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# Net Children Go Mobile

UK children's experience of smartphones  
and tablets:  
Perspectives from children, parents  
and teachers

Leslie Haddon & Jane Vincent



Qualitative findings  
Report

May 2015



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Leslie Haddon and Jane Vincent

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# Executive summary

After carrying out a quantitative survey, the Net Children Go Mobile project conducted a qualitative study of parents', teachers' and children's perspectives on children's use of smartphones and tablets. That study took place in nine European countries and this present report focuses on the UK findings.

## Parents

One main aim of this research was to investigate parents' evaluations of what role smartphones and tablets might have in their children's lives, what aspects captured their attention, in order to understand how and why they mediate children's experiences of these portable devices.

Smartphones are expensive items for children to carry around, more than traditional mobile phones, which if used in certain ways, could lead to high bills. No wonder that many parents discuss whether their feel their children are responsible enough to take care of smartphones, and subsequently advise children to avoid incurring high costs, requiring parental permission for younger children before they can buy items like games.

The parents interviewed saw online risks as being an issue for internet use general rather than being particular to these portable technologies. However, the main concern about the potentially greater access through smartphones and tablets was that it might lead to more overall screen time, upsetting the balance of activities that parents wanted their children to experience. In this respect a number of parents referred to their own childhood and memories of going out to play, (although smartphones and tablets aside this may be becoming less common with broader trend towards children spending more time at home in their 'bedroom culture').

A related, but distinct, anxiety about children's use of smartphones was that they might contribute to their children becoming less sociable offline, assuming, as in some academic debates, that mediated communication is not as good face to face socialising. Hence some parents had a particular negative reaction to the vision of children sitting together looking at screens, not talking to each other, even if they may be communicating online. Reflecting this as well as apprehensions about screen time generally, much mediation of smartphones and tablets involved limiting time spent on these screens, sometimes encouraging alternative activities.

Some parents felt that smartphones in particular undermined their ability to monitor their children's internet use, compared to online access via a PC, because smartphones were more personal device. However, the picture is not so clear-cut, as some parents felt they knew more about their children's internet use through observing casually the screens of their children's tablets or else the parents had developed new forms of control, such as requiring children to hand in devices at night. Given eSafety advice to parents to pay attention to their children's activities online, it is perhaps not surprising that some parents feel apprehensive about losing this ability, especially with regard to older children. But, arguably, any decline in monitoring reflects a broader trend over years as children had gain certain forms of privacy from parents, as in their private times in bedrooms.

Alongside worries about screen time, sociability and occasional trivialising what children do online from their portable devices, there were more positive parental evaluations. For example, some noted these devices could lead their children to make some social contact that might not have existed before, they were a source of information and they helped to create more peer awareness. But to put such changes into context, some parents also noted that use of these new technologies involved continuities with what previous generations of children had done before, reflecting the texting practices of a slightly older generation of children or many young people's immersion in 1980s games and home computers when the parents themselves had been children.

## Teachers

The Net Children Go Mobile survey had shown that there were different policies in different countries regarding smartphone use in schools. In the UK such policies are made at the school level, and it appears that often use of smartphones in general is banned on school premises. One key aim here is to understand the basis for that decision.

Students themselves appreciated that the use of smartphones in lessons could be distractive and disruptive. Although in principle the mobile internet on smartphones could be used constructively in lessons, on the whole they were not perceived by teachers as having any educational value – a theme also reflected in many teacher comments in the other European countries. In this respect the teachers interviewed in the UK saw the tablet has having more educational potential, but one key barrier to its use was that it would not be fair to allow use of own personal device unless tablets could be offered by the school to all students.

Reasons given for banning the use of smartphones outside of lessons, i.e. in breaks, in part reflected practical problems associated with school's potentially being seen as responsible if the devices were stolen or lost, and dealing with the affected child. But another theme raised as regards young children was that, like parents, some teachers were also concerned about the perceived antisocial nature of smartphones, given the broader education agenda to foster social skills in school.

## Children

One claim about the smartphones in particular is that they increase anytime/anywhere internet access by virtue of being always 'at hand'. The first goal in this section is to qualify this assumption, especially for younger children but to some extent for older ones too. In practice adults face social constraints on their use of technologies, but this even more true for children. This is because of the power of adults to influence, usually restrict, children's use and, as we have seen, because both

parents and teachers have particular worries about the effects of smartphone use by children.

First, the sheer expense of smartphones means that there are pressures on children to be careful and, for example, not use the phones in certain social spaces. Parental fears about high running costs, mean that children often monitor and sometimes ration their own use, e.g. not using some applications because they might go over their allowed budget. Children face time constraints given many parents' efforts to limit their screen time. And there are spatial limitations, as seen when use is banned in schools.

In addition, any assumption about children embracing smartphones and tablets and using them at every opportunity also needs some correction. True, children are generally positive about the devices and some now feels they could not do without their smartphones. But they also make critical judgements about when they are useful and when other devices are better suited to certain purposes (e.g. because of larger screens, keyboards). This reminds us that even for children use of the latest technologies does not replace all that has gone before but rather smartphones and tablets have to fit in with the devices that children already have. In addition, younger children use of smartphone is quite limited, with the range of activities only expanding as they grow older.

The children often referred to how changes in their experiences accompanying the arrival of smartphones related mainly to communications. Some thought that they personally communicated more because of the various channels offered by the devices, including access to social networking sites. Many certainly thought that it had led to more peer communication in general. The downside was that this generated a good deal of 'noise', in terms of distracting communication, some of which they considered to be trivial. It could be too tempting to reply to communications quickly, giving their response less preparation. And some children, like adults, complained of the antisocial behaviour of peers using their devices when physically present in peer gathering. Partly reflecting peer pressures to check messages, a few also acknowledged the beginnings of their own

'excessive use'.

On the whole, children, like the parents, did not dwell much upon specific risks associated with smartphones and tablets, but when they talked about online risks they thought about the internet in general. While they speculated about some risks, e.g. whether smartphones might lead to more cyberbullying, the one area that did strike a chord was identity theft. In particular, this involved cases where peers had taken interviewees' smartphones and sent messages to friends, pretending to be the victims, and so damaging their reputations

# 1 Introduction

The main focus of this report is on UK children's experience of mobile media and the mobile internet, with an emphasis on smartphones and tablets. Ultimately the project is interested in risk and safety issues, but to contextualise this, the report also considers children's adoption and use of these devices and the wider consequences that follow. The overall research involved a qualitative study of children, their parents, teachers and others working with young people in nine European countries: Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Portugal Romania, Spain and the UK. This report focuses specifically on the UK data.

The report builds on a number of related previous studies. The first is the quantitative survey conducted by Net Children Go Mobile (Mascheroni & Ólafsson, 2014), which covered patterns of smartphone and tablet use, as well as risk issues. The current qualitative study reported here provides an opportunity to reflect on some of the statistics and explore further some of the patterns identified through in-depth interviews where children, parents and others could explain their perspectives and decisions. The second report of relevance to the current one is the qualitative study conducted by the EU Kids Online network (Smahel & Wright, 2014). The specific UK findings from that project were also reported (Haddon and Livingstone, 2014). It is worth adding that all the national teams in Net Children Go Mobile also took part in the EU Kids Online project generally, and many also took part in that EU Kids Online qualitative study. Hence this is very much a sister project, often noting what difference mobile internet access makes compared to the general internet access examined in the EU Kids Online study. The EU Kids Online project also conducted a European survey (Livingstone et al, 2011), with a separate UK report (Livingstone et al, 2010). At times there are also references in the current report to these findings in order to provide more contextual information.

There are some differences from the previous EU

Kids Online qualitative research. In general there is still only a limited amount of research on smartphones (Verkasalo et al., 2010; Lee, 2013), even less on smartphones and children (Bertel, 2013) and little on tablets (Park, 2013). It was therefore important to spend more time in the Net Children Go Mobile project establishing how children acquire and use these devices and why those patterns exist, since it might have repercussions for risk and safety issues. Based on a similar rationale, we also asked more general questions about what difference these devices, and this mobile internet, makes in young people's lives, and how they (and adults) evaluate those changes. The aim is to put the discussion of risks and safety into a broader perspective, for example, to see what issues are problematic for parents, teachers and children and how that compares to their evaluation of areas of risk identified elsewhere (Livingstone et al., 2012).

## 1.1 Methodology

As noted, the present report looks specifically at the experiences of the UK children who took part in that wider Net Children Go Mobile European project. Interviews and focus groups were used to collect children's data.

The interview schedule for the research was tested in all participating countries. The European pilots indicated that the interview schedule was generally sound although some alterations were made to it in the light of the pilot feedback. Since there was a lack of research on children, smartphones and tablets, more of the Net Children Go Mobile interview was spent finding out the role that these technologies played in everyday life, compared to the EU Kids Online qualitative research. In addition, partly to develop rapport, the Net Children Go Mobile interviews with children in focus groups started with an exercise whereby individual children wrote down good and bad things about smartphones and tablets and then explained these.

In the UK the main interviews took place between January and September 2014. The original aim was to conduct interviews with two boys and two girls

from each age group (9-10, 11-13, 14-16), and hold one boys' and one girls' focus group from each of the three age bands. It proved difficult to recruit older girls through schools, so three pairs of 14-16 year old girls were interviewed in a home setting. Most focus groups consisted of 3-4 children, the exception being the six 14-16 year old boys. The choice of which children were free to be interviewed in schools often depended on the teachers who acted as intermediaries, but overall this process produced a range of children with different socio-demographic backgrounds and educational capabilities. A total of 19 boys and 19 girls (including the pilot) took part in the research. The interviews, conducted by the authors, were fully transcribed for the present report.

In addition to children, the aim had been to conduct focus groups with parents, teachers, and others working with children (e.g. youth workers, sports coaches). Again, there were some recruitment problems and as in other countries, individual interviews were sometimes conducted where a focus group could not be assembled. The end result was three focus groups with parents, two with parents of mainly 11-13 year olds (4 people and 6 people) and one with parents of mainly 14-16 year olds (7 people), although some parents had children in both age groups. There were two individual interviews with the parents of a 9-10 year old and 14-16 year old. There were two focus groups with teachers one from a primary school (7 teachers), one from a secondary school (6 teachers). And there was one focus group with others working with children (4 people). Note that parents of children in some age groups were sometimes also parents of children of another age group. Meanwhile some teachers and others working with children were also parents, and so sometimes spoke in that capacity. A total of 30 adults took part in the research, the majority being female (25).

Since the UK research was part of a wider European project it followed the same procedures as in the other participating countries. Each point discussed in the interview was summarised in a comment box, and all the comments from the interview were imported into an Excel file. Here they received a secondary level of coding so that for each point

made by a child it was clear whether and what ICTs were involved, whether and what risks were involved, who was being discussed, whether the theme was about activities, communication, mediation of some kind, etc. The coding meant that it was possible to search the Excel sheets by various criteria, whether looking into the adoption of the technologies, specific risks forms of adult mediation of children's internet experiences (See Annex 1).

Parallel to this, the main points for translation that related to previous project-wide discussions of the whole area were marked and collated. In the other countries these observations by children were translated into English to make them accessible to all the other researchers when collectively writing the pan-European report. In the UK, they were simply collated in the original English. When conducting the analysis, these points for translation often became the basis for the main quotations in this report, either because they summarised certain issues (more succinctly than some of the other children), captured ambivalences or demonstrated a theme well.

The points for translation were used in conjunction with searches of the Excel sheet. The latter aimed to capture overall tendencies within the sample, the range of experiences and diverse examples of the same theme. When children are cited but not directly quoted, the material often comes from this second strand of analysis involving an overview of the interview material on any particular topic.

The whole procedure had the effect that some children are quoted more, often reflecting the fact that they are either more articulate in explicating an emerging theme, more reflective or have more of certain kinds of experience. However, the overall content and conclusions of this report fully reflect the range and diversity of opinions and experiences expressed by all children interviewed in the project.

# 2 Parents

## 2.1 Parental concerns about and evaluations of smartphones and tablets

### 2.1.1 Origins of parental concerns

For decades there has been a concern among adults that children's involvement with certain technologies, nowadays called information and communication technologies (ICTs), takes time away from doing other things. This can be seen in concerns originating in the 1950s about children's television viewing, the home computer use, interactive games playing and more recently going online (Haddon, 2004). It is not that that these ICTs are all simply regarded as bad – in general parents are positive about the internet, for example, and appreciate their children's interest in being entertained through a variety of technologies (Vincent 2015). But **the concern is usually about finding a balance between activities, that children should not be engaged with whatever ICT 'too much', and that it can take time away from study, from other (offline) creative activities in life**, from sport, from simply 'going out' and especially from socialising. **Such observations about ICTs in general or the internet more specifically were repeated in the interviews in this study**, as when Dierdre (mother of an 11-13 year old) noted that nowadays younger children have not had the chance to develop social skills because ICTs influences their lives so much.

**These long standing concerns existed when today's parents and even their parents**, if we consider television (Winn, 1977), **were themselves children** and they have carried over to the new portable technologies like smartphones and tablets. It underlies Jeanette's explanation of why she did not allow her children to have a tablet.

Jeanette: *I was already worried about the amount of time they were spending on screens, and just to introduce another one that could be sneaked up to the bedroom or whatever, I just didn't see the need*

*for it.*

(Mother of an 11-13 year old)

Below Nick talked about how his daughter's friends all had iPads whereas he was wary of getting one for his daughter. In this example he described how he encouraged other activities (in this case probably seen as more 'wholesome'), but afterwards it was fine with him that the children can also engage with their ICTs, in this case television.

Nick: When her friends come round sometimes, all they want to do is watch videos on my phone – some of her more screen-y friends. And I'll say to them: 'Look. It's a nice day, why don't you do this, why don't you do that?' And they end up in the garden playing football or doing something and they have a really nice day. And then they come in and they watch a bit of TV when they're a bit more worn out.

(Father of a 10 year old)

**Other parents also gave examples of how their children (eventually) managed to cope without their ICTs and engage in other activities.** For instance, Jeanette (Mother of an 11-13 year old) observed: 'When they don't have screens they have 20 minutes of being lost and "I'm bored, can I have something to eat?" And then they start doing normal things'. Emily, in the same focus group, elaborated the same theme further.

Emily: *The first time I took it away from Alicia one time she could hardly live without her iPad, she found it really difficult. (...) To start with she found it really hard, but then when she actually got used to it she became very creative like she used to do, and going around and really doing things around the house like dressing up, spending more time as well with us, interacting with us.*

(Mother of an 11-13 year old)

In the search for a balance in children's life there has been a particular **concern about ICTs taking time away from socialising, or to put it another way, a concern about their potential to making children anti-social**. Nick captured how this worry was also highlighted in the media:

Nick: *I think there's more consciousness of it in mainstream press (now), about children being exposed to too much of one thing and also about quality time with parents. Not having time to actually engage with them and just letting them do things where they just go off.... which sounds a bit hypocritical, given that I just used to come home from school and go off on my bike, but that was a world in itself. But I guess it was physical and it was social. It involved other children so there was friction, there were social lessons to be learned whereas I feel just being on an iPad is a bit lonely. Whilst it's okay for a while, if you're doing that for your whole entertainment...*

(Father of a 10 year old)

Actually, this is more complicated because Nick noted the merits of socialising in general, but in his own case when he was young this had not involved socialising with parents, the 'quality time' to which he also refers. That theme will return later. Jill (Mother of an 11-13 year old) indicates a similar worry about children being anti-social when she described how her 14 year old niece when visiting them would have the screen of her smartphone close to her face all the time: '*She doesn't interact with the others, with my other children. I feel a bit out of control, with what she's doing on it all the time. And I'd rather she be like the other two.*'

In fact, it turned out that the niece was socialising. She was communicating in the sense that much of her use of the screen related to social network sites like Facebook. But the 'problem' was that she was not communicating with those immediately around her. In more academic discussions some of those who are concerned about what we might lose from spending (too much) time online - adults as well as children – is that communication through a device, also called 'mediated communication', is not as good as face-to-face interaction (Haddon, 2004).

There is, in fact, a debate about this but the point of relevance here is that this sentiment may be implicit in the anxiety about Jill's niece using her smartphone. That concern may also reflect the fact that the niece is visiting them, and this is a situation where the parent felt it was appropriate to prioritise

face-to-face interaction with the other children. In other words, the specific context in which this behaviour occurs may also make a difference to adult evaluations of children's actions. This comes across even more clearly in the following case:

Jeanette: *Communication between friends (has changed). Just that example of sitting on the sofa with the iPads altogether...the number of times I've said: 'Why don't you talk to your friend who's come round? Why don't you talk about your day?' (...) I always used to talk to my friends. You'd go up to your bedroom, you'd chat ... stuff about what you learned at school, about him, about her. And now with the boys they're playing these things. With the girls they're probably texting each other about things rather than talking.*

(Mother of an 11-13 year old)

Texting pre-dates smartphones by over a decade so in this respect Jeanette could just as well have been talking about a generation of children using traditional mobile phones say 10 years ago (but not when she was child herself). So have things changed as much as she thinks? **Arguably the far greater number of things you can do on smartphones, the greater number of communication channels on these devices and the other portable devices like tablets means that the scenario she describes, while not being totally 'new', may now simply occur more often than in the past.**

**If not complaining about this vision of children being together but not communicating aloud, some parents were at least uncomfortable with it,** like Jan (Mother of an 11-13 year old): 'Yes, all meeting up with each other. But they'll meet up with each other in Minecraft, which is, I think, a bit spooky really. They can be sitting there not talking to each other, but communicating.' Yet others expressed a stronger reaction, as when Jill (mother of a 14-16 year old) commented: 'I hate it with a vengeance but I kind of know there's not a lot I can do'.

So if not always a 'concern' we see examples of a malaise about how the internet, potentially intensified by more access through portable

devices, might be changing some children's behaviour for the worse. However, other parents were more sanguine, for one thing questioning if current behaviour was really so different from a few years previously.

Stan: '*But I just wonder whether it's just, this is just an extension of the texting world, so they all group through texting, and now they just happen to have a different method of communicating, which is a little bit easier to use. And a bit more instant. But it's... I think this generation's sort of grown up all the way through it. It's not like it's a new adoption for them.*'  
(Father of a 14-16 year old)

In fact, some parents took a more relativistic perspective acknowledging that the current generation of children's behaviour was 'different' from their own childhood experiences , but they may simply have to accept it (in the same way as previous generations of parents had had to accept the different behaviour of their children).

Ellis' mother Mary reflected back in time to when she and her brother were young, noting similarities to the current day in order to put into perspective some of the concerns about children and the latest ICTs (in this case, in a discussion of the smartphone)

Mary: '*I'm not worried about the amount of usage time by Ellis. He's getting much more out of it so I'm not worried that modern times are any different from the '80s...since the Sinclair ZX whatever it was called. My brother's a computer programmer. He was constantly on his computer back in the '80s. I don't think anything technologically is really robbing our children of any childhood differently from the '80s.*'

(Mother of an 11-13 year old)

And going to an even earlier period, in the focus group of those working with children Rachel and Mary questioned Nigel's view about the extent to which this new generation is radically different, not how there are some underlying aspects of children's lives that are more constant, whatever technologies come along.

Nigel: *The social interaction with youngsters now is that they are very much always Facebooking, Twittering, all that stuff. Society has changed!*

Rachel: *I think that's showing your age.*

Mary: *I am with Nigel, though. I think what are we...? We're sociable creatures. We should interact...*

Rachel: *But 50 years ago that's what people were saying about the television or the radio. Isn't it part of development and we have to go with it. Rather than saying no to it, saying: 'How do we get around this? How do we make it acceptable?*

(Youth workers)

One of this report's authors (Haddon) has been interviewing parents for many, many years. Twenty years ago when some of the current generation of parents were children, a number of the parents interviewed at that time were even then lamenting the fact that their own children did not go out so much as they did when they, i.e. the parents, had been young. In other words, **the overarching sentiments expressed when discussing the new technologies of smartphones and tablets are in some sense not so new. They may reflect changes happening in children's lives in the longer term, like playing in public areas, but some of those changes started many years ago.**

While attributing the decline in children playing outside to the smartphone, and lamenting the change, Jeanette put a different slant on that children 'socialising'.

Jeanette: *I think the (smartphone's) definitely made a difference in all the ways I've said. I just think it's probably mostly they're not forced to do the things we used to have to do, I'd have been playing out in the street.*

Interviewer: *Were you forced to play out in the street?*

Jeanette: *I say 'forced' because there wasn't anything good on telly after a certain time. We couldn't just play wherever we wanted to, so Sunday afternoons were classic, weren't they, there was nothing on telly. You just go out, you go out and play, you go out and call on your friends.*

(Mother of an 11-13 year old)

Here we see that **going out to play, captured in many nostalgic reflections, was in some cases**

**not simply a desirable activity but sometimes a default because there was nothing better to do**, specifically because there was nothing (interesting) on television. In this respect one can argue that one of the significant changes that has occurred for the current generation of children is that there are more online (and even television) alternatives on offer for them, especially as the internet in general has evolved to Web2.0. And this is compounded by a variety of portable devices like smartphones and tablets. In other words, **there are more positive alternatives available competing with ‘going out’ and more alternative spaces and moments for communication compared to face-to-face socialising.**

There were even some parents who were more positive about the online forms of socialising that new devices offered. Deirdre, Helen and Rula (Mothers of 13-14 year old boys) start by talking about participating in closed online gaming groups on laptops but later when discussing Facetime they imply that a range of devices had enabled their boys to meet up online with friends from abroad at times when they might normally not be doing much at all.

Deirdre: 'So, (my son and I) talk about stuff. Like the Minecraft on laptop you could access worldwide far more easily than on Xbox... but you have to be invited onto a certain server, so my son is playing with his friends in the States, with Carl. But only their friends. It's their server, they've set that bit up.'

'So, he's invited Tom (Rula's son) to play on that server and Bill (Helen's son) to play on the app server. So only them. Of course, they're not talking online, because they can't through that.... they can only 'see' it if they're tied to each other. But they (also) FaceTime each other on the other devices.'

Helen: 'At ten to eight on a Sunday morning! They're there and they're talking to each other!'

Deirdre: 'Yes, they're talking to each other FaceTiming. So it's a different social set up. Because they can actually... there is 'face to face' contact,...it's just that it happens to be through ICT, which is just mind boggling for us - why can't you just be around a table?'

(Mothers of 13-14 year olds)

We see that even when being positive about the technologies, indeed, noting children can be 'face to face online', a slight sadness creeps in that the children as not interacting like the parents did when they were young.

Parents do not only make comparisons to their own childhood experiences but also drew upon their personal experience when deciding what was good or bad for their children. Nick had given his daughter his old iPhone but disabled the WiFi on it so that she could just play the games on the device. In general, that was part of his wider strategy to limit her screen time, and in so doing commented on how it related to his own experiences of the internet.

Nick: *When she was younger, maybe a couple of years ago, there was a phase when she was going through it and when she'd go online for a little bit and maybe I'd be a bit distracted by things and not realise it had been an hour. And then I'd try and pull her out of that world and she'd get very cross and very sullen. It wouldn't be a nice state. It would not be a very nice emotional state to have to extract her from that world. So I got very conscious of the fact that she gets very lost in it, which I don't know if it's a bad thing or not. I wouldn't necessarily say it is or not. But trying to get her out of that, back into 'Can you lay the table? Can you help with supper? Or: Can you do some homework?'*

Interviewer: *Can you be sympathetic to what she does in the sense that you could find yourself...?*

Nick: *I'm a bit of a Facebook addict. I have to stop myself, ration that for myself. So yes, I have to ration that and I know how addictive it can be. I mean, it's infinite, isn't it, I suppose? She can go on YouTube and find one video that she likes and then there'll be another one that she likes right next to it, with more puppies on it or more cats on it or more funny things, and it's the same with my internet use. It constantly unfolds, doesn't it? You see something you like and – I'll have a quick look at this film about funny this or that, and it's just I want her to be conscious of it, really.*

Interviewer: *Is that partly because you're learning from experience? You're thinking about how it is with you and then you're trying to work out...?*

Nick: Yes, because I think it's actually a really unknown quantity for adults as well. We're

*struggling with it. I realised that I'm spending quite a lot of my time on social media during work days and it really affected my workflow. It really affected my productivity in quite a big way – I'd say maybe 20% of the day before you know where you are, and I'm not brave enough to completely extract myself from that. But I was thinking, if it's like that for me, I'm supposed to have learned self-control. I'm supposed to have learned about running my own business and being disciplined. But if it's like that for me, the chances are, for a child, it's going to be a lot harder. So I felt it was quite a big issue, really.*

(Father of a 10 year old)

This is a well-articulated version of another theme that occasionally parents mentioned – that **the internet in general, or smartphones or tablets in particular, could easily consume or make demands on adults' time (at the cost of doing other things). This was not necessarily just an issue for children – it reflected the 'addictive' nature of technologies that adults had also experienced. However, children, because of their age, and depending on age, may need more help controlling this.** In fact, this is identical to a long standing discussion in academic circles (e.g. Turkle, 1984).

**Because adults, including parents, also have sometimes found themselves attracted to and immersed in the online world, some noted that it does make parents job as 'role models' more problematic.** In a focus group where parents had just been discussing their concerns about how much time their children spent online Jan put this into perspective by noting some of the mother's own behaviour while the children were offline.

Jan: *Having said that, though, I think we set a bad example as parents because I certainly play. Emily came round today and was playing on (the tablet) for hours while the kids were eating their pizza. We were sitting playing karaoke on the iPad, and then looking up other things.*

(Mother of an 11-13 year old)

And in a discussion about holidays in 'places that don't have internet' where the children would not be able to go online on their smartphones, Jan made a critical comment about her husband's

double standards when enforcing rules about his children's use of these portable device :

Jan: *We just did one and Francis cracked – that's my husband. He wouldn't let the kids play on it but he had to go and see his work messages, and I said: 'You're just as sad as them'. But he said he was in charge so he had to keep an eye on other people.*

(Mother of an 11-13 year old)

### **2.1.2 Parental evaluations of children's changing behaviour because of smartphones**

Concerns about the time children spent on the internet, or now on portable devices, also have to be contextualised by examining how parents evaluate what children are doing when they are online. Some uses were more legitimate. For instance, **sometimes parents recognise that young children especially are simply being entertained and up to a point or at certain times that was acceptable**, an example being to occupy them on long car journeys or meeting with other adults when they might get otherwise get bored. **More generally there is often a sense that children have the right to 'be children' and experience the state of childhood, including the right to some entertainment.**

Indeed, some activities can be seen even in a good light as when parents appreciate how their children were now 'accessing information' more. This was identified as one of the ways that the portable devices like smartphones might have made a difference to children's lives.

Jill: *I think (the smartphone's) made them quite... they need everything now. They won't wait for anything. They can't wait. They need answers. If anything crosses their mind, they're on there, straightaway.*

Lisa: *Weather, anything.*

Jill: *Yes, the weather. But yes, any fact, figure, that they need to look up, they've got it there, like that. I think that's changed.*

(Mothers of 14-16 year olds)

Similarly, the **social network updates** - which we

will later see are increasingly checked because it is so easy to do through smartphones - **were acknowledged by parents to have made children more aware of what their peers were doing**. Mothers in the focus group of parents of 14-16 year olds appreciated how smartphones had enabled their children to keep track of each other more, with Lisa noting that when she asked her daughter: 'Who's around this week? Or: 'Did you talk to anyone today? She can reel off where everybody is. They know exactly where each other is. And I said: 'Did you speak to anyone! And she went: 'No'. But they know.

These are children's activities online where parents are either less worried, seeing how ICTs like smartphones and tablets have a role to play, or even impressed by what their children do. **However, as with many aspects of children's lives, those parental evaluations can also be more critical, especially in terms of trivialising what children do online.**

June: *But what about the younger ones, are they using it, like Liz and Melanie? Are they using (the smartphone) to access information on the internet?*

Jill: *Blogs and things like that.*

Lisa: *Oh yes, minor stuff, yes.*

Jill: *Beauty products and stuff like that. Hairstyles.*

Andrea: *I don't know that they're using it for useful information. Molly's is just total rubbish, actually.*

Lisa: *It's just replaced glossy magazines. And a way of chatting. But, to your friends, but permanently.*

(Mothers of 14-16 year olds)

The first observation about the above discussion is that when children do things potentially similar to adults this is sometimes not seen in the same light as when adults do them. For example, when one of the authors (Haddon) was interviewing parents twenty years ago, parents often thought that their own chatting on the phone was acceptable (indeed it is a major use of the telephone) and socially important for maintaining relationships. But when their children did the same thing and chatted with their peers that was often deemed to be a 'waste of time'. Maybe that dual standard lies behind the comments about children accessing information about 'minor things' (like beauty products), or

looking up 'total rubbish'.

But in contrast, the second point arising from the quotes above is that when Lisa draws parallels with 'magazines' and 'chatting' there is once more a recognition that **although there are some things about the internet, and about using portable devices to access it, that are new, there are also continuities from what children have done in the past.**

### **2.1.3 Parental views on risks related to smartphones and tablets**

The *EU Kids Online* qualitative research (Smahel and Wright, 2013) had only involved interviews with children, so there was no chance to hear directly from parents about their views on how mobile access to the internet affected the various risks that had been examined at some depth in the survey – seeing sexual images, cyberbullying, sexting and meeting strangers (Livingstone et al, 2010). Since the *Net Children Go Mobile* qualitative research involved interviews with various adults concerned with children (parents, teachers, other types of youth worker) we had the chance to pursue this question. But as with their European counterparts (Haddon and Vincent, 2014), those **adults often did not single out smartphones and tablets as posing particular risks – the risks that existed, and that they were concerned about, usually related to the internet in general, whether that happened to be accessed through, say, a smartphone or through some other device.**

This is also exemplified in the discussion below where the mothers start by talking about sexting on smartphones and, in this case more specific to that device, the ease of taking and sending/posting pictures on smartphones. But really the conversation moves, as in many other cases, to talking about the online risk more generally.

Mary: *To be honest I don't think it's going to be a major issue. How many of us when we were whatever age would have taken the opportunity to send a naked picture of ourselves across the phone to another teenager. We're not that daft, are we?*

Jan: *You'd be surprised.*

Emily: *I wouldn't.*

Jan: *What if you're drunk?*

Jeanette: *What about the pressure if it becomes the norm?*

Jan: *Yes, what if you're drunk and you're 15?*

Jeanette: *Or you think it's more normal than it actually is.*

Jan: *Yes, if you're drunk at 14 and 15 and you think they're just going to keep it on their phone because they're so madly in love with you, you might do.*

(Mothers of 11-13 year olds)

In fact, if not prompted by the interviewer, **when thinking about potential negative consequences specific to portable devices the various adults were more likely to say something about money issues than other risks specific to mobile internet.**

Kelvin: *We do want them to have the phone with them but it's like with them being abroad now. You think: 'Oh, make sure you've got the roaming thing off and all of that'. So it could all go horribly wrong. They get bored and suddenly you'll get this big bill. That's probably the most likely thing to go wrong in all honesty.*

(Father of 13 and 14 year olds)

### 2.1.4 Summary

In sum, this section has pointed to the antecedents of one key parental worry about ICTs use – **the importance of their children finding a balance in their activities – which has carried over to children's use of smartphones and tablets in terms of anxieties about more screen time.** More specifically we find the **long-standing concern about ICTs leading children to be more anti-social is now also voiced in relation to these portable devices. Arguably there have been some developments in the broader technological landscape children inhabit that can fuel these concerns.** Mediated communication options have been increasing, for example with the arrival of social networking sites, and smartphones and tablets add to this trend.

Yet, to put the these concerns into perspective, although **mobile internet access changes**

**options somewhat, as part of the changing internet in general, they are not leading in themselves to totally new behaviour. Indeed, some of those interviewed make just that observation, pointing, on different occasions in this section, to various continuities or parallels with the experience of children in different eras.**

Parents' reference to the decline of going out and socialising with peers in public spaces is not unique to the current generation of children. Indeed, it was first reported in academic research on ICTs 14 years ago (Bovill and Livingstone, 2000). The question was also raised as to whether that going out was sometimes something one did when there was nothing better to do. In this respect, the other change in these technologically savvy children's lives more generally is that **nowadays there may be 'better' (or at least 'other') things do online, and once again smartphones and tablets may add to this trend of having alternatives to hand.**

When making evaluations of the impact of the online world on their children, parents are not just comparing their own childhood experiences to those of their own children. Nowadays, they are usually actors in that digital world themselves. Hence their **anxieties about their children sometimes reflect their own experience as adults, for example, about addiction. And as role models they sometimes acknowledge that their own engagement with portable devices can be at odds with how they try to mediate their children's use.**

The parents suggested ways in which they felt the smartphone and tablets had made a **difference to children's lives: in terms of their access to information and children's heightened awareness of what their peers were doing.** But they could often be more critical, **trivialising what children did online, even when their interests and activities on the internet may have counterparts to those of adults.**

**Finally parents had little to say specifically about how smartphones and tablets affected some of the standard risks cited in the eSafety**

**literature.** When talking about risks, they more often referred to risk on the internet in general, whatever device was used to access it. In fact, when unprompted they were sometimes more worried about potential costs associated with the devices, reflecting the earlier discussions about buying the device in the first place and advice to children about how to safeguard them.

## 2.2 Parental mediation of smartphones and tablets

### 2.2.1 Rules and controls

Daniel: *I had had two phones before that, but they weren't really good phones, so then my 13th birthday happened and everyone had a BlackBerry then, and then I was asking my parents for a BlackBerry, but since there was a lot of crime to do with BlackBerry's – people getting stabbed because of a BlackBerry – they said, no, we're not getting you... you're not mature enough for it yet. So when I finally got the BlackBerry I was really happy, but they put terms on it. So: 'If you get caught using your phone in school or doing something, then we'll confiscate it for two weeks', or something.*

(14-16 boy)

Daniel's comments reflect an experience found in other countries in the European qualitative study. Especially because the smartphone is such an expensive item that children carried with them, parents often talked about only buying their child a smartphone when their child was mature or responsible enough to look after such a gift. Hence **giving children smartphones in particular often marked a rite of passage, symbolically acknowledging a transition moment** such as Confirmation or going to a secondary school (Haddon and Vincent, 2014). In Daniel's case, his parents decided that he was only ready for this gesture when he was a little older than this. We also see in this example that this is a moment to introduce some of the rules about the smartphone's use and punishments for breaking

them. Following on from concerns identified earlier in this report, such rules included for how long and when smartphones could be used, but also issues of avoiding 'inappropriate content'.

**Many of the rules about smartphone and tablet use were extensions of rules about the internet in general, like how much 'screen time' children could have.** But some were more specific to these portable devices, and, especially for the smartphone, **the main message was be careful not to lose it or use the device in a place where it might be stolen. But there were other rules and forms of mediation more specific to portable devices.** For example, in one of the focus groups Abdur (11-13 boy) noted that his parents had given their credit card details on his phone so he could buy apps, but if he did so his parents would get an email notifying them of any purchase, so they had a way to monitor this use of the phone. In fact, Wilson (11-13 boy) in the same group had once made the mistake of clicking on what he thought was an ad and it had cost his parents £50. As a result, the credit card details had been removed and now Wilson could now only install free apps. Meanwhile Pranav received specific advice about checking messages on his smartphone in case they came from his Network Operator because he had once gone over his data limit and his phone had ceased to work.

Pranav: *My parents also say 'Be cautious' (of dealing with messages on the smartphone) Because, you know, a lot of people, when notifications just come up, they'll just click X, 'OK'. But (my parents) say: 'Read it and if it doesn't apply to you or it doesn't make sense come to them and if it's irrelevant or it's junk then just close it. But if it's something important, like your phone is running out of mobile data, which some phones do, don't just click 'Ok'. You've got to act because then that's your fault and not the phone's fault because it had notified you but you just hadn't bothered to actually open it.'*

(11-13 boy)

Although we shall see in the next section some concerns that the portability of smartphones and tablets limit the ability of parents to control what children do on their devices, it is worth pointing out

that **parents still find other control options open to them.** Deidre's husband (parents of children 11-13) had set filters on the central home WiFi to control what their children could access on smartphones, tablets and games consoles. **Meanwhile the very portability of these devices also gave parents another way to control their use: by requiring children to hand over their devices.**

Deidre: *Rula said to me one day that the boys had to sign in their things at night. When they're out of parental view, that's when things happen. When they're in parental view, they're less likely to go off on a mission, which they shouldn't be on. Because (my daughter) definitely has her phone in her room, and sometimes she's up there, and she'll be chatting to her friends on FaceTime and we're like 'You haven't signed in your phone'. They have to bring them downstairs, they have to give it in at night, so they're not having them upstairs.*

Interviewer: What does that mean: 'sign in your phone'?

Dierdre: *They have to bring them downstairs, they have to give it in at night, so they're not having them upstairs, otherwise they...when she was under 11, it wasn't a problem, but now it is a problem. She would spend a lot of time on it.*

Rula: *For me, it was their particular bed time. They didn't have phones until they went to secondary school, but then it becomes... very difficult to monitor because if you've got Wi-Fi, if you've got a Smartphone and you've got Wi-Fi, you can do anything.*

(Mothers of 11-13 year olds)

The success at getting children to stick to their rules varies. For example, Sula (mother of 11-13 year olds) could sometimes hear her children sending messages after bedtime (when they should not). But, as also found in the *EU Kids Online* study (Smahel and Wright, 2013), often the children understood and accepted the rules:

Ellis: *My Mum sometimes confiscates my smartphone if I am playing on my phone instead of doing my homework. She would confiscate my phone and then let me do my homework instead of messing around on my phone.*

Interviewer: That seems fair as well?

Ellis: Yes, I guess. Stopping me from getting detention.

## 2.2.2 Monitoring the smartphone and tablet

One of the general discussions amongst stakeholders concerned with children's safety that prompted the funding of the *Net Children Go Mobile* study is whether children's access to portable devices meant that parents were less able to monitor what children did online. In fact, that same concern had led to the funding of earlier research: Haddon and Vincent, 2009.

Rula captured that sense of losing the ability to monitor what children did online once they had smartphones in the previous section. However, once again, that whole issue had antecedents. One observation a decade earlier was that basic mobile phones had first facilitated children's ability to organise their social lives with peers beyond the surveillance of parents compared to when they used the landline in the home (Ling, 2004). Meanwhile, the rise of 'bedroom culture' had itself given children a relatively private space from where they could access the online world from PCs (Bovill and Livingstone, 2001). This was an issue precisely because of apprehension about various online risks.

It has been argued that these reflect part of a broader trend whereby children are, in various senses, gaining more autonomy (Pasquier, 2008). Part of this involves gaining more privacy, here in terms of more privacy from their parents. Seen in this broader context, **smartphones, especially, potentially add to that privacy but at the same time exacerbate long-standing advice that parents should monitor their children.**

In fact, in the case of ICTs such as the tablet, with a larger screen, some parents thought the issue of monitoring was actually more complex, that they were sometimes actually more aware of what their children were doing online. For example, Roseline (Teacher of 9-10 year olds, but also a parent) noted: '*Actually, quite often my son's sitting next to me on the sofa with his laptop and I'm much more able to see what he was doing than when it was in the dining room.*'

That said, **some parents did indeed feel that smartphones gave them less control, less options to mediate their children's online experiences.**

June: *I think you do need to be aware that once they've got a smartphone, your control over what they access on the internet has gone really, hasn't it? You can't really set it can you? Well, I can't, set it to restrict what they're... you can have all sorts of controls on your computer, and stuff like that, but actually on a smartphone.*

Lisa: *They know how to work it, inside the house. They know. They can get past all the security aspects, because they know how to work it better than we do.*

June: *So I suppose if you're accepting that they have a smartphone, you're accepting that you let them loose on the internet.*

(Mothers of 14-16 year olds)

Parental monitoring comes in various forms. For example, Denzil and Taran's (9-10, boys) parents both had an application through which they could see what the boys were doing on their smartphone. Denzil pointed out that his parents could even take a video on their phone of what he was watching on his smartphone and Taran noted: 'You will really get in trouble for watching wrestling'. The boys in this younger group did not mind their parents using this application, in keeping with the EU Kids Online qualitative finding that the 9-10 year olds in general had no objection to parents monitoring internet use (Smahel and Wright, 2014).

The most common form of monitoring involved checking the 'history' part of the device to see what children had accessed. Although most of the children interviewed were aware parents could monitor their phone in this way some were not, as Alice (secondary school teacher and parent of an 11-year-old boy) noted: "... he'd been Googling something on our house computer, and simultaneously on his phone, and something either popped up or he stored something on his phone ... and so he'd been looking at porn. And obviously we knew how to check his history and stuff. He had no idea that we could do that, [...] I said: Let's unlock your phone, and let's look at your phone'... and he was totally mortified'. It is also worth adding, as a

caveat to children's resistance to this practice to be discussed below, that **children did not always object to parent's checking the smartphone history, when they recognised that it would be to their benefit.**

Ellis: *My Mum checks my phone sometimes to see what I'm up to and to see if I'm not doing anything stupid.*

Interviewer: *So what do you think about that? Are you happy with that?*

Ellis: *Yes, fair enough, they're protecting me from harm and stuff. Like say on a social network I followed someone that I don't entirely know and it turns out that they're not who they're meant to be. So it would be my Mum or my Dad that will spot that and tell me not... I won't be able to spot that because I'll be too naïve as I'm young.*

(11-13 boy)

However, there can be a difference between checking what is on a young person's PC or laptop and checking a smartphone. **Mobile phone researchers have for along time noted how, compared to other ICTs, the devices (and by implication the smartphone inherits this) are considered more personal, more intimate, evoking more emotion (Vincent 2003). And this was indeed observed by some parents, when commenting on how difficult it was to check their child's smartphone.**

Sarah: *I'm not even allowed to touch it.*

Lisa: *Yes, they would go completely ballistic, if I tried to.*

Sarah: *No, she won't even let me hold it, when she's showing me a photograph. I have to... 'I need to hold it because I need to...' ....She can't let go of it. In case, I somehow, see something.*

(Mothers of 14-16 year olds)

The EU Kids Online's UK qualitative research had also shown that **as children grew older, especially by the age of 14-16, they had a greater sense of their own responsibility and a right to privacy, to some personal space free from parental monitoring**, and hence judged their parent's checking of their internet use in

general to be intrusive (Haddon and Livingstone, 2014). In addition, it was important to these young people that they had, with maturity, earned a sense of trust. **All these findings seemed to be confirmed for smartphone use in the Net Children Go Mobile study reported here.** When Alan was asked whether his parents checked his phone he explained:

Alan: *No. No, they trust me enough to not do that. But I also think they understand that I have the right to my own privacy. I have the right to do my own things. So long as it doesn't affect me in a negative manner or affect them in a negative manner they don't check up on me like that.*

Interviewer: *Of course in principle you'd find that a bit negative if they were to check up on you like that?*  
Alan: *Yes. I'd just feel that they didn't trust me. Because if they were always checking up on my history or looking at my social media I'd just feel that it wasn't....I'd find that a bit unnerving that I was being checked up on like that. I would feel that the trust wasn't placed in me to do things of my own accord*

(14-16 boy)

Daniel, below, starts by expressing an equally negative reaction, although we later see at the end how he can still empathise with the parents' perspective. He starts by explaining how he had been sent by his parents on an errand upstairs in the house and when he returned he found them checking the WhatsApp messages on his phone.

Daniel: *I asked: 'what are you doing?' 'We're just checking if you're safe, and just checking what you're doing'. And then they started questioning me about different people who are on my phone.*

Interviewer: *And was that a problem?*

Daniel: *It wasn't a problem, because I knew these people; it's just like, 'Why do you need to know these people? I won't ask you to tell me on your phone: 'Who was this person you were talking to, because you're an adult'(...)*

Interviewer: *But even though technically in a sense they can check up things, you're still not an adult, you still feel it's a bit too much?*

Daniel: *Yes. They can check it in front of me, just... If*

*you told me to do something and then you go on my phone, it's a little bit invasive.*

Interviewer: *Well, there's an issue whether... it's also awkward because it shows a lack of trust.*

Daniel: *If I had a child, I'd want to know what my child's involved in, where I could help my child, to better my child. As a parent, I can see where they're coming from, and it just takes a certain mindset to see: 'Okay, this is for your own good. If you're doing something you're not supposed to be doing, well, if you can't stop it by yourself then I'm going to have to help you stop it.'*

(14-16 boy)

**If their parents check up on what is on their smartphone, a number of the young people agreed that it does sometimes make them very careful about what they do with or allow to appear on their smartphone.**

Wilson: *You've got to be really careful because... maybe on Instagram even ....because that's pictures.... somebody could accidentally follow you, you don't know, and it could be something really rude; I mean not like swear, swear, I mean, like sexual...*

Interviewer: *What, it could be a picture or something like that?*

Wilson: *Pictures and then you've got to get rid of them really quickly.*

(11-13 boy)

### **2.2.3 Monitoring the smartphone's locations**

One form of monitoring more specific to smartphones relates to the fact that it can be used to convey user's location. The use of geolocation for tracking and checking on children does not appear to be widespread, but location services are beginning to be used for checking your children are safe, as in this example given by Erica, when talking about having her phone with her at school.

Erica: *I don't keep it [my phone] switched off because my parents have Find My Friends on there so that can track where I am so they're never afraid of me getting kidnapped or getting lost anywhere. I keep it on silent though so it won't bother anyone in Chapel*

or in lessons.  
(12, girl)

However, children expressed some ambivalence about this as in the case of Joshua below. Although he initially talks about 'a case he knows', it becomes clear he was referring to his own parents tracking his sister.

*Joshua: (A location tracker in the smartphone) could be useful for, say, parents wanting to know where their child is because they're worrying about ..... seeing if they're lying. Because I know someone that had a tracker in their phone because she wasn't as trustworthy as she said she was. So if she said 'I'm going to the library' she was out partying. Dad tracked it down and found her.... grounded her, took the phone away. And sometimes it could be an invasion of privacy or something but ....if you probably tell the truth it might have not happened that way and it can be useful in that way but it can also be an invasion of privacy.*

Interviewer: What did you think about that particular case? Were you on the side of the parents, on the side of the girl?

*Joshua: I'll be on the side of the parents because if you asked them and they said 'No' then you can't go.... but if you lie to them then they have every right to know where you are because you're the child and they worry about you so they're going to want to know where you are.*

(14-16 boy)

Some were even more critical of the idea of being tracked in this way, once again making the case for some privacy. In fact, this mode of checking was seen as being almost deceitful.

*Alan: They trust me enough to text them (about where I am). But then I can see uses for (tracking) but I just think it infringes that person's privacy because they shouldn't have to... I understand if they're under 16 and their parents want to know where they are but they should still have the right to be able to go to places without being constantly followed because I just find that a bit unnerving I guess, being known where I was every second. (...) I don't mind them texting me and asking me where I am. I'm happy to*

tell them. But I'd just rather not be checked up on behind my back. So if I'm being checked up on I want to know that I'm being checked up on.  
(14-16 boy)

## 2.2.4 Summary

This section first noted how the smartphone especially was often a rite of passage present, marking a certain maturity to be responsible for such an expensive technology. **While many rules about its use (and that of tablets) were extensions of general internet rules, some forms of monitoring, rules and advice were more specific to the smartphone.**

It is worth adding that **parents also developed some specific strategies for controlling smartphone and tablet use (e.g. by controlling the WiFi link and demanding that at times portable devices be handed in).** Many children appreciated why these rules existed.

There were specific discussions among those interested in children's eSafety, sometimes echoed by parents, about the way that **portable devices, smartphones in particular, reduced parent's ability to monitor what their children were doing. We saw that this was itself an extension of early concerns about knowing what children are doing (online or communicating with others) given broader factors that may have contributed to children's greater privacy from their parents.**

The main form of monitoring still open to parents is checking their children's smartphone histories. However, there is a long standing argument that **personal devices like mobile phones and now smartphones are more personal and private meaning that this practice is now perceived as being much more intrusive than checking the history on a PC.** This theme was reflected in some of the comments from both parents and children highlighting that some parents do check on their children's phones and that children had become wary of what their parents might find on their phones.

**Another form of monitoring more specific to**

smartphones was via the apps that allowed parents to check the location of these phones. Children had mixed views about this, some thinking it to be an invasion of privacy, although others were more comforted by knowing they could be found in an emergency.

# 3 Schools

## 3.1 School policies on smartphones

In the survey conducted for *Net Children Go Mobile* one of the questions asked about whether smartphone use was allowed in schools (Mascheroni and Ólafsson, 2014). According to the children surveyed use was not allowed in 63% of UK schools, above the average of 54% for the 6 countries that took part. The UK is not the strictest country – smartphone use was not allowed in 87% of Irish schools and 74% of Italian ones. But at the other end of the scale its use was totally banned in only 18% of Danish schools. **Clearly there are different levels of concerns in different countries, maybe in part based on different understandings of what children should be doing at school, and hence also what they should be allowed to do.**

Because of the **decentralised nature of decision making – i.e. individual schools make the decision about smartphone rules – there is also scope for considerable variation within countries.** From the qualitative interviews it was clear that ‘not allowed to use’ actually meant different things. In some schools the children reported that they were not allowed to even bring smartphones to school at all. In others, they were in theory supposed to hand them in when arriving and pick them up when leaving. It worked to varying degrees – the teachers interviewed from the secondary school thought that most of their 850 students had smartphones, but only 9-12 handed them in daily. The children interviewed for this report, who came from a range of schools, reported that it was just using smartphones, as opposed to having them on you, that was not allowed, and if children were caught using them the devices would be confiscated. The exception was when children were allowed to make calls to home when school finished but only from a specific monitored space.

*Anuj: At the end of the day if you’re like downstairs, then you’re allowed to use them to call your Mum, but they’ve said: ‘If you want to call your parents you go to the office to call them’.*

(11-13 boy)

To illustrate the differences in rules between countries, in the European qualitative report for *Net Children Go Mobile* showed that although some children from schools in Denmark reported that mobiles of any kind were banned, far more reported that it was using them in lessons that was not allowed - the children were permitted to use them in the breaks (Haddon and Vincent, 2014). In fact, in some Danish lessons, like working on maths problems, the students were even allowed to listen to music through the smartphone.

More generally, the European report that reflected on the interviews from all 9 countries, noted that even when general rules existed, there were often exceptions. The report noted that enforcement also varied and it seems that can also be the case in the UK. The very same primary school teachers who explained their school policy of not using smartphones could, at other points in the interview, described what school children did with their phones – what apps they used, the pictures they took. This suggests that sometimes the teachers choose not to enforce the rule when they observed children’s use.

In the UK the teachers and most of the children we interviewed all came from the 63% of schools cited earlier where use was not allowed, (even if everyone was aware that sometimes students broke those rules). Hence it was not possible to explore the experience of schools with more lenient school rules, although, as we shall see below, some teachers knew of such schools.

## 3.2 School concerns about smartphones

Since there were only two focus groups with teachers in the UK project this report can only cover some of teachers’ concerns, but they may well be

shared in other schools. The primary school teachers explained how their rules had emerged:

Interviewer: *Was there a discussion about school policy at one stage or is it the Local Authority who comes down and says they should be handed in at the start of school? How did it work?*

Tom: *No, it was the Head who said this is what we want to do in our school: 'I don't want to ban them per se but we must have rules in place on when children can...'*

Roseline: *Just encouraging discreetness and...*

Tom: *Yes, being polite, manners. School is a place for learning; it's not for texting and phoning people, they can do that outside school.*

(Primary school teachers)

Here we see the de-centralisation of decision making about these rules, and hence appreciate why rules can vary between schools.

As regards using smartphones in lessons, the teachers never ventured any arguments about their educational potential (e.g. for looking things up online). In other words, and reflecting a theme in many of the other European countries taking part in the project, they were considered to be of no educational value (Velicu, 2014).

Furthermore we also saw in the previous quote why Tom felt that the **educational ethos of schooling also does not fit with mobile or smartphone use**. It later became clearer that there were in fact multiple reasons why mobile phone and smartphone use was not allowed even in breaks. First they commented on playing games on smartphones:

Amelie: *There was a time when they were playing games in the playground before the bell went, which was knocked on the head and said: 'No, phones are not out then'.*

Interviewer: *So why was that policy? I can understand in the lesson someone's doing something and they should be doing what you said. Why was the playground one happening?*

Amelie: *Because it's a time to just be getting ready for school, to talk to your friends. It's not time to be playing games.*

Shelley: *It's an insular behaviour. You want them to*

*be learning to relate to other people.*  
(Primary school teachers)

**These teachers clearly shared much the same concern as some parents about mobile devices leading to anti-social behaviour. But specifically for the teachers any 'barriers' to children socialising went against the broader educational agenda whereby teachers were expected to try to foster the social skills of the children they taught.**

But there were other issues besides what smartphones symbolised. The teachers then went on to note **issues about institutional responsibility and the effect on the children themselves if something goes wrong in relation to the smartphone being on the school premises.**

Roseline: *And also, if anything happens to that phone...*

Shelley: *If it drops, if someone grabs it from them while.....*

Roseline: *If it drops, if it lands in a puddle, whatever, then...*

Tom: *The school will be blamed sometimes.*

Roseline: *But it also will be an issue for the whole day because they'll be very upset about their phone and all they can think about is their phone, the phone, the phone.*

Shelley: *What mum's going to say?*

Roseline: *Yes, what mum's going to say? So it's best if they enter school premises, phone should be away.*  
(Primary school teachers)

On the other hand, in this particular school it also turned out to be useful that children were still allowed to bring phones to school even if they were not supposed to use them. Just as parents wanted children to carry these devices because the parents could then contact them, this was also useful for the teachers on some occasions. The previous summer some children had decided to go to the park together after school and this led to the parents phoning the school when the children did not arrive home on time. The teachers knew that one child in the group had a mobile phone and so

phoned various other parents to find out the child's number to phone. After this experience the teachers took the mobile phone numbers of all the children who had them in case such an incident should ever arise again.

Meanwhile, keeping mobile phones and smartphones out of classrooms remained a challenge for the larger secondary schools. One UK secondary school teacher, Alex, explained that her school had not quite reached the situation experienced by some fellow staff in their previous schools:

*Alex: We've got quite a few new teachers from Ireland and Australia, and one of the Australian teachers was saying to me that, in the end, their school was so big, it was over 2,000 pupils. They said: 'We more or less have given up on it. We just couldn't fight the battle of phones in lessons anymore, it was just too difficult.'*

(Secondary school teachers)

It is worth adding that teacher influence on children's smartphone use was not confined to the school premises. School advice to the schoolchildren about smartphone use extended beyond the school walls:

*Amelie: I think one of the worries, also, is that when children are walking home...we experienced this last year with some of our Year 6s [11 year olds]...they put their music on and headphones in and they're walking along the street dancing away and now they've got their music blaring. They're only young, they're only 11, it's obvious that they've got some expensive gadget in their pocket and you just don't know whether they're going to be mugged, how safe they are.*

(Primary school teachers)

In fact, several of the primary school teachers discussed how children would often take out the phone as soon as they left school to contact their parents and in those cases the teachers usually intervened (outside the school gates) warning the children not to show the devices in public. In fact, this was a concern that related to actual experiences, since two years earlier when fewer primary school children had phones, a number of

secondary school children in the area were stopped and had their smartphones stolen. The teachers in the primary school had told their own classes about this, when warning them to be careful.

### **3.3 Children's evaluations of school policies on smartphones**

Many of the **children appreciated the usefulness of bringing the smartphone to school**, mainly for the ability to phone home after school. The older ones also mentioned things like being able to show a video to a classmate during the break. **On the other hand, they acknowledged that the devices could be disruptive.** For example, Ellis (11-13 boy) noted '*A girl brought in her phone in my geography lesson and her Mum, of all people, texted her during her geography lesson, and her phone went off, and it was loud and distracted every kid in the class*'. More rarely, they even admitted the temptation to be 'naughty' themselves.

*Ellis: Teachers don't know what it's like to be young in a class with a phone in your bag. You know it's there and just like... I can do something naughty with this; I could really make some trouble'. They don't know how that feels so they just have simple rules of not having them because you could get mugged and stuff.*

(11-13 boy)

However, echoing the findings of the European report for *Net Children Go Mobile* (Haddon and Vincent, 2014), broadly speaking the UK children appreciated the need for school rules because the smartphone could disturb the class. A group of 14-16 boys described how in their school smartphones not allowed, but in practice nearly every child carried one. They thought the teachers were well aware of this and it was clear that the device would be confiscated if on show. One of the boys, Luke, explained how they thought that was fair: '*At the end of the day you can leave school, you can call your parents but just don't take it out in lessons*

*because that's disrespectful.'* However, **several of the children of various ages had reservations about the severity of the punishments, namely the confiscation of smartphones** if caught using them:

Denzil: *I really think that if they confiscate your accessory for a year., I think they're being a bit too harsh. I would suggest that they just ban it for the term. Because sometimes if you're walking home by yourself you might need your phone to ask your mum which bus you take because you might forget.* (9-10 boy)

They sometimes pointed out that this was not just a matter of convenience but related to the risks children might face.

Ellis: *I'd rather the teachers be a little bit less strict on phones but still be reasonably strict, because sometimes kids live quite far away so they have to phone their parents if there's traffic problems. And also say there's been an accident. And you're on the way home with your friend and your friend maybe got followed by a car. And there's no one around you, it's like what do you do in that situation? You have no means of getting in contact with the police. You can't do anything.* (11-13 boy)

Meanwhile Anuj (11-13 boy) reported how the previous year, year seven, one of the boys at his school was caught cyberbullying via a smartphone and so as a punishment all the children in that year were no longer allowed to use phones in school for 12 months. Anuj: *'I didn't really like that because it was only one boy who had done that and it was not really fair to the rest of us'.*

The problem was not just one of punishment but the fact that **if school policy did not allow students to carry smartphones then there was no system to sort out problems related to those phones, such as when they were stolen.**

Joshua: *I was getting changed for badminton with people in the changing room. I put my phone in my*

*bag. Then we went out played badminton came back ....it had been robbed, I think Tim's phone had been robbed, John's phone had been robbed.*

Luke: *Everyone was just shocked because it never happened before.*

Joshua: *And then they couldn't report it. Well, they could report it...but they couldn't investigate it because you're not allowed to have your phones in school anyway.*

Luke: *Yes the school says 'we'll support a police investigation but we won't do our own'.*

(14-16 boys)

This added to the risk of bringing smartphones to school and could make the students apprehensive about carrying the devices. Several reported regularly checking if the smartphone was still on them, and it made them careful about where they put the devices.

Joshua: *I think you feel it's more safe in your bag (at school) because it's always on you and you can always check it. If it's in your locker...It's a silly kind of....worry that you have that maybe someone might have a master fob that opens all the lockers.*

(14-16 boys)

### 3.4 Tablets in schools

The focus groups of teachers reported that tablets were also not allowed in schools, which fitted in with what most children had reported in their interviews. That said, and like their European counterparts (Haddon and Vincent, 2014), the **teachers were more positive about the potential educational value of tablets compared to smartphones:**

Tom: *I mean, imagine a classroom where everybody had an iPad.*

Roseline: *That would be lovely. It'd be marvellous. It would! It would if we were giving them out a specific task. I mean, there's plenty of iPads features going on.*

Tom: *Well, we've just started this new literacy thing online and it's an online book, and it's such a shame*

*that they can't even see it and touch all the things that you can do...that we have to do as a whole class...that they can't do, so we have to end up photocopying a page for them to read it because they can't see it. That's just so annoying (...)*  
(Primary school teachers)

The teachers explained that **the issue that stopped them encouraging use was one of equality - it would be unfair for children who had tablets to use them when other children did not have these devices.** Tom added that even if they reach a state where most children in his school have tablets in a few years it would still be unfair to ask them to bring them to school if some children did not have them. It was only fair when the school could supply all the children with tablets. In fact, that happened in some schools, but then the issue became one of inequality between schools.

Tom: *I think for schools that's a main issue. So in richer schools the whole school is full of iPads and stuff like that. And then you've got other schools who don't have the money to buy this new technology. And that, I think, is very unfair because it will also probably reflect the families as well, who won't have access to that technology as soon as these other children. I mean, it's yes, when you go to (he names a school), they say: 'Oh, we've got tablets in every class'. You go: 'What!' 'Yes, we've got iPads for all the children.'*

Roseline: *Their catchment (area) is like ....ah.*  
Tom: Yes. *It's the haves versus the have-nots really.*  
(Primary school teachers)

Teachers from the secondary school also **saw the potential tablets in schools - and some had even seen examples of schools where they were allowed.** But the success was attributed to the nature of the children in those schools.

Kate: *I've been to a school... because I go out visiting schools... and I went to a Catholic school, and every child had a tablet on their desk. It belonged to the school, but they were exceptionally good kids, and it worked really well, and I was really impressed. And I was thinking, God, can you imagine!*

(Secondary school teacher)

The 'imagine' here may well imply 'imagine trying to do that in our school'. One of the other teachers noted that in some schools smartphones were not only allowed but could be used in lessons – but again, she felt that only worked in some schools.

Iris: *I think that works on very rare occasions. I know a school in Hampshire that is a flagship that has fully integrated use of phones and iPads. They've got the money, they've got the iPads that students can use, but also students can use their iPhones, their Smartphones in lessons, and it works really well. But I also have heard of a few other schools trying that, and it just bombs. So I think it's just this one school it's worked.*

(Secondary school teacher)

**However, although the teachers saw the education possibilities of tablets, they could be ambivalent and repeat some of the same concerns of parents about their anti-social potential.**

Interviewer: *Do you think the availability of tablets is generally a good thing for the children's education? Do you see it coming through somehow that they can do more things now? Do they do more things or are they more skilled or whatever?*

Jessica: *I think it's a yes and no answer. Yes in certain using media, yes, definitely. But then they're losing lots of social skills, how to talk to somebody decently, how to socialise without having some big tablet or a phone in your hand.*

(Primary school teacher)

## 3.5 Summary

Although policies about smartphones are decentralised to the level of the school, **the majority of schools restricted their use, either forbidding children to bring them to schools or banning their use on the premises.** There are multiple considerations behind these policies: **the school as a place of learning is not a place for**

**these devices, that the devices make children anti-social, and also that there can be questions of institutional responsibility if the smartphones are lost or stolen.**

Apart from policies relating to smartphones on the school premises, teachers exert some influence on their use beyond the schools walls. Specifically, **teachers joined parents in advising children to be careful about using phones in public spaces after school.**

Even if the rules about using smartphones in school were sometimes broken, children in general appreciated why they are there, especially because they can be a distraction in lessons. **However, the children were more likely to be critical of the severity of some punishments, mainly the length of time for which the phone is confiscated, if rules were broken.**

**Teachers were more positive about the education potential of tablets, but there would be possible problems of equality if they allow some students to use them in school when others do not possess these devices.** The teachers taking part in this project saw more potential if tablets could be supplied by the schools, and indeed knew of schools where this had been done – albeit then creating inequalities between schools. They were not sure whether this would be successful in their own schools and some still had reservations about the anti-social effects of allowing tablets into schools.

# 4 Children practices

## 4.1 Constraints on using smartphones and tablets

There were several concerns about the potential online risks posed by children's access to the mobile internet that led to the funding of the Net Children Mobile Go Mobile study. We have seen that one was the reduced ability of parents to monitor what children were doing online. But another was that this "anytime, anywhere" and now "always at hand" availability of the internet for children meant that online dangers were also more present. However, while the internet may be relatively more at hand, and more so for older children, it is important to be aware of the factors that constrain children's mobile access to the online world – to put its availability into perspective.

### 4.1.1 Financial cost constraints

The amount of money involved in acquiring and subsequently using smartphones was especially important for both children and their parents. More so than in the case of tablets, various parents reported discussing the high cost of smartphones, and how they might be lost, stolen or broken, when deciding whether their child could have one. The price of different brands and models also had a bearing on which ones they bought for their children. In fact, the children were usually equally cost conscious, complaining often about the price of (some) smartphones, especially when they appeared to be fragile. And some of those interviewed mentioned their everyday anxieties about losing such a dear possession.

Daniel: *I need to be careful how I'm going to use it, where I'm going to use it, where to put it. Because people put their phones in their pockets and then they just drop out and they lose it, so I'd usually put mine in my top left blazer pocket so I know it's there*

*at all times.*

Interviewer: *So you can feel it?*

Daniel: Yes. Or panic attacks when you're: 'Oh, where's my phone, where's my phone! And to feel it's there; or have these check-ups, to check it's still there.'

Interviewer: *Is this panic attacks because it's so expensive, or because you can't do without it?*

Daniel: *Expensive.*

(14-16 boy)

After acquisition **financial considerations often have a bearing on what apps children download**. As in other countries, some UK parents had advised their children to stick to free downloads (free apps, free games, free music downloads) occasionally adding that if the child really wanted to download something that you had to buy, they would have to pay for it themselves. Where the parents had agreed to pay for downloads, younger children in particular often pointed out that they have to ask their parent's permission first. But many young people just stuck to downloading free apps, especially games, at times arguing that they are good enough and the games you had to buy are too dear.

**Running costs also influenced usage.** Some of the, often older, children are very knowledgeable about the ISP (internet service provider) tariff plans for their smartphones, and even when they do not know all the details with a few exceptions they had **a good deal of awareness of the package they were on. This can influence their evaluation of smartphone apps, several noting how Snapchat and WhatsApp were good in part because they were free and hence replaced texting.** Many older children especially were conscious that potential costs also led them to **avoid doing things on their phones that might go above the limits set on their package.** Wilson, for example, recalled first being told by his parents about the cost of watching YouTube on the phone.

Wilson: *I remember, I went on holiday ages ago and I wanted to watch The Simpsons on YouTube and I was on this journey but in the car and then I was using 3G. Then my dad said, how are you watching*

*this? And I said, 3G and he said, no, get off it, it costs. I didn't even know that so I've been using 3G for ages.*  
(11-13 boy)

Parents were, however, sympathetic to higher bills on the first trips overseas and these high bills were how the 11-13 year old girls found out to avoid using their phone abroad.

Elizabeth: *If you contact people when you're overseas then it costs because my bill is normally only £7 and it got up to like £80.*  
(11-13 girl)

Hence **most of the children who used the smartphone regularly reported monitoring their usage and try to stay below the limit, even if that involved rationing their use.**

Anuj: *I check how much data I have left normally. And then if there is WiFi I'll use it but if there isn't I won't mind using my internet, but only if it's somewhere when I really need it. If I don't need to go on my phone for something important then I'll wait till home or later on.*  
(boy, 11-13, UK)

Anuj was not the only one to seek out free WiFi areas to keep costs down, but some were starting to reflect about whether even that was worthwhile.

Interviewer: *When you're out do you go in search of Wi-Fi spots to use your tablet?*  
Alan: *Occasionally but to be honest I find them more effort than it's worth because... So if I wanted to watch something on YouTube, I'd go and find a Wi-Fi hotspot because videos take up a lot of the gig. But apart from that I just don't bother because it's more effort because you have to sign up and then you have to go to your email and work with the account and then it's just... It becomes more of a hassle than it's worth when I could just go on the internet on my smartphone.*  
(14-16 boy)

Some of the motivation to be careful about costs

came from bad personal experiences. For example:

Pranav: *I didn't know that if you use YouTube without wifi you're using mobile data. And I thought I had unlimited data and I didn't, I only had a limited amount so I went over that and I didn't know. Then one day I wanted to call my dad when I was leaving school for the coaches and it said, there's no credit left so I couldn't call, text or anything. And then I rang Vodafone and they said: 'You've used this amount you have to pay £50.'* So my dad did that.  
(...) it is quite annoying, that is a disadvantage of...  
Interviewer: *So what did your father think about having to pay £50?*

Pranav: *Quite angry. But he understood because I didn't know, I had no alert saying (I had gone over).*  
(11-13 boy)

In fact, some of those interviewed were **quite critical of the mobile phone companies for not warning them about the costs they could incur**, and in this respect thought the firms were deceptive, only concerned about making money even though the consequences could be tough for children in particular. Some interviewees had also learnt the hard way about how particular uses, in this case certain games when connected to social media, had hidden costs.

Abdur: *Some of the games are connected to the internet. Once I went over my phone bill by over £100, just because of this game called Subway Surfers. If you connect it to your Facebook on that game then every single time you get a point, you go up a level, get more coins, (Facebook) sends (notifications) to your friends. And the same with this game called Candy Crush. It's always connected to the internet and some people go on those games for hours. So it used up so much of my mobile data. I just deleted the game.*  
(11-13 boys)

Linda: *You're paying stuff and you don't know it. It comes up as a notice but it doesn't actually say, do you want to pay for it.*

Sophie: *And no one really knows how to close it.*  
Linda: *Yes, and then the verification thing is in tiny writing in the middle of these paragraphs, and you*

*just put 'Accept' because you want the game.*

*Elizabeth: Then if you pay for a certain amount of coins, if it's only like 50p, it will do it. There was one game, I can't remember what it was, but you paid 50p every day to get a new amount of coins, which it didn't say.*

(11-13 girls)

Previous research has shown that children were cost conscious about pre-smartphone mobile phones. In research conducted in the UK in 2007 children had been able to access the internet via their mobile using WAP, but in practice they had made limited use of the internet mainly because of cost – those that did use it looked up something quickly and then went offline (Haddon & Vincent, 2009). This project was first commissioned in 2007 because of concerns even at that time about how use of the mobile phone might give rise to more risks online. Yet in practice there was little risk at that time because of cost barriers to use. Some of that behaviour related to the (pre-paid) pay-per-use tariff arrangements at that time. Although those tariffs still exist, as does the get-in, get-out-fast behaviour, there is a wider range of packages now, especially more flat-rate ones. Nonetheless, this section has demonstrated how costs remain an issue and shapes the acquisition and use of smartphones in various ways. Other, older, research across countries had shown that adults are also aware of and influenced by telecom costs (Haddon, 1998). But arguably, **money concerns are more acute for children because of their financial dependence**, meaning limited personal funds as well as parental pressures to be frugal (also suggested by analysis of earlier data from the 2010 EU Kids Online survey: Haddon & Ólafsson, 2014). **Hence money is a major constraint on use and provides one reason to question the potential of children to use portable devices “anytime/anywhere”** - for economic (and related social) reasons they do not. It also has a bearing on their perceptions of what is good about smartphones and apps (e.g. when they save money) as well as what is potentially problematic (when there are hidden or unexpected charges).

#### **4.1.2 Time constraints**

One of the other factors limiting children's use of both smartphones and tablets, here using devices "anytime", arises from various **social constraints on the time they have to use the devices**. We saw in the sections on parental concerns and subsequently on their mediation strategies **how parents set rules about how long their children can spend on various devices and when they could use them**. As Daniel, (14-16 boy) noted. '*Because they wanted me to do good in my work and exams, they said, be careful how you use it, don't spend all your time on your phone*'. In fact, many of the children appreciated their parents' concerns and often heeded them, though not always; just as previous generations of children had sometimes not fully followed parental rules.

*Angela: When I have to go to bed and it's school, I'm not allowed to use the phone, only so it can wake me up in the morning, because I put an alarm on it, so it can wake me up. And when it's in the night, I'll go under the covers and start playing games or looking at my pictures to delete, things like that.*

*Interviewer: Things which you're not supposed to do?*

Angela: Yes.

(9-10 girl)

**Even without parental pressure, some children prefer to do their homework first before using devices, including portable ones, for other purposes** – even turning these devices off so that they cannot be disturbed by incoming messages. For certain young people their after-school activities their hobbies, their sporting interests, etc. take precedence - as in the time Antony (14-16) was committed to spending as a Sea Cadet. In effect they are not using devices, including smartphones, at these times. Or to be more exact, they are not doing tasks that take up blocks of time on these devices. Communication may be another matter, as some children check incoming communications regularly, fitting this in between other activities, but others do not. How many commitments people have depends on the individual, but in general older children were more likely to mention these as reasons for not using the phone at certain times. Sometimes their more general time commitments limited the children's use.

Daniel: *I mainly used (the tablet) at the weekend; I would try to use it in the weekday, but it would only be for a limited amount of time because after coming back from school activities, and then obviously there's house chores and homework, so there wouldn't be much time to use it.*

(14-16 boy)

#### **4.1.3 Space constraints**

If the previous section shows the limit on using portable devices “anytime”, this section shows the limits on using them “anywhere”. **The section on schools showed some of the limitations on using the technologies in that institution and parents joined teachers in warning children about use in public generally**, or in more specific locations, as well as on public transport. Repeatedly the children interviewed reported that they heeded these warnings

Daniel: *If I'm on the bus without my friends and there's a group of people behind me, then I'm wary of how I use it. You won't go through just poking the screen – because that's asking to get your phone stolen.*

(14-16 boy)

Meanwhile Antony was careful about using it in certain streets

Antony: *I go to XXXX Bus Station to go to cadets and I never get my phone out there. You'd literally get dragged behind... someone would take it!*

(14-16, boys)

If anything, children are even more careful about where they take their tablets, and there are often parental rules about this, more so for younger children but also for older ones. Some children, for example, are not allowed to take tablets out of the house unless accompanied by a parent. Some could take the devices when visiting relatives such as grandparents, or visiting friends – that is, locations where the parents thought it would be safe to use them.

Lastly, previous research on mobile phones had shown that they are used less in certain spaces (e.g., theatres during shows; reviewed in Haddon, 2004 and Green & Haddon, 2009). **The same is clearly true for smartphones, as some young people told embarrassing anecdotes about their phones ringing in places like church during a service. Thus, in some places they are not used but are not switched off (or even put on ‘silent’).**

## **4.2 Use of smartphones and tablets**

### **4.2.1 The range of use**

For the **youngest children playing games and watching YouTube videos, especially comical videos, on tablets are two of the more common activities**. In fact, some noted that you could only get some games like *Subway Surfers* for this device since they were not available for the PC. But to show the broader range of use John (9-10 boy) also took selfies with the tablet in different locations, and when not actually playing games used it to check his game profile to see how much progress he had made in online games. Fletcher (9-10 boy) sometimes used the tablet to get games tips on YouTube when he was stuck and had looked at toys online to get ideas for Christmas presents. Angela (9-10 girl) used her tablet for listening to music (she had just been shown by a friend how to download music from Spotify) and for editing pictures using PhotoBooth. Alison's (9-10 girl) father was a musician and wanted her to develop a certain technique for playing the Oboe and so he had encouraged her to use the tablet to see this on YouTube.

These younger children used the smartphone for fewer activities, but Krystal (9-10 girl) had used the maps on her device and Angela (9-10) had taken pictures with the Blackberry on special events. She was a more adventurous smartphone user for her age: she had used the Blackberry to go online, to listen to music, play games, watch catch-up TV and

as an alarm to wake her up. Meanwhile Alison used her iPhone to play Geocaching – searching for things that have been left by others in different locations - with her parents when on holiday.

**Older children still played games and watched videos on their portable devices, but the games could now be ones like Clash of Clans, and the videos were more likely to be films.**

They continued to listen to music and look at their pictures. Sometimes use is still limited as in the weekdays Cath (11-13 girl) mainly checked the smartphone for any missing homework on the way to school, turning it off at school and sending a text to her mum after school to arrange to be picked up. Daniel (14-16) would sometimes break the rules and look at Sky News while at school.

**In general, even more so for 14-16 year olds, the older children start to use the smartphone for more socialising and communication.**

For example Luke (14-16 boy) reported that he often showed peers pictures and videos on his smartphone and he and his friend looked forward to an American blog that came out weekly – they looked at it together on the smartphone when they met up in the morning. Meanwhile Anuj (11-13 boy) used FaceTime on the iPhone as an alternative to Skype in order to talk to his brother. At lunchtime Daniel (14-16) used his smartphone to communicate with people in different schools. And a number reported using the smartphones to check out and message via various social media.

Bea: *On my phone I'll just Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, Face Book, What's App, text, call, FaceTime, whatever. And I probably use my Instagram and things like that all the time.*

(14-16 girl)

#### **4.2.2 Finding a place for smartphones and tablets in device ecologies**

The European qualitative report for *Net Children Go Mobile* found that in general, when these new technologies portable are adopted they do not simply and completely replace the ICTs that people already have (Haddon and Vincent, 2014). **The newer technologies find their place within an ecology of devices** (Ito et al., 2010) that people

already have. This applied in the UK as well.

Sometimes the portable devices were used in conjunction with older ones, as when Alison (9-10 girl) first took videos with her iPad but then her parents transferred the videos to the computer and deleted them from the tablet to save space. Sometimes the portable devices take on a role not previously played by other ICTs: if Anuj (11-13 boy) wanted to find out something about TV programme he would check his smartphone since he carries it with him – he previously would not have made the effort to go upstairs and check it on his tablet or PC. In other cases, the portable device has taken over the role of another ICT, as when Alan (14-16 boy) now watched YouTube or a film on the tablet if he was in bed at the weekend since it more comfortable than sitting at the computer. And for Anuj (11-13) what device he used depended on the circumstances - he would normally watch films on the iPad rather than smartphone, but might use the smartphone if at someone else's house with free WiFi, or somewhere outside with free WiFi.

But the newly arrived portable device was not always the best option. Roxana (girl, 9-10) was one of several who complained that the smartphone was in her opinion too small for watching video: '*If you go on YouTube and you want to watch something it's so tiny!*' Jenna (girl, 9-10) made a similar point about the iPad Mini screen being too small for looking things up for homework: '*I've used my tablet a few times, but it's not really the greatest thing to use for me.*' Some of the older children also had their reservations about portable devices, arguing that for some things PCs and laptops were better:

*Ellis: There are some things that you can't really do on a tablet that you can do on a computer. Like it's hard to download things on a tablet or you can't really write on Word, for one, firstly, because you don't really have Word on the tablet, and, secondly, it would take ages to type.*

(11-13 boy)

As a result few interviewees mentioned actually doing homework with the help of their smartphones, reflecting the mere 16% in the UK *Net Children Go Mobile* survey who said that the device

made it easier to do homework and class assignments (Livingstone et al, 2014). Even the tablet had its limitations:

Daniel: *(The tablet) is convenient to use for when we have to rush out of the house and check bus times. But then say you're going to order something online, you wouldn't really trust a tablet (...) But with a laptop, it's sturdy; it's on the PC, it's on the hard drive, it's in the history. But with a tablet, I don't think it does all the actions a laptop can do.*

(14-16 boy)

messaging.

Anuj: *In the morning when I wake up I already find there's been text on the group already, because it's free. (...) because if you had normal text people only message you if they need to message you. And you can't really create groups on text message so I think that's why you might message more. So if you want to tell, let's just say, about your birthday party, or something, you could instead of sending it individually, and paying a lot on the text message, on the group you could send it one time for free and everyone would know about it on the group.*

(11-13 boy)

### 4.3 Changing communication practices using smartphones and tablets

When the children interviewed discussed the **consequences of using smartphones and tablets, while they sometimes referred to risks, more often they volunteered other observations first**, including in the initial exercise at the start of the interview where they listed positive and negative aspects of the devices. In various ways, **by far the most common thing these young people commented on was how smartphones had affected communications**, and hence this theme is explored further in the section below.

The *Net Children Go Mobile* survey had shown that 59% of children in the UK thought that the smartphone had enabled them to feel more connected with their friends (Livingstone et al, 2014). As with their European counterparts, a number of the children interviewed felt that it was the **smartphone's sheer convenience that had led them to communicate more**. As Joshua noted: 'Probably because it's just more readily available....not having to go up to your room, wait 20 minutes for the laptop to turn on'. **Others felt that the smartphone had led to more communication amongst peers in general** (compared to the days of texting) in part because the WhatsApp messaging system was free and in part because of its affordances, allowing group

**Some pointed to the new mobile access specifically to social networking sites.** For example, Abdur (11-13 boy) noted that when Facebook was accessed solely through his computer he used to check it once or twice a day. Now that he could access it through an app on his smartphone he checked it 'constantly... 'Oh yes, who's doing this, who'd doing that?'. Abdur was not alone in noting the change arising from on the access to social media sites from the smartphone.

Alan: *I talk a lot more to people and I talk to a lot more to people in general because the ability is there in my hands, it's much easier to... Previously if I didn't have Facebook I wouldn't be talking to this person, but because I have Facebook and they have Facebook and I have my phone and it's quite easy to communicate with them.*

(14-16 boy)

Of course, when these interviewees compare their current lives to a few years ago, they might be becoming more sociable with peers partly because of becoming more mature themselves. That said, Alan was not alone in feeling that the smartphone had aided this process.

Daniel: *Well, when I got my BlackBerry it made me more social because of BBM – that was a really big thing. With BlackBerry it made you know what was going on. Because when I didn't have a BlackBerry people would say: 'There's this happening, there's this happening'. And I'll be: 'Oh, where did you hear*

*this? Oh, BBM'. I was: 'Oh, I don't have BBM'. (...) Before, when I didn't have the BlackBerry, people said that: 'I live 60% of my life on BlackBerry'. I was: 'You can't really live that much of your life on a phone!' But then as I got into the phone I started to realise what they were saying, and my parents started seeing that I'm spending too much time on the phone.*

(14-16 boy)

**However, the downside of more communication was the 'noise' generated.** In the initial exercise at the start of interviews we saw how those in focus groups had written down a list of positive and negative things about the smartphone. Pranev (11-13 boy) explained why one of his negatives was 'Notifications during the night': *If one of my friends stays up later than all the others and I get that one notification and then my screen will turn on and wake up and the light will come on. And usually my brightness is right up so it will wake me up and then have a disturbed sleep so... That is a common problem.'* In fact Abdur in the same group then added that he points the screen down precisely to avoid that problem. This led Wilson to join in:

Wilson: *I got rid of (WhatsApp) ....because normally I used to lay there and then suddenly, because I'm in loads of groups...and then they're all talking to each other at ten o'clock at night....I used to have this really annoying text message sounding, it's like a laser, it goes pew-pew-pew...then I just kept hearing it go de-de-de, de-de-de because everyone's speaking to each other. It's so late, why?*

(11-13 boy)

Moreover, it was **not just the late timing of messages but their trivial content** (in the eyes of young people themselves, not just the parents), **that drew some criticism**. For example, Alan (14-16 boy) noted '*You get things like people instagramming their food which I don't see the point in to be honest because it's just food. It's nice but there's no need to share it with the world.'*

Given the increase in communication, adding various forms of internet messaging to texting,

some felt that it was also more likely that the smartphone could lead to cases of **replying too quickly, without forethought**.

Alan: *If you see that message and it fires you up a little bit...then you're probably going to reply to it and not think through what you're going to say. And that then leads to problems and issues with other people.*

Interviewer: *Have you encountered this?*

Alan: *A couple of times where I've said things that I then go back and think: 'Oh, that was a stupid thing to say'. But nothing that led to anything major... But I just feel that for some people...it could be an issue because if they reply too fast without thinking through what they're going to say. Then the other person is going to read it and think: 'Oh well, they must have seen this and thought it through and that's what they want to say'.... When in reality that's just something that just sprung to mind at the time without being reflected on.*

(14-16, boy)

Another negative dimension picked up in some interviews related to the theme of phones making children anti-social, the same concern that had been discussed by parents and teachers. This could be in the form of **complaints about peers constantly looking at the smartphone and not attending to other things that are around them, or that it affected their social skills.**

Elsa: *I think it stops face to face communication, which you need. Because social interaction is becoming so.... it's disappearing I think. Some people I talk to can just be so.... lack social interaction because they're so used to being just on their phones.'*

(15, girl)

For others the anti-social theme specifically related to children not talking to their parents so much because of being on their smartphones.

Alan: *Well it got to the point where my parents were complaining because I was always on my phone and so as I got older I realised I'm spending a bit too much time on it. (...) because when we were having dinner I would be on my phone and that's not*

*sociable at all (...) So the complaints were that: 'We're going to take it away from you', etc. ...and so now at dinner I just leave my phone in my room and talk to my parents. But it's mainly because it makes them... I guess it makes them happier and, I don't know, I guess it makes me happier as well because I'm not always on my phone*  
(14-16, boys)

One of the risks discussed in both the *EU Kids Online* and *Net Children Go Mobile* surveys was 'excessive use' (Livingstone et al, 2011; Mascheroni and Ólafsson, 2014) and in both surveys that was measured by a set of questions, including questions particularly asking if smartphones were leading to this behaviour rather than the internet in general. One question was whether 'I spent less time with either family, friends or doing school homework because of the time I spent on the internet'. Clearly Alan at one stage might have been among the 39% of UK children who experienced this very or fairly often because of his smartphone (Livingstone et al, 2014), (although here interacting more with friends at the cost of time with parents). Another of these questions from the *Net Children Go Mobile* was 'I felt bothered when I cannot check my smartphone' - 45% of UK children felt that very or fairly often and below we see an example of this in Bea's description of her reaction to being without the mobile internet.

Interviewer: *Do you think, Bea, that now, when you're sitting here without your phone because you're talking to me, when you go back and pick it up again are you going to feel you've missed out on something because you haven't been able to follow it?*

Bea: *I don't think like an hour would make that much difference to me...*

Elsa: *What about a week?*

Bea: *A week, oh gosh, I'd die, I couldn't live with that.*

Elsa: *Really, wow.*

Bea: *Well, I could do it, obviously. If I go on holiday I always... and they don't have WiFi. I would always be looking for free WiFi, cafés and stuff.*

(14-16 girls)

The volume of messages being sent also meant checking constantly to keep up with the gossip and

messages; you miss out on some things, although in the end, as Emma said: *You get used to it.*

Emma: *Mostly I check it most of the time because when I'm on my phone I just... everyone's talking on that and posting things so I just check that most of the time.*

Interviewer: *So are you allowed to keep an eye on it when you're having dinner?*

Emma: *No, we're not allowed phones at the table.*

Interviewer: *So can that be quite frustrating sometimes, not being able to keep it with you?*

Emma: *Yes, because sometimes you lose.... or you're like... 'What does that mean? And you just lose all the gossip. But I don't really mind that much ... it's worse on WhatsApp, I'd say, because there are groups.... and then say I went for dinner there'd be like 100 messages and you just can't be bothered to read them, and then you miss something. So it's just like, 'Whoa!'*

(13 girl)

A third question measuring excessive use from the survey was 'I have caught doing things on the smartphone that I am not really interested in'. 33% of the UK children had experienced this very or fairly often, and here Isleen captured this experience.

Isleen: *I get to the point where I'm kind of like, I get so bored, sometimes I just pick it [smartphone] up and look at it and I have nothing. Or I'll go onto Instagram, come out of it, go on Twitter, come out of it, go on Snapchat and come out of it, and just keep going in the circuit and I'll not realise I'm doing it, because I've got nothing to do..*

(14-16, girl)

**Arguably the availability of 24/7 information feeds on their smartphone produce in this case a perpetual circle of tedious non-activity as children scroll through SNSs finding nothing for them or nothing new, but looking again and again just in case they have missed something.**

Using the phone to fill moments of boredom has been noted in past studies (Haddon & Vincent, 2009). Now, the smartphone offers even more opportunities and does appear to fill awkward uncomfortable, "can't be bothered" and "not

interested in anything” moments experienced by children. However, this ennui can also lead to laziness as admitted in a discussion with teenage sisters.

Teema: We'll be in separate rooms and we'll tweet each other.

Isleen: Or call each other because you can't be bothered to get up.

Teema: No, you call me.

Isleen: Yes, or I Facetime, because like I'll call my house phone - if no-one answers [Facetime]- I'll call my house phone and make someone get up and talk to me

Interviewer: Is this when you are in your room?

Isleen: Yes.

Teema: Really?

Isleen: Yes.

Teema: That's really bad.

Isleen: And then I call, I just call them to find out if they're there; I can't be bothered to get up and see

Teema: That's lazy.

Isleen: I know.

Interviewer: So what's the response to that? From the person who answers?

Isleen: Well to be honest my Mum is always like: ‘Oh it's pointless just calling, just come down!’ But then sometimes she does it to me, or she calls and expects us to come to her so she can talk to us..

(14-15, girls)

## 4.4 Children's perceptions of risks relating to the smartphone and tablet

### 4.4.1 Children's concerns and priorities

When conducting the initial exercise in focus groups asking what was positive and negative about smartphones and tablets, **the children never voluntarily mentioned the various online risks discussed earlier – e.g. sexual images, bullying etc. – although they could talk about the risks when prompted.** They did sometimes mention viruses, **but they were more likely to complain about the high cost of the devices, their fragility, the fear that they would be**

**stolen, or some of the communication issues discussed earlier. In other words, while various stakeholders in the field of children's online safety may worry about the risks noted above it was not the first thing that children thought about.** In fact, one of the most common things that first came to mind when thinking of **negative things was the adverts and pop-ups on smartphones and tablets** - which for boys was especially irritating when occurring in the middle of playing a game:

Pranav: *It happens a lot more on the smartphone because with the smartphone you have more accessibility to internet.*

Wilson: *Well on the computer you can go and do stuff and then it's on the sides, it's a moving advert but on this (holds up his smartphone) it's just like... because on the computer normally you have to click on the ad to get it off... but it on the phone it comes out of nowhere, it's really annoying.*

Pranav: *Because on the computer it won't take up the whole screen, t will be in the corner somewhere .... but on a phone, because it's a lot smaller, it'll take up the whole screen.*

(11-13 boys)

In the group discussion Abdur added that when he tried to remove the advert by clicking X the small size of touchscreens relative to his thumbs meant that it was too easy to press the advert by mistake. Wilson then commented that on smartphones there was sometimes also a time delay before the advert disappeared, which meant waiting until he could get back to his game. What comes across in such discussions is that these are quite common, everyday irritations, blocking them from doing what they want to do, which is why they come to mind so quickly when asked about negative experiences of the devices.

### 4.4.2 Perceptions of smartphone and tablet risks

**Sometimes what children worry about is not the ‘risk’, of seeing sexual images, but the ‘risk’ of how parents will respond.** We saw earlier how children are careful to remove such

images from the phones, especially if they got there somehow not through the intentions of the child and because they knew their parents checked the histories. Below, Denzil indicated his worry when describing how he watched a TV channel through his tablet

Denzil: *I watch Channel One quite a lot and .....about the sexual photos and scenes and adverts for the strip clubs that keep on coming up..... if my Mum would have walked in she'd really overreact. She wouldn't understand that these things keep popping up..... all my sisters would understand because they quite like the One Channel as well and they watch movies.*

Interviewer: So they know this happens?  
Denzil: They know this happens but my Mum doesn't and my Mum will quite overreact because she doesn't have a mobile phone. She has an iPad but she doesn't really watch movies on the iPad.  
(9-10 boy)

**When the children did discuss risks, as with parents, they often talked about internet risks in general, that could occur through the use of any device, smartphones and tablets included.**  
Or something in practice some event took place via a smartphone, like cyberbullying, but it could have happened through other devices. **Only occasionally did one of the children interviewed suggest that something might happen more precisely because the smartphone was more often with them.**

Daniel: *It leads to more fights; it leads to more arguments. Because when you're at home you're at home by yourself, but when you have your phone you're open to the outside world.*  
(14-16 boy)

Or the children pointed out that **the greater ease of doing something on the smartphone like taking and sending pictures with the smartphone, could have both good and bad consequences:**

Abdur: *With WhatsApp you can take photos and put*

*them on your phone straight away, which could be good....for example a photo of someone holding a medal or award that could be shared with friends) or bad ....for example, a school fight – or bullying*  
(11-13 boy)

Only occasionally did those interviewed mention something very specific to smartphones, such as the location features. In one focus group discussion Josua mentioned meeting strangers via smartphones.

Interviewer: You said 'meeting dodgy people'.... but you can meet dodgy people via any other device, PC, is there a special thing about...?

Josua: *I don't know.... you have it with you the whole time I suppose.*

Luke: *You've got GPS on it people can see where you are (...) if you download a virus on your phone from a dodgy app or something then someone might be able to see where you are.*

(14-16 boys)

But note that many of these comments are not based in personal experiences, but are the children's views of what could happen. **The main example that did relate to more personal experiences was identity theft by peers getting access to their smartphones (because they were portable) and sending messages that damaged their reputations.**

Antony: *Another thing that's quite annoying is when someone steals your phone...for just a few seconds... and then starts messaging all your friends, really weird stuff.*

Josua: *I lost so many people, really (because of that) that. Someone had taken my phone, they know my password, ....don't trust them anymore. They said something very inappropriate, broadcasted it to everyone... I lost so many people, so embarrassing.*  
(14-16 boys)

In fact, the equivalent examples, specifically relating to smartphones arose in the UK report for the *EU Kids Online* qualitative study, and of all the dangers this was the one that children found very

challenging, it really upset them (Haddon and Livingstone, 2014). Small wonder that some took preventative measures of not handing smartphones to peers, or even controlling how peers could see their smartphones

*Joshua: But every time I'm showing someone a picture I'm always having two hands on the phone because everyone doesn't tend to ask say 'Can I see that'... they just go like this (gestures someone snatching it) ... Can I see that'.... they take it first and then they ask 'Can I see that'.... it's really annoying.*  
(14-16 boy)

## 4.5 Summary

A strand of the academic literature called 'Domestication' research has emphasised how new technologies have to find a role in people's lives, which means taking into account the rest of their lives, including social pressures on them (Haddon, 2004). At the start of this section we saw how **one of those pressures is children's economic circumstances, especially their financial dependency on parents. Another was time constraints, both as parents sought to control the amount and timing of use because of their concerns and because of children's own time priorities and commitments. Lastly, we saw the spatial limitations, where they can use devices, not just in schools, but in certain other public spaces.**

Next we saw the range of diverse activities, illustrating how older children use a wider range of functionalities. We also saw another layer of the domestication processes, fitting new technologies like the smartphone into the existing ecology of devices and the communications repertoire already available to children. **Once again, and in keeping with previous studies of technology adoption, it is by no means a straightforward process of new displacing old, but depends on the pros and cons or affordances offered by different devices.**

The area where children talked most about how these portable devices affected their lives, for better or for worse, was in relation to communication.

**Many felt that either they communicated more, or their peers did (often both), reflecting the greater ease of communication with these devices, the greater number of channels, the fact that some communications did not cost anything, and some of the particular affordances of the technologies, like one-to-many communication.** Specifically, some felt their use of social media had increased because of mobile internet access. This is a relevant development and context for understanding risks if more communication possibilities increases the chances of certain types of risk, like cyberbullying. On the positive side, **some felt that smartphones had contributed to them becoming more sociable** (with their peers). But on the downside, **they created considerable 'noise', communication that was distracting, disruptive and sometimes in their eyes not worthwhile.** Some shared with parents and teachers the view that more **mediated communication detracted from socialising face-to-face, and hindered the development of related social skills.** Furthermore we saw various examples that illustrated the dimensions of 'excessive use' that were first explored in the survey. **Through their own words, wading through communications could be tedious and some children thought always relying on mediated communication could make them lazy.**

As regards risk, when children were first asked to think about negative experiences online they listed a whole range of things, but not the standard set of risks from the eSafety literature. It is not that they were unaware of these – given that every child had had eSafety training as well as advice from parents, they could talk about online risks in general and how to protect themselves. **But rather it says something about their own priorities that the first things that came to mind were aspects such as costs associated with devices and, in particular, the pop-ups that got in the way of what they were doing. In other words, they first thought of the mundane but apparently regular irritations that they experienced.** As regards the more standard list of risks, **in relation to sexual content they were sometime more worried about parental responses than the material itself. Some saw the potential for more cyberbullying, certainly more**

arguments, because of portable devices. The same was true for the likelihood of more contact by strangers, where GPS might give away their location. But these were often speculations rather than being based in experience. The one area where a few children had had negative experience was in identity theft and subsequent reputation damage caused by peers.

# 5 Conclusions

In this section we provide an overview of the main findings of this report and in particular aim to address the main research questions: What have we learned from children's wider adoption of smartphones and tablets especially with regard to risk and safety issues? How do the children and adults evaluate the difference these devices have made to their lives and what issues are problematic for each of parents, teachers and children.

The report explored these topics in three sections that looked at the issues from the perspective of parents, schools and children. This conclusion explores the key points that emerged from the discussion under these respective headings.

## Parents

We interviewed parents, teachers and others who worked with children, many of whom were also parents and so were able to offer a dual perspective on some situations such as using smartphones in school or seeing problems from a child's perspective at home and at school.

- Finding a balance in their activities was an important point for children and their parents' responsibility for guiding and supporting them to avoid spending too much time online, on their smartphones and tablets, was a recurring concern.
  - Many of the anxieties expressed about these portable devices related to long-standing concerns about ICTs leading children to be more anti-social.
  - Although the availability of the internet anytime, anywhere offers new experiences compared to the internet only being available via a fixed PC it did not necessarily mean that it added to the concerns. Indeed some parents found they were more involved with their child's online activities now that they were not confined to the location of the PC.
  - That parents are also actors in the digital world
- their children inhabit and their own experiences, like feeling addicted, added to the concerns they had about their children's online experiences. Sometimes parents acknowledged that their own use of smartphones and tablets might be at odds with the advice they gave to their children - i.e. they were not presenting good role models.
- Overall the use of these devices was applauded but not always when they were used when there was nothing better to do.
  - A parent's view of what are meaningful and useful activities on these devices did not always accord with the children's and they sometimes trivialised what the children did online.
  - Online risks for parents was often not distinguished between portable or fixed devices, the internet was seen as a universal offering regardless of device, and so online risks related to the internet in general.
  - Many parents were worried about the costs of smartphones and tablets and the content they conveyed than about safeguarding the children.
  - The role of the smartphone as a rite of passage for children being a gift that marked a certain maturity brought with it the extra responsibility for the child of keeping an expensive device safe from theft and damage.
  - The main mode of monitoring was checking history of use on the device, and again, many children, especially younger ones, were not opposed to this as they could see they would learn about what was appropriate and inappropriate use in this way. Nevertheless the smartphone especially is a highly personal device to which the child has an emotional attachment and checking the smartphone histories is now perceived as being more intrusive than checking the history on a PC.
  - In some instances children had become wary of what their parents might find on their phone.
  - Some parents felt that they were less able to

monitor their children's internet use.

- That said other parents had found new ways to control the use of devices – e.g. turning off the WiFi, requiring that devices be handed in at night.
- There were a few situations in which parents had location tracking apps that could monitor where their children were at all times; some children were happy that this was to their advantage in an emergency whilst others felt it was step too far.

## School

- School policies on smartphones varied from banning them completely to rules under which they could be used; this reflected the ad hoc policy setting on a school by school basis.
- There was a general feeling among teachers that using smartphones at school, and especially during breaks, or playtime, was restricting the opportunities for social interaction and that school is a place of learning and not a place for these devices.
- There was also a concern for institutional responsibility for expensive devices that were confiscated, or lost during the course of the day.
- Teachers influence on smartphones extended beyond the school premises as they gave advice about using phones safely on route to school and in public places.
- Children did appreciate the need for school rules in the same way as they appreciated their parent's intervention in assisting them to learn the safe use of smartphones and tablets. However, the severity of punishments was not entirely condoned such as the confiscation of devices for a long time, or banning many children's use because of the actions of a few.
- Although teachers were positive about the educational potential of tablets they could not foresee an equitable system for distributing their use, nor could they see it working in a

universal way in all schools – some would be less able to accommodate them than others.

- Some teachers remained concerned about the 'anti-social' effects of tablet adoption in schools.

## Children

- A child's economic circumstances were a major factor in children's uptake of smartphones and tablets. That children are price sensitive when it comes to acquiring and using a mobile phone is not new but with so much more content now available and the initial cost of the device so much more than in the past the cost of obtaining and running a smartphone and/or tablet is not diminishing.
- Most children were dependent on their parents for funding their smartphone use, even after the device had been given to them and this framed their approach to accessing free WiFi, albeit often within the household and so paid for by parents.
- Rules about when smartphones and tablets could and could not be used also provided another constraint on children's use of these devices.
- Other limits were due to location of use where there was no free WiFi or where they were not permitted to use their smartphone such as at school or when abroad.
- Children's use of smartphones and tablets shows the legacy of their use of old devices as the new devices have to fit into existing options already available to children. It is by no means a straightforward process of new displacing old, but depends on the pros and cons or affordances offered by different devices.
- Smartphones provide a much wider range of broadband based services and this was perhaps the greatest change that children in this present study experienced. Indeed more apps and mobile internet capabilities have become available even between the EU Kids Online and Net Children Go Mobile qualitative

studies discussed in this report, such as the widespread use of Instagram, WhatsApp and the declining use of Facebook and text messaging, voice having already declined before smartphones.

- Some of the children felt that their use of social media had increased as a result of the mobile internet and there was a greater ease with which they could communicate using the now widely available WiFi and messaging services that were no longer linked to specific manufacturers. These meant children could group message and share information among their peers as well as specific friendship groups with relative ease.
- Some felt, however, that with this greater ease of use came more risks and threats such as cyberbullying, as well as the creation of too much ‘noise’ communication that was distracting and sometimes not worthwhile.
- Some of the children were beginning to recognise the possibilities of excessive use, even addiction, and that communication could be tedious and by always relying on it you could become lazy and not think for yourself.
- In common with the adults the risks that children talk about first are more to do with the management of the devices such as the cost of getting one and of using it, especially the hidden and unexpected costs associated with going abroad on holiday, or playing games.
- Whilst they recognised the potential for cyberbullying, for having more arguments via social media and the risks of being located (or being known to be not at home so open to burglary and theft) were usually speculation and not personal experiences.
- Perhaps the most common risk was that of identity theft by letting their device be misused by their peers leading to loss of respect.

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