

National report for the UK

By Leslie Haddon and Sonia Livingstone

Contribution to the European report:

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Universities and Disciplines

There are approximately 330 higher education institutions. UCAS is the body that handles all higher education applications for the UK and in 2006 there were 327 participating bodies (this has risen by about 2 a year for the past few years). However, not all of these will be universities if we adopt the criterion of whether they offer degrees. If you search UCAS, 84 universities offer degrees in these subjects. Judging from the list 'media studies' is the slightly more common name, but if you search for media studies you will be offered communication studies courses as well and vice versa. IT and New media studies do exist but it is difficult to specify numbers because of the variety of titles of courses and you cannot always be sure what is being taught under these headings (i.e. whether the social dimensions of ICTs are covered). But there are a number of course on multimedia, a few on digital media, a few on informatics, and quite a number on 'information technology' but those might be technically oriented. Some examples of new Media degree courses include the University of Wales, (New Media Publishing), Lancaster (New Media and Audio Visual Cultures), University of Luton (MA in Media, Culture and Technology) and the LSE (MSc in Communication, Information and Society).

National Data Collected

There is a long tradition of collecting official statistics and every year there are two large survey: the General Household Survey (approx. 8600 households) and the Family Expenditure Survey (approx 5600 households). These are organised by an independent body, the Office for National Statistics. The GHS¹ has some household and individual data relating to the Internet e.g. about Internet access. The FES² has figures for Internet subscriptions (but the data available online are old: 2001).

Of more relevance, the ONS also has a smaller Omnibus³ survey (1800) that also has household and individual data, with a range of questions about the Internet:

- Proportion of households with Internet access
- Access from the home vs other places
- Access by mobile devices
- Broadband access
- Reasons for not having broadband
- Individual's frequency of use
- Individual's activities on the Internet
- Where/how adults learnt Computer and Internet skills
- Reasons for not using the Internet
- Experience of viruses
- How often users made back-ups
- Purchases online
- Purchases downloaded

In the GHS, FES and Omnibus surveys ONS get data from all household members over 16. In their published tables they usually combine figures to compare the age group 16-24 with

¹ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=5672>

² <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Expodata/Spreadsheets/D5595.xls>

³ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/inta0807.pdf>

other age groups. But in principle they have separate data on 16 and 17 year olds. Strictly speaking the ONS is a non-Governmental body, but all its work (including the 10 yearly census, is for the Government. The Oxford Internet Institute, the UK partner in the World Internet Project, conducts its Oxis survey every two years, so data exists for 2003, 2005 and 2007⁴. Interviews are conducted with one person in a household aged 14 or over. Hence the sample includes 14,15,16 and 17 year olds, but in their actual report data for these is never shown separately

Institutional processes in applying to conduct research

There are no regulations on what cannot be researched. All proposals need to be approved by a University ethics committee. Usually the head of department and the legal representative of the university (e.g. financial head) have to approve the project.

Pressures to conduct research

There is a pressure on university employees to do research. There are regular Research Assessment Exercises (RAE) that evaluate universities, and how well they do has implications for the core funding of the universities. The exercise evaluates the quality of research and the esteem in which it is held. In the social sciences the research councils strongly encourage universities to cooperate with industries. In fact, on application forms there is a section of 'cooperation with users', which can mean the Government, NGOs but also industry.

Factors influencing the orientation of research

The industry often approaches academics to conduct research. For example, drawing on the experiences of one of the authors of this national report (Leslie Haddon), the Media Studies Department at Sussex University conducted research for the cable company Telewest in 1995 and for NCR in 1996. Digital World Research Centre at Surrey University was originally funded to do research for the mobile phone companies and later did several projects for Vodafone (in which the author was involved). Other companies known to collaborate with academia include British Telecom, T-Mobile, Microsoft, Hewlett Packard and Nokia. Trade Associations (e.g. UTMS forum, for the mobile phone industry) also sponsor research. Some makers of computers sponsor research in education departments that promote technology in education. Government ministries also commission research. In this field the two main ones would be BECTA and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSf, ex-DfES). Ofcom, the regulator, also commissions research. In terms of research councils inviting universities to do research, the first of the programmes where funding was specifically allocated for research on ICTs was PICT (Programme for Information and Communication Technologies). This was followed by the Virtual Society? Programme and then the eSociety Programme. The Digital World Research Centre in the UK makes research proposals to the industry regularly, as do other institutes within universities such as SPRU at Sussex University, PREST in Manchester University, Chimera at the University of Essex and the Oxford Institute at Oxford University. These institutes survive by winning research contracts.

National Research Traditions

In the UK there was a long reformist tradition searching for evidence of social problems and social issues, e.g. trying to measure poverty in the UK in the late 19th Century before it was done in many other countries. Hence, we have a research tradition, and even an academic discipline called 'Social Administration', which has collected various statistics for many years. NGOs campaign for reforms also contribute to this tradition of research (one of the highest profile ones for commissioning research being the Joseph Rowntree Foundation). Qualitative research is well established partly because of the strong anthropological tradition, which itself relates to the fact that Britain had an Empire (hence the British Government funded some anthropological studies of the colonies). This entered sociology in 1950s through a number of community studies (e.g. of rural areas, but also of urban communities such as East London)

⁴ <http://www.oii.ox.ac.uk/microsites/oxis/> - the 2007 survey covered 2350 respondents.

that started in the 1950s. Feminist sociology and psychology later also contributed substantially to this qualitative tradition, as did cultural studies. The first study of TV was that of Himmelweit in 1958 (Television and the Child) followed by Belson in 1960s. There was nothing earlier on radio except for a project called Mass Observation. Therefore research on TV started as television first reached a mass market. As in other European countries, there was very little research on telecoms while it was organised by engineers and was part of the Post Office. When Telecoms was separated, liberalised and then privatised in the form of British Telecom, the firm decided that it needed to be more market orientated and so set up a system for liaising with universities. Leslie Haddon, was involved in some of this early work in the early 1990s. As in some other European countries, BT later developed a department of social scientists (BTExact) to conduct research. This has subsequently become part of the University of Essex, but it still conducts research for BT. The mobile phone companies (e.g. T-Mobile, Vodafone) also commission research on communication. One of the earliest studies on mobile use, before a mass market developed, was by Wood 1992 and in the mid-90s there was one at the Digital World Research Centre, Surrey University, called STEMPEC.

EURESCOM P-903 conducted a large multi-country quantitative and qualitative study of on the mobile phone and the Internet in 2001 (countries covered in that study were Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Norway, Spain, the Netherlands, the UK (Leslie Haddon was the UK representative, not BT)

The UK (represented by BTExact) lead the EC funded eLiving project that also collected 2 years of longitudinal data on these technologies. (Bulgaria, Israel, Italy Norway, the UK) (Leslie Haddon was on the steering committee)

Haddon organised a five-country⁵ qualitative study of middle-class use and non-use of the Internet for NCR study in 1996. At that time there were a few agencies collecting statistics about take up of the Internet. Livingstone organised the regulator and industry funded project Young People and New Media, which ran from 1995-99. The survey collected data on Internet use amongst that on other media use in 1997 in collaboration with parallel surveys in 11 European countries

There was a separate tradition of researching media in classrooms, or media used for educational purposes. This had involved research on TV and later computers, so it is probable that equivalent research existed concerning the Internet when it first entered classrooms. The National Grid for Learning, the Government policy to introduce the Internet into schools, appears in 1997, so there is probably research prior to this. The Institute of Education has led in this field

Sources of Funding for Research

Funding is largely from governments and research councils although companies and NGOs (e.g. Rowntree) also fund research. Commercial companies also fund research (see above) but usually there is an embargo before publishing the results in the public domain. For example, in the case of the Telewest and NCR studies, this was 6 months; in the case of a study for BT by Sonia Livingstone, the embargo was 12 months. Sometimes companies in other countries fund research in the UK. For example, Telecom Italia funded a five-country⁶ survey of telecoms use. (Leslie Haddon was the UK representative⁷).

For work published between 2000 and 2007 we found nearly 41 reports in the UK (at this stage). These are all single country studies, but there are also a further 7 multi-country studies that include the UK.

Most of the projects identified have a single funding source, although there are some cases of joint funding. For example, 'UK Children Go Online' was mainly research council (ESRC) funded, but included collaboration with commercial companies and charities. There have also

⁵ Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, the UK

⁶ France, Germany, Italy, Spain, the UK

⁷ This was published as Fortunati, L (Ed.) (1998) *Telecomunicando in Europa*, Franco Angeli, Milano.

been some partnerships between child protection charities and commerce: for example, the supermarket Tesco funded a study in which the charity NCH (National Children's Homes) was the lead organisation. Commercial companies and the national research council (ESRC) are most commonly the main funders in these joint collaborations.

For projects with a single funder, the most common sources of funding are the national research council, commercial companies (e.g. MSN, PC World) and charities (e.g. NCH, ChildLine, Banardos the NSPCC and Children International) – these accounted for 15 of the studies. The industry regulator, Ofcom, has funded a few studies (e.g. Media Literacy) as have Government departments such as the DfES (Department for Education and Science), for example. Research institutes (e.g. the Trust for the Study of Adolescence) have conducted some research, and there are some partly funded by the media industry in partnership with regulators, involving the BBC and the Broadcasting Standards Commission), trade association such as the Internet Service Providers' Association and the EC.

In sum, the national research council (ESRC) has been a leading funder for research in this area. There is also a considerable amount of research from commercial bodies and children's charities, more than seems common in other European countries. The establishment of the Home Office Task Force for Child Protection on the Internet, a unique body in Europe, has been useful in linking agencies and giving NGOs a stronger lobbying power than in some countries. The resulting visibility of risk issues in particular has contributed to the number of studies that has taken place in this field.

Political initiatives influencing research

There was a concern about child abuse images in 1994/5 and this lobbying originally led to the setting up of the IWF in 1996. 'Stranger danger' in Chatrooms was also an early risk that was discussed and was the basis for the report *ChatWise/Streetwise* in 2001. This was produced by a consortium of industry, charities and the Government. It led to Home Office Task Force in 2001. Following on from this, CEOP (the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Agency) was launched in 2006 as a new Government-sponsored multi-agency body, managed by the police, and involving academics, industry, children's charities etc in a multi-stakeholder collaboration that seems unique in Europe. CEOP commissions some research.

The *Byron Review* (2008) arose through the Prime Minister asking for an independent review of the risks children face from the Internet and video games. This review process also included commissioning some new research. The Communications Act 2003 had been preceded by a Green (consultation) paper in 1997. This is when the Government decided not to regulate the Internet but to leave it to self-regulation by industry. To inform guidelines on film and videogame regulation the BBFC regularly commissions research, as does the regulator Ofcom. To inform its proposal for the Extreme Pornography Act the Home office commissioned a literature review. The original legal principle was that what is illegal offline is illegal online and therefore no special laws were needed relating specifically to the Internet. The appearance of grooming children online change this and led to the Sexual Offences Act 2003. It is not known if this led to research. In 1997 the *National Grid for Learning* was launched to get the Internet into all schools by 2002 – this may well have helped to frame some of the educational related research on the Internet. Becta (British Educational and Communication Technology Association), which advises schools on Internet safety, produced the two earliest large surveys of children's Internet use in 2001 and 2002. The British Educational and Communication Technology Association (Becta) organised internet training for teachers. Becta also conducted nation-wide surveys of school internet use in 2001 and 2002, The Institute of Education plays a major role in teacher training. In 2006-2007 the mobile operators in Europe were in negotiation with the EC about whether mobile phones should be regulated or self-regulated, especially as children could get access to the Internet online. There were also concerns about such issues as cyberbullying. Vodafone UK led the mobile operators and its Corporate Responsibility department commissioned a review of existing evidence relating to these issues and a study of children's use of the mobile phone so that, if necessary, it would have independent evidence in its deadlines with the EC. These were conducted by one of the authors of this report, Leslie Haddon. There was a consultation

document in 2007 – Children’s Safety and Online Technologies? It is not known if this led to research. Finally, Ofcom, the regulator, has commissioned literature reviews of children’s and adults’ media literacy research, major national audits of children’s and adults’ levels of media literacy – since Ofcom is charged with developing media literacy.

The Influence of media coverage, events and lobbies on research

The media picked up on the phenomenon of happy-slapping. Some NGOs commission research probably followed from this (e.g. the NCH survey). Certainly one cyberbullying study was commission by an NGO. Apart from lobbying, a range of NGOs also conduct research. The children’s charities are active in this area and regularly commission new research to draw attention to key challenges to children’s safety from internet/mobile technologies – examples include the recent bullying survey, the activities of Childnet International, Barnardo’s research on child victims of online grooming, etc. The Byron Review refers to some of the on-going concern about the effects of new media, which forms part of the context in which this review was commissioned. And that included killings in the UK (James Bulger, in 1993) and in the US (the Columbine School Massacre, in 1999).

Particular debates and concerns about children

Two of the best known academic publications on the concern around commercialisation of childhood are Buckingham ‘After the Death of Childhood’⁸; Buckingham and Bragg ‘Sex and the media’. The National Consumer Association funded research on children’s awareness of commercialisation on the Internet - in its report ‘Fair Game’⁹ (2008) . Currently the DCSF has commissioned of review of commercialism on the Internet and children – this is now underway. There is some material on children’s rights (coming from those working in the sociology of childhood and social policy) but it does not have a high visibility. There is more on participation in civil life, trying to get children involved politically and as citizens (e.g. Ruth Lister, Stephan Coleman, Brian Loader). There is a huge concern around public spaces being unsafe. This relates to children’s greater absence from unsupervised public spaces (Livingstone, 2002).ⁱ The related practice of children socialising with peers in their home has been identified as Bedroom Culture’.

In the last decade or two has also seen the process whereby there has been a growing concern for children’s safety in public spaces. The UK “Young People, New Media” study of children and ICTs described how parents felt under pressure to keep their children indoors (Livingstone and Bovillⁱⁱ, 1999; Livingstone 2002).

Case Studies

In 2003 Sonia Livingstone published a literature review that found very little research on children and the Internet. When the eSociety Programme was announced she decided to bid for the project. The need for research was obvious. The age group included 9-19- year-olds. The main tool was a survey, which is not readily administered to younger children. 17-19 year olds were included to capture the post-school transition to adulthood. The ambition was to cover all aspects of Internet use, though methodologically it was difficult to survey responses to particular contents. The project was funded by the ESRC e-Society Programme. Co-funding from the regulator and industry sources achieved a buy-in to the findings from these sectors.

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

ⁱⁱ Livingstone, S. and Bovill, M. (1999), *Young People, New Media*, London: London School of Economics.

⁸ Buckingham, D. 2000, *After the Death of Childhood: Growing up in the Age of Electronic Media*, Polity Press, Cambridge.

⁹ Fielder, A., Gardner, W., Nairn, A. And Pitt, J. (2008) *Fair game? Assessing commercial activity on children’s favourite websites and online environments*, National Consumer Association, London.