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# children and young people's views on web 2.0 technologies

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# children and young people's views on web 2.0 technologies

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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# Executive summary

## Introduction

The overarching aim of this project was to gather young people's views about web 2.0 technologies. Such technologies include social media and social software: they consist of online tools which allow users to share, collaborate and interact with one another. These technologies allow and involve interactive use of the internet, rather than mere one-way presentational use. These tools and websites include popular social networking sites such as MySpace, Facebook and Bebo, and media sites like Flickr and YouTube.

The project was interested in young people's personal use of social media, but also in how they might use these tools in a community or local authority (LA) context, for example, to communicate with other young people, organise meetings and events, express their views, or take part in a youth cabinet or similar representative group. The more detailed aims of the research were centred on key research questions.

- What is the extent to which children and young people currently make use of web 2.0 technologies, especially social networking sites, and how do they use them?
- How can web 2.0 technologies help to engage children and young people in expressing their views about their needs, their concerns and the services offered to them?
- What advice would children and young people give to social work educators and practitioners about maximising the benefits of web 2.0 technologies to the benefit of their clients?

The aim was to produce a report that would provide useful information for LA personnel considering using web 2.0 tools and policy personnel considering future forms of communication within children's services fields.

## Methodology

In order to obtain children and young people's views on web 2.0 technologies, semi-structured discussions were held in focus groups. Focus groups were conducted in three LAs: a London borough, a shire county and an urban unitary authority. The participants were all in the 11–19 age group and were youth cabinet (or similar) representatives, and were therefore probably more 'digitally literate' than young people who were not in a similar representative position.

The three LAs were recruited by means of an email request for assistance with the project. These were sent to a youth participation officer, or similar. The LAs, which agreed to take part, tended to have already used social media in some way to canvass young people's views and encourage participation in decision making.

In addition to the young people's discussion groups, four adult LA officers were interviewed by telephone. They were all youth participation officers, though their official job titles varied slightly. With one exception, they were from different LAs to those that provided focus groups. The focus groups and the adult telephone interviews were all conducted between April and October 2009.

## Main findings

- The findings indicated that web 2.0 technologies were used extensively by the young people featured in the study (all of whom belonged to a youth cabinet or similar group) for personal use, participation in peer discussions and expressing opinions.
- A small minority of young people did not use these technologies, raising issues about digital inclusion, partly because the technologies required can still be expensive or other barriers to their use. Agencies

working to obtain young people's views may need to take steps to address issues of inclusion.

- Much of the use of these tools takes place in informal or peer-supported contexts. Therefore, a good proportion of the development of e-skills takes place outside schools, colleges and youth groups. Professionals working with young people could perhaps make more use of the informal development of e-skills.
- Young people are confident and feel safe when using these tools. 'Cyber bullying' and malicious use of

texts did exist but were rare, and the young people either knew how to deal with these things themselves, or who they should turn to for advice and support.

Overall, there is enormous potential for using web 2.0 technologies to collect the views of young people and therefore involve them in civic duties and local and national democracy. Some LAs have driven this forward through, for example, the use of special council-supported websites (and web editors) enabling young people to discuss and share views on particular topics, and sharing this good practice would be beneficial to all LAs.



# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

Web 2.0 technologies allow and encourage interactive uses of the world wide web, with a particular emphasis on collaboration and interactivity amongst users. These technologies can be closely linked with the development of social media and networking sites. Social media and social software are terms usually used to describe the online tools that allow users to share, collaborate and interact with one another: they involve interactive use of the internet, rather than mere one-way presentational use. These tools and websites include social networking sites such as MySpace, Facebook and Bebo, media sites like Flickr and YouTube, and computer-mediated communication tools such as blogs, wikis, podcasts and instant messaging software. The interaction that these tools allow is an important part of what has become known, formally, as 'web 2.0 technologies'. Reference is also sometimes made to a 'spectrum' of web 2.0 technologies, with the most interactive and creative technologies (such as web design) featuring at the top of this spectrum (see, for example, Dede, 2009).

The use of these new forms of interaction by young people, and especially by young people who may prefer these forms of communication to more traditional, formal, institutional forms of contact, suggests that these media might be useful in helping to engage hard-to-reach young people. Furthermore, it has been argued that web 2.0 technologies have the potential not only to enhance particular aspects of communication, teaching and learning, but also to contribute to the creation of completely new forms of these activities. In particular, they are likely to contribute to substantial increases in 'anytime, anywhere', user-directed, peer and community learning. One leading author in this area has expressed a view that the adoption of social software tools, techniques and ideas will be 'the most important and visible example of the use of emerging technology...over the next few years' (Bryant, 2007).

Having said this, and although young people generally tend to be enthusiastic about using new technologies,

their positive use at school and home cannot be taken for granted, especially for certain groups of young people. The use of computers, especially word-processing at school, is sometimes described as 'boring' and pupils can dislike homework whether it is digital or paper-based (see, for example, Valentine *et al.*, 2005, p.63).

It is clear, however, that, both on their own and with the support of schools and local government services, web 2.0 technologies have considerable potential for helping to engage and involve young people in their communities. The bringing together of children's services functions within LAs, and more widely as part of Children's Trust arrangements, makes it more likely that these forms of communication will become even more important as a means for LAs to facilitate young people's participation in local democracy, decision making and communications.

Children's services, including social care, youth offending, school improvement, school support and youth services, have frequently been tasked with finding innovative ways of engaging their service-user groups in both consultative and participative activities, which inform the future planning and commissioning of services. Given the variety of service functions and the specific needs of their particular user groups, there is universal agreement that there is no single, 'one size fits all' approach to engaging children and young people. There are, however, national examples of how web 2.0 technologies can provide a solution to engagement.

- **Viewpoint:** A web-based solution to engaging children and young people in reviews and assessments, including child protection and looked-after children reviews, detention and training order reviews and special needs reviews (available at <http://www.vptorg.co.uk/>).
- **11 Million:** The Office for the Children's Commissioner in England, '11 Million', hosts a website that offers opportunities for children and young people to upload their own videos,

presentations and photographs, and respond to consultations online (available at <http://www.11million.org.uk/>).

The benefits of web 2.0 technologies have already been recognised and utilised by a number of well-established UK children's organisations including, for example, the NSPCC, through its online Childline/There4me service (available at <http://www.childline.org.uk/play/Pages/Play.aspx/there4m%20e.htm>), and Connexions, through their Adviser Online service (available at <http://www.connexions-direct.com/index.cfm?pid=223>).

Although the potential benefits of using social media are clear, time-pressured practitioners may struggle to assist children and young people to use these new forms of interaction to best effect, and in ways which take account of the complex ethical and safety issues that surround their use. Safety issues, in particular, have been receiving a good deal of attention recently: see the recommendations of the Byron Review (DCSF, 2008), the work of The UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS, 2009) and the guidance produced for social work educators and practitioners by the Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services ([www.iriss.ac.uk/node/228](http://www.iriss.ac.uk/node/228)) and the Joint Information Systems Committee ([www.jisc.ac.uk/publications/reports/2007/twweb2.aspx](http://www.jisc.ac.uk/publications/reports/2007/twweb2.aspx))

It was in this context that the Local Government Association commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to carry out a small-scale evaluation of children and young people's views on the use of web 2.0 technologies, and how such technologies might assist these young people to express their views and opinions.

## 1.2 The aims of the project

The overarching aim of the project was to gather young people's views about web 2.0 technologies, particularly their views about how social work educators and practitioners could best engage and support them in the use of such technologies. The more detailed aims were centred on the following key research questions.

- What is the extent to which children and young people currently make use of web 2.0 technologies,

especially social networking sites, and how do they use them?

- How can web 2.0 technologies help to engage children and young people in expressing their views about their needs, their concerns and the services offered to them?
- What advice would children and young people give to social work educators and practitioners about maximising the benefits of web 2.0 technologies to the benefit of their clients?

The aim was to produce a report that would provide useful information about 'what works', with examples of the practical uses of social software for improving communications and engagement with and between young people. The findings should also be useful to LA personnel considering the use of web 2.0 tools and for policy personnel considering future forms of communication within the children's services fields.

The focus on these questions, and on young people's views, was maintained throughout the study, but as the project progressed we involved more professional adults in the research process. This was necessary because of both methodological considerations (numerous youth workers offered individual interviews alongside group interviews with young people), and substantive considerations (youth workers had facilitated the use of these technologies, often with more than one cohort of young people, and were therefore able to provide useful information, as well as adult and LA perspectives, for the research team).

## 1.3 Methodology

In order to obtain children and young people's views on web 2.0 technologies, focus groups were carried out based on the use of a semi-structured discussion guide. One focus group was conducted in each of three different local authorities (one more than was planned in the project proposal). The discussion participants were all in the 11–19 age group.

The three LAs were recruited by means of an e-mail request for assistance with the project. These were usually sent to a 'Youth Participation Officer' or similar. The three LAs that agreed to take part were different in

their nature: one was a London Borough, another was a shire county and the third was an urban unitary authority. These LAs tended to be authorities where social media had already been used in one way or another to canvass young people's views and to encourage their participation in decision making. Each of the three LAs provided a venue for the discussion and the research featured as an item for the youth cabinet (or equivalent) meeting.

The fact that the young people had, in the great majority of cases, experienced using web 2.0 technologies meant they could comment in interviews on their experiences to date. This did mean, however, that the focus groups were based primarily on youth cabinet or youth parliament groups. It may be that, while these young people tended to be experienced users of social media, and therefore well placed to comment usefully on these technologies, they may not have been fully representative of the broader population of young people. In particular, they may have had high levels of 'digital literacy'. Steps were taken, however, to address this issue. For example, we asked these focus group participants about their friends' uses of web 2.0 technologies, and how widespread they felt their use was among young people generally.

The numbers in each of the focus groups ranged from eight to 24. The researcher, as far as was practicable,

used established focus group techniques to ensure all participants had an appropriate say in the discussions. The discussions were stimulated by means of a common set of questions covering the key research issues presented in Section 1.2.

As the project evolved, opportunities became available to include professional adults, usually youth participation officers, in the research process. It became apparent that they could offer very useful perspectives on young people's use of web 2.0 technologies. Some of these youth officers had been involved both in youth participation and in using social media for several years and were, therefore, able to articulate the pitfalls and advantages of using such media in these kinds of contexts. Consequently, four adult LA youth participation officers were interviewed by telephone. With one exception, these individuals were from different LAs to those that provided the focus groups. Some of the LAs that responded to the email request were unable to provide a focus group of young people, but were able to offer an adult youth participation officer for interview.

The focus groups and the adult telephone interviews were all conducted between April and October 2009. The views and perspectives collected from these discussions and interviews form the basis of the evidence presented in this report.

## 2 Use of and attitudes towards web 2.0 technologies

Research evidence from a variety of sources (for example: Rudd *et al.*, 2009) indicates that the great majority of children and young people now have access to both a computer and the internet at home. The proportion seems to be somewhere between 80 and 95 per cent of the school-aged population, depending upon the precise wording of the question asked. It is certainly true to say that most young people's homes are 'technologically rich' (see Keating *et al.*, 2010): personal ownership of computers increases as young people become older and socio-economic status increases. In addition to home access, of course, many young people will have mobile access to the internet and social networking sites via their mobile phones.

Consequently, the first question in the focus groups with young people sought to ascertain whether the young people used social networking sites, media sites and communication tools. It was not ascertaining the frequency of use. The common response was a very positive 'yes' to all three types. The most common types of tools mentioned by the young people in focus groups were social networking or media sites, notably Facebook, Bebo, YouTube and MySpace, and (less frequently) Flickr. There were only a small number who said that they did not use these technologies. For example, one boy said: 'I don't have a mobile and I don't use the internet. I'm 15 now and my mum says I can't use those things until I'm 16.'

The four LA-employed adults, interviewed individually, confirmed what the young people said about the main tools used. One LA web editor, for example, reported that the young people particularly used Facebook, MySpace and Bebo to keep in touch and to share details of events, including events at youth clubs. They used blogs, but only used wikis very occasionally (these are 'less natural'). They have also made short podcasts. Another adult interviewee, a youth participation worker, said that the LA's young people 'definitely' used these tools, 'and they can use them without our involvement'.

There is some evidence, from the interviews conducted for this project and from other pieces of research

(Keating *et al.*, 2010) that young people are tending to develop their e-skills largely in their own time and outside formal institutions. This is true in relation to both hardware – using mobile phones and games consoles, for example – and software applications such as Facebook, Wikipedia and YouTube. It would be beneficial for those who work in schools and children's services to build upon and make greater use of the ICT skills and experience that learners have acquired at home and outside of school.

However, both at home and school, learners tend to use computers most frequently for what might be called 'routine' learning tasks such as personal communications, internet research and to present their school or college work in particular ways. For example, in a nationally-representative survey of school pupils carried out by the NFER on behalf of Becta, relatively low proportions of young people reported using what might be considered to be 'advanced' e-skills, such as uploading or downloading resources to or from the internet, or using web 2.0 technology to create web pages (Keating *et al.*, 2010). This suggests that the full interactive capacities of web 2.0 technologies are not yet being fully utilised.

It is also worth bearing in mind that, even if the great majority of young people have access to these technologies, this still leaves between five and 20 per cent of young people without a home computer (despite digital inclusion campaigns and initiatives such as the Home Access Programme, a government drive that helps low-income families who currently lack access to a computer or internet to get online at home). This remains a challenge for those aiming for universal access and greater youth participation in local decision making. Particular attention may need to be given to hard-to-reach groups of children and families for whom there are barriers to home access and use of computers. There is a serious risk of 'double deprivation' for these groups, in the form of combined economic and technological exclusion.

The second question in the focus groups asked how and why young people use these technologies.

Answers indicated that they used these tools, especially the social networking sites, for a mixture of personal communications and youth group, youth cabinet or communal purposes. (It should be stressed, once more, that these young people were members of bodies such as youth cabinets, so their use of these tools may be more extensive than that of young people in general). This mix of uses is reflected in this typical comment:

*We mostly use them to chat with people we know. This youth group has a Facebook page and anyone can use it, pretty much everyone has Facebook [but] most of our communications are between friends and family.*

Young person

The adult interviewees supported this view:

*They use MSN, chat rooms, Facebook. They use these for talking, sending messages and flirting. They also arrange events and can have campaigns. These tools help them to develop their own identities, though there are also pitfalls.*

Youth participation worker

The adults also usually added a comment about how the LA could use a website for the (one-way) provision of information for all young people in the area. For example:

*The web page provides basic information about the youth cabinet and how it operates.*

*[The web page] provides information on a range of matters, including travel timetables, sexual health, fund-raising...It is a one-stop shop.*

In terms of a question about the frequency of use of these web 2.0 social networking tools, the most common response from the young people was 'every day', and this was usually a reference specifically to social networking tools: 'I use these every day now'. Many of the young people reported using social networking sites 'several times a day'.

Three of the adult interviewees concurred that not all young people, but most of them, use web 2.0 every day, often while doing their homework. One adult respondent, however, was slightly more circumspect, suggesting that use was not quite as frequent as this:

*It's hard to tell. I couldn't put a figure on it. But clearly they are used and they are useful. We send out weekly messages to keep them informed of what's going on.*

Youth Participation Officer

Frequency of use, then, appears to be quite regular, if not daily, though it has to be remembered that, for a variety of reasons, including a lack of access to computers and mobile devices, and parental controls, there will be some young people who do not use these tools or only use them occasionally. For those who were regular users, it was very evident that they were used 'anywhere'. These comments on locations of use, made by the adult interviewees, were typical:

*Anywhere where there is internet access.*

*I get the sense that they can access these technologies both at school and at home.*

*The great thing is that these tools are going to where the young people are.*

*All over the place. Wherever there are mobile devices or computers. There are also accessible machines in all our youth centres.*

The 'anywhere, anytime' functionality of these technologies was clearly recognised by both the young people and the LA officers, and both groups could see that there were potential advantages to this.

### 3 Safe use of web 2.0 technologies

Following the questions about types of web 2.0 tools used, mode, frequency and locations of use, we asked the young people a number of questions about safety, the possible apparent dangers, and the steps that could be taken to ensure safe use.

The general finding here, perhaps contrary to the dominant views of the popular media, was that young people felt safe using these technologies, were aware of the dangers they could present, and were 'savvy' about what they needed to do to protect themselves from such dangers. Most of the young people in the focus groups said that they had never had a problem in this respect.

We asked the young people what steps they took, if any, to protect themselves, and where they obtained advice about e-safety. It was evident that the majority had a good knowledge of the steps required for staying safe and that they had plenty of sources of advice:

*Everyone tells you. The papers, teachers, mum and dad.*

Young person

*I only use friends' pages...You should never give your details to anyone. Keep changing your passwords, use the computer privacy options.*

Young person

When asked about the possible dangers of using social networking sites and other tools, the young people were able to identify a number of possible issues. These included: 'Strangers talking to you, hacking, viruses.'

The LA officers' comments supported what the young people said about e-safety:

*I think they do feel safe. They're used to engaging with their friends in this way. It's very normal for them.*

LA officer

*Yes, they do feel safe. They have very little anxiety. They are aware that you can easily change your identity. They seem pretty savvy.*

LA officer

One LA officer provided further detail about the sources of e-safety advice that were available to young people, if they needed them:

*We say that if you are worried, talk to an adult who you can trust...Most young people know how to cope with these issues: they are very savvy. They are very aware through the work of their schools and parents are very aware too; they can use privacy settings, and I imagine that schools give them lots of advice.*

LA officer

Of course it cannot be assumed that all the young people receive comprehensive e-safety advice from their schools, colleges or parents, but peer support on this issue appeared to be strong for these particular groups: 'I'm not sure what advice schools give, but they definitely receive good advice informally.'

The adult interviewees, who in most cases had some responsibility for ensuring the safety and well-being of young people in their LA, were able to elaborate:

*Inappropriate intimacy can be a risk...Young people here have experienced text bullying, also I'm aware that cyber-bullying exists, but I have not experienced it personally. We have an anti-bullying team.*

*There has been some name calling, but nothing more dangerous than that...The young people are not as concerned as the media would have us believe.*

It seems that, on the whole, young people are very aware of the dangers of using social networking and media sites, and have access to strategies and advice for dealing with them. As one LA officer said:

*They are very aware of the dangers...Young people are ahead of the grown-ups in terms of awareness of the risks.*

This does not mean, however, that there is any room for complacency on the part of adults tasked with working with young people and keeping them safe from these

types of issues. Davies and Cranston (2008, p.15) have noted that bullying, for example, was perceived by youth workers to be the major online risk for young people.

In this study, cyber bullying was not raised as a major issue. The emphasis was more on technical problems such as viruses and the need to stay safe by not giving out personal details online. One of the LA officer interviewees pointed out that, while the great majority of young people are very aware of online dangers, and know how to keep themselves safe, the main problems might be to do with particular groups of young people. It might be necessary, she said, to identify some potentially vulnerable groups or individuals, which could include, for example, those who are lonely, isolated or have learning difficulties:

*Some young people, especially those with emotional and behavioural difficulties, may be vulnerable in the sense that they could use electronic communication to replace human communication. Some people can be on their computers for hours and can become totally immersed in them, or can become addicted to video games and avatars. Some games can involve violence or sexual activities.*

LA officer

Young people's responses to a Becta survey, conducted by the NFER (Keating *et al.*, 2010), suggest that there is still scope for e-safety advice and guidance to be improved by both schools and parents. In this survey, for example, 20 per cent of primary learners reported they had not received e-safety education from a teacher, while almost 15 per cent had not received e-safety education from a parent. At secondary level, these figures were 35 per cent and 29 per cent, respectively. In addition, only 13 per cent of primary learners and five per cent of secondary learners answered 'yes' when asked if they were supervised when using the internet at home (Keating *et al.*, 2010).

E-safety is an area that continues to receive official attention. The Byron Review (DCSF, 2008) made a number of recommendations for keeping children and young people safe, and many of these recommendations were implemented in December 2009, partly through the launch of a new 'digital code' for internet safety, *Zip It, Block it, Flag it* (UKCIS, 2009).

## 4 Expressing views by means of web 2.0 technologies

The findings in the previous two chapters suggest web 2.0 technologies are used extensively by the young people featured in this study, and that they are confident and feel safe when using these tools. This chapter turns to a different question, concerning the actual and potential use of these tools to engage and encourage young people to express their views and to take part in decision making. The background to this is a view that web 2.0 technologies can assist individuals to obtain information for themselves, and express their views in straightforward and 'instantaneous' ways, thus having much potential for enabling young people to take part in civic and democratic processes.

In the group discussions we asked young people how they express views on issues affecting their local area. The general response was that they had plenty of opportunities to express their views, both by electronic means and by other means, such as workshops and projects.

In terms of using web 2.0 technologies to 'have a say', one young person commented: 'Facebook, Bebo, MSM and digital photos have all been used for this purpose. It is good to express your view, get it off your chest.'

When the young people were asked to give actual examples of how they had expressed their views at a local level, they had to give more thought to the question. Responses included:

*We have used electronic voting in conferences.*

*We use film and video a lot. There are DVDs on our web page linked in to YouTube. We use films to campaign on relevant issues, for example, smoking or drugs.*

*We have a blog on our website. We also use the website to express personal opinions. Lots of people have discussions and express their opinions.*

*We can make comments by means of YouTube videos. There are public spaces and blogs where we can comment.*

Similar examples were provided by the four LA officer interviews. Generally, they found that young people were very keen on these forms of communicating their views. A further question, for the four adults, asking about the potential to use web 2.0 technologies more frequently to help young people express their views about their needs, concerns and the services offered to them, stimulated some interesting comments in favour of the potential of these technologies:

*It is a good way to express views on rural issues. Young people in isolated rural areas can keep in touch and can feel part of the community.*

LA officer

*It brings us all together; it is as if we are one family, a movement, both within the borough and across the city... Everyone has the opportunity to be involved. This is a great way of reaching young people.*

LA officer

*This is the future...You have to be excited about the potential. Some young people do communicate better using computers...and there is a lot of potential for peer support, for sharing experiences.*

LA officer

The common themes in these comments are those of family, community and support, and sharing. The *social* part of social media was seen to be particularly important for these LA officers.



# 5 Maximising the benefits of web 2.0 technologies

## 5.1 Youth participation websites

During the course of the project we came across a number of websites that were used as a mechanism for young people to express their views. Indeed, nearly all LAs seem to have a website for young people, usually accessed from the main home page or an A-Z list of services. These websites can broadly be categorised into three types:

- information giving only (events, advice, transport and facilities)
- information giving with moderated interactivity
- information giving and with full, non-moderated interactivity.

One of the LA officer interviewees, who supported a well-established youth cabinet, described how their website had been developed, and this is an interesting example because the LA has experienced all three of these formats:

*We had our own web page on the council's website. This used to give publicity to young people. At first we had a link to a My Space page, but this led to problems. Anyone could write comments and some of the comments and pictures were inappropriate. Obviously we did not wish to have inappropriate comments linked with the council webpage. We had to make our own page 'read only' and then we disbanded it altogether, and we are working on a new version... There are problems in using live, online sites. The big issue is moderation by an adult. If you're going to have discussion groups or a forum, this is an ongoing problem, you must have a moderator.*

LA officer

It may well be that many LAs, like this one, will try a degree of experimentation and then end up with some form of moderated participation website.

Another LA officer interviewee explained how any web page for youth groups needed to be 'youth friendly'. Council websites, she said, 'tend to be corporate, dull

and grey... It is important to involve young people in setting it up, let them input into the content and design.'

The message seems to be, then, that young people should be involved in the design of web pages intended to be used for communication and the expression of viewpoints, but also that, once such a website is up and running, it needs to be moderated by an adult.

## 5.2 Key benefits

Investment in terms of time and effort are required, for example, to establish an appropriate web page or to set up the communication systems required for a youth cabinet or other consultative body for young people. And there are clear benefits to establishing such mechanisms as a 'voice' for young people.

All young people involved in this project saw that the benefits of web 2.0 technologies outweighed any disadvantages or dangers. They also saw that there was still much potential for the use of these tools, both in terms of their own personal uses and accessing, collecting and expressing the views of a broad range of young people (and not just those who represent their locality).

The adult interviewees were able to articulate these benefits in more detail. Overall, the main reported benefits can be summarised as follows.

- These technologies enable LAs to go where the young people are. They can, in some cases literally, be used 'anywhere, anytime'. Young people can express their views from the privacy of their own home, or in many other contexts, by means of their computer devices or mobile phones.
- These technologies, once established and with age-appropriate use, are familiar, easy to use, encourage spontaneous and instantaneous communication and are a form of communication that young people

favour. For some young people, such as those with movement or access issues, or those living in rural or remote localities, they are especially valuable.

- Web 2.0 technologies have important sharing and peer-support elements which can be immensely valuable to young people. They allow for informal discussions, seeking information, sharing resources and community building, all on one familiar device.

### 5.3 Summary of main findings

These are the main findings from the group discussions with young people.

- The sample of young people featured in this study (though not necessarily representative of all young people) used web 2.0 technologies, and especially social networking sites, extensively and regularly.
- A small minority did not use these technologies, and there are also issues concerning digital inclusion, partly because the technologies required can still be expensive. Agencies working to obtain young people's views may need to take steps to address this.
- Much of the use of these tools takes place in informal or peer-supported contexts. Therefore, a good proportion of the development of e-skills takes place outside schools, colleges and youth groups. Professionals working with young people could perhaps make more use of the informal development of e-skills.
- The young people featured in this study were confident in their use of web 2.0 tools. They were aware of the dangers and of the steps required to stay safe online. There may be some young people, however, who would benefit from further e-safety support, including an emphasis on the *Zip it, Block it, Flag it* code, and age restrictions on social media should be maintained.

Overall, there is enormous potential for using web 2.0 technologies to collect the views of young people and therefore involve them in civic issues and local and national democracy. Some LAs have driven this forward through, for example, using special council-supported websites (and web editors) enabling young people to discuss and share views on particular topics. Sharing this good practice would be beneficial to all LAs.

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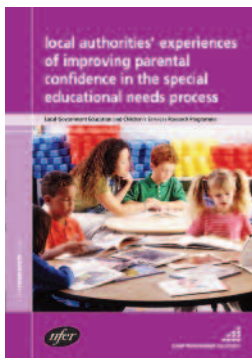
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## 7 Further reading

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## Recently published reports

The Local Government Education and Children's Services Research Programme is carried out by the NFER. The research projects cover topics and perspectives that are of special interest to local authorities. All the reports are published and disseminated by the NFER, with separate executive summaries. The summaries, and more information about this series, are available free of charge at [www.nfer.ac.uk/research/local-government-association/](http://www.nfer.ac.uk/research/local-government-association/)



### Local authorities' experiences of improving parental confidence in the special educational needs process

This research focused on LAs with evidence of good practice in supporting children with SEN. Partnership working is enhanced where SEN teams have a positive ethos and approach towards parents. LAs need to ensure that parents have good quality, face-to-face contact with SEN professionals at the earliest possible stage in the process.

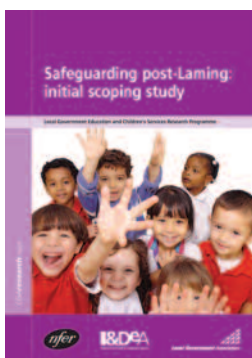
[www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/LAM01/](http://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/LAM01/)



### The impact of the Baby Peter case on applications for care orders

This study looked at the impact of the case of Baby Peter Connelly on LAs' applications for care orders and child protection more widely. There was evidence of a rise in applications for care/supervision orders and LA staff reported implications of the increase in care orders on staff workload, morale, recruitment and retention.

[www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/BPI01/](http://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/BPI01/)



### Safeguarding post-Laming: initial scoping study

This review looked at research since 2009 (following the Laming review on safeguarding children). The database searches identified 48 relevant items, including good practice guidance, quality assessments, interagency training and information sharing. Website searches found 41 items, most were responses to the Laming report. The report summarises the main findings and identifies potential areas of further research.

[www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/LGM01/](http://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/LGM01/)

For more information, or to buy any of these publications, please contact: The Publications Unit, National Foundation for Educational Research, The Mere, Upton Park, Slough, Berkshire SL1 2DQ, tel: +44 (0)1753 637002, fax: +44 (0)1753 637280, email: [book.sales@nfer.ac.uk](mailto:book.sales@nfer.ac.uk), web: [www.nfer.ac.uk/publications](http://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications).

Web 2.0 technologies are online tools that allow users to share, collaborate and interact with one another. This small-scale project focused on young people's personal use of social media, and on the potential to use these tools to collect the views of young people and involve them in democracy in communities and local authorities.

The main findings indicated that:

- web 2.0 technologies were used extensively by young people for personal use and expressing opinions, although not all have equal access to it at home
- young people are confident and feel safe when using these tools
- 'cyber bullying' and malicious use of texts did exist but were rare.

This report is important reading for LAs, children's services practitioners and all those working with young people.