

The ICT and Home School Links Project (ICTHOS)

Diane Mavers

Manchester Metropolitan University

The ICT and Home School Links Project (ICTHOS) has recently been set up by the British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (Becta) on behalf of the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). Based at the Research Centre at the Manchester Metropolitan University the project is led by Professor Bridget Somekh with Cathy Lewin and myself. It is a small-scale project of nine months duration, running from January 2001 to August 2001.

Increasing access to ICT resources and networked technologies both in homes and schools, in addition to workplaces, libraries and other locations, affords potential for a variety of communication possibilities between teachers, parents/guardians and pupils for a range of purposes. The web enables unmediated access to a plethora of educational resources for parents and pupils published by schools, LEAs and

government bodies and increasingly by other providers in the form of support for schoolwork (for example BBC Bitesize, Homework High). The ICTHOS research is looking primarily at schools' use of email and the web for communication between teachers and parents and between teachers and pupils, and on home use of the web by parents and pupils for a range of purposes, as well as use of portables between home and school.

The ICTHOS project aims aim to gather information on existing content, organisation, management, structure and use of electronic resources for home-school links along with evaluation and exemplification of good practice. Through description of models in different schools it will identify similarities and contrasts, thus informing policy makers and a providing a data source for dissemination to practitioners.

The project's specific objectives are to:

- examine the various ways in which the relationship between the school and home is potentially strengthened by the use of ICT;
- identify both the types of technologies being used and the various models of use being developed in a range of home school initiatives (including both established practices and special short-term projects);
- identify the particular benefits that may result;
- investigate the ways in which these benefits may relate not only to teaching and learning but also to the way schools are managed and administered;
- consider a range of software and web based content that is available in the home that might support home learning;
- consider the implications of these developments for decision makers, schools, LEAs, students and parents;
- consider issues associated with the implementation and management of ICT to support home school links;
- consider any further potential benefits of using ICT for home-school links which may accrue in the near future as the technology develops.

The first phase of the project includes a process of knowledge mapping where national and international key informants are providing information on related issues and current initiatives in schools. We are also seeking information from commercial companies. This information, supplemented by literature review findings, is helping us to identify approximately 200

primary, secondary and special schools throughout England where innovative practice in the use of ICT for home-school links is either in place or in the process of development. In order to build a profile of practice we are asking each of these schools to complete a questionnaire. A later phase of the research will entail case studies in a small number of schools which have introduced a range of contrasting practices.

At this stage in the research process, we are continuing to seek schools which are either just beginning to explore the use of ICT for home school links or which have established or developing models. Maybe your school would like to be involved. Participation would entail completion of a four-sided questionnaire which should take no longer than 20 minutes to complete. An addressed pre-paid envelope is provided for its return. Should it be preferred, there is also an electronic version which can be sent as an attachment via email. All information is treated confidentially and all data will be anonymised. Schools completing the questionnaire will be sent a copy of any publications produced by DfEE as a result of our work, should they wish it. This opportunity for schools to share their development of the use of ICT for links with the home is an important means of representing a picture of current work in schools and disseminating exemplary practice.

We appreciate that teachers are very busy. However, if your school would like to contribute to this important research by completing a questionnaire, please contact Di Mavers on d.mavers@mmu.ac.uk.