UK **Children Go Online**

Final report of key project findings

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A word from the 'UK Children Go Online' advisory panel

We hope that these findings are of value to policy developments and academic knowledge as work in this field continues to move forward.

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'Professor Livingstone's findings are showing up valuable insight into this most tricky area of the internet, namely the safety of children and the role of parents in their use of the internet.'

(Professor Leonard Waverman of London Business School, former Director of the ESRC e-Society programme)

'UK Children Go Online offers the Internet industry, policymakers and children's organisations crucial insight into the nature of children's internet use and their parents' view of what they do online. It is clear that there is still significant progress to be made in ensuring that families make the most of the advice and tools available to them for reducing online risks. We must continue to act upon the findings of this in-depth research to ensure a safer experience for younger internet users.'

(Camille de Stempel, Director of Policy, AOL UK, and co-sponsor of UK Children Go Online)

'This is a milestone study. Its size, its scope and its authorship give it a unique authority. It confirms some things that we already knew or suspected, and it provides many rich details which greatly expand our knowledge of children's use of the internet. The gap between what children are actually doing and what their parents think they are doing is a lot larger than many people would have imagined. It is a gap we must try to close.'

(John Carr, Internet Adviser to the children's charity NCH and adviser to UK Children Go Online)

'Much has been said in the media recently by adults about the impact of the internet on children. For the first time, this important piece of research reveals the thoughts and feelings of young people themselves. It is vitally important we listen to them as we shape the future of our new digital society.'

(John Fisher, CEO of Citizens Online and co-sponsor of UK Children Go Online)

'This is the largest body of academic research on children's use of technology ever to happen in the UK. It is an enormous achievement to get children to reveal their thoughts, fears and preferences honestly, in a way that it has only been possible to do anecdotally before. The report demonstrates the urgent need for more internet literacy within education since too many young people do not apply critical thinking skills to online content.'

(Stephen Carrick-Davies, CEO of Childnet International and co-sponsor of UK Children Go Online)

'This project gives us illuminating, much-needed insights into the attitudes and behaviours of young people. Of particular value is how it unpicks the balance between the opportunities and risks that young people experience online.'

(Robin Blake, Manager of Media Literacy, Ofcom, and co sponsor of UK Children Go Online)

Executive summary

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.

This report presents the main project findings and recommendations. These are based on a national UK survey conducted face to face with 1,511 children and young people aged 9-19, together with a survey administered to 906 of their parents, and a series of focus group interviews and observations focusing on children's use of the internet. The findings and recommendations are summarised below.

Access to the internet

- **Home access is growing:** 75% of 9-19 year olds have accessed the internet from a computer at home.

- **School access is near universal:** 92% have accessed the internet at school.

- **Homes with children lead in gaining internet access:** 36% have more than one computer at home, and 24% live in a household with broadband access.

- **Access platforms are diversifying:** 71% have a computer, 38% a mobile phone, 17% a digital television and 8% a games console, all with internet access.

- **Socio-economic differences are sizeable:** 88% of middle class but only 61% of working class children have accessed the internet at home.

- **Many computers in private rooms:** 19% have internet access in their bedroom.

The nature of internet use

- **Most are daily or weekly users:** 9-19 year olds are mainly divided between daily users (41%) and weekly users (43%).

- **Most online for less than an hour:** 19% spend about ten minutes per day online and 48% between half an hour and one hour.

- **Most use it for searching and homework:** 90% of 9-19 year olds who go online daily or weekly use the internet to do work for school or college and 94% use it to get information for other things.

- **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 project and handed it in as their own.

Inequalities and the digital divide

- **A continuum in quality of use:** 16% of 9-19 year olds make low levels or even no use of the internet.

- **Enablers of internet use:** Middle class teenagers, those with home access and those who have spent more years online tend to use the internet more often, spend more time online per day and, consequently, have greater online skills.

- **Lack of interest is only part of the story:** 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.

- **Parents' experience of the internet matters:** Daily and weekly users have parents who also use the internet more often and are more expert.

- **The internet is not yet used to its full potential:** Many children and young people are not yet taking up the full potential of the internet, for example visiting a narrow range of sites or not interacting with sites.

- **In/exclusion depends on quality of use:** A new divide is opening up between those for whom the internet is an increasingly rich, diverse, engaging and stimulating resource and those for whom it remains a narrow, unengaging, if occasionally useful, resource of rather less significance.

Education, learning and literacy

- **Many have not received lessons:** 30% of pupils aged 9-19 report having received no lessons at all on using the internet.

- **Skills gap between parents and children:** Only 16% of weekly and daily user parents consider themselves advanced compared with 32% of children.

- **Children lack key skills in evaluating online content:** 38% of pupils aged 9-19 trust most of the information on the internet, and only 33% of 9-19 year olds daily and weekly users have been taught how to judge the reliability of online information.

Communication

- **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.

- **Most online communication is with local friends:** Being in constant contact with friends is highly valued, and there is little interest contacting strangers, though some have contacted people that they have not met face to face, this being mainly among the 21% who visit chat rooms.

- **Talking online is less satisfying:** 53% of email, IM and chat users think that talking to people on the internet is less satisfying than talking to them in real life.

- **Some seek advice online:** 25% of 12-19 year old daily and weekly users say they go online to get advice.

Executive summary

Participation

- **Producing as well as receiving content:** 44% 9-19 year old weekly users have completed a quiz online, 25% have sent an email or text message to a website, 22% have voted for something online, and 17% have sent pictures or stories to a website.

- **Some are interested in civic issues:** 54% of 12-19 year olds who use the internet at least weekly have sought out sites concerned with political or civic issues.

- **Age, gender and social grade make a difference:** Girls, older and middle class teens visit a broader range of civic and political sites.

The risks of undesirable content

- **More than half have seen pornography online:** 57% of 9-19 year old daily and weekly users have come into contact with online porn.

- **Most porn is viewed unintentionally:** 38% have seen a pornographic pop-up advert while doing something else, 36% have accidentally found themselves on a porn site when looking for something else, and 25% have received pornographic junk mail.

- **More porn on the internet than in other media:** 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.

- **Mixed responses to online porn:** When young people encounter pornography on the internet, 54% claim not to be bothered by it, but a significant minority (14%) do not like it.

- **Too young to have seen it:** 45% of 18-19 year old internet users who have seen any pornography (on or offline) think they were too young to have seen it when they first did.

- **Other areas of concern:** 22% of 9-19 year old daily and weekly users have accidentally ended up on a site with violent or gruesome pictures and 9% on a site that is hostile or hateful to a group of people.

- **The most risky medium?** Both parents and children regard the internet as riskier than other media in terms of a range of content and contact risks.

The risks of online communication

- **Parents underestimate children's negative experiences:** One third of 9-19 year old daily and weekly users have received unwanted sexual (31%) or nasty comments (33%) online or by text message, though only 7% of parents are aware that their child has received sexual comments and only 4% that their child has been bullied online.

- **Children divulge personal information online:** 46% say that they have given out personal information to someone that they met online.

- **Children engage in identity play:** 40% say that they have pretended about themselves online.

- **Some have attended face to face meetings:** 30% have made an online acquaintance, and 8% say they have met face to face with someone whom they first met online.

Regulating the internet at home

- **Parents seek to manage their children's internet use:** 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 face some difficult challenges:** 18% of parents say they don't know how to help their child use the internet safely.

- **Confusion about filtering:** In homes with internet access, 35% of children say that filtering software has been installed on their computer while 46% of parents claim this.

- **Children don't want restrictions:** 69% of 9-17 year old daily and weekly users say they mind their parents restricting or monitoring their internet use.

- **Children protect their privacy from parents:** 63% of 12-19 year old home internet users have taken some action to hide their online activities from their parents.

- **Mind the gap:** There are considerable gaps in understanding between parents and children (in internet expertise, in awareness of risks and in acknowledgement of domestic regulation implemented) which impede an effective regulation of children's internet use within the home.

Balancing opportunities and risks

- **More skilled young people do not avoid the risks:** Not only do the most skilled young people fail to avoid online risks, but their risky encounters increase with increased use – thought these young people are more likely to be able to deal with the risks.

- **Opportunities and risks go hand in hand:** There is a strong, positive association between opportunities and risks – the more children and young people experience the one, the more they also experience the other, and vice versa.

- **Internet literacy is crucial:** Increasing internet skills is vital since it seems that children and young people's level of online skills has a direct influence on the breadth of online opportunities and risks they experience.

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A parental wish list

- **Stricter regulation:** 85% of parents want to see tougher laws on online pornography, with 59% wanting stricter regulation of online services.

- **More education:** 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:** 64% want more sites developed specifically for children.

- **Improved technology:** 66% want improved filtering software, 54% improved parental controls and 51% improved monitoring software.

A last word from young people

Qualitative interviews with children help to identify a number of ways in which they wish their internet use enhanced – by better quality content addressing their interests, by truly interactive sites that offer responses to their contributions, by more guidance on content creation, improved protection from unwanted content and attention paid to their privacy needs, including from their parents.

Summary of future research priorities

We offer a series of key proprieties for future research in the area of children and young people's uses of new technologies:

- Keep up with technological and market developments in relation to access

- Track shifting and diversifying contexts of use

- Conduct an audit of online content aimed at children and young people

- Critically examine causes and consequences of exclusion

- Examine (and explore measurement of) future developments of online literacy

- Examine the nature and quality of new social networks in online communication

- Investigate best practice for participatory websites for children and young people

- Explore how to facilitate online creativity

- Carefully examine the extent and nature of actual harms associated with online risks

- Investigate how to best target safety messages at different audiences

- Assess the external threats to children's online privacy

- Explore strategies and effectiveness of parental regulation

- Continue tracking the balance of opportunities and risks

Summary of policy recommendations

It is hoped that the present findings provide a clear and careful picture of the nature and extent of online risks especially, as well as an account of the concerted 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 because this would be to deny them the many benefits of the internet. Indeed, there are real costs to lacking internet access or sufficient skills to use it.

However, the risks 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.

We offer a series of key recommendations to policy makers, internet service providers, teachers, parents and children:

- Recognise the complexity of 'access' when designing information and advice campaigns

- Direct children and young people towards valuable content

- Address the changing conditions of digital exclusion

- Improve levels of internet literacy

- Develop critical evaluation skills

- Develop online advice resources with the help of young people

- Facilitate the shift from just receiving to also creating content

- Rethink online participation from 'having your say' to 'being listened to'

- Continue efforts to prevent exposure to undesirable content

- Maintain internet safety awareness

- Encourage parental sharing in children's internet use

- Respect children's online privacy in the home

- Take care not to reduce young people's online opportunities

- Target guidance and regulation more carefully at different groups of children

- Design websites which encourage internet literacy

- Develop more and better child and youth portals

Overview of the 'UK Children Go Online' project

The 'internet generation'

Many UK households, especially those with children, now have access to the internet although, importantly, some do not. The growing significance of the internet in our lives raises many questions for social scientists, policy makers and the public – about access and inequalities, the nature and quality of use, the implications for education, family life and social relationships and the balance between online risks and opportunities.

As public discussion moves beyond the initial hyperbole of high hopes or moral panics about the potential of the internet, a fascinating picture is emerging of the diverse ways in which people are using this new technology. While providing only moderate support for claims of social changes associated with the internet, the emerging picture reveals the desires and pressures that influence how we are fitting the internet into our lives.

The growing research literature sets the scene for a shift from asking questions of access and diffusion to asking questions about use, especially about the depth and quality of internet use. And we need to know more about the ways in which this new technology is socially shaped and socially embedded within the meanings and practices of everyday life. As many studies make clear, it is important to pay careful attention to context and diversity when characterising 'internet use' among 'the public'.

The present report contributes to this emerging picture with a new and substantial body of findings on the ways in which children, young people and their parents are accessing and using the internet. Young people are often called 'the internet generation'. They are the first generation to grow up with the internet, being more likely to have domestic internet access than households without children. Indeed, today's youngest generation proudly proclaims itself to be the experts online. Moreover, it seems that many of their parents and teachers struggle to keep up, let alone to inform and guide children and young people's internet use.

So, how are children and young people accessing and using the internet? How do families differ in their responses to the internet? What does the internet mean to them? And most important, can we shed some light on the consequences of widespread internet use?

Research aims

An informed account of the nature of children and young people's internet access and use is crucial in order to counter the anxieties and confusion stimulated by media panics over the supposedly dramatic consequences of mass internet adoption. A clear, empirically sound assessment of current uses, skills and concerns is also essential if, in practice, the potential benefits of the internet are to be realised for the present and coming generations.

The research project *UK Children Go Online* (UKCGO) has conducted a thorough investigation of 9-19 year olds' use of the internet between 2003 and 2005. We have worked with girls and boys of different ages and socio-economic backgrounds across the UK in order to ask how the internet may be transforming – or may itself be shaped by – family life, peer networks and education.

The project combined qualitative interviews and observations with a major national in-home survey of children, young people and their parents (see below).[1] The aims were to:

1. Provide detailed, systematic survey data that documents the extent and nature of understandings, practices and contexts of internet use among 9-19 year olds.

2. Provide in-depth qualitative data that reveals children and young people's own perspectives on the emerging place of the internet in their lives.

3. Target original empirical research on key policy-relevant domains, integrating academic theory and research with new findings and analysis.

The research questions, and linked policy questions, are summarised in Table 1.

Policy focus

Across a range of policy domains, there is a sense of urgency in the debates, 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. Hence, we hope the range of empirical findings summarised in this report makes a constructive contribution, providing much needed data derived from children and young people themselves on a nationwide basis.

The four areas prioritised in our research questions map onto distinct, but linked, areas of current policy development (see Table 1), each being central to the concerns of a range of stakeholders across the public and private sectors. Additionally, since the inception of the project, 'media literacy' or, specifically, 'internet literacy' has come to the fore in policy discussions. Defined broadly by Ofcom as 'the ability to access, understand and create communications in a variety of forms',[2] this theme intersects with each of our research questions. Particularly, internet literacy provides a framework for examining the emerging balance between online opportunities and risks.

In seeking to advance this and related agendas, we note that in policy debates, children and young people are regarded with some ambivalence, being seen both as 'the digital generation', pioneers in developing online competencies, yet also vulnerable, potentially at risk, and so requiring special protective measures. This report offers some support for both

Overview of the 'UK Children Go Online' project

Table 1: Research and policy questions

Four areas	Research questions	Policy-relevant questions
Access, inequalities and the digital divide	To what extent is internet access and use unequal? What are the key barriers to use? Is there a digital divide or continuum of digital in/exclusion for children and young people?	How should persistent inequalities in internet access and use be addressed? Does the internet introduce new forms of in/exclusion?
Undesirable forms of content and contact	What is the incidence of upsetting, worrying or intrusive experiences online? What risky practices do children and young people engage in? How successful are parents' and others' attempts at improving online safety?	Are internet safety messages received and implemented by children and parents? What areas of risk require further initiatives?
Education, informal learning and literacy	Are children as expert online as they seem and in what ways? How is children's online learning being supported and by whom? What kinds of new internet or media literacy (eg skills, trust, breadth of use) is being developed?	Is the link between educational policy and domestic internet use effective? Are there further issues that schools could address?
Communication, identity and participation	How far are online opportunities for self-expression, creativity and communication being taken up and by whom? Does this open up new possibilities for advice-seeking, participation or privacy?	Are the desired benefits of the internet forthcoming and widespread? What further efforts are required to broaden and deepen internet use?

views, thereby inviting a balanced approach to policy that acknowledges children's skills and pleasures as well as their needs and their limitations.

The report also points up the very real challenges faced by parents in attempting to make sense of this often-difficult new technology so as to manage their children's use of it. Hence, we argue that multiple stakeholders – educators, industry, consumer groups, content providers and regulators – must share the responsibility with parents in balancing the twin imperatives of maximising online opportunities and minimising online risks.[3]

Research context and design

In designing the *UK Children Go Online* project, we built on a fast-growing research literature conducted in the UK and beyond by researchers across the social sciences.[4] From this, it was clear that, although parents have been primarily motivated to provide internet access for their children for educational reasons, to 'keep up' or 'get ahead', children are themselves far more motivated by the entertainment and communication possibilities offered by the internet.

These and other findings provided us with an important steer towards a child-centred approach to research, for a key message is that adults and children often understand the internet very differently. Hence, one should be wary of inviting parents to speak for children for, as this report shows, they offer divergent accounts of online opportunities and risks and, interestingly, of domestic rules and regulations for internet use.

A child-centred approach invites children's own understandings of their daily lives. It regards children as active, motivated and imaginative (though not necessarily sophisticated) agents who shape the meanings and consequences of the 'new' through the lens of their established social 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 perspective of their users plays a key role in mediating just how this occurs and with what consequences.[5]

However, the research also sought to recognise the subtle and not so subtle constraints which frame the choices and possibilities in children's lives. Through all phases of the research, we sought to work with children from diverse backgrounds in terms of socio-economic status, ethnicity, family status, geographic region, and so forth. The survey permitted a statistical analysis of the interrelations among the dimensions of internet use measured, in addition to the straightforward presentation of headline statistics. In reporting the research findings, conducted between 2003-05, we caution that 'answers' to questions of internet use are inevitably provisional because both the technology and its social contexts of use continue to change.

Overview of research methods and presentation of key findings

Research methods

Concretely, the UKCGO research design consisted of three phases from April 2003 to April 2005. (For methodological details on the survey and focus group samples, see the Appendix.)

1. **Qualitative research:** 14 focus group interviews with 9-19 year olds around the UK (summer 2003), nine family visits and in-home observations (2003-04), a children's online panel.

2. **Quantitative research:** A major national, in-home, 40 minute face to face survey of 1,511 9-19 year olds and 906 parents of the 9-17 year olds, using Random Location sampling across the UK, permitting generalisation to the UK population. The fieldwork was conducted via multi-media computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI) with children, and included a 'private' self-completion section for sensitive areas of questioning, plus a paper questionnaire completed by their parents. This was carried out between 12 January and 7 March 2004 by BMRB International.

3. **Qualitative research:** A follow-up on findings from the survey with 13 focus group interviews and observations in autumn 2004, together with a reconvening of the children's online panel.

Research with children, especially regarding aspects of their private lives, requires careful ethical considerations.[6] The project's ethics policy is available at www.children-go-online.net

Presentation of key findings

The main body of this report presents a summary of key findings from the project overall. In doing so, it integrates findings from a series of project reports. These contain more detailed analysis of children and their families in terms of age, gender, socio-economic status and other factors. This report then concludes by offering a series of policy recommendations and by identifying priorities for future research.

Related project reports: These are freely available at www.children-go-online.net (also see the Appendix).

- Report 1 – UK Children Go Online: Listening to young people's experiences, October 2003 (qualitative research, drawing on focus groups and individual interviews with children)

- Report 2 – UK Children Go Online: Surveying the experiences of young people and their parents, July 2004 (an overview of the key findings from the UKCGO survey)

- Report 3 – Active Participation or Just More Information? Young people's take up of opportunities to act and interact on the internet, October 2004 (findings for young people's interaction with websites and their civic/political participation on the internet, based on the UKCGO survey)

- Report 4 – Internet Literacy among Children and Young People: Findings from the UK Children Go Online project, February 2005 (findings focusing on young people's internet literacy and its relation to the take up of online opportunities and risks, based on the UKCGO survey)

- Report 5 – Inequalities and the Digital Divide in Children and Young People's Internet Use: Findings from the UK Children Go Online project, April 2005 (findings in relation to internet access, low users and the digital divide, based on the UKCGO survey)

- Report 6 – UK Children Go Online: Final report of key project findings, April 2005 (a summary of integrated project findings with main conclusions and policy recommendations)

Comparison with other surveys: As befits a global medium, the research effort to understand children's internet use is ongoing in many countries. Where appropriate, and while recognising that surveys vary in sampling and procedures, this report compares findings from the UK Children Go Online project to the following surveys (see Appendix for full details):

- Becta (2002). Young People and ICT 2002 (UK)

- Cyberspace Research Unit (2004). Emerging Trends amongst Primary School Children's Use of the Internet (UK)

- Eurobarometer (2004). Illegal and Harmful Content on the Internet (EU)

- Internet Advisory Board (2004). The Use of New Media by Children (Ireland)

- Ofcom (2004). The Communications Market 2004 (UK)

- Office for National Statistics (2004). Internet Access (UK)

- Oxford Internet Survey (2003). The Social Dynamics of the Internet (UK)

- Pew (2005). Protecting Teens Online (USA)

- Pew (2001). Teenage Life Online (USA)

- SAFT (2003). What do SAFT kids do online? (Northern Europe)

- USC Annenberg School Center for the Digital Future (2004). The Digital Future Report (USA)

Key findings on access to the internet

'My younger cousins, they're all under the age of eleven – and they're now coming into an age where the internet is all they've ever known. Where we, really, when we were young, we were still doing all the [outdoor] activities, and the internet wasn't really around. So we've got balance. But maybe in five or ten years time, that will change.' *(Lorie, 17, from Essex)*

'If we didn't have the internet, we'd get everything we have on the internet somewhere else. And I don't think the internet is the solution to anything. And especially not education because there are too many distractions… I just think the internet can be an easy way of doing things.' *(Marie, 16, from Essex)*[7]

As the extent, nature and quality of internet access changes rapidly, the project asked which children have access to the internet, in which locations and using which delivery platforms. The results show that 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.[8]

Among all 9-19 year olds:

- **Home access is growing:** Three quarters (75%) have accessed the internet from a computer at home (see Figure 1). 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.

- **School access is near universal:** 92% have accessed the internet at school (see Figure 1), and one quarter (24%) rely on this, having access at school but not at home. Two thirds (64%) have also used the internet elsewhere (someone else's house, public library etc).

- **Homes with children lead in gaining internet access:** Children and young people are 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.

- **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, but this does not necessarily mean use). Further, those with internet access at home are also more likely to have these other technologies at home.

- **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.[9] The number of access points to the internet is also greater for children from middle class homes than from working class homes.

- **Many computers in private rooms, including bedrooms:** 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.

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

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

Legend: Computer at school | Computer at home | Elsewhere
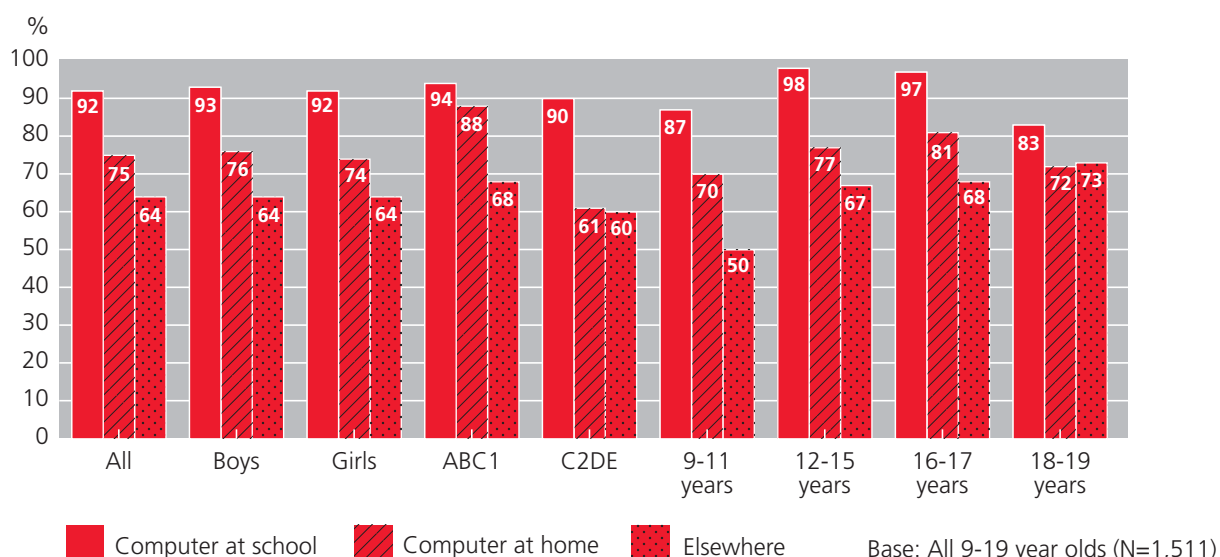
Key findings on access to the internet

Children lead in internet access. According to the **Office for National Statistics**, only 58% of UK adults (aged 16+) had used the internet by February 2004 (up from 54% in 2003 and 49% in 2002).

Similarly, the **Oxford Internet Survey** found most internet users among 14-22 year olds in full time education: 98% of UK individuals aged 14+ were internet users in Spring 2003, compared with 67% of people of working age up to 55 years and 22% of those retired (over 55). Most users accessed the internet 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%).

Internet use for UK children is considerably higher than in many other countries in Europe. A 2003 **Eurobarometer** survey found that the European average for 12-15 year olds is 73% and for 16-17 year olds is 83%, with 34% using the internet at home and 31% at school.

While in the UK access at school is higher than at home, in the US 85% of 12-19 year olds had access at home and only 63% at school in 2003 according to the **Digital Future** survey, and 87% of 12-17 year olds were internet users in 2004 according to **Pew**.

Access figures have increased dramatically over the past few years. In 1997, the **Young People New Media** survey found that 53% of 6-17 year olds in the UK had a PC at home, 7% with internet access, and 19% had used the internet anywhere then.

In 2002, 58% of 5-18 year olds in the UK had access at home, 72% at school, and 84% had accessed the internet somewhere, according to **Becta**.

The **Internet Advisory Board** quotes 2004 figures for Ireland as high as 98% for use at home and as low as 33% for use at school among 10-14 year olds.

For ownership of new technologies, the UKCGO figures are broadly comparable with those obtained by **Becta's** UK survey of 5-18 year olds in 2002: 81% had a computer at home, 92% had a mobile phone, 77% had a games console, though only 21% had a WAP/3G phone.

(Full details of these surveys can be found in the Appendix.)

Priorities for future research

Keep up with technological and market developments in relation to access: Although teenagers increasingly have access to an internet-enabled mobile phone, few access the internet other than from a computer at present. Clearly, research on access and inequalities must keep pace with technological and market developments. How are patterns of access to the internet changing, and what difference does it make that young people can access the internet in different ways and from different locations, including from mobile devices?

Policy recommendations

Recognise the complexity of 'access' when designing information and advice campaigns: As children and young people access the internet in different places (home, school, elsewhere), including different locations within the home (public room, bedroom), it is crucial to recognise that these different contexts vary in their possibilities for adult supervision and filtering, use with peers or in private, speed of connection etc. Such variation must be recognised when designing information campaigns and advice to parents. As mobile devices become internet-enabled, the complexity of 'access' will increase, as will inequalities across socio-economic groups. While targeting the disadvantaged becomes more complex, the complexity of access also opens up new routes to draw in those who are digitally excluded.

Key findings on the nature of internet use

'I use it for like homework, emailing my cousin in Australia and keeping in touch with my friend in Cornwall.'   *(Linda, 13, from Derbyshire)*

'The best thing about the internet is downloading music, things like that, and MSN.'
    (Ryan, 14, from Essex)

Prince: 'Because you get lots of information on the internet and things that in school, like, you are told to bring into your own words. It's really difficult to turn the information into your own words. It's definitely why people find it frustrating.'
Amir: 'And they get tempted to copy it… Copy and paste.'
    (14-16 year old boys from London)

Nina: 'You don't like buy CDs from HMV anymore. You just get them off the internet or off one of your mates who copies CDs.'
*Steve: 'They get paid enough anyway, them stars.'*
    (17 year olds from Manchester)

Now that access is commonplace, if not universal, attention is turning to charting the ways in which people use the internet. The research asked about 'internet use' in three ways – the frequency and amount of use, the location and social context of use and the nature of contents and services accessed. Drawing these together, we sought to chart young people's growing breadth and sophistication of internet use.[10]

Most young people use the internet frequently though often for moderate amounts of time, and half have been online for over four years. They go online 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 (compared with 22% of their parents).

- **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.

- **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

Figure 2: How often do you…?
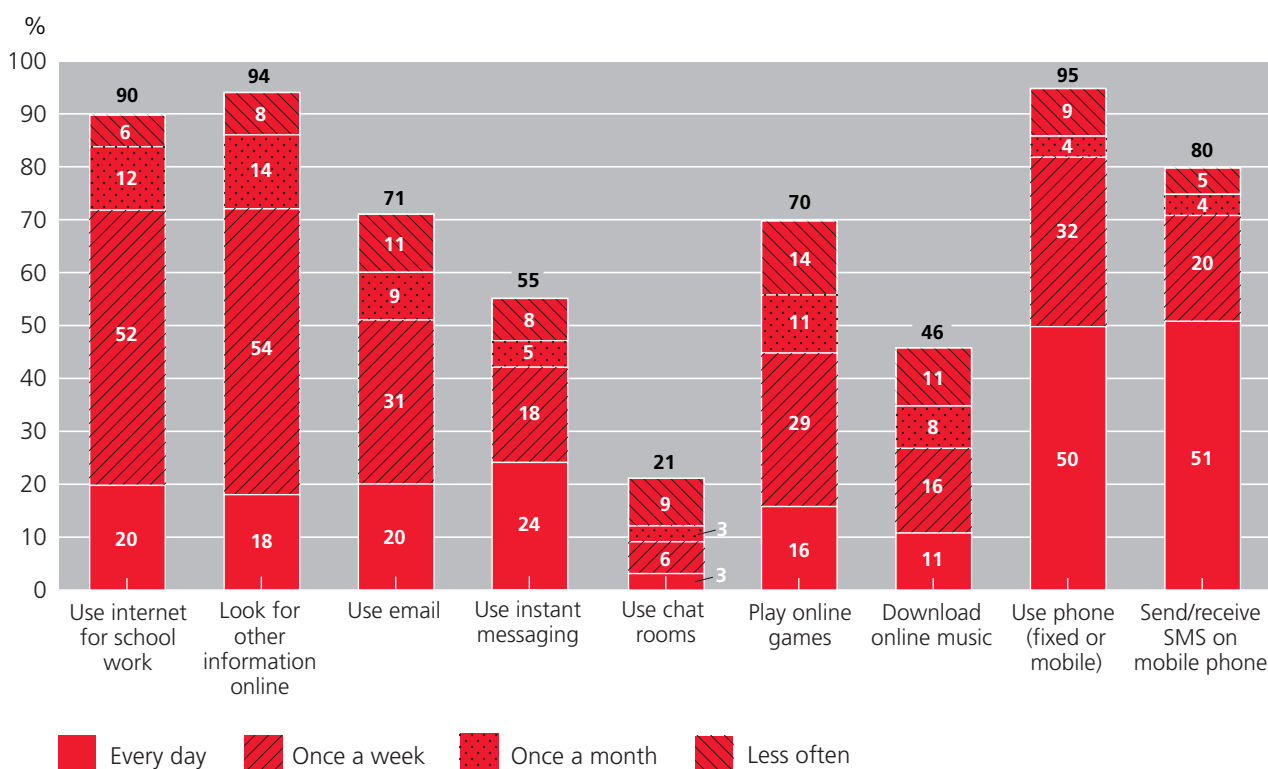
Base: 9-19 year olds who use the internet at least once a week (N=1,257)

Key findings on the nature of internet use

Other surveys found more weekly users but similar preferences in online activities as the UKCGO survey.

In 2002, **Becta** found that 27% of 11-18 year olds in the UK 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.

The 2004 **Internet Advisory Board** survey shows only 23% of 10-14 year olds in Ireland using the internet daily and 62% weekly, with 74% going online for school projects, 59% for homework and 30% to play games.

In a European comparison in 2003 (**SAFT**), 66% of 9-16 year old boys used the internet to play games and 49% to download music, while the most popular activities for girls were email (58%) and using the internet for homework (43%). In Norway, Sweden and Ireland, 60% found downloading music acceptable, but only 4% thought the same about hacking.

In the US, 12-17 year old daily users used the internet mainly for email (99%) and instant messaging (74%) in 2000 (**Pew**). A further 73% had downloaded music, and 62% had used chat rooms. In 2003, 84% of 12-19 year old internet users went online to send/receive emails, 69% for instant messaging and 51% to play games (**Digital Future** survey).

(Full details of these surveys can be found in the Appendix.)

greater than time spent on the phone or reading. Yet when asked which medium they would most miss if it disappeared tomorrow, only 10% name the internet.

- **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, and 94% use it to get information for other things. Regarding communication, 71% use it to send and receive emails and 55% to send and receive instant messages but only 21% to use chat rooms. Regarding entertainment uses, 70% go online to play games and 46% to download music (see Figure 2). Further, 44% look for information on careers and further education, 40% look for products or shop online, and 26% read the news. However the internet is used less frequently than the phone (95%) or text messaging (80%).

- **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 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, 4% have sent a message to make someone feel uncomfortable or threatened, and 2% admit to having gambled online.

Priorities for future research

Track shifting and diversifying contexts of use: It is vital that research continues to track the institutional and social influences on children's internet use. For example, do uses at home affect or undermine educational uses, and are educational uses increasing pressure on parents? How does the peer group act to promote or critique commercial contents? Are community locations of use important to young people and, if so, how should these be evaluated? Particularly, can internet access help compensate for disadvantages in the home, school or community?

Conduct an audit of online content aimed at children and young people: What is the range of online resources available to, and used by, children and young people? How far are these designed for children and young people or the general population, how many carry advertising/sponsorship, how hard is it to find the best sources? Where are the key gaps in content, recurrent problems of design or biases in take up and use? What are the implications for children and young people's searching skills and learning needs?

Policy recommendations

Direct children and young people towards valuable content: If such a research audit of online contents and uses were conducted, this could inform content provision in both commercial and public sectors. Some excellent resources are underused – better signposting and linking could direct children to these sites. Less satisfactory resources may be overused in the absence of high quality alternatives. More and more diverse content provision would be beneficial here.

More on this issue can be found in Report 2 – UK Children Go Online: Surveying the experiences of young people and their parents, July 2004.

Key findings on inequalities and the digital divide

'Some people can't afford it, which is just a sad truth.'
(Steve, 17, from Manchester)

'We should have time in our computer lesson if we want to find out something, like, the other kids have been talking about … I haven't got the internet at home. So if you want to go and see what they're all talking about, you can go on it then.' *(Holly, 10, from Hertfordshire)*

Given the considerable concerns over the digital divide, the research examined the extent and sources of inequalities in internet access and use. What are the key barriers to use? Is there a digital divide, or continuum of digital in/exclusion for children and young people?

Unlike for the adult population, very few children and young people are wholly excluded as 98% have used the internet at some time. But inequalities remain. A few children and young people have not used the internet. A minority use it only infrequently. And, even among frequent users, many make only narrow use of the internet. Lastly, there are some drop-outs as users cease to use or have access to the internet.

For children and young people, therefore, the digital divide has become a continuum of digital inclusion and exclusion, with the locus of inequality shifting from technology access (haves and have-nots) to quality of use (as assessed by time use, skills and range of online activities).[11]

- **A continuum in quality of use:** 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.

For example, among those who go online at least once a week, half (51%) concentrate their use on fewer than five different websites.

- **Socio-economic status continues to matter:** Those of higher socio-economic status have more and better internet access than those from lower status homes. They are also more likely to have a broadband connection and access the internet from a greater number of locations. Further, middle class teenagers, those with home access and those who have spent more years online tend to use the internet more often, spend more time online per day and, consequently, have greater online skills and self-efficacy.[12]

- **Other enablers of internet use:** The oldest (18-19 years) and the youngest (9-11 years) age groups, and children and young people living in the North of England, are more at risk of exclusion. Further, children and young people with a disability are slightly more likely to be low users of the internet (14% of occasional and non-users have a disability vs 9% of daily and weekly users). These factors all result in some young people benefiting from a wider breadth of online opportunities than others.

- **Lack of interest is only part of the story:** Access and expertise remain significant barriers – 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 Figure 3). For those that have no access or have lost it, this is the main reason for not using the internet (or not using it more frequently). For those that have access and don't use the internet, the main reasons are lack

Figure 3: Reasons given for occasional/non-use of the internet (Multiple response)
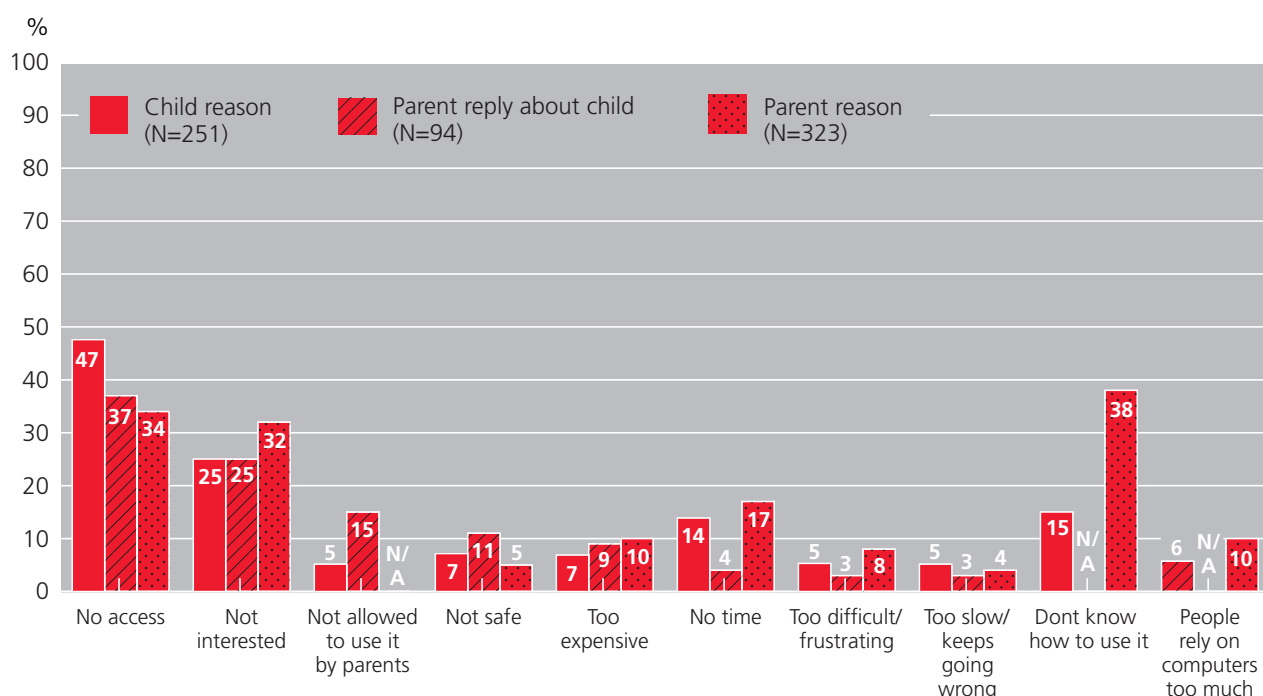
Base: 9-19 year old occasional and non-users (N=251); Parents of 9-17 year old occasional and non-users (N=94); Occasional and non user parents of 9-17 year olds (N=323)

Key findings on inequalities and the digital divide

In the European **SAFT** 2003 survey, 3% of 9-16 year olds said they never used the internet, a similar proportion to those identified in the UKCGO survey.

In the US similarly, 97% of 12-18 year olds were internet users in 2003 (compared with 76% for the whole US population) according to the **Digital Future** survey. Main reasons for non-use (among the young and adult population) included lack of access (40% of non-users and 43% of drop-outs say this), followed by a lack of interest (24% of non-users, 7% of drop-outs) and not knowing how to use it (18% of non-users). The survey also found that the longer people had been online, the less television they watched. According to the **Pew** 2004 survey, of the 13% of 12-17 year old Americans not using the internet, about one in ten said that safety issues, bad experiences or parental restrictions keep them from going online.

According to **Ofcom**, over a third of the UK adult population did not use the internet in 2003. This was mainly due to lack of interest although some stated costs as a barrier: 37% of those without internet access at home saw no need for having the internet, 19% weren't interested in the content, 13% weren't interested in new technology, and 15% thought that PCs and another 15% that internet usage costs were too expensive.

(Full details of these surveys can be found in the Appendix.)

of interest, not having enough time and restrictions by parents. Daily and weekly internet users also spend more time on activities, such as doing homework, playing computer games, talking on the phone, going out and seeing friends, whereas occasional and non-users spend more time watching television.

- **Parents' experience of the internet matters:** Daily and weekly users have parents who also use the internet more often and are more expert. These parents consider their children more advanced in using the internet and trust them more to know what they are doing online. By comparison with the parents of low and non-users, they also consider the media generally – and the internet in particular – as more beneficial for their children.

- **Ethnic minorities not more excluded:** Children and young people from an Asian or mixed race background are more likely to be daily online users than other ethnic groups. Children and young people from the black community are more likely to use the internet only on a weekly basis. However, those from a white background are equally divided between daily and weekly users, and they also include the largest percentage of occasional and non-users. There are no significant differences between children and young people who speak English as a first or subsequent language.

Priorities for future research

Critically examine causes and consequences of exclusion: Although most children and young people are now internet users, a few are not, a few drop out, and a sizeable minority use the internet only occasionally. What are the causes and consequences, and how are the trends changing? What does their avowed 'lack of interest' mean? Will non or low access continue to be socio-economically stratified? Targeted research is needed to examine minority groups in more depth – by ethnicity, disability, and so forth.

Policy recommendation

Address the changing conditions of digital exclusion: Despite basic internet access becoming more widespread, a few children remain digitally excluded, and rather more use the internet only occasionally. Further, even among frequent users, many make narrow use of the internet, therefore not benefiting from the many online opportunities. While in part this is a matter of choice, for the internet is not an 'unqualified good', the clear association between socio-economic status and indicators of access and use suggests that the social and economic sources of exclusion require concerted attention if the benefits of the internet are to be fairly spread.

More on this issue can be found in Report 5 – Inequalities and the Digital Divide in Children and Young People's Internet Use: Findings from the UK Children Go Online project, April 2005, and Report 2 – UK Children Go Online: Surveying the experiences of young people and their parents, July 2004.

Key findings on education, learning and literacy

'My dad hasn't even got a clue. Can't even work the mouse… So I have to go on the internet for him.'
(Nina, 17, from Manchester)

'I'm probably the expert in my house, but not that big because my dad's… starting to catch up with me.'
(Steve, 17, from Manchester)

'I don't find it hard to use a computer because I got into it quickly. You learn quick because it's a very fun thing to do.' **(Amir, 15, from London)**

'Doing research, it's easier with books than on the internet… There's so much on the internet – what you want to find is really hard to find.'
(Abdul, 17, from Essex)

'It's like you don't know who's doing what, whose website it is, who wants what, who wants you to learn what. So you don't know who's put what information there.' **(Faruq, 15, from London)**

The research asked whether children are as expert online as they seem and in what ways. Also, how is children's online learning being supported and by whom? What kinds of new internet or media literacy (eg skills, trust, breadth of use) is being developed?

There are clear signs that the internet is becoming central to the learning experience, with 90% of 9-19 year old weekly users going online for school work and with 60% of pupils regarding the internet as the most useful tool for getting information for homework. Children and young people are also gaining in internet literacy, but such gains are both uneven and unequal.[13]

- **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'.

- **Skills gap between parents and children:** Children usually consider themselves more expert than their parents, gaining in social status within the family as a result. Among daily or weekly internet users, 19% of parents describe themselves as beginners compared with only 7% of children, and only 16% of parents consider themselves advanced compared with 32% of children. While most parents and children are confident in their searching skills, among parents only one in three (35%) know how to set up an email account, and only a fifth or fewer are able to set up a filter (15%), remove a virus (19%), download music (12%) or fix a problem (21%) (see Figure 4).

- **Children lack key skills in evaluating online content:** Four in ten (38%) pupils aged 9-19 trust most of the information on the internet, half (49%) trust some of it, and only one in ten (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.

- **Beginners are more distrustful of the internet:** Young people who rate themselves as beginners in using the internet lack critical skills and are more distrustful towards internet content than those who call themselves experts. It seems that expert users are more skilled in finding their way to material they feel they can trust, for example by checking information across several sites.

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

Figure 4: Which of the following are you good at? (Multiple response)
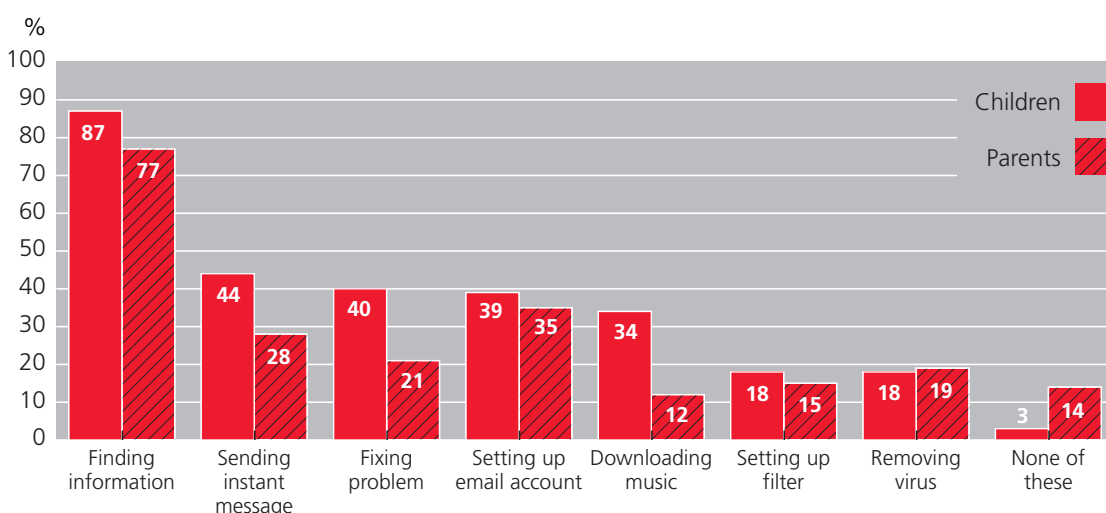
Base: 9-19 year olds who use the internet at least once a week (N=1,257); Parents who have ever used the internet (N=629)

Key findings on education, learning and literacy

According to **Becta** in 2002, among 5-18 year olds boys were more likely than girls to say they have advanced skills (11% of boys in Key Stage 1, 31% in Key Stage 2 vs 9% of girls in Key Stage 1, 24% in Key Stage 2).[14] Girls were more likely to think of themselves as intermediate. Similar to UKCGO findings, 76% of those who were aware of safety issues had received some form of guidance.

However, primary school children are unlikely to have received lessons on online safety. The **Cyberspace Research Unit** found that only 2% of 8-11 year olds had such training in 2003.

In the US, the 2002 **Pew** survey shows that 11-19 year olds had fewer years of online experience than their parents: 21% of children had used the internet for three or more years compared with 28% of parents. However, similar to UKCGO findings, children claim to know more about the internet than parents: 64% said they knew more, 32% said parents knew more. According to the 2003 **Digital Future** survey, 40% of 12-19 year olds thought that the information on the internet is somewhat reliable.

As in the UKCGO survey, the **Oxford Internet Survey** also found that users are more trusting of online content than non-users. Among UK adults in 2003, 7% of broadband users and 7% of narrowband users thought that the information on the internet was unreliable, compared with 13% of past users and 16% of non-users.

(Full details of these surveys can be found in the Appendix.)

evaluation, and many parents lack the skills to guide and support their children's internet use.

Priorities for future research

Examine (and explore measurement of) future developments of online literacy: It is important to examine how children and young people's critical literacy skills develop as they become experienced in a greater range of types of online content. How do they make decisions of trust and reliability, which are the greater challenges (poor quality content, race hate material, politically biased content, commercially-motivated content), and what are the costs and consequences of lack of literacy? Do distinctions learned in relation to broadcast or print media serve them here? How is trust more generally (eg of institutions, other media) related to online trust? None of these questions are easy to address empirically, necessitating attention also to methodology and measurement issues.

Policy recommendations

Improve levels of internet literacy: Some pupils are missing out on internet training, or missing out on some safety messages, and many lack key online skills, notably searching skills. A continuing programme of internet literacy initiatives, covering use in school, home and elsewhere, is vital. Moreover, although adults tend to rely on self-teaching, local 'experts' and work place experience, for children and young people it is teachers and parents who are the primary supports for learning. Given the skills gap between children and parents, schools represent, potentially, the fairest and most appropriate location for such literacy training. This raises key issues of teacher training and curriculum content.

Develop critical evaluation skills: Although it is important to value children and young people's expertise, their internet literacy requires further support and development. This must include and go beyond technical and searching skills to encompass a critical awareness of the quality, purpose and reliability of websites. This is partly a matter of educational curricula and partly a question of legibility and transparency in website design. The youngest and oldest pupils especially lack guidance on online safety, searching and reliability of websites. And, since internet-literate parents have internet-literate children, literacy initiatives should be targeted also at parents.

More on this issue can be found in Report 4 – Internet Literacy among Children and Young People: Findings from the UK Children Go Online project, February 2005, and Report 2 – UK Children Go Online: Surveying the experiences of young people and their parents, July 2004.

Key findings on communication

'Even if you've just seen them at school like, it'll be like you're texting them or talking to them on the phone or on MSN.' **(Kim, 15, from Essex)**

'I once dumped my old girlfriend by email... Well, it was cowardly really. I couldn't say it face-to-face.' **(Cameron, 13, from Derbyshire)**

'I have friends in other countries who use MSN. I can send them an email every day rather than phoning them up and running up a huge phone bill.' **(Lorie, 17, from Essex)**

'If you're talking to someone on the internet who's a friend, you actually talk to them saying stuff, but feelings and everything are real... but if you're talking to someone you haven't met, how do you know if what they're telling you is the truth?' **(Mark, 17, from Essex)**

'I have had a very close relationship with a young lady over the internet for about a year.' **(Oliver, 17, from Kent)**

Key questions concern how far online opportunities for communication are being taken up and by which young people. Does this open up new possibilities for advice-seeking or privacy? The research showed that enthusiasm for online communication and, especially, mobile communication, is considerable. Significantly, rather than seeing face to face communication as automatically superior, as do many adults, young people instead evaluate the different forms of communication available to them according to distinct communicative needs.

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), and email or instant messaging are now much preferred to chat rooms (see Figure 5).[15]

- **Most online communication is with local friends:** While the conversational content is often mundane, being in constant contact with friends is highly valued, thus fostering offline relationships and broadening social circles by permitting cost-free contact with friends and relatives living further away and through the construction of extensive buddy lists of 'friends of friends'.

- **Little interest in contacting strangers:** While online communication is little used as an escape from real life, and many are wary about talking to strangers online, some do contact people that they have not met face to face, this being mainly among the 21% who visit chat rooms. Generally, however, chatting to unknown others around the world has little appeal.

- **Talking online is less satisfying but has its advantages:** Half (53%) of email, IM and chat users think that talking to people on the internet is less satisfying as talking to them in real life. A quarter of children and young people identify significant advantages to online communication in terms of privacy (25%), confidence (25%) and intimacy (22%).

- **Teens seeking advice online:** A quarter (25%) of 12-19 year olds who use the internet at least weekly say they go online to get advice, this being more common among older teens and, interestingly, boys. However, some worry about the reliability and privacy of online advice-seeking.

Figure 5: 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?
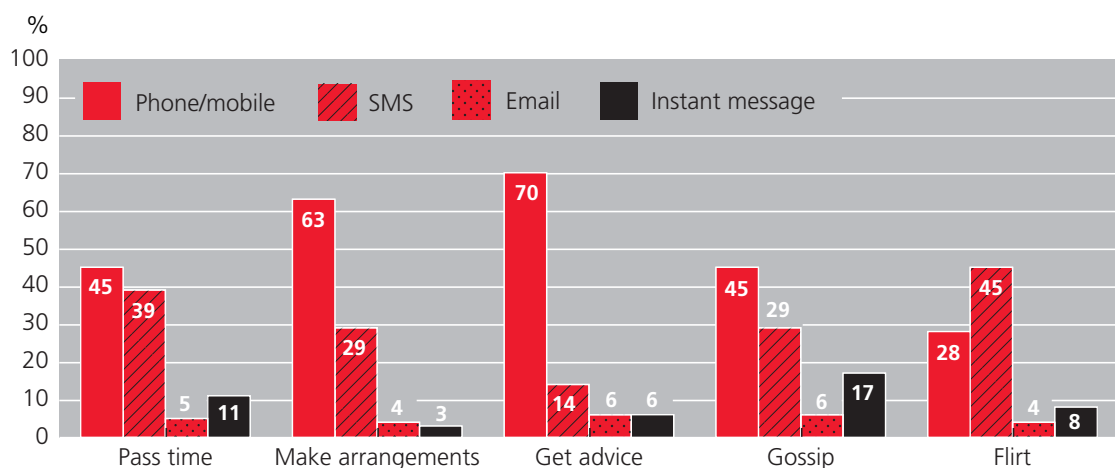
Base: All 12-19 year olds (N=975)

Key findings on communication

In the US, 45% of 12-19 year olds said their online use had increased communication with their family (40% said it did not) according to the **Digital Future** survey in 2003. 54% thought it had increased the number of people they stay in touch with. However, the majority agreed that time spent with family (84%) and friends (80%) had remained the same.

According to **Pew** in 2000, 64% of 12-17 US teens thought that the internet keeps them from spending time with their family, 48% said they use it to improve relationships with friends, and 32% thought it helps make new friends. Further, 37% had used instant messaging to say something they wouldn't have said in person, and 18% had looked for sensitive information and advice online.

(Full details of these surveys can be found in the Appendix.)

Priorities for future research

Examine the nature and quality of new social networks in online communication: There is a growing body of research examining the implications of diverse forms of communication for children and young people's social networks and social identity. As technologies develop (eg the shift from chatrooms to instant messaging, the growth of mobile communications), and as social practices evolve (peer norms, parenting rules etc), research must continue to examine these implications. Key issues concern changes in the composition of peer networks as 'friends of friends' and 'buddy lists' act to expand these networks in new ways.

Policy recommendations

Develop online advice resources with the help of young people: The intimacy and privacy afforded by mobile and online communication, much valued by young people, justifies efforts to provide personal advice online. Since at present, one quarter of teens – especially boys – go online for advice, it is likely that there are as yet untapped needs here, and provision should be expanded. Our qualitative research suggests this could valuably be developed in cooperation with young people themselves.

More on this can be found in Report 2 – UK Children Go Online: Surveying the experiences of young people and their parents, July 2004.

Key findings on participation

'I'm not in the least bit interested in politics and think it extremely boring.' **(Oliver, 17, from Kent)**

'At the end of the day, you're going to look at what you're interested in. And if you haven't got an interest in politics, you're not going to get one from having the internet.' **(Lorie, 17, from Essex)**

'Young people's opinions are not at all valued, especially not by politicians.' **(Anne, 15, from Essex)**

'You can email your MP, but is he going to listen?' **(Hazel, 17, from Essex)**

'I get personal mails from celebrities. My favourite celebrities. That's ok! … I'm not really interested in [politics] exactly. They all chat crap, so…' **(Padma, 15, from London)**

'I really don't understand how people could have said that they aren't interested in politics! What about the 'Don't attack Iraq' rallies and marches? There was a massive under-18 turn out!' **(Milly, 15, from Essex)**

'There's a Greenpeace website which had a petition about like global warming and stuff and we should do something about it. And I signed that just because it's easy, and you might as well put your name down.' **(Poppy, 16, from London)**

Key questions addressed here are: how far are online opportunities for self-expression, creativity and participation being taken up and by which young people? Further, does interacting with websites or creating content and contributing to online communities encourage young people to become more engaged specifically in civic and political issues online?[16]

The research identified only modest ways in which the internet encourages creativity, interactivity and civic participation. More evident were the ways in which traditional factors – age, gender and social background – play a part in how much children are (or more significantly are not) using the internet to interact with online content, voice their opinions on the internet or take part in civic and political activities.

- **Producing as well as receiving content:** 44% of 9-19 year old weekly users 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, though not all have managed to maintain this online.[17] Further, 9% have offered advice to others while 8% have signed a petition.

- **Some are interested in civic issues:** 54% 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 (42%) are not interested (see Figure 6). However, only one in three (35%) of those who have visited such sites responded or contributed to them in any way.[18]

- **Age, gender and social grade make a difference:** Girls, older and middle class teens visit a broader range of civic and political sites. For example, 31% of girls have visited a charity site compared with 22% of boys, 35% of 16-19 year olds compared with 20% of 12-15 year olds and twice as many middle class (34%) as working class teens (17%).

- **Participation is short-lived:** These levels of participation suggest that young people are enthusiastic about interacting with the internet but that they do not follow through. For example, they take up only a few opportunities to interact, produce content or visit civic sites. Particularly striking is the finding that there is only a weak relation between responding to interactive opportunities (eg on entertainment sites) and participating in civic activities online. Further, the survey

Figure 6: Have you ever visited websites about…? By demographics (Multiple response)
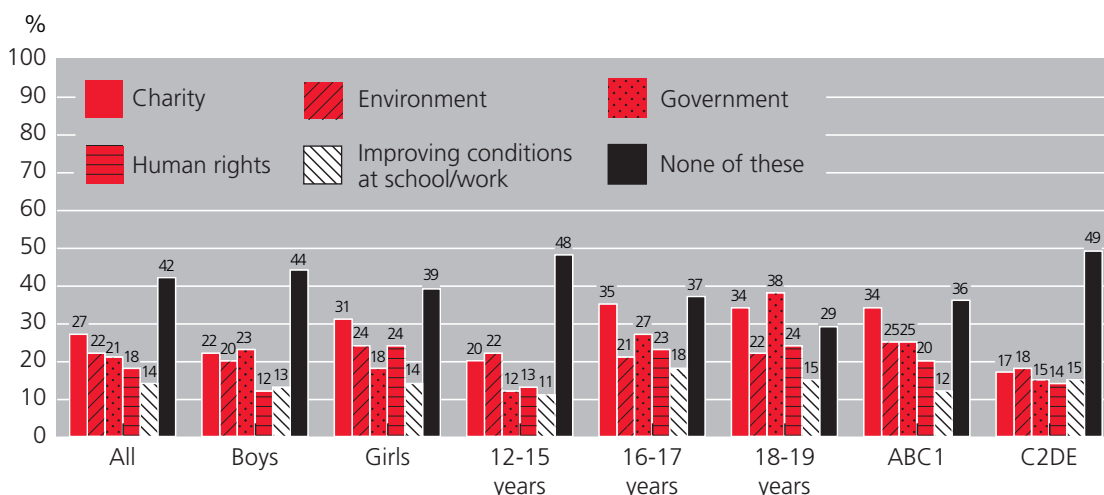
Base: 12-19 year olds who use the internet at least once a week (N=975)

Key findings on participation

According to a 2002 survey by the **University of Salford**, young people are far more likely to participate online than take part in more traditional forms of politics. While only 10% of 15-24 year olds in the UK took part in any form of political activity offline, three times as many did something political on the internet.

In the US, 40% of 12-17 year olds visited websites of clubs, and 38% said they go online to express their opinion according to **Pew** in 2000. In 2003, the **Digital Future** survey found that 12% of 12-19 year olds used message boards.

(Full details of these surveys can be found in the Appendix.)

results suggest that increased expertise online leads to more interaction but not more civic interests.

- **Disengaged youth 'on the wrong side' of the digital divide:** Looking closely at the different ways young people participate, we found a group of young online users who are most disengaged and neither interact with websites nor visit civic and political sites. These young people find themselves 'on the wrong side' of the digital divide – less likely to have home access and made up of lower, less experienced and less expert internet users.

Priorities for future research

Investigate best practice for participatory websites for children and young people: Here, questions include – what are the best practice lessons of participatory websites for children, and how are the most activist or political young people using the internet? What lies behind many children's lack of apparent interest in politics, and how can the internet stimulate this? Is the internet important here, or are other media or non-media means of communication still paramount?

Explore how to facilitate online creativity: Possibly by learning from initiatives in relation to other media, research should examine in what ways children are being creative online and, especially, how this can be further facilitated. What kinds of texts do they produce or co-produce, what kinds of communities are they creating, what are the emerging aesthetic, design and social features of these creations, and in what ways, if at all, do they challenge adult expectations or values? Does creativity facilitate other dimensions of internet literacy?

Policy recommendations

Facilitate the shift from just receiving to creating content: Since few children and young people seem as yet to be sufficiently inspired or informed to create and, crucially, maintain their own internet content, the challenge remains to provide them with accessible and stimulating opportunities for content creation. This might be targeted at the younger children, for the 9-11 year olds greatly enjoy creative activities and are keen to make online content but feel they lack the skills. The challenge to educators remains to present online content creation in an interesting and meaningful way since the danger exists that it will be perceived as just 'another boring school project' by students. Some of the schools we visited for this project have successfully put this into practice in the form of after-school 'web clubs', giving the students a further incentive to gain and develop such skills by entering web design competitions for schools and young people.

Rethink online participation from 'having your say' to 'being listened to': Children and young people's cynicism or lack of interest in civic or political participation online poses a challenge to policy makers especially. Many young people are cynical towards the offer to have their say as they feel their contributions are not taken seriously and they are not listened to. Since many have 'tested the water' but taken few steps beyond this, the task is to encourage more exploration and contribution from them. Possible strategies include designing links from popular to civic sites (especially since the former are often designed to be 'sticky'), improving the 'dull' appearance of civic and political sites especially behind the home page and, most important, developing a more genuinely interactive environment in which young people's contributions are directly responded to in such a way that their efforts at participation can be sustained and experienced as rewarding.

More on this issue can be found in Report 3 – Active Participation or Just More Information? Young people's take up of opportunities to act and interact on the internet, October 2004, and Report 2 – UK Children Go Online: Surveying the experiences of young people and their parents, July 2004.

Key findings on the risks of undesirable content

'Yeah, these boys, they just go onto the internet, they download it [porn], they put it on as screensaver… It's just disgusting.' **(Tanya, 15, from London)**

'The internet is just like life as I see it, but just easier. So if these 13 or 14 year olds want to find stuff, they're going to find it in real life or on the internet.' **(Lorie, 17, from Essex)**

'Once you're into your teenage years, you've got used to the idea that people have sex. It's not really that scary any more.' **(Milly, 15, from Essex)**

'I don't think there is realistically any way it [porn] can be censored completely. So I think, yeah, you just have to try and avoid it as best as possible.' **(Scott, 17, from Essex)**

'It's just what teenagers do, I mean, it's only hormones. Some people deal with it, some people don't. Some people I know, they go on it because – some people just have fun… I just find it's a good experience!' **(Amir, 15, from London)**

'I think [spam] is evil. I don't know where they find my email from, but every day I'll get all this stuff about starting your own business, getting a degree.' **(Amir, 15, from London)**

'My mum kept getting sent viruses, you know, where it says like they're pretending to know you, so you open it, and it gives your computer a virus.' **(Nina, 17, from Manchester)**

'What annoys me is when you get into something like 'Open this website, it's a good website'… You open it, it's something highly illegal.' **(Stuart, 17, from Manchester)**

Recognising public concern over the inappropriateness of some internet contents for children and young people, the research sought to examine exposure to several kinds of unwanted or inappropriate content (pornography, spam, advertising and violent/racist content). These questions, as for those concerning online contacts, were asked in the private, self-completion section of the survey.

Taking a lead from discussions with children and parents, the research focused mainly on online pornography.[19] Recognising that exposure to porn could be deliberate or accidental, the research pursued the incidence, responses to and consequences of such exposure. Coming into contact with pornography is, the UKCGO survey shows, a commonplace but often unwelcome experience for children and young people.[20]

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.

- **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

Figure 7: Have seen pornography on the internet by age (Multiple response)
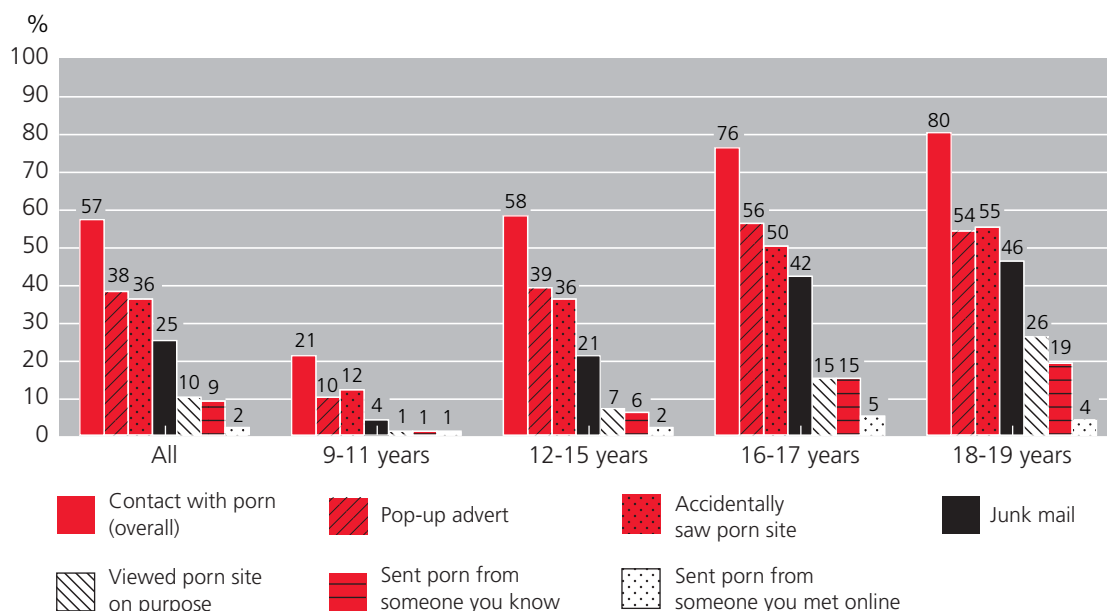
Base: 9-19 year olds who use the internet at least once a week (N=1,257)

Key findings on the risks of undesirable content

Previous surveys have suggested cause for concern. A Canadian survey of parents by the **Media Awareness Network** suggested in 2000 that one in five children had found undesirable sexual material online. The American **Kaiser Family Foundation** 2000 survey found that one in three 10-17 year olds had seen pornography online, and 12% of 12-19 year olds admitted to looking at sexual content in the US 2003 **Digital Future** survey.

In the UK, the **Kids.net** survey found that in 2000, up to a quarter of children aged 7-16 may had been upset by online content and that few reported this to an adult.

According the **Cyberspace Research Unit** in 2003, 5% of 8-11 year olds in the UK admitted to accessing porn sites often, 22% sometimes, and 73% said they never did this.

In 2003, the European **SAFT** survey found that between a quarter and a third of 9-16 year olds had accidentally seen violent, offensive, sexual or pornographic content in the previous year: 12% had accidentally ended up on a pornographic website (20% of 13-16 year olds, 19% of boys), though 9% had visited such sites 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.

(Full details of these surveys can be found in the Appendix.)

purpose, 9% have been sent pornography from someone they know, and 2% have been sent pornography from someone they met online (see Figure 7).

- **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.

- **Mixed responses to online porn:** When young people encounter pornography on the internet, half (54%) claim not to be bothered by it, but a significant minority (14%) do not like it, and one quarter (28%) of 9-15 year olds who have seen porn say they were disgusted. Half (56%) of those who encounter online pornography leave the site as quickly as they can while the others say they look at it (31%), tell a friend (7%), parent or teacher (6%), click on the links (7%) or return to it later (5%).

- **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 have seen it when they first did.

- **Other unwanted content:** 44% worry about 'getting a virus', though only one in five of children and parents say they know how to remove it from their computer. Further, 22% have accidentally ended up on a site with violent or gruesome pictures (12% on purpose) and 9% on a site that is hostile or hateful to a group of people (2% on purpose). This is more common among frequent internet users.

- **Some are not bothered, some are disgusted:** As with online porn, most of those who have seen violent or hateful content claim not to think about it too much (48%), but a significant minority is disgusted (27%) or didn't like it (16%). When encountering such material

almost half look the site and then leave (46%) while others leave immediately (37%), tell a friend (13%), click on some of the links (9%) or return to the site later (9%).

- **Age matters:** In general, younger children (9-11 years) are less likely to have encountered undesirable content (as in Figure 7), but they tend to be more upset by it when they do see it.

Priorities for future research

Carefully examine the extent and nature of actual harms associated with online risks: Unwanted or undesirable content varies considerably, from the mildly distasteful to hard core or illegal material. Acknowledging the ethical issues involved in researching this with children, the consequences of exposure to unwanted or inappropriate content remain a key research gap. Little is known of how children and young people respond to exposure to different kinds or levels of content or, especially, whether or when this has adverse consequences for their sexual or personal development.

Policy recommendations

Continue efforts to prevent exposure to undesirable content: Parents and children are clear that pornography and other forms of undesirable content are more available online than via other media. Most exposure is accidental and much is unwelcome, with some being disturbing or upsetting, particularly when encountered in unexpected circumstances (eg when doing homework, when in school or with younger siblings). Continued efforts are required to seek to prevent accidental and unwanted exposure. Efforts are also required to increase the likelihood that children will tell an adult if something has upset them.

More on this issue can be found in Report 2 – UK Children Go Online: Surveying the experiences of young people and their parents, July 2004.

Key findings on the risks of online communication

'My friend's family kind of used to send me horrible messages. I gave my email address to my friend, and then she used it, and somehow her friend got it, and half of her mates did…' **(Laura, 13, from Essex)**

Interviewer: 'Do you sometimes sign up to sites to get more info, win competitions?'
Rosie: 'No, 'cause I don't trust it.'
Bethany: 'Yeah, and also 'cause I don't want to get spam or them to give my details to some other place, which is what they usually do.'
(13 year old girls from Derbyshire and London)

'I've got about five buddies on my thing [IM], but you can't really say, oh, this is a young girl, she's got brown hair, blue eyes, 'cause she could be an old – she could be a he and it's an old man, but I suppose it's quite nice to just say, oh, I've met someone on the internet.' **(Rosie, 13, from Derbyshire)**

'I would say that chat rooms would be dangerous because… you don't know who you're talking to. And then if you give your address, then they can come and kidnap you or something. And take you away. It's just, I think it's on the news. I remember someone's got into a chat room and gone off to Paris'
**(Joe, 13, from Derbyshire)**

Online communication is not always a positive experience for children and young people, and the benefits must be balanced against the problems. The research asked about a range of potentially negative or risky consequences of online communication in order to establish the incidence of upsetting, worrying or intrusive experiences online.[21]

Among 9-19 year olds who go online at least weekly:

- **Parents underestimate children's negative experiences:** One third of children and young people report having received unwanted sexual (31%) or nasty comments (33%) via email, chat, instant messaging or text messaging. 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 Figure 8).

- **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 existence of this rule. Moreover, nearly half (46%) of children and young people say that they have given out personal information, such as their hobbies (27%), email address (24%), full name (17%), age (17%), name of their school (9%) phone number (7%) or sent a photograph (7%), to

Figure 8: Have you/has your child done these things on the internet? (Multiple response)
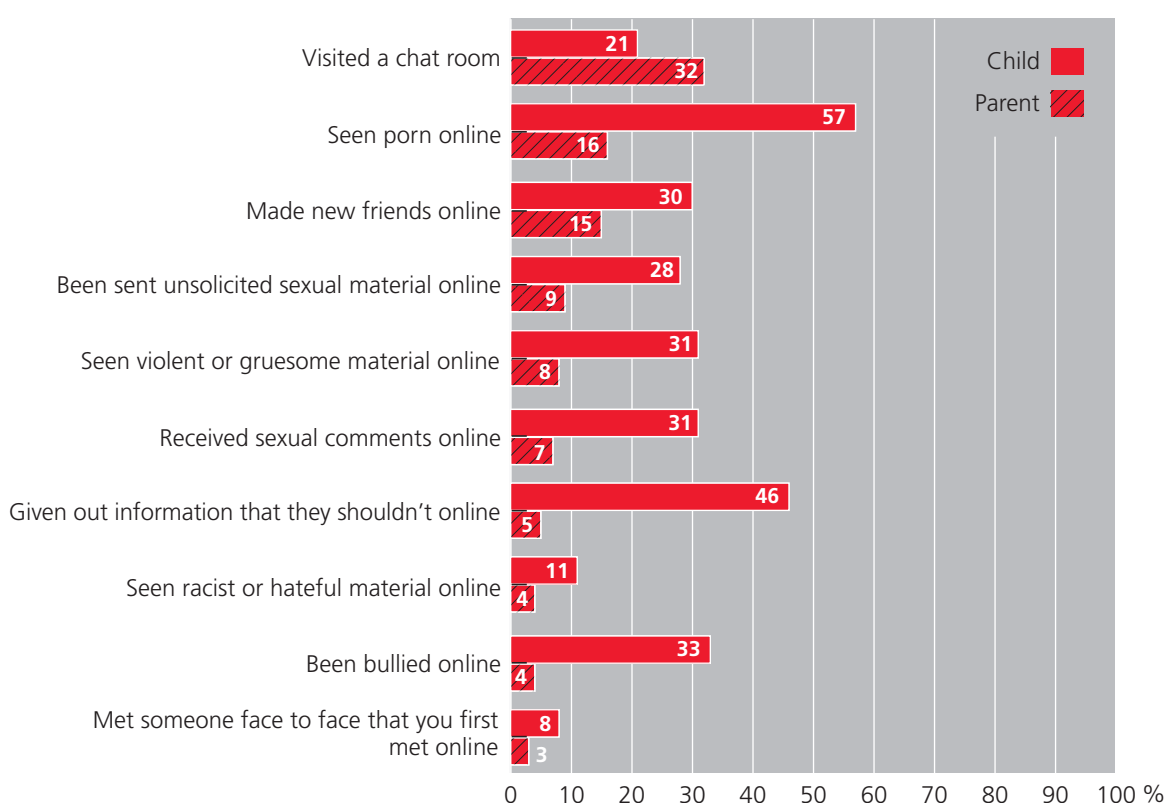
Base: All 9-19 year olds who use the internet at least once a week (N=1,257); Parents of 9-17 year olds (N=906)

Key findings on the risks of online communication

Such meetings occur more among older than younger children, and they may be less common in the UK than in some other European countries.

A survey among primary school children in England by the **Cyberspace Research Unit** in 2003 found that 54% have never been asked to meet someone they first met in a chat room (12% sometimes, 34% often), and only 3% actually met the person afterwards.

The European **SAFT** survey of older children (9-16 year olds) in 2003 reported that 14% had attended a meeting (8% of 9-12 year olds, 18% of 13-16 year olds). Only 4% of parents were aware of this. Furthermore, 13-16 year olds pretended more about themselves online than other age groups.

In the US, 24% of 12-17 year old teens pretended to be someone else in a chat room according to **Pew** in 2000, and 60% received and 50% exchanged messages with a stranger. More than half (53%) were not worried about this though.

(Full details of these surveys can be found in the Appendix.)

someone that they met on the internet. By contrast, only 5% of parents think their child has given out such information.

- **Children engage in identity play:** Two fifths (40%) say that they have pretended about themselves online – using, for example, a different name (27%), changing their age (22%), appearance (10%) or gender (5%). And though they often know the rules, a minority (7%) admits to forgetting about safety guidelines online while 17% enjoy being rude or silly on the internet.

- **Some have attended face to face meetings:** One third (30%) 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. Although 6% said the person they met turned out to be different from what they had expected, the majority of these young people tell someone they are going to the meeting (89%), take a friend with them (67%), meet someone of their own age (65%) and, they say, have a good time (91% said the meeting was 'good' or 'okay').

- **Children have concerns about the internet:** Despite their considerable enthusiasm for the internet, children, like their parents, are aware of media anxieties. 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', and 38% worry about 'others finding out things about you'.

- **Age matters:** Older children are more likely to encounter or engage in the risks of online communication, for example giving out personal details to someone they haven't met (9-11 years: 25%, 12-15: 45%, 16-17: 61%, 18-19: 64%), meeting up with people from the internet (9-11 years: 2%, 12-15: 7%, 16-17: 14%, 18-19: 16%) or being the victim of bullying (9-11 years: 11%, 12-15: 35%, 16-19: 44%).

Priorities for future research

Investigate how to best target safety messages at different audiences: As in other areas of safety campaigns (eg health), research attention is needed to determine how to tailor safety messages for different target groups or to be applicable in different circumstances. Further, too little is yet known on the relation between risky practices and the incidence of actual harm, necessitating research that integrates the analysis of patterns of internet use with specific clinical cases and/or criminal investigations.

Assess the external threats to children's online privacy: What kinds of personal information are children giving out and under what circumstances? How can websites be designed differently to make their approach to privacy, tracking, cookies etc transparent to children? In terms of children's (and parents') advertising literacy, what are the parallels or differences between the now-familiar commercial environment of broadcast and print media and new forms of promotion, sponsorship and advertising developing on the internet?

Policy recommendations

Maintain internet safety awareness: As internet use grows, more children are encountering risky or unwelcome experiences online. There are encouraging signs that the safety messages are getting through, though these must be maintained to track the changing nature of online risks. However, general safety knowledge does not always translate into safe practices, necessitating more carefully targeted strategies in the form of campaigns across media platforms, continually updated to reflect new sources of risk. Risky or upsetting forms of communication occur off as well as online. Issues such as bullying, harassment etc can, therefore, be discussed with teens in relation to face to face, mobile and online environments simultaneously.

More on this issue can be found in Report 2 – UK Children Go Online: Surveying the experiences of young people and their parents, July 2004.

Key findings on regulating the internet at home

'I think parents should also try and educate themselves. You can say, 'my children know', and leave them… [but those] parents are going wrong. So you leave the child alone to sit down on the net for two, three hours? No! Sit in with the child… It's not wrong to learn from your children… You have to be interested in what your child is doing.'
(Mother of Anisah, 15, from London)

'Well, we've had long talks with them and they are fully aware of the dangers of chat rooms and things. And I do trust them to a certain extent. I do sort of, if they are on there, I just sort of look over their shoulder or something, but I do trust them not to. I think they're quite aware of the dangers that are lurking there.'
(Mother of Eve, 13, and Clarissa, 12, from Surrey)

It is widely hoped that parents are able to manage their children's internet use, and few parents would deny such a responsibility. However, a key question is how exactly parents seek to achieve this, and how successful they are at ensuring their children's online safety. Parents have a key role to play – shared with schools and others – in guiding their children towards the positive uses of the internet. Again, how are they attempting this and with what success?

The UKCGO survey finds that children claim a higher incidence of risky experiences online than their parents recognise (see Figure 8, page 22), suggesting that parents may assume rules are not needed when they are. Conversely, it also finds that parents claim a higher degree of domestic rules and regulations than their children recognise, suggesting that parents tend to assume rules are being followed when they are not.

Rather than criticising parents for this apparent ignorance and complacency, we recognise first that parents are making a considerable effort to regulate their children's internet use

and, second, that they face a series of challenges that threaten to undermine their efforts.

- **Parents seek to manage their children's internet use:** 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 (see Figure 9).

- **Parents face some difficult challenges:** One in ten (10%) parents say they don't know what their child does on the internet, and a fifth (18%) say they don't 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.

- **Parents' view of the internet is ambivalent:** This is much more the case than for other media in the home. They are concerned that it may lead children to risk their privacy (90%), expose them to sexual (89%) and/or violent images (77%), displace more worthwhile activities (70%) or lead them to become isolated from others (59%). On the other hand, 73% believe that the internet can help their child do better at school and help them learn worthwhile things.

- **Confusion about filtering:** In homes with internet access, 35% of children say that filtering software has been installed on their computer while 46% of parents claim this. However, 23% of parents say they don't know if a filter is installed. Even among parents who have used the internet, only 15% say they know how to install a filter.

- **Parents lack expertise:** Children appear more confident and skilled in using the internet than many of their parents. Since computers are often located in private rather than public rooms, and since children may seek privacy online,

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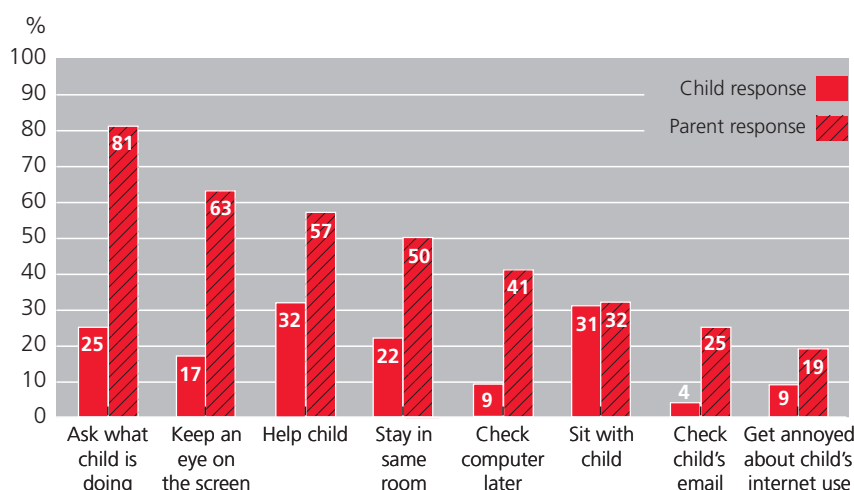
Base: 9-17 year who live with parent(s) and use the internet at least once a week (N=1,060); Parents of 9-17 year olds whose child has home internet access (N=677)

Key findings on regulating the internet at home

According to the **Eurobarometer** 2003 survey, UK parents seem more restrictive than the European average of 49% not allowing their children to give out personal information and only 32% of parents banning chat rooms (for 0-17 year olds). Overall, 24% set rules for the internet, compared with 42% setting rules for television.

Similar to the UKCGO findings, the 2003 **SAFT** survey found that parents across Europe claim to monitor their children's internet use more than children acknowledge: 20% of parents said they talk with their child about what he/she does online a great deal, but only 12% of 9-16 year olds agree; 20% of parents said they often sit with their child at the computer while only 3% of 9-16 year olds confirm this.

In the US, 61% of parents said they had set rules about using the internet according to **Pew** in 2004, and 62% said they check up on their children's internet use afterwards although only 3% of 12-17 year olds believed this – a gap in perception also present in the UKCGO findings. Further, 54% of households had filters installed on their home computers, up from 41% in 2000, and 73% of teens said the computer was located in a public area in the home. Even though their parents check up on them, 64% of teens said they do things online that they wouldn't want their parents to know about.

(Full details of these surveys can be found in the Appendix.)

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. Unwelcome restrictions may lead children to evade parental regulation.

- **Children protect their privacy from parents:** Two thirds (63%) of 12-19 year old home internet users have hidden their online activities from their parents – 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.

- **Simple restrictions don't work well:** The survey finds no direct relationship between parental rules and regulations and the range of risks that their children encounter on the internet. Hence, simply banning certain activities seems ineffective. For example, children who have been told not to give out personal information still do provide this online.

- **Going online with children may help:** The findings suggest that a range of factors seems to help, including the level of parental social support when children go online, increasing children's online skills and ensuring that children understand how to apply safety rules in everyday contexts.

Priorities for future research

Explore strategies and effectiveness of parental regulation: Research is needed to track how parental regulatory strategies evolve as parents gain internet experience, as the regulatory context changes and as different media and information technologies converge. Evaluation research should examine how effective these strategies are in guiding, directing and protecting children.

For example, where are the gaps in parental strategies, which children are falling through the protective net, and how can these gaps be addressed? And are the moral panics in the media misleading parents as to the key risks?

Policy recommendations

Encourage parental sharing in children's internet use: The recommendation to parents is to increase supportive activities (asking the child what they are doing online, keeping an eye on the screen, helping them online, staying in the same room and going online together) as this seems to increase children and young people's online skills and opportunities. While the findings suggest this may not reduce online risks, it could improve parental awareness of the risks their children encounter. There are limits, however, to relying on parents to manage children's internet use because the internet poses some new and difficult challenges that fall outside many parents' experience and expertise. As a result, parents undertake this task in varying ways and they succeed in varying degrees.

Respect children's online privacy in the home: Simply pressing for more parental monitoring, restriction and control could encourage children's evasion rather than their cooperation with attempts at internet regulation in the home. While often naïve about threats to their privacy from external sources, teenagers especially are fiercely protective of their privacy in relation to their parents. However, parents need more information, confidence and guidance so that they feel enabled to discuss the risks with their children, especially as they grow older. An explicit negotiation of the balance between children's safety and children's privacy is important to the trust relationship between parents and children.

More on this issue can be found in Report 2 – UK Children Go Online: Surveying the experiences of young people and their parents, July 2004.

Balancing opportunities and risks

'Talking to them [parents] about the internet is bad for you and stuff. They might try and think about taking the internet off your computer, which isn't good for us.'
(Amir, 15, from London)

'My dad… doesn't let me go on the internet very often because we had an incident one day where my sister… she was on MSN, and someone sent her something through. And it was actually like – it was like porn. So my dad saw it, and he was like very angry, so he doesn't let us use MSN now.'   *(Hazel, 17, from Essex)*

'We have different names to log on to the computer, it's not just one. You can set up your own thing. So my dad's got hardly any [restrictions] on it. I've got, you know, quite a bit. But my brothers, they've blocked out most of the stuff, so they can only go on very limited sites.'   *(Toby, 13, from Derbyshire)*

'I think parents are more inclined to shout at the children and say, 'get off the internet, go to bed', rather than spending the money on filtering.'
(Lorie, 17, from Essex)

As these quotes suggest, if things go wrong, young people's freedoms – understandably – tend to be restricted in response. Drawing the line, therefore, is a tough task for parents and regulators. A guiding principle of this research has been that online opportunities and risks for children must be considered together. Research and policy concerned with maximising opportunities must also take into account, as an unintended consequence, any increase in risk while that concerned with minimising risk must also take into account, again as an unintended consequence, any decrease in opportunities.

- **More skilled young people do not avoid the risks:** It was initially supposed that, as children become more skilled and experienced internet users, they would simultaneously embrace more opportunities and manage to avoid the risks. Indeed, expert children, it is often hoped, can be more-or-less left to their own devices while attention is devoted 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'. The UKCGO findings contradict this assumption. Not only do the most skilled young people fail to avoid online risks, but their risky encounters increase with increased use – thought these young people are more likely to be able to deal with the risks.

- **Opportunities and risks go hand in hand:** There is a strong, positive association between opportunities and risks – the more children and young people experience the one, the more they also experience the other, and vice versa. This points up the dilemma that parents and regulators face: increasing opportunities increases the risks – restricting children and young people's internet use reduces not only the risks but also their opportunities.

- **Online skills mediate online opportunities and risks:** Children and young people's level of online skills has a direct influence on the breadth of online opportunities and risks, over and above the effects of demographics, access and use. Notably, it seems that young people from a higher socio-economic background are more likely to have home access, that having home access leads to higher levels of online expertise and more internet use, and that this in turn leads these children and young people to experience both more opportunities and more risks online.

The UKCGO survey findings were further analysed to reveal four types of children and young people. Among 12-17 year olds, we identified two groups relatively low in online expertise ('low risk novices' and 'inexperienced risk takers') and two who are relatively skilled ('skilled risk takers' and 'all-round experts').

- The **'inexperienced risk takers'** merit concern. On the internet, they tend to seek problematic content on purpose and take few opportunities other than exchanging information with others. They seem little bothered by online violence and show an interest in online porn. Their low online expertise seems to put them at even greater risk than the 'all-round experts' (who, despite taking more risks, are more skilled, well-supported and benefit from a broader range of opportunities). Strikingly, they are the least regulated by their parents in their online use, and their parents also have the lowest level of online expertise.

- By contrast, the **'all-round experts'** are (older) teens with high online expertise, and they take the most advantage of the opportunities that the internet offers. They seem to have learned to avoid sites with problematic content, partly because they dislike it. Though, because they take up the most opportunities, they also most frequently come upon problematic content by accident. Their parents appear to rely more on trust as a style of regulation.

- The **'skilled risk takers'** – who are the biggest group – have a slightly different balance of opportunities and risks compared with the 'all-round experts', taking up fewer opportunities (though still more than the two low-skilled groups) and encountering more violent content by accident than the 'all-round experts'. Also unlike the 'all-round experts', whose parents are as highly skilled as they are, this group seems comparatively more skilled than their parents. However, despite being subject to a fair-to-high amount of parental regulation, they encounter a considerable number of risks. In addressing the risks here, the issue seems to be more the sensation-seeking of some young teenage boys rather than that of internet literacy per se.

- The **'low risk novices'** occasion concern for a different reason. Their risky encounters are few and far between, but so too are their online benefits. As part of the digital divide discussion, we would draw policy makers attention to this inexpert group of young people. Both their online expertise and that of their parents is low, and they are not yet benefiting from the new opportunities of the internet. In this context, the highly regulated domestic environment

Balancing opportunities and risks

that their parents are implementing is not as helpful as it might be, since it reduces both risks and opportunities and does not appear to result in increased online expertise.

Priorities for future research

Continue tracking balance of opportunities and risks: As the nature of online risks and opportunities changes over time, and as children and young people's skills develop, continued research should track the balance between risks and opportunities and the role of skills and expertise in mediating these. The present research has identified some ways in which parental regulation affects their children's use, but more work would be valuable in teasing out, and then testing, just which regulatory practices work best for which parents and which children in different circumstances.

Policy recommendations

Take care not to reduce young people's online opportunities: Since the UKCGO findings suggest that for some children and young people, anxieties about online risks, or restrictive parental (and school) practices, are acting to limit their take up of online opportunities, care is needed in designing literacy and safety initiatives. We note that at present, increasing online opportunities goes hand in hand with increasing the risks, but that our findings hint that carefully targeted parental regulation may protect children from risks precisely by increasing their online expertise.

Target guidance and regulation more carefully at different groups of children: Children and young people adopt different styles of engagement with the internet, depending not only on demographic factors but also on skills and interests, which leads them to balance opportunities and risks in different ways. This suggests that guidance and regulation should be more carefully targeted. For those who are risk averse (or whose parents are risk averse), more encouragement is needed; for children who take risks but have parents low in internet literacy, guidance should be targeted at parents as well as children; and the confident explorers would benefit from advanced critical and safety guidance.

Design websites which encourage internet literacy: Since children and young people's level of online skills has a direct influence on the breadth of online opportunities taken, multiple routes to improving internet literacy are recommended. Some website design facilitates literacy, some impedes it. For example, if websites ask for personal information without addressing the fact that many children are told not to give this out, or if sites are sticky, missing the opportunity to link to other good sites, or if they do not make clear their source and purpose, children will be confused about the application of safety advice, they will make narrow use of the web, and they will not develop critical skills.

Develop more and better child and youth portals: Since even the most skilled children and young people cannot avoid online risks, more attention is required to structuring the online environment itself so as to make it safer for them (and all users). Internet literacy results from the mix of individuals' skills and competencies, as well as the design and distribution features of online contents and services (see previous recommendation). Internet literacy initiatives, therefore, should pursue a two-pronged strategy, addressing both the skills and competences of children and young people and the nature and organisation of the online environment with which they are engaged.

More on this issue can be found in Report 2 – UK Children Go Online: Surveying the experiences of young people and their parents, July 2004.

The persistence of demographic influences on internet use

It will be evident from the many findings summarised in this report that age, socio-economic status and gender are important in understanding children and young people's internet use as elsewhere. Children are a far from homogenous group, and it can be unhelpful to treat them as a single category. Moreover, although they exhibit considerable diversity and creativity in their response to circumstances, demographic factors continue to matter, structuring young people's lives generally as well as the conditions under which they use the internet in particular.

Age

Age makes the biggest and most consistent difference. Having encompassed the range from 9 to 19 years, it is unsurprising that age differentiates internet use across most if not all of the dimensions examined here.

- **9-11 years:** Often not major media users, these young people are beginning to broaden the range of their internet uses. They are also a group whose internet skills are easily over-estimated and on whom many anxieties centre, yet their enthusiastic ambitions outstrip their abilities, and they would benefit from greater support and a wider diversity of age-specific online content.

- **12-14 years:** Relishing their new-found independence, these young teens are experimenting with and expanding their use of the internet to pursue their interest in games, fandom, music etc. Still the focus of parental anxieties but concerned to maintain their privacy, they are no longer easily subject to parental regulation.

- **15-17 years:** Older teens are absorbed by the culture of their peer group, yet also seeking to express their individuality through their interest in music, social networks, consumer goods and internet expertise. They are still at risk from inappropriate contact and other risks, yet facing high educational expectations and have a growing serious interest in civic/political and personal/health/careers information. Hence, they have much to gain from the internet.

- **18-19 years:** These young adults negotiate a range of information, communication and literacy demands as they manage the transition from school to further study and/or work. On average, they access and use the internet less and have lower levels of online skills. Being no longer 'minors' subject to parental regulation, they are beginning to reflect on the risks and opportunities facing children younger than themselves.

Socio-economic status

While acknowledging that socio-economic status encompasses a range of factors (household income, parental education, parental occupational status etc), the importance of socio-economic status varies across the dimensions of internet use examined.

- Socio-economic status makes a continuing and significant difference to the quality of access. However measured – access at home, broadband at home, number of access locations, personal access in their bedroom etc – middle class children are privileged over working class children.

- Socio-economic status also makes a difference to the indicators of internet use. For example, young people from the lowest socio-economic background have the lowest rating of self-efficacy, average time online per day and years of internet use. Further, on a range of measures (such as civic participation, interactivity and content creation, levels of parental expertise and social support, range of overall opportunities taken up online etc), socio-economic status again privileges middle class children.

Gender

There is a growing debate over whether a gender divide continues to exist now that the internet has become widely available. Certainly, this report has found some differences although there are some key similarities too. These include:

- **Boys** spend more time online per day, have been online for longer (in years) and have higher levels of online skills and self-efficacy. They also experience more online risks than girls. They are more likely to seek out pornographic and violent/racist websites on purpose and to come across online porn by accident. Boys take up slightly more peer-to-peer opportunities (such as emailing, instant messaging, downloading music and playing games), though overall, the gender differences are modest. Furthermore, web design is an activity undertaken more often by boys than girls.

- **Girls** tend to visit a broader range of civic sites, particularly charity sites and human/gay/children's rights sites, and they take up slightly more civic opportunities (such as visiting civic/political sites and signing petitions online). Girls encounter less pornography online but are more likely to experience contact risks (such as online bullying, talking to strangers online and meetings with people from the internet).

- There are **no differences** in the take up of opportunities to interact with websites and no differences in parental rules and practices between boys and girls. In relation to regulating the internet at home, parents report equivalent treatment of sons and daughters.

The persistence of demographic influences on internet use

Ethnicity

Ethnic background does not appear to play a large role in determining internet access or frequency of use:

- **Access:** 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.

- **Frequency of use:** Children and young people from an Asian or mixed race background are more likely to be daily online users than other ethnic groups. Children and young people from the black community are more likely to use the internet only on a weekly basis. However, those from a white background are equally divided between daily and weekly users, and they also include the largest percentage of occasional and non-users. There are no significant differences between children and young people who speak English as a first or subsequent language.

Region

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. Greater London is the most 'included' region, with half of children and young people (51%) being daily users, followed by the East Midlands (48%), the South West (46%) and the West Midlands (45%). The least included region is the North with 10% non-users.

More on this issue can be found in Report 2 – UK Children Go Online: Surveying the experiences of young people and their parents, July 2004.

A parental wish list

'You see, children spend a lot of time in school, and they tend to hear more [safety advice] from the teachers… And then, the parents shouldn't leave it to the teachers because at weekends the children are here with us… Everybody has to play their part. The government also, that's the highest level. But we have to start from the basics. And if the government has a guideline, then the teachers will also follow through… the Education Secretary, and from there to schools, and so to the parents.'
(Mother of Anisah, 15, from London)

'Wilf's always telling me that he's having these adverts for Viagra… I know it can't happen at school because they have to sign an agreement that they won't do this and they won't do that… We have to sign it as well to say that we've discussed it with our children, and I think that was quite good because it actually brought up conversations that, you know, how on earth do you talk about it otherwise?'
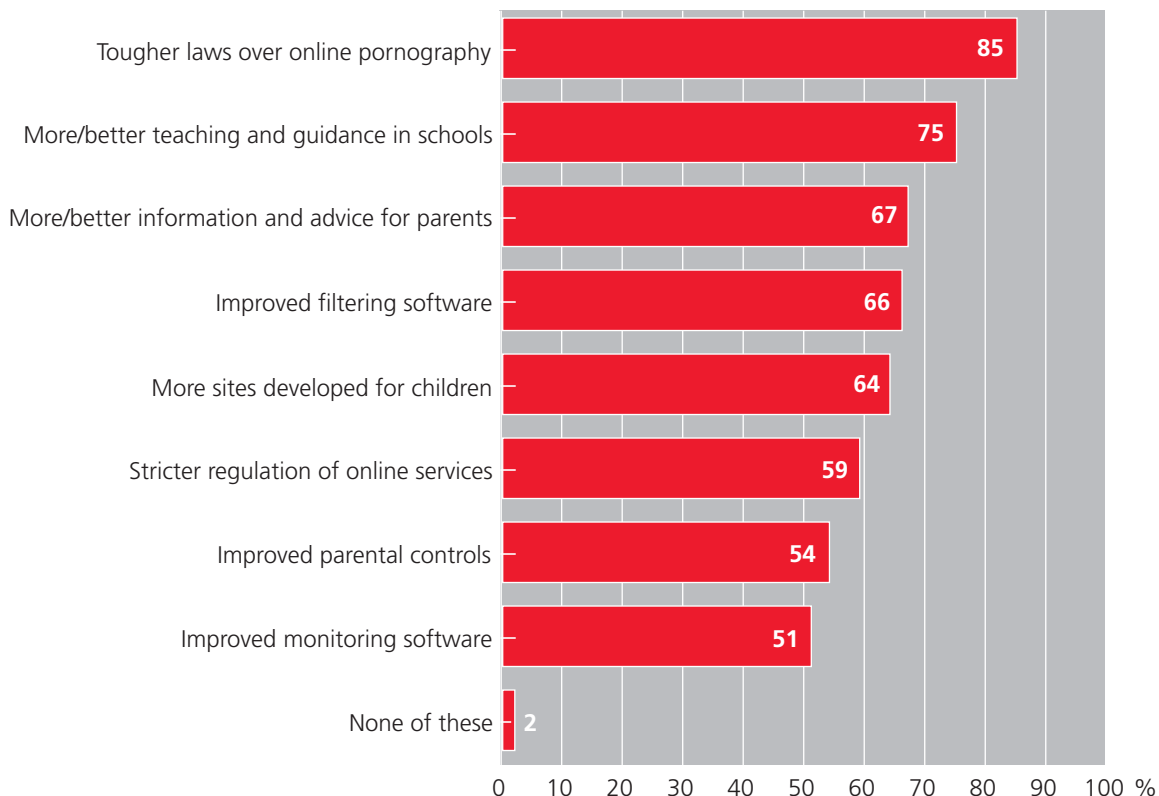*(Mother of Wilf, 13, from Hertfordshire)*

Much is said on behalf of children and parents in policy discussions about the internet. The broad premise that internet content cannot and should not be regulated is well known in policy circles but less well understood or accepted by the public. Since in some ways, internet content is regulated (mainly by extending offline laws online, for example seeking to restrict spam or illegal content), the UKCGO survey finds that parents welcome this and wish for further regulation, largely because, as we have seen, many feel burdened and worried by the task of managing their children's internet use. However, regulation can take various forms, including not only legal restriction but also 'soft regulation', such as information and awareness campaigns or promoting filtering and rating tools.

The UKCGO research findings show that parents favour a multi-stakeholder approach. Their priorities are as follows:

- **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.

Figure 10: Which of these would help you to make sure that your child uses the internet effectively and safely? (Multiple response)

	%
Tougher laws over online pornography	85
More/better teaching and guidance in schools	75
More/better information and advice for parents	67
Improved filtering software	66
More sites developed for children	64
Stricter regulation of online services	59
Improved parental controls	54
Improved monitoring software	51
None of these	2

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

A parental wish list

Almost half of European parents (47%) in the **Eurobarometer** 2003 survey said they have enough information on how to protect their child online, 43% would like more information. 42% of all parents would like more information from schools, 28% from the media and 16% from the government.

The **Internet Advisory Board** 2004 survey found that 93% of parents in Ireland thought the primary responsibility of protecting children online lies with parents. This is followed by schools (61%), the government (24%) and internet service providers (22%).

(Full details of these surveys can be found in the Appendix.)

- **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 (see Figure 10).

'I check [computer's] the history every now and again and see who's looking at what, and Eve's been doing quite a few projects at school so it's been important for her to be able to look at things… it's pointless having parental controls, not being able to look at all these different sites. We also find that the school, when they send out a project, they give you a list of websites to visit to help you with the project, and a lot of those, you wouldn't be able to get onto with controls.'
(Father of Eve, 13, and Clarissa, 12, from Surrey)

Reflecting on parental expectations regarding domestic regulation within the family, our child-centred perspective means that we cannot simply report parents' desire for greater control over or monitoring of children by parents. For, from the children's point of view, some key benefits of the internet depend on maintaining some privacy and freedom from their parents, making them particularly wary of intrusive or secret forms of parental regulation.

Kim: 'Parents are a bit over the top because they should be able to trust us…'
Interviewer: 'You have a strong sense of the invasion of your privacy then?'
Kim: 'Yeah. I think it is like your personal space and…'
Milly: 'It's like tapping your phone calls and things. It's like you're being stalked!'
(14-15 year old girls from Essex)

After all, as we have argued under 'balancing opportunities and risks', 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.

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.

More on this issue can be found in Report 2 – UK Children Go Online: Surveying the experiences of young people and their parents, July 2004.

A last word from young people themselves

Although we didn't ask children and young people in the survey directly about their wishes for their internet access and use, it was a theme of all our discussions throughout the interviews. We end with some ways in which children and young people told us that they would welcome more support.

Most importantly, they value content that addresses their interests and welcomes their responses, content that at present they find hard to locate. Here, 15 year old boys from London discuss the possibilities for a Londoners' website for young people:

Malik: 'They could arrange for us young Londoners to meet people like, you know, the Prime Minister perhaps and MPs, so you can… they could listen to them.'
Lee: 'Things that affect us like, about our schools, about like when we leave school, college – what we're gonna do, like things that will affect us. We might not be able to get a job, so what would they do to help us?… It could be if like they had, say we were talking about our area, like how it could improve. Then they could have a website, and then they use a part where [young people] can just give tips. And they might not listen to them, but you'll feel like you're doing something.'

As this suggests, political participation might be encouraged if young people feel listened to, and if the sites are 'cool':

'I know a friend, she has actually emailed [our MP] about the war and stuff, and how she feels toward it. And she [our MP] has replied back.'
                                    (Amir, 15, from London)

'Cool sites generally have fun things to do and things that are comical. These [government sites for young people] don't have that because they are being serious about serious issues. These sites are what I would class as being interesting but not cool.'
                                    (Greg, 15, from Essex)

Moreover, young people would welcome more opportunities to create their own websites:

Interviewer: 'What would you tell other young people to encourage them to make websites?'
Zhi Zhi: 'It's fun… You can put down all stuff that you're thinking about and make everybody else look at it, and you can kind of make new friends.'
Henrietta: 'You could have lessons. If they kind of start younger, then they're more willing to try it and therefore they would – if they enjoy doing it, and then they could make them later.'
                            (14-15 year old girls from Oxfordshire)

And they would like fewer restrictions on internet access:

Anthony: 'I think we shouldn't be able to play games during lessons, but I think we should be able to play games [on the internet] during our free time, like during lunch time. Cause that's what we should be able to do. Like, what's wrong with doing games? It's not as if we were doing work. It's our free time.'
Sahen: 'Yeah, 'cause you're not really going to be doing work anyway, you're probably going to be eating your lunch or go out on the field or doing something. So that's not work either. So why can't we play games at lunch time?'
                                (13 year old boys from Essex)

'I used to have kids AOL, but my dad changed it. You couldn't go on Google because it wouldn't let you go on it. So my dad changed it because you couldn't go on anything.'   *(Ellen, 10, from Hertfordshire)*

On the other hand, they know there is content online that they want protection from:

Interviewer: 'You said sometimes it's good that [the filter] doesn't let you go on some sites. So what kind of websites… are not good for you?'
Robby: 'If they're like really violent ones, like what happened in the war, and you see all these people dying, and you might not want to.'
                            (10 year old boy from Hertfordshire)

'It restricts the websites that you can go on… And it stops people emailing you like nasty emails.'
                                (Emma, 10, from Hertfordshire)

'My little sister, she'd type in like her favourite artist or band, and porn sites just come up that had their name on it… Boyzone… Spice Girls… She was eleven at the time.'   *(Nina, 17, from Manchester)*

A last word from young people themselves

They value and learn from safety campaigns:

'There's obviously the scare of paedophiles and people like that on chat rooms… It's on the news, and there are ad campaigns against it. It's just a kind of thing that you realise there's probably someone on it who is a paedophile or like a child sex-abuser or someone, and you don't really want to kind of meet one of them or speak to one of them.'

(Alan, 13, from Essex)

Interviewer: 'I'm just wondering, what age you think people should be protected up to?'
Nina: 'I'd say about – just when they're young, and they don't really know what they're doing. About 14… 13, 14, about then. Because after that they know what they're doing and all that… they've got more sense.'
Interviewer: 'And how do you think they should be protected?'
Nina: 'I think they need to know not to go around giving email addresses out and meeting people they don't know.'

(17 year old girl from Manchester)

'Sometimes my mum might, like when I'm on MSN, she goes, 'Hope you're not going to chat rooms' and stuff because she hears loads of stuff. So I just say I'm chatting to my friends and she can see that.'

(Kim, 15, from Essex)

And they value the intimacy offered by the internet and, therefore, their online privacy from parents:

'You just like don't want your mum spying on you and knowing everything about you.'

(Nina, 17, from Manchester)

More on this issue can be found in Report 1 – UK Children Go Online: Listening to young people's experiences, October 2003.

Conclusions

This report has surveyed findings across a wide range of activities on the internet. Here, we draw out some of the overarching themes that have emerged.

- **Continuum of in/exclusion depends on quality of use:** 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 do persist. Increasingly, 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 to gain more internet skills. Consequently, they experience the internet as a richer, if risky, medium than do less privileged children.

- **The internet is not yet used to its full potential:** As an information medium, the internet has rapidly become central in children's lives, and as a communication medium, it represents a significant addition to the existing means of communication available to them. 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.

- **Internet literacy is crucial:** The Government's UK Online report[22] has added ICT skills to the literacy and numeracy requirements of education for all pupils. This is vital since our analysis shows that children and young people's level of online skills has a direct influence on the breadth of online opportunities and risks they experience, in addition to (and to some degree compensating for) the effects of demographics, access and use. As we have seen, access to the range of opportunities on the internet involves far more than the provision of technology. Additionally, it requires a range of skills, some more complex than others, many of which are stratified by age, gender and socio-economic status. The key point is that greater online skills are consistently associated with the take up of a wide range of online opportunities for children and young people.

- **The internet poses more risks than other media:** It is clear to parents and children that the internet is both more exciting but also more risky than the media they have been used to hitherto. The nature of the risks changes continually. Today, these include spam, pornography, invasions of privacy, grooming, bullying, unreliable or manipulative content, viruses, gambling, and many others. In the near future, the list will change. The extent to which these offend against cultural norms and, more significantly, the extent of actual harm associated with these risks is less than clear. A substantial investigation in the distribution and consequences of internet-related harms to children is now much needed.

- **Mind the gap:** This research has consistently identified gaps in understanding between parents and children – in internet expertise, in awareness of risks encountered (see Figure 8, page 22) and in acknowledgement of domestic regulation implemented (see Figure 9, page 24). 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. It would be impractical to hope for complete understanding between parents and children, of course, but it is important not only to seek ways of closing the gap where possible but also to recognise the existence of the gap insofar as it persists – in designing research, safety guidance and other policy initiatives.

- **Evidence-based policy:** As our priorities for future research indicate, research raises as many questions as it answers. Yet, when we began this project, it was not known how many children had internet access in their bedroom, for example, or whether parental regulation was working, or whether children could avoid the risks as they became more skilled. We hope that this project has served its purpose in addressing these and many other questions by producing a careful and sound picture of the ways in which 9-19 year olds are using the internet today. We hope too that this is useful in informing the development of policy in relation to education, commercial and public sector content development, child protection, media literacy, parenting practices, and so forth (see recommendations).

Impacts

The findings of the UKCGO research project have informed:

An advert for the for 'Virtual Global Taskforce', a new website by the National Crime Squad Paedophile OnLine Investigation Team (www.virtualglobaltaskforce.net), placed in the EasyJet Inflight magazine, September 2004, cited findings from the UKCGO survey:

'Nearly half of 9-19 year olds who use the internet have given out personal information to strangers they've met online', Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics.

The DfES Parents Online newsletter on online plagiarism in schoolwork from September 2004 (now Parentscentre, www.parentscentre.gov.uk) used a parent quote from the UKCGO family visits:

A parent, John, (not his real name) father of two girls aged 12 and 13 from Surrey, says:
'Nowadays children don't know how to search anymore. If it doesn't come up in Encarta or Google, it doesn't exist. But there is this thing called a library, but they don't want to know about it... At their school, they get extra marks for handing in part of the project handwritten. That's what we used to do, just everything handwritten and draw the pictures, now they just get everything off the internet.'

The Social Trends 2005 report (Office for National Statistics, www.statistics.gov.uk) cited findings from the UKCGO survey:

Use of the Internet is far higher among UK children than among adults. According to the 'UK Children Go Online', study, which surveyed 9 to 15 year olds between January and March 2004, 74 per cent of children have accessed the Internet via a computer from home and 93 per cent have accessed it at school. Information gathering and school and college work was their main use.

Households with children are more likely than those without children to own a computer or have Internet access. In 2004 54 per cent of children aged 9 to 15 lived in a household with a computer and 34 per cent lived in a household with more than one; 34 per cent of children had broadband access at home.

The Children's Charities' Coalition for Internet Safety's (CHIS) digital manifesto on 'Child Safety Online' (www.nch.org.uk/chis) cited findings from the UKCGO survey:

One third of 9-19 year olds who go online at least once per week report having received unwanted sexual (31%) or nasty comments (33%), via email, chat, IM or text message.

Only seven per cent of parents think their child has received sexual comments, and only four per cent think their child has been bullied online.

Others include:

- The development of the Epal website, a pilot project by Greater Manchester Connexions to provide life and career's advice to young people (www.epal.tv)

- The Kidsmart Parent Seminars: internet safety advice for parents in schools developed by Childnet-International (www.kidsmart.org.uk)

- Ofcom's work on the promotion of media literacy (www.ofcom.org.uk)

- Vodafone's parent safety leaflet about children's use of mobile phones (www.vodafone.co.uk)

- Various police constabularies, schools, parent organisations (eg National Family and Parenting Institute), children's charities (eg Unicef, NSPCC, Barnardo's, ChildLine, NCH, Childnet International), broadcasting corporations (eg BBC), internet service providers (eg AOL UK, Wanadoo), non-profit internet organisations (Citizens Online, Internet Watch Foundation, Internet Content Rating Association) and new media companies (eg Intuitive Media, Cimex Media, Atticmedia) across the country.

Advisory panel

The research was informed by guidance from the project's advisory panel, with members from the policy community, industry and children's organisations:

- **AOL UK:** Karin Sieger (Director, Research and Analysis), Camille de Stempel (Director, Policy) and Simon Kinnersley (Manger, Research – Research and Analysis)

- **BCS (Broadcasting Standards Commission) and ITC (Independent Television Commission):** Andrea Millwood Hargrave (Research Director)

- **Childnet-International:** Stephen Carrick-Davies (Chief Executive), Nigel Williams (Founder), Mary Louise Morris (Education and Awareness Officer)

- **Citizens Online:** John Fisher (Chief Executive), Gail Bradbrook (Director of Strategy and Partnerships)

- **NCH – the children's charity and CHIS (The Children's Charities Coalition on Internet Safety):** John Carr (Internet Advisor)

- **Ofcom:** Alison Preston (Senior Research Associate), Robin Blake (Manager, Media Literacy), Andrew Carruthers (Policy Executive)

Media coverage

Selected excerpts from what the media have said about *UK Children Go Online*:

The Guardian, 16 October 2003, *Children are internet experts*

Children are becoming the internet experts in families as their parents leave them to it in what could be 'a lasting reversal of the generation gap', according to research published today. The report from the London School of Economics claims that warnings about the risks of chat rooms and of meeting strangers and paedophiles have got through to youngsters, but that parents, government departments and internet providers could do more to make the internet safer for children.

BBC News Online, 16 October 2003, *Children 'need to improve web use'*

Children should be taught to use the internet 'more creatively', rather than spending their time playing games and chatting to friends, a report recommends. Research carried out at the London School of Economics found youngsters were often at the forefront of family computer use. But schools and parents should do more to encourage children to participate in online political discussions and produce their own websites, it added.

CBBC Newsround, 21 July 2004, *Parents 'unsure how kids use net'*

Parents aren't sure what happens when their kids go online and don't know much about the dangers of surfing. That's what a new survey reckons, after asking kids how they used the net and parents how they thought kids did.

Silicon.com, 21 July 2004, *Porn pop-ups and spam hijacking UK kids' surfing*

Teenagers are looking at dodgy content on the internet and their parents don't know anything about it – that's no surprise. What is surprising, however, is that most claim to be unwitting victims of spammers and pop-up merchants. According to a London School of Economics report, UK Children Go Online 36 per cent of children have stumbled upon porn while surfing for another type of site, 25 per cent have got porn spam and 38 per cent have seen porn pop-ups they weren't expecting.

The Register, 21 July 2004, *Parents clueless about kids online*

Parents haven't a clue what their kids get up to online. That's just one of the findings of a report out today by the London School of Economics which reveals a gulf between what children do online – and what parents think their children get up to. Of course, any parent knows they will never really know what their children get up to – either online or offline. Nonetheless, the research found that parents need to be more 'Web wise' about their kids' activities online.

The Sun, 22 July 2004, *50% of kids see net porn*

More than half of kids have seen porn on the internet, it was revealed yesterday. A third have also been subjected to unwanted sexual comments. And most parents are unaware their kids have been affected – with only 16 per cent believing their children have seen porn online.

The Straits Times, Singapore, 26 July 2004, *Youngsters 'can't evaluate reliability of info on Net'*

Children lack the skills needed to evaluate the reliability of information available on the Internet, says a new study by the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). The study, published last week, found that only one in 10 children are sceptical about the information they find online. Youngsters 'can't evaluate reliability of info on Net'.

Wendy Early, British Film Institute, in Spiked Online (www.spiked-online.com), 23 September 2004, *Lost in cyberspace?*

The authors of the report, LSE academics Sonia Livingstone and Magdalena Bober, reveal that the vast majority of children are now connected to the internet and have mobile phones. The report tries to give a balanced perspective, measuring the risk and opportunity in children's access to this sophisticated technology. Nevertheless, it is very much a product of today's fearful times, which is preoccupied with issues such as inequality of access (the 'digital divide') and 'undesirable forms of content and contact'.

Henry Jenkins, MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), in Technology Review (www.technology review.com), 3 September 2004, *The Myths Of Growing Up Online*

Livingstone's report arrives at a pivotal moment: after decades of state-supported broadcasting, the British government is deregulating media content and opening the airwaves to greater commercial development. The number of media channels in British homes is expanding – and parents are being asked to play gatekeepers determining what media entered their home without being given the training or resources needed to do that job properly.

BBC News Online, 9 February 2005, *Children 'lack web safety advice'*

Nearly one in three UK children have not had any lessons on how to use the internet safely, a study suggests. Those most at risk of encountering pornography or paedophiles were the most expert computer users, the survey of nine to 19-year-olds found. They entered sites more adventurously, ignoring safety concerns, London School of Economics researchers said.

Appendix

Details of the survey administration are provided in UK Children Go Online: Surveying the experiences of young people and their parents, July 2004, www.children-go-online.net

UKCGO children's survey sample

In this report, percentages have been weighted in accordance with population statistics. Sample sizes are reported as unweighted. The sample characteristics (N=1511) are as follows:

Age	9-11 years (N=380), 12-15 years (N=605), 16-17 years (N=274), 18-19 years (N=251)
Gender	Boys (N=668), Girls (N=842)
SES	AB (N=264), C1 (N=418), C2 (N=407), DE (N=422) [9]
Region	England (N=1,232), Wales (N=69), Scotland (N=161), Northern Ireland (N=48)
Ethnicity	White (N=1,333), Non-white (N=169)

UKCGO focus group sample

The focus groups (27 in total) were carried out in ten schools across England, involving 88 students in all, as shown below. The interviews in 2003 consisted of a semi-structured discussion in the secondary schools and post-16 colleges and a mind-mapping exercise in the primary school and in 2004, an evaluation of websites.[23]

School	Type	Size	Area	Location	Social grade	Achievement	Ages interviewed	Date of interview	Number interviewed
A	Primary	97	Rural	Hertfordshire	Mixed	Above average	10-11	July 2003	8
B	Secondary	369	Town/rural	Derbyshire	Middle class	Above average	12-13	July 2003	8
C	Secondary	928	City	London	Working class	Above average	14-16	July 2003 Dec 2004	8 + 6
D	Secondary	1,148	Town	Essex	Mixed	Above average	13 14-15	July 2003	14
E	Post-16	2,010	Town	Essex	Middle class	Slightly above average	16-17	July 2003	10
F	Post-16	2,911	City	Greater Manchester	Working class	Below average	17-19	June 2003	7
G	Primary	501	City	South Yorkshire	Working class	Average	10-11	Nov 2004	8
H	Secondary	763	City	South Yorkshire	Working class	Below average	14-15	Dec 2004	5
I	Primary	178	Town/rural	Oxfordshire	Mixed	Above average	10-11	Dec 2004	8
J	Secondary	1,343	Town	Oxfordshire	Mixed	Above average	14-15	Dec 2004	6

Appendix

UKCGO family visit sample

The family visits consist of initial interviews with parents and the child, conducted separately in-home, followed by two periods of observation of the child using the internet in their own home (carried out during 1999-2000) and recently extended by a three or four year return visit combining interviews and observation (in summer 2003 or 2004). The age of the child given below was recorded at the time of the return visit.

Family	Age of child	Gender	Area	Location	Social grade	Family type
1 'Ted'	18	Male	Town	Surrey	B – Middle class	Couple, single child
2 'Anisah'	15	Female	City	London	C2 – Skilled working class	Couple, one older brother and sister
3 'Megan'	12	Female	Suburb	Essex	C1 – Lower middle class	Couple, one older brother
4 'Jane'	18	Female	Rural	Surrey	C1 – Lower middle class	Couple, one older brother
5 'Poppy'	16	Female	City	London	B – Middle class	Couple, one older brother
6 'Eve'	13	Female	Town	Surrey	C1 – Lower middle class	Couple, one younger sister
7 'Simon'	13	Male	Town	Surrey	C1 – Lower middle class	Couple, one older, two younger sisters
8 'Wilf'	13	Male	Rural	Hertfordshire	C1 – Lower middle class	Couple, one younger brother
9 'Daniel'	20	Male	City	London	B – Middle class	Couple, single child

UKCGO project reports

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UKCGO website

Further information, the survey questionnaires, focus group and interview guides and the research ethics policy for UK Children Go Online can be downloaded from the project website, www.children-go-online.net

Appendix

Other surveys referenced for comparison purposes

Becta: A government-funded in-depth survey with 2,073 home-based interviews of a nationally representative UK sample of 5-18 year olds and their parents in relation to ICT use at home and school (with one child and their parent per household; see Becta (2002) *Young People and ICT 2002,* www.becta.org.uk/page_documents/research/full_report.pdf

Cyberspace Research Unit: A school-based survey of 330 8-11 year olds in England carried out in 2003; see O'Connell et al (2004, February) *Emerging Trends amongst Primary School Children's Use of the Internet,* Preston: University of Central Lancashire, www.uclan.ac.uk/host/cru/docs/emerging_trends_full_report_060204.pdf

Digital Future: 2,000 US citizens aged 12+ were interviewed by telephone in July-September 2003; see USC Annenberg School Center for the Digital Future (2004) *The Digital Future Report,* www.digitalcenter.org

Eurobarometer: A survey of 16,000 parents of 0-17 year olds across the EU on children's internet use, parental regulation and safety awareness, conducted in November-December 2003; see Eurobarometer (2004) *Illegal and Harmful Content on the Internet*, Brussels: European Commission, http://europa.eu.int/information_society/activities/sip/docs/pdf/reports/eurobarometer_survey.pdf

Internet Advisory Board: An Irish survey of 317 children aged 10-14 years and their parents (N=317) with face to face interviews in August-September 2004; see Amárach Consulting (2004) *The Use of New Media by Children,* Dublin: Internet Advisory Board, www.iab.ie

Kaiser Family Foundation: A telephone survey of 1,506 adults and 625 children aged 10-17 conducted in February 2000; see Kaiser Family Foundation (2000) U.S. Adults and Kids on New Media Technology, in C von Feilitzen and U Carlsson (Eds), *Children in the New Media Landscape,* Göteborg, Sweden: Nordicom.

Kids.net: A UK marketing survey of 2,019 7-16 year old internet users carried out by NOP in June 2000; see Wigley, K and Clarke, B (2000) *Kids.net,* London: National Opinion Poll, www.nop.co.uk

Media Awareness Netowork: A telephone survey was conducted in Canada in March 2000, involving 1,081 parents with children aged 6-16 who owned PCs; see Media Awareness Network (2000), *Canada's Children in a Wired World: The parents' view,* www.media-awareness.ca

Ofcom: A nationally representative sample of 2,131 adults 15+ was surveyed in the UK in November 2003; see Ofcom (2004, August) *The Communications Market 2004,* www.ofcom.org.uk/research/cm/cmpdf

Office for National Statistics: These quarterly statistics on internet access and use draw from the national 'Expenditure and Food Survey' of individuals aged 16+; see ONS (2004, April) *Internet Access: 12.1 million households online*, www.statistics.gov.uk

Oxford Internet Survey: Face to face interviews with a nationally representative random sample of 2,000 individuals aged 14+ were carried out in the UK May/June 2003; see Dutton, W (2005, February) *The Social Dynamics of the Internet,* Presentation for the International Technology, Knowledge and Society Conference, University of California, Berkeley, USA, www.oii.ox.ac.uk

Pew 2000: US sample of 754 internet users aged 12-17 and one of their parents/guardians (total of 1,508 participants) were interviewed by telephone in November/December 2000 about the child's use of the Internet at home and school; see Pew (2001) *Teenage Life Online,* www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Teens_Report.pdf

Pew 2002: A total of 14 focus groups were conducted with 136 students aged 11-19 drawn from 36 different schools in the US between November 2001 and February 2002; see Pew (2002) *The Digital Disconnect: The widening gap between internet savvy students and their schools,* www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Schools_Internet_Report.pdf

Pew 2004: A nationally representative US sample of 1,100 12-17 year olds and their parents was interviewed by telephone in October/November 2004; see Pew (2005) *Protecting Teens Online,* www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Filters_Report.pdf

SAFT: In this survey, 4,700 children aged 9-16 and 3,200 parents from Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Ireland and Iceland completed a school-based self-completion questionnaire (children) and telephone interviews (parents) between December 2002 and March 2003; see SAFT (2003, October) *What do SAFT kids do online?* Paper presented at the 'Future Kids Online – How to Provide Safety Awareness, Facts and Tools' Conference, Stockholm, Sweden, www.saftonline.org

University of Salford: A survey of 1,972 adults aged 15+ during May 2002 with questions relating to political participation on and offline; see R Gibson, W Lusoli and S Ward (2002) *UK Political Participation Online: The public response,* Salford: ESRI, www.ipop.org.uk

Young People New Media: A face-to-face, in-home, computer-assisted survey of UK children's media use with a representative sample of 1,303 6-17 year olds and a self-completion questionnaire to 978 of their parents, carried our in April-May 1997; see Livingstone, S and Bovill, M (1999) *Young People New Media,* London: LSE, www.lse.ac.uk/collections/media@lse/whosWho/soniaLivingstonePublications3.htm

Endnotes

1   The project develops an earlier project in which the first author conducted participant observation in thirty families; see Livingstone, S and Bovill, M (2001) *Families and the Internet: An observational study of children and young people's internet use,* www.lse.ac.uk/collections/media @lse/ pdf/btreport_familiesinternet.pdf

2   See Ofcom (2004) *Ofcom's Strategy and Priorities for the Promotion of Media Literacy: A statement,* London: Office of Communications, www.ofcom.org.uk/consult/ condocs/strategymedialit/ml_statement/strat_prior_ statement.pdf

3   See also Livingstone, S (2001) *Online Freedom and Safety for Children,* IPPR/Citizens Online, www.lse.ac.uk/ collections/media@lse/pdf/free_safety_children1.pdf

4   See Livingstone, S (2002) *Young People and New Media,* London: Sage.

5   See also James, A, Jenks, C and Prout, A (1998) *Theorizing Childhood,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

6   See also Greig, A and Taylor, J (1999) *Doing Research with Children*, London: Sage.

7   The names of all children appearing in this report have been changed to preserve anonymity.

8   See also Rice, R (2002) Primary Issues in Internet Use: Access, civic and community involvement, and social interaction and expression, in L Lievrouw and S Livingstone (Eds) *The Handbook of New Media,* London: Sage.

9   The market research category ABC1 is described as 'middle class' households, and C2DE is described as 'working class' households. Socio-economic status is measured according to the standard market research categories as follows: A – Upper middle class (Higher managerial administrative or professional occupations, top level civil servants), B – Middle class (Intermediate managerial administrative or professional people, senior officers in local government and civil service), C1 – Lower middle class (Supervisory or clerical and junior managerial administrative or professional occupations), C2 – Skilled working class (Skilled manual workers), D – Working class (Semi and unskilled manual workers), E – Those at lowest levels of subsistence (All those entirely dependent on the State long term, casual workers, those without regular income). Socio-economic status is strongly correlated with measures of parental occupation, education and income. 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.

10 See also Valkenburg, PM and Soeters, KE (2001) Children's Positive and Negative Experiences with the Internet: An exploratory survey, *Communication Research,* 28(5), 652-675.

11 See also Selwyn, N (2003) Apart from Technology: Understanding people's non-use of information and communication technologies in everyday life, *Technology in Society,* 25(1), 99-116.

12 Self-efficacy (or self-rated internet expertise) was assessed on a four-point scale. We asked respondents whether they think of themselves as beginner (7%), average (56%), advanced (32%) or expert (5%) in using the internet.

13 See also Buckingham, D (2004) *Assessing the Media Literacy of Children and Young People: A literature review,* London: Ofcom, www.ofcom.org.uk/advice/media_liter acy/medlitpub/mlcyp.pdf

14 Key Stage 1: 5-7 years; Key Stage 1: 7-11 years

15 See also Ling, R (2004) *The Mobile Connection: The cell phone's impact on society,* San Francisco: Elsevier.

16 See also Sundin, E (1999) The Online Kids: Children's participation on the internet, in C von Feilitzen and U Carlsson (Eds) *Children and Media: Image, education, participation,* Göteborg, Sweden: Nordicom.

17 See also Stern, S (1999) Adolescent Girls' Expression on Web Home Pages: Spirited, sombre and self-conscious sites, *Convergence,* 5(4), 22-41.

18 See also Montgomery, K et al (2004) *Youth as E-Citizens: Engaging the Digital Generation,* www.centerforsocial media.org/ecitizens/youthreport.pdf

19 We discussed the definition of this with children and young people in the focus groups. In the survey, the following definition was provided: 'The next questions are about porn, which is stuff meant for adults. For example, nude people, rude and sexy pictures.'

20 See also Mitchell, KJ et al (2003) The Exposure of Youth to Unwanted Sexual Material on the Internet: A national survey of risk, impact, and prevention, *Youth & Society,* 34(3), 330-358.

21 See also Palmer, T and Stacey, L (2004) *Just One Click: Sexual abuse of children and young people through the internet and mobile telephone technology,* London: Barnardo's.

22 See Office of the e-Envoy (2004, January) *UK Online Annual Report,* www.e-envoy.gov.uk

23 Information about schools is taken from the most recent OFSTED inspection report. Achievement was determined according to how the school had performed in relation to National Average Performance levels cited in the most recent school league tables (www.ofsted.gov.uk).

List of figures

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