Appendix 1: Methodology

A brief outline of the research design and conduct is provided in the main body of the report. This appendix provides further details of the research questions and the methods used to address these questions.

Overarching research question

How do schools (focusing on Key Stages 2 and 3) use technology to support parental engagement in their children's education and what are parents' experiences of these practices?

Sub questions

- What are the technology practices at school level and provided by local authorities to engage with parents?
- What are parents' experiences of these technology practices and how do these experiences fit into the wider landscape of their engagement with school?
- What learning practices do families engage in at home and what is the role of technology within this?
- What role do school and local authorities' technology practices and policies play within this learning that happens in families?
- What is the impact of parental engagement in schools on their own relationships to learning?
- What kinds of information and resources do parents want and need in order to support their children's learning?

Sample

The research was focused in five local authorities: Croydon, Hampshire, Luton, Brighton and Hove, Leicester City. These were selected through the Family and Parenting Institute's (FPI) knowledge of and work within local authorities across the country. The sample represents variation in terms of local authorities' advancement in parenting and family strategies and technological capabilities. It also attempts a geographical spread.

In each local authority, we carried out two focus groups with a purposive sample of parents of children of Key Stage 2 (primary aged 8-11 years) and Key Stage 3 (secondary aged 11-14 years), with approximately eight parents in each group (n=80). We also carried out a number of interviews with local authority representatives and other relevant stakeholders in these local authorities. Also

included was a number of education professionals in key schools in these local authorities (n=19).

The focus groups

Focus groups contained a mixture of parents from different schools in the local authority, but all had at least one child at Key Stage 2 or 3. We accessed parents through a variety of networks. These networks include organisations outside of school, which we felt would enable us to achieve a broader spread of parents, not just those who were most engaged.[1] In this context, we included parents with a range of levels of engagement in their children's school and learning. We drew on existing networks of voluntary and community sector parent-facing organisations held by the FPI. The FPI has extensive networks of organisations and practitioners working with parents, including those parents who are identified as 'hard to reach'. We know from research with parents that we are more likely to get good response rates from information brokered through a trusted professional. We also know that voluntary services are often viewed by parents with less suspicion than statutory services.

We sent information out about our research project through various networks and asked for parents to volunteer to participate. Parents were compensated for travel and childcare costs, where necessary. They were given a retail voucher in gratitude for their participation. Table 1 shows the networks we used.

[1] See Russell and Granville for similar methods. Russell K and Granville S (2005), *Parents' Views on Improving Parental Involvement in Children's Education*, Scottish Executive.

Table 1 Routes used for recruitment of parents

	Focus group	Networks used
1	Hampshire – 1st group	Parentline Plus helpline regional office and parenting courses; county parenting strategy lead officer contacts with family support projects
	Hampshire – 2nd group	Parentline Plus; parent link-worker at a specific community school
2	Luton – 1st group	Children's Services partnerships with Family Action (voluntary sector); youth service; parent support advisers in schools; Learning Direct; parenting fund project
	Luton – 2nd group	As above
3	Croydon – 1st group	Parenting fund project; family learning; Parentline Plus helpline regional office and parenting courses; classes for parents on a parenting order; community and faith groups
	Croydon – 2nd group	As above
4	Leicester City – 1st group	Leicester Voluntary Services Council Parents Forum; Ask For Research
	Leicester City – 2nd group	As above
5	Brighton and Hove – 1st group	FPI parents' panel; faith groups; voluntary sector
	Brighton and Hove – 2nd group	Family learning group at West Hove Children's Centre, all English as an Additional Language

From volunteers, we selected a purposive sample, aiming to get a good range of parents along the following criteria:

- Income groups
- Ethnicity
- Marital status.

We also aimed to get a substantial minority of fathers, minority ethnic parents, those with English as an Additional Language (EAL), single parents and parents of children with special educational needs (SEN). See Appendix 3 for details on the sample of parents.

Table 2 shows the five local authorities, reasons for selection and an overview of participants in focus groups in each of those locales.

Table 2: Case study areas, reasons for selection and summary of focus group participants

Case study area	Demographics of the local authority	Advancement of parenting and family strategy of local authority	Technological advancement of local authority	Summary of focus group participants
Croydon	London, Urban, high BME, mix of affluent and deprived	Strong voluntary sector. Parenting Fund	Low	Mix in terms of gender, socio-economic status and ethnicity. Some single parents, some fathers.
Hampshire	Rural, low BME, affluent	Established parent support. Parenting Fund	High	High socio-economic status; married; predominantly white British. Several fathers.
Brighton and Hove	Urban, low BME, affluent	Good family learning provision	Medium	Mix in terms of gender, socio-economic status and ethnicity, some single parents. All EAL parents in second focus group.
Leicester	Urban, mix white and BME, mix of affluent and deprived	Mixed	High	Low socio-economic status; predominantly

				white British; single /divorced. Some fathers
Luton	Urban, mix white and BME, mix of affluent and deprived	Strong parent support. Strong integrated services	Medium	Predominantly minority ethnic; married; mixed socio-economic status. Some fathers.

Qualitative, in-depth interviews helped us gain insight into the issues faced by diverse groups of parents in engaging with schools and their children's education. It helped us to understand the kinds of information they wanted, the impact they felt that technology had on their child's learning (drawing out the costs/benefits of specific interventions and practices) and their personal feelings about its impact on their own relationships to education.

We also asked parents to fill in a short questionnaire, so that we could obtain basic information on each individual participant. These included: gender, age, ethnicity, language, marital status, educational levels, occupation, household income, housing tenure, internet access, number of children and their ages, which schools they were attending and any Special Educational Needs (SEN).

The school and local authority interviews

Face-to-face and telephone interviews were carried out with representatives from a selection of schools and local authorities in the case study areas. Schools were identified following comments received from parents at the focus group interviews. In each case, both in the schools and the local authorities, the role of the person interviewed varied depending on a range of factors. These factors included: how the local authority delivered ICT to schools, the size of the school and their stage of development and implementation of technology, parental engagement and online reporting. The table below summarises the role of those interviewed in each case study area. Local authority staff job titles have not been divulged to protect their anonymity.

Table 3 – The role of those interviewed in schools and local authorities by case study area

Case study area	Primary school	Secondary school	Local authority stakeholder	Total number of interviews
Luton	Home school link worker		x1	3
	ICT Coordinator			
Leicester City	Headteacher – also responsible for parental engagement	Strategic manager of new technologies	x1	5
	ICT coordinator	Inclusion manager		
Hampshire	ICT coordinator	Principal	x2	6
	Year 5 teacher & ICT	Home school link worker		
Brighton and Hove	Family learning teacher		x1	2
Croydon	Headteacher	Family support worker (Special school 5-16 yr for olds)	x1	3

As Table 3 shows, a total of 19 interviews were conducted with 13 school representatives (from eight schools) along with six local authority staff. The eight schools in the study varied in size, location and pupil demographics. The interviews with local authority representatives aimed to gain some context on the local authority's role in policy and strategy in terms of parental engagement and the use of technologies in this context. (See Appendix 4 for a summary of this.) The aim of the interviews with school staff was to cross-reference to some extent the views and

experiences of parents. The aim was also to gain insight into the barriers faced by schools in engaging parents in their children's learning.

Analysis

All interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed and analysed using the software package Nvivo. The attributes of each parent participant collected in the questionnaire were assigned to their focus group comments. This meant that we were able to analyse focus group interviews as a whole narrative. It also meant that we could analyse differences in experiences, views and opinions of individual participants, according to the questionnaire data collected. We looked for themes or patterns according to school phase. This includes differences between experiences of Key Stages 2 and 3, SEN, gender; ethnicity, EAL issues and socio-economic status (income, educational levels and housing tenure). We also analysed parents' stories (focusing on their relationships with schools, learning, their children and technology). Interviews with school staff and local authority stakeholders were also analysed in Nvivo according to common themes arising. These include good practice and barriers/constraints as well as the relationships, flows and networks between key actors and organisations.