

Parental attitudes towards home PCs as a learning tool will enhance the success of the Home Access Programme

Microsoft survey demonstrates the importance of a connected approach to learning, with responsibilities of both teachers and parents as learning spreads beyond the classroom

LONDON – 13 January 2010 – Microsoft has today released the findings of a recently-commissioned survey that highlights the importance of parental engagement alongside getting PCs into the hands of children that currently do not have computers at home. The study explored the attitudes of parents of secondary school age children (11-18 year olds) across the UK and revealed that making IT in education a success is more than just about *access* to the right technology. In order for children to truly benefit, there must be parental understanding of PCs as a learning resource as well as effective parental engagement.

512 parents participated in the research, conducted in December 2009 and released today. The study shows that 9 of 10 children use their home computers at least once a week for educational reasons – the same percentage as those who use a school computer for study during the same period of time. The survey also found that 4 out of 10 children use their home computers for study every day, which is more than the 3 out of 10 who use computers daily at school.

“Children today grow up with PCs at school so are much more tech savvy than previous generations, where computer skills would traditionally have been learnt in the workplace or potentially higher education only. So for many parents, the role of PCs in education remains obscure,” said Ray Fleming, Education Marketing Manager for Microsoft UK.

Despite this generation gap, according to the Microsoft study, almost all parents (97%) believe computers have at least some value for their child’s learning and 4 out of 10 describe it as ‘crucial’. The home computer is highly valued with 82% of parents thinking that their child’s computer at home is better than the one at school.

Despite parents enthusiasm for computers (99% of parents enjoy using a computer, with one fifth classing it as their favourite pastime), many are worried about their own IT skills and feel it is their responsibility as parents to learn about technology. They want to protect their children and ensure that they are getting what they need from IT. According to the survey, nearly a half of the men asked think that the IT knowledge gap between themselves and their children is harmful to their learning development, compared to a third of women asked the same question.

Concerns about the dangers of the internet are also still top of mind for parents and a key driver of their involvement with their children’s IT activities. Monitoring web use is a recognised responsibility of the parent with 58% being worried about what their children are doing on the internet and 63% stating they need to improve their knowledge to help supervise activities online. Younger parents, despite typically having greater levels of expertise and knowledge of IT and the internet also worry more about their children online. 64% of under 34s with children compared to only 43% of over 55s are concerned about what their children are doing online.

As might be expected, children from higher household income families (£50k+) are using computers for study marginally more than the less well off (81% compared to 72%). Less well off parents worry more about the internet, with 70% of parents with household income of less than £20k worrying what their children are doing online compared to 51% of those who have a household income over £50k. This again is likely to come back to a lack of knowledge.

“Due to the way that children are using PCs, there is an increasing blurring between learning-time and leisure-time and so computers in the home are becoming as important as those in the classroom,” added Fleming. “The way that students are consuming information and engaging with each other and their teachers is constantly changing, as is the way that they learn and are motivated. There is a need for parents as well as teachers to adapt to this changing behaviour through the use of technology and programmes like Home Access. Getting parents aren’t on board, with the right skill-set to support and engage with their children effectively at home, is essential.”

“At Microsoft we keep the long term goal in mind and can see the wider economic benefits of offering all children in the UK the right access and support when it comes to IT in their development. Martha Lane Fox, the UK’s Champion for Digital Inclusion, worked with Price Waterhouse Coopers recently and found that people with good ICT skills earn between 3% and 10% more than those without. Furthermore, the total potential economic benefit from getting everyone in the UK online is estimated to be in excess of £22 billion yet a staggering 10.2 million adults (21% of the UK adult population) have never accessed the internet. It is clear that access to a PC at both school and home, along with effective parental engagement to encourage learning online will be critical to our children’s success and even to the future of our economy.”

Recent findings by Becta, the government agency responsible for ICT in education, corroborate the findings of this survey. According to Becta, access to technology at home benefits learners by; improving learning and achievement, motivating and engaging children, encouraging independence and creativity, connecting learning at school and at home and helping parents and carers get more involved.

“Microsoft fully supports the Government’s Home Access Programme and welcomes the recognition that parents, students and teachers all have a part to play in education. We are confident that Microsoft’s technologies will play a large part in this process and can help make home access a reality for all,” said Fleming.

“There seems to be a common misconception that children only use their computers at home to play games or connect to social networks. However, our research seems to suggest that instead the connection gap between the home PC and schoolwork comes not from students but from the parents who are using home PCs for social networking and uploading photos and videos. The culture of learning is changing and parents need to keep up and I can imagine across the country kids are saying, “Get off Facebook, Dad, I need to finish my homework!”

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