

*young people are generally very confident with new technologies and are rapidly developing their e-skills*



## How young people use new technologies

Peter Rudd

**N**FER is continuing to develop its range of research projects on new technologies, and in recent months there has been a particular focus on the role that they play in the lives of young people. The findings from a number of current projects show that although young people are tending to develop their skills in their own time and outside school or college, a minority don't have access to a computer at home and therefore risk digital exclusion.

The great majority of young people now have access both to a computer and to the internet at home. The proportions seem to be somewhere between 80 per cent and 95 per cent of the school-aged population having home computer access, depending upon the precise wording of the question asked, and which survey findings you choose to use. It is certainly true now to say that most learners' homes are 'technologically rich'. Personal ownership of computers increases as learners become older and as socio-economic status increases.

This still leaves between five and 20 per cent of young people without a home computer (despite initiatives such as the Home Access programme), and this remains a challenge for those aiming at universal access and digital inclusion. Particular attention may need to be given to 'hard to reach'

groups of learners and families who face serious barriers to home access and home use of computers. There is a serious risk of 'double deprivation' for these groups, in the form of combined economic and technological exclusion.

*particular attention may need to be given to 'hard to reach' groups of learners and families who face serious barriers to home access and home use of computers*

Young peoples' responses to survey and interview questions on ethical and safety issues related to computers and the internet suggest that there is scope for e-safety advice and guidance to be improved by both schools and parents. In a survey carried out by NFER for Becta, for example, 20 per cent of primary learners reported that they had not received e-safety education from a teacher, while almost 15 per cent had not received e-safety education from a parent. At secondary level, these figures were 35 per cent and 29 per cent respectively. In addition, only 13 per cent of primary learners and 5 per cent of secondary learners answered 'yes' when asked if they were supervised when using the internet at home.

Young people are generally very confident with new technologies and are rapidly developing their e-skills. However, learners tend to use computers most frequently for what might be called 'routine' learning tasks, such as internet research and to present their work in particular ways both at home and school. Relatively low propor-

tions of learners reported using what might be considered to be 'advanced' e-skills, such as uploading resources from the internet, or using Web 2.0 technology to create web pages.

There is some evidence, especially from interviews, that young people are tending to develop their e-skills largely in their own time and outside formal institutions. This is true in relation to both hardware – using mobile phones and games consoles, for example – and applications, such as Facebook, Wikipedia and YouTube. It would be beneficial for those who work in schools and children's services to build upon and make greater use of the ICT skills and experience that learners have acquired at home or outside school. Having said this, there are already excellent examples of innovation. These include, for example: the use of gaming in primary schools to assist children with thinking, planning, design and strategic skills, the use of dedicated websites by local authorities to improve youth participation in their area, and increasing use of videos and podcasts to enable young people to complete a project or to make a presentation.

**Further information**  
[www.nfer.ac.uk/nfer/research/projects/harnessing-technology-survey-2008/](http://www.nfer.ac.uk/nfer/research/projects/harnessing-technology-survey-2008/)  
[www.nfer.ac.uk/nfer/research/projects/using-social-software/](http://www.nfer.ac.uk/nfer/research/projects/using-social-software/)