



# UK children go online : surveying the experiences of young people and their parents

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# UK Children Go Online

Surveying the experiences of young people and their parents



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ECONOMIC  
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RESEARCH  
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**E-SOCIETY**  
Innovative Academic Research on the Digital Age

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## Executive summary



### Executive summary

#### The research project

UK Children Go Online (UKCGO) aims to offer a rigorous and timely investigation of 9-19 year olds' use of the internet. The project balances an assessment of online risks and opportunities in order to contribute to developing academic debates and policy frameworks for children and young people's internet use.

The research was funded by an Economic and Social Research Council grant under the 'e-Society' Programme, with co-funding from AOL, BSC, Childnet-International, Citizens Online and ITC.

This report presents key findings from a major national, in-home, face to face survey, lasting some 40 minutes, of 1,511 9-19 year olds and 906 parents of the 9-17 year olds, using Random Location sampling across the UK (see Annex). It complements the project's recent qualitative report on young people's experiences of the internet.

The fieldwork, conducted via multi-media computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI) with children and a paper questionnaire to their parents, took place between 12 January and 7 March 2004. In this report of findings from the UKCGO survey, all percentages have been weighted in accordance with population statistics.

#### Key findings on access and inequalities

Internet access and use is widespread among UK children and young people, being considerably higher than among adults and among the highest in Europe. However, significant inequalities persist especially in home access. Continuing changes in the nature and quality of access indicate fast-rising standards and expectations.

Among all 9-19 year olds:

- **Home access is growing:** Three quarters (75%) have accessed the internet from a computer at home. Currently, 74% have internet access via a computer, games console or digital television while one quarter of 9-19 year olds (23%) have never accessed the internet on a computer from home, and 29% currently lack such access (see p. 9).
- **School access is near universal:** 92% have accessed the internet at school, and one quarter (24%) have access at school but not at home. However, two thirds (64%) have also used the internet elsewhere (see p. 9).
- **Socio-economic differences are sizeable:** 88% of middle class but only 61% of working class children have accessed the internet at home; 86% of children in areas of low deprivation in England have used the internet on a computer at home compared with 66% in areas of high deprivation (see p. 10).
- **Homes with children lead in gaining internet access:** They are also now acquiring multiple computers plus broadband access to the internet – 36% have more than one computer at home, and 24% live in a household with broadband access (see p. 12).
- **Access platforms are diversifying:** 87% have a computer at home (71% with internet access), 62% have digital television (17% with internet access), 82% have a games console (8% with internet access), and 81% have their own mobile phone (38% with internet access) (see p. 13).
- **Many computers in private rooms:** One fifth (19%) have internet access in their bedroom – 22% of boys versus 15% of girls, 21% middle class versus 16% working class, 10% of 9-11 year olds versus 26% of 16-17 year olds. Fewer than half the computers online at home are located in a public room, and four fifths (79%) of those with home access report mostly using the internet alone (see p. 14).

#### Key findings on the nature of internet use

Most young people use the internet frequently though often for moderate amounts of time. They use the internet for a wide range of purposes, not all of which are socially approved.

- **Most are daily or weekly users:** 9-19 year olds are mainly divided between daily users (41%) and weekly users (43%). Only 13% are occasional users, and just 3% count as non-users (see p. 18).
- **Most online for less than an hour:** One fifth (19%) of 9-19 year olds spend about ten minutes per day online, half spend between about half an hour (25%) and one hour (23%) online, and a further fifth go online for between one (14%) and three hours (6%) each day. One in 20 (5%) spend more than three hours online on an average day (see p. 19).
- **More time spent watching TV or with the family:** Time spent online is still less than time spent watching television or with the family, but it is similar to that spent doing homework and playing computer games and greater than time spent on the phone or reading (see p. 20).
- **Most use it for searching and homework:** Among the 84% of 9-19 year olds who use the internet daily or weekly, 90% use it to do work for school or college, 94% use it to get information for other things, 72% use it to send and receive emails, 70% to play games online, 55% to send and receive instant messages, 45% to download music and 21% to use chat rooms. Further, 44% look for information on careers and further education, 40% look for products or shop online, and 26% read the news (see p. 21).
- **Some use it for less-approved activities:** Among 12-19 year olds who go online daily or weekly, 21% admit to having copied something from the internet for a school

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project and handed it in as their own, 8% claim to have hacked into someone else's website or email, 5% have visited an online dating site, and 4% have sent a message to make someone feel uncomfortable or threatened (see p. 23).

One in six (16%) 9-19 year olds make low levels or even no use of the Internet, and even among more frequent users, use is often narrow.

- **Non-use not just a matter of lack of interest:** Access and expertise remain significant issues – 47% of occasional and non-users say that they lack access, 25% are not interested, 15% say they don't know how to use the internet, and 14% lack the time to use it (see p. 24).
- **Even frequent users make narrow use of the web:** Among those who go online at least once a week, half concentrate their use on fewer than five different websites (see p. 23).

### Key findings on education, learning and literacy

- **Many have not received lessons on how to use the internet:** Despite the stress laid on ICT in education policy, nearly one third (30%) of pupils report having received no lessons at all on using the internet, although most have been taught something – 23% report having received 'a lot' of lessons, 28% 'some' and 19% 'just one or two' (see p. 26).
- **Skills gap between parents and children:** Children usually consider themselves more expert than their parents – 28% of parents who use the internet describe themselves as beginners compared with only 7% of children who go online daily or weekly, and only 12% of parents consider themselves advanced compared with 32% of children. While most parents and children are confident in their searching skills, among parents only 1 in 3 know how to set up an email account, and only a fifth or fewer are able to set up a filter, remove a virus, download music or fix a problem (see p. 27).
- **Children lack key skills in evaluating online content:** Four in ten pupils aged 9-19 trust most of the information on the internet, half trust some of it, and only 1 in 10 are sceptical about much information online. Only 33% of 9-19 year olds who go online at least once a week say that they have been told how to judge the reliability of online information, and among parents of 9-17 year olds, only 41% are confident that their child has learned how to judge the reliability of online information (see p. 28).

Thus, there is considerable scope for increasing the internet-related skills and literacy of both children and their parents. Many children are using the internet without skills in critical evaluation, and many parents lack the skills to guide and support their children's internet use.

### Key findings on pornography online

Coming into contact with pornography is, the UKCGO survey shows, a commonplace but often unwelcome experience for children and young people.

Among 9-19 year olds who go online at least once a week:

- **More than half have seen pornography online:** Nearly six in ten (57%) have come into contact with online pornography. However, only 16% of parents think that their child has seen pornography on the internet (see p. 29).
- **Most porn is viewed unintentionally:** 38% have seen a pornographic pop-up advert while doing something else, 36% have accidentally found themselves on a pornographic website when looking for something else, 25% have received pornographic junk mail by email or instant messaging, 10% have visited a pornographic website on purpose, 9% have been sent pornography from someone they know, and 2% have been sent pornography from someone they met online (see p. 29).
- **More porn on the internet than in other media:** Among teens (12-19 years), 68% claim to have seen pornography on the internet, 20% saying 'many times'. Moreover, 53% of parents consider (and children agree) that the internet is more likely to expose children to pornography than are television, video or magazines (see p. 31).
- **Mixed responses to online porn:** When young people encounter pornography on the internet, half claim not to be bothered by it, but a significant minority do not like it, and one quarter of 9-15 year olds who have seen porn say they were disgusted. Half of those who encounter online pornography leave the site as quickly as they can, while the others say they look at it, tell a friend or parent, click on the links or return to it later (see p. 31).
- **Too young to have seen it:** Interestingly, nearly half (45%) of 18-19 year old internet users who have seen any pornography (online or offline) now think they were too young to see it when they first did (see p. 32).

### Key findings on communication and participation

Rather than seeing face to face communication as automatically superior, young people evaluate the different forms of communication available to them according to distinct communicative needs. The mobile phone is fast overtaking the desktop computer as a prioritised means of communication.

Among 9-19 year olds who use the internet at least once a week:

- **The mobile phone is the preferred method of communication:** Whether for passing time, making arrangements, getting advice, gossiping or flirting, the phone and text messaging are preferred over emailing or instant messaging (IM) (see p. 33).

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- **Most online communication is with local friends:** Contact with people that children have not met face to face, on the other hand, occurs mainly among the 21% who visit chat rooms (see p. 33).
- **Talking online is less satisfying but has its advantages:** A third (33%) of email, IM and chat users think that talking to people on the internet is at least as satisfying as talking to them in real life, and a quarter of children and young people identify significant advantages to online communication in terms of privacy, confidence and intimacy. Further, a quarter of 12-19 year olds who use the internet at least weekly say they go online to get advice (see p. 35).
- **Not all use is receptive but, rather, interactive:** 44% have completed a quiz online, 25% have sent an email or text message to a website, 22% have voted for something online, 17% have sent pictures or stories to a website, 17% have contributed to a message board, and 8% have filled in a form. Most active of all, 34% have set up their own website. Further, 9% have offered advice to others while 8% have signed a petition (see p. 36).
- **Some are interested in civic issues:** 55% of 12-19 year olds who use the internet at least weekly have sought out sites concerned with political or civic issues, although two fifths are not interested. However, only a minority have responded to or contributed to these sites in any way (see p. 37).

### Key findings on the risks of online communication

Online communication is not always a positive experience for children and young people, and the benefits must be balanced against the problems.

- **Parents underestimate children's negative experiences:** One third of 9-19 year olds who go online at least once a week report having received unwanted sexual (31%) or nasty comments (33%) via email, chat, instant message or text message. Parents substantially underestimate their children's negative experiences online and so appear unaware of their children's potential need for guidance. Only 7% of parents think that their child has received sexual comments, and only 4% think that their child has been bullied online (see p. 38).
- **Children divulge personal information online:** Most parents whose child has home access to the internet (86%) do not allow their children to give out personal information online (though only 49% of children acknowledge this). Moreover, nearly half (46%) of 9-19 year olds who go online at least once a week say that they have given out personal information, such as their full name, age, email address, phone number, hobbies or name of their school, to someone that they met on the internet. By contrast, only 5% of parents think their child has given out such information (see p. 39).

- **Children engage in identity play:** Two fifths (40%) of 9-19 year olds who use the internet at least weekly say that they have pretended about themselves online – using a different name, changing their age or appearance etc. And though they often know the rules, a minority admits to forgetting about safety guidelines online (see p. 38).
- **Some have attended face to face meetings:** One third (30%) of 9-19 year olds who go online at least once a week have made an online acquaintance, and one in 12 (8%) say they have met face to face with someone whom they first met on the internet. However, the majority of these young people tell someone they are going to the meeting, take a friend with them, meet someone of their own age and, they say, have a good time (see p. 40).

### Key findings on parents' and children's views of the internet

Parents' view of the internet is ambivalent – much more so than for other media in the home. They are concerned that it may lead children to become isolated from others, expose children to sexual and/or violent images, displace more worthwhile activities and risk their privacy. On the other hand, 73% believe that the internet can help their child do better at school and help them learn worthwhile things.

Despite their considerable enthusiasm for the internet, children, like their parents, are sensitive to media anxieties. While awareness of risks is important, widespread anxiety may also contribute to restrictions on young people's use of the internet, undermining exploration, expression and creativity.

- **Children worry about the internet:** Three quarters of 9-19 year olds (74%) are aware of some internet safety campaign or have heard or read a news story that made them think the internet can be dangerous; 48% of daily and weekly users worry about 'being contacted by dangerous people', 44% worry about 'getting a virus', and 38% worry about 'others finding out things about you' (see p. 43).
- **Confusion about filtering:** In homes with internet access, 35% of children say that filtering software has been installed on their computer, and 46% of parents claim this. However, 23% of parents say they don't know if a filter is installed, and only 15% of parents who have used the internet say that they know how to install a filter (see p. 44).

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### Key findings on regulating the internet at home

In regulating their children's internet use, parents face several challenges, not least that they often lack the expertise to do so, especially compared with their children.

Overall, the UKCGO survey finds that children perceive a higher incidence of risky problematic experiences online than do their parents. It also finds that parents perceive a higher degree of domestic regulation than do their children. This suggests that parents tend to assume that rules are not needed when they are and/or that rules are being followed when they are not.

- **Confusion about parental guidance:** Most parents whose child has home access to the internet claim that they directly share in and/or support their child on the internet, though their children are less likely to say that this occurs. Parents also claim to monitor their child's internet use indirectly or discreetly, though again children appear less aware of this. However, one in ten (10%) say they do not know what their child does on the internet, and a fifth (18%) say they do not know how to help their child use the internet safely – suggesting a clear need to improve and extend the reach of awareness and internet literacy initiatives (see p. 46).

Since computers are often located in private rather than public rooms, and since children may seek privacy online, even evading parental monitoring, parents' attempts at regulation are not easy to implement.

- **Children don't want restrictions:** Two thirds (69%) of 9-17 year olds who go online at least once a week say that they mind their parents restricting or monitoring their internet use in various ways (see p. 46).
- **Children protect their privacy from parents:** Moreover, two thirds of 12-19 year old home internet users have taken some action to protect their privacy online – 38% have deleted emails so no one else could read them, 38% have minimised a window when someone else came into the room, 17% have deleted the history file, 17% have deleted unwanted cookies, 12% have hidden or mislabelled files to keep them private and 12% have used someone else's password without their permission (see p. 46).

### A parental wish list

Notwithstanding pressures to rely on parents to regulate their children's access to and use of the internet, it is worth noting that parents themselves favour a multi-stakeholder approach (see p. 48):

- **Stricter regulation:** 85% want to see tougher laws on online pornography, with 59% wanting stricter regulation of online services.
- **More education:** In support of media and internet literacy, 75% want to see more and better teaching and

guidance in schools while 67% want more and better information and advice for parents.

- **Better content:** Parents also hope for a more stimulating and rewarding online experience for children and young people, with 64% wanting more sites developed specifically for children.
- **Improved technology:** Lastly, 66% want improved filtering software, 54% improved parental controls and 51% improved monitoring software.

However, one cannot simply recommend greater control over or monitoring of children by parents. From children's point of view, some key benefits of the internet depend on maintaining some privacy and freedom from their parents, making them less favourable particularly to intrusive or secret forms of parental regulation.

Managing, guiding and regulating children's internet use is, therefore, a delicate and challenging task and one that will surely most effectively be pursued with children's cooperation. Such cooperation need not be impossible. While children are often confident of their online skills, they are also aware of many ways in which they are confused, uncertain or lacking in skills, and their desire to combat these is genuine.

### Balancing opportunities and dangers

It might be supposed that children who go online more often become more savvy and so able to avoid the risks while optimising the benefits. Expert children can, it is often hoped, be left to their own devices while attention is given to those not yet or not much online who, because they lack experience and expertise, run greater risks than those who 'know what they are doing'.

- **High users – more benefits but also more risks:** The UKCGO survey finds that those who use the internet more make a broader use of it, and, more significantly, frequent users both take up more of the opportunities of the internet and are also exposed to greater risks. Compared with weekly users, daily users of the internet are more likely to use the internet for making webpages, for political participation, for exam revision and for interactive engagement. However, they are also more likely to have encountered pornography and violent or hateful material online, to have met online 'friends' offline and to have revealed personal information online.
- **Low users – fewer risks but also fewer benefits:** The UKCGO survey also finds that those who make less use of the internet both face fewer risks but also benefit from fewer opportunities. Hence, simply restricting children's access to the internet represents a poor strategy for minimising the risks they face, given the other costs of reduced use.

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### A new divide

No longer are children and young people only or even mainly divided by those with and without access, though 'access' is a moving target in terms of its speed, location, quality and support, and inequalities in access persist.

Children and young people are divided into those for whom the internet is an increasingly rich, diverse, engaging and stimulating resource of growing importance in their lives, and those for whom it remains a narrow, unengaging if occasionally useful resource of rather less significance.

Hence, a new divide is opening up, one centred on the quality of use. The UKCGO survey finds that middle class children, children with internet access at home, children with broadband access and children whose parents use the internet more often are more likely to be daily users and so to experience the internet as a rich, if risky, medium than are less privileged children.

### Conclusion

- **Is the glass half full or half empty:** Much public attention is focused on the risks children are encountering when using the internet, and rightly so. Some may read this report and consider the glass half full, finding more education and participation and less pornographic or chat room risk than they had feared. Others may read this report and consider the glass half empty, finding fewer benefits and greater incidence of dangers than they would hope for. Much depends on one's prior expectations.
- **Evidence-based policy:** It is hoped that the present findings provide a clear and careful picture of the nature and extent of these risks, as well as an account of the attempts that parents and children are making to reduce or address these risks. In our view, the risks do not merit a moral panic, and nor do they warrant seriously restricting children's internet use. But they are nonetheless widespread, they are experienced by many children as worrying or problematic, and they do warrant serious attention and intervention by government, educators, industry and parents.
- **Internet not yet used to full potential:** The UKCGO survey reveals a plethora of ways in which children and young people are taking steps towards deepening and diversifying their internet use, many of them gaining in sophistication, motivation and skills as they do so. But it has also identified many children not yet taking up the potential of the internet. These young people worry about the risks, visit only a few sites, fail to upload and maintain personal websites and treat sites more as ready-made sources of entertainment or information than as opportunities for critical engagement, user-generated content production or active participation. How this potential can be better realised remains a key challenge for the coming decade.
- **A balanced approach to regulation:** In sum, this report suggests that a balanced approach to regulation is vital if society is to steer a course between the twin risks of exposing children to danger or harm and of undermining children's opportunities to participate, enjoy and express themselves fully. Focussing on either dangers or opportunities, without recognising the consequences of particular policies or provision for the other, is likely to be problematic, undermining either children's rights or their safety.



## Project overview

### Project overview

#### **The internet generation**

Many households, especially those with children, now have domestic internet access although, significantly, some do not. The ways in which the internet is rapidly becoming embedded in everyday life is attracting widespread attention, raising questions about access and inequalities, about the nature and quality of use, about the implications for children's social and educational development and, ultimately, about the balance between the risks and opportunities posed by the internet for children and their families.

Children and young people are regarded with ambivalence, being seen both as 'the digital generation', pioneers in developing online competencies, yet also vulnerable and potentially at risk. Early research has shown that parents hope to improve their children's educational prospects but are concerned about online dangers.<sup>1</sup> Further, parents are unsure how to guide their children towards creative or valuable sites. Although children are enthusiastically using the internet, proudly labelling themselves 'the internet generation', they too vary in confidence and competence when faced with the challenge of getting the best from the internet while also avoiding the problems it brings.

Commercial interests seeking to expand the child and youth market increasingly centre on the development of targeted online contents and services. In the public sector, there are hopes that the internet may stimulate young people's political engagement, community values and educational prospects. The opportunities are considerable, though to a great extent still untapped at present. But media attention – and hence public concern – more often focuses on the potential risks and dangers, leading to discussions of how to regulate or restrict young people's internet access and use. In policy terms, society must strike a balance between two risks – the failure to minimise the dangers and also the failure to maximise the opportunities.<sup>2</sup>

#### **UK Children Go Online (UKCGO)**

The research project *UK Children Go Online* (UKCGO) is conducting a rigorous investigation of 9-19 year olds' use of the internet, comparing girls and boys of different ages, backgrounds etc, in order to ask how the internet may be transforming – or may itself be shaped by – family life, peer networks and learning, formal and informal. It combines qualitative interviews and observations with a major national survey of children (both users and non-users) and their parents.<sup>3</sup>

In our first project report, we presented qualitative research findings, drawing on a series of focus groups and individual interviews with children conducted during summer 2003.<sup>4</sup> This second report presents an overview of findings from the national face to face survey of children and parents, conducted during spring 2004. The UKCGO final report, due in spring 2005, will present a detailed analysis and integrated findings from the project overall.

## Aims and approach

### Aims and approach

#### Research aims

An informed and grounded understanding of the nature and extent of internet access and use is crucial in order to counter the present climate of speculation, even of media panics, regarding the supposedly dramatic consequences of mass internet adoption, particularly for children and young people.

Facts, figures and even anecdotal observations about children's internet use are accompanied by heated debate over their significance. The project aims to balance an assessment of two areas of risk with two areas of opportunity in order to contribute to developing academic and policy frameworks regarding children and young people's internet use. The four areas are as follows:

- 1 Access, inequalities and the digital divide
- 2 Undesirable forms of content and contact
- 3 Education, informal learning and literacy
- 4 Communication, identity and participation

#### Continuities and change

In responding to the growing body of empirical research, some commentators stress historical continuities, being sceptical of utopian and dystopian claims for a technology-led future and critically questioning whether and in what ways everyday life may be undergoing a radical change. After all, the historical lesson of once-new media is one of gradual diversification or repositioning of media rather than the wholesale displacement or transformation of previous ways of life. This approach leads us to examine the contexts of media use – in terms of the family and childhood, leisure and lifestyles, youth culture and consumer culture, work and education, and social values – all of which are simultaneously undergoing gradual change in a manner that intersects with, and shapes the conditions of, internet use.<sup>5</sup>

By contrast, other commentators postulate more radical change, seeing the internet as a facilitator of larger social, cultural, political and psychological transformation, whether towards the network society, the post-modern condition or a dystopian nightmare.<sup>6</sup> This position extrapolates from early indications of the innovative nature of internet content and use to advance some imaginative visions of the future, particularly stressing the blurring or reconfiguration of those once-significant boundaries between entertainment and education, work and leisure, public and private, local and global, and producer and consumer. It adds a sense of urgency to the debate, for an intelligent anticipation of future developments will aid the timely formulation of internet-related policy, products and practices, just as a misreading of the early signs may misguide or confuse matters.

#### A child-centred approach

*UK Children Go Online* seeks to steer a course between these polarised approaches by charting empirically the unfolding relation between continuity and change. It is guided not only by prior analyses of trends in internet content, services and use but also by a 'child-centred' focus that regards children as active and interpretative (though not necessarily highly sophisticated) agents who appropriate and shape the meanings and consequences of the 'new' through a series of established and novel social semiotic practices.

Whether information and communication technologies are incorporated into the ongoing stream of social life or whether they reorient or open up alternative trajectories, the new media depend on the beliefs and actions of their users to activate particular trajectories over others and to give them meaning and value in daily life. Thus, we seek an account of how children themselves play a role – through their imaginative responses, their creative play, their micro-practices of daily life – in establishing the emerging uses and significance of the internet.<sup>7</sup>



## Methodology

### Research with children

Despite the growing number of surveys conducted on adult populations, particularly in Europe and North America, few independently-conducted surveys directly ask children (rather than adults speaking for children) about their internet use.<sup>8</sup> This may be because research with children places some distinctive requirements on the research process, particularly in relation to informed consent, the formulation of survey questions and research ethics.<sup>9</sup>

However, since children are widely seen to be 'ahead' of adults in their internet expertise, and since they are often motivated to conduct their internet use away from the eyes of concerned adults, the reliability of findings obtained by asking adults to report on the activities of children must be questioned.<sup>10</sup> Most research conducted directly with children tends to be small-scale, qualitative work.<sup>11</sup>

Hence, a large-scale, in-depth, national survey conducted with children face to face in UK homes, together with a survey of their parents, is timely.

### Learning from qualitative findings

In our first project report, the above four areas of opportunities and dangers were explored through focus group interviews and family visits. In terms of the opportunities, this research revealed that children and young people are generally enthusiastic and creative adopters of the internet – especially for communication, entertainment and education – and they make subtle comparisons of the strengths and disadvantages of different media available to them. It also showed that they are particularly proud of their expertise in using the internet, perceiving their 'media literacy' to be greater than that of many adults. However, in terms of critical and productive literacy, the research identified some limitations on their skills.

The interviews also revealed that children are concerned about their online privacy in relation to parents (though not commercial organisations), valuing the internet for the opportunities it offers for exploration in social relationships, for advice-seeking and for private experimentation with identity. However, the creativity of children's use of the internet should not be overstated, both because young people are attracted to highly branded commercial online environments and because the normative pressures of the peer culture are strong.

In terms of the dangers of content and contact, the interviews contained some lively discussions of when 'strangers' became 'people you know', albeit only online. However, while many young teens go through a phase of playful communication with unknown others, most online communication takes place with local and, less often, distant friends that young people also know face to face. Instant messenger applications are particularly favoured for this, with email less popular and chat rooms apparently declining

in use. The interviews also included some discussions of pornography, with young people less in agreement here – boys were more interested and tolerant than girls, with girls more ambivalent and, at times, disgusted. Views among young people on how access to such content should be regulated also differed.

### Designing quantitative research

Though often insightful in suggesting themes or trends, qualitative research is best complemented by quantitative research in order to judge the scale and significance of the findings. In order to take the above analysis forward, a national face to face survey of children and young people aged 9-19 was conducted to examine the social, economic and cultural patterning of internet-related interests, beliefs and practices among children and young people.<sup>12</sup>

Discovering which aspects of internet use are more or less common is essential in developing both theory and policy. Particularly, a reliable assessment of the incidence of comparatively rare but risky behaviours demands a sizeable sample. *UK Children Go Online* surveyed 1,511 children aged 9-19 and 906 of their parents. Such a sample can be broken down to advantage, for too often children and young people are treated as a homogeneous group, masking diversity. A large survey permits systematic analysis of findings according to a range of demographic and other factors, thereby revealing precisely who is gaining the advantages, running the risks or getting left out in the growing adoption of the internet at home.

As a note of caution, in presenting the survey findings we are acutely aware that 'answers' to questions of internet use are inevitably provisional because both the technology and its social contexts of use are changing. Moreover, any answers are inevitably diverse because, however unified the medium may be (and of course it is not), families are far from homogenous. In presenting the findings from the *UK Children Go Online* project, we compare our findings with those from such other surveys with children that have been conducted in order to relate the present findings to others and so identify trends over recent years.<sup>13</sup>

The administration and sampling procedures used for the UKCGO survey are outlined in the Annex to this report. All percentages reported here derive from the UKGCO survey unless otherwise specified and have been weighted in accordance with population statistics, as described in the Annex. Actual numbers/sample sizes (N's) are reported unweighted.<sup>14</sup>

## Access, inequalities and the digital divide



### Access, inequalities and the digital divide

#### The process of internet take-up

Access to new technologies is usefully analysed in terms of the diffusion of innovation in which a model is proposed for the typical acquisition path for each new medium from the early adopters to mass ownership.<sup>15</sup> Once the mass market has been reached, one would expect some displacement of activities (eg from television viewing to time spent online, from face to face to online communication) or effects on the meanings of familiar activities (eg television viewing becomes a family activity again while the internet is used for more individualised pursuits).<sup>16</sup>

Mass market adoption, arguably, is a prerequisite for the significant levels of investment in online contents and services required to expand the range of uses and further attract users to the internet. Hence, as internet access grows, one would expect the services offered, and so the nature of use, to change. Already, most daily activities can be pursued online – information, education, civic participation, commerce, relationships, entertainment – and more people are adjusting their daily practices so as to accommodate these opportunities.

#### Growing access to the internet

*'In 2000 the Prime Minister set a target for internet access for all who want it by 2005, underlining the Government's commitment to ensuring that the opportunities of the digital age are extended to all. The target recognizes that, unless tackled, digital exclusion may reinforce rather than address broader social inequalities.'* (Office of the e-Envoy, 2004, p. 5)

In strikingly few years, children have rapidly gained access to the internet at both school and home, strongly supported by Government policy and industry initiatives. Indeed, young people's lives are increasingly mediated by information and communication technologies – at home, at school and in the community. For many adults, these technologies are also transforming the workplace.<sup>17</sup>

#### Internet access at home

According to the Office of National Statistics, by February 2004 58% of UK adults (aged 16+) had used the internet (up from 54% in 2003 and 49% in 2002).<sup>18</sup> Overall, some 12.1 million UK households (49%) had access to the internet at home in the last quarter of 2003.<sup>19</sup>

Government figures do not differentiate between households with and without children. However, analyses of the diffusion of new information and communication technologies have long shown that households with children tend to be in the vanguard of the adoption process. This suggests that such families will have greater access than UK household figures overall.<sup>20</sup> Yet it is also the case that some children live in the poorest households in the UK, suggesting that they may be left behind on the wrong side of the digital divide.

The *UK Children Go Online* survey finds support for both these outcomes:

- Three quarters of all 9-19 year olds (75%) have accessed the internet from a computer at home.<sup>21</sup> This figure is considerably higher than that for the adult population (49%, ONS 2004). Overall, 71% of 9-19 year olds currently have internet access at home via a computer, and 74% have access via either a computer, games console or digital television.<sup>22</sup>
- On the other hand, one quarter of 9-19 year olds (23%) have never accessed the internet on a computer from home (and 29% cannot or do not currently do so). If domestic internet access is reaching a plateau, a substantial minority of the population may remain on the wrong side of the digital divide.

#### Internet access at school

Children and young people do not only access the internet at home, and for this age group, school is the most widespread location of use. After all:

*'A key strand of the Government's education strategy is to stimulate and support the use of information and communications technology (ICT) in teaching and learning as a means of raising educational standards. The cornerstone of the strategy is the ICT in Schools Programme, which supports the Government's vision for delivering higher standards of education and increasing employability through the use of ICT.'* (Becta, 2002, p. 4)

For children especially, schools are crucial to redressing the digital divide, for they have the potential to equalise the effects of inequalities in resources at home.

- The UKCGO survey finds that while 75% of 9-19 year olds have accessed the internet from a computer at home, almost all children and young people (92%) have accessed it at school.
- However, while access at home and elsewhere is rapidly increasing, there remains one quarter of the youth population (24%) that has access at school but not at home. This figure has not reduced significantly in recent years, making provision through school an important opportunity for redressing inequalities.<sup>23</sup>

#### Internet access elsewhere

Young people also use the internet in a range of locations other than at home and school.

- Two-thirds (64%) of 9-19 year olds have also used the internet elsewhere. This includes 48% in someone else's house, 31% in a public library, 17% via a mobile phone, 9% in an internet café, 7% at a parent's work place, 6% via a games console, 4% via digital TV and 4% at their own work place.

The figures are similar for parents of the children surveyed, although parents are more likely than children to use the

## Access, inequalities and the digital divide

internet in a public library and children more likely than parents to use it in someone else's house.

- Of all parents who have ever used the internet (N=692, 78%), 82% have used it at home and 51% at work, these being the most common locations of use. However, 31% have used the internet in someone else's house, 19% in a public library, 13% via a mobile phone, 8% through a digital television, 7% in an internet café, 7% via a games console and 1% at university/college.

### Sources of inequality

In diffusion theory terms, the market is approaching saturation. Access in schools is now widespread (at 92%), and 98% of children have accessed the internet in one place or another.<sup>24</sup> In homes, the late majority stage has been reached, with 23% 9-19 year olds not having used the internet at home. To term this group 'laggards', however, is to ignore the problem of both cost and expertise for the families without access at home, for, if we consider those with and without home access, the key factor is clearly socio-economic (see Figure 1).

- While differences in accessing the internet at school and elsewhere by socio-economic status are marginal, differences in access at home are sizeable: 88% of middle class but only 61% of working class children have accessed the internet at home.<sup>25</sup>
- The relative privilege of ABC1 over C2DE children is also evident in relation to use of the internet other than at home or school, with 68% of middle class children using the internet elsewhere compared with 60% of working class children.
- The age of the children also matters. Access at school is greater for teens than for either the youngest (87% of 9-11

year olds) or oldest group (83% of 18-19 year olds). Figures for access at home show a parallel age trend to that for access in school, being greater for the teenagers than for the children or young adults.<sup>26</sup> Use of the internet elsewhere (ie other than on a computer at home or school) becomes more common as children grow into their teens.

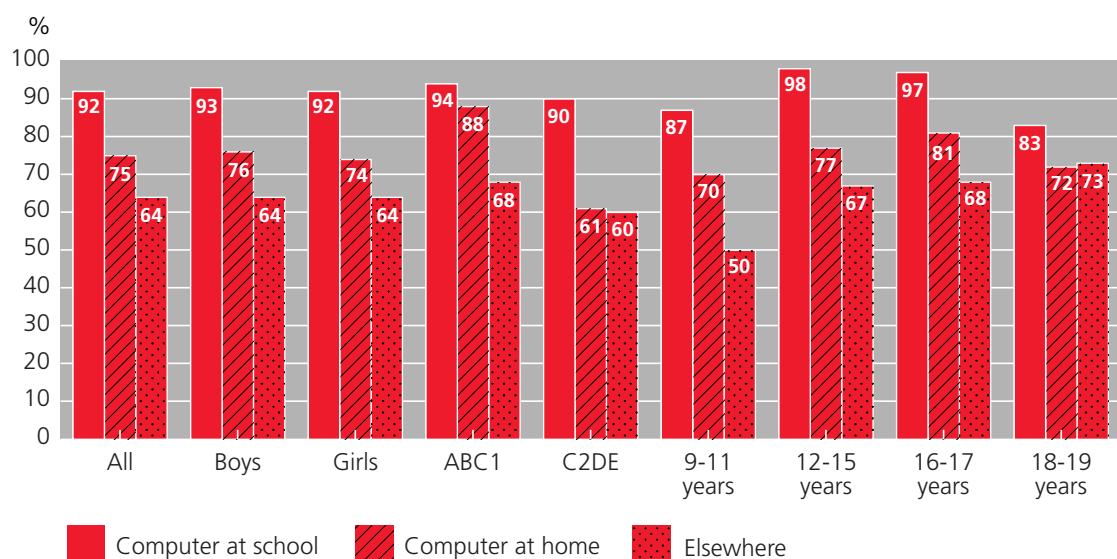
- Interestingly, gender makes little difference to access in any location. It could be that for many of the girls surveyed there were also boys in the household for whom internet access is acquired. However, the findings for use of the internet suggest instead that parents are not inclined to discriminate significantly against girls but, rather, provide access for both sons and daughters.

### Relying on school for access

In Figure 2 we combine data on whether children have ever used the internet in certain locations with whether they currently have access in that location. 'Home (any)' here means they have access to the internet via computer, digital television or games console. 'School, not home' means they have used the internet at school but have never had access at home. 'Other location only' means they have used the internet but not at home or school. 'Non-users' do not use the internet and have no access at home.<sup>27</sup>

- 74% of 9-19 year olds currently have access to the internet at home via either computer, digital television or games console.
- 13% of middle class children and 35% of working class children have access to the internet at school but not at home, thereby relying mainly on their school for access.
- Only 2% of 9-19 year olds lack access to the internet in any location.

Figure 1: Which of these have you ever used to access the internet? By demographics



Base: All 9-19 year olds (N=1,511)

# Access, inequalities and the digital divide



In short, the importance of socio-economic status in domestic access suggests that, as for other new technologies, the innovators and early adopters of the internet tend to be the already-privileged in society while those slow to gain access tend to be the already-disadvantaged.

## Regional differences

If we examine differences across the UK, some variation becomes apparent in access both at home and at school (see Figure 3):

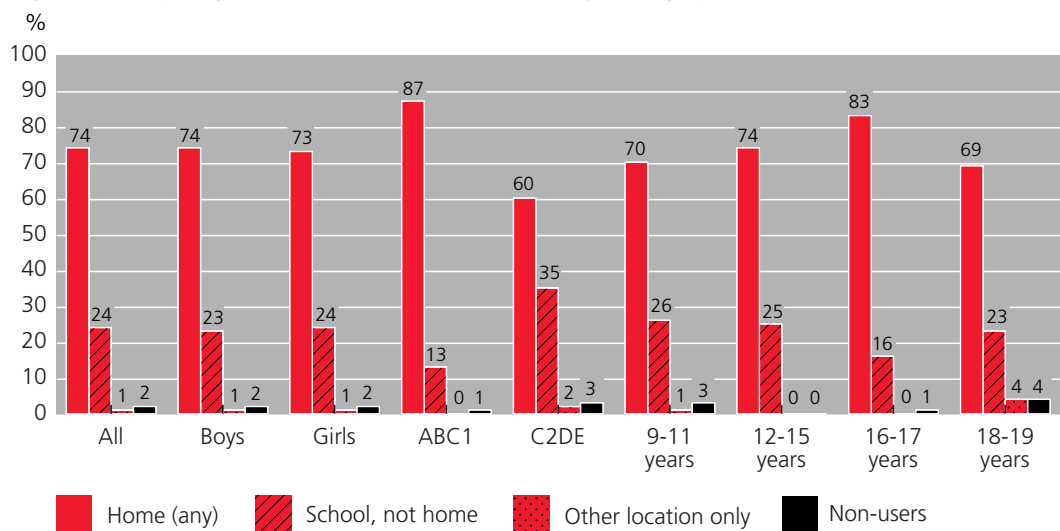
- Internet access at home is comparatively lower in the North, Yorkshire and Humberside, Wales and Scotland,

and access at school is lower in East Anglia and Wales.

The UKCGO survey found that access to the internet is lower in areas of high deprivation.<sup>28</sup>

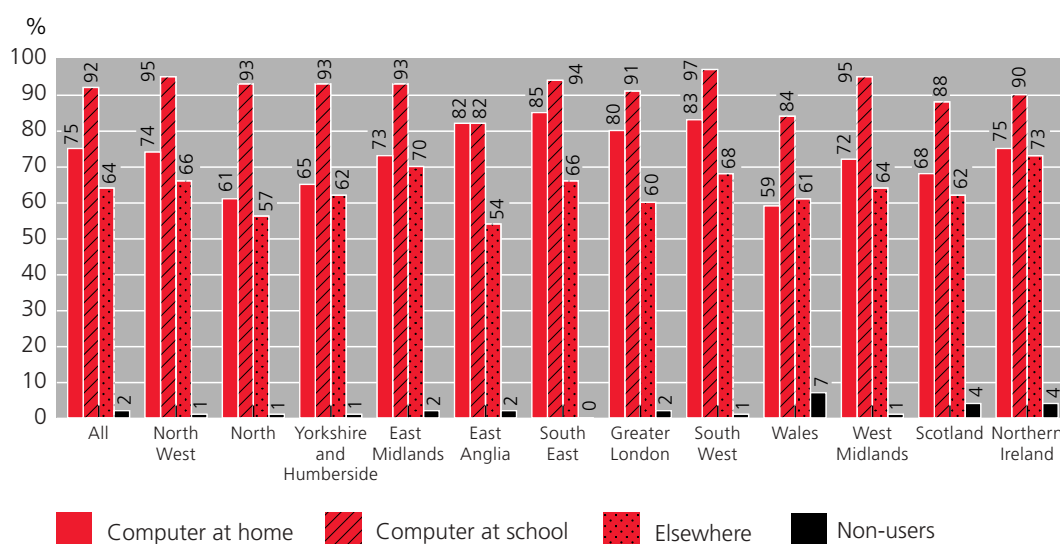
- Some 86% of children and young people in areas of low deprivation in England (N=1,233) have used the internet on a computer at home, compared with only 66% in areas of high deprivation (and 83% for medium deprivation).
- This difference is balanced out at school where 93% in areas of high deprivation have used the internet, a figure only marginally below the 95% for areas of low deprivation (and 92% for medium deprivation).

Figure 2: Comparing sources of access to the internet by demographics



Base: All 9-19 year olds (N=1,511)

Figure 3: Where ever used internet by region



Base: All 9-19 year olds (N=1,511)

## Access, inequalities and the digital divide

### Ethnicity

Ethnic background does not appear to play a large role in determining internet access.<sup>29</sup>

- 75% children and young people from a white background and 72% from a non-white background have used the internet on a computer at home, and 92% of white and 90% of non-white children have used it at school.

### Inequalities in range and speed of access

Gaining internet access at home is no simple matter as many parents have discovered. Crucially, it should not be thought of as a one-off act of acquisition of a computer/modem/ISP. Rather, as our qualitative research showed, families are grappling with a continuous flow of demands and expectations. Technology must be researched, chosen, bought, installed, upgraded, added to, fixed, re-installed etc, – if 'internet access' is to be sustained and kept up to date.

In a pattern familiar from most previous media, whereby a medium is acquired first for the family and then subsequently multiple versions are bought to satisfy the individualised preferences and taste of individuals, we are now witnessing homes with more than one computer and, increasingly, more than one source of internet access, as well as different speeds of access.<sup>30</sup>

### Multiple computers

How far have the cascading demands within the home resulted in the multiplication of computers in households with children?

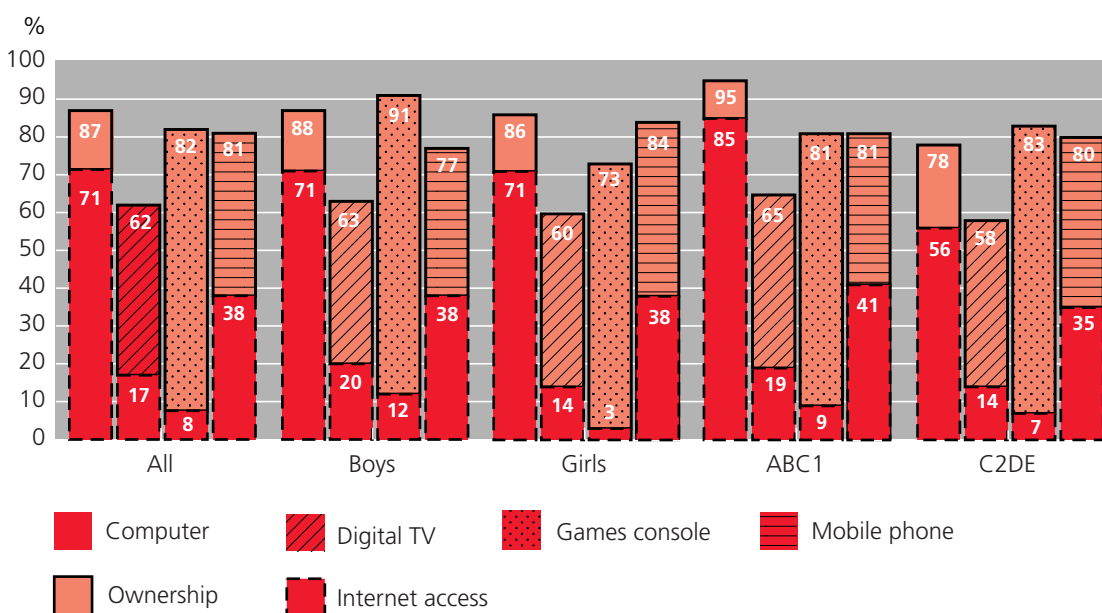
- Some 36% of 9-19 year olds have more than one computer at home. Of those who have a computer at home, 59% have one, 26% have two, 9% have three, 4% have four, and 1% have five, with an average of 1.6 computers.
- Again, gender and age differences are marginal, but socio-economic status matters – middle class homes with computers average 1.9 per household while working class homes with computers average 1.3 computers per household.
- Furthermore, 52% of all 9-19 year olds have one computer with internet access, 12% have two, 4% have three and 2% more than three.<sup>31</sup>

### The shift to broadband

The latest decision facing many families is whether to acquire broadband or not:

- Overall, 24% of 9-19 year olds live in a household with broadband access to the internet, again showing that households with children are 'ahead' of those without.<sup>32</sup>
- 33% of those children and young people with internet access at home have a broadband connection while 41% pay a monthly subscription fee and 20% pay for connection by the minute. Of those with broadband, age and gender differences are marginal.<sup>33</sup>

Figure 4a: Whether have technologies at home and whether these have internet access by gender and socio-economic background



Base: All 9-19 year olds (N=1,511)

## Access, inequalities and the digital divide



- However, there are larger differences in relation to socio-economic background with 38% of ABC1 and 26% of C2DE children with home access to the internet using a broadband connection. This is unsurprising, given the comparatively greater cost of a broadband connection, but it marks one of the various and subtle ways in which socio-economic status perpetuates the digital divide even among those with internet access at home.<sup>34</sup>

### Diversifying access platforms

Further complicating matters, until recently internet access meant access via a personal computer. But today, forms of access are also diversifying. As yet it is unclear whether these different platforms matter for the nature or quality of internet use, though since the costs involved, expertise required and social contexts of use all differ, one would indeed predict differential consequences according to the platform.

It would seem that we are witnessing a step-wise phenomenon in which families first acquire a television set, computer, games console, mobile phone, then they acquire multiples of at least some of these, and then they acquire internet access on one or more of each (see Figures 4a and b).

- 87% of children aged 9-19 have a computer at home, 62% have digital television, 82% have a games console and 81% have their own mobile phone.<sup>35</sup>

- Games consoles are more common among boys than girls; mobile phones are more common among teenagers than children; computers especially, and to a lesser degree digital television, are more common in middle class than working class households.

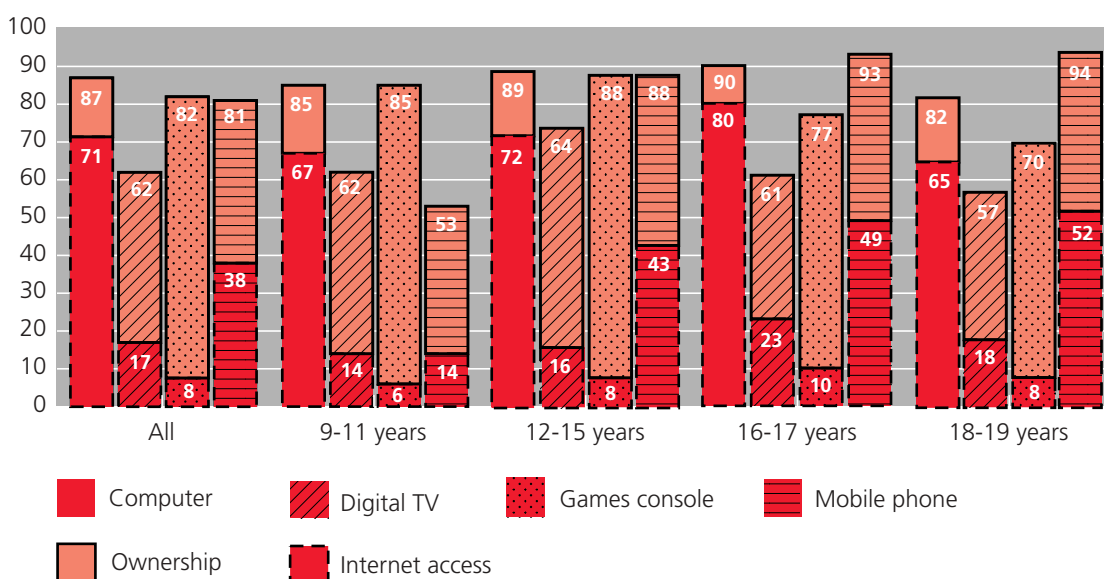
Although it is possible to gain internet access on each of these technologies, it is clear that the computer is the favoured platform for internet access, followed by the mobile phone. However, digital television should not be neglected since nearly a fifth of young people can access the internet in this way.

- Thus, 71% of 9-19 year olds can currently access the internet at home through a computer, 17% through a digital television set, 8% through a games console and 38% via their mobile phone.<sup>36</sup>

- If we include all the ways in which a child can access the internet at home, home access rises to 74%.

- Also interesting is the fact that, while more middle class homes access the internet via the computer (85% compared with 56% of working class homes), working class homes (35%) are almost as likely to provide internet access via a child's mobile phone as are middle class homes (41%). Internet-enabled mobile phones jump in ownership for the 12-15 year olds.

Figure 4b: Whether have technologies at home and whether these have internet access by age



Base: All 9-19 year olds (N=1,511)



## Access, inequalities and the digital divide

### Media-rich bedrooms

Unlike for television, whose rightful place initially was clearly in the living room but which has since migrated into an increasing number of rooms in the house, the computer has not fitted easily into UK homes. Each family has a story to tell, explaining why it has been put in one or another room and, very often, how it has been moved around the house – stories which reveal domestic practices, individual preferences, family conflicts, questions of aesthetics and décor and practicalities of space and telephone wires.

One key trend is that, as media goods in the home multiply in both number and range, children are being provided with increasingly media-rich bedrooms.<sup>37</sup> Interviews with parents reveal that the decision to put a television, games console or computer in a child's bedroom is not taken lightly. Nor is provisioning a media-rich bedroom simply a matter of money, for often it is lower socio-economic status households, including some of those with comparatively few media goods elsewhere in the home, that invest in personalised media for children.<sup>38</sup>

Over and above financial and spatial considerations, this decision involves a weighing up of family preferences for communal or individualised leisure, a judgment regarding children's maturity and good sense, as well as an assessment of parental ideals regarding 'family life'. In short, this is a moral as well as a material decision and one that is often a source of conflict within the household.

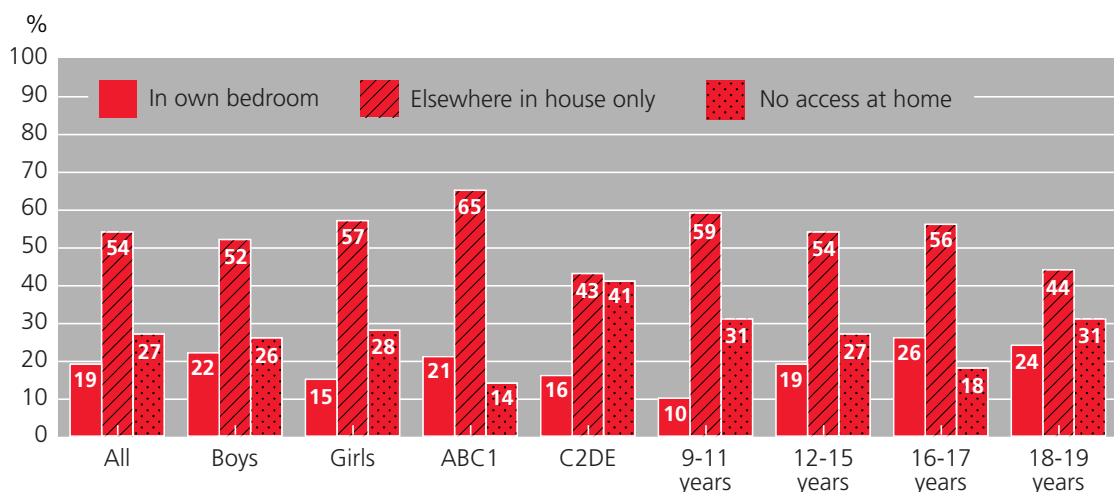
### The internet in children's bedrooms

The UKCGO survey shows that the location of an internet connection varies according to the platform with most variability for internet via a computer.

- Among 9-19 year olds with at least one computer online at home (71%), most often a computer is located in the living room (41%), in 31% of homes in the study, in 22% in the child's bedroom, in 12% in a sibling's bedroom, in 10% in the parent's bedroom, in 7% of homes a computer moves around (eg laptop), in 6% it is in the hall or landing and in 1% in another bedroom.
- Fewer than half the computers online at home are, therefore, located in a public or living room.
- For those who access the internet through a digital television set (17%), location varies little, for 96% have put it in the living room, 4% in the parents' bedroom and only 2% in the child's bedroom.
- By contrast, for the few who access the internet via a games console (8%), this access is most likely to be located in a child's bedroom (60%), 27% placing it in the living room, 18% in the sibling's bedroom, 3% in the parents' bedroom and for 3% in the study.

The internet, more than any previous medium, brings the outside world – with its opportunities and its dangers – into the home, raising concerns for many parents about children's private or unsupervised use of the internet and so making the location of the point of access critical in managing a range of risks relating to both contact with strangers and inappropriate or unwelcome content.

Figure 5: Access to the internet in child's own bedroom by demographics



Base: All 9-19 year olds (N=1,511)

## Access, inequalities and the digital divide



Government advice to parents is to 'locate the computer in a public area of [the] home, rather than hidden away in a bedroom'.<sup>39</sup> Yet, as our focus groups with children showed, children and young people themselves are keen to use the internet to have control over the conditions and context of their internet use, essentially to manage their own privacy online as well as offline.

Looking across platforms, Figure 5 shows the overall availability of internet access in children's bedrooms.

- In all, 19% of 9-19 year olds have internet access in their bedroom.
- This figure is higher for boys (22%) than girls (15%), a subtle but not insignificant way in which gender differences are marked in the home.
- Middle class children are also more likely to have their own internet access in their bedroom (21% compared with 16% of working class children).
- Predictably, personal access to the internet in the bedroom rises with age from only 10% of the 9-11 year olds to 24% of the 18-19 year olds and 26% of the 16-17 year olds.<sup>40</sup>

### Overview of internet access among children and young people

Access at home is widely regarded as a key measure of diffusion. It suggests voluntary take-up and broad-ranging use by the population (by contrast with the required and, possibly, narrow use of the internet at work or school). It is a crucial measure to consider for children because, although nearly all have access at school, use is often relatively restricted there. As it becomes ever more taken for granted that people do have access to the internet, the costs of exclusion from home internet may also rise, particularly if use at home differs from or is more flexible than use at school or elsewhere.

In other words, if it is at home that children are most free to experiment with the medium as our focus groups suggest, then it is here that they may gain most in confidence and expertise, making inequalities in home use of continuing significance. Yet, parental concerns that the medium is used 'well' and that risks are minimised results in some restrictions on children's online activities, this perhaps contributing to their use of the internet in other locations.

- These figures for internet access in different locations represent a substantial rise in just a few years. Compared with 2002, access at home has risen from 56% to 75%, access at school has risen from 71% to 92%. In 2001, the comparable figures were 45% for home access and 56% for school access, and access elsewhere has risen from 19% in 2002 to 64% in 2004.<sup>41</sup>
- Overall, the UKCGO survey finds that 98% of 9-19 year olds have accessed the internet in one location or another. Beta figures for previous years again confirm the rapidity of the increase in access, from 73% in 2001 and 84% in 2002.

Taking the most obvious measure of access, the *UK Children Go Online* survey shows that children – more than adults – nearly all have access to the internet. Only 1% of pupils aged 9-17 lack any kind of access to the internet, and only 3% of 9-19 year olds say that they never use the internet, a figure that contrasts with 22% of the parents of 9-17 year olds. When the *Young People New Media*<sup>42</sup> survey asked children about the internet in 1997, only 19% of 6-17 year olds had used the internet, marking a dramatic change in just seven years.

However, as we have seen, this near-universal access among children remains stratified in key respects – in terms of home access especially, gender, age and socio-economic inequalities persist.

The nature and quality of access is constantly changing. Increasing expectations, developing technologies and changing social norms result in a continual process of upgrading and extending the form of internet access in the home. Current trends towards multiple computers, towards broadband access and towards access in the child's bedroom are all altering the communication ecology of the home. Yet, while access is no longer exclusively computer-based, the computer is at present still the main platform for access to most online contents and services.

## The nature and quality of internet use

### The nature and quality of internet use

#### What are children and young people doing online?

How much time do they spend using the internet and for what purposes? Are they, indeed, the pioneers of the digital age?

Considerable policy attention has addressed the digital divide, seeking to identify, and remove, the barriers to internet access and use in order to reduce inequalities.<sup>43</sup> With rising access to the internet, especially for school children, the debate has moved from early concerns with material access to the technology to the trickier question of symbolic access – the practical skills and subtle competencies which facilitate confident internet use, the lack of which crucially hinders new and inexperienced users, limiting the richness of their use if not excluding them altogether. The UK Government frames this shift as one from basic to advanced levels of use thus:

*'Encouraging remaining non-users onto the first rung of the internet ladder will remain an important challenge to guide policy in the next few years. However, for individuals to fully realise the benefits of the internet we must help them move up the ladder – to move from basic activities such as e-mail and browsing to more advanced uses such as e-learning and transactional activities like buying, banking and accessing government services.'* (Office of the e-Envoy, 2004, p. 11)

However, identifying the ways that children and young people use the internet is not as straightforward as identifying whether they have access. The quality of use and the skills required to maximise the benefits of internet use may be measured in a variety of ways – frequency of use, time spent online, kinds of uses, expertise in use, specific skills online, attitudes towards internet use and so forth.

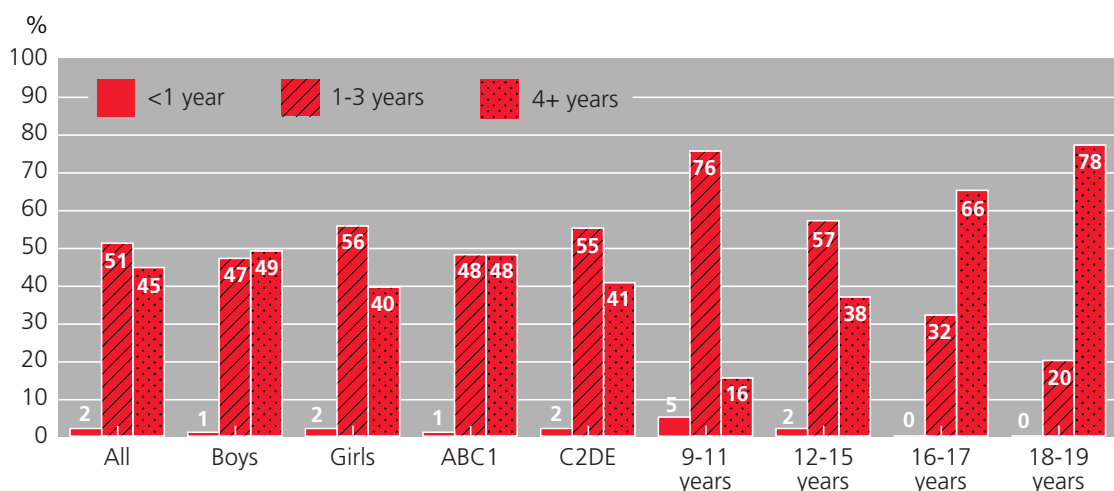
We employ a range of measures, below, to examine the nature and quality of children and young people's use of the internet.

#### Length of experience of using the internet

Even if most children now have access to the internet, when they first gained access reveals inequalities whose consequences may be long-lasting in terms of experience, confidence and expertise.

- Among 9-19 year olds who currently have home access to the internet (74%), the largest proportion (30%) first got the internet at home at least four years prior to being surveyed; some 16% got it 3-4 years ago, 19% 2-3 years ago, 18% 1-2 years ago, 5% 6-12 months ago, 6% 1-6 months ago and 2% less than one month ago.

Figure 6: Number of years using the internet by demographics



Base: 9-19 year olds who use the internet at least once a week (N=1,257)

## The nature and quality of internet use



In consequence, few children and young people with home internet access are very recent users as one would expect for a medium that has now reached, if not saturated, the mass market.

- As Figure 6 shows, around half of 9-19 year olds who go online at least once a week have been using the internet for between one and three years, with the other half having used it for more than four years. Boys are slightly more long-time users than girls, middle-class children more than working class children and older teens more than younger children.
- On average, those who use the internet at least once per week were between 10 and 11 years old when they first started using it.

We explore below whether length of time using the internet has any implications for expertise and range of uses.

### Life without the internet

Perhaps surprisingly, even though the internet has become a fairly familiar technology, it is not as thoroughly embedded in children's lives as are some other media.

- When asked which one item they would miss the most if it disappeared tomorrow, 31% of children and young people name television; 28% would miss their mobile phone most, 14% their games console, 10% the internet, 9% the computer and 7% books.
- Those who chose the internet (N=145) as their 'miss most' medium were more likely to be boys, 12-15 year olds and from ABC1 backgrounds.

This greater preference for television (31%), when asked to choose one medium, is not just a matter of television being more familiar since that more recent arrival, the mobile phone, has also become more necessary to young people's daily lives than the internet. Given the struggles that our qualitative research reveals many children and their families to encounter in trying to use the internet, we suggest that the very complexity – often, the frustrations – of the internet accounts for its low ranking as a 'miss most' medium. Although increasingly, most children do consider it an essential tool for homework.

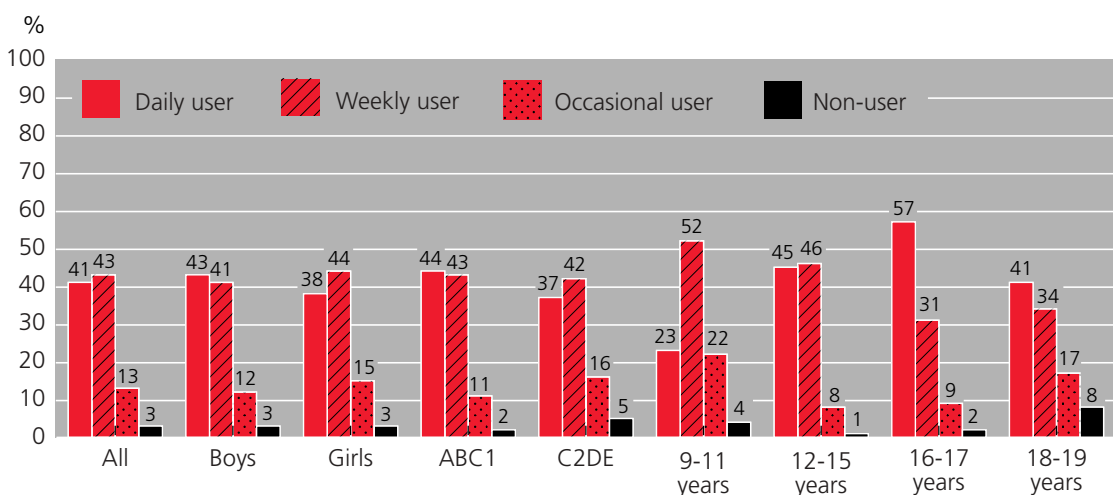
When the *Young People, New Media* project asked the same question of 6-17 year olds in 1997, 45% named television, 8% chose the games console, 5% the computer and 4% books; at that time, too few had a mobile phone or internet access to choose these media. Comparing this with the UKCGO survey suggests a decline in television's popularity in favour of the phone, the computer, the games console and the internet over the past seven years.

### Frequency of internet use

Also unlike television, music and the mobile phone, for many children, the internet is not always a daily medium. We divided 9-19 year olds into four user categories (see Figure 7a):

- Daily users who use the internet at least once a day
- Weekly users who use the internet at least once a week but less than once a day
- Occasional users who use the internet less often than once a week
- Non-users who never use the internet

Figure 7a: Frequency of internet use by demographics



Base: All 9-19 year olds (N=1,511)

## The nature and quality of internet use

Most children and young people make either daily or weekly use of the internet:

- 9-19 year olds are mainly divided between daily users (41%) and weekly users (43%); only 13% are occasional users, and just 3% count as non-users. If we compare these figures with data from 2002, it seems that the proportion of children who are daily users has risen.<sup>44</sup>
- There is a small tendency for more boys (43%) than girls (38%) to be daily users, and a similarly small difference in relation to socio-economic status. Middle class children (44%) are more likely to be daily users than working class children (37%), and the latter group contains more non-users (5%) than the middle class group (2%).
- The age differences in frequency of use are more marked: 9-11 year olds are most likely to be weekly users (52%), though one fifth of them (22%) are occasional users; 12-15 year olds are divided between daily users (45%) and weekly users (46%) while 16-17 year olds are most likely to be daily users (57%).
- The 18-19 year olds are rather more divided, for, while 41% are daily users, they also contain the highest proportion of both occasional users (17%) and non-users (8%). This suggests that this oldest group – not all of whom are in school or college – contains either some 'internet drop-outs' or some for whom the internet arrived too late.<sup>45</sup>

- There are almost as many daily users among parents of 9-17 year olds (N=906) as among children aged 9-19 – 39% of parents. The remaining parents are divided evenly between weekly users (21%), occasional users (18%) and non-users (22%). Thus, there are considerably more non-users among parents than among children.

In the UKCGO survey, detailed questions about use were asked of the 84% of 9-19 year olds who use the internet at least weekly (ie daily plus weekly users) while questions seeking to understand low or non-use were asked of the remaining fifth of the age group.

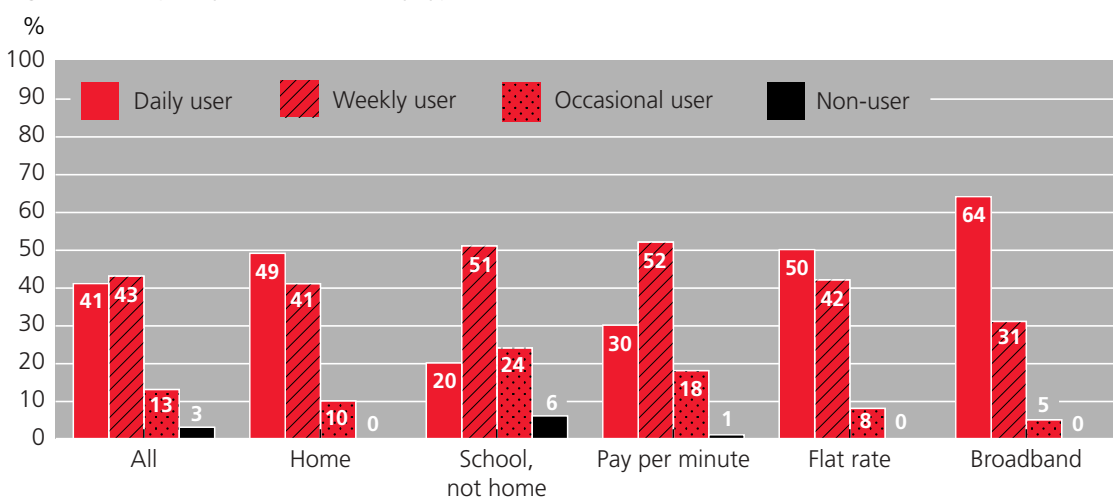
### Relating frequency and location of use

There is a clear association between frequency of use and both location and mode of access (see Figure 7b).

While cautioning that no assumption can be made regarding the direction of causality here, we observe that:

- Those with home access are more likely to be daily users while those with school access only are more likely to be weekly users.
- Those who pay for access by the minute are more likely to be weekly users, flat rate access is divided between daily and weekly users, and those with broadband are most likely to be daily users.

Figure 7b: Frequency of internet use by type of access



Base: All 9-19 year olds (N=1,511)

## The nature and quality of internet use

### Time spent online

How much time are children and young people spending online? Measuring time use is never easy for adults or children. We asked children to estimate the time they spent on a typical weekday and a typical weekend day and then produced a composite score for internet use on a typical day, as reported in Figures 8a and b.

- One fifth (19%) of 9-19 year olds spend about 10 minutes per day online, half spend between about half an hour (25%) and one hour (23%) online, and a further fifth go online for between one (14%) and three hours (6%) each day. Only one in 20 (5%) spend more than three hours on the internet on an average day.

- Any gender differences in time spent online are marginal,<sup>46</sup> as are class differences, though age differences are more marked. The youngest age group (26% of 9-11 year olds) are very light users, spending about 10 minutes per day on the internet.
- Among the older age groups, a sizeable proportion spends several hours online each day. Indeed, half of 12-15 year olds go online for one hour or more, as do two thirds of 16-17 year olds. Among 18-19 year olds, this decreases again to one half who spend one or more hours on the internet each day. Among 9-11 year olds, however, it is only one third who spend this long.

Figure 8a: Time spent online on an average day by gender and socio-economic background

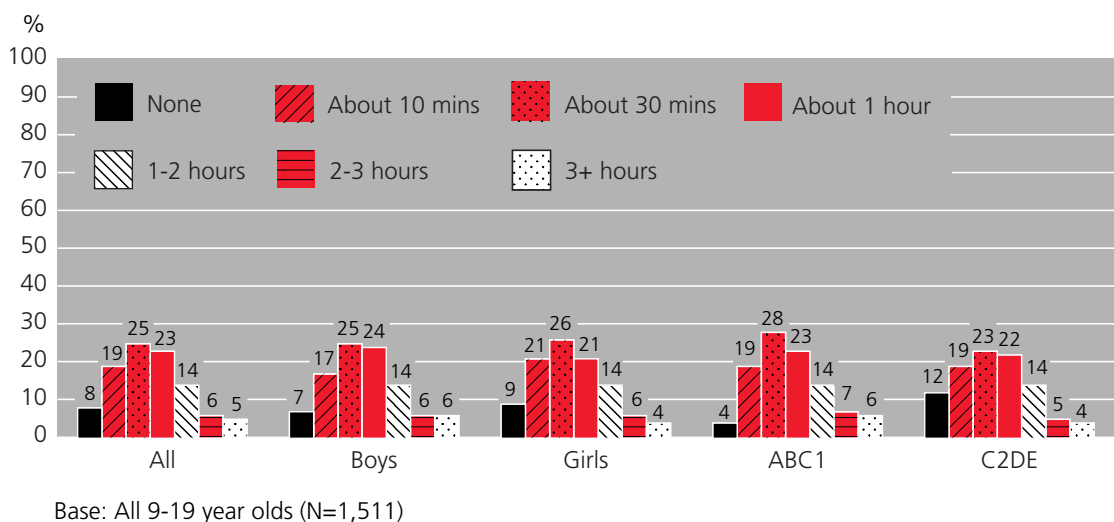
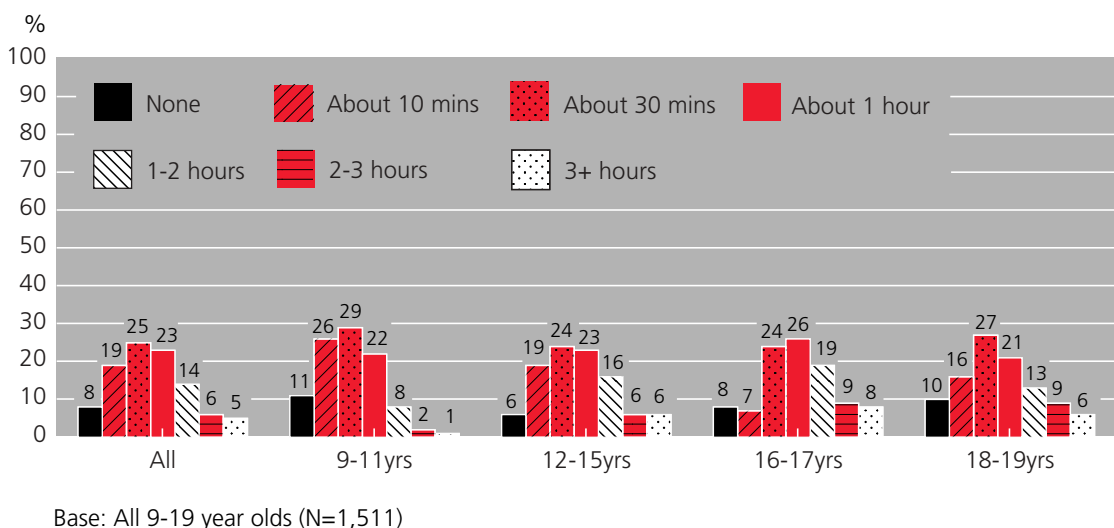


Figure 8b: Time spent online on an average day by age



## The nature and quality of internet use

### Relating frequency of use and time online

Frequency of use is, not surprisingly, associated with time spent. Among those who go online daily, six in ten (57%) spend between one and three hours online per day, and one in ten spend longer than three hours per day. By contrast, among those who go online once a week, 28% spend between one and three hours online on a typical day, and only 1% spend longer than three hours per day.

These amounts of time can be compared with time spent on other activities by children in order to gauge the relative importance of the internet (see Figure 9).

It seems that time spent online is less than time spent watching television or with the family, similar to that spent doing homework and playing computer games and greater than time spent on the phone or reading.

### Social context of use

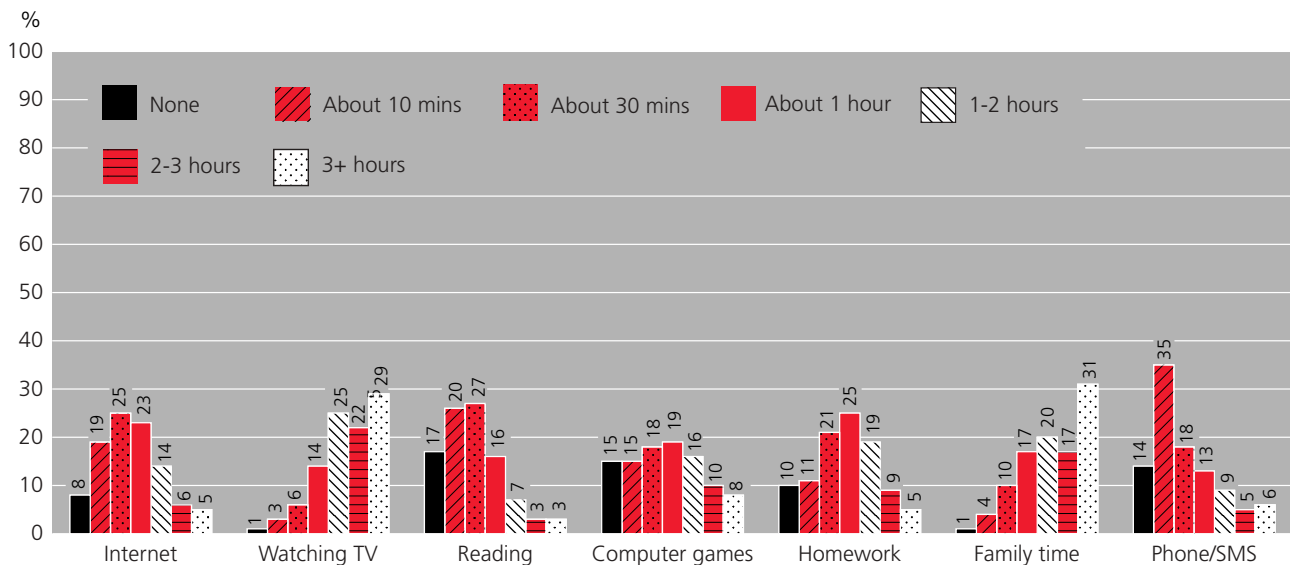
We have seen that, more often than not, the computer is located in a private rather than a public room in the home. However, the nature of the room does not dictate the context of use. Several friends may gather in front of the screen in a bedroom; a teen may wait till the family is out before using the internet in the living room.

The UKCGO survey shows that, unlike television, but like books and often music, the internet is generally used alone.

- Four fifths (79%) of children and young people with home access to the internet report mostly using the internet on their own.
- A further 5% report mostly using it with a sibling, 5% with their mother, 5% with their father and 4% with one or several friends.

Hence, even though the internet may be located in a public space (eg living room), it appears to be a personal medium in terms of the experience of using it.

Figure 9: Amount of leisure time spent on activities on an average day



Base: All 9-19 year olds (N=1,511)

## The nature and quality of internet use



### Varieties of use

When they go online, what do children and young people use the internet for?

In our observational studies,<sup>47</sup> we found that some children go online once a week or less, for perhaps half an hour, visit the same two or three familiar sites linked to favourite television programmes or sports teams, conduct a quick search to help their homework and save themselves a trip to the library, perhaps play a simple game or see if they have an email from a relative living abroad.

For other children or, more often, teenagers, the internet has rapidly become something very different, occupying considerable amounts of time, opening up new communities for immersive game-playing, a source of expertise and self-development, perhaps a place where they can take some risks in experimenting with relationships or escape from the difficulties of their offline lives.

Thus, we witnessed a fair proportion of children for whom the internet is an occasional convenience but by no means bringing about a grand transformation in their daily lives while for others it is becoming of much greater importance. Within the family, however, each or any of these children might be considered 'the internet expert' by their parents or siblings, and each or any might run some risks of encountering inappropriate material.

### Main uses of the internet

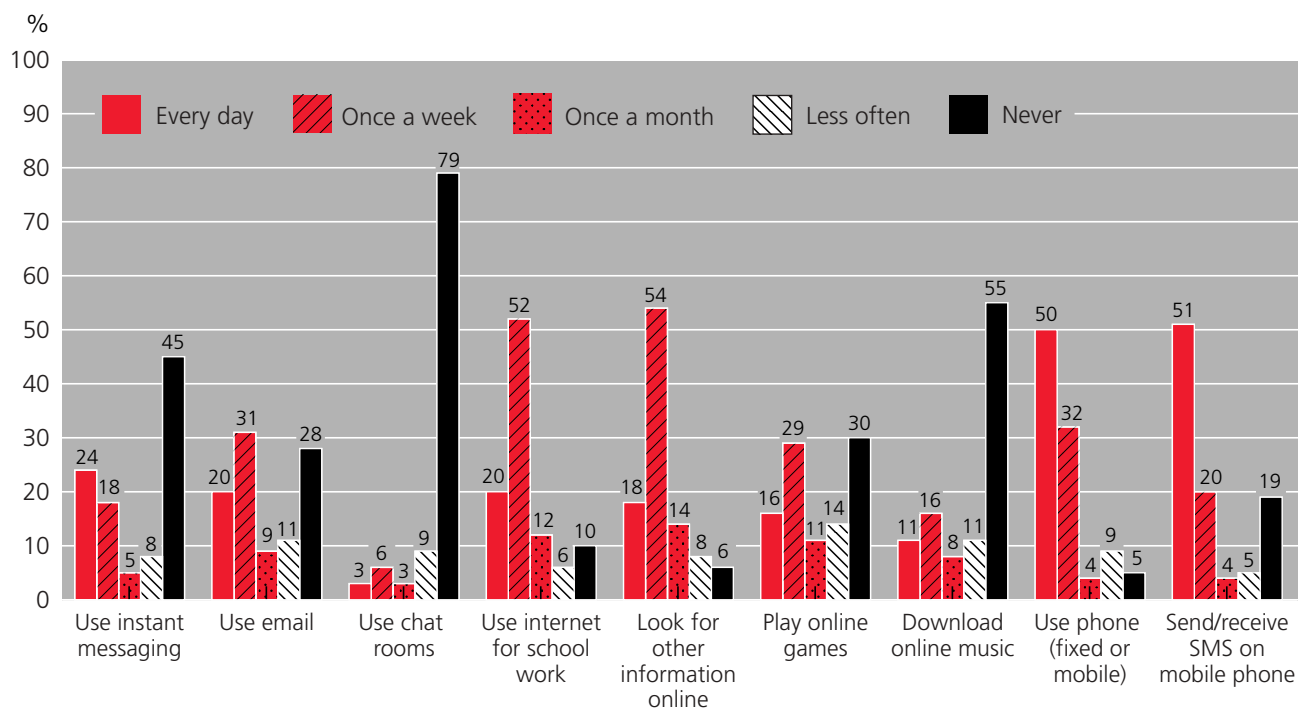
How far are these observations supported and extended by the *UK Children Go Online* survey? We asked those who go online at least once a week (84% of all 9-19 year olds) what they do on the internet (see Figure 10). Overall:

- 90% use it to do work for school or college
- 94% use it to get information for other things
- 72% use it to send and receive emails
- 70% to play games online
- 55% to send and receive instant messages
- 45% to download music
- 21% to use chat rooms

Among parents who have ever used the internet, the range of uses is as follows:

- Email (78%), searching (not for work) (75%), work (50%), events (45%), music (21%), games (19%), instant messaging (15%) and chat (6%).

Figure 10: How often do you...?



Base: 9-19 year olds who use the internet at least once a week (N=1,257)



## The nature and quality of internet use

Comparing children and parents, it would seem that both prioritise the internet as an information medium, though 'information' must be interpreted very broadly. Both children and their parents use the internet for searching for non-work related topics, though children are more likely also to use the internet as a work/education-related medium. For children, compared with their parents, the internet is also more multifaceted, being used not only for information but also to a greater extent for games, music and communication.

The frequency with which these activities are engaged in varies, as shown in Figure 10, where, for comparison, we have included also the frequency with which children use the telephone and send and receive text messages.

- Communication uses tend to be more frequent than others – instant messaging and, especially, the phone and SMS<sup>48</sup> tend to be used daily, with email and chat used less frequently. Searching for information, whether school work or other things is more likely to be a weekly activity, as are playing games and downloading music.

### Main types of website visited

Given the popularity of searching online, we also asked those who go online at least once a week which kinds of websites they visit (see Figure 11).

- Following the widespread use of search engines, the most commonly visited sites are those for music, games, hobbies and revision, though a wide range of sites are visited in all.

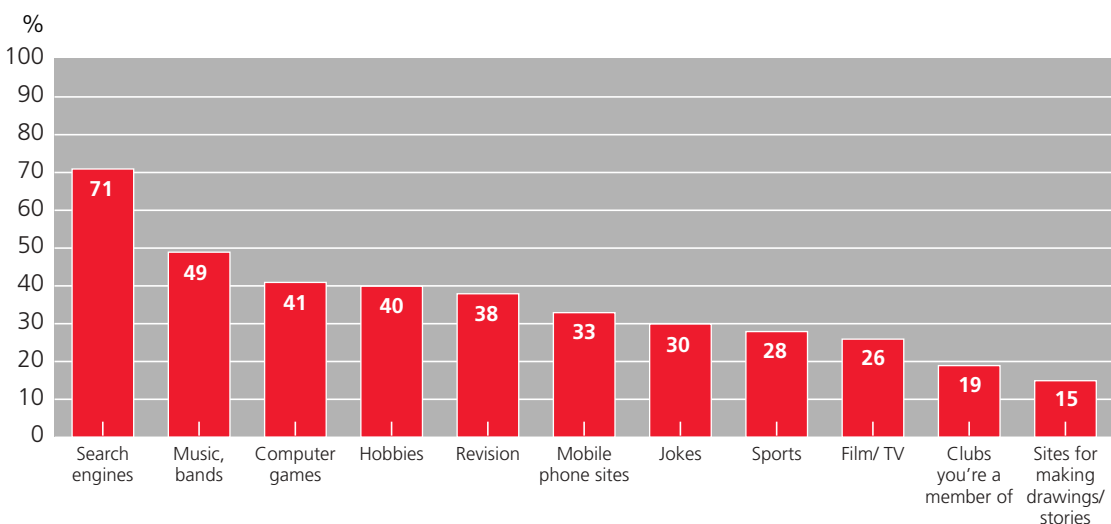
However, the internet can be used for many more activities than these. 12-19 year olds who go online at least once a week (N=975) were asked about a range of further activities. They also report using the internet as follows:

- 44% use it to look for information on careers and further education
- 44% to look for events listings
- 40% to look for products or shop online
- 35% to do something that someone else has asked them to do
- 30% to watch or download video clips
- 26% to read the news
- 23% to look for information on computers, programming or web design
- 17% to use message boards
- 14% to access other people's personal homepages
- 13% to plan a trip

### Less-approved uses of the internet

Not all uses of the internet are approved by society, and we tried to reflect this in the UKCGO survey by asking, in the 'private' self-completion section of the survey (see Annex), about a range of less-approved activities. After all, children and young people can be, on occasion, naughty or deceitful, this being arguably intrinsic to childhood (and some adults may also recognise these online activities).

Figure 11: Which of the following sites do you visit on the internet nowadays? (Multiple response)



Base: 9-19 year olds who use the internet at least once a week (N=1,257)

## The nature and quality of internet use



Among 12-19 year olds who go online at least once a week, we found that:

- 21% have copied something for a school project and handed it in as their own
- 8% have hacked into someone else's website or email
- 5% have visited an online dating site
- 4% have sent a message to make someone feel uncomfortable or threatened
- 2% have gambled for money online

Two thirds (67%) claim to have done none of these, a figure which may or may not reflect their activities accurately. Since, in our qualitative work we found some hints of a pleasurable defiance in relation to both hacking and the illegal downloading of music, it may be that young people regard online activities through a different moral lens to that conventionally used for the same activities offline.

### Narrow use of the web

Although this suggests that across the population as a whole the internet is a highly diversified medium, each individual may use the internet in just a few ways (see Figure 12).

- Among those who go online at least once a week, half concentrate their use on fewer than five different websites.
- Frequency of use is associated with range of use, with those who use the internet daily being more likely to visit more sites than those who use it once a week. Indeed, among daily users, one third had visited more than ten sites in the previous week.

### Relating frequency and range of use

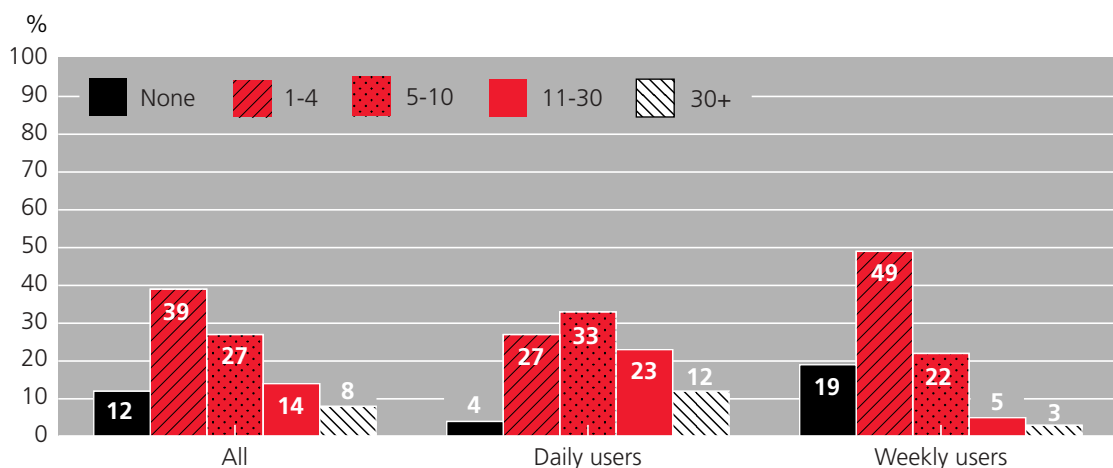
If we compare those who use the internet every day with those who use it about once a week, it is apparent that the former make a much broader use of the internet (see Figure 13). In short, more use appears to mean a greater range of uses.

### Overview of children and young people's internet use

In sum, the internet is used in a range of ways by children and young people.

- As an information medium to support school work, the internet has rapidly become central in children's lives: 60% of 9-19 year olds in full time education regard the internet as the most useful tool for getting information for homework (compared with 21% who say books, 11% who say parents, 3% who say CD-Rom, 2% friends and 1% television).
- Interestingly, the youngest (29% of 9-11 year olds) and the oldest groups (31% of 18-19 year olds) are more likely to choose books than the other groups (15% of 12-15 year olds and 21% of 16-17 year olds). These groups are least likely to have access to and use the internet. Compared to this, parents (N=906) think that books are most likely to help their child do better at school (82%), followed by the internet (73%), the computer (40%) and television or video (22%).<sup>49</sup>
- As a communication medium, the internet represents a significant addition to the existing array of means by which young people communicate with others, with both email (72%) and instant message (55%) being popular, though chat rooms are less used (21%). Online communication is, nonetheless, less widely used than the

Figure 12: Number of websites visited in the last week by frequency of internet use



Base: 9-19 year olds who use the internet at least once a week (N=1,257)

## The nature and quality of internet use

phone (fixed or mobile). Even among those who use the internet at least once a week, 95% use the telephone, and 81% send and receive text messages (see Figure 13).

- As an entertainment medium, internet use remains significantly below the amount of time spent watching television. On an average school day, 47% of 9-19 year olds watch for between one and three hours and a further 29% watch television for over three hours.
- By comparison, going online takes place for much shorter periods of time: 48% of 9-19 year olds spend between 30 and 60 minutes on the internet and a further 25% more than one hour. However, such use is often more active or interactive than television viewing, with games playing, downloading music and following up fan interests through online searching all being popular activities.

### Low and non-users

How likely is it that the remaining 25% of children and young people will gain internet access at home, and how important is it that they do so? Might some drop out of current levels of access and use? Does it matter that a very small percentage (3%) has never used the internet and that 13% are occasional users? Are these merely the 'laggards' in an inexorable process of universal access, or is there, rather, a digital 'underclass'? The Government suggests that access to the internet is no longer a problem in the UK:

*'Opportunities to physically access the internet are now available to all, whether at home or at work, in the community or through the possibilities afforded by new*

*mobile technologies and [digital television].'* (Office of the e-Envoy, 2004, p. 5)

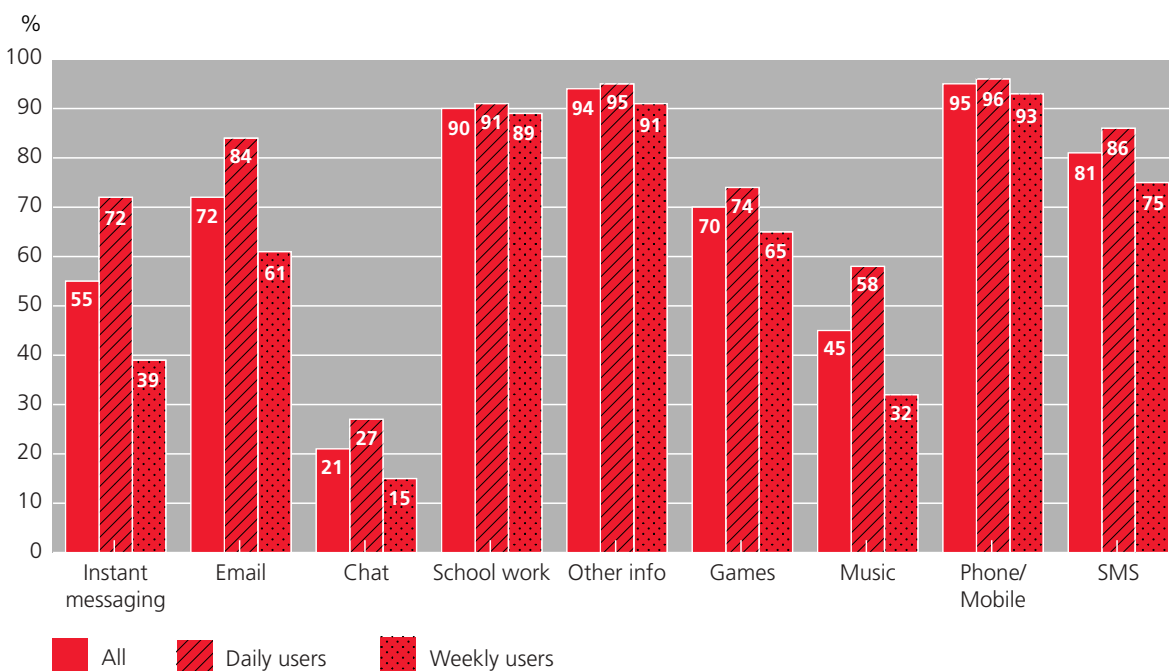
Similarly, commenting on the 41% of the adult population (14+) in the UK who do not use the internet, the Oxford Internet Survey suggests that there are no remaining barriers of fear or anxiety about technology. Rather:

*'People who don't use the Internet don't see how it will help them in their everyday affairs [...]. Among the two-fifths who do not use the Internet, half are informed but indifferent [...]. [Only] one in seven are excluded because they do not know anyone who could [...] get on the Internet on their behalf, and this group divides equally into those who are anti-technology and those who are apathetic.'* (OxIS, 2003)

However, social exclusion is a multi-determined phenomenon, and people's stated 'choices' require careful unpacking (see Figure 14).<sup>50</sup>

- The UKCGO survey concurs that there seem to be few negative attitudes towards computers among non-users.
- However, the findings suggest that access and expertise remain significant issues, and that non-use cannot simply be explained by lack of interest.
- Many of the parents who are not online say they themselves lack knowledge or expertise (38%), as well as lacking access (34%), though one third (32%) also state that they are not interested in going online. While lack of time remains a barrier for some (17%), few claim costs, attitudes, safety or other impediments to going online.

Figure 13: Online activities and use of phone/SMS by frequency of internet use



Base: 9-19 year olds who use the internet at least once a week (N=1,257)



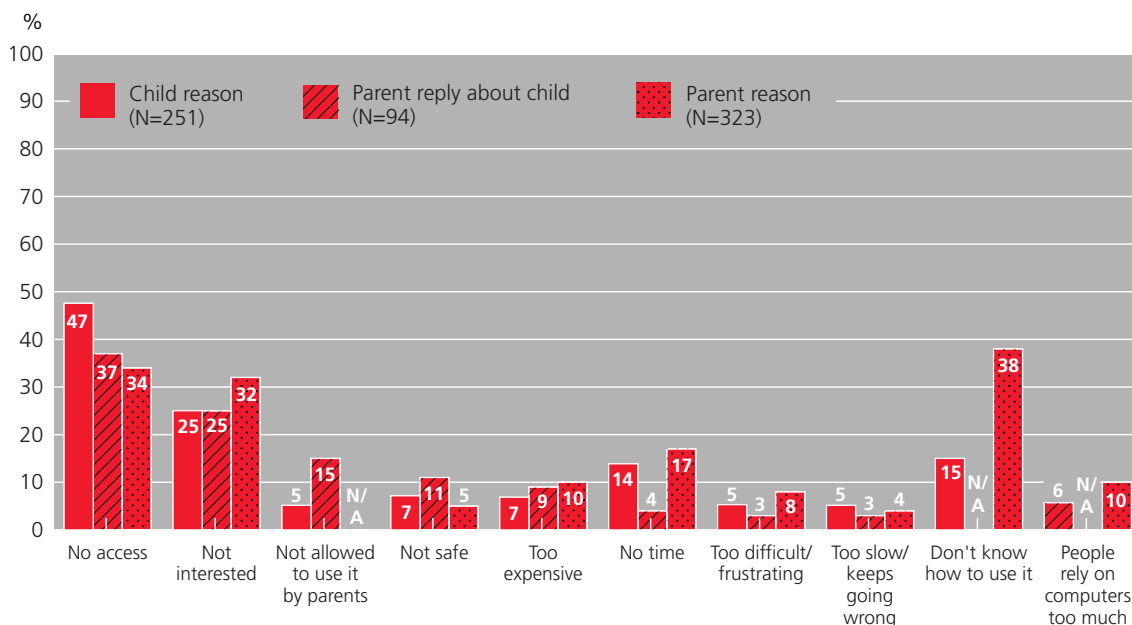
## The nature and quality of internet use

- Commenting on the non-use or low use of their children, parents claim that lack of access is the main reason (37%), with lack of interest as the second most important reason (25%). Some do not allow their children to use the internet for reasons of safety, cost or other factors.
- Children themselves explain their own low or non-use primarily in terms of a lack of access (47%), with only 25% saying that they are not interested in using the internet. Some 15% say they don't know how to use it, this being the reason why they don't use it at all or more,

14% lack the time to use it, and a few find it too expensive or unsafe.

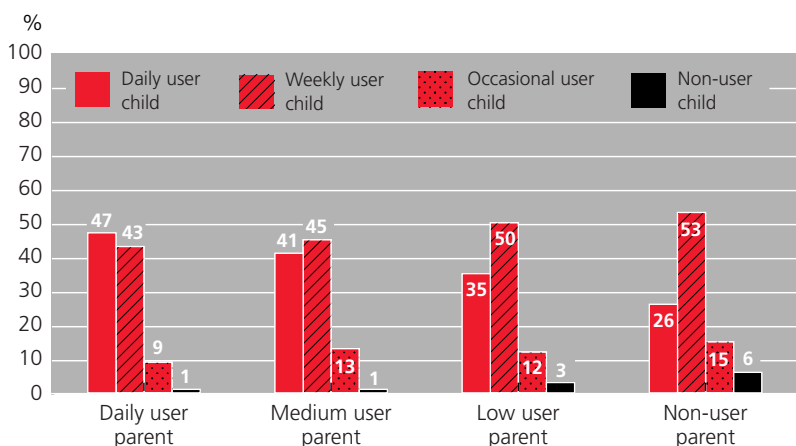
Parents' own levels of internet use makes a difference to their children, it seems. As Figure 15 shows, in relation to internet use as in many other domains of socialisation, children's practices tend to follow those of their parents. Parents who make daily or weekly use of the internet are more likely to have children who go online often. Parents who are occasional or non-users are less likely to have children who go online daily.

Figure 14: Reasons given for occasional/non-use of the internet (Multiple response)



Base: 9-19 year old occasional and non-users (N=251); Parents of 9-17 year old occasional and non-users (N=94); Occasional and non user parents of 9-17 year olds (N=323)

Figure 15: Child frequency of internet use by parent frequency of internet use



Base: All parents of 9-17 year olds (N=906) and their children (N=906)

## Education, informal learning and literacy

### Education, informal learning and literacy

The UK Government's recent report, 'UK Online',<sup>51</sup> proposes that the traditional requirement that all children be taught literacy and numeracy in school should be expanded to include ICT skills in recognition of the growing importance of such skills, including internet skills, to young people's education and future employment:

*'Nowhere is the importance of sophisticated ICT skills clearer than in the recent DfES White Paper '21st Century Skills, Realising Our Potential'. It makes a commitment to help adults gain ICT skills as a third skill for life alongside literacy and numeracy. DfES' aim is to enable all adults to have the ICT skills they need to learn effectively online, become active citizens in the information age and, with 62% of adults stating that ICT skills are essential to their current or future job, contribute productively to the economy.'* (Office of the e-Envoy, 2004, p. 11)

This is, therefore, a good moment to note the baseline in terms of both education and expertise among children and young people.<sup>52</sup>

#### Learning how to use the internet

In our qualitative work, we found that children often prefer to learn how to use the internet informally by playing around with the medium and working things out for themselves. This resonates with a long-standing debate within education circles about the benefits of experimentation and free play compared with more structured teaching.<sup>53</sup>

While it is too early to determine whether in terms of measurable outcomes internet literacy is best gained through formal or informal learning, and notwithstanding

children's avowed preference for informal learning, the advantage of formal learning is that a clear curriculum can be designed and delivered in an age-appropriate manner.

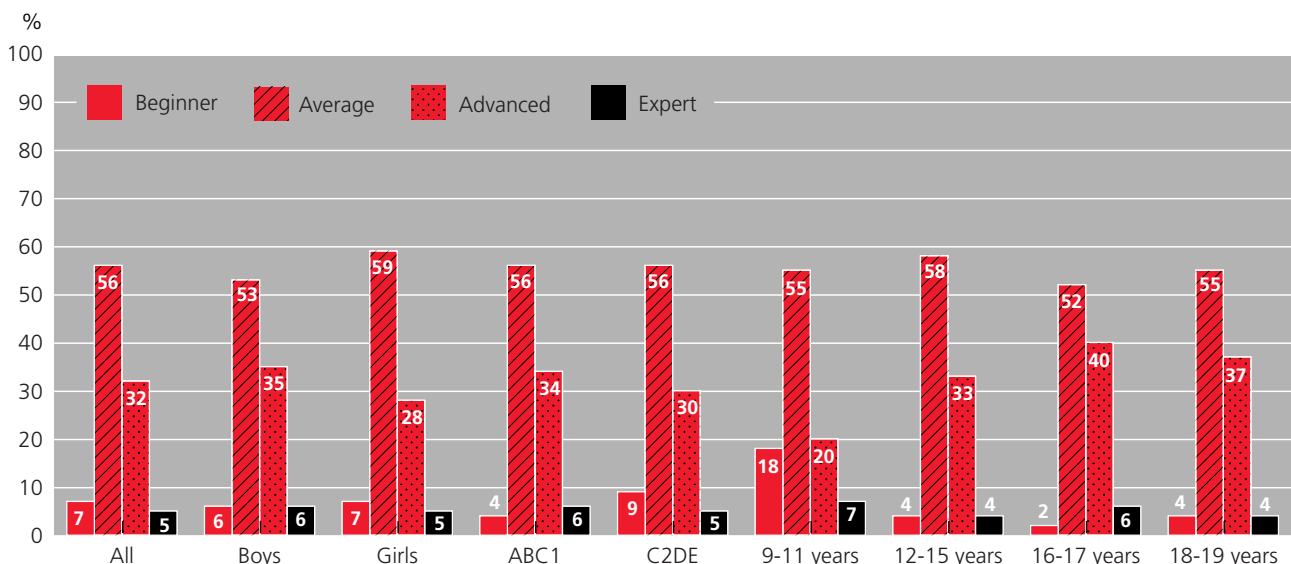
Ideally, this would include a balance between opportunities and safety information, including a range of 'internet literacy' or 'media literacy' skills, such as effective searching, the critical evaluation of websites, production, as well as reception of online content.<sup>54</sup> Is this happening in schools at present?

- Of those in full time education (N=1,326), the majority of children and young people have received lessons on how to use the internet, 23% reporting they have received 'a lot', 28% 'some' and 19% 'just one or two'.
- However, nearly one third (30%) reported having received no lessons at all on using the internet.
- It might be expected that these children have lessons yet to come in the curriculum, but in fact, it is teenagers who are more likely than the younger children not to have been taught how to use the internet. Only 19% of 9-11 year olds say they have had no lessons in how to use the internet, compared with 26% of 12-15 year olds, 45% of 16-17 year olds and 51% of 18-19 year olds in full time education.
- Not surprisingly, 69% of non-users claim to have received no lessons, yet 36% of daily users also report receiving no lessons in internet use. While the former group risk digital exclusion, the latter group risk the dangers of ill-informed use.

#### Online expertise and self-efficacy

It is difficult to measure objective levels of online expertise. Which skills matter, and what is their purpose?. However, research suggests that the perception of oneself as more or less expert online matters as much if not more than actual levels of expertise. Such internet self-efficacy or internet confidence, it is argued, has consequences for internet use.<sup>55</sup>

Figure 16a: How good are you at using the internet? By demographics



Base: 9-19 year olds who use the internet at least once a week (N=1,257)

## Education, informal learning and literacy



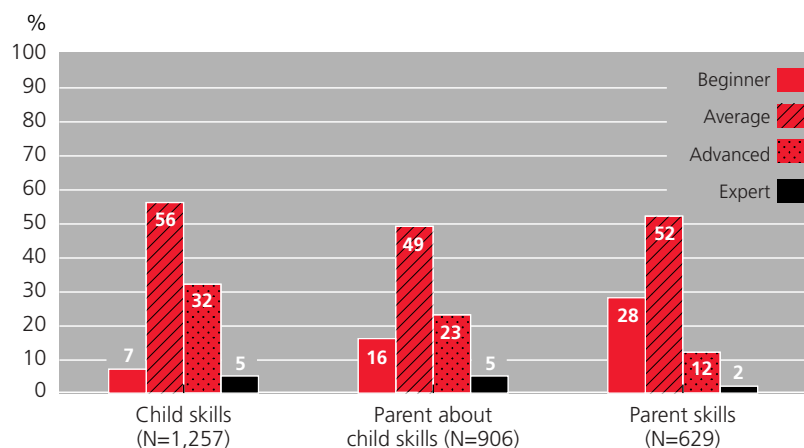
- Perhaps unsurprisingly, most children (56%) who use the internet at least weekly consider themselves 'average' in terms of their online skills, though one third (32%) consider themselves 'advanced' (see Figure 16a).
- Slightly more boys (35%) than girls (28%) consider themselves 'advanced', suggesting greater levels of confidence and, perhaps, skill among boys. The age differences are more strongly marked, with judgements of one's own skill rising sharply with age. Those who claim either beginner or expert status vary little by demographic variables.
- 28% of parents who use the internet describe themselves as beginners – compared with only 7% of children who go online at least once a week. Half (52%) of parents consider their skills average, and only 12% consider themselves advanced – compared with 32% of children.
- Even though parents agree that children are more advanced than they are and that fewer of them are beginners, they still consider more children to be beginners and fewer to be advanced than do the children themselves.

This apparent skills gap between less-expert parents and more-expert children poses an interesting challenge to parents' ability to guide their children's internet use, a point we return to later.

### Relating parental and child expertise online

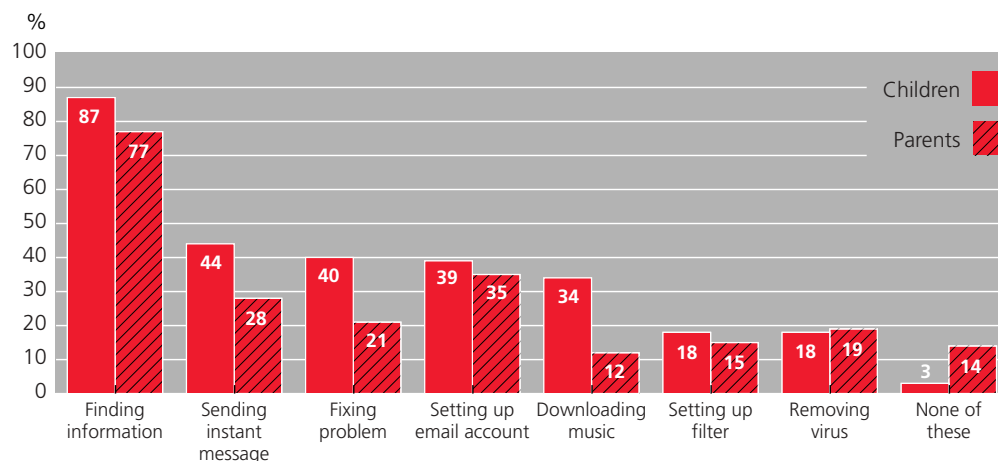
Parents are more modest about their own skills on the internet than are children. Moreover, parents are a little more sceptical about their children's skill level than are children themselves (see Figure 16b).

Figure 16b: How good are you at using the internet? / How would you judge your child's skills in using the internet?



Base: 9-19 year olds who use the internet at least once a week (N=1,257);  
All parents of 9-17 year olds (N=906); Parents who have ever used the internet (N=629)

Figure 17: Which of the following are you good at? (Multiple response)



Base: 9-19 year olds who use the internet at least once a week (N=1,257); Parents who have ever used the internet (N=629)

## Education, informal learning and literacy

### Developing skills online

What kinds of skills have children in mind when they describe themselves as good at using the internet? The UKCGO survey compares the skills of parents who ever use the internet with the skills of children who use the internet at least once a week (see Figure 17).

- Finding information is the key skill associated with internet use and one in which both children (87%) and parents (77%) are confident.
- In finding information, as in most other online activities, children claim a higher level of competence than their parents. This is most apparent in relation to sending an instant message, something that 44% of children but only 28% of parents feel able to do, in fixing a problem (40% of children, 21% of parents) and downloading music (34% of children, 12% of parents).
- Only one third of children and parents feel able to set up an email account, and less than a fifth are able to set up a filter or remove a virus.
- Since also only a fifth of parents feel able to fix a problem if it arises, it is evident that levels of confidence and competence in managing the home internet environment are fairly – and perhaps problematically – low.

### Trust and critical literacy

Given the enormous variation in nature and quality of information available online, a crucial skill that all users must acquire is that of determining the quality and worth of the information they find. Unlike for print media, where considerable quality thresholds, gate-keeping checks and editorial standards are imposed, children must determine this for themselves when using the internet.

Hence, critical literacy is a vital part of ICT and media literacy skills, with trust emerging as a central issue in navigating the online environment. Most children and young people we interviewed in the focus groups appeared to be ignorant of the motives behind the websites they were using, and many, it was clear, had not thought about this question at all. Only a few were aware of the commercial interests or strategies at stake.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, our qualitative work provided a range of examples in which children were unclear or confused about when online information is trustworthy and how to discriminate between different kinds of sites – which could be commercially-motivated, politically-biased or simply of poor quality.

This confusion over trust is confirmed by the UKCGO survey.

- Of all 9-19 year olds currently in full time education (N=1,326), half think that some of the information on the internet can be trusted (49%), 38% trust most of it, 9% trust 'not much of it', and 1% trust none of it.

The 4 in 10 children who trust most online content indicates, at the very least, the scale of the challenge for media or internet literacy programmes. However, if many other children and young people are neither as wholly innocent or as naively trusting as often supposed, they may yet be ignorant. In other words, for the 49% who think some of the information can be trusted, how do they make such a discrimination and is it well-founded? A sceptical attitude is of little value unless one is equipped with some means to act upon this scepticism, discriminating between the trustworthy and the problematic.

- Only 33% of 9-19 year olds who go online at least once a week say that they have been told how to judge the reliability of online information.
- Among the parents of 9-17 year olds, only 41% are confident that their child has learned how to judge the reliability of online information.

Since two thirds of children who go online at least once a week claim to have received no advice or teaching on judging online information, the introduction of some guidance for all is an obvious and urgent first step (especially as many parents also struggle with these discriminations, making it difficult for them to advise their children). Going beyond this, to ensure that all children become competent and informed in weighing the value of the vast range of online resources is a vital if longer-term priority for the education system.

## Pornography online



### Pornography online

#### A cause for concern?

One of the main causes for concern in relation to children's use of the internet is that it provides access to pornography. In the often heated debates over online pornography, too little attention has been paid to the definition of pornography, often failing to distinguish images which are upsetting to some from those which are of the kind whose availability is controlled or restricted in traditional media (television, magazines, video) and, in turn, from those which are illegal. This makes estimating the amount and availability of online pornography difficult.<sup>57</sup>

Previous surveys have suggested cause for concern. A Canadian survey of parents<sup>58</sup> suggested that 1 in 5 children have found undesirable sexual material online. The American Kaiser Family Foundation survey<sup>59</sup> found that one in three teens have seen pornography online and that children are more likely than adults to trust online information. In the UK, the Kids.net survey<sup>60</sup> found that in 2000, up to a quarter of children aged 7-16 may have been upset by online materials and that few reported this to an adult.

In 2003, the European SAFT survey found that between a quarter and a third of 9-16 year olds across five European countries had been accidentally exposed to violent, offensive, sexual or pornographic content within the previous year. Specifically, 12% of young people had accidentally ended up on a pornographic website (20% of 13-16 year olds, 19% of boys) and 9% on purpose (16% of 13-16 year olds, 16% of boys). While girls aged 9-12 were mostly upset by it and wished they had never seen it, boys aged 13-16 said they did not think too much about it or thought it was funny.

How do the UKCGO findings fit into this international picture? It turns out that the incidence of accidental exposure to such online content is considerably higher for children and young people in the UK, as outlined below.

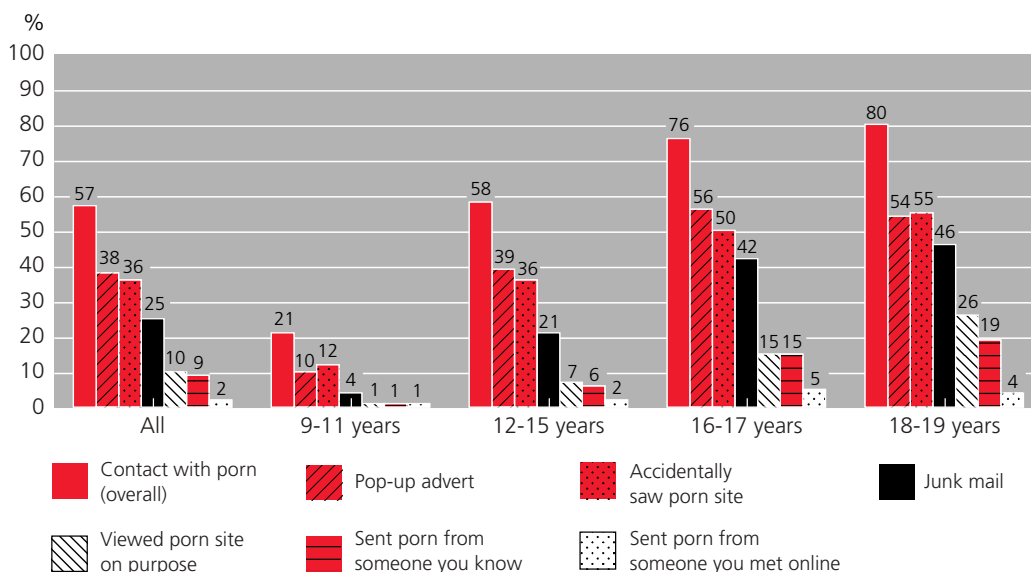
#### Contact with pornography on the internet

The UKCGO survey asked 9-19 year olds who use the internet at least weekly whether they have come into contact with pornography online,<sup>61</sup> and if so, how (see Figure 18). We have called this 'coming into contact with pornography' because not all of these children describe themselves as having 'seen' pornography, and, as we show below, a fair proportion recognise a message as containing pornography but do not open or look at it.

For reasons of research ethics, all questions about pornography were asked in the private, self-completion section of the survey. Furthermore, follow up or more detailed questions were only asked of those children who indicated in the initial question that they had indeed encountered pornography online.

- 57% of 9-19 year olds who go online at least once a week have come into contact with online pornography
- 38% have seen a pornographic pop-up advert while doing something else
- 36% have accidentally found themselves on a pornographic website when looking for something else
- 25% have received pornographic junk mail by email or instant messaging
- 10% have visited a pornographic website on purpose
- 9% have been sent pornography from someone they know
- 2% have been sent pornography from someone they met online

Figure 18: Have seen pornography on the internet by age (Multiple response)



Base: 9-19 year olds who use the internet at least once a week (N=1,257)



## Pornography online

Coming into contact with pornography is, it seems, commonplace for children and, especially, teenagers. In our focus groups, children and young people held some lively debates over whether this was welcome and why, for many, it was not. Annoyance and disgust seemed to be more frequent reactions than being upset, and girls had especially negative reactions to being sent it, or shown it, by boys they knew (for example, having it displayed on computers at school).

The age differences are marked. Only 21% of 9-11 year olds who use the internet at least once a week have come into contact with porn. This rises sharply to 58% of 12-15 year olds, 76% of 16-17 year olds and 80% of 18-19 year olds. The relative frequency of these different sources of contact does not alter, however, with age. Rather, each form of contact becomes more common as children become teenagers.

### Possible harms

Does this exposure to pornography matter? While illegal content is addressed by the criminal justice system and the Internet Watch Foundation, content which is legal but which may be harmful to children or offensive to both adults and children is subject to considerable controversy.<sup>62</sup>

For the most part, encountering pornography is unintentional. Whether teens stumble upon it when searching for information or when they receive a pop-up advert while doing something else, pornographic images appear to interrupt an ordinary activity – this surprising interruption doubtless making it all the more unwelcome.

However, 10% of internet users between 9 and 19 have sought out pornography on the internet on purpose, this being only 1% of the 9-11 year olds but 26% of the 18-19 year olds and only 3% of girls but 17% of boys aged 9-19. A substantial minority of the older teens also circulate pornography among themselves or those they meet online. Again, more boys than

girls do this: 14% of 9-19 year old boys have been sent pornography from someone they know but only 3% of girls.

In evaluating these data, we face several challenges. Determining both harm and offence is difficult in terms of empirical measurement, especially when asking children how they feel about or react to such situations. Determining what weight to accord such evidence, when balanced against such other considerations as freedom of expression and choice, key actor responsibility and children's rights, is also difficult in moral terms. Lastly, determining what action to take or what regulation to implement is difficult in policy and practical terms. We shall return to the issue of regulation in the home later.

### Comparing pornography online and offline

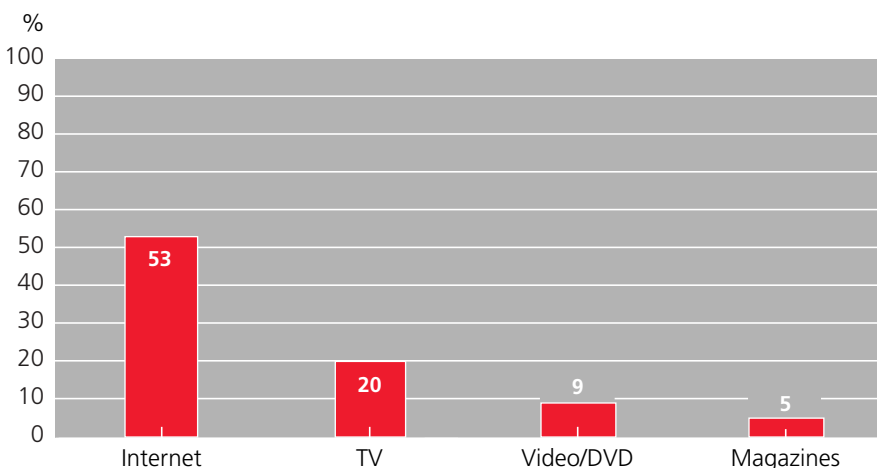
What is striking is that parents consider that the internet has made children's exposure to pornography much more likely (see Figure 19). We asked them to compare media for how likely it was that their child will come across explicit or pornographic material.

- 53% of parents consider that the internet is likely to expose their child to pornography, a figure far higher than for any other medium, including not only television (20%) but also those traditionally associated with pornography – video and magazines.

Children tell a similar story. We asked the 12-19 year olds how often they have seen pornography in different media (see Figure 20):

- 68% of all 12-19 year olds claim to have seen pornography on the internet, 20% saying 'many times'.<sup>63</sup>
- This is a much higher figure than the 52% who have seen pornography on television, 46% in magazines and 30% on video.

Figure 19: Where, if at all, is your child most likely to come across sexually explicit or pornographic material?



Base: All parents of 9-17 year olds (N=906)

## Pornography online



### Responses to viewing online pornography

One way to discover the possible consequences of online pornography is to ask children themselves. So, how do children and young people say they feel when they encounter pornography online? Of those internet users who go online at least weekly and who have come into contact with porn on the internet (57%, N=720):

- 54% say they did not think too much about it
- 14% didn't like it
- 20% thought it was disgusting
- 8% wished they had never seen it
- 7% thought it was interesting
- 7% enjoyed it

In short, half of those who see pornography online claim not to be bothered by it, and a small minority even positively like seeing it. However, a significant minority did not like it, one fifth claiming to have been disgusted.<sup>64</sup>

- Girls and younger children were more likely to say this: 22% of girls said they didn't like it (8% of boys), and 35% thought it was disgusting (10% of boys).
- 18% of 9-15 year olds didn't like encountering pornography online compared with 8-9% of 16-19 year olds, and 25-28% of 9-15 year olds thought it was disgusting compared with 12-16% of 16-19 year olds.

There might be reasons why children claim not to be bothered by pornography when in fact they are bothered. There might be reasons why children claim to be bothered when they were not. Wanting to be 'cool' would account for the former source of error, and so one might be sceptical that as many as 54% claim not to think too much about

encountering online pornography. On the other hand, it is even less likely that children would exaggerate their concern in a survey suggesting, therefore, that the disgusted one quarter of 9-15 year olds (one fifth of 9-19 year olds) represents something of an underestimate of the population about which one might be concerned and for which policy initiatives may be required.

### Actions on seeing online pornography

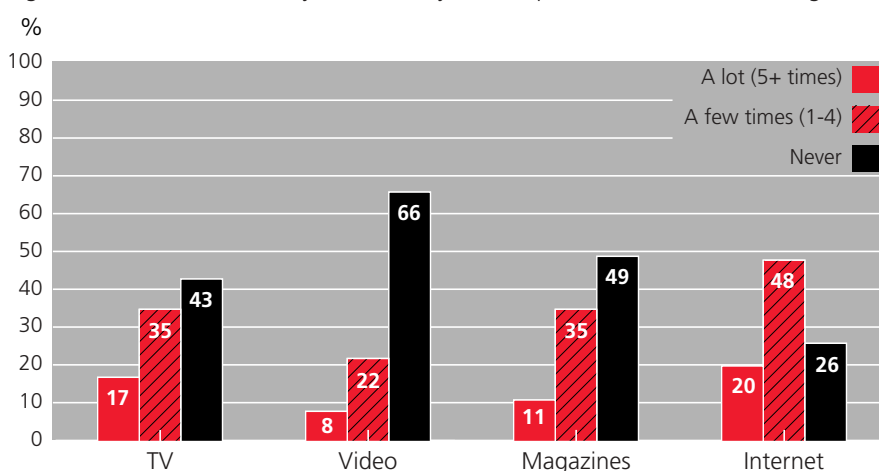
Parents are advised to make themselves accessible to their children should something online upset them or make them uncomfortable, and most parents would hope to do this. We asked children and young people what they would do under these circumstances (see Figure 21).

- Three fifths of all 9-17 year olds (61%) say that they would tell their parents if something on the internet made them feel uncomfortable. However, this average masks striking differences in age and gender, with girls and younger children being more likely to tell their parents.

What, then, do children actually do when they see pornographic material? Of those users who have been on a pornographic website (40% of those who use the internet at least weekly):

- 56% said that they left the site immediately without looking at it
- 31% looked at it first and then left
- 7% told a friend about it
- 7% clicked on some links to see what else was there
- 6% told a parent or teacher
- 5% went back to it another time
- 3% sent the website address to a friend<sup>65</sup>

Figure 20: Overall, how many times have you seen porn on TV / video / in magazines / on the internet?



Base: All 12-19 year olds for TV, video and magazines (N=1,131); All 12-19 year olds who have come into contact with online pornography for internet (N=839)

## Pornography online

Half of the children and young people who encounter online pornography leave as quickly as they can, it seems, while the other half are likely to take a look at it or act upon it in some way.

Similarly, we asked internet users who have received pornographic junk mail, including pop-up adverts (45% of those who go online at least weekly), what they did next, with similar results:

- 65% said that they deleted it immediately without opening
- 12% opened and looked at it
- 9% told a friend
- 8% told a parent or teacher
- 7% clicked on some of the links to see what else was there

While recognising that half of those who have encountered pornography do not think too much about it and so could not be described as feeling uncomfortable, the other half did not report such a casual response. It may give some cause for concern that only 8% said they told a parent or teacher what they had found.

### Reflecting on early experiences of pornography

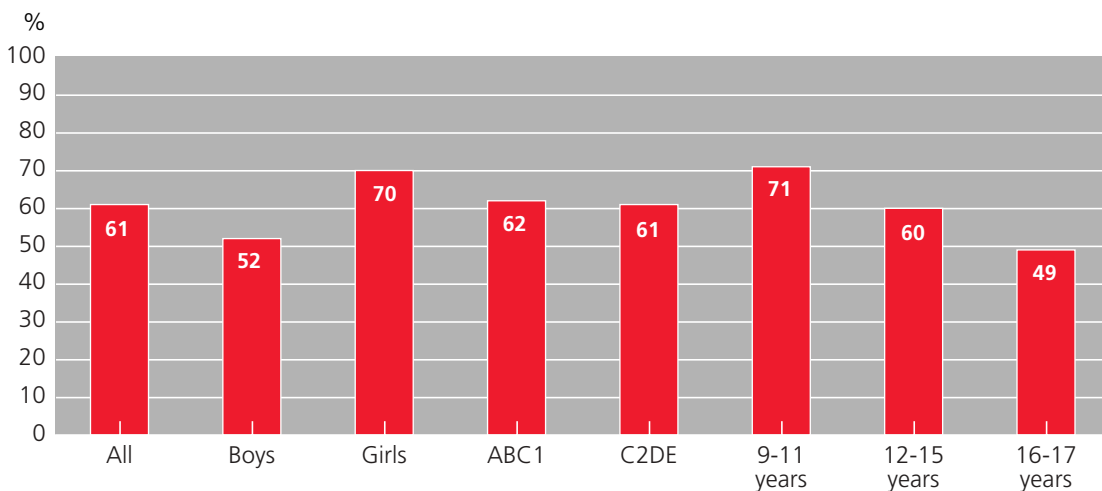
Lastly, we invited young adults to reflect on their encounters with pornography, reasoning that, although younger children may be embarrassed in answering or consider it 'uncool' to express concern, older teens who had come across sexually explicit material in one form or another might be more realistic in telling us whether it matters that children encounter pornography.

We asked 18-19 year olds who use the internet at least weekly and who have seen pornography anywhere (70% of 18-19 year olds who use the internet at least once a week) to 'think back to when you first saw porn':

- Nearly half (45%) thought they had been too young to see it when they did
- 42% thought they were about the right age
- Only 13% thought it would have been all right if they had seen it before then

Since nearly half of those who have seen pornography think they encountered it when they were too young, and since we have seen above that few children tell their parents when they do encounter pornography, this provides a pointer to the scale of the problem. However, it remains difficult, especially in a survey, to gauge the extent or seriousness of any consequences of exposure to pornography as a child.

Figure 21: I would tell my parent(s) if something on the internet makes me uncomfortable by demographics



Base: 9-17 year olds who use the internet at least once a week (N=1,071)

## Communication, identity and participation



### Communication, identity and participation

#### A diversifying communication environment

The choices underlying young people's uses of the media are highly complex, as shown by the focus groups preceding the UKCGO survey. Public discourse tends to judge online communication against a ideal of face to face communication. However, rather than accepting the supposed superiority of face to face communication, young people evaluate the different options as superior for different communicative needs.

Hence young people themselves consider a wider range of options – face to face, writing, email, instant message, chat rooms, telephone, SMS – and they judge them according to a range of criteria (such as cost, privacy, wanting closeness or deliberately keeping a protective distance to avoid embarrassment).

#### From desktop to mobile communication

The UKCGO survey shows that the mobile phone is already overtaking the desktop computer as a prioritised means of communication (see Figure 22). The mobile phone enables children and young people to be in contact with their friends from anywhere, by comparison with which the still-fixed location of the desktop computer and internet connection is an important constraint.<sup>66</sup>

- Across all activities – passing time, making arrangements, getting advice, gossiping and flirting – the phone (both fixed and mobile) and text messaging score higher than emailing or instant messaging.

#### Local and distant contacts

These communication technologies are mostly used to contact friends that live locally but also, though to a lesser extent, friends living further away (see Figure 23).

- The phone and text messaging are particularly preferred, it seems, as means of getting in touch with friends nearby while email and instant message are used for friends whether nearby or further away.

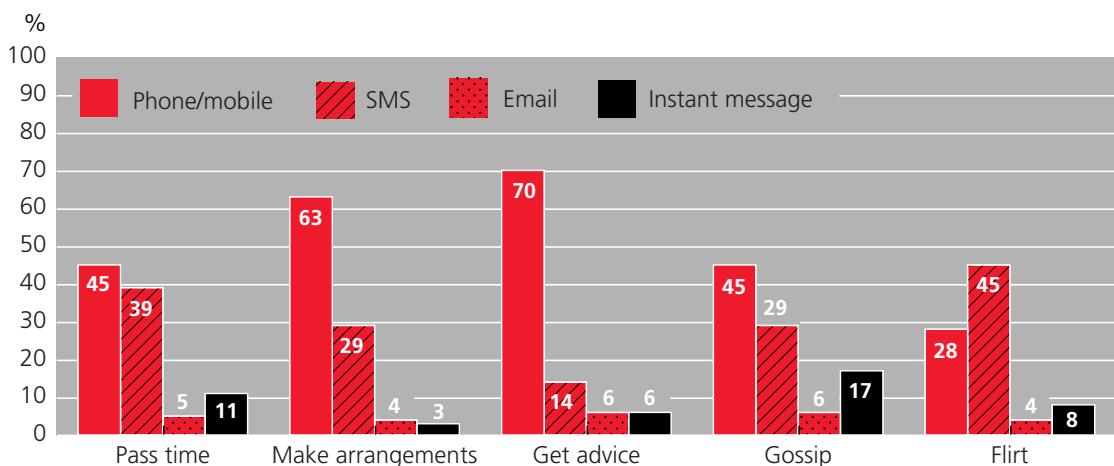
'Local' is the key term here, for, as the integration of on and offline communication implies, it appears that most contacts are local rather than distant (or 'virtual'), not strangers. This is especially the case for the telephone and text messaging and least the case for online chat.

- The number of chat room users is small compared with other online activities (21% of 9-19 year olds who use the internet at least once a week), but it is mainly here that contact takes place with people that children have not met face to face.

Hence, young people are using both on and offline communication to sustain their social networks, moving freely between different communication forms.<sup>67</sup> It seems that access to new communication technologies does not necessarily result in a larger and/or geographically more wide-spread social circle.

However, the internet does permit some broadening of everyday networks, strengthening already-existing relationships which are otherwise hard to maintain – friends from abroad, distant relatives, staying in touch with people who have moved and adding local contacts within the peer group whom they may not have previously got to 'know'. As young people add these 'friends of friends' to their buddy or address lists, it may be that online and mobile communication is resulting in a transformation of young people's networks.<sup>68</sup>

Figure 22: If you want to get in touch with a friend who wasn't with you in order to ..., which one of these methods would you use?



Base: All 12-19 year olds (N=975)

# Communication, identity and participation

## Benefits of online communication

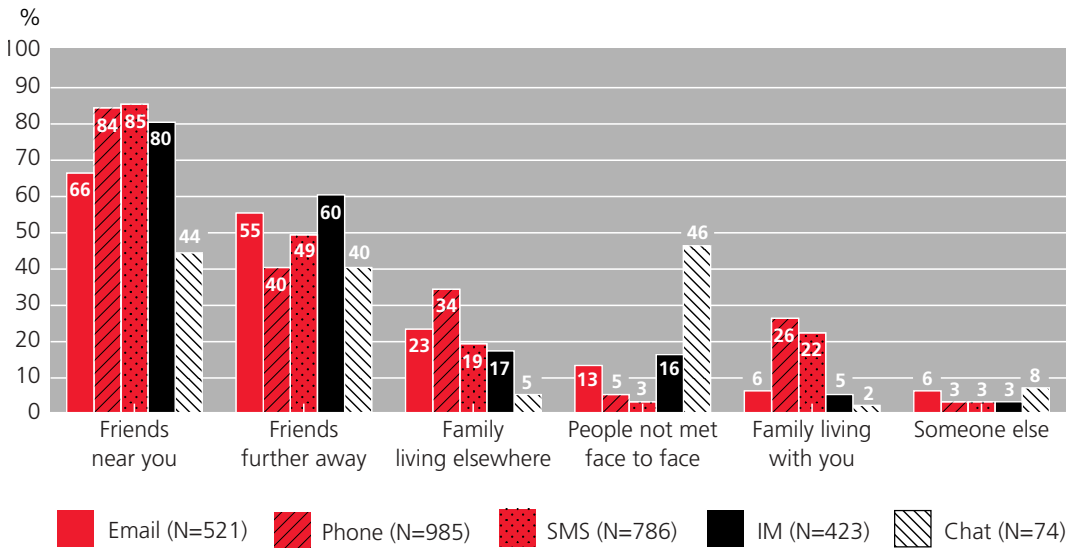
Why might some young people choose to communicate with others – friends, family or other people – online instead of face to face? Figure 24 shows some of the views that those 9-19 year olds who use chat, email or instant messaging (IM) hold about online communication.

- Half (53%) of email, IM and chat users agree that talking to people on the internet is less satisfying than in real life; a third think it is at least as satisfying.

- For some, there are advantages of communicating online: 25% think that it is easier to keep things private online, 25% feel more confident talking on the internet, 22% find it easier to talk about personal things online and, as we also found in the focus groups, some (17%) enjoy being rude or silly online.

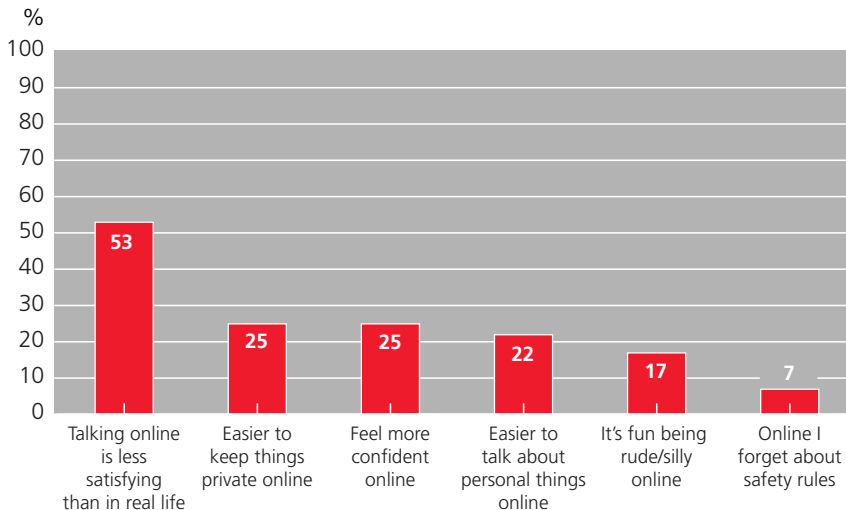
In sum, approximately one quarter of children and young people identify some significant advantages to online communication in terms of privacy, confidence and intimacy. For these young people, online communication affords them some opportunities that they may not find offline in face to face communication.

Figure 23: Types of people contacted by communication method



Base: 9-19 year olds who use email, phone, SMS, IM and/or chat at least once a week and have been in touch with people by email, phone, SMS, IM and/or chat in the last week

Figure 24: Here are some things people say about the internet compared to real life face to face. Which ones do you agree with? (Multiple response)



Base: 9-19 year old chat, email and/or IM users (N=983)

## Communication, identity and participation



### Seeking advice online

Given these perceived benefits of online communication, not only for sustaining contact with people one already knows but also for feeling more confident or talking about personal things online, a variety of organisations have sought to provide reliable and confidential online advice for children and young people.

In the focus groups with children, we found that young people differ among themselves in whether the internet represents a useful way of getting advice on personal problems (such as family, relationships, health or sexual matters) via specialist websites or online communities. For some, seeking advice online is less embarrassing as it can be done anonymously. However, most children said that they preferred to speak face to face to people they knew, such as friends and family, and older respondents particularly were not convinced that online conversations would stay private.

- In the UKCGO survey, a quarter of 12-19 year olds who use the internet at least weekly (25%) reported going online to get advice (see Figure 25).
- Online advice-seeking was slightly higher among the older age groups (29% of 16-17 year olds and 32% of 18-19 year olds) and among boys (26%) than girls (23%). Girls rely more heavily on teenage magazines with their well known problem pages (29%), an option that barely exists for boys (9%).

12-19 year olds who go online at least once a week and who use the internet to get advice (25%) mostly look for advice related to:

- school or work (65%)
- health (31%)

- alcohol, drugs or smoking (24%)
- relationships (23%)
- sex, contraception or pregnancy (22%)
- money (14%)
- family problems (13%)
- 'coming out' or being gay (2%)

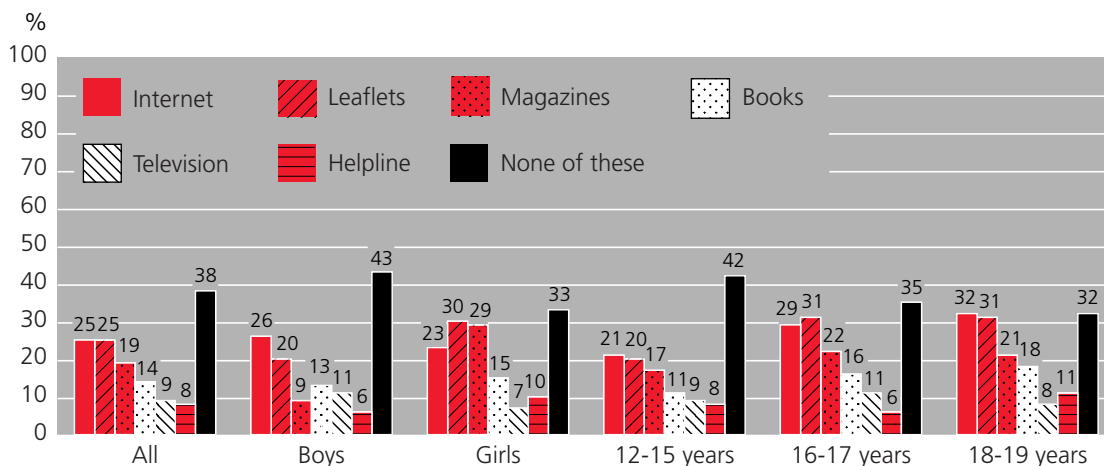
On the other hand, those who do not go online to get advice (75%) mostly say that they prefer to talk to someone they know (67%), 25% prefer to talk face to face, 17% do not think the advice would be reliable, another 17% think the wrong people might get personal information about them, 9% think that someone might see or find out what they said, and 7% think the other person or advice website would not understand their situation.

### Participation online

When would we say that online communication encompasses not only private, personal or peer-to-peer communication but also public, community-oriented or civic participation? What activities might young people pursue, and to what extent, for the judgement to be made that the internet is facilitating public participation? What would be a socially desirable or even optimal level of engagement?

Undoubtedly, the internet has been hailed as the technology to bring direct participatory democracy to the masses, enabling citizens to become actively engaged in the political process.<sup>69</sup> A variety of organisations are now initiating innovative and interesting opportunities for public or civic participation of one kind or another. Some research suggests that young people value opportunities for participation when offered, although in practice these tend to be restricted in scope and tightly controlled.<sup>70</sup>

Figure 25: If you want some personal information or advice on things like relationships, family problems, sex, health, drugs etc, which if any of these do you use? By demographics (Multiple response)



Base: 12-19 year olds who use the internet at least once a week (N=975)

## Communication, identity and participation

The young people we interviewed in the focus groups were, however, rather disillusioned about or uninterested in the possibility of political participation via the internet. Over and over again the conversation flagged when we turned from communicating with friends to the idea of communicating in order to connect to the world of politics via the internet.

In the UKCGO survey, we pursued the question of participation in two ways. First, since the internet is notable particularly for its interactive potential, we asked about the ways in which children and young people used it as an interactive medium. Second, we asked specifically about political or civic uses, defined broadly.

### Interactivity

Email, chat and instant messaging are socially interactive media, meaning that users engage peer-to-peer, co-constructing the communicative encounter and, thereby, potentially reconfiguring social networks and relationships. However, interactivity also encompasses textual interactivity (between user and documents via hypertext, the world wide web).<sup>71</sup> This represents a shift in use from the reception of ready-made, often professional, information and entertainment contents (as with non-interactive broadcasting) to an active involvement, even co-construction, of online contents.

We have already seen (Figure 10) that 70% of those who go online at least once a week go online to play games (interactivity between the user and a technical system, the game, as well as, for some games, a form of social interactivity), and a similar proportion communicate online. But information uses – including browsing educational and entertainment sites – are near-universal. Does this simply mean the passive uptake of online contents, paralleling the days of terrestrial broadcasting, or do children and young people actively contribute to such sites?

The UKCGO survey asked 9-19 year olds who use the internet at least once a week (N=1,257) whether they have made use of interactive elements of websites (see Figure 26).

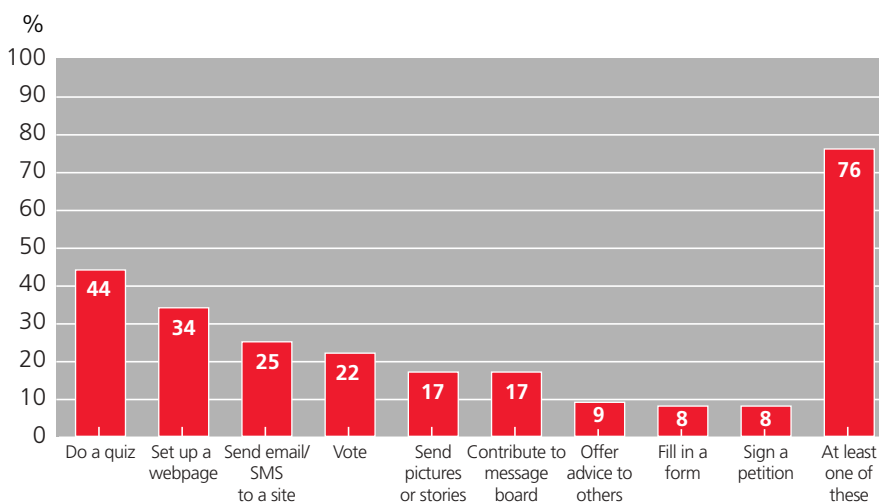
- 44% have completed a quiz online, 25% have sent an email or text message to a website, and 22% have voted for something online – all forms of engagement regularly invited by many websites seeking to engage and attract users.
- Less common among young people, we also find that 17% have sent pictures or stories to a website, 17% have contributed to a message board and 8% have filled in a form.
- Most active of all, 34% of these young internet users have set up their own website. And most civic-minded of all, perhaps, 9% have offered advice to others while 8% have signed a petition.

In sum, over two thirds altogether (76%) report at least one form of interactive engagement with a website, suggesting a high level of interest and motivation among children and young people to be active online and perhaps helping to explain the growing attraction of the internet over television for this generation.

### Civic and political interest

Is this interactive engagement with the internet best characterised as an engagement with peer-produced or, most likely, commercially-produced contents, or does it also indicate a willingness to engage in a public or civic sense with wider societal and democratic processes? Given the commonplace observation that young people are apathetic and politically disengaged, the UKCGO survey asked also about a range of sites that young people might visit and interact with, though without explicitly using the term 'political participation'(see Figure 27).<sup>72</sup>

Figure 26: Here are some things people do on websites. Do you ever do any of these things? (Multiple response)



Base: 9-19 year olds who use the internet at least once a week (N=1,257)

## Communication, identity and participation



- When it comes to actively seeking out information about political, environmental, human rights or other participatory issues, two fifths (42%) of 12-19 year olds who go online at least once a week have not visited relevant websites.
- The other half (55%) who have sought out such information said that they visited sites for charities (27%), environmental issues (22%), the Government (21%) and human rights (18%), with 14% visiting sites concerned with directly improving young people's educational or working conditions.

What do they do when they visit sites like these? We asked those 12-19 year old internet users who have visited such sites whether they had made a contribution on such sites during their visit. The majority replied that they had just 'checked out' the website (64%). Some of them had sent an email (18%), voted for something or signed a petition (12%) or joined a chat room (5%). Political and civic sites are, in short, more a source of information than an opportunity to become engaged for all but a minority.

What about those who have never visited political or civic sites (42%)? Most (83%) say that they are not interested in these kinds of issues. Other reasons include thinking that these sites are not intended for young people (6%), that they themselves are too young to find out about the issues covered (4%), that they do not trust or respect political organisations (4%) or do not know how to find these sites (2%).

If we take young people's words at face value, their lack of online political participation would appear to be due to a general lack of interest rather than to more specific problems – of website design, or trust, of searching – with politics as represented online. This is not to say that better designed websites could not succeed in drawing young people into

political participation, but at present this is certainly not occurring, at least for half of all teenagers.

This lack of interest is confirmed when we asked if young people discuss such political or civic issues peer-to-peer on the internet. More than half (56%) of email, IM and chat users aged 12-19 (N=828) say they never talk about these issues with anyone by email, IM or chat. However, 14% have done so once or twice, 24% sometimes and 4% often.

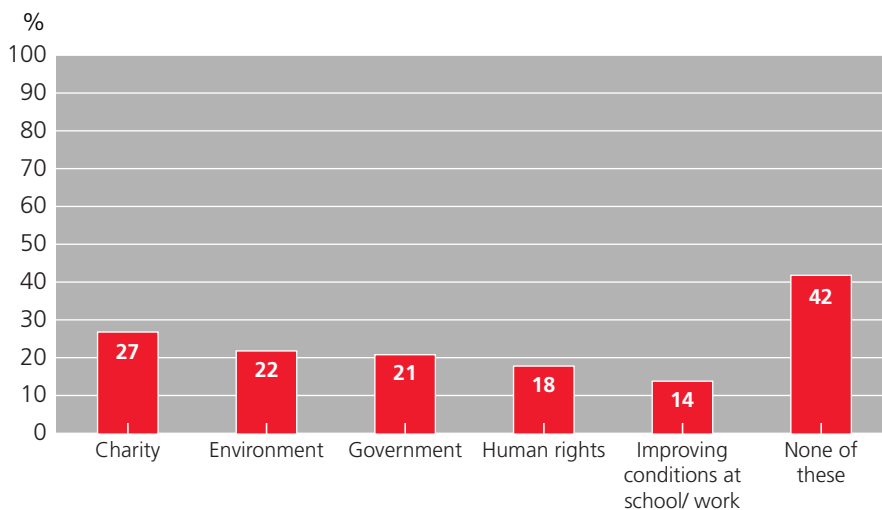
### Risks of online communication

Online communication is not, however, always a positive experience for children and young people, and the benefits discussed above must be balanced against the problems that arise when communicating on the internet (see Figure 28).

- One third of 9-19 year olds who go online at least once a week report having received unwanted sexual (31%) or nasty comments (33%) on the internet (email, chat, IM) or in a text message on their mobile phone.
- As we shall see later, parents substantially underestimate their children's negative experiences online and so appear unaware of their children's potential need for guidance.

Yet, perhaps because of the considerable media attention devoted to giving out personal information, to chat rooms and, especially, to stranger danger, the routine unpleasantness of some online communication appears relatively neglected in public discussion of the risks of the internet for children. We return to the gap between parental knowledge and children's experiences later.

Figure 27: Have you ever visited websites about...? (Multiple response)



Base: 12-19 year olds who use the internet at least once a week (N=975)



# Communication, identity and participation

## Playing with identity

Given the advantages that children and young people experience with online communication – in terms of intimacy, personal discussion, confidence etc, and given the playfulness – even silliness – that is inherent to childhood, there have been concerns that children will pretend about their identity online and perhaps reveal aspects of their identity that might be exploited online.

The potential consequences of pretending on the internet are unclear, though some risks exist. The UKCGO survey finds that pretending about who you are is commonplace among children and, especially, teenagers (Figure 29). This suggests that in designing safety advice – which often assumes a rather serious approach to the internet – it is crucial to recognise the desire to play, to mess around, with this medium.

- Some 40% of 9-19 year olds who use the internet at least weekly say that they have pretended online.

- 27% have used a different name, 22% have pretended about their age, 10% about their appearance, 9% about doing things that they never do in real life, 5% have used a different sex, 1% a different ethnicity and 4% state that they have pretended in other ways.

## Giving out personal information

Nonetheless, the safety advice not to give out personal details to other people they meet online seems to have gained a fair familiarity amongst young people, but there remains considerable scope for improved safety practices (see Figure 30).

- Half (49%) of those who go online at least once a week say that they have never provided information, such as their full name, age, email address, phone number, hobbies or name of their school, to anyone that they met on the internet.

Figure 28: Have you ever received unwelcome sexual comments from someone in any of the following ways? / Has someone ever said nasty or hurtful things to you in any of the following ways?

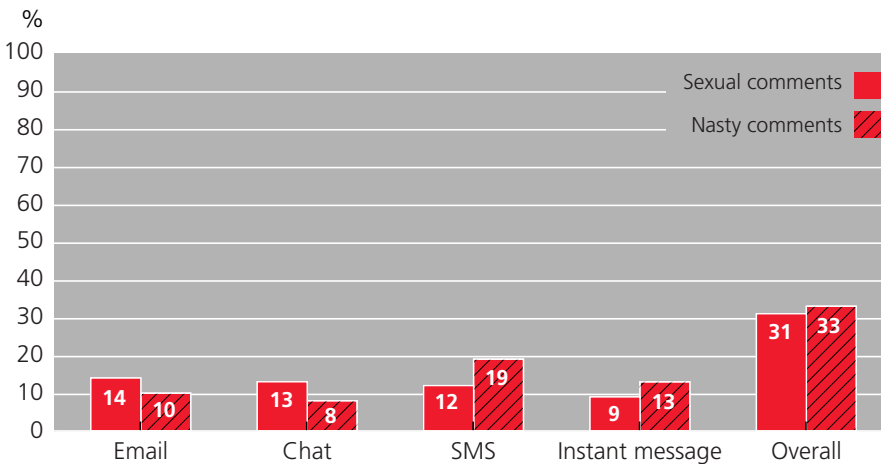
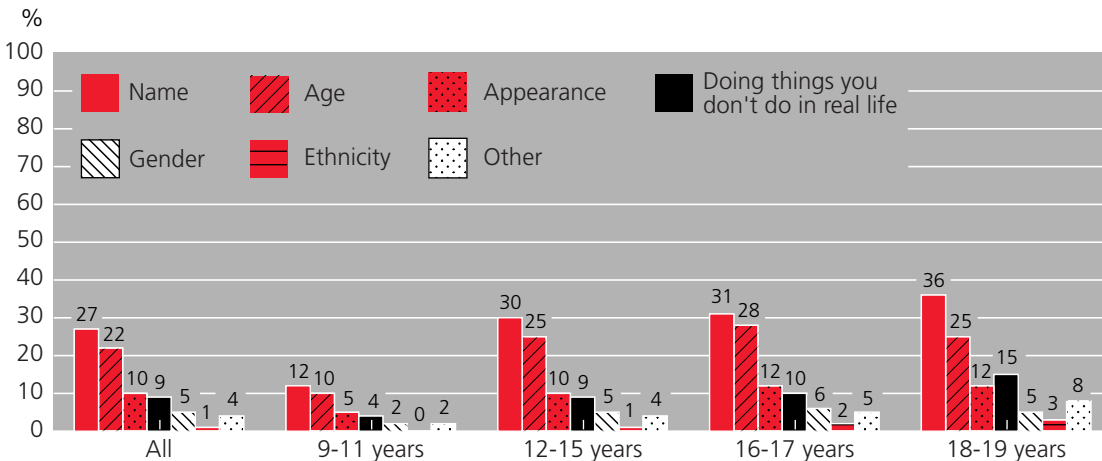


Figure 29: When you are on the internet, have you ever pretended about yourself? By demographics (Multiple response)



Base: 9-19 year olds who use the internet at least once a week (N=1,257)

## Communication, identity and participation



- Half, however, have provided at least some of this information online, including their name, email, school, phone number etc.

Interestingly, their actual practice appears a little more sensible than their intentions. For, when asked whether they would give out personal information so as to win a prize in a competition, only a quarter of those who go online at least once a week (27%) said they would not provide this information (see Figure 30). Three quarters, therefore, say they would provide at least some of this information, though only half of them have done so thus far.

### Chat rooms

Only a minority (9% of all 9-19 year olds) use chat rooms at least once a week. This figure is likely to represent a reduction on the year or two preceding the survey, both because of Microsoft's recent closure of its chat rooms and also because the advent of instant messaging has meant that many (55% of 9-19 year olds who use the internet at least once a week) now use this form of communication instead.

Of those 9% who do use chat rooms at least once a week, 57% report using chat rooms for teens, 27% chat rooms for everyone, 20% chat rooms for kids and 7% chat rooms for adults only. Since only chat rooms intended for children are likely to be moderated, a sizeable proportion of these young people appear to be visiting unmoderated chat rooms.

While 19% of chat room users say that they don't know whether the chat rooms they use are monitored, some 39% of the above chat room users state that all of the chat rooms they use are monitored, 26% say that some are monitored and 15% do not use monitored chat rooms.

Young people recognise that chat rooms offer benefits and risks:

- When asked about their opinion on chat rooms, 64% of the chat room users agree that it is hard to know if people are telling the truth in a chat room.
- However, they identify several positives: 58% enjoy talking to new people in chat rooms, 36% think it is fun that no one knows who they are in a chat room, and 14% agree that chat rooms give them a chance to express their thoughts and feelings.

Of those 9-19 year olds who use the internet at least weekly and who do not use chat rooms, one quarter (26%) used to visit chat rooms but have now stopped.

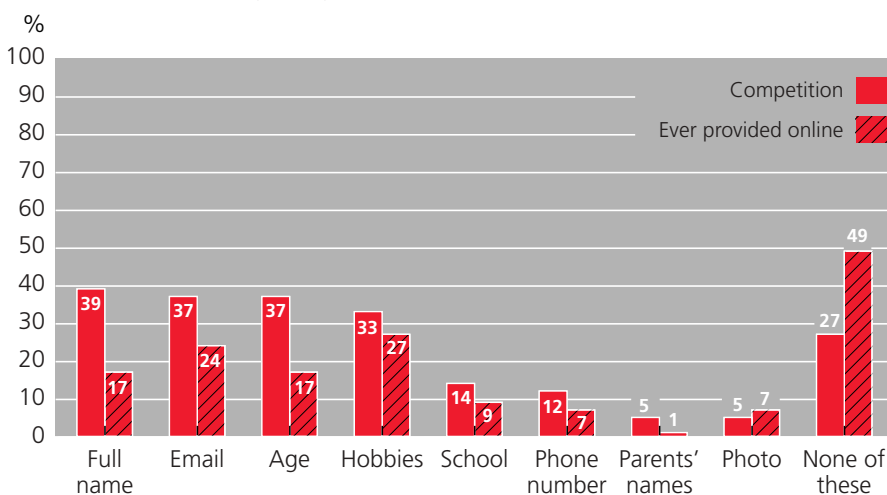
- When asked why they stopped using chat rooms, 24% of the former chatters state that they found chat rooms were a waste of time or boring, 23% didn't like not knowing who they were talking to, 15% preferred instant messaging or email, 10% did not have enough time for it, 9% said their parents had stopped them going into chat rooms, 9% didn't feel safe using them and a further 6% reported that the chat room had closed.

### Meeting online contacts face to face

Considerable public concern has centred on the small but worrying risks associated with meeting strangers face to face following online contact. The UKCGO survey investigated how frequent such meetings are through the private section of the questionnaire (see Figure 31).

- One third of 9-19 year olds who go online at least once a week (30%) have made an online acquaintance, ie someone they only talk to online.

Figure 30: Imagine you were entering a competition, what information about yourself would you give to be able to win a prize on the internet? / While on the internet what information have you ever given to another person that you have not met face to face? (Multiple response)



Base: 9-19 year olds who use the internet at least once a week (N=1,257)

## Communication, identity and participation

- One in twelve (8%) say they have met up with someone face to face who they first met on the internet.

A survey among primary school children in England by the Cyberspace Research Unit<sup>73</sup> found that 3% of 8-11 year olds had attended a meeting. The European SAFT survey of older children (9-16 year olds) reported that 14% had attended such a meeting. Comparing our UK figure of 8% for 9-19 year olds with these two earlier findings suggests that, while such meetings occur more among older than younger children, they may be less common in the UK than in some other European countries.

From the UKCGO survey it emerges that these meetings were mostly enjoyable get-togethers between young people of similar age. In many cases the child had told someone else about the meeting and took another person with them. Of those who attended face to face meetings (N=106):

- The majority said that the other person was about the same age as them (65%). In 23% of cases, the other person was a bit older, in 3% much older and in a further 3% younger.
- Two thirds (63%) stated that the meeting was suggested by both parties, in 12% of cases by the child and in 5% by the other person.
- Only 5% did not tell anyone they were going to the meeting. The majority (74%) told a friend of the same age, 45% told a parent, 14% a sibling and 7% another adult.
- Of those who told someone about the meeting (N=95), the majority did not attend the meeting on their own. Some 67% said they brought a friend, 11% a parent, 3% another adult and 3% a sibling.

We also asked them how the meeting went and what happened afterwards:

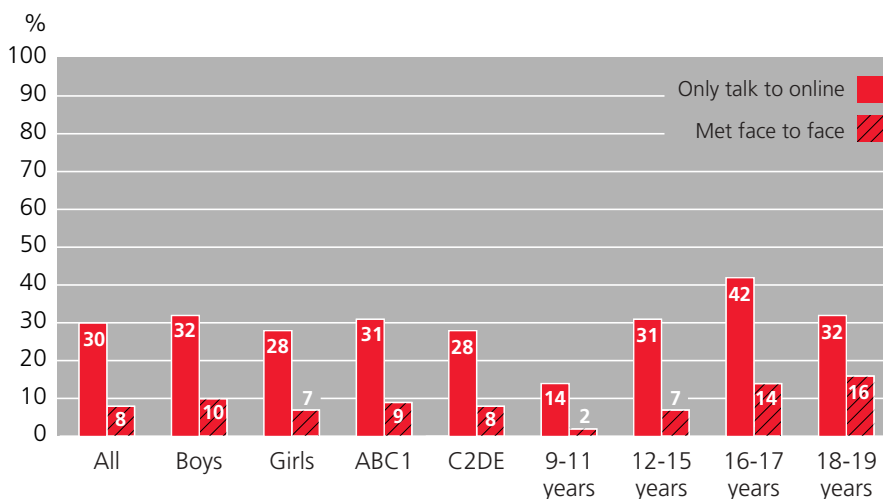
- Most (58%) replied that they had a good time, a third (33%) said that the meeting was 'okay, but nothing special', 6% stated that the other person turned out to be different from what they had expected, 5% didn't meet after all, and only 1% (one person) said they did not enjoy the meeting.
- After the meeting, only 9% did not tell anyone about the meeting: 80% told a friend of the same age as themselves, 37% told a parent, 16% a sibling, 7% another adult and 3% someone else.

Again, these findings are broadly in agreement with other surveys. In both the European SAFT survey and in the study by the Cyberspace Research Unit, the majority, if not all, of children who had been to a face to face meeting reported having had 'a really good time'. Arguably, the safety campaigns have been successful. While one third of those who go online at least once a week have made friends online, only a few go onto arrange a face to face meeting, and nearly all of those tell someone they are going, take a friend with them, meet someone of their own age and have a good time.<sup>74</sup> However, it might be a cause for concern that few children tell an adult (ie a parent) about a meeting or take an adult with them who would be better qualified to intervene in a potentially dangerous situation.

Furthermore, as Figure 24 shows, 7% of those who go online at least once a week confess to forgetting about the safety rules when communicating online.

In seeking to ensure their safety in online communication, it also seems that knowing in theory about the safety rules may not always translate into safe practices online. Since this 7% is more likely to be an under- than an over-estimate, safety awareness guidance must continue to be carefully targeted.

Figure 31: Do you know someone that you only talk to online using email, IM or chat? / Have you ever met anyone face to face that you first met on the internet? By demographics



Base: 9-19 year olds who use the internet at least once a week (N=1,257)

## Regulating the internet at home



### Regulating the internet at home

#### The regulatory challenge

Thus far, we have identified some benefits and some risks associated with young people's internet use. The emerging story is neither as positive as perhaps parents hope when first investing in the internet at home but nor as worrying as the media panics would have us believe.

The key challenge for parents and for policy makers is achieving a balance so that children feel empowered to make the most of the internet while minimising or avoiding the associated risks. In seeking this balance, it would clearly be undesirable (though understandable) if the anxieties associated with the internet led to such significant restrictions in children's use of the medium as to undermine their exploration of its potential.

A further balance to be struck, much discussed among policy-makers and industry, is how far regulation should be the responsibility of parents and how far it should be managed by hardware, content and service providers or by the state (whether through government regulation, self-regulation or education/awareness/literacy programmes).

In seeking to inform these deliberations, a detailed empirical account of emerging domestic practices of regulation is vital.

Hence, in this final section, we consider the UKCGO findings in relation to parent and child attitudes, practices and values, focusing on use of the internet at home.

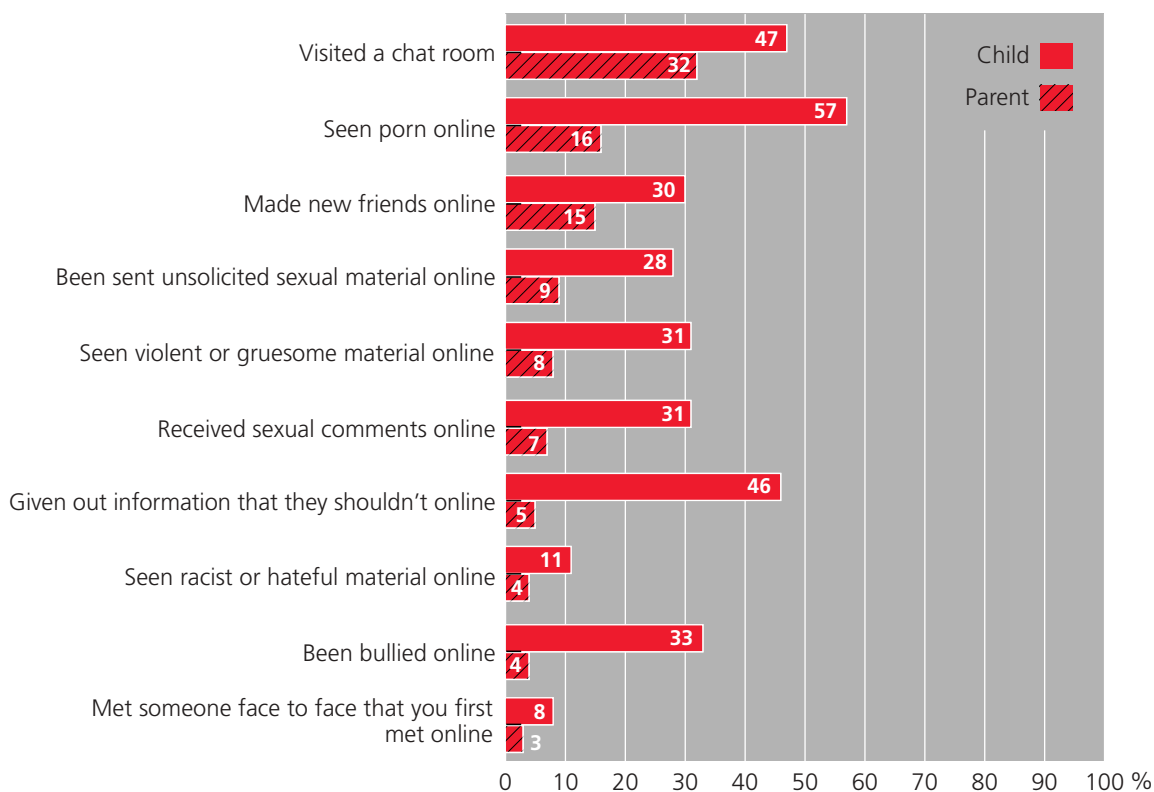
#### Differing perceptions of the problem

Regulatory practices, whether at home or elsewhere, are based on an implicit or explicit assessment of the problem to be addressed. When it comes to knowing what their children have done online, the UKCGO survey finds that parents make a very different assessment of their children's internet experiences compared with that of their children.

Strikingly, children report considerably higher levels of problematic online experiences than do their parents (although we cannot know, on the basis of a survey, whether parents and children are applying different criteria to the definition of 'pornography' or 'bullying', for example). Figure 32 shows both what children and young people who go online at least once a week and what parents of 9-17 year olds say has happened online.<sup>75</sup>

- The largest differences can be found in relation to having come across pornography online (57% of children claim to have seen, this but only 16% of parents say this has happened to their child) and giving out personal information on the internet (46% of children have done this, but only 5% of parents appear aware of it).

Figure 32: Have you / has your child done these things on the internet? (Multiple response)



Base: All 9-19 year olds who use the internet at least once a week (N=1,257); Parents of 9-17 year olds (N=906)

## Regulating the internet at home

- Further differences are apparent in relation to online bullying (this has happened to 33% of children, but only 4% of parents know this) and being sent sexual comments on the internet (31% of children say this, but only 7% of parents know).
- The smallest differences occur relation to having seen racist material on the internet (11% of children claim to have seen it, 4% of parents know of this) and going to face to face meetings with an online acquaintance (8% of children have done this, 3% of parents are aware of it).<sup>76</sup>

The regulatory challenge, as perceived by parents, does not therefore match the challenge that one would draw out of children's own accounts. Given this assessment of their children's practices, together with their understanding of the risks, how then do parents seek to regulate their children's use of the internet?

### Children's and parents' accounts of regulation

Having seen the discrepancies between parents and children in assessing the occurrence of problematic incidents, whom should one ask about these often implicit or subtle domestic practices? Domestic regulation occurs in the privacy of the home, it is not always welcomed, or even recognised, by children, yet it is not always practiced as preached by parents, thereby rendering questionable the accounts of both children and parents. In the UKCGO survey, we asked both parents and children about, firstly, the rules of internet use (Figure 33) and, secondly, the practices of internet use (Figure 35).

Figure 33 reveals, by implication, the internet uses that parents consider to be worthwhile or, more likely, safe and so less in need of restrictive regulation (games, email, instant messaging) and those that they consider unsafe and so give a higher priority to regulating (shopping, privacy, chat, some forms of interactivity). Children perceive their internet use to be much less rule-bound, but the overall pattern is similar.

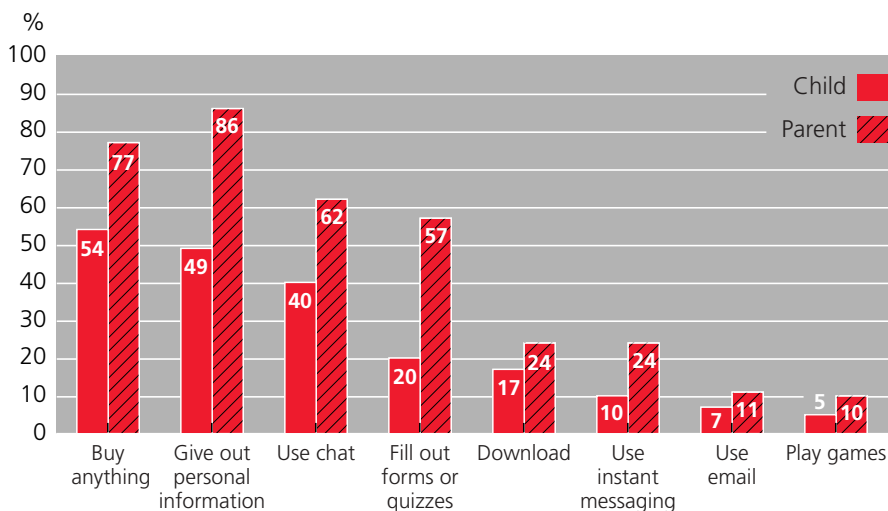
Clearly, there is a discrepancy between what children say they are not allowed to do online and what parents forbid them (see Figure 33). Among children who use the internet at least weekly and among parents with children who live at home:

- 86% of parents do not allow their children to give out personal information online, but only 49% of children say this is the case – a 37% difference.<sup>77</sup>
- There is a similarly large difference between parents and children when it comes to filling out forms or doing quizzes online: 20% of children claim they mustn't do this compared with 57% of parents who do not allow it.
- Just over half of the children say they are not allowed to buy anything online (54%). However, three quarters of parents say they mustn't do this (77%).
- 62% of parents forbid their children to use chat rooms, but only 40% of children say this is the case.<sup>78</sup>
- Younger children are generally allowed to do less by their parents, as confirmed by both children's and parents' accounts. The largest differences between children and parents relates to giving out personal information online (35% of 16-17 year olds, 76% of parents of 16-17 year olds) and filling out forms or quizzes (20% of 12-15 year olds, 62% of parents of 12-15 year olds).

### Interpreting the gap between children's and parents' accounts of 'the rules'

Evidently, asking parents and children the same question does not produce the same answer, for the above findings show some substantial discrepancies between parents' and children's perceptions of domestic regulation of the internet. Arguably, the truth lies somewhere in between.

Figure 33: Are there any things which you are (your child is) not allowed to do on the internet...? (Multiple response)



Base: 9-19 year olds who use the internet at least once a week (N=1,257);  
Parents of 9-17 year olds whose child has home internet access (N=677)

## Regulating the internet at home



More subtly, however, we may posit differences in the interpretation of rules, especially since rules at home are often implicit and they may not be rigidly adhered to, depending on circumstances. It is possible, for example, that parents report the 'general' or 'official' rule of the household, which still holds even while exceptions are made, while children reflect on actual circumstances and will not report a 'rule' if it is occasionally broken.

For example, 86% of parents say that children must not give out personal information compared with 49% of children (see Figure 33). Yet, as Figure 32 shows, while only 5% of parents think that their child has given out personal information that they shouldn't, 46% of young internet users say that they have done this (and 49% say that they have never given out personal information; see Figure 30). Similarly, more children than parents say that they (the child) have visited a chat room (see Figure 32), and more parents than children say that chat rooms are not allowed (see Figure 33).

In effect, parents and children each appear to be consistent in themselves, but they differ from the other. While parents may accurately report the rule they believe that they operate in their home, a rule which tallies with their assessment of their children's internet use, children appear to follow their own, rather different, understanding of the rules.

Overall, children perceive a higher incidence of risky problematic experiences online than do their parents while parents perceive a higher degree of domestic regulation than do their children. Since parents appear to claim a greater degree of domestic control than they achieve and than – from their children's reports – appear to be warranted, it may be that parents are more complacent than is wise, assuming rules are being followed when they are not or assuming that rules are not needed when they are. A greater degree of understanding between parents and children would seem to be called for.

### Children's concerns about the internet

It would be inappropriate to conclude that, while parents attempt to institute domestic rules to manage the internet, children themselves have no concerns and simply wish to use the internet freely. Rather, they too are aware of public discussion, media panics and word-of-mouth difficulties.

Particularly, the various public campaigns regarding online stranger danger would seem to have been successful. We asked 9-19 year olds who use the internet at least once a week which of a range of things, if any, they worry about when they use the internet.

- 48% worry about 'being contacted by dangerous people' (57% of girls, 40% of boys)
- 44% worry about 'getting a virus' (49% of boys, 38% of girls)
- 38% worry about 'others finding out things about you'
- 20% worry about 'seeing things that upset you' (25% of girls, 16% of boys)

- 14% worry about spending too much time online
- Only 13% worry about none of these things

Moreover, three quarters of 9-19 year olds (74%) are aware of some internet safety campaign or have heard or read a news story that made them think the internet can be dangerous. In an open-ended question in the survey, we asked children to describe a recent campaign or news story they had come across.

- One fifth (18%) referred spontaneously to the danger of paedophiles, 13% to chat room dangers, 9% to people getting into dangerous situations after having met someone online, 8% to the Government's 'think U know' campaign,<sup>79</sup> 6% to recent abduction stories, 6% to stranger danger online in general, 6% to the advice not to give out personal details online, 5% to viruses, hacking, spam and credit card fraud and 4% to the danger associated with people pretending to be someone else in chat rooms.

Hence, children understand the responsibilities of their parents in monitoring their internet use, even though they may doubt or, sometimes, resent their abilities or motives in doing so. As for their parents, for children also the internet is seen as a worrying, as well as an exciting, technology. The challenge is how to manage this technology within the home.

### Parental regulation in practice

Rules are one thing, practice is often different. What do children and parents say are the regulatory practices as implemented in their homes in relation to the internet? In regulating their children's internet use in particular, parents face several challenges:

- First, as we have seen, many computers are located in private rather than public spaces at home, making all forms of regulation more difficult and more intrusive than they would be otherwise.
- Second, many parents lack the expertise, especially by comparison with their children, to intervene in or mediate their child's internet use – whether technically (eg by installing a filter) or socially (by discussing contents or services with their child).
- Third, as our qualitative work showed, children relish the opportunities the internet affords them – for identity play, relationships, exploration and communication – and may not wish to share this experience with their parents.

How are UK parents responding to these challenges?

## Regulating the internet at home

### Technical solutions

One much promoted way for parents to reduce the risks to their children on the internet is to install a filter. Further, some companies offer monitoring software so parents can check on their children's use of the internet afterwards. Qualitative work suggests that both parents and children are confused about the options available and about how to install and use such software. As Figure 34 shows:

- One third (35%) of children say that filtering software has been installed on their computer, and 23% say that monitoring software has been installed. A further 13% believe that some such software is installed but don't know what it is. Only one third (31%) believe that their computer has no such software installed.
- One might expect increased use of filtering by age, but the figures do not support this. They do show, however, that, as children get older, they become more sure that (or when) there is no filtering or monitoring of their internet use. These figures show no differences by gender or social class.
- Of those children who use the internet at least weekly and have internet filtering or monitoring software installed on their home computer, 38% say that pornographic sites are blocked or filtered on their computer, followed by junk mail (25%), adverts (18%), chat rooms (17%), email (8%) and instant messaging (5%).
- Parents report slightly higher figures on filtering and monitoring (see Figure 34). For all parents whose child has internet access, 46% say that the computer their child uses has filtering software, and 30% claim monitoring software while 23% say they don't know. These figures are higher for younger than for older children: 55% of 9-11 but only 37% of 16-17 year olds have filtering software, according to their parents.
- For all parents whose child has home internet access, 46% say that pornographic sites are blocked or filtered,

followed by junk mail (29%), chat rooms (23%), adverts (17%), instant messaging (8%) and email (7%).<sup>80</sup> These figures too are similar or higher than the levels of filtering claimed by children.

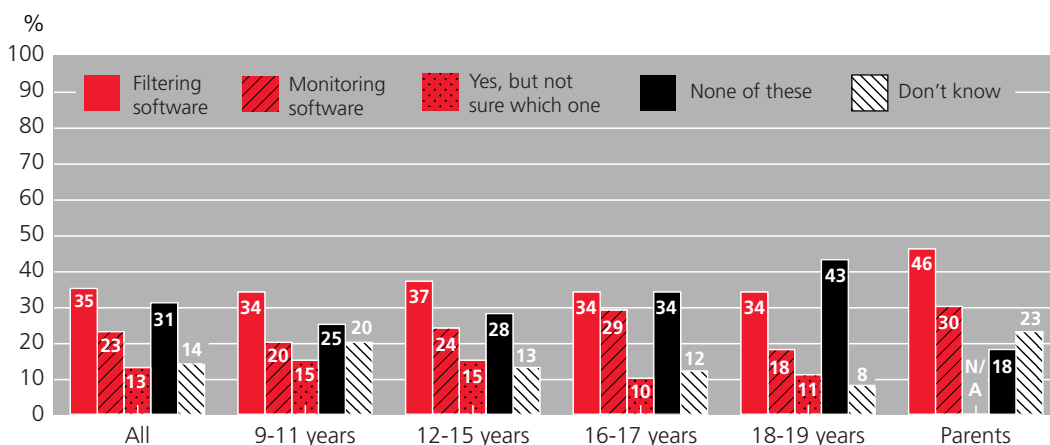
It appears either that the use of filtering and blocking on domestic computers is fairly widespread or that there is a misplaced optimism among both parents and children regarding the safety precautions on these computers. Only 17% of parents said none of these contents were blocked or filtered, and 20% said they did not know if these contents were blocked on their child's computer, this hinting at a considerable level of ignorance regarding security measures on domestic computers.

Indeed, recalling the earlier findings in Figure 17, only 15% of parents who have used the internet say that they know how to install a filter. It is possible that the parent who completed our survey (more often mothers) is not the parent who installed the filter on the child's computer. But the scale of the discrepancy between the 15% of parents who say they can install a filter and the 46% who say that one is installed gives grounds for scepticism.<sup>81</sup> If scepticism is appropriate, there may be a level of complacency among parents which should be addressed through awareness campaigns and skills training.

### Social solutions

In addition to, or instead of, technical approaches to regulation, parents may regulate their children's internet use through social strategies. Research on parental regulation or mediation of children and young people's media use in general finds that parents regulate media use in a number of ways.<sup>82</sup> They may try to influence their child's reactions to the media through discussion (often labelled 'evaluative guidance') or by simply sharing media time with the child (labelled 'unfocused guidance'). More straightforwardly they may seek to control access to media, for example, by restricting time spent (labelled 'restrictive guidance').

Figure 34: Does your computer at home have any of these? By age (Multiple response)



Base: 9-19 year olds who have internet access at home (N=1,088); Parents of 9-17 year olds whose child has home internet access (N=677)

## Regulating the internet at home



The UKCGO survey reveals a range of emerging practices of internet regulation at home (see Figure 35). According to young people (we asked 9-17 year olds who use the internet at home at least once a week and who live with their parents):

- Restrictive guidance is a little more common than evaluative or conversational forms of guidance: 42% of the children say that they have to follow rules about for how long and 35% about when they can go online. Parents are in agreement with their children here, for 43% of parents claim to have set up rules for how much time their child can spend on the internet.
- According to one third of children, their parents play a direct social role in supporting their internet use – by helping (32%), suggesting websites for the child to visit (32%) and generally sharing in the experience of using the internet by sitting at the computer with the child (31%). However, up to two thirds do not.
- One third of 9-17 year olds also note a variety of indirect monitoring activities, saying that their parents know what they (the child) are doing online (31%), how to check what sites they have visited (30%) and that 15% of parents know how to access their child's email.
- However, only a fifth say that their parents stay in the same room (22%) or keep an eye on the screen (17%) when they are online, and few parents, they say, actually check up on their emails (4%) or history (9%).

Parents give a somewhat different account of the social context of children's internet use, however (see Figure 35).

- Parents are most likely to claim a direct role in sharing and supporting their child on the internet: 81% say they ask what the child is doing on the internet (compared with only 25% of children); 57% say they help the child online (compared with 32% of children); 32% claim to sit with the child when online (and here children agree – 31%).

- Parents also stress an indirect social monitoring role: 63% say they keep an eye on the screen (compared with 17% of children); 50% say they stay in the same room when the child is online (compared with 22% of children).
- Parents less often claim technical monitoring, though they do this far more than children realise, it seems: 41% of parents say they check the computer later to see what the child has been doing (compared with only 9% of children), and 25% claim to check their children's emails (only 4% of children seem aware of this).

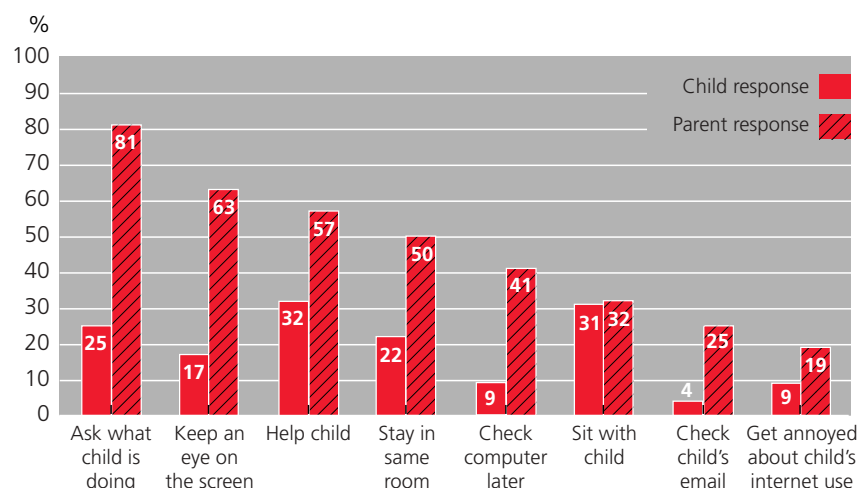
### Challenges to parental regulation

At least two serious difficulties undermine parents' attempts to regulate their children's internet use. The first is that, while parents have the responsibility to ensure their children's safety, they must also manage their children's growing independence and rights to privacy, something that children themselves feel strongly about.<sup>83</sup> The second is that, as we saw earlier, parents and children agree that children are more often more expert than their parents on the internet, making it difficult for parents to regulate their children's use. Hence, the more the regulatory burden is devolved to parents, the greater the difficulty, and potential conflict, within the family in balancing safety and privacy online. As Figure 35 also shows, 19% of parents and 9% of children acknowledge that the internet occasions conflict or annoyance between parents and children.

### Privacy online

Online privacy is commonly discussed in relation to invasions of privacy from commercial organisations online. However, children are more concerned about maintaining their privacy from people that they know – unsurprising given the nature of at least some of their online communication. There is an irony, therefore, that parents are often advised to check up on children's internet use in order to ensure their safety when children may consider this intrusive.

Figure 35: What parents do when child is using the internet (Multiple response)



Base: 9-17 year who live with parent(s) and use the internet at least once a week (N=1,060); Parents of 9-17 year olds whose child has home internet access (N=677)



## Regulating the internet at home

Many of the children and young people we spoke to in the focus groups did not like their parents and teachers monitoring their internet use and saw it as an invasion of their privacy, expecting more trust and respect as they get older. To explain their right for privacy and why they therefore object to having their internet use monitored by their parents, many children used metaphors such as having one's pockets searched, having one's personal space invaded or being stalked.

- Asked which of a list of activities they mind (or would mind) their parents doing, two-thirds (69%) of 9-17 year olds who use the internet at least once a week say that they mind their parents restricting or monitoring their internet use in various ways: 42% mind their parents checking their email, 28% mind them blocking websites, 30% mind them checking their internet use without their knowledge and 15% with their knowledge.

### Protecting one's privacy

In the UKCGO survey, 12-19 year olds with home access who use the internet at least weekly (N=991) were asked if they had taken any actions to protect their privacy online and offline. While some 35% of them say they have not done this, two thirds have taken some action to protect their privacy online – both from outsiders and, more often, from those they know.

- 38% report having deleted emails so no one else could read them
- 38% have minimised a window when someone else came into the room
- 17% have deleted the history file
- 17% have deleted unwanted cookies
- 12% have hidden or mislabelled files to keep them private
- 12% have used someone else's password without their permission

Hence, to maintain their privacy, young people may seek ways of evading parental or school monitoring and controls, and some of them clearly enjoy the challenge of outwitting the adults, capitalising on their comparatively greater expertise in relation to the internet. Indeed, we would identify a kind of game – a tactical dance, perhaps – in which it seems that the more adults check up on children, the more they seek ways of evading such checks.

### Who is the internet expert at home?

Key to deliberations over who should regulate children's access to the internet is the question of expertise. Who can regulate children's access to the internet? The UKCGO survey sought to throw some light on the supposed reverse generation gap by which children are held to know more than their parents about the internet.

Parents and children are not entirely in agreement about who is the expert at home:

- Children who go online at least once a week claim that they are better at using the internet than their parents: 46% say

they are the expert in their home while 33% think their parents know more.

- However, parents claim rather more expertise for themselves: 41% think they or the other parent know most about the internet in their home while 37% admit that their child is better.
- In terms of advising parents how to support their children's internet use, one should also note that nearly a third (29%) of the parents who are beginners on the internet have children who consider themselves advanced or expert users.

We also asked those parents whose child has internet access at home if they (or the other parent) understood the internet well enough to help their child get most out of it:

- 79% claim that they (or the other parent) knows what their child does online
- 71% claim to know how to help their child to use the internet safely
- 66% claim to know how to check which websites their child has visited
- 64% claim to know how to help their child get the best out of the internet
- 55% claim to know how to access their child's email account
- Only 15% of parents who have ever used the internet claim that they personally know how to install a filter

Confidence among parents, it seems, is fairly high. However, one in ten say they do not know what their child does on the internet, and a fifth say they do not know how to help their child use the internet safely. Put this way around, there is a clear task ahead to improve and extend the reach of awareness and literacy guidance to help parents.

Parents are also fairly, but not wholly, confident of their children's online skills:

- 72% are confident that their child remembers the safety advice when online. One quarter, therefore, is not confident of this.
- 72% are confident that their child would tell them if something online made him/her uncomfortable.
- 60% are confident that their child knows how to protect his/her privacy.
- 58% are confident that their child knows what to do if something made them uncomfortable online. Two fifth, therefore, are not confident of this.
- 41% are confident that their child has learned how to judge the reliability of information online. Parents are least confident of their children's critical media literacy, it seems, especially compared with safety issues.

## Conclusions: Looking ahead

### Conclusions: Looking ahead

#### Is the internet good for children?

It remains a difficult judgment whether one considers using the internet intrinsically a 'good thing' so that not using it means one is socially excluded and using it should be encouraged and facilitated. Perhaps those not using the internet much are spending their time in other valuable, even better, ways. Such judgments require evaluations of social change over time in relation to multiple aspects of daily life, and empirical research may never provide an uncontroversial 'answer'.

However, it is clear that children and parents, together with government and industry, are all focused on a future in which the internet will play an ever-greater role. Consequently, it must be a priority to ensure that internet use is equitable, beneficial and not harmful. This report has sought to identify a variety of ways in which internet use does, indeed, match up to these three values and the ways in which it does not.

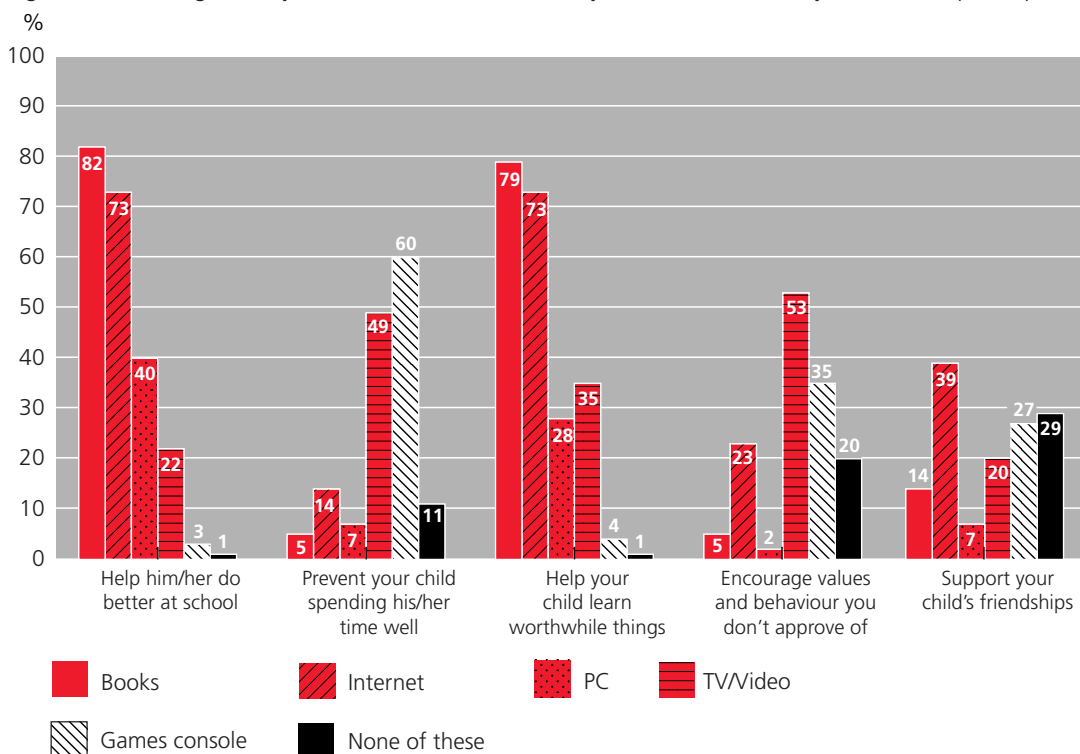
Our present purpose is to produce much-needed and rigorous empirical data to inform, in such a way as benefits children and young people, the future development of online contents and services, of regulatory developments and of the conditions within which children and young people access and make use of the internet in their everyday lives. We end with an assessment of the balance of opportunities and dangers thus far in the diffusion and appropriation of this new medium.

#### Parental ambivalence about the internet

Since the internet is still a recent arrival in a complex multimedia environment, we asked parents to set the internet in context by comparing the risks and benefits of several different media (see Figure 36). We also asked them to make an overall judgement about which of these different media benefit their child overall and which of these media worry them in relation to their child.

- Parents are strongly in agreement with government policy to embed ICT in the curriculum, believing that the internet can help children's formal and informal education: 73% believe both that the internet can help their child do better at school and help them learn worthwhile things.
- By comparison with books, however, parents are rather more ambivalent about the internet. They believe that books are even more helpful for children in supporting their educational progress and learning, and they have few, if any, worries about books.
- By contrast, 14% worry that the internet can prevent their child spending their time well, and 23% worry that the internet encourages values and behaviours that they do not approve of, though, unlike books, they consider that the internet can support their child's friendships, thus offering a social advantage.

Figure 36: Thinking about your child, which of these do you think is most likely to...? (Multiple response)



Base: All parents of 9-17 year olds (N=906)

## Conclusions: Looking ahead

- This ambivalence about the internet is not mirrored by a similar ambivalence about the computer which is regarded only positively, if moderately so. In other words, it is the world that the internet provides a connection to, not the technology *per se*, that both enthuses and worries parents.
- Television is seen by parents in more negative terms: 49% believe it prevents their child spending their time well, and 35% believe it encourages values and behaviours that they don't approve of. However, some ambivalence is evident here also: 35% think their child can learn worthwhile things from television, and 22% think it can help them do better at school.
- By contrast, the games console is regarded in far more negative terms – wasting children's time (60%), encouraging unwelcome values and behaviours (35%) and offering no educational benefits, its only benefit being social (27%). It may be that all new media generate an ambivalent response. However, it seems plausible that the very breadth of activities and services provided by the internet is what creates the present ambivalence among parents. If all aspects of society are online, for good and for bad, the internet can hardly fail but be regarded with ambivalence.

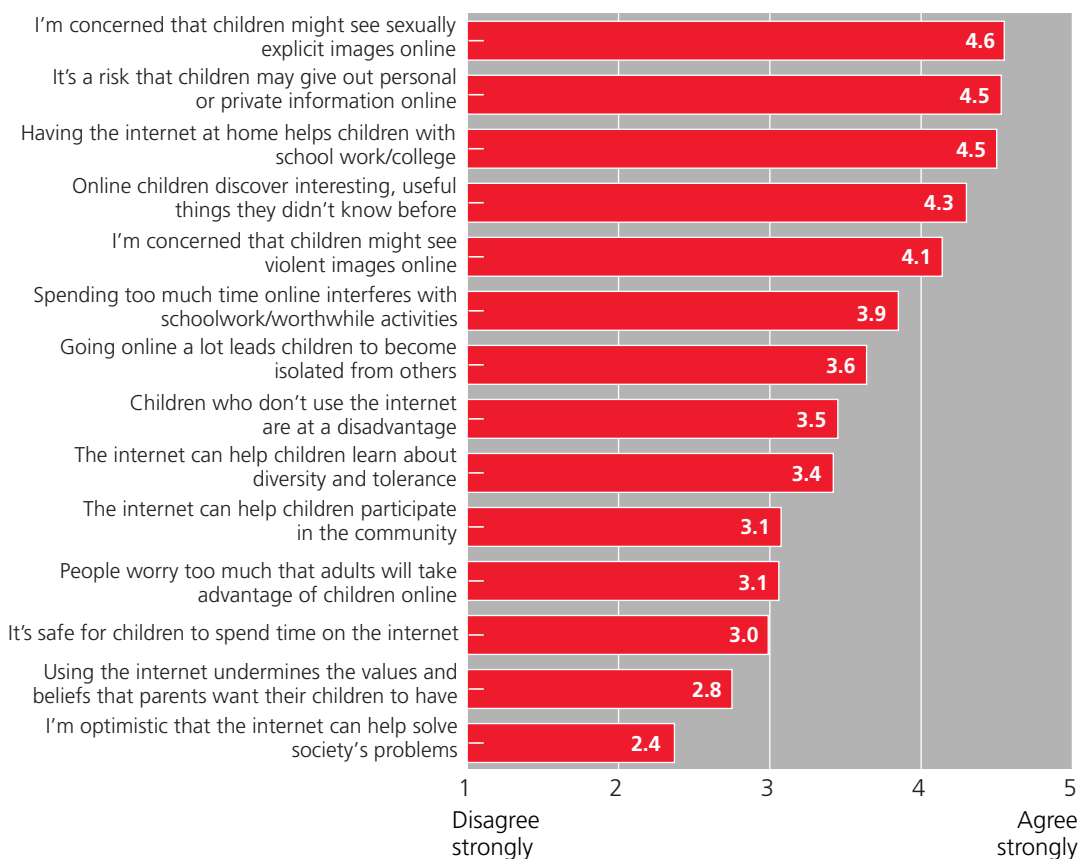
This poses an unprecedented challenge for parents, for perhaps never before have they sought to introduce into their homes a medium that both offers such great benefits that they can hardly miss out and yet risks such great dangers that they can hardly give it house room. While in the early days, some ambivalence also attached to television,<sup>84</sup> the opportunities and risks here are far more polarised, and the challenge to parents' ability to manage something so technologically-demanding only adds to their burden.

### Conflicting values associated with the internet

This ambivalence about the internet is reflected in the diverse attitudes and values which parents attach to the internet, and, in this regard, they reflect wider cultural, media, and political discourses surrounding the internet (see Figure 37).

- It seems that parents' greatest concerns about the internet are that it may lead children to become isolated from others, expose children to sexual and/or violent images, displace more worthwhile activities and risk their privacy.
- On the other hand, parents also recognise that the internet can help children with their school work and provides an opportunity to discover interesting and useful things. It can also help them to become more tolerant and understanding, and those who lack access may be at a disadvantage.

Figure 37: Parents' attitudes towards the internet



Base: All parents of 9-17 year olds (N=906)

## Conclusions: Looking ahead



### Parental views on the regulation of children's internet use

In finding a way forward that facilitates their child's internet use while avoiding the risks, parents have some clear views on how they can be better supported (see Figure 38).

Parents' first preference is for a more regulated communication environment:

- An overwhelming 85% want to see tougher laws on online pornography, with 59% wanting stricter regulation of online services.

Secondly, they want more institutional support as they and their children become increasingly media – or internet – literate:

- 75% want to see more and better teaching and guidance in schools (ie for their children) while 67% want more and better information and advice for parents.

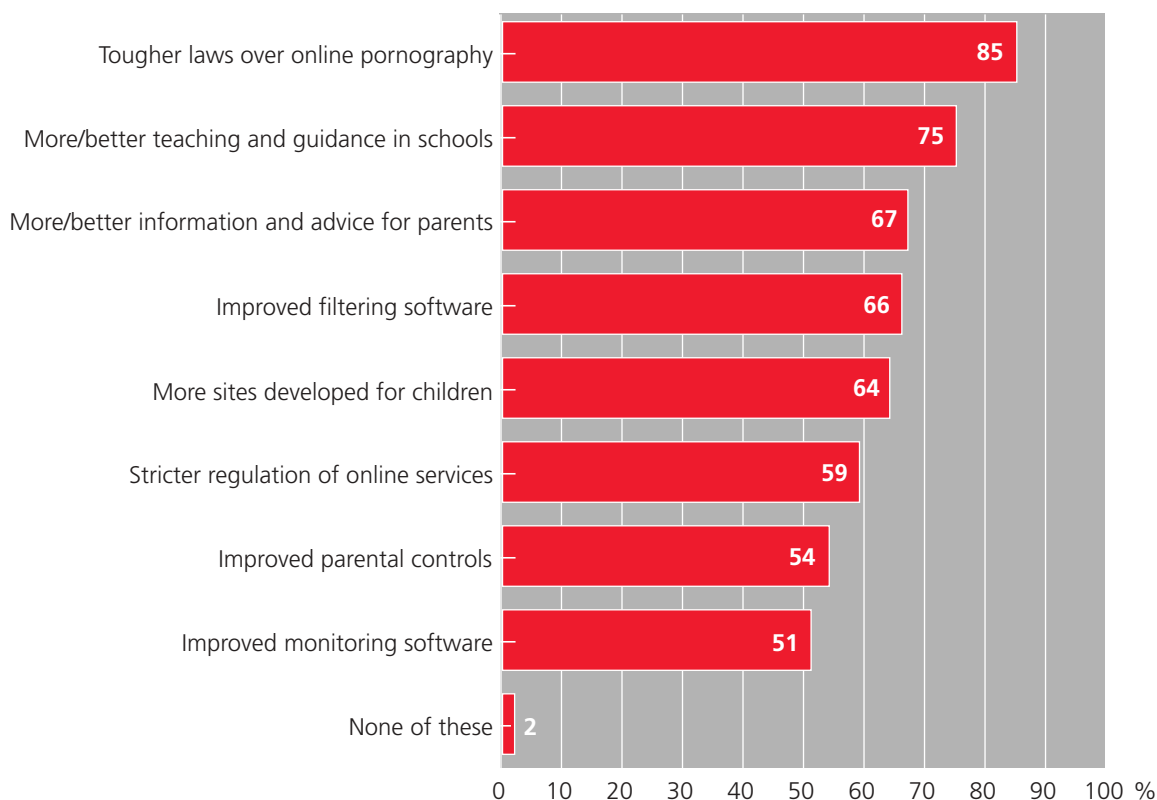
Thirdly, parents would welcome more sites being developed specifically for children (64%), thereby facilitating a more stimulating and rewarding online experience for children and young people.

Fourthly, they would welcome improved technical solutions to online risks (improved filtering software 66%, improved parental controls 54%, improved monitoring software 51%).

There are no easy answers to the question of whose responsibility it should be to guide children through the opportunities and dangers online. These views from parents would support a balanced and multi-stakeholder approach, neither devolving all internet regulation for children to their parents nor relying wholly on state or commercial solutions. Involving multiple stakeholders allows for maximum flexibility and, hence, better regulation.

For parents who wish to manage their children's online access, improved technical solutions might be the answer. For parents who lack confidence or expertise to do this, improved guidance for children in schools would be helpful. Schools encourage children to go online but, having encouraged this, appear reluctant to guide them in non-educational uses or locations. Simply to reduce national or international regulation/self-regulation of the online environment shifts the burden to parents' shoulders, and yet, as this report has shown, this is proving to be difficult, often ineffective, sometimes intrusive and certainly confusing for UK families.

Figure 38: Which of these would help you to make sure that your child uses the internet effectively and safely? (Multiple response)



Base: All parents of 9-17 year olds (N=906)

## Conclusions: Looking ahead

### Balancing opportunities and dangers

It might be supposed that children who go online more often become more savvy and so able to avoid the risks while optimising the benefits. 'Expert' children can, it is often hoped, be left to their own devices while attention is given to those not yet or not much online who, because they lack experience and expertise, run greater risks than those who 'know what they are doing'. Against this easy supposition, however, the UKCGO survey finds that frequent users both take up more of the opportunities of the internet and are also exposed to greater risks.

Further, it might be supposed that restricting children's access to the internet would effectively minimise the risks they face without other costs. However, such restrictions also reduce their online opportunities, for the UKCGO survey also finds that those who make less use of the internet not only face fewer risks but also take up fewer opportunities.

- Most simply, those who use the internet more make a broader use of it. While half of 9-19 year olds visited fewer than five websites in the previous week, this is the case for only one third of the daily users but for two thirds of the weekly users. Moreover, one third of daily users (35%) but only 8% of weekly users have visited more than 10 sites in the past week. Daily users are also more confident in their online skills, with twice as many as weekly users saying that they know how to set up an email account, send an instant message, download a music file, set up a filter or get rid of a virus.

Crucially, this broader and more confident use brings both benefits and dangers, as a comparison of daily and weekly internet users reveals.

- More use suggests more benefits. Daily users compared with weekly users make more frequent use of instant messaging and email, and they more often play games online and download music. Indeed, daily users are more likely to engage in nearly all the activities we asked about in the survey, suggesting a more wide-ranging engagement with the internet and the resources it provides – including more use of exam revision sites, hobby sites, etc. For example, while 25% of 12-19 year old internet users have used the internet for advice, this is the case for 31% of daily users but only 18% of weekly users. Of the 34% who have set up their own webpage, this holds for 40% of daily but only 28% of weekly users, and the daily users are also more successful in getting their site online and in updating it. Daily users are also more likely to interact with websites – voting, sending email to sites, offering advice or contributing pictures or messages, and they are more likely to have visited political or civic sites.
- More use also brings more risks. While 38% of 9-19 year olds who use the internet at least once a week have seen pornographic pop-ups, this breaks down into 48% of daily users and 29% of weekly users. Similarly, overall 36% have ended up accidentally on a pornographic website – this is 43% of daily users and 30% of weekly users. The same picture holds for the 22% who have ended up accidentally

on a site with violent or gruesome pictures (27% daily, 17% weekly users) and for the 9% who have ended up accidentally on a site that is hostile or hateful to a group of people (12% daily, 6% weekly users). While 8% have met offline someone that they first met online, this is the case for 12% of the daily users and only 5% of the weekly users, and this is not surprising since 42% of the daily users, compared with 18% of the weekly users, know someone that they only talk to online. Lastly, while 49% have never revealed personal information online, this is claimed by 57% of the weekly users but only 40% of the daily users.

Consequently, far from becoming unnecessary, the task of guiding children in their online use becomes more subtle, complex and demanding as they make more use of the internet.

### Balancing parents' and children's experiences

Strikingly, the UKCGO survey has identified a significant gap between parents' and children's experiences of the internet. Parents, it appears, underestimate the risks their children are experiencing online. Children, it appears, underestimate the regulatory practices their parents are attempting to implement. Parental anxieties, we might conclude, tend towards being both ill-informed and ineffective in supporting regulation. Children's enthusiasm for the new medium is resulting in some risky behaviours. Taken together, these findings suggest a rather low level of understanding between parents and children, impeding an effective regulation of children's internet use within the home.

However, one cannot simply recommend greater monitoring of children by parents. From children's point of view, some key benefits of the internet depend on maintaining some privacy and freedom from their parents, making them less favourable particularly to intrusive or hidden forms of parental regulation. Moreover, the internet must be perceived by children as an exciting and free space for play and experimentation if they are to become capable and creative actors in this new environment. It is inherent to childhood that, if children feel themselves monitored, taught or evaluated, their enthusiasm fades.

At present, children are in many ways confident of their new online skills. But these should not be overestimated, for children are also aware of many ways in which they are confused, uncertain or lacking in skills, this resulting perhaps in a relatively narrow or problematically risky online experience. As the locations and forms of use all multiply, some children are becoming adept at finding ways to do what they want to do online while others are getting lost.

Managing, guiding and regulating children's use is, therefore, an increasingly challenging task and one that will surely most effectively be pursued with their cooperation. On the other hand, if they are to be both empowered and safe in this new information and communication environment, media literacy or internet skills guidance might be as sensibly directed towards their parents as to children so as to enhance parental skills and understanding of their children's activities as well as to benefit parents themselves.

## Conclusions: Looking ahead

### A new divide?

Moreover, a new divide is opening up, one centred on the quality of use. No longer are children and young people only or even mainly divided by those with and without access, though, as argued earlier, 'access' is a moving target in terms of its speed, location, quality and support, and so inequalities in access persist. But also, children and young people are divided into those for whom the internet is an increasingly rich, diverse, engaging and stimulating resource of growing importance in their lives, and those for whom it remains a narrow, unengaging if occasionally useful resource of rather less significance. In debating whether and how much this matters, two questions are paramount.

- First, is the opportunity to use the internet in a rich rather than a narrow way equally or unequally distributed? The UKCGO survey suggests significant inequalities, for it finds that socio-economic status discriminates daily from weekly users. Middle class children, children with internet access at home, children with broadband access and children whose parents use the internet more often are all more likely to be daily users and, therefore, are more likely to experience the internet as a rich, if risky, medium than are less privileged children.
- Second, do those who lack online opportunities enjoy compensatory opportunities elsewhere? This is not so easy to resolve without surveying many contextual factors in children's lives. Children tend to be reluctant to describe themselves directly as 'missing out'. Parents of daily users tend to agree that children who lack internet access are at a disadvantage, but parents of low or non-users are less likely to think this.<sup>85</sup> In short, both children and parents have reasons not to express concern. On the other hand, as social, economic and political online resources develop and, arguably, become prioritised over offline resources, the nature of exclusion will become more subtle but no less significant. Furthermore, since it is 'the usual suspects' who enjoy greater online access – households with more economic, educational and cultural advantages – it is likely that children in these homes will benefit from comparatively greater resources of many kinds, both online and offline.

### Last words

Much public attention is focused on the risks children are encountering when using the internet, and rightly so. Some may read this report and consider the glass half full, finding more evidence of education and participation, for example, and less occurrence of pornographic or chat room risk than they had feared. Others may read this report and consider the glass half empty, finding fewer benefits and greater incidence of dangers than they would hope for. Much depends on one's prior expectations. It is hoped that the present findings provide a clear and careful picture of the nature and extent of these risks, as well as an account of the attempts that parents and children are making to reduce or address these risks. In our view, the risks do not merit a moral panic, and nor do they warrant seriously restricting children's internet use. But they are nonetheless widespread, they are experienced by many

children as worrying or problematic, and they do warrant serious attention and intervention by government, educators, industry and parents.

Perhaps the best way of both optimising opportunities and minimising risks might be to steer children and young people towards inviting, useful, exciting, participatory and creative sites online.<sup>86</sup> To be sure, in terms of the opportunities afforded by the internet, the UKCGO survey reveals a plethora of ways in which children and young people are taking steps towards deepening and diversifying their internet use, many of them gaining in sophistication, motivation and skills as they do so. However, it has also identified many children not yet taking up the potential of the internet. These young people worry about the risks, visit only a few sites, fail to upload and maintain personal websites and treat sites more as ready-made sources of entertainment or information than as opportunities for critical engagement, user-generated content production or active participation.

Notwithstanding the rapid diffusion of the internet through UK society, we have yet to hold a sustained public debate on the nature of the opportunities of internet use for children and young people. It has been suggested here that such opportunities should include not only access to a variety of pre-packaged, highly commercialised entertainment and information content but should also engage children creatively, support their social and personal development and facilitate their active and critical participation in social and political forums. How all this can be achieved, particularly given the diversity among children themselves – in terms of age, gender, background, interests and expertise – remains a key challenge for all concerned with the provision of contents and services mediated by the internet.

There are also many questions remaining for research, particularly in identifying the consequences of the risks of internet use – the nature of possible harms from exposure to pornography when young, the degree to which privacy or personal information is being exploited, the best way in which safety messages can be sustained and made effective, etc. Indeed, throughout this report many points have been addressed that invite further consideration, more research and new initiatives in provision or regulation.

We end by reiterating that a balanced approach is vital if society is to steer a course between the twin risks of exposing children to danger or harm and of undermining children's opportunities to participate, enjoy and express themselves fully. Focussing on either dangers or opportunities, without recognising the consequences of particular policies or provision for the other, can only be problematic, undermining either children's rights or their safety. No simple answers can be forthcoming in managing this complex, multifaceted and constantly-changing technology, but it is hoped that the present findings contribute to informing further developments that will shape the use of the internet at home.



## Annex: Survey administration and sampling procedures

### Annex: Survey administration and sampling procedures

In order to investigate 9-19 year olds' use of the internet, BMRB International was commissioned to conduct a survey across the UK among 9-19 year olds and parents of those aged 9-17.

#### Young people aged 9-19

The sample was drawn by means of Random Location sampling, providing a high-quality sample of young people within the target age groups.<sup>87</sup> Fieldwork was spread across 188 sampling points across the UK, and to increase fieldwork efficiency, areas were chosen which had a higher than average prevalence of 9-19 year olds.

The target was to provide 1,500 interviews. A screening interview was conducted on the doorstep to ensure that the young people were of the correct age, and interviewers worked to quotas by sex and age to ensure the required number of interviews in each sub-category.

Where a young person was aged 17 or younger and not living independently, written permission was sought from a parent or guardian. Parents were told the content of the interview and were asked to complete and sign a form to show that they were happy for their child to be interviewed.

In total, 1,511 interviews were achieved among 9-19 year olds. The table below shows the number of interviews conducted in each sub-category.

Table 1: Interviews with young people

|                   | Girls      | Boys       | Total        |
|-------------------|------------|------------|--------------|
| <b>Aged 9-12</b>  | 241        | 314        | 555          |
| <b>Aged 13-16</b> | 268        | 301        | 569          |
| <b>Aged 17-19</b> | 159        | 227        | 386          |
| <b>Total</b>      | <b>668</b> | <b>842</b> | <b>1,511</b> |

#### Parents of 9-17 year olds

If the young person being interviewed was aged 9-17, we asked the adult in the household (preferably the parent or main carer) to complete a paper questionnaire. In order to obtain a maximum response rate, we encouraged respondents to complete the questionnaire while the young person was being interviewed. This enabled the interviewer to take the completed questionnaire away with them rather than leaving it with the respondent to send it back to BMRB in their own time. Where there was a mother and a father in the household, interviewers were briefed to ask the father to complete the survey to ensure that as many fathers as possible took part in the research. Usually, males have a lower response rate.

In total, 1,077 parents out of 1,259 eligible parents of children aged 9-17 agreed to complete a questionnaire, and 906 paper questionnaires were received. The response rate was 72% overall, which is very high.

#### Fieldwork

Fieldwork was conducted by BMRB's fully trained interviewers, working under supervision. (In Northern Ireland, the interviews were conducted by Millward Brown Northern Ireland.) Interviews were conducted face to face and in-home, with the young people's questionnaires being administered face to face by interviewers using multi-media computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI).

Both questionnaires were piloted prior to the main fieldwork taking place. The pilot took place in London with interviewers being accompanied by BMRB research executives and members of the LSE research team.

The most sensitive questions in the young people's questionnaire, specifically those relating to viewing pornographic and hate websites and meeting people through the internet, were contained in a self-completion section in the questionnaire, which ensured that these questions were answered in privacy. The interviewer showed the respondent how to use the computer and completed a small number of practice questions with them. The respondent was then left to read the questions on their own and key in their own answers. At the end of the self-completion section, the respondent was asked to give the computer back to the interviewer who finished the interview in the normal way.

The average length of the young people's questionnaire was around 40 minutes. The parent's questionnaire was eight A4 sides long and took around 15 minutes to complete. Copies of both questionnaires can be found on the project website, [www.children-go-online.net](http://www.children-go-online.net).

All fieldwork took place between 12 January and 7 March 2004.

## Annex: Survey administration and sampling procedures

### Weighting procedures

Rim weighting was applied to the data to correct for minor imbalances between the sample profile achieved and the known sample profile. Data from the young people's survey were weighted to data in BMRB's TGI (Target Group Index) and Youth TGI surveys. The weighting efficiency was 91%, and the effective sample size was 1,375.

As the sample frame was designed to be representative of the population of young people aged 9-19 years, the parents' data had the same weighting applied that was employed on the young people's data. For those parents who had a child aged 9-17 years and who had completed a questionnaire, the identical weight that had been applied to

their child's data was used. This approach allowed for cross-comparisons between the children's and parents' data sets. Further, this weighting approach would ensure a high weighting efficiency and, therefore, a high effective sample size. The weighting efficiency was 91%, and the effective sample size was 824.

### Reporting of findings

In the present report, findings are presented for the population as a whole (ie weighted sample) or stratified by age, gender and/or social grade. The social grade classification used is outlined in the table below and was obtained by questions put to parents at the end of each child's CAPI interview.

Table 2: Actual and target sample sizes

| Demographic variable | Categories  | Actual % | Target % |
|----------------------|-------------|----------|----------|
| <b>Sex</b>           | Male        | 56       | 51       |
|                      | Female      | 44       | 49       |
| <b>Age</b>           | 9-12 years  | 37       | 37       |
|                      | 13-16 years | 38       | 37       |
|                      | 17-19 years | 26       | 26       |
| <b>Social Grade</b>  | AB          | 17       | 26       |
|                      | C1          | 28       | 26       |
|                      | C2          | 27       | 21       |
|                      | DE          | 28       | 27       |

Table 3: Social grade classification

| Grade | Social Status                         | Occupation of Chief Income Earner  |
|-------|---------------------------------------|--|
| A     | Upper middle class                    | Higher managerial administrative or professional occupations. Top level civil servants. Retired people previously graded A with a pension from their job and widows/widowers if they are receiving a pension from their late spouse's job.                               |
| B     | Middle class                          | Intermediate managerial administrative or professional people. Senior officers in local government and civil service. Retired people previously graded B with a pension from their job and widows/widowers if they are receiving a pension from their late spouse's job. |
| C1    | Lower middle class                    | Supervisory or clerical and junior managerial administrative or professional occupations. Retired people previously graded C1 with a pension from their job and widows/widowers if they are receiving a pension from their late spouse's job.                            |
| C2    | Skilled working class                 | Skilled manual workers. Retired people previously graded C2 with a pension from their job and widows/widowers if they are receiving a pension from their late spouse's job.  |
| D     | Working class                         | Semi and unskilled manual workers. Retired people previously graded D with a pension from their job and widows/widowers if they are receiving a pension from their late spouse's job.  |
| E     | Those at lowest levels of subsistence | All those entirely dependent on the State long term through sickness unemployment old age or other reasons. Casual workers and those without a regular income.   |



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## Endnotes

- 1 See Buckingham (2002); Livingstone (2002).
- 2 See Livingstone (2001).
- 3 The project develops an earlier project in which the first author conducted participant observation in thirty families (Livingstone and Bovill, 2001), and it extends the work of the second author on young people's construction of personal homepages (Bober, 2002; 2003).
- 4 See Livingstone and Bober (2003). For full details of the research and related publications, see [www.children-go-online.net](http://www.children-go-online.net).
- 5 See Bolter and Grusin (1999); Marvin (1988); Winston (1996).
- 6 See Kellner (2002); Poster (2001); Turkle (1995).
- 7 See Buckingham (2002); James, Jenks and Prout (1998); Seiter (1999).
- 8 Many market research surveys have been conducted, but these tend to offer only broad-brush findings, charting changes in access and the basic features of internet use but offering little by way of detail, depth or context. For example, BMRB's Youth TGI survey (2001) showed that the most common uses are studying/homework (73%), email (59%), playing games (38%), chat sites (32%) and hobbies and interests (31%). But these leaves open many questions: Which young people are emailing whom? Who makes use of which educational resources? If some lack access, what are they missing out on?
- 9 See Greig and Taylor (1999); Livingstone and Lemish (2001). The research ethics policy for *UK Children Go Online* can be found on the project website, [www.children-go-online.net](http://www.children-go-online.net).
- 10 See Livingstone and Bober (2003).
- 11 As reviewed in Livingstone (2003a).
- 12 In designing the survey, the qualitative stage of the research offered some guidance in matters of phrasing – including the difficulty in measuring time spent online, everyday terms from online communication (described as 'talking to' or 'texting' someone), for communication with strangers (described as 'people you don't know' or 'when you don't really know who you are talking to') and online pornography (described as 'porn' or 'rude websites' or as showing 'people with hardly any clothes on'). The focus groups offered guidance in approaching ethically-difficult topics. For example, spontaneous discussion in the groups of paedophiles, 'paedos' and 'weirdos' online suggested that their mention in a survey would be less intrusive than initially feared. The groups also included mention of the many myths regarding the technological means of monitoring, regulating or intruding upon internet uses (whether by other children, parents, public or commercial bodies), suggesting possible confusions in answers to survey questions on domestic regulation.
- 13 See Becta (2001/2002); Wigley and Clarke (2000); O'Connell (2002); O'Connell et al (2004); OxIS (2003); Pew (2001a; 2001b); SAFT (2003).
- 14 Total percentages do not necessarily add up to 100% due to missing data or because some respondents did not wish to answer.
- 15 In his now-classic theory of the diffusion of innovation, Rogers (1995) constructed a standard S-shaped diffusion curve by which to classify individuals into five categories: innovators (the first 2.5% of the population to acquire the new technology); early adopters (14%); early majority (34%); late majority (34%); and laggards (16%). Each of these groups is characterised according to the point in the diffusion curve at which individuals acquire a particular new technology.
- 16 Bolter and Grusin (1999) term this process 'remediation', with the new arrival altering the relations of use among the already-established activities in the media environment and, typically, resulting in increased specialisation in the uses of older media.
- 17 The measurement of internet access and use is no simple matter, and different survey instruments take different approaches. For example, asking if one has 'ever used' the internet generates higher usage figures than questions concerning 'regular' use or 'use in the past month'. 'Ever used' may include respondents who previously used the internet but have since stopped. 'Have internet access at home' may include respondents who have the technology but never use it. Note that Becta (2002) asks, 'Do you use the Internet on a regular basis at home, at school or elsewhere?', and the Oxford Internet Survey (2003) asks, 'Does this household have access to the internet?'.
- 18 See ONS (2004). These quarterly statistics on internet access and use draw from the national 'Expenditure and Food Survey' of individuals aged 16+. Similarly, the Oxford Internet Survey (OxIS, 2003) found that 59% of Britons aged 14+ used the internet in Spring 2003. The internet was accessed mostly from home (89%) but also at work (28%), school or college (13%), a friend's house (10%), via mobile access (6%), at libraries (5%) and internet cafés (3%). The highest user group was found to be 14-22 year olds in full time education – 98% of this group were internet users at the time of the survey. (Face to face interviews with a nationally representative random sample of 2,000 individuals aged 14+ were carried out in May/June 2003).
- 19 ONS data on recent trends in UK household access to the internet are as follows: 9% in 1998, 18% in 1999, 32% in 2000, 39% in 2001, 44% in 2002 and 48% in 2003 (ONS, 2003).
- 20 See Livingstone (2002).
- 21 Not all 18-19 year olds are in school or college: for those who are not studying, the question included the option 'computer at own work place'.

## Endnotes

- 22 Not all those who have ever used the internet at home currently have internet access at home, therefore. Of those 9-19 year olds who do not currently use the internet (4%, N=54), 43% say there was a time when they used to use the internet, and of those, 81% (N=24) say they no longer use it because they haven't got access anymore.
- 23 Comparing UKCGO figures with those from Becta, their 2001 and 2002 surveys both found 26% of children aged 5-18 who had access at school but not at home. Becta conducted two government-funded in-depth surveys with home-based interviews of a nationally representative sample of 5-18 year olds and their parents in relation to ICT use at home and school. Wave 1 (Autumn 2001) included 1,750 and Wave 2 (Autumn 2002) 2,073 interviews (with one child and their parent per household) as well as interviews with parents of 3-4 year olds. Note, however, that this sample is a little younger than the 9-19 year olds sampled for UKCGO.
- 24 Internet use for UK children is considerably higher than for many other countries in Europe. A recent Eurobarometer survey found that the European average for 12-15 year olds is 73% and for 16-17 year olds is 83% (Eurobarometer, 2004). The greater access to the internet identified here for UK 9-19 year olds exceeds EU figures for both home and for school access.
- 25 Socio-economic status of the household was measured as described in the Annex. Throughout this report 'middle class' refers to ABC1 households and 'working class' refers to C2DE households.
- 26 Our qualitative research shows clearly that parents are strongly motivated to acquire computer and internet access at home to support their children's education and employment prospects, and this is evident in the figures for access at home (Livingstone and Bober, 2003).
- 27 To be precise, definitions are based on combinations of variables as follows:  
 'Home (any)' = currently has computer/laptop, digital TV or games console at home with internet access.  
 'School, not home' = has accessed the internet at school, has never accessed the internet on computer / digital TV / games console at home and does not currently have computer with internet access at home.  
 'Other location only' = no access to the internet at either home or school but has used elsewhere, ie has never accessed the internet on computer / digital TV / games console at home, nor on computer at school and does not have computer with internet at home.  
 'Non-users' = has no access to the internet at home or school and has never used the internet before.
- 28 The 'Index of Multiple Deprivation' for England 2004 combines seven domains of deprivation: income deprivation, employment deprivation, health deprivation and disability, education, skills and training deprivation, barriers to housing and services, living environment deprivation and crime (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, [www.odpm.gov.uk](http://www.odpm.gov.uk), 2004).
- 29 The sample sizes of different minority groups were too small to break down these figures further (1,333 respondents were of white background, 91 Asian, 35 black, 4 Chinese and 39 of mixed ethnic background.)
- 30 Caron and Caronia (2001) term the escalation of expectations regarding updates and add-ons to the computer at home a 'cascade' in demands upon parents, while Livingstone (2002) and Flichy (2002) chart the history of different media – telephone, radio, television, hifi and now computer – which began as shared household possessions but multiplied in the home to become personalised media.
- 31 Hence, of those children with one or more computers at home, 60% have access on one computer while 22% have internet access on more than one computer (14% on two, 5% on three and 3% on more than three).
- 32 The Oxford Internet Survey found that in 2003, 11% of British households had broadband, and 24% were planning to go broadband within the following year (OxIS, 2003).
- 33 Some 33% of boys and 34% of girls with an internet connection at home have broadband access, as do 32% of 9-11 year olds, 31% of 12-15 year olds, 38% of 16-17 year olds and 33% of 18-19 year olds who have the internet at home.
- 34 See also Pew (2004, p. 4): 'Among people who are relatively well off economically, close to half have home broadband connections.'
- 35 These figures are broadly comparable with those obtained by Becta's survey of 5-18 year olds in 2002. This survey found that 81% had a computer at home, 92% had a mobile phone, 77% had a games console, though only 21% had a WAP/3G phone at home.
- 36 Note that though new mobile phones come with WAP, they might only have been used once or a few times to access the internet. Furthermore, WAP and digital television do not yet provide the same experience using the internet as does the computer, providing only limited access to online content.
- 37 See Livingstone and Bovill (2001).
- 38 The *Young People New Media* survey conducted among UK 6-17 year olds in 1997 found that 63% of children had a television set in their bedroom – 54% of ABC1 and 71% of C2DE households (Livingstone and Bovill, 1999).
- 39 [www.thamesvalley.police.uk/crime-reduction/internet-crime6.htm](http://www.thamesvalley.police.uk/crime-reduction/internet-crime6.htm)

## Endnotes

- 40 In a recent European comparison (SAFT, 2003), 30% of children were found to have a computer in their own bedroom. This was highest in Denmark (40%) and lowest in Ireland (16%), with Norway (27%), Sweden (33%) and Iceland (34%) in between. The computer was located in a public room as follows: Ireland 58%, Denmark 47%, Norway 44%, Iceland 41%, Sweden 20%. These data do not distinguish between computers with and without internet access. In this survey, 4,700 children aged 9-16 and 3,200 parents in the above countries completed a school-based self-completion questionnaire (children) and telephone interviews (parents) between December 2002 and March 2003.
- 41 Comparison data for 2001 and 2002 come from the British Educational and Technology Agency (Becta, 2001; 2002).
- 42 Livingstone and Bovill (1999).
- 43 See Warschauer (2003); Norris (2001); Rice (2002).
- 44 Among 11-18 year olds, Becta (2002) found that 27% were daily users, 47% were weekly users (once or twice a week), 17% were occasional users (once a month or less), and 9% were non-users.
- 45 See Selwyn (2003); Wyatt et al (2002).
- 46 Findings from the *World Internet Project* suggest that gender differences are projected to disappear among the next generation, at least in terms of access and time spent online (Dutton, 2004).
- 47 See Livingstone and Bovill (2001).
- 48 SMS – short messaging service via the mobile phone; also text messaging.
- 49 Note that children were asked to choose the single most helpful tool, whereas parents were asked to choose all in the list that help their child.
- 50 This figure shows children's reasons for non and occasional use by combining the reasons provided by children who no longer use the internet but used to (N=24), children who have never used the internet (N=29), children who no longer use it as often as they did before (N=89) and children who have always been occasional users (N=109). Among children, the reason 'don't know how to use it' was only asked of 9-19 year olds who had never used the internet (N=29), and the reasons 'people rely on computers too much' was not asked of children who used to use the internet. The figure also shows why the parent says that their child does not use/has low levels of internet usage (N=94) and parents' reasons for their own low or non use (N=323).
- 51 See Office of the e-Envoy (2004).
- 52 See also Pew (2001a).
- 53 See Kellner (2002); Livingstone (2002).
- 54 Media literacy can be defined as the ability to access, analyse, evaluate and create messages across a variety of media and contexts (Livingstone, 2003b).
- 55 See Eastin and La Rose (2000); Torkezadeh and Van Dyke (2001; 2002).
- 56 See also Montgomery and Pasnik (1996); Turow (2001).
- 57 At least one study mapping online pornography identified much that is upsetting or embarrassing for children (Feilitzen and Carlsson (2000); although see Sutter (2000) for some questions about whether inappropriately sexual or pornographic websites are experienced as problematic for young people and their families).
- 58 A telephone survey was conducted in March 2002, involving 1,081 parents with children aged 6-16 who owned PCs (see Media Awareness Network, 2000).
- 59 The research involved a telephone survey of 1,506 adults and 625 children aged 10-17 conducted in February 2000 (see Kaiser Family Foundation (2000).
- 60 A UK marketing survey of 2,019 7-16 year old internet users carried out by NOP in June 2000 (see Wigley and Clarke, 2000).
- 61 This was defined in the survey, with the younger respondents in mind, as 'stuff meant for adults, for example nude people, rude and sexy pictures'.
- 62 The current role of the Internet Watch Foundation is to 'foster trust and confidence in the internet among current and future internet users by operating a hotline to enable the public to report instances of potential child abuse images, criminally obscene and criminally racist material found anywhere in the world on the internet, for example via websites, newsgroups, mobiles or other on-line services [... and to] assist law enforcement in the fight against criminal content on the internet' ([www.iwf.org.uk](http://www.iwf.org.uk)). See also the EC's initiatives regarding the protection of minors on the internet: The European Parliament and the Council of Europe recommend 'action to enable minors to make responsible use of on-line audiovisual and information services, notably by improving the level of awareness among parents, educators and teachers of the potential of the new services and of the means whereby they may be made safe for minors, in particular through media literacy or media education programmes [and, furthermore,] action to facilitate, where appropriate and necessary, identification of, and access to, quality content and services for minors, including through the provision of means of access in educational establishments and public places' (European Commission, 2004).

## Endnotes

- 63 Note that this figure is higher than the 57% of weekly internet users who claim to have had contact with pornography, not so much because occasional users are included here but because 9-11 year olds are excluded.
- 64 Since respondents were permitted multiple responses to this question, these percentages do not simply add up to 100%.
- 65 Again, multiple responses were permitted.
- 66 See Ling (2000).
- 67 See Drotner (2000); Pew (2001b).
- 68 See Drotner (2000); Ling (2000), Livingstone and Bober (2003).
- 69 See Bentivegna (2002).
- 70 See Coleman (2003); Sundin (1999).
- 71 See Dutton (1999) on reconfiguring social relations; see McMillan (2002) on varieties of interactivity.
- 72 See Barnhurst (1998); Kimblerlee (2002); Montgomery et al (2004).
- 73 A school-based survey of 330 8-11 year olds in England (see O'Connell et al, 2004).
- 74 Still, among our sample of 1,511 children, one child did not have a good time, and, while we know no more about this instance, one cannot be sanguine about such a report. Nor can we be sure that other children surveyed were truthful in reporting a positive experience.
- 75 The percentage of children who say they have visited a chat room includes both current and past users.
- 76 However, the discrepancies are of a similar order. It is simply that these are less common occurrences and so the figures are smaller.
- 77 Here UK parents seem more restrictive than the European average of 49% not allowing their children give out personal information (for 0-17 year olds) (Eurobarometer, 2004).
- 78 Here UK parents also seem more restrictive than the European average, where only 32% of parents ban chat rooms (for 0-17 year olds) (Eurobarometer, 2004).
- 79 This campaign combines television advertising, pop-up adverts and a website with online games to inform children of the dangers of using chat rooms and also gives safety advice to parents (see [www.thinkuknow.co.uk](http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk)).
- 80 These figures from the parent survey could be higher than those from the children's survey because the parents were answering for all child users, including occasional users, while the children's survey asked only those who used the internet at least once a week.
- 81 We cannot be sure, and it is not easy to pursue in a survey, exactly what parents and children think is meant by 'filtering' or 'monitoring', and our qualitative work suggests some confusion about the technical options available.
- 82 See Abelman (1985); Austin (1993); Bybee et al (1982); Lin and Atkin (1989); Livingstone (2002); Van der Voort et al (1992).
- 83 See Livingstone (in press).
- 84 See Oswell (2002); Spigel (1992). The shifting view of television, now the internet is present in most people's homes, provides an example of remediation (Bolter and Grusin, 1999). Once also regarded with ambivalence as ushering both opportunities and dangers into the home, television appears now to be regarded rather more negatively, and in less polarised terms, while it is the internet that attracts both our greatest hopes for and deepest fears of society.
- 85 Asked whether children who lack internet access are at a disadvantage, parents of daily users score 3.7 (where 5=agree and 1=disagree), while parents of low or non users score 3.0 and 2.8 respectively.
- 86 See [www.childnetacademy.org](http://www.childnetacademy.org)
- 87 The sampling technique used in this survey is a tightly controlled form of random location sampling which aims to eliminate the more unsatisfactory features of quota sampling without incurring the cost and other penalties involved in conducting surveys according to strict probability methods. Crucially, the interviewers are given very little choice in the selection of respondents. Respondents are drawn from a small set of homogenous streets selected with probability proportional to population after stratification by their ACORN characteristics and region. Quotas are set in terms of characteristics which are known to have a bearing on individuals' probabilities of being at home and so available for interview. Rules are given which govern the distribution spacing and timing of interviews. The sample of areas takes as its universe all enumeration districts (groups of on average 150 households) in Great Britain. Enumeration districts are stratified thus: (i) Standard Region; (ii) Within Standard Region – by Acorn type; (iii) Within Standard Region by County and ITV Region. Thus, the design is single stage using direct selection of appropriate Enumeration Districts rather than taking streets at random from larger units, such as wards or parishes.

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**[www.children-go-online.net](http://www.children-go-online.net)**

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