



**Viewpoint Digital Survey**  
***Looked After Children***

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## Summary

- The aim of this questionnaire is to inform the creation of innovative ideas that exploit the potential of digital technology to make a positive impact on the lives of children in care.
- 19 young people completed questionnaires in North Lincolnshire.
- Information from other surveys has been included so that the views of 1091 young people are reported.
- This report highlights research, which confirms the benefits of digital technologies: improved educational attainment, increased confidence, and improved reporting about sensitive subjects.
- Young people also report benefits of digital technologies: feeling more confident, a better way of communicating, and being helpful in discussing feelings. This awareness may link to an interest they report in the use of the internet for advice and counselling.
- Almost all the young people in the survey said they had email addresses, and most said they used the internet at least once a week. A couple of other surveys in relation to reviews for children in care have demonstrated the benefits of using digital methodologies to communicate with services, convey concerns and provide information. Young people recognise the benefits of digital technology for communication. They can see the value of the technology in communication and would like to use internet or text messaging to communicate with services.
- In their responses to the digital questionnaire young people also reported their current use of the internet for educational benefits and its potential use for homework and accessing resources or services. This value and the beneficial effect is also backed up by other surveys with a larger number of respondents.
- **About three quarters of young people have a computer at home, usually a desk top, and about the same number could access the internet where they lived. Some young people do not have these resources and will not benefit from any innovative developments.** This is an important issue as there is evidence from this report about the benefits of the use of existing technologies. The digital technology survey sample is small but the impression is that the younger group of young people in foster care are better resourced than the older group, of whom a majority live alone in the community.
- Where computers are available, young people report little experience of training even though it is assumed training would be taking place at school. Perhaps

the training provided at school does not meet their needs, but there is no information about this.

- Young people do report an interest in access to equipment and activities to support music mixing and digital photography. There is potential from this interest to a beneficial use of technology identified by young people in the availability of online scrapbooks to store photos and memories. As can be seen in the report only 37% of young people were satisfied with current 'life story book or information about people they know'.
- For the 17 to 21 age group, managing money and finding either a job or a training course are things they said they most needed help with. Pathway Plans for all care leavers should address financial management and technology could help with budgets, monitoring and banking. Additionally, both younger and older groups said they wanted more support; from care leavers and from other specialist professionals. It may be that personal support, together with technology solutions, are important.
- Finally, young people identified the opportunity to remain in placements for longer periods and to have a forum for their views as helpful.

## **Introduction**

The Digital Inclusion Team is a delivery body funded by the Communities and Local Government Department to implement the report "Inclusion Through Innovation" published in 2005. It focuses on how the innovative application of digital technologies, of any kind, can improve the lives and life chances of socially excluded people and deprived neighbourhoods. The common focus of the team's work is on delivering positive social outcomes. One of the key themes from the Social Exclusion Task Force is Children in Care, and the team's aim is to create innovative ideas that exploit technology's potential to meet digital and social inclusion objectives, and ultimately make a positive impact to the lives of children in care.

This project located in North Lincolnshire seeks to identify ideas that can be taken forward for piloting within North Lincolnshire with the long term aim of mainstreaming the learning and developing a tool kit for local authorities in the UK.

## **Aims**

To consult young people in care about how digital technology could make a positive impact on their lives.

## **Methodology**

A questionnaire for young people in care to complete was developed by North Lincolnshire Council and the Digital Inclusion Team. The questionnaire content aimed to identify what is important to young people in terms of their use of digital technology.

In line with the digital technology theme, it was planned to make the questionnaire available through the use of Viewpoint CASI (computer-assisted self-interviewing). The Viewpoint multimedia ACASI instrument is an interactive questionnaire tool, delivered on a computer with internet access or downloaded to a stand alone computer. In the full, interactive version, all text that appears on the screen is read out loud by animated characters, aiding literacy difficulties. Respondents can choose from a selection of animated characters and can choose from a selection of animated and colourful screen backgrounds. A simpler, survey version of Viewpoint is also available for use. Routing or filtering for follow-up questions is automatic.

Self-complete methods are generally viewed as advantageous, in terms of being cheaper and quicker to administer and also in terms of avoiding interviewer variability and bias, particularly in terms of under-reporting issues that could be

sensitive. Self-complete approaches using new technology in particular have been associated with a number of advantages and have been identified as of particular benefit to special groups, such as children and young people. ACASI approaches have also been associated with aiding literacy difficulties, with an enhanced sense of privacy and with increased disclosure of sensitive information. The use of automatic skip and branch patterns is thought to decrease respondent error or fatigue and allows the use of more complicated questionnaires.<sup>1</sup>



## Sample

A small group of young people completed the questionnaires, the majority from North Lincolnshire, although two young people from two different authorities also participated. In terms of age:

- 7 young people were aged 17 years to 21 years.
- 12 were aged 11 years to 15 years
- 2 young people were aged 7 years and 8 years.

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Davies, M. & Morgan, A. (2005). Using Computer-Assisted Self-Interviewing (CASI) Questionnaires to Facilitate Consultation and Participation with Vulnerable Young People. *Child Abuse Review* 14, 389-406; De Vaus, D.A. (1996). *Surveys in Social Research*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn. London: UCL Press; Tourangeau, R. & Smith, T.W. (1996). Asking Sensitive Questions: the Impact of Data Collection, Question Format and Question Context. *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 60, 275-304; De Leeuw, E., Hox, J., Kef, S. & Van Hattum, M. (1997). Overcoming the Problems of Special Interviews on Sensitive Topics: Computer Assisted Self-Interviewing Tailored for Young Children and Adolescents. *1997 Sawtooth Software Conference Proceedings, Sawtooth Software Inc.*, 1-14; Borgers, N., De Leeuw, E. & Hoox, J. (2000). Children as Respondents in Survey Research: Cognitive Development and Response Quality. *Bulletin de Methodologie Sociologique*, 66, 60-75. Borgers, N., Hoox, J. & Sikkels, D. (2004). Response Effects in Surveys on Children and Young People: The Effect of Number of Response Options, Negative Wording and Neutral Mid-point. *Quality and Quantity* 38, 17-33.

The main analysis features the two older age groups. Of these, 10 young people were male and 11 were female.

In the oldest age group, four young people were living alone in the community, and one was in a residential home. Two young people did not report their living arrangements. In the two younger groups, the young people were in foster care or had been adopted (3 young people).

*Note: All of the young people in North Lincolnshire answered paper questionnaires which has resulted in gaps in the information available. The two young people from other authorities completed the 'digital' questionnaires online using Viewpoint CASI.*

In addition six other studies involving additional young people are reported on. This report includes the views of 1091 young people.

## Part 1. Current issues and Potential Developments

The 17 to 21 year age group answered the questions relating to current issues, beginning with: **‘Thinking about your life at the moment what kind of things do you need most help with?’**. Key issues identified by the young people were managing money and finding a job or training course, as outlined in the table below. No young people selected ‘housing’ or ‘school’ from the list of options.

Managing your money	4
Finding a good training course	3
Finding a job	3
Finding a college place	1
Accessing social or leisure activities	1
Health	1

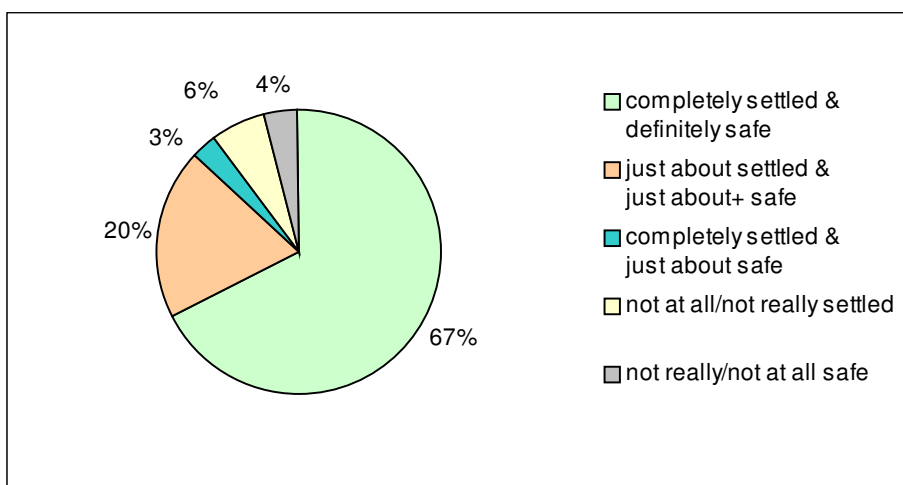
Young people were also asked **‘Which of the following do you think would help you?’**

	11 –15	17 - 21
Mentoring support from care leavers	7	4
The right to extend your stay in care up to 18 years	7	4
More activities to do e.g. sports, outdoors	7	4
Guaranteed access to work experience/trainee schemes with local council	6	4
Be able to stay in your placement once you have reached 18 years	6	4
A forum that represents views and opinions of children in care to the government and business	6	4
Guaranteed access to work experience schemes with local businesses	6	2
A single doctor or health worker who supports your health needs	6	1
To have a personal advisor up to the age of 25 years	4	5
More regular visits by social workers	4	0
A personal adviser who provides support on personal issues	3	3
A head teacher who takes a special interest in your education and maintains contact to provide support	3	0

Although it should be remembered that the numbers in this sample are small, the themes from this small group of young people are:

- Both age groups (11 to 15 years and 17 to 21 years) would value:
  - Support from care leavers.
  - The right to remain in care to 18 and beyond.
  - Access to work experience.
  - More activities.
  - A forum that represents their views.
- The younger age group highlight the importance of access to a specialist health practitioner and more social worker visits.
- The older group attach more importance to having a personal advisor to 25 years.

In a report by the **University of Bath (2006)** on data provided by children and young people for their LAC Reviews (281 in total), Ian Butler, Professor of Social Work, identified two groups of young people, those who were 'safe and settled' and those who were not.



The report concluded:

*'67% were completely 'safe and settled'. An analysis of the responses of the children in the 'safe and settled group' found that they were generally very positive about their care experience. For example, these children and young people felt able to make choices, had good support and were satisfied about much of their contact arrangements with family and friends. Indeed, there were 21 questions (in the Viewpoint LAC Review questionnaire) where the 'safe and settled group' gave significantly more positive responses than the*



*undifferentiated sample might suggest. These included issue around friends, doing hobbies, communication with social workers and foster carers, access to support around schoolwork and information needs.*

*Nearly 80% of the safe and settled group indicated that their foster carer/key worker encouraged their hobbies compared to 43% of the rest.'*

This finding may also support the importance the young people in the 'digital survey' attached to remaining in their placements.

The University of Bath report also identified concerns from young people about the need for more regular visits from social workers, as presented in the table below, which reports young people's responses to the Viewpoint LAC Review question: *'Do you see your social worker as often as you like?'*

<b><i>Response</i></b>	<b><i>Safe and settled</i></b>	<b><i>Less safe and settled</i></b>
<i>Yes definitely</i>	<i>55%</i>	<i>23%</i>
<i>Just about</i>	<i>21%</i>	<i>38%</i>
<i>Not really</i>	<i>13%</i>	<i>28%</i>
<i>Not at all</i>	<i>11%</i>	<i>11%</i>

'More contact with social workers' was also identified as helpful by the small number of young people who answered the 'digital questionnaire'.

## Part 2. Use of technology

Young people were asked about the devices they had access to at home. The responses for the two age groups are outlined in the table below:

	11 –15	17 - 21
Satellite/digital television	12	4
Fixed telephone line	11	1
Mobile phone	9	7
Games console	9	4
Desktop computer	9	4
Internet enabled mobile phone	5	3
Portable computer (laptop)	4	2
Television	0	3
Handheld computer	0	0

The responses suggest:

- Fewer young people in the oldest group, some of whom lived alone in the community, said they had access to digital television or a fixed telephone line. All of the oldest young people said they had a mobile phone, with a minority having internet access from the phone.
- Most young people said they made use of their mobile phone (12 in the 11 to 15 group; 7 in the 17 to 21 age group).<sup>2</sup>
- All age groups had access to desktop computers more than laptops, and also had access to games consoles. Young people aged 7 and 8 years said they had access to a desktop computer, which they used at least once a week.

Most young people in each age group said they used a computer at least once a week (10 in the 11 to 15 group, and 7 in the 17 to 21 age group), with 5 young people in each group saying they used the computer every day, or almost every day.

In relation to **training**, 9 young people in the 11 to 15 group, and 2 in the 17 to 21 group, said they had taught themselves to use the computer. Smaller numbers (3 in the 11 to 15 group; 4 in the 17 to 21 group) said they had received training, although in the older group, the young people said they had received training between 3 months and 3 years ago.

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<sup>2</sup> Note: two young people aged 8 years and 7 years did not have a mobile phone.

Similar findings were made by the research project, UK Children Go Online (UKCGO, 2005), which surveyed 1,511 9-19 year olds. The report found that **many young people had not received lessons on how to use the internet**, despite the stress laid on ICT in education policy. The research found that nearly one third (30%) of pupils reported having received no lessons at all on using the internet, although most have been taught something: 23% reported having received 'a lot' of lessons, 28% 'some' and 19% 'just one or two'.

The UKCGO report concluded that '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'.<sup>3</sup>

The Lincolnshire digital survey also asked young people about the computer related activities they had carried out. The results are presented in the table below.

	11 -15	17 – 21
Using copy and paste tools	12	6
Copying or moving a file or folder	10	6
Using basic formula in spreadsheets	10	5
Compressing files	4	4
Connecting and installing new devices	4	4
Handheld computer	0	0

In another Viewpoint survey for Connexions, in which 718 young people completed questionnaires, the following computer use was identified:

- Word (148)
- Internet (148)
- Email (77)
- Excel (62)
- Clip art (50)
- Games (48)

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<sup>3</sup> Livingstone, S. & Bober, M. (2005). *UK Children Go Online: Final Report of Key Project Findings*. London: LSE; Livingstone, S., Bober, M. & Helsper, E. (2005). *Inequalities and the Digital Divide in Children and Young People's Internet Use: Findings from the UK Children Go Online Project*. London: LSE.

## Internet access

Most, but not all, of the young people said they could access the internet where they lived (8 of the 11 to 15 age group; 5 of the 17 to 21 age group). Of the young people accessing the internet, the main access was with a desktop computer and most used the internet 'at least once a week'.

Of the young people:

- 11 young people in the 11 to 15 group accessed the internet with a desktop computer (4 also had laptop access).
- 4 young people in the 17 to 21 group accessed the internet with a desktop computer (1 also had laptop access).
- All of the young people in both groups had used the internet within the last 3 months.
- 6 young people in the 11 to 15 group said they used the internet 'every day or almost every day'.
- 4 young people in the 17 to 21 group said they used the internet 'every day or almost every day'.

For those in the 17 to 21 age group who said they could not access the internet, **cost** was cited as a reason ('equipment costs too high' and 'access costs too high').

The research project, UK Children Go Online (UKCGO), made similar findings in relation to age differences in internet access and factors affecting young people's access to the internet. The report found that the oldest (18-19 year olds) and youngest (9-11 year olds) children and young people were least likely to have access to the internet at home. Non-users were also found to be more likely to be the oldest age group.

The report found that frequency of use of the internet was associated with home access. This highlights the importance of ensuring young people have access to computers and the internet. The report also found that:

- For all ages, being a frequent user was also facilitated by home access. Only a few children, especially among the younger ones, managed to be frequent users if they relied on access only at school/college.
- Without access at home and/or school, children and young people hardly used the internet. Some frequent users seemed to find opportunities to use the internet in other locations, such as someone else's house for 9-17 year olds, the public library or an internet café for 18-19 year olds.
- More access locations were associated with more use for all age groups, though especially among older teens. Across all age groups, lack of access was the most important reason that prevented children and young

people from using the internet (more): 39% of 9-11 year olds, 42% of 12-15 year olds, 48% of 16-17 year olds, 57% of 18-19 year olds.<sup>4</sup>

In the Lincolnshire technology survey, all of the young people in the 17 to 21 group and 10 young people in the 11 to 15 group said they had **personal email addresses**. The two young people aged 7 and 8 years said they did not have an email address.

Three young people in the 17 to 21 group said they used the **Internet or Text Messaging** for dealing with public services, compared to only one in the 11 to 15 group. Seven young people in the 11 to 15 group said they would be interested in this. Where there were concerns about using the internet or text messaging to deal with public services, the numbers were small and the reasons cited were: services not being available on-line, concerns about data security or the additional costs.

Two other studies provide some evidence about the value young people attach to using computers and the internet to contact services. In one study (2008), commissioned by a voluntary organisation, a local authority looked at young people's participation in LAC Reviews, finding that 76% of young people said it was 'Very important' or 'Quite important' to attend LAC Reviews. The study also found that:

*'50% of young people said they felt 'uncomfortable about saying how they felt at the review'. These young people had an opportunity to use Viewpoint ACASI. 85% 'liked using the computer system' and 'would like to use it again', 77% said that they 'felt more confident than when they had used the paper questionnaire', and 77% selected using the computer as their preferred method of giving their views.'*

Another study by the Open University looked at the contribution of ACASI to the process of participation, particularly in LAC Reviews in two authorities. The study found that:

- *95% of the young people agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 'I enjoy using Viewpoint to record my views and feelings. When asked to give reasons for their responses, the young people said, 'better way of communicating', 'helps me discuss my feelings' and 'lets you write down stuff instead of talking face to face'.*
- *90% of the young people agreed or strongly agreed with the statement about Viewpoint ACASI, 'It helps me think more clearly about what I feel'.*

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<sup>4</sup> See previous footnote.

- *In reference to different methods of consultation, young people also made comments such as, 'it gives you more options to think about than the booklet'.*
- *93% of the young people agreed or strongly agreed with the statement about Viewpoint ACASI, 'It's a good way to get people to hear what I think'.*
- *Other advantages of ACASI digital technology commented on by the young people included, 'I can write down my thoughts and feelings better than I can say them' and 'because if you are shy in front of people and too scared to say what you feel'.*

In their responses to the digital questionnaire, the current internet activities recorded by young people are listed in the table below:

	11 –15	17 - 21
Using a search engine to find information	11	6
<b>Educational activities</b>	10	1
Sending and receiving emails	7	6
Playing or downloading games	7	3
Sending emails with attached files	6	6
Posting on chat rooms/newsgroups/discussion forums	6	4
Creating a web page	6	3
Finding information about goods and services	5	4
Social networking sites	5	5
Listening to web radio, watching web television	4	5
Downloading software	3	5
Using peer to peer file sharing for music, films	2	5
Telephoning over the internet	1	3
Seeking health related information	1	2
Reading newspapers magazines online	0	3

The use of the internet for **educational activities**, highlighted particularly for the number of responses in the 11 to 15 age group, has also emerged in other surveys of young people.

In surveys for Connexions Services by the Viewpoint Organisation, young people (n =718) report that they use computers for:

- Schoolwork and homework (78%).
- To find information (53%).
- Games (49%).

- Email (31%).
- Chat rooms (22%).
- Shopping (8%).

The research project, UK Children Go Online (UKCGO), made similar findings in relation to the interest of young people aged 12 to 17 years in the educational benefits of technology, based on the different activities they undertook at different ages. The research found that:

- The oldest age group (18-19 years) would download music (57%), get information for other things not related to school (45%), and send/receive emails (49%). They were the least interested in games.
- The middle age group (12-17 years) would use the internet for school work (40%) and exam revision sites (33%), play games (48%) and also download music (45%).
- The majority (62%) of the 9-11 year olds would play games if they used the internet (more often). Using the internet for school work came second (54%), and creative uses, such as making a drawing or a story, which are not as popular with the other age groups, came third (40%).

The Department for Education and Skills (DfES, 2005) has also reported on research into the benefits of ICT use in schools. This use is shown to have a positive effect on attainment:

- At GCSE level effect equivalent to ½ a grade
- At Key Stage 2 and 3 equivalent to an extra term

This DfES research also reported that students with online access:

- Are more confident.
- Produce better researched, more effective and well-presented projects.<sup>5</sup>

Interestingly this research mirrors the findings of the much smaller study on young people's participation in LAC reviews (reported above). The young people reported that they felt more confident (having used a computer for their review) than when they had used the paper questionnaire.

**Young people were also asked to identify from a list the uses of technology they would find useful.** The results are presented in the table below.

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<sup>5</sup> Valentine, G. & Pattie, C. (2005). *Children and Young People's Home Use of ICT for Educational Purposes: The Impact on Attainment at Key Stages 1-4*. London: DfES.

	11 –15	17 - 21
An email address that people could use to contact you	12	6
An online life scrap book to store photos, memories	9	6
Access to music mixing activities and equipment	9	5
A secure confidential website where you can meet with friends, get help with homework, access advice and information	9	3
Access to digital photography activities and equipment	8	5
Confidential and secure access to advice and counselling on personal issues via the internet	8	4
Access to organised group gaming activities using different consoles and games	8	2
Access to a laptop, or a computer and the Internet	7	4
Access to video making activities and equipment	7	4
Out of school access to a tutor to support homework via the internet or text messaging	7	3
A confidential helpline to report phone, text or email any problems with services e.g. teaching/housing	4	3
Confidential and secure access to advice and counselling on personal issues via text messaging	2	5

In summary, the uses of technology identified by young people as useful were:

- Computers, internet access and email addresses were seen as useful and were mainly available to these young people.
- Online scrapbooks to store photos and memories were also seen as valuable. This request is confirmed by a study carried out by University of Bath on data collected by 24 authorities from young people using Viewpoint ACASI for their LAC reviews. Respondents were asked if they had ‘a life story book or information about people you know?’ Just over a third indicated that they had ‘As much as I like’ (37%), a quarter indicated that they had ‘Some but would like more’ (26%) and a third indicated ‘Not at all’.

A subsidiary open question was used to find out from the two thirds who did not have ‘As much as I like’ what further information they would like.



Those indicating that they wanted more information suggested a range of areas, particularly:

- *Birth.*
  - *Early life, information on siblings, nephews and grandparents.*
  - *Photographs and information on their early experiences of care.*
  - *Photographs and pictures were highly valued.*
  - *Assistance in filling in gaps in memory is important.*
  - *'About when I was born' (M, 10-14).*
  - *'To know about the places I have lived' (F, 10-14).*
  - *'What carers (placements) I went into and what they were like when I first came into care and where I was living' (F, 10-14).*
  - *'What I was like when I was small and why I came into care' (F, 10-14).*
- Access to advice and counselling on personal issues is seen as useful. Such a service is available from the NSPCC, and access could be promoted with the availability of computers and the internet.
  - Young people's interest in education is further highlighted by their identification of internet or text access to a tutor for homework support. This is also reflected in the recorded usefulness of a confidential website for help with homework, advice and for meeting friends.
  - Access to equipment and activities to support music mixing and digital photography is also highlighted.

## **Conclusion**

The North Lincolnshire study is a small sample of young people, and may not be representative of the population of young people in care and care leavers. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that only about three quarters of the young people responding to this survey said they had a computer at home or said they could access the internet where they lived. So some young people do not have these resources and will not benefit from any innovative developments.

This is an important issue as there is evidence from this report about the benefits of the use of existing technologies and the use made of them by young people. In the North Lincolnshire group, and in the other studies, young people value the educational benefits that computers can bring. Young people make regular use of computers but by their report are largely self-taught.

The young people have identified a number of activities that would be helpful to them and where technology could be useful. Some of the technology identified as useful already exists, and could be made available to young people. Other areas are identified that would be innovative and valuable.