



University of Glasgow | Centre for Cultural  
Policy Research

**21<sup>st</sup> Century Literacy: What is it and how do we get it?**

**A Creative Futures Think Tank**

**Stakeholder Perspectives**

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## **Preface**

'21<sup>st</sup> Century Literacy' is a Creative Futures Think Tank. Creative Futures is a programme launched by Creative Scotland in 2011 to promote the professional development, vision, connectivity and ambitions of Scotland's creative practitioners and organisations.

The Centre for Cultural Policy Research (CCPR) at the University of Glasgow was commissioned to undertake research to create the preconditions for forming a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Literacy Think Tank. Dr Katherine Champion undertook the empirical research for the present report, which has been accompanied by a review of the literature on literacies by Susan Galloway.

### **The Centre for Cultural Policy Research**

CCPR's mission is to produce world-class analytical, theoretical and empirical research that contributes to public debate on cultural, communications and media policies in Scotland, the UK, the EU, and globally.

The Centre is internationally networked in the academic world and has excellent relationships with policy makers, cultural agencies and the media and communications industries.

CCPR values its role as an independent voice and aims to be a highly respected source of critical analysis.

The present study was conducted under the supervision of Professor Philip Schlesinger, Director of CCPR.

## **Abbreviations and Glossary**

**AMES** Association for Media Education in Scotland

**CfE** Curriculum for Excellence

**CPD** Continuing Professional Development

**Creative Scotland** - the strategic body tasked with leading the development of the arts, creative and screen industries across Scotland. Creative Scotland took over the functions and resources of Scottish Screen and the Scottish Arts Council as well as having a wider set of responsibilities for developing the sector.

**Education Scotland** - the new national body responsible for supporting quality and improvement in learning and teaching from early years to adult and community learning in Scotland. Education Scotland has taken over the functions and resources of HMIE and LTS.

**Glow** Scottish national intranet for education

**GTCS** General Teaching Council for Scotland

**HMIE** Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education

**LTS** Learning Teaching Scotland

**Ofcom** Office of Communications, the

**SDS** Skills Development Scotland

**SFC** Scottish Funding Council

**SQA** Scottish Qualifications Authority

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## Introduction

Literacy has been firmly placed upon the agenda for public organisations in Scotland in the last five years, particularly within the new policy context of the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE). The redefinition of text and literacy within CfE, along with initiatives led by Scottish Screen, Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS) and Skills Development Scotland (SDS), have highlighted the necessity of promoting a new, '21<sup>st</sup> Century literacy'.

Rapid changes in communications technology have characterised the last decade and this, in part, is shaping the literacy agenda. Mobile phones and multichannel television have had a relatively slow adoption curve, both taking more than a decade to reach 50% penetration. Social networks and online TV launched since 2000 reached 50% penetration within 4-5 years and smartphones are expected to reach the same landmark equally quickly. This has been enabled by the high penetration of computers, increased availability of mobile data services and faster fixed broadband connections.<sup>1</sup> The familiar boundaries of what it means to be literate have been destabilised within this context of considerable change in social, cultural and economic practices. The range and complexity of texts and communications are expanding and technological convergence is opening up opportunities for creative participation.

Despite recognition that literacy is fundamental to our well-being and ability to participate in all aspects of life, it has been accepted that there is currently a gap between literacy, as conventionally treated within the school curriculum, and everyday experience of multiple literacies.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, definitions of literacy are contested and a range of barriers has been erected, particularly relating to how best to operationalise a broader, multi-modal view of literacy.

This study aims to present the views of a range of relevant partners and stakeholders involved in the education system in Scotland. Ultimately, this report – which draws on the views of key stakeholders in the field - seeks to review how a 21<sup>st</sup> Century conception of literacy might be incorporated and promoted within the Scottish curriculum.

The empirical evidence for this report was gathered for the C21 Literacy project, a Creative Futures Think Tank, commissioned by Creative Scotland. The project's overall aims are:

- To clarify definitions of literacy, including international definitions and approaches;

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<sup>1</sup> Ofcom (August 2011): 36

<sup>2</sup> BFI, 2008; Lankshear and Knobel, 2004

- To clarify approaches to learning and development;
- To engage key organisations concerned with literacy development in Scotland in thinking through a way forward.

In the next section, the methodological approach taken to gathering stakeholder views is laid out, including an account of the selection of the participants and the generation of interview questions. The findings are then arranged in four sections. The first of these explores whether participants broadly acknowledge a recent and decisive shift towards a broader conception of literacy. The second one reviews respondents' views on operationalising 21<sup>st</sup> Century literacy, looking at pedagogy, assessment and teacher training. The third section considers the key areas of challenge as conceptualised by the respondents which included: definitions; engaging teachers; tackling an 'egg box' curriculum; and issues concerning assessment and technology. The final section suggests the key areas that the current literacy agenda must tackle in order to move the debate forward.

## Methodology

Qualitative data was generated in the form of semi-structured interviews. There are many advantages of interviewing, related to the long length of time spent with an individual respondent. These include greater depth, allowing attitudinal and behavioural insights, eliminating negative group dynamics such as difficulty with sensitive issues, and achieving more control over the direction of the discussion.<sup>3</sup> The interviews were undertaken with key stakeholders and commentators within the field of education and with a specific interest in literacy. They were used to elicit in-depth information about conceptions of literacy as well as contextual information about the debate in Scotland.

The development of wider literacy is an important objective for many organisations and interests including national and local government, Creative Scotland (formed in 2010 from Scottish Screen and the Scottish Arts Council), Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS), HMIE (HMIE and LTS merged to form Education Scotland on 1 July 2011), Skills Development Scotland, Ofcom, Universities and Colleges, the Scottish Funding Council, SQA, GTCS and others. It was, therefore, important to capture the views of stakeholders across this broad professional field as it is acknowledged that, whilst there are likely to be commonalities, each organisation's aims are also likely to vary somewhat.

A total of 17 stakeholders and consultants were interviewed, with the interviews lasting from between 45 minutes to one hour and a half. The interviews were conducted in May and June 2011. The size of the interview sample was determined by the limits of time and resources and when it was considered that there was likely to be no new data emerging regarding the specific themes being probed. Participants were initially identified via Creative Scotland and then also through recommendations by the other interviewees.

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<sup>3</sup> Greenbaum (2000)

**The stakeholders and consultants were drawn from the following:**

Creative Scotland
Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)
Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education (HMIE)
General Teaching Council Scotland (GTCS)
Learning Teaching Scotland (LTS)
Skills Development Scotland (SDS)
Association for Media Education in Scotland (AMES)
Media Education Association
Institute of Education, University of London
School of Education, University of Glasgow
School of Education, Social Work and Community Education, University of Dundee
Literacy consultant
Northern Ireland Screen
Gray's School of Art, Robert Gordon's University, Aberdeen
Edinburgh City Council
Independent Film Education Consultants

**Table 1 – Stakeholder and consultant interviews**

It is common practice for researchers to protect the identity of those who participate in research. It was deemed appropriate to anonymise the interview transcripts after the request to do so by at least one interviewee. It was not considered sufficient to tag the quotations with the organisation or job title as this would be likely to allow identification of the respondents. Thus, the only labels applied are these: policymakers, practitioners and academics.

The interviews comprised five main parts (see Appendix One). The first part elicited basic information regarding the participant's role within their organization and an introduction to their interest in the field of literacy. In the second part, participants were asked to set out their conceptions of literacy, including their own definitions, whether they recognized a shift in perceptions to a broader conception of literacy and how important they considered this shift to be. The third section asked participants to consider the methods of assessment and qualification they felt appropriate for 21<sup>st</sup> Century literacy. Within the fourth section participants were asked about the issues 21<sup>st</sup> Century literacy might present for teacher training. Finally, they were asked to consider how the debate in this area could be moved forward and to articulate what sort of barriers need to be overcome.

The interviews were conducted, as far as possible, face-to-face with participants. In the end, four of the interviews were conducted by telephone due to the geographical distance (these were

participants located in London, Aberdeen and Belfast). The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Clarity and openness about the aims and purpose of the interviews were important, so that any concerns the subjects had could be addressed. Prior to meeting them, interviewees were given an information sheet (see Appendix Two) detailing the aims of the study and giving assurances of anonymity. A consent form was signed by each candidate at the time of the interview (see Appendix Three). These reminded participants of their right to withdraw from the study whenever they wanted. A digital tape recorder was used. All interviews were transcribed and anonymised. The ethical requirements of conducting the interviews have been fulfilled in accordance with the codes observed by the University of Glasgow.

## **A new way of thinking about literacy**

*Everybody goes on about [how] our children all need to be literate, but everybody has their own idea about what that literacy is and how it's to be achieved. (policymaker)*

There has been an evolution of thinking about literacy since the 1970s, a multiplicity of rationales has developed concerning the importance of broadening out conceptions of literacy. Literacy has acquired priority status across a range of policy contexts for a number of reasons, including:

- The rapid development of new communications technologies and practices;
- The emergence of the 'knowledge economy';
- Globalisation;
- The policy agenda around social inclusion and equality of opportunity.<sup>4</sup>

These have provided the political impetus for literacy becoming a policy priority in recent years and have been the main drivers of policy thinking about education and skills development.

In order to probe perceptions of this shift, participants were first asked about their conceptions of literacy, why they thought a broader definition was important and whether they perceived a recent shift towards a broader conception of literacy within their fields of work and also within the wider society.

## **Being print-literate alone is not enough these days**

A commonly espoused rationale amongst respondents for promoting the literacy agenda related to the rapidly changing technological and communications environment. Many of the interviewees articulated the belief that the education system had to do more to relate to the kind of world young people are participating in and will do in future. There was seen to be a lag between what is being taught in schools and the practices of the 'real world'. As one policymaker commented:

*I think the big picture should be about preparing our young people for the world that's out there and for too long I think schools have kind of been separate and isolated environments that haven't blended well.*

Technology was a pervasive theme across all the interviews and emerged as an important driver of change as well as barrier to it. Many saw advances in information and communications technology as a rationale for using a wider notion of what constitutes a text within education. Questions were raised about the relevance, particularly to the lives of young people, of the skills and knowledge being taught in schools. Young people were regarded by most respondents as already possessing

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<sup>4</sup> Scottish Government (2010); UNESCO (2005)

skills in the use of technology from their home lives. It was widely thought to be a missed opportunity not to fully engage with this capability.

Several respondents also described the importance of equipping young people to ensure they could, at the very least, be *minimally competent citizens* and drew on discourses related to social justice and equality of opportunities, which have also been identified as driving the literacy agenda. In a key sense, literacy was regarded as a common good:

*What could you possibly argue against in terms of allowing people to have language at their disposal, to help them think better, to communicate whatever it is that they want to say, to have the personal growth attached to accepting other peoples' views and not feeling personally challenged? (policymaker)*

It was this attitude, shaped by broader societal changes, which underpinned many of the respondents' views and gave a strong sense that *'being print-literate alone is not enough these days'* (policymaker).

### **Beyond a shift amongst the cognoscenti?**

There were assertions by several respondents that there had indeed been a recent push in policy circles as well as wider support for a broader sense of literacy. This movement was seen as part of a historical process. For instance, one respondent said *'there have been shifts and I think the word is shifts: there have been lots of them'* (policymaker).

A number of participants warned that, despite significant support for a broader conception of literacy, there remained some narrow views, in part related to a failure to translate the work of 'the converted' into the curriculum in Scotland.

*There's been a shift in the cognoscenti. Anyone who has been engaged in one of these sort of problems or anyone who has been engaged in arts education takes for granted that there are other forms of literacy which are pertinent in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, but I think there is a gulf between that and how it is formally described perhaps within the average context of the teacher, learner, curriculum, assessment equation. (academic)*

There was broad consensus across the interviewees that there had been a recent positive movement towards embracing a broader conception of literacy within the policy landscape in Scotland. The Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) was commonly mentioned and the definition proposed within the CfE document *Literacy across Learning: Principles and Practice* was seen as illustrative. Within CfE literacy is defined as:

*The set of skills which allows an individual to engage fully in society and in learning, through the different forms of language, and the range of texts, which society values and finds useful. (LTS, 2009: 1)*

The key attributes of CfE felt to exemplify this shift included its emphasis on literacy as a cross-curricular theme, the embracing of a wider definition of texts (multi-modality) and – probably the most commonly espoused sentiment in the interviews – the need to connect the educational experience with the literacies which young people use in their daily lives. This definition was seen to be distinct from policy references to literacy prior to CfE's inception, particularly with its recognition of a wider conception of the text. As well as CfE, participants also drew attention to initiatives by Scottish Screen and LTS and the availability of resources such as Glow and Scotland on Screen. These interventions were seen to have promoted a broader conception of literacy within the Scottish education system.

## Operationalising 21<sup>st</sup> Century Literacy

The interview findings demonstrate that there have been shifts in thinking about literacy in a range of professional circles, but a crucial aspect of the present study has been to determine how these shifts in conceptions of literacy might be translated into changes in practice. The key question here is how this broad multi-modal version of literacy for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is translated into curriculum delivery, qualifications and assessment. This section explores how respondents conceived of the pedagogical models, assessment methods and teacher training needed to operationalise 21<sup>st</sup> Century literacy.

### New literacies - new learning models?

*This is about new ways of learning and expanding ways of learning in exciting ways that motivate children and also teachers in school. (policymaker)*

Most of the participants believed strongly that one of the key advantages and assets of promoting a broader conception of literacy was that it opened up opportunities for embracing more innovative pedagogical methodologies and tools. With reference to Moving Image Education (MIE) projects, it was asserted that these had allowed teachers to *'re-examine their own pedagogical approach'* and reflect on the value of using multi-modal texts in all areas. Existing research supports this and suggests that MIE can:

- enable access to a distinctive, culturally important, non-verbal mode of expression and communication (i.e. the moving image);
- provide previously failing or excluded learners with access to the curriculum;
- offer different routes into key literacy concepts;
- give learners a sense of agency and autonomy that supports self-image and confidence;
- build bridges between 'home' and 'school' cultures and knowledge.<sup>5</sup>

Respondents drew on multiple instances where they had experienced or observed the power to engage with students in new and interesting ways. Participants drew out potential areas of development in the area of soft skills, team working and project management. This supports the view of the 'new literacies' agenda,<sup>6</sup> which is distinct from other perspectives in literacy. The ethos characterising the 'new literacies' approach is held to differ from more conventional approaches to

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<sup>5</sup> Bazalgette (2009)

<sup>6</sup> Buckingham (1993)

literacy. Practices associated with new literacies are seen as participatory and collaborative. It is suggested that they are less hierarchical and more easily shared.<sup>7</sup> Interviewees echoed this point of view by describing a very *open* and *inclusive* pedagogy distinct from more *exclusive* and *insular* pedagogies of conventional literacy approaches.

There was also seen to be a role for a wider conception of texts in encouraging the engagement of traditionally harder-to-reach groups, such as the ‘more choices, more chances’ group.<sup>8</sup> According to a participant from academia, as well as helping young people who could already be described as ‘*successful learners*’, embracing pedagogical models associated with a broader conception of literacy could also help those ‘*who you would have described as reluctant learners or disengaged, [to] develop a sense of themselves as effective learners.*’ It was felt that MIE, in particular, could engage academically excluded groups and build confidence that could promote all types of literacy. In his study of MIE and young people not in education, employment or training, Head (2010:26) describes the shifts in power associated with this approach, which can encourage traditionally disengaged students to take ownership over their learning experience:

*What might be termed ‘traditional’ pedagogies encourage the learner to be dependent upon the teacher and to be a passive recipient of knowledge. The possibilities offered by MIE challenge these roles and encourage autonomy and a sense of self as an effective learner capable of generating the knowledge required to deal with whatever challenges life may present.*

## **More progressive assessment models**

*We’re not assessing literacy as it’s really lived. (policymaker)*

In a similar way to the progressive and innovative learning models, it was recognised by respondents that novel forms of assessment were necessary to capture 21<sup>st</sup> Century literacy. Nearly all respondents challenged the existing emphasis on summative assessment mechanisms and felt that a corollary of promoting literacy would be to overturn this focus and identify new, more progressive assessment models.

*In 20 or 30 years’ time the idea that you will go into an exam and memorize things and regurgitate them will feel quaint. We should be assessing whether children can find information from websites rather than whether they can memorize information from a book long enough to get into the exam room and write it down before they forget it again. (policymaker)*

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<sup>7</sup> Lankshear and Knobel (2006)

<sup>8</sup> The NEET Strategy, More Choices, More Chances is an action plan to reduce the proportion of young people not in education employment or training in Scotland – See Scottish Government (June 2006)

Many of the respondents emphasised the need to capture process and achievement when assessing literacy and that technology should be embraced to facilitate this collection, using tools like e-portfolios<sup>9</sup>.

One participant highlighted the Education and the Arts Action Plan<sup>10</sup> in stating the case for more arts and creative learning methodologies. It was felt that despite the advances of CfE and a perception of policy permission to push the agenda for more creative teaching and learning, the present stress on assessment was impeding it.

It was suggested by two participants, who had experience in the creative arts, that the debates from that realm could help guide the process of assessment selection for literacy, although it was recognised that this was not a straightforward task.

*Are we measuring the artefact of literature in whatever sense that is, or are we assessing the methodology or development? Once you start to soften the bounds of what we mean by literacy we start to get into an assessment debate, which is probably much more akin to the one used in the creative arts – about what we are really assessing here. It's perhaps difficult to develop objective assessment methodologies and that's perhaps why literacy has become so narrow and constrained in the first place. (academic)*

## **Teacher training**

*There's something that's about raising awareness; there's something that's about changing dispositions; and there's something that's about providing resources. (policymaker)*

Those who worked with teachers on literacy suggested that much of the work required could be done through getting them to reflect on their current practices and then apply that to alternative texts. It was pointed out that many of the tools that students use to interpret and understand the written word can be used for alternative texts like the internet or moving image.

*This isn't about learning how to use Final Cut Pro or whatever...We introduce them in a very basic way to simple things that they can do without too much help and support, something that they can do in the classroom tomorrow rather than having to go on 10 courses before they have the skills. (policymaker)*

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<sup>9</sup> An electronic portfolio, also known as an e-portfolio or digital portfolio, is a collection of electronic evidence assembled and managed by a user, usually on the Web. Such electronic evidence may include inputted text, electronic files, images, multimedia, blog entries, and hyperlinks. An e-portfolio can be seen as a type of learning record that provides evidence of achievement.

<sup>10</sup> The Scottish Government published the Education and the Arts, Culture and Creativity Action Plan in 2010 under Curriculum for Excellence in Scotland. The Plan brings together the education and cultural sectors to provide exciting learning experiences to ignite children's imaginations and help them develop their creative skills. This plan has been endorsed by endorsed by Fiona Hyslop, Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs; Mike Russell, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning; Keith Brown, former Minister for Skills and Lifelong Learning in February and can be found at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Education/Schools/curriculum/ACE/expactionplan>

A number of participants drew attention to the large existing set of teaching materials available through resources like Glow to assist teachers in improving their practice in relation to literacy. Some did feel that this could be publicised more. A number of different interventions in teacher training were also mentioned, drawing on participants' experience from their own practice and also examples from elsewhere. These included giving teachers opportunities for continuing professional development (CPD), 'parachuting' experts into schools, running 'twilight' training sessions, and working with schools over an extended period of time. Many of the respondents saw quite low barriers to entry for teachers to become involved, at least at a basic level, enabling them to use a wider variety of texts in their teaching practice. As one practitioner underlined, *'To train teachers how to teach it you only need one or two days to give them the insight to do it.'*

Some of the participants believed that recently-trained teachers might be more comfortable than older teachers with the latest advances in communications technology and that minimal effort was needed to encourage new entrants to the profession to incorporate it into their teaching practice.

*I am less pessimistic about teacher training as in early career because I think we're probably now talking about the natives of a different communication world. I think new teachers coming into the system – if they're young graduates – probably will have a real handle themselves on the complexity. I think it's a case of harnessing that and getting them to exploit that thematic across all their delivery. (academic)*

## **Barriers to 21<sup>st</sup> Century Literacy**

Despite a policy shift and some synergy over possible routes to operationalise a 21<sup>st</sup> Century conception of literacy, respondents articulated a range of challenges to be overcome. It is important to explore how they conceived of the barriers to achieving 21<sup>st</sup> Century literacy. These centred on five key areas:

- terminological clutter – lack of clarity
- engaging teachers – lack of confidence and awareness amongst teachers
- an ‘egg box’ curriculum – little scope for cross-curricular work particularly in secondary school
- assessment – driving teaching priorities
- technology - constraints on embracing technology

These are taken in turn before moving on - in the concluding section - to think about how a number of these might be overcome.

### **Terminological clutter**

The level of terminological clutter surrounding the concept of literacy has been widely acknowledged. The stakeholder interviews clearly underlined this, largely through highlighting difficulties they had encountered. They demonstrated that there is a degree of conceptual confusion as well as multiple, sometimes competing, rationales for a move towards a broader conception of literacy.

There was evidence of multiple terms, which related in some way to the promotion of literacy. Those mentioned by participants included: digital participation; digital literacy; digital inclusion; media literacy; communication skills; ICT literacy and health literacy. It is likely that these have been mainly shaped by policy concerns and language, and these were, in some instances, more associated with a proficiency or specific competence such as using computers, looking after one’s own healthcare, etc. The challenges of bringing together a range of views, exemplified by instances of *‘tension and confusion when it comes to implementing it’*, were well recognised.

One or two participants themselves seemed not to acknowledge a large scale shift had occurred and held a rather narrow conception of literacy, referring to ‘basic’ or ‘core’ reading and writing skills. This can be linked to the emphasis in education policy on interventions which focus on the skills-

based 'basic' literacy associated with achieving universal reading literacy, as in the 2007 *Skills for Scotland* strategy. A couple of other participants also cautioned that literacy remains a very politicised area with a dominant discourse of 'slipping standards' and failures in improving 'basic' literacy skills used to berate the teaching profession.

*It's part of political and public discourse to use literacy as a blunt weapon...The difficulty with that is that when you hold them to it they find the conception of literacy they have is an extremely narrow one, a hierarchical one, it relates more or less entirely to the written word... It's do with people who are unhappy with people who put apostrophes in the wrong place. (policymaker)*

This would seem to support the assertion that, despite gains in some quarters for a broader multi-modal conception of literacy, there remains a persistent view of a 'basic' literacy skill that refers to conventional print based literacy conceived as underpinning other 'add-on' literacies.

### **Engaging teachers**

Persuading teachers was seen as one of the most crucial challenges of moving towards acceptance of a broader conception of literacy and use of a wider variety of texts. It was certainly seen by participants as needing a significant amount of work. Opinions varied amongst respondents as to the extent of the challenge, with some citing problems with *confidence building* and *raising awareness*. A number of interviewees provided possible rationales for a reluctance to engage. Some suggested that teachers might feel the changes to pose a threat to their professional authority and dignity, whilst others thought that it might be regarded as '*just another government initiative*' (*academic*).

Of some concern, perhaps, was that initial teacher education was seen as problematic by a number of participants. There was anecdotal evidence that students were not supported in exploring new methodologies and practices associated with a wider variety of texts. One respondent described asking student teachers, '*Are you getting media? Are you getting digital? Are you learning how to use wikis and blogs? Are you learning how to analyse film, make film? Nothing*' (*policymaker*). There were definite concerns about the time and resources devoted within initial teacher training establishments to alternative texts and modes of learning and teaching.

### **An 'egg box' curriculum<sup>11</sup>**

As mentioned earlier in the report, participants drew on examples from primary education, in particular, where projects focused on developing multi-modal literacy had been undertaken with great success. The situation within secondary schools was viewed as much more problematic. This was largely due to teaching falling into disciplinary silos and the complexity of timetabling. In terms

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<sup>11</sup> Boyd (2006)

of the barrier of separation by discipline, the participants were divided in their views on how literacy should be treated within the curriculum. Some felt that without it being given a home within a particular discipline, no one would take ownership over it, whilst others felt that this thwarted the opportunity for a range of subject areas to get involved.

Many asserted the importance of utilising wider, multi-modal texts within all disciplines: *'there's a lot of stuff that you do in Science or PE or even Maths that is better expressed in film or animation or visual images than it is in writing, so why not use them?'* (academic). Literacy, however, was commonly associated by respondents with the subjects of English, Drama, Media Studies, IT and occasionally the Humanities. It was English, in particular, that was thought to be the natural home for literacy even if this was not seen as a positive thing:

*The poor old English department gets lumped with it all because we acquire most of our tools and knowledge for learning through our mother tongue, and the English teacher then gets lumped with having to learn and understand all these new media and texts, moving image and technology.* (policymaker)

Many respondents also took issue with making literacy a stand-alone subject or qualification and warned against teachers seeing literacy as an add-on. They felt it had to be integrated into and across the curriculum:

*For those teachers who conceptualised it as being part of communications...then it was straightforward. For those teachers who saw it as something extra, something not connected, it was like another subject.* (academic)

Major challenges were also raised regarding the opportunities for engaging in novel learning models based on inter-disciplinary project work within secondary schools. It was felt that the logistical complexities of introducing such an approach would be hard to overcome:

*How can you do things which are inter-disciplinary, project focused, involving technology, involving the kids getting utterly absorbed in what they're doing when you've only got 40 minutes and they go off and do something else and come back in a few days time? It doesn't work.* (academic)

### **'It won't be taken seriously until it's assessed'**

*We know that assessment shouldn't drive the curriculum... but the reality is that a lot of teachers won't necessarily take something seriously unless they see that it is being assessed.* (policymaker)

Respondents were divided about how literacy should be handled within the curriculum, particularly with regard to assessment. Some felt that assessing projects based on a broader conception of texts - for example, assessing a task to create a moving image or analyse a video game - might rob students of their interest and excitement in the area and essentially *'take the fun out of it'*

(*policy maker*). On the other hand, rather more respondents pointed out that dealing with wider literacy in a cross-curricular way would result in secondary teachers ignoring this aspect of their teaching, since it was neither their responsibility alone, nor judged to be of value (since it wouldn't be assessed). Basically the view was that *'If it gets assessed it gets taught'* (*policy maker*). For those taking this view, incorporating literacy within the assessment programme would legitimise a broader conception of literacy and raise its status.

## Technology

Many participants emphasised that using technology did not necessarily mean buying expensive equipment. Whilst the majority felt that adequate technological resources were in place in most schools to support literacy, some concerns were raised regarding certain schools: *'Some of the equipment, to be fair, it's come out of the ark'* (*policy maker*). How resources were being allocated was also questioned: *'They're buying whiteboards, but they're not buying Macs...It's resourcing, but it's also what the funding is being spent on'*. (*policy maker*)

Some interviewees also thought that teachers were worried about children and young people being more skilled in using technology than they were. This echoes other findings, with research showing that almost half (48 %) of parents with children aged 5-15 who use the internet at home think they know less about the internet than their children do. This rises to 70% of parents of 12-15 year olds.<sup>12</sup> Restrictions on fully engaging with technology within the classroom were also seen as caused by policy makers' attitudes and views held in the wider society. For example, respondents repeatedly mentioned the focus on security and the abuse of technology as an impediment to exploring new possibilities and innovative uses of technologies young people already possess, such as mobile phones.

*We should be using the children's equipment, but we're nowhere near that stage. We're still at the stage where children have to switch their phones off when they're going into classrooms instead of switching them on. It's not sustainable... People are just trying to stem this tide because the change is happening too fast for them* (*policy maker*).

Others emphasised how internet policy within education establishments had contributed to a culture of fear that was feeding paranoia amongst teachers about students accessing inappropriate materials, which was preventing the exploitation of online resources for learning.

There was also a pervasive theme in the interviews that concerned the technologically deterministic discourses of some approaches aimed at promoting 21<sup>st</sup> Century literacy. This was perceived to

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<sup>12</sup> Ofcom (April 2011)

heighten fears amongst teachers, as this approach emphasises technological competence and skills. As one participant noted: *'It can be too much technology-led and not about the learning itself, so the software kind of gets in the way'* (policymaker).

## **Moving towards 21<sup>st</sup> Century literacy**

The research has shown there are a number of arguments in play regarding the challenges or opportunities for the acceptance and promotion of 21<sup>st</sup> Century literacy. There are a number of question areas future discussion could address systematically.

### **A workable definition of literacy**

An alternative course of action to strictly defining literacy was seen to be viewing it as a cross-thematic matter. It was suggested by a number of participants that they would welcome the treatment of literacy as a 'pervasive theme', rather as creativity has been treated within CfE. In some instances, a plural definition was embraced. As one respondent said:

*I think the beauty of it is that it ticks all those boxes...whether it's enterprise, whether it's a pedagogy, whether it's just improving learning and teaching, or whether it's improving literacy and communication. (policymaker)*

Whilst participants considered it unhelpful to have an ambiguous or vague interpretation, they certainly saw some merit in employing a definition of literacy that is future-proof and not dependent solely on contemporary modes or media of communication. However, achieving this goal is likely to be very demanding.

Many of the participants, whilst recognising the challenges presented by a lack of definitional clarity, felt that the continuing focus on a definition was proving unhelpful and resulting in stagnation:

*There is a plurality to the idea of literacy and trying to unify it is never particularly helpful. People like to kid themselves...that there is a really hard, bare-knuckle definition of literacy that is just waiting to knock us down. (policymaker)*

Ultimately, the findings from the stakeholder interviews raised the questions:

- Should literacy be treated as cross-thematic in policy and teacher training?
- Is the concept of 'basic' and 'add on' literacies, or a broader conception of literacy more helpful?
- Is there a way to move the debate onwards from a continued focus on finding a perfect definition?

## Supporting teachers

Underlying some of the challenges and opportunities of introducing a wider sense of literacy was a broader debate about the teaching profession. The idea of increased support for teachers and a wider re-professionalisation were mentioned with particular reference to ongoing training and career paths.

In many ways, the responses of the interview participants regarding promoting a broader conception of literacy parallels the challenges of introducing CfE. The *Donaldson Review*, undertaken by Graham Donaldson of HMIE, which reported in December 2010, highlighted that progress in CfE could be derailed unless teachers were able to access high-quality training. This echoes research undertaken by the UK Film Council regarding the prospects for introducing film education within schools. The report found:

*A great deal of film education, in or out of the classroom, currently depends on the passion and commitment of individual teachers and other educators. However great their enthusiasm, teachers may feel that a lack of specialist expertise diminishes their professional confidence and therefore their ability to challenge and extend the learning experience of their students.*<sup>13</sup>

The Donaldson review asserted that all new teachers should be confident in their ability to teach the essential skills of literacy and numeracy and that this should be emphasised within initial teacher education as well as through continuing professional development.<sup>14</sup> The Scottish Government's response accepts the importance of this recommendation regarding the importance of confidence in literacy.<sup>15</sup>

The findings from the stakeholder interviews raised a number of issues, related to teacher education:

- How can teachers be made confident in literacy teaching during initial teacher training and via CPD routes?
- How can this confidence be extended to include a broad multi-modal conception of literacy?

## Making the shift in reality

*The shift has been made in terms of policy. It's been made. Now it's about the shift in reality and that's a whole different challenge. (practitioner)*

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<sup>13</sup> UK Film Council (no date)

<sup>14</sup> Donaldson (2011)

<sup>15</sup> Scottish Government (March 2011)

Participants felt that, in the main, the *policy* shift had been achieved with CfE. There was a sense that further change would be unhelpful and could undermine CfE by making it appear like *'just a kind of new strategy that is the next one that has come along'* (policymaker). The interviews strongly suggested that participants want the Scottish Government to keep underlining and highlighting CfE and keep pushing *'from on high that literacy is not just reading, writing, listening and talking; it is also media and digital as well'* (policymaker).

There were perceived difficulties in changing attitudes in wider society, including the views of parents, employers and the media. So far as employers are concerned, a challenge emerged in the field of assessment that was particularly emphasised by participants with an interest in issues of employability. This related to the problem of maintaining the confidence of employers and the wider society if the qualifications and assessment system were to be overhauled<sup>16</sup>. Employers were regarded as having narrow perceptions of literacy, requiring candidates for employment who could demonstrate basic reading and writing skills and this was seen as a fairly mainstream attitude: *'When you ask somebody on the street and basically ask them a quick question – "What does it mean to be literate?" - they would say "It's to read words and to write those words"'*(policymaker). The *credibility* of the education system was regarded as firmly focused on the use of end assessment. As one respondent explained:

*I think, as Curriculum for Excellence starts to filter through, there is a massive re-education for employers to understand what that is and what those measures are, because as you start to change any qualification framework, then it actually destabilises the confidence that some employers have in qualifications.*  
(policymaker)

Also articulated was the view, seen as whipped up by the media, that use of a broader conception of what constitutes a text could be seen as a *'dumbing down'*. It was believed that continued government support in this area could help change attitudes within wider society.

With regard to gaining acceptance for a broader conception of literacy stakeholders one of the main questions to be addressed was:

- How might policymakers and government fully articulate and promote a 21<sup>st</sup> Century conception of literacy so that it is broadly convincing to employers and members of the public?

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<sup>16</sup> SQA are in the process of developing new qualifications. For more information please see <http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/37917.html>

## Appendices

### Appendix 1 – Interview Schedule

June 2011

#### **C21 LITERACY: WHAT IS IT, HOW DO WE GET IT?**

##### **Centre for Cultural Policy Research, University of Glasgow**

The key aim of the C21 Literacy initiative is to bring together many voices and interests seeking to promote literacy development, create new synergies and provide a focus for innovation. This entails understanding how a broad multimodal version of literacy for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is translated into literacy development in formal and informal education, qualifications and assessment. These interviews aim to capture the experience of key stakeholders and experts concerned with literacy development in order to identify the central issues and try and determine a way of moving the debate forward.

Only the named researcher will have access to the interview transcripts. The interview subjects will only be named in the final research if permission is obtained. Each interviewee will be asked to sign a consent form before the interview. This will point out that they can opt out of the research at any point. Transcripts or notes of the interviews can be forwarded to interviewees, if expressly desired; to check that they feel what they have said has been correctly documented.

##### **Part 1: Introduction**

Please can you give a brief introduction to your organisation and your role within it?

##### **Part 2: Conceptions of literacy**

Do you think that there has been a shift in conceptions of literacy in recent years?

Do you see a move towards a broader conception of literacy as important for the education system? If yes, in what way? If no, why not?

##### **Part 3: Assessment**

What methods of assessment are appropriate for 21st Century literacy? Are new ways of assessing needed?

Are new qualifications needed?

- Why/why not?
- If new qualifications are needed is there evidence of suitable approaches that can be used to shape the new qualifications?

Does the selection of assessments and qualifications have particular relevance for some disciplines more than others? For example: What does it mean for English in particular?

##### **Part 4: Pedagogy and teacher training**

What kinds of issues does 21st Century literacy present for teacher training and CPD?

Do you have examples of suitable approaches?

In your experience, how can technology be used in curriculum delivery?

What can be done now (quick wins) and what requires a long term change in approach?

## **Part 5: Moving forward**

### **Barriers**

- What do you see as the key barriers / challenges to moving forward?
- Are there mismatches with how different organisations conceive of how to move the debate forward?

### **Policy commitment**

- What policy changes would help deliver 21<sup>st</sup> Century literacy in Scotland?
- What do you consider to be the central resourcing issues? (financial, staffing, technology, partnership etc)

### **Research**

- What research do you think needs to take place to move this agenda forward?
- Do we need a systematic review of recent work on new literacy theory and practice to inform the next steps in Scotland?
- Do we need more research into practical examples of 'what works'?

### **Partners**

- Which do you see as the most important partnerships to develop? Who needs to be on board?
- Do you think it would help if key stakeholders met regularly to discuss these issues?

### **Commitments**

- What do you see as the role of your organisation in guiding /participating in this process?
- Are there resources which can be committed by your organisation to drive this forward?

**Many thanks for your participation**

**C21 LITERACY: WHAT IS IT, HOW DO WE GET IT?**

**Centre for Cultural Policy Research, University of Glasgow**

**Aim of study**

Literacy has acquired priority status for public organisations in Scotland across a range of policy contexts. However the scope for partnership working is currently blurred by the accumulation of new types of literacy being promoted, by competing definitions and perspectives, and by the continual evolution of new terminology.

The key aim of the C21 Literacy initiative is to bring together many voices and interests seeking to promote literacy development, create new synergies and provide a focus for innovation. This entails understanding how a broad multimodal version of literacy for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is translated into literacy development in formal and informal education, qualifications and assessment.

**The study aims to explore:**

- How can the policy commitment to 21st Century literacy be translated into practical change?
- What are the implications of new literacies for the curriculum?
- What methods of assessment are appropriate?
- What are the implications for pedagogy and for teacher training?
- Which partnerships, organisations and resource commitments are necessary to promote C21 literacy?

These interviews aim to capture the experience of key stakeholders and experts concerned with literacy development in order to identify the central issues and try and determine a way of moving the debate forward.

**Anonymity**

Only the named researcher will have access to the interview transcripts. The interview subjects will only be named in the final research if permission is obtained. Each interviewee will be asked to sign a consent form before the interview. This will point out that they can opt out of the research at any point. Transcripts or notes of the interviews can be forwarded to interviewees, if expressly desired; to check that they feel what they have said has been correctly documented.

**Thank you for your time.**

**Please keep this leaflet for information.**

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**C21 LITERACY: WHAT IS IT, HOW DO WE GET IT?**  
**Centre for Cultural Policy Research, University of Glasgow**

Please tick, sign and date where appropriate:

1. I have read and understand the information sheet \_\_\_\_\_
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason \_\_\_\_\_
3. I agree to take part in the research \_\_\_\_\_

Name of the respondent \_\_\_\_\_

Organisation \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

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