Striking a balance:
the control of children's media consumption

Report edited by Pam Hanley
Head of Audience Research, ITC

BBC

broadcasting
standards
commission

iTc
Independent Television Commission
PUTTING VIEWERS FIRST

Striking a balance:
the control of children's media consumption

Report edited by Pam Hanley
Head of Audience Research, ITC

Contents

1 Summary

Context

- Ongoing changes in home entertainment mean that parents are facing new challenges in exercising control over their children's media consumption:

    - In-home access to a range of televisual and new media services continues to increase, with more than half the families in the survey research having digital television and slightly fewer having internet access.

    - There is a decline in families watching television together: high proportions of children have sets in their bedrooms. They also watch television and use the internet outside the home, for instance at friends' houses.

    - Parents feel that children are maturing earlier and are often more technology-literate than they are.

Attitudes and concerns

- Parents want to have open, trusting relationships with their children, but they also wish to protect them from harm. They perceive a need to strike a balance between protecting children from harmful or inappropriate material, and educating them about the real world.

- They are concerned about content such as sex, violence and bad language, but acknowledge that context and treatment have a bearing on these issues.

- The key period for parental concern about media consumption is when the children are aged between 10 and 14. Before then, they tend to be supervised more closely, and afterwards they are considered to be on the fringe of adulthood. As direct, personal parental control becomes less possible, the potential importance of external control mechanisms increases.

- All parents in the research were exercising some degree of control over children's media usage, although this did not usually exist as a fully thought-through policy.

- Whereas television is considered overall to be effectively regulated, there is concern about access to unsuitable content via the internet (among parents whose children use this medium).

Television

■ There is a high degree of unsupervised television viewing, but most parents do try to check programme content and exercise some form of control - although in most cases the approach to control is organically developing - rather than being fully thought through.

■ Informal control mechanisms include:

  ■ banning some programmes and channels, but encouraging others

  ■ switching the television off or changing channels, or sending children out of the room to avoid undesirable content

  ■ discussing any content of concern with children

  ■ limiting time children are allowed to watch television

  ■ preventing or rationing access to television in bedrooms

  ■ random checks on viewing

■ The Watershed is a highly valued mechanism in controlling children's television viewing, although there is concern about the pre-Watershed content of some genres (particularly soap operas and police/crime dramas). Notwithstanding this, there is a belief that television is effectively regulated by external bodies and is a 'safe' medium, with the prospect of stronger regulation often unwelcome.

■ Parents would, however, like to have better information about programme content. Their main source of information is listings in newspapers or television guides, or on-air announcements before the programmes. However, there is low satisfaction with these sources of information. Electronic programme guides and film/video classifications are the best received. Parents would like to see more consistent and more widely disseminated information about age suitability of programming in television guides and listings, empowering them to make informed choices if they wish to do so.

■ There are now several technological aids for controlling children's access to television, such as PINs to block programmes and channels. However, there is variable awareness of these. Fewer than half those aware of each device claim actually to use it. This may reflect parents' unwillingness to imply a lack of trust in their children and an acknowledgement that their children are more technologically literate than they are.

■ Many parents are uncomfortable about imposing external controls on television viewing, particularly for older children (around 10 and over), as they feel it throws doubt on how well the family unit is functioning. They prefer to trust their children: however, although children do regulate their own viewing, they do not always comply with parental ground rules. Moreover, children may over-estimate their emotional maturity and ability to cope, and they may in fact gain reassurance and confidence from parents setting boundaries.

Internet

■ Parental thinking about the internet is much less developed than for television, but as a medium it raises more concerns and uncertainties.

■ Parents are worried because they know the internet is vast, but unregulated. Media publicity has made them cautious about sites featuring pornography and paedophilia, and about chatrooms. Even when they are confident in their children's ability to regulate their own use of the internet, this still leaves the issue of accidental exposure.

■ They are also aware of the need to maintain a balance between their anxieties and the positive aspects of the internet, including its educational potential.

■ Younger children (under 8 years) rarely use the internet unsupervised, but unaccompanied use is increasingly common as children become older, and it is prevalent at 14-16 years.

■ Most control over children's internet usage is informal, such as:

  ■ placing the computer where usage is visible (public versus private areas of the home)

  ■ only parent turning on the computer

  ■ sitting with child (especially younger or new users)

  ■ child keeps parent informed of all internet use

  ■ random checks on usage (including history of sites visited)

  ■ no, or limited, random surfing

  ■ time limit on usage

  ■ checking phone line to find out if internet is connected

■ Awareness and usage of technical controls (such as blocking software and ratings services) is quite low. Parents welcome the principle of a labelling and filtering system, but criticise current offerings for being complex to install and lacking in straightforward age categorisations. However, they are cautious about trusting sites to rate themselves.

Looking ahead

■ Most parents feel that their children's television consumption is currently under control and that regulatory guidelines - such as the Watershed - are effective. However, there are signs that as more channels and services become available their concerns could increase.

■ Against that background, there is a desire for better information about programme content, and possibly for content ratings to help inform parental control.

■ There is also a need for improved awareness and understanding of the various technological aids available to help parents control access to television.

■ As families thought more about the future media developments and the role of the internet, concerns increased. There was much dissatisfaction with the available technological controls. When introduced to such mechanisms, parents identify various shortcomings in the existing systems, including the wrong balance between complexity and ease of set up.

■ More generally, it is clear that parental control mechanisms can have a valuable part to play in the control of children's media consumption. However, it is essential that they are easy to use and targeted in the right way, with an emphasis on the positive, empowering aspects - not blocking or depriving people of content, but enabling them to explore family-friendly offerings with confidence.

2 Background

This report covers research commissioned in a joint initiative between the Broadcasting Standards Commission, the Independent Television Commission and the British Broadcasting Corporation.[1]

An important public policy aim is protection of minors from harmful material. Broadcasters, regulators and advisory bodies have a number of mechanisms in place to ensure that children and young people are shielded from inappropriate content. The best known of these is the 9.00 p.m. Watershed. Other mechanisms include individual PIN numbers, removable smart cards, ratings and filtering systems.

The *Communications White Paper* (2001) states that such mechanisms should be investigated, and makes special mention of the ratings and filtering systems currently being developed for the internet. The convergence of media and cross-platform viewing opportunities suggest that a variety of systems should be investigated. It was, therefore, decided to commission this research with the aim of drawing together attitudes, behaviour and feasibility in relation to mechanisms, primarily those designed to be used by parents and other adults to control children's media consumption.

The project was divided into two main stages:
- Stage 1: qualitative research with parents, carers and children
- Stage 2: quantitative research among parents

It was underpinned by a collation of current knowledge about the control mechanisms on offer.

The objectives for the project were defined as follows:

- To collate and understand current knowledge about the way in which parents or carers of children use the mechanisms available, across all media in the home (including conventional broadcasting, digital, cable and satellite, internet, video, DVD and film).

- To establish the attitudes of parents and carers to these mechanisms and their importance.

- To explore the usability of these mechanisms, and to understand what would make the protection of children in the home more effective, should parents require the facility.

- To examine children's attitudes, knowledge and behaviour.

- To investigate attitudes across media and delivery platforms (for example, the same content delivered in different ways on mainstream television versus satellite).

---

1. See Appendices 3-5.

The qualitative research comprised 36 interviews with families, parents/carers and children, covering those with and without access to multi-channel television and the internet. Fieldwork was carried out in October 2001. This was followed up a few weeks later with a quantitative survey of 528 parents of children aged 5-16. Details can be found in Appendix 1.

The two pieces of research are reported together in this document: verbatim quotes and the term 'participants' indicate the qualitative research; percentages and the term 'respondents' refer to the quantitative.

3 Media control within the family

In-home context

According to the quantitative survey, 54% of families with children aged between 5 and 16 had a digital television and 43% had in-home internet access. Satellite was the dominant digital platform, with nearly three-quarters of digital households receiving their services via Sky. Only a third of the families (34%) did not have access to multi-channel television. These findings are in line with other available industry statistics.[2]

Chart 1: Television platform
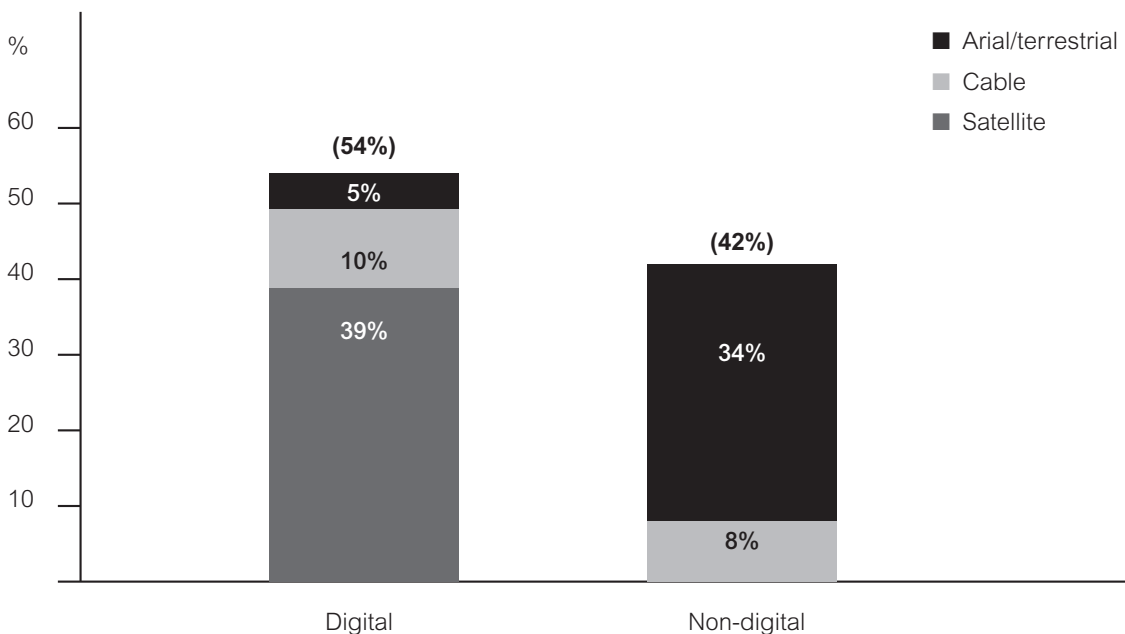
Base: All parents of children aged 5-16 (528)

There was a slight bias in digital television penetration towards younger families (eldest child aged under 10) and a stronger bias in internet penetration towards older families (eldest child aged from 10-14 and, in particular, 15+). This may reflect the different interests of older and younger children. Even when the internet *was* available in the household, children aged 5-9 were much less likely than older children to use it - or be allowed to use it (58% compared to 93% if the child is aged 10+).

Traditionally, a household's socio-economic status also has an impact on the take-up of new technology. However, the penetration of digital television was weakest in those households classified AB (47% compared to the average of 54%), whilst internet penetration was much greater in AB families (71% compared to the average of 43%). Full internet access still requires a PC or laptop, and these remain expensive items despite recent price cuts driven by bulk retailers. Such economic factors have a significant influence on penetration, but there are other influences as well (e.g. AB householders are more likely to come into contact with the internet at work).

2. For example, IPSOS-RSL digital tracker (DART).

On average, each household had three televisions, and it was common for even very young children to have one in the bedroom. This was the case in two-thirds (67%) of households where the eldest child was aged from 10-14, and in more than four in ten (42%) households where the eldest was aged from 5-9. However, these televisions were usually 'hand-me-down' televisions. In digital households, a quarter reported that the television(s) in the children's bedroom(s) could receive more than the standard five channels, but this seems to be an atypically high proportion compared with other sources.[3]

The qualitative interviews usually began with an informal audit of the media-related products within the household, and this revealed a wide variety of products in both family and individual ownership. The plethora of products reflected the emphasis in the sample on multi-channel and internet households which data suggests are both early and enthusiastic adopters of media opportunities.[4] More specifically, most households contained: several televisions; at least one video (and often more) - though relatively fewer DVDs; music centre(s), including CD and tape players and radios; portable CD and tape players; portable radios; games console(s); personal computer.

It was clear that the location of entertainment equipment had a significant effect on the pattern and quality of its usage and specifically on the control exerted over it - with the important distinction being between the public and private areas within the home.

As regards the television, the 'best' television in the household was invariably to be found in the living room - a public area. In all but one of the multi-channel households in the qualitative research, this was the only multi-channel television in the home (the exception being a couple who had multi-channel television in a bedroom for when their grandchildren came to stay). There were also many instances of televisions in dining rooms and/or kitchens - which were often, but not always, 'hand-me-downs' from the living room; these, too, were public places in terms of television consumption.

Nearly 80% of parents with internet access at home said their (selected) child[5] used it. However, as mentioned above, the age of the child makes a big difference to usage. Almost everyone (93%) with a selected child aged 10-16 said his or her child used the internet at home. A significantly lower proportion claimed the same when the selected child was aged 5-9 (58%).

Bedrooms were private areas where supervision was more difficult. Parents reported a great deal of pressure from their children to have televisions here, using the excuse that 'everyone else has one'; despite misgivings, a majority of parents had given in. Only a minority were 'standing firm', although even here the researchers sensed it was only a matter of time.

3. e.g. *The Public's View 2001*, Independent Television Commission and Broadcasting Standards Commission, 2002.
4. *The Public's View 2001*, Independent Television Commission and Broadcasting Standards Commission, 2002, p.12.
5. Respondents were directed to answer questions about the child aged 5-16 who had a birthday most recently.

'When I was a young lad it wasn't thought of to have a telly in your bedroom. Now you're old-fashioned if you haven't got one.'
(Parents and Carers/Older/ABC1/North/Multi-channel and internet)

The main issue surrounding television in bedrooms was the risk of children watching unsuitable programmes or simply watching for too long, and the difficulty of 'policing' this. Non-availability of multi-channel was one way of putting limits on the situation (as well as reflecting cost and/or technical considerations), while another was confining children to videos rather than allowing them to watch television on combined television/video sets. There was definite evidence of parents' concerns being justified, with reports from children of late night viewing with the sound turned down.

Q: Do you let them watch television in their room when they go to bed?'

'No.'

Q: How do you know that?

'We would hear it! Believe you me!'
(Family/Younger and Older/C2DE/South/Multi-channel and internet)

'I think the more channels you get, the more wider scale and it's harder to keep an eye on what's going on. My children want Sky and I've refused.'
(Parents and Carers/Older/ABC1/Midlands/Terrestrial and internet)

There was invariably a video recorder in the main living room, connected to the main television set (i.e. a 'public' setting), and also, as described above, many instances of 'combi' sets in bedrooms. While there was often a music centre in the main living area, other music centres, together with CD and tape players, and portable radios, were scattered around the home and often to be found in bedrooms, i.e. private spaces.

The siting of personal computers was interesting. In pre-internet households, PCs were often placed in the home with convenience as the main criterion - possibly in a spare room or home office set-up. With acquisition of the internet, PC siting became more of an issue, with PCs often - but not always - placed in public areas within the home.

'They want to know what sites we're going on. They leave the door open.'
(Girls/Aged 12-13/ABC1/South East/Terrestrial and internet)

Q: You decided to have the PC down here, did you? Was that the most convenient place or ... ?

'Well, yeah, really so you can keep an eye on things as well really.'
(Family/Older/C2DE/South East/Multi-channel and internet)

'We were able to have the extra phoneline which I had put up in M's bedroom, and he's got the internet access because the computer's in his bedroom.'
(Parents and Carers/Older/ABC1/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

An important theme in relation to the in-home context was the phenomenon of fragmentation versus integration. Many parents adhered to the ideal of family-based media consumption - everyone sitting comfortably enjoying the same television programme or film video - but it was clear that this ideal was under significant pressure. The trend towards media consumption on a fragmented basis was encouraged by multiple ownership of media sources (especially television) and clearly again has implications for control. Fragmented consumption was also influenced by the age and, to an extent, gender of the children. For instance, older children wanted to 'do their own thing' and not be part of family viewing, and there was some feeling that boys tended to be out and about with their friends at an earlier age than more home-orientated girls. The attitudes and lifestyles of the parents were also influential: some parents were more 'laissez faire' than others, while working parents and single parents simply had less time available to share media consumption with their children.

'If EastEnders *is on, that we all like, we watch it down here.'*
(Family/Older/C2DE/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

'If there is something on I want to watch my mum usually says, "Yes, you can watch it in your bedroom."'
(Girls/Aged 10-11/C2DE /Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

'Very rare do we actually sit down as a whole family and watch anything any more, because our lifestyle is so hectic.'
(Family/Younger and Older/C2DE/South/Multi-channel and internet)

Another notable element affecting consumption patterns was the primacy given to individual choice. Even young children are given the 'right to choose', and at the other end of the family scale some parents at least were keen to protect their own 'leisure space'. This means that every member of the family has his or her own 'entertainment agenda', and this inevitably leads to conflicts and compromises. Multiple product ownership within the family can reduce these tensions. but also brings its own problems, specifically relating to control - albeit these are not always recognised in all households.

'[We] *fight over the controls because I want to watch* Nickelodeon *and she wants to watch* MTV.'
(Family/Older/C2DE/South East/Multi-channel and internet)

'*I must admit, we dominate the telly. If they're up late like in the holidays and things we say, "No, this is our space, we're watching it. Tough, you've got to put up with it."'*
(Parents and Carers/Older/ABC1/Midlands/Terrestrial and internet)

When participants looked back over the development of in-home entertainment, they recognised that there had been significant changes in the media environment: more media channels and platforms, more choice and more 'access to the world' via the internet. However, it was noticeable that, looking forward, most participants had only limited awareness of forthcoming changes which will have an equal and perhaps greater effect on in-home media consumption - for example, the analogue switch-off, the growth of interactivity via the television, convergence (e.g. internet via television/television via internet) and lighter touch regulation. This low awareness meant that the 'control' implications of future changes had barely been considered by participants prior to the research interview.

The family dynamic

It was clear from the qualitative interviews - whether family, or parents/carers and children individually - that family dynamics are placed under pressure by a variety of factors.

Children are thought to be maturing earlier. While this can be a matter of parental pride, there is also sadness at the loss of innocence and fear about potential and actual loss of parental control - for instance, children requiring their own personal space within the home and a sense that they are wanting to think for themselves at an earlier age than their parents remember being the case in their own childhoods. There is also an issue as to whether physical and social maturity is matched by emotional maturity - and the difficulty of judging this.

'*K has always been older for her years, even as a little girl, so really with K she is so grown-up in her attitude. Some things I feel they need to know.*'
(Family/Older/C2DE/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

'*It gets hard to get the balance of whether H's mind is old enough to take what it's given on the television.*'
(Family/Older/C2DE/SE/Multi-channel and internet)

'*I'm still one of those kind of mums that ... I like to keep the innocence ... 'cos it gets wiped out so quickly, doesn't it?*'
(Parents and Carers/Younger and Older/C2DE /South East/Multi-channel)

In addition, there are 'educational' factors, including the need to educate children about the real world, and the role of the media in this, especially perhaps the soap operas.[6] Also, as suggested earlier, there is an increasing emphasis in education (and elsewhere) on children developing their critical faculties and ability to make their own choices.

> *'You know about the internet* [from Coronation Street]. *I think they are putting that on telly to say you shouldn't go on that* ... [chat rooms]. *It is helping you be careful ... It is kind of warning you.'*
> (Girls/Aged 10-11/C2DE /Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

> *'Some of the soaps that come up cover real life stories anyway and H tends to take it in, like* Coronation Street *a while back, one of them got raped. So I just sat down and explained it to her.'*
> (Family/Younger and Older/C2DE/South/Multi-channel and internet)

> *'I think it's on the news. It's happening, and I think it's good to let the kids see what's going on in the world.'*
> (Family/Younger and Older/C2DE/South/Multi-channel and internet)

The increasing complexity of technology and the fact that children are often ahead of their parents in the knowledge and ability to master new technology was also a common theme. More broadly, the pace of societal change led to anxiety among some parents that traditional models of parenting were no longer relevant in today's world.

> *'I know it's me, I don't know why I feel it, I just do. It's technology, there's too much of it around and the access that people have got to all this information and is it really necessary?'*
> (Parents and Carers/Older/ABC1/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

> *'How much control have you really got because an intelligent kid's going to get round it.'*
> (Family/Younger and Older/C2DE/South/Multi-channel)

> *'I mean obviously you want them to learn and you want them to use the communication systems, but you've also got to be very worried, too.'*
> (Family/Younger and Older/C2DE/South/Multi-channel and internet)

Parents often spoke about their desire to have open and trusting relationships with their children, which needed to be based on the parent knowing the child and the child knowing the values operative within the family. Clearly, children had absorbed their family values, they knew their parents' preferences in relation to their media consumption and they were aware of the boundaries that had been set.

---

6. See also *Viewers and Family Viewing Policy,* Dr. R. C. Towler; Broadcasting Standards Commission/British Broadcasting Corporation/ Independent Television Commission, 2001, p9.

'I do trust my children, and it's got to be worked on that principle, that I trust you and you trust me and this is our medium ground sort of thing, you know?'
(Family/Older/C2DE/South East/Multi-channel and internet)

'She's really good, she knows how I feel and she goes by the rules.'
(Parents and Carers/Older/ABC1/Midlands/Terrestrial and internet)

'We wouldn't go behind our parents' backs.'
(Family/Older/C2DE/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

However, it was clear that even with good parent-child relationships, things were not always as 'good' as they seemed. In virtually every family researched, discrepancies were found between parents and children: not only in relation to attitudes, but also in terms of actual behaviour, e.g. television programmes watched and internet sites visited.

'Well, sometimes she knows and sometimes she doesn't. If she tells us off we still watch it.'
(Girls/Aged 8-9/ABC1/North/Terrestrial and internet)

'Well, say if there was like an action film on, that was like over on Channel 4 or something, if it has like guns and ... I wasn't allowed to watch it, then I would just go upstairs and watch it.'
(Boys/Aged 10-11/C2DE/North/Multi-channel and internet)

Such discrepancies are not necessarily the result of deceitful children or poor parenting, but reflect the process of maturation which inevitably includes elements of boundary testing, separating and developing individualism. However, the parent-child gap can be exacerbated by parental wishful thinking (wanting everything to be 'okay') and, indeed, possible parental naïvety and ignorance.

'No, they have never been in a chat room. I trust H and A, really, they are quite sensible ... And I suppose they are still naïve ... I think they would be straight down and tell me, yeah.'
(Family/Older/C2DE/SE/Multi-channel and internet)

'We have got very, very good ground rules. They have had good childhoods. It just doesn't go on here.'
(Family/Older/C2DE/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

All these factors lead to an evident challenge for parents in maintaining the balance between control and trust, between prohibition and encouragement to experiment, and between responsibility and freedom. In this context, imposition of control mechanisms can seem like a denial of trust.

> *'When they are not there, we don't watch rude films or something, maybe, 'cause I think they can trust us.'*
> (Family/Older/C2DE/South East/Multi-channel and internet)

> *'I think if you wrap them in too much cotton wool it doesn't really pay off, because you can say, "No" and then they go against you.'*
> (Family/Older/C2DE/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

The agenda for the interviews was based on media consumption, and there was no difficulty in engaging participants in this topic; however, there were mixed views expressed on its relative importance compared with other 'family issues'. Some parents claimed to be more concerned about what their children *did* rather than what they *saw*. There was also a view that parents needed to be more concerned about *external dangers*, with home being seen as the 'safe place'.[7] However, other parents had higher anxiety levels, being more aware that media coming into the home could pose some kind of threat and more inclined to see the media as having the potential to influence behaviour - for good or ill.

> *'With stuff like Cat* [EastEnders], *my mum says, "That is why I don't want you wearing tight T-shirts and stuff."'*
> (Girls/Aged 10-11/C2DE/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

> *'I think if you are keeping things from the kids and blocking things off, then when they get out in to the real world, I would say which is a vicious world, then they get a bit shy, so I think they have got to be made aware of what is going on ... it is kind of a preparation for them going out in the outside world, and I don't believe things like that should be blocked off unless it is detrimental to them, so it is a form of education.'*
> (Parents and Carers/Younger/C2DE/North/Multi-channel and internet)

> *'Everything has got bad ... I feel safe at home. When I am sitting on my bed. I have these two pillows I have had all my life and I cuddle them ... I feel safe with my mum.'*
> (Girls/Aged 10-11/C2DE/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

The survey data describing parental confidence in their children's viewing behaviour tend to support the finding that most parents trust their children. Overall, more than three-quarters (78%) were confident that their child *'would try to avoid material that* [the parent] *would consider unsuitable for him/her',* including one-third (34%) who were 'very confident'.

---

7. See also *Young People, New Media*, Sonia Livingstone and Moira Borill; London School of Economics. 1999, p6.

Parents were slightly more confident of older children (80% were confident if the child was aged 14-16, 78% if 11-13, 78% if 8-10, 74% if 5-7) and of their daughters (81% were confident if the child was a girl, 74% if a boy); however, the response was fairly consistent across all sub-groups. It is worth noting that parents were no less confident when the child had access to multiple channel television and/or the internet. Clearly parents were willing to trust their children, even though they also had fears about what is out there.

Children themselves often showed impressive insights and critical faculties, and they were able and willing to self-regulate. Many were confident that they could 'handle things', reflecting the influence of child power and the youth culture.

> *'You have to learn to deal with things.'*
> (Family/Older/C2DE/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

> *'Because I had been going on chat rooms with my friend C at her house and* [my mother] *said she doesn't really like me going on chat rooms - she said if you do go on them just make sure you don't get too involved with the person on there. Never ever meet them in secret.'*
> (Family/Younger and Older/ABC1/North/Multi-channel and internet)

> *'Yeah, cause it's like they don't ... I don't know. It's just like they put something on and it's rude and they turn it over. We're like, "Well we do know what it means."'*
> (Girls/Aged 10-11/ABC1/Midlands/Multi-channel)

Confirming their parents' perceptions, they were often very 'savvy' about media and technology, and claimed to be able to distinguish between fantasy and reality in television programmes and other media presentations. This was true from quite a young age and certainly from 10 years upwards.

> *'I just think of it as a good storyline.'*
> (Family/Older/C2DE/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

> *'You know it is not real ... Some films are quite scary even though they are not real, like* The Shining.'
> (Boys/Aged 12-13/ABC1/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

> *'Like it's violent a bit,* [but] *it's just made up.'*
> (Boys/Aged 10-11/C2DE/North/Multi-channel and internet)

Children seemed to be reassured by their parents setting boundaries, even though it was an important part of the growing-up process to test and challenge these boundaries. Within this, they seemed to respond better to positive encouragement than to prohibition and to be very keen on 'fairness'. This has implications for control mechanisms in that children will be more amenable to those that seem 'fair' than those which seem arbitrary or too heavy-handed.

'When you're our age [10/11], *you know what you're not allowed to watch and what you are allowed to watch because you're told.'*
(Boys/Aged 10-11/C2DE/North/Multi-channel and internet)

Children could also exert control themselves, in their protectiveness of younger siblings - although admittedly this also played an important role in reinforcing their own 'older' status.

As anticipated, the age(s) of the child(ren) in the family proved to be an important factor influencing attitudes and behaviour relating to parental control. However, it is important to note that chronological age per se was not necessarily the determinant, in that parents also took into account the child's intellectual level and maturity in social and emotional terms. Thus caution is required when generalising about age issues, although it is a valuable 'rule of thumb'.

'She is extremely open, she tells us everything. I think she will be the type that will mature quite quick, she is quite naïve but I think she knows a lot.'
(Family/Older/C2DE/South East/Multi-channel and internet)

'It's only that C is quite grown up for her age that I would let her watch it.'
(Family/Younger and Older/C2DE/South/Multi-channel)

Up to around 9 years of age, it is feasible for parental supervision and control to be quite close and personal in that there is usually a parent (or parental figure) in the home with the child. However, around 10 years (the top class in junior school), the drive towards separation from parental influence is starting to develop. As more distance and independence is achieved, the potential for personal parental control diminishes - but the child is still naïve in many ways and still believed to need 'protection'.[8]

'She never does anything without checking. With her age she'll never do anything without checking first. You know, "Is it okay if I go on to the Popstars [site]?" *and we go, "Yeah."'*
(Family/Younger/ABC1/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

The first years at secondary school (11-14) are seen as a particularly vulnerable time, when the child is out in the 'big world' and wanting to seem 'grown-up', but at the same time may not be as emotionally mature as his or her physical appearance and aspirations suggest.

'They never used to let me watch it if there was too much swearing, but now they're not bothered any more.'
(Girls/Aged 14-15/ABC1/Wales/Multi-channel)

'She doesn't want me to be ahead of myself, but to know things I should know.'
(Family/Older/C2DE/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

8. See also *Viewers and Family Viewing Policy,* Dr. R. C. Towler; Broadcasting Standards Commission/British Broadcasting Corporation/ Independent Television Commission, 2001, pp. 12-14.

The 10-14 age band is, therefore, a key stage in terms of potential parental concern, and the situation is ripe for interest in and adoption of 'external' mechanisms to compensate for the diminishing control that parents themselves are able to exert. At the same time, there is also potential for significant parent-child friction if the controls are too overt or seen as excessively heavy.

> *'We haven't set it* [parental control] *yet because we haven't got any need to because the children aren't old enough.'*
> (Family/Younger/ABC1/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

> *'If you stop her it'll make her more determined to watch. Whereas if we let her have her own way and let her watch, she might just skip over stuff like that.'*
> (Parents and Carers/Older/ABC1/North/Multi-channel and internet)

Once children reached their mid-teens (15+), they were seen as being on the fringe of adulthood and, therefore, control issues may become less relevant - or may be abandoned in the face of strong objections as 'too much hassle'.

> *'I think now the age they are* [13 and 15], *they're old enough and mature enough to watch that or ... to me, there's nothing on television that I would say, "You're not watching that."'*
> (Family/Older/C2DE/South East/Multi-channel and internet)

In terms of gender, there were some differences reported by parents which, to an extent, reflect stereotypical ideas about boy/girl differences. For example, boys were described as 'upfront, active, curious, trouble-seeking' while girls were felt to be more 'self-protective, devious, relationship-seeking'. However, there was also evidence of these distinctions becoming blurred, with girls becoming more assertive and boys more willing to admit to the importance of relationships. This, in turn, reflected changing patterns in parental roles and wider societal changes.

> *'Girls are different to boys, I think ... boys are more wanting to watch* [rude programmes].'
> (Family/Older/C2DE/South East/Multi-channel and internet)

Although parents might have begun the interview by expressing their confidence that everything was 'okay' in relation to their control over their children's media consumption, this was quite easy to challenge as the session proceeded. So, for example, discussion of control mechanisms raised rather than allayed anxieties, because it uncovered many parents' lack of awareness as to what they might have to guard against and the ease of accidental exposure.

> *'The dangers. I knew they were out there and I think sometimes you just put them to the back of your mind, where I think you've just exposed them a bit more tonight.'*
> (Family/Younger/ABC1/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

This suggests that there is scope for greater parental engagement with the issue of control.

In particular, there seems to be significant (potential) anxiety in situations where the parent is not in immediate contact with the child. For all ages, this can be when the parent is busy in another part of the house, or when the child has retreated to his/her bedroom. And, as suggested earlier, there is a significant change when the child is old enough to be left alone in the home, taking them out of the orbit of personal parental control. In these situations, where parents are not around, there is a justifiable role for some external control mechanisms.

Current family policies in relation to control

Overall

Families rarely had a fully thought-through strategy in relation to the control that was exerted over media consumption. However, the discussion and reflection which were part of the interviewing process did often reveal underlying beliefs and tenets about the issue, even if these had not been made explicit prior to the research.

It was not just a question of a policy or strategy not being promulgated within the family. Even where parents' views were quite well developed, they often also recognised a need for flexibility. It was an 'organic' situation, which had to reflect the changing needs of their children and varying circumstances, as well as more transitory factors such as mood and behaviour. So boundaries did exist, but could be modified on a case-by-case basis. For example, decisions about what television programmes were allowable might vary from day-to-day, week-to-week or according to circumstances. This professed need for flexibility had implications for external control mechanisms, which ideally should be able to incorporate flexibility when required.

In the discussion of parental control, two key themes emerged: 'trust' and 'family values'. As suggested earlier, trust was seen as essential to a good parent-child relationship, and good behaviour was believed to rest on the child's internalisation of family values from an early age. This was felt to be more effective than heavy policing, as that would imply a lack of trust (and might lead in turn to an increase in problematic behaviour, then to more control, in a vicious circle). Also, only internalised values would be effective in influencing the child's behaviour when the parent was absent.

> *'I think it's best to be open about it and explain the dangers.'*
> (Family/Older/C2DE/South East/Multi-channel and internet)

'J, the oldest one, she is pretty good at asking if it is alright watching anyway, she has never really been a one for trying to watch something on the side ... Plus, if you switch something off, she knows there is a reason why we have switched it off.'
(Parents and Carers/Younger/C2DE/North/Multi-channel and internet)

'I think the more you deter her watching what she really wants to watch, the more she will go behind your back anyway.'
(Family/Older/C2DE/South East/Multi-channel and internet)

However, in some cases, alongside these expressions of trust seems to sit a degree of collusion (turning a blind eye for the sake of a quiet life) and some parental wishful thinking and naivety.

'I think now they're more independent they tend to watch things behind my back and I probably know nothing about it ... I abhor violence and ... if they're watching in their own room, I don't agree with it, but if they go off and they watch it and I don't know they're doing it, you know, I'm not going to go up and scream and shout.'
(Parents and Carers/Older/ABC1/Midlands/Terrestrial and internet)

'He [older brother] *can like bring in a video when they* [parents] *are out shopping and* [we] *can just watch it.'*
(Family/Older/C2DE/South East/Multi-channel and internet)

While most parents took a basically pragmatic approach to the issues, there was a vocal minority who expressed strong libertarian and anti-censorship views, in general, and in relation to their own family's media consumption.

'It is people like Mary Whitehouse that cause this problem, so I think it is a very fine line that has got to be drawn over how much control can be put on by a television company or an Internet Service Provider or whatever, before it becomes restricting your freedom as an adult to choose what you want to do with your life.'
(Parents and Carers/Younger and Older/C2DE/North/Multi-channel)

More positively, there was widespread recognition of the value media contributed in terms of entertainment and education to the family and its individual members which, taken overall, outweighed the elements of concern and anxiety.

'Drugs and stuff like that, I don't mind her watching programmes about drugs ... the education of it, because she needs to know.'
(Family/Older/C2DE/South East/Multi-channel and internet)

Implicit in all the above is the finding that all the families interviewed in the qualitative research sample were exerting some form of control i.e. they were taking some notice of their children's media consumption, it was not a 'free for all'. However, the level and manner of control varied according to a number of factors, including:

- the age of the children
- their perceived robustness/vulnerability
- the level of parental awareness and knowledge
- the parents' personal values
- time pressures (especially relevant for single and/or working parents)

'In a couple of years time, my mum won't care what I watch.'
(Boys/Aged 12-13/ABC1/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

'I didn't explore it [parental control] *because I know my children and because it's very rare that I'm out.'*
(Parents and Carers/Older/ABC1/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

It is also important to note that control was related not only to the child suitability of the content, but also to factors such as the weight of consumption, preferences between media and the perceived quality of the content.

Some types of content were always outside the boundary of what would be allowed into the family circle: hard porn, extreme violence, snuff movies, paedophilia.

'I think for everybody there needs to be a block on those things ... As far as hardcore pornography, I'd love to see that banned.'
(Parents and Carers/Older/ABC1/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

Beyond this, judgements about the content were based on the age, maturity and susceptibility of the child - but with this process being complicated in multi-child families. Here, the desire might be to base control decisions on the needs of the youngest in the family, but this was not always workable in the face of complaints from older children. Sometimes in these households looser control was justified by the perceived extra maturity of the child with older siblings, and the final judgement was often based on the family as a whole rather than its youngest member. This again has implications for the flexibility of external mechanisms.

'It sounds very unfair, but I suppose you have to do it for the youngest member of the family, don't you. You'd have to, otherwise if you do it to the oldest child then you're going to run the risk always of the younger one seeing something that they shouldn't necessarily see.'
(Parents and Carers/Older/ABC1/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

It is important to acknowledge in the context of control that children often have their own 'rules'. These may be based on internalised family values (especially when they are passing through their 'conformist' stage), or they may come from self-awareness about what upsets them or makes them feel 'bad', as well as protectiveness for younger siblings. In addition, children showed some awareness of external rules, such as film ratings, and were capable of being guided by these.

> *'If little children watch it, if there's like loads of fighting and everything they might think that's good and they want to go and play at that.'*

> *'I wouldn't really like to watch everything. I wouldn't like to watch anything higher than 15.'*

> *'I pick up videos and stuff, and they have always got that big circle with the number in.'*

> *'She's very grown up ... I'll watch something and she'll not let herself watch it ...*
> *She doesn't look when things are going to happen.'*
> (Family/Younger and Older/ABC1/North/Multi-channel and internet)

Information sources
The issue of information sources used by parents and children was specifically explored in this research because of the potential role these have in providing guidance in a parental control context.

However, much consumption of television (and other media) is not information-driven. Choices were often based on habit and routine ('We always watch X'). There was also a significant level of random searching and flicking through the channels, while word-of-mouth could also be highly influential.

> *'I usually know. On* Nickelodeon, *it is the same sort of programmes, but different episodes, so I know what is on at special times.'*

> *'Because I have got this NTL, I just press browse and I just look what is on.'*
> (Boys/Aged 12-13/ABC1/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

When survey respondents were asked how they checked the suitability of television content for their child, only 11% of parents said that they never check, with another 8% failing to come up with a specific strategy. One in four (25%) parents claimed to watch the programme with the child if they were concerned about it. Mothers were more likely to claim this than fathers (29% compared to 19%). One in five (19%) said that they relied on announcements before a programme starts. Most parents (61%) used textual sources of

information as well. Parents were most likely to check newspaper listings (28%), followed by specific television listings magazines (21%), film/video classifications where available (15%), Teletext or Ceefax (9%), and electronic programme guides (EPGs) (9%). It is notable that only 15% of digital customers spontaneously mentioned using their EPGs to check content and they were not significantly less likely than non-digital consumers to use printed media sources. Only one in four of those parents using textual information mentioned using more than one source.

Table 1: Sources of textual information used for checking television content

	All parents %	Digital %	Non-digital %
Newspaper listings	28	28	30
Television listings magazines	21	19	22
Film/video classification	15	17	13
Teletext/Ceefax	9	11	7
EPG	9	15	1

Base: All parents of children aged 5-16 (528)

Parents were also asked to judge these sources of information on whether they included enough about programmes' sexual content, violence, strong language, blood and gore, and illegal drug use. Because the use of each individual source was not widespread, the sample sizes were too small to draw firm conclusions from the data. Moreover, respondents may have struggled to differentiate between the various subjects when assessing each information source. Perhaps the proportions claiming the source 'tells me enough about all these issues' is most relevant. As the table below shows, only a minority were fully satisfied with each source, although this does not seem to have persuaded them to use other sources (see above). It is possible that parents do not think that checking is important enough actively to seek out new information sources or that they expect all sources to fall down in certain respects.

EPGs and film/video classification seemed to be the most satisfactory of the sources used, and printed listings the least. The finding for film/video classification supports the qualitative data which found the classic U - PG - 12 - 15 - 18 system simplest and most informative, whereas it does seem that, once people use EPGs, they find them informative.

Table 2: Satisfaction with information sources

	Enough about all issues %
Newspaper listings (Base: 153)	22
Television listings magazines (Base: 106)	28
Film/video classification (Base: 79)	49
Teletext/Ceefax (Base: 47)	29
EPG (Base: 47)	52
Announcements before programmes (Base: 98)	35

Base: All using each source (see row)

The qualitative research showed that formal information sources were primarily used for pre-planning (which in this sample seemed to be relatively limited) and for immediate assistance if 'all else fails', i.e. if they did not succeed in finding something acceptable via random searching. The information would allow viewers to 'see what's on' with some additional assessment of the extent to which programmes had the potential to be relevant, interesting or of acceptable quality.

> '[Dad] *always looks through the magazine, and he will tell us there is a good film on tonight and we will sit down and watch it.'*
> (Family/Older/C2DE/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

The qualitative interviews suggested that usage of information sources to check suitability (i.e. as a potential control mechanism) mainly focused on films, where parents often looked for the age rating or code. This reflected the established awareness of film ratings and the greater likelihood that films were pre-planned viewing when there was scope to take this kind of information into account.

> '*If the kids said, "I want to watch such and such a film," I would maybe, if I had the magazine, I would check it out and think, "Alright." You know and it says what age, you know, if it's suitable or not.'*
> (Family/Older/C2DE/South East/Multi-channel and internet)

However, a minority of more concerned and/or anxious parents did check programmes as well as films, especially where there was felt to be variable or risky content. This could include series such as *Casualty* and *The Bill*, and soap operas, and illustrated the importance of predictability in enabling parents to keep on top of their children's viewing.

> '*The older kids were like, "Oh, you have to watch, such and such has happened to Peggy," and I'm like, "What?" I didn't think it was appropriate, I came in and switched it off.'*
> (Family/Older/C2DE/South East/Multi-channel and internet)

'I say, "Is it alright if I watch it [Holby City] *this week as this and this is happening?"*
and she will say yes or no.'
(Family/Older/C2DE/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

Another element of programme information which could, indirectly, help in the assessment of suitability was programme timing. There was widespread awareness of the Watershed, so that a programme scheduled after 9.00 p.m. might be examined more closely for suitability than one in a pre-Watershed slot.
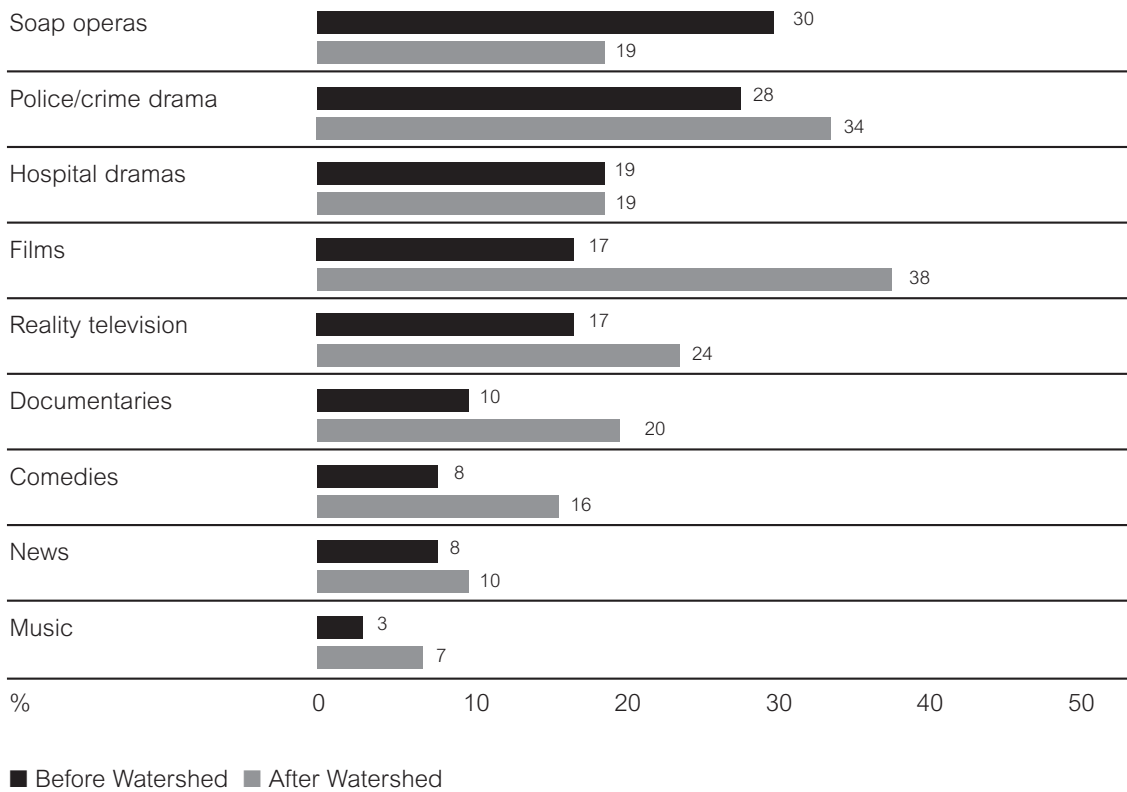
Suitability of content

Nearly every parent in the survey (95%) was aware of the 9.00 p.m. Watershed. When asked whether they were ever concerned that any types of programme shown before 9.00 p.m. would contain material not suitable for their child, more than half (56%) said yes for at least one genre. Although the absolute figure is difficult to interpret, it is instructive to look at the differences by genre. Soap operas and police/crime dramas were the primary concerns (30% and 28%, respectively), with hospital dramas (19%), films (17%) and reality television (17%) next on the list. On the whole, the sex of the selected child made little difference to parents' attitudes, but soap operas were an exception. When the selected child was a girl, nearly four in ten (38%) parents expressed concern, but when the selected child was a boy, this figure dropped to 23%. This may be related to the fact that girls are more likely than boys to watch soap operas (as shown by BARB audience measurement data).

Parents were also more likely to be apprehensive about younger children than older children, although the peak age for concern varied from genre to genre. For instance, concern about soap operas peaked around ages 7-10, whereas concern about reality television peaked around the 10-12 age band.

After 9.00 p.m. the concern switched from soap operas to films. Most soap operas are broadcast before 9.00 p.m., so this is not surprising. Similarly, many young children do not watch any television after 9.00 p.m., and this neutralises some parental concern about post-Watershed content. Where the selected child was aged 5-9, two-thirds (64%) of parents were concerned about some pre-Watershed content, whereas 52% were concerned about the suitability of post-Watershed content.

Nearly four in ten (38%) parents were concerned about film content after 9.00 p.m. (up from 17% pre-Watershed), especially if the child was aged between 11 and 13 (48% were concerned). There were also increases in concern about police/crime dramas (from 28% pre-Watershed to 34% post-Watershed) and reality television (from 17% to 24%).

Chart 2: Genre concern

Genre	Before Watershed	After Watershed
Soap operas	30	19
Police/crime drama	28	34
Hospital dramas	19	19
Films	17	38
Reality television	17	24
Documentaries	10	20
Comedies	8	16
News	8	10
Music	3	7

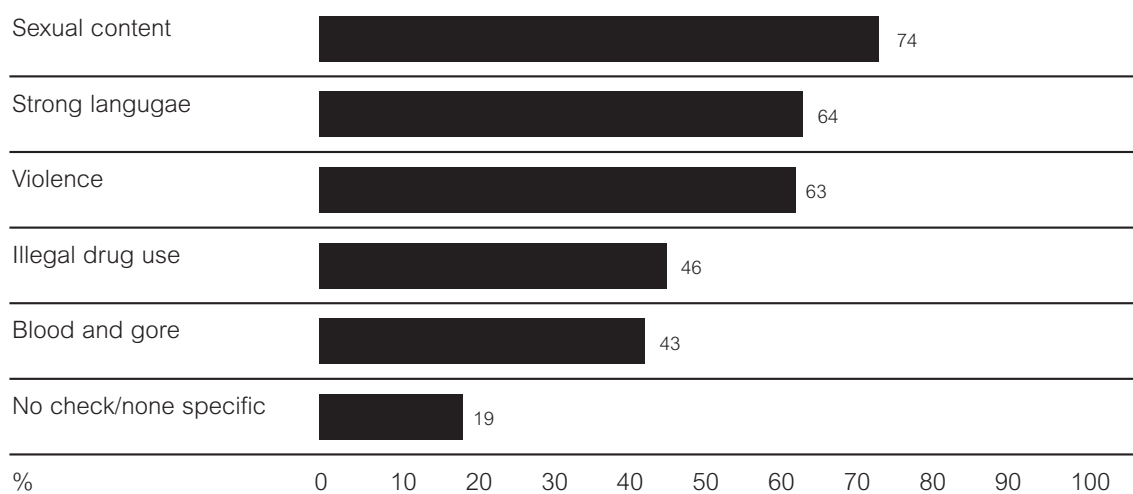■ Before Watershed ■ After Watershed

There was a notable correlation between the household social grade and parental concern. The higher the social grade, the more concerned the parent. The split was generally between ABC1s on one hand and C2DEs on the other, although there was a more dramatic curve with regard to pre-Watershed soap operas: 41% of ABs were concerned about the suitability of the content, compared to 36% of C1s, 27% of C2s, and just 21% of DEs.

Each parent was asked which they look for when checking for suitability of a television programme for their child:

■ sexual content
■ strong language
■ violence
■ illegal drug use
■ blood and gore

As Chart 3 shows, large majorities claimed to check for sex (74%), strong language (64%) or violence (63%) at least some of the time. Indeed, nearly half (46%) claimed to check for all three. Parents were less likely to check for either illegal drug use (46%) or blood and gore (43%), but these are still substantial minorities.

Chart 3: What parents check for

Sexual content	████████████████████ 74
Strong langugae	█████████████████ 64
Violence	█████████████████ 63
Illegal drug use	████████████ 46
Blood and gore	███████████ 43
No check/none specific	█████ 19

%   0   10   20   30   40   50   60   70   80   90   100

Base: All parents of children aged 5-16 (528)

If parents checked for one type of content, they tended to check for others. For instance, three-quarters of those who checked for sex also checked for violence and nine in ten of those who checked for violence also checked for sex.

As would be expected, parents were more likely to check television content for younger children than for older children. For example, three-quarters (75%) said they checked for strong language if the child was aged 5-9, but only 39% checked language if the child was aged 14-16. With violence, the proportion checking fell from 74% if the child was aged 5-9 to 40% if aged 14-16. The degree of change-by-age was smaller when it came to sex, dropping from 78% if the child was aged 5-9 to 59% if the child was aged 14-16. This suggests that, whereas parents hardly discriminate between sex, violence and strong language when the child is young, their concern with violence and strong language dwindles as the child becomes older, while sex remains a key issue. However, other research[9] does not support this, raising the question of how respondents interpreted the phrase 'sexual content'.

Interestingly, the sex of the selected child was not a key variable. Parents were almost equally likely to check for boys (73%) and for girls (77%). There were also no consistent trends by social grade - although AB parents were most concerned about television content (soap operas in particular), this was not reflected in their 'checking behaviour', which was no different from parents in other social grades.

Parents were most likely to check programmes shown after 9.00 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays (47% of those who check content), but much less likely to check on a school night (28%). Presumably this is because children do not stay up so late on school nights. The data are also affected by the fact that many young children go to bed before 9.00 p.m.

9. For example *Sense and Sensibilities*; British Board of Film Classification, 2000.

so post-Watershed monitoring is not relevant. Parents of 5 to 9-year-olds were less likely to check after 9.00 p.m. than before it, whether it was a school day or the weekend. The reverse is true with older children. As a result, it looks like parents are most concerned about children in the middle age group (10-14) once it is past 9.00 p.m.

Parents were also fairly likely to check content if no adults were going to be around, especially if younger children were going to be watching (40% if the child is aged 5-9, 42% if aged 10-14, but only 21% if aged 15-16). The figure for 5 to 9-year-olds may be depressed by the fact they are rarely left alone for long.

In the qualitative research, concerns about language and violence (both real and fantasy) seemed uppermost in parents' minds, with fears about children emulating what they had seen a key issue.

> **Q: What is it about the content that you're not happy with?**

> *'It's just the level of violence, the language and if there's not blatant sex, it's the sexual innuendos, especially for children, you know? And okay it's over their head, but I still don't think it should be in there.'*
> (Family/Older/C2DE/South East/Multi-channel and internet)

> *'If I ask them, if I wanted to watch* Gladiator, *I think they would say no because of all the violence and all the swearing words. And it would give me nightmares and if I had a word in my mind like a swear word from* Gladiator *and I was in school, the word might have come out of my mouth.'*
> (Family/Younger/ABC1/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

Sexual portrayal and references, especially the sex act itself (particularly, for some, the depiction of homosexual characters and themes), were also problematic - albeit simply because they were embarrassing or over the heads of younger children.

> *'She doesn't like me watching rude things.'*
> (Boys/aged 12-13/ABC1/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

> *'The one thing that bothers them that they choose that they don't want to watch are the sex things, if something gets too mushy.'*
> (Parents and Carers/Older/ABC1/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

> *'Don't want to watch it* [sex on television]. *Well, it would depend, if it's not disgusting ... Sometimes it can be embarrassing if it's really detailed, and other times it's okay ...*
> (Family/Younger and Older/ABC1/North/Multi-channel and internet)

Horror and the depiction of blood and gore were also a concern for some, especially their propensity to cause nightmares.

'We get [Sleepy] Hollow *and it's really horrible, they chop heads off. S keeps talking about it and I keep having dreams about it.'*
(Family/Younger/ABC1/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

'They love murder mystery kind of things, really like them. But when they are a bit gruesome, I don't like them watching that.'
(Family/Older/C2DE/South East/Multi-channel and internet)

However, although these broad areas were of concern, the point was made that the nature and level of the treatment of these issues also had to be taken into account: whether it was a documentary, fiction or fantasy, the mood conveyed and the general context, and whether the objectionable elements were seen or merely heard or referred to.

'In what context is it being portrayed? If it's being gratuitous then it's one thing, but if somebody said, "Oh, I would never look at violence or sex on television," my immediate impression is, "Okay, what context are you talking?" Blanket bans to me are making a whole pile of trouble.'
(Parents and Carers/Older/ABC1/Wales/Terrestrial and internet)

'Violence and bad language ... I'm not into violent films, but if there's been a film with a scene of violence we'll watch it because if it's done in a drama and you think that was an excellent drama, it's been part and parcel of it. I think they also need to know that things like that do happen and it's very frightening, but you do need to be aware that there are some horrible people out there who do awful things.'
(Parents and Carers/Older/ABC1/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

Television
In the survey, two-thirds (67%) of parents believed that their child 'often' watched television unsupervised, including a third (33%) who said 'very often' (Table 3). Even when the child was aged 5-7, the majority (61%) believed he/she very or fairly often watched television without adults around. It should be stressed that unsupervised viewing is not the same as unsuitable viewing.

Table 3: How often watches television without adults

Age	Very often %	Fairly often %	Not very often/never %
5-7	22	39	39
8-10	35	30	36
11-13	34	38	28
14-16	44	32	24
ALL	33	35	32

Base: All parents of children aged 5-16 (528)

The survey listed a number of technological aids that can restrict access to certain kinds of television content. Parents were asked whether they were aware of each in turn, whether it was available with their television and whether they used it. The aids were:

- Channel PIN: Identification code (or PIN) which allow certain users access to certain channels
- PPV/digital services PIN: Identification code (or PIN) required for accessing pay-per-view or other digital services
- Channel filter: a filter which blocks all access to certain channels
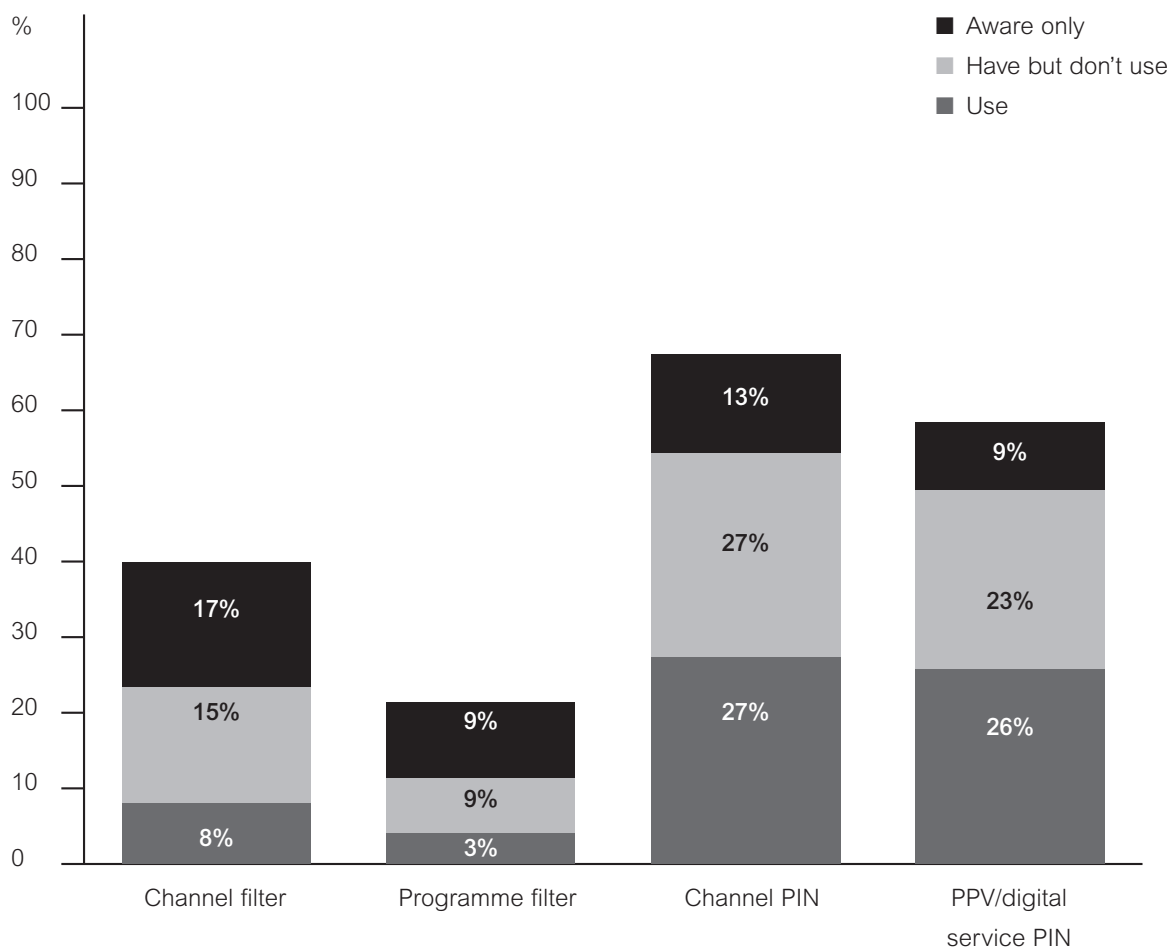- Programme filter: a filter that blocks out certain programmes but not whole channels

Because of the difficulties of disentangling what is provided by each supplier, there is a likelihood that some respondents were confused about precisely which mechanisms were which, and the results should be interpreted with this in mind.

Most digital householders were aware of channel PINs (67%) and PPV/digital service PINs (58%), and a substantial minority were aware of channel filters (40%). The PPV/digital service PINs are necessary to use PPV/digital services, so presumably those unaware are non-users. Non-digital householders were, understandably, less aware of these aids, although it is notable that awareness of programme filters was low among both digital and non-digital householders (21% and 17% respectively). This lack of awareness may be a result of the supporting programme classification system not being well developed, or inadequate publicity by the suppliers.[10]

Although AB parents were the least likely to have digital television, they were most aware of PIN and filter technology. For instance, 42% were aware of channel filters, compared to just 28% of C2DE parents. This may be related to their greater concern about television content (see p25).

Less than half the people who *could* use these aids actually *were* using them. About 15% of all parents used channel PINs, although a little over 30% knew they could use them, and only a very small minority used filters of either kind. Perhaps parents did not want to use them (preferring to rely on their own judgement), or maybe some parents had not worked out how to use them. The qualitative work also suggested that many parents are sceptical about these kinds of aids, as they frequently believed their children to be more technologically literate than they were. This, along with the trust issue, may discourage some from even trying to work them out.

---

10. Unfortunately, the sample sizes are too small to differentiate between the various digital platforms.

Legend:
- Aware only
- Have but don't use
- Use

	Channel filter	Programme filter	Channel PIN	PPV/digital service PIN
Aware only	17%	9%	13%	9%
Have but don't use	15%	9%	27%	23%
Use	8%	3%	27%	26%

Base: All parents of children aged 5-16 with digital (528)

From the exploration of family television consumption in the qualitative work, it was clear that a range of informal control mechanisms was available to parents, although there were significant variations in the types and frequency of strategies used in different households. It is also important to reiterate that control related not only to the content of programming, but also to the overall amount of television watched by children, on the basis that sheer volume of consumption could have deleterious effects, for example on sleep patterns.

Informal mechanisms cited by parents comprised:

■ banning some programmes/channels and/or encouraging others

   'I stopped them watching The Simpsons, *I don't like that.'*
   (Family/Older/C2DE/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

■ switching off the television or changing channels (usually with some time limit on how long it is turned off or switched over for)

'If dad sees something he doesn't like, we will turn it off.'
(Family/Older/C2DE/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

'We will often sit with the finger poised over the control thinking, "Will we turn it off or..."
I think there have been occasions, when it gets too [much] *... we will switch it off.'*
(Parents and Carers/Younger/C2DE/North/Multi-channel and internet)

■ sending the children out of the room or asking them to cover their ears or eyes

'I try not to look. I go like that [fingers over eyes] *so I can't see the horrible bits*
[Casualty].'
(Girls/Aged 10-11/C2DE/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

'I just think that I'm always here and, you know, I usually deal with it. "That's not
suitable for you, time for you to go to bed!" Don't need a code for that!'
(Family/Older/C2DE/South East/Multi-channel and internet)

■ discussing programme content with children, either before viewing or during/after seeing
something with 'concerning' content - this was favoured by some parents as a more
constructive solution than simple prevention

'But if it was so much that it was really bad language, then my dad would ... turn off
for five minutes and say, "Right girls, you know not to be influenced by any of this"
and he will say "This is okay to watch, but I don't want to hear any of these words in
this house."'
(Family/Older/C2DE/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

'There will always be things that your children will see that you don't want them to see,
but if they see something and you talk about what they've seen ... as far as the age of
the child and everything will allow you.'
(Family/Older/C2DE/South East/Multi-channel and internet)

■ placing time limits on television consumption e.g. not before school, not before
completion of homework, not after 9.00 p.m. - this being one example of the multiple
role of controls in addressing both amount and content of television viewing

'The telly has to be off about 9.30 p.m., 10.00 p.m. latest.'
(Family/Older/C2DE/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

■ limitations on television in bedrooms: no television set (minority), only terrestrial
television, rules laid down for the timing and content of television viewing in bedrooms
(rules which the evidence suggested were often flouted), aerial removed as a sanction

'I can't watch television on it, it's just for my PlayStation.'
(Girls/Aged 8-9/ABC1/North/Terrestrial and internet)

'He was watching a lot of television up there and not just even sitting and watching it, but had it on for background, you know? But that's why he had the aerial taken from him.'
(Family/Older/C2DE/South East/Multi-channel and internet)

■ random checks by parents e.g. in the living room when children are watching alone or in the bedroom - with some parents checking on the television downstairs what their children might be watching on their bedroom televisions

'I think a lot of the time people tend to stick their children in front of the telly. I tend to come in and out of the room. If I'm busy doing something else, I'm in and out and I'm watching.'
(Family/Older/C2DE/South East/Multi-channel and internet)

'I go to bed at 9.00 p.m. and my mum likes to know that I'm watching something suitable and like she checks and sees me.'
(Girls/Aged 10-11/ABC1/Midlands/Multi-channel)

'There was a film on ... it was sex and it was quite explicit actually and it was all going on and I was sitting in bed and I had a flick through and I watched it and I thought, "I wonder if they're watching it in their bedrooms?"'
(Parents and Carers/Older/ABC1/Midlands/Terrestrial and internet)

'The times you get back up the stairs they've switched over, you're up and down the stairs all the time ... Suddenly it goes really quiet and [I] *want to go upstairs and see what's going on in case they are watching something bad.'*
(Parents and Carers/Older/ABC1/North/Multi-channel and internet)

Of the 'external' control mechanisms available to parents, the Watershed played an important role. All parents and many children were aware of the Watershed, although this knowledge was at quite a simplistic level, with little awareness of the Watershed's gradations.[11] Participants felt that, in general, the Watershed was a user-friendly and very 'feasible' mechanism because it does not require their active participation. It seems to fit quite well with the realities of weekday family life and bedtimes, although perhaps working less well at weekends when there is a 'looser' approach to family timetables.

'I know anything before 9.00 p.m. is safe. So that is the rule normally.'
(Family/Older/C2DE/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

'Well, I think it's quite a good idea. Like they put them sorts of things on quite late because children go to bed between 9.00 p.m. and half past. So they like put those programmes on like 11.00 p.m.'
(Girls/Aged 8-9/ABC1/North/Terrestrial and internet)

11. See also *Viewers and Family Viewing Policy*, Dr. R. C. Towler; Broadcasting Standards Commission/British Broadcasting Corporation/ Independent Television Commission, 2001, p24.

There were also some challenges to the way the Watershed was implemented and the criteria on which scheduling decisions were made. Some pre-Watershed programmes were considered to contain excessively adult-orientated material, with the soap operas and some of the themes contained in their storylines a particular example. In contrast, some post-Watershed programmes - especially, for example, wildlife documentaries - were considered suitable for family viewing and there was regret that children might miss these (although they could be videoed for subsequent viewing).

> *'Incest and things like that. I think that should be after 9 o'clock ... When your son starts asking, "What does that mean?"'*
> (Family/Younger and Older/C2DE/South/Multi-channel)

As regards other external controls (see Appendix 2 for details), there was very limited usage of blocking mechanisms on multi-channel/digital television to control unsuitable content. Awareness of them was vague, and most participants had been reluctant to engage with them as they felt they would be a hassle to install and use - and also that techno-savvy children were likely to be able to get round them. However, there was a consistent theme in households with younger children that they might consider them more seriously when the children were older and parental supervision was less close.

> *'I never use this thing at all. The only time I've ever gone into any of these menus is probably about three years ago and that's the truth.'*
> (Family/Younger and Older/C2DE/South/Multi-channel)

> *'Now I know it's there I might investigate it.'*
> (Parents and Carers/Older/ABC1/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

There was more use of password and/or card-related protection to control access to services which cost money, for example PPV and interactive services. However, once again there were suspicions that children knew how to override the control and might 'risk it', even though they would be found out when the bill came in.

> *'There is a pin code ... They know I know it ... On the card - it is the last four digits ... I wouldn't go behind their back ... If I really wanted to do something, I know how to change it. They don't even know how to do it.'*
> (Boys/Aged 12-13/ABC1/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

> *'With mine, at least the children know what it is because there have been times when I've been in the bath and they've said there's nothing on the telly so I've said fine, carry on - you know what to do, do it.'*
> (Parents and Carers/Older/ABC1/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

> *'Take out the card and block it. I've only really gone down that road.'*
> (Family/Older/C2DE/South East/Multi-channel and internet)

Another area where content control could be a factor was in relation to choice of television packages, where child/family suitability could be a consideration - although this was hampered by the non-availability of an 'à la carte' approach to choice.

> *'There was a whole channel* [of soft porn] *but my mum got rid of it.'*
> (Family/Younger/ABC1/Scotland/Multi-channel)

It was clear from many of the discussions that parents' desires and attempts to control their children's television consumption had the potential to generate arguments and battles, and parents admitted that they sometimes gave in for a quiet life or if they believed that their child might be disadvantaged among peers if he/she did not watch a particular programme. Indeed, sometimes parents literally walked away from the situation, although this was usually because the programme was not to their taste, rather than because they believed it contained unsuitable material.

> *'Sometimes at 9.00 p.m. they're in bed, but an hour later I'll go upstairs and they're wide awake watching* Crimewatch UK *and stuff that I don't want them to watch. We didn't want them to watch it, but they're into that now, we can't stop them. If we tell them not to watch it, they'll turn it back on. It's mostly the eldest lass. She's starting to understand things now, you know.'*
> (Parents and Carers/Older/ABC1/North/Multi-channel and internet)

> *'I thought, "Well, all her friends watch it* [Bad Girls] *and talk about it at school," so well I thought I'll let her watch it and she did like it. It didn't adjust her behaviour or anything like that, so I didn't mind her watching it.'*
> (Family/Older/C2DE/South East/Multi-channel and internet)

Children were self-regulating, based on what they believe they are ready for and sometimes on a strong moral sense of what is right and wrong. Children were also aware that some things go over their heads - although many understand more than their parents think.

> *'Sometimes there is stuff I don't like watching, like girls being raped, and in Africa people starving ... I wouldn't want to see that.'*
> (Girls/Aged 10-11/C2DE/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

> *'The thing is you have sex education at school, so you know all the stuff. We have sex education when we are 10 years old now.'*
> (Boys/Aged 12-13/ABC1/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

Internet

It was in relation to the internet that participants showed the greatest variations in both feelings and behaviour. This reflected its position as one of the latest major entrants into the media scene, which meant that attitudes were driven by two key dimensions: level of knowledge/naïvety and level of anxiety/confidence.

Certainly, attitudes to internet content proved very different to attitudes to what appears on television:

> *'On telly it is like just an acting thing. It is really boring you, but on the Web ... it is influencing you.'*
> (Girls/Aged 10-11/C2DE/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

> *'Telly is just showing it happening and that* [the internet] *is just showing worse. It stays on something you can see for ages and with telly, it just goes past and goes on to different things.'*
> (Boys/Aged 12-13/ABC1/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

> *'I think on the television I wouldn't be too concerned, but the internet, well you can get access to literally anything on that, so I will be very wary, if she started to look at sites on there that I wasn't happy with. Stop her using it really if I can do.'*
> (Family/Older/C2DE/South East/Multi-channel and internet)

Although one might expect there to be a direct correlation between experience and confidence, this was not the case where the internet was concerned. For example, some participants showed both low knowledge and low anxiety, whereas for others, the more they experienced the internet, the more anxious they became about its dangers and the accessibility of 'dodgy' sites.

This matrix is illustrated in the diagram below:
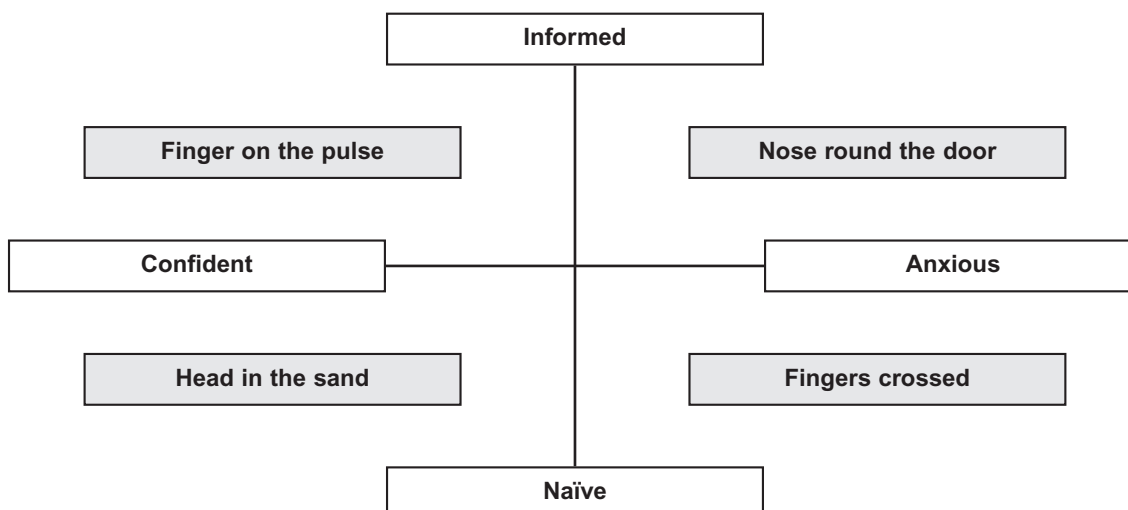
While it would be unwise from a qualitative study to assign numbers or proportions to each segment, it was evident that, overall, parental anxiety predominated over confidence, for a variety of reasons. Most participants knew that the internet was unregulated, and the implications of this were magnified by the vast range of sites and authors known to be active on the worldwide web. Media publicity about 'weird' and 'sick' sites - especially those involving pornography and paedophilia - had inflamed these anxieties, with further fuel being added by exposure to such sites in the course of surfing the web. Interestingly, parents themselves had limited direct experience of this, whereas children were often able to furnish many examples of such experiences. Children seemed to take an experimental approach to the internet, often typing in made-up words or even accidentally misspelling the names of popular child sites. In this way, they often seemed to easily come across sites with unsuitable content, such as pornography.

> *'He's just started surfing on his own now, where he logs on and goes on for school projects. You've only got to type in the wrong word and whoosh.'*
> (Family/Younger and Older/C2DE/South/Multi-channel and internet)

> *'I've just started looking at it now because they've got to the stage where ... he said the other night, "Dad, my mate got some nude pictures off the internet," didn't he?'*
> (Family/Younger and Older/C2DE/South/Multi-channel and internet)

> *' ... There was one where it said sex things and naked women and rude things and you can get pictures of naked women doing things.'*
> (Girls/Aged 10-11/C2DE/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

Parental concerns focused not just on sites themselves, but also on chat rooms. At the lowest level of sophistication, some parents had a simple horror of chat rooms, whether moderated or not. Further up the scale, parents with a little more knowledge and/or experience distinguished between chat rooms on 'good' sites (which would probably be moderated) and those on 'dodgy' sites and/or unmoderated - although only the most internet-knowledgeable participants were fully conversant with the issue of moderation (i.e. having a third party to screen messages, block anything unacceptable and evict users who persistently ignore the chat room's rules). E-mail was also an area of anxiety, especially unsolicited messages, with paedophiles and 'weirdos' again the concern.

> '[My Dad] *doesn't like us going on chat rooms because of all the stories you hear.'*
> (Girls/Aged 14-15/ABC1/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

> *'C had received junk mail, not as much as that, but she had one or two and it was of a sexual nature.'*
> (Family/Older/C2DE/South East/Multi-channel and internet)

'All these paedophile rings that go around and ... that frightens me to death.'
(Parents and Carers/Older/ABC1/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

'[My parents aren't] so keen on us giving out our e-mail address to people.'
(Family/Older/C2DE/South East/Multi-channel and internet)

Once parents had become more conscious of the risks involved in the internet, they understood that it was easy for children to be accidentally exposed to unsuitable sites. If this happened, they hoped that the child would tell them about it and they did not feel that it had especially serious implications. If, however, they discovered that their children were deliberately choosing to visit unsuitable sites, this was a much more serious event (which had happened in some cases) and might lead to a desire for stricter controls.

'I hope, and I think I am right, but if they ever did get something up that they shouldn't be watching, I hope they would come and say, "Look this has come on, I didn't mean to get it." I think they would be honest enough to come and own up.'
(Parents and Carers/Younger/C2DE/North/Multi-channel and internet)

Some parents had become more aware of potential risks through letters sent home from school about their policy for policing access while children were in school.

As with other media, although the main emphasis of the research was on content suitability, it must not be forgotten that parental control was often related to issues of time and cost - both of which were very relevant for the internet.

Again as with other media, the negatives had to be offset against its undoubted benefits. Parents were aware that the internet was a valuable educational tool, the use of which was often encouraged by their children's schools, and more generally they were aware of its role in widening children's contact with and knowledge about the outside world. So forbidding access to the web was not really an option, although some parents were delaying acquisition of the internet - or of better/faster/always-on access - because of their concerns about its risks to children.

'It's a tool that you know it's going to get better. It's got a long way to go, but when these grow up it'll be commonplace I would think in every household.'
(Family/Younger/ABC1/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

'We should have freedom of speech, but I think there are limits ... There are some advantages and also it became very apparent when M started going to high school. Most people expect you to have a computer.'
(Parents and Carers/Older/ABC1/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

'We haven't got a lot of knowledge of the internet, we got it for education ... They lost me on it. I wish I had more knowledge of it, it is just time.'
(Parents and Carers/Younger/C2DE/North/Multi-channel and internet)

Parental control over their children's usage of the internet generally comprised informal, in-family methods. Those mentioned were:

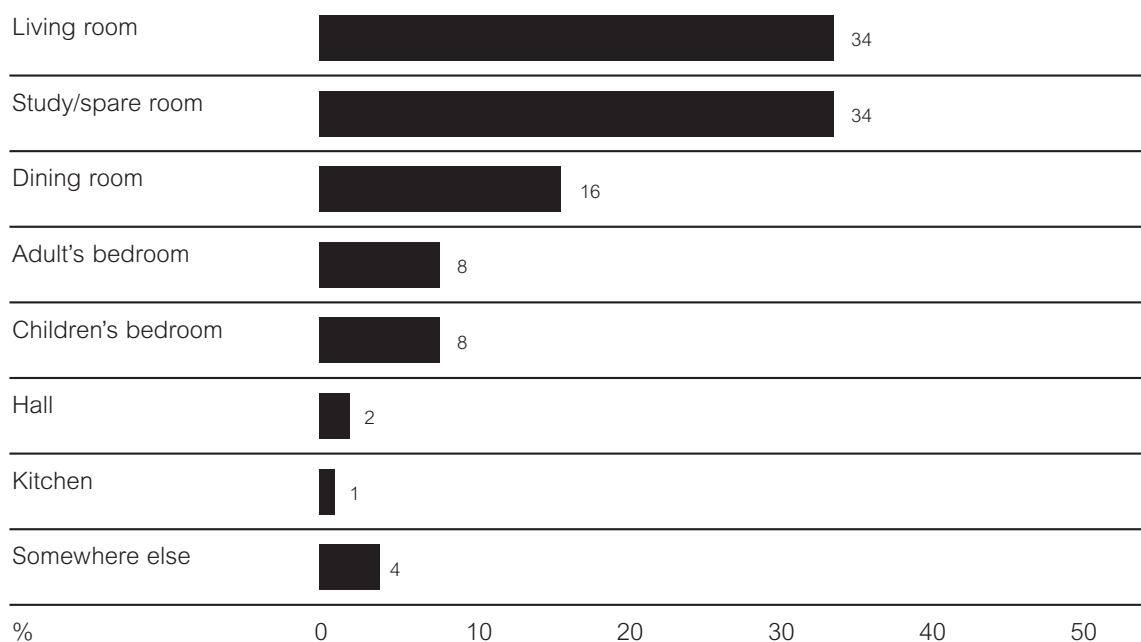■ placing the computer where usage is visible

'I always know when she's on her computer, then I make sure when she comes off it. So we're sort of patrolling it without her realising it. To be quite honest, I don't think we've got to that [difficult] stage yet - that's to come.'
(Family/Younger and Older/ABC1/North/Multi-channel and internet)

The survey showed that the living room and study/spare room were by far the most common places to have a computer with internet access. Only 8% of parents with a (selected) child that used the internet at home said their children had internet access in their bedroom. This is considerably lower than the presence of television sets: over 60% of parents reported that there was a television in their child's bedroom.

About one in two children who use the internet at home use it in a private place (study/spare room, children's or adult's bedroom). It is worth pointing out that 'keeping the computer in a family room/public place' is not a preventative action per se. There may well be other reasons for keeping the computer in the living room, such as availability of sockets, space etc. But it probably increases or facilitates the monitoring process. The data support this, but the sample size is too small to make any further statistical analysis.

Chart 5: Where children use internet

Location	%
Living room	34
Study/spare room	34
Dining room	16
Adult's bedroom	8
Children's bedroom	8
Hall	2
Kitchen	1
Somewhere else	4

Base: All parents of children who are internet users (158)

■ only the parent is allowed to turn on the computer

   *'My dad comes in and turns the computer on and gets the internet for me and then me
   and my sister just play on it.'*
   (Girls/Aged 8-9/ABC1/North/Terrestrial and internet)

■ the parent sits with the child while he or she is using the internet - this was more
   common with younger, new users

   *'Whenever they are on the internet, well it is usually me, but either me or my husband,
   is sitting right beside them, we are all learning together what's on the computer.'*
   (Parents and Carers/Younger/C2DE/North/Multi-channel and internet)

One-third (33%) of surveyed parents whose child used the internet said it was fairly
or very often without adults around. This is much lower than the figure for television,
where around two-thirds (67%) said their children watched television on their own.
Perhaps not surprisingly, the greatest influence is age. The younger the child, the more
likely parents were to supervise internet use. Three age bands emerged from the data:
none of the 5 to 7-year-olds who used the internet used it unsupervised very or fairly often;
the corresponding figure for 8 to 13-year-olds was 29% and, when they reached 14-16
around two-thirds (63%) of them often used the internet unsupervised.

■ the child has to ask permission to access the internet and inform the parent of the
   sites in use

   *'My mum is worried, but if I want to see stuff about Tigger I go on the search thing and
   type in "Tigger" and I will go on the websites I already know.'*
   (Girls/Aged 10-11/C2DE/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

■ the parent makes random checks on the child while she is using the internet

   *'My mum caught her reading these swear words and she is not allowed to go on
   Yahoo! chat lines.'*
   (Girls/Aged 10-11/C2DE/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

■ the parent limits or discourages random surfing (and checks to see that this is being
   adhered to)

■ the parent limits the time the child spends on the internet

   *'She doesn't let us go on it that often. Too dear. If we're on it it's for about 20 minutes
   or something at the most.'*
   (Family/Older/C2DE/South East/Multi-channel and internet)

■ the parent checks the phone line to see if the internet is (still) in use

However, despite the theoretical availability of this range of informal control mechanisms, in practice some parents were doing very little to control their children's internet usage. Sometimes this was because they were intimidated by the technology, but there was also a significant element of 'wishful thinking': trusting - or wanting to trust - the child to remember and conform to parental values.

> *'We turn it on for them if they are going on to the* CITV *website or something like that, we'll get it into that, and then we'll leave them alone. She'll sort of play around.'*
> (Family/Older/C2DE/South East/Multi-channel and internet)

> *'[Talking to son] You know when you were getting up some stuff on the internet and things and it was a bit rude and I was fussy, what happened. How did we stop that? Did you just stop doing it, or was there a stop put on it?'*
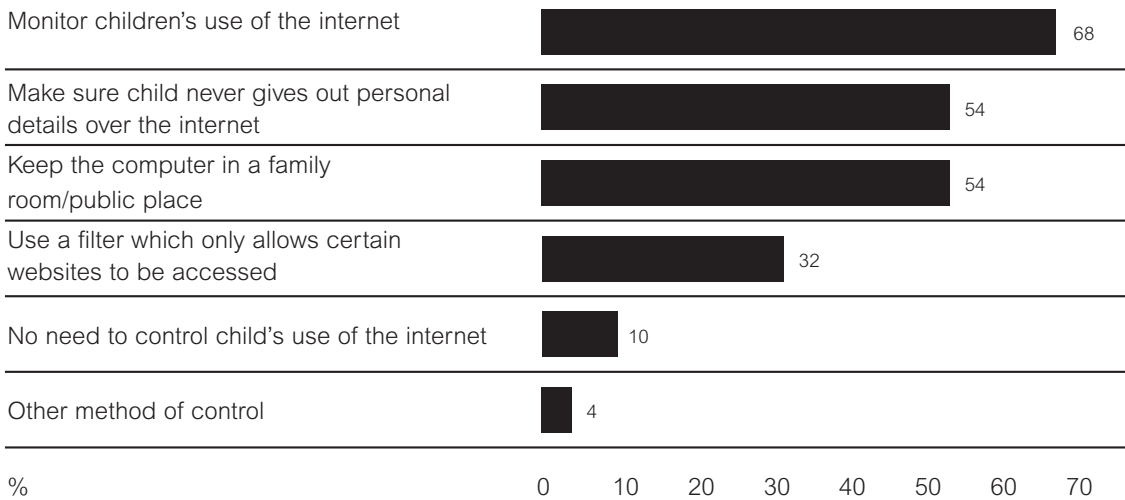
> *'[Son] No, there wasn't a stop on it.'*

> *'So you've just stopped doing it cause I didn't like it?'*

> *'[Son] Can't be bothered to go on the internet!'*

> *'But no one brings that up now, do they? 'Cause they were actually doing prints of women and things like that as well. That was mostly the older one ... Obviously because I've put my foot down they've stopped doing it cause it's a no-no.'*
> (Parents and Carers/Older/ABC1/Midlands/Terrestrial and internet, son in attendance)

When parents in the survey were asked what they did to control what their children see on the internet, only one in ten (10%) said that there was no need to control their child's use. Almost one-third (32%) said that they used some sort of technical filter (either software based or ISP based). This was similar to the 30% of parents in *Public's View 2001*, although higher than might be expected from the qualitative findings. Many ISPs now offer family packages and service providers such as AOL and Compuserve are targeting families. Men were more likely than women to cite a filter, possibly because men are traditionally responsible for - or take more interest in - purchase decisions regarding computer software/choice of ISP.

Chart 6: Parental control over internet

Monitor children's use of the internet	68
Make sure child never gives out personal details over the internet	54
Keep the computer in a family room/public place	54
Use a filter which only allows certain websites to be accessed	32
No need to control child's use of the internet	10
Other method of control	4

%   0   10   20   30   40   50   60   70

Base: All parents of children who are internet users (158)

Of the parents who used software or ISP-based filters, about six in ten (62%) thought it blocked out the right amount of the internet. One in five (18%) thought it blocked out too much and one in ten (11%) reported that it blocked out too little.

Almost a quarter (23%) believed that their child went to chat rooms as part of their internet use. This result is very similar to TGI Youth data (a media and consumer survey conducted by BMRB International with 6000 respondents aged 7-19), even though that is a self-completion survey asking children directly, *not* their parents. The figures (23% in the parental survey versus 27% in the youth study) indicate that parents slightly underestimate their children's use of chat rooms, but not to a great extent.

Two further questions about chat rooms were asked, but there were so few respondents the figures should be treated with caution. Of the 35 respondents who believed that their child visited chat rooms, 19 (60%) knew that some chat rooms are actively monitored while others are not. Only five (27%) of these believed that their child ever spent time in unmonitored chat rooms, four (23%) said maybe and a further eight (41%) said definitely not.

Parents' awareness of technological control mechanisms for the internet was low in the qualitative sample - and usage was even lower.

> *I've heard of* Net Nanny *and* Cyber Patrol. *Are they not American? To me having this thing* [internet blocking] *is like, well I do not trust you and that's the message.'*
> (Family/Older/C2DE/South East/Multi-channel and internet)

A few participants were aware of the History and Favourites buttons and used these to check the sites visited by their children.

> 'We've got the history page, we can look up the history and we can look in the recycling bin and we did ... One of them last year, now we don't know if it was the 19-year-old or who it was, they didn't claim that they did it, but we did discover somebody had been on pornography sites and we told them that is not on. It's just a no go and once they found out ... I mean the kids are smart, but once they found out we can actually get the history pages up that was it and we never had it again.'
> (Family/Older/C2DE/South East/Multi-channel and internet)

Some were vaguely aware that blocking mechanisms were available, but only a couple had tried them and at least one had subsequently removed the mechanism as too restrictive. Others were considering installing blocking mechanisms when their children were older and informal control was less feasible. However, several were averse to blocking per se as they believed it would undermine the wide-ranging benefits of the internet.

> 'My brother [age 16] was downloading some pictures and my mum went psycho. She went crazy with my brother. She deleted all the pictures. Put locks on everything.'
> (Boys/Aged 12-13/ABC1/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

> 'It's got to be controlled though, because there's a lot of stuff on there that they shouldn't see and shouldn't be exposed to. But I've got a web protector on there which will filter out certain sites.'

> 'It's very difficult, too, if you set it to so many different levels I doubt I'd be able to get in there myself. It's not flexible enough.'
> (Family/Younger/ABC1/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

> 'It might block out the good things.'
> (Girls/Aged 10-11/C2DE/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

There was low awareness of convergence - the possibility of internet through the television - and immediate reactions were generally negative, on the practical grounds that it would 'tie up the television' and lead to even more arguments and competing interests. When considered more fully, convergence was seen as potentially opening a can of worms in relation to children, as it could facilitate unsupervised access - especially given children's greater ease with technology. (A few participants who had experienced access to the internet via television were unimpressed, finding it limited and slow.)

As in other media areas, the qualitative work showed that there was a degree of child self-regulation evident. This may be due to their having internalised family values and feeling comfortable that they would not be punished if they admitted accidental exposure to

unsuitable sites. They also themselves recognised the (relative) safety of approved sites and moderated chat rooms. But fear was also operative: of the computer 'freezing' if they went past warning signs and basically of getting caught!

> *'I don't go in there and turn it on without him* [Dad] *saying because, I don't know, I might mess something up.'*
> (Parents and Carers/Older/ABC1/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

> *'I search on stuff, but sometimes I go past things and there is really rude things there and I click off and go to another thing and I see it and I click off again.'*

> *'Most of the time I don't want to look. It is a bad influence.'*
> (Girls/Aged 10-11/C2DE/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

> *'I wouldn't go in it, I think my parents wouldn't let us. I think it would be bad of me ... I really wouldn't want to go on it because it would be, like, rude.'*
> (Girls/Aged 8-9/ABC1/North/Terrestrial and internet)

However, despite some self-regulation, there was also definite evidence of children not complying with the guidance and instructions from their parents. This might involve accessing the internet when their parents were out and/or deliberately visiting sites of which they knew their parents would disapprove - relying on their parents' lack of technical 'savvy' to escape being found out. This tendency to disobey was intensified by children sharing information about 'bad sites' with friends and peer pressure to take the risk.

> *'If I am interested by it I keep watching.'*

> *'Porn stuff, you can get it on the internet.'*
> (Boys/Aged 12-13/ABC1/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

Q: Does he ever check what sites you are looking at?

> *'Well, I try not to show him ones I've been on, 'cause I've been on a few, I went on this* Harry Potter *one, I've been on the* EastEnders *one.'*

> *'It was a good laugh, yeah, but, um, as I say, you've got to be careful, there's like people put their names on this list and if you want you just click on a name and start talking.'*
> (Family/Older/C2DE/South East/Multi-channel and internet)

Other in-home media

The qualitative sample included only one or two DVD owners - perhaps surprisingly, given that the majority had multi-channel television and/or the internet and were, therefore, not backward in adopting (relatively) new technology.[12] However, it is assumed that participants' attitudes to parental control in relation to video will be transferable to DVD.

Overall, participants seemed to be less anxious about videos as a channel of media consumption than television. They felt more in control of it, and this was particularly true where it was used to play pre-recorded films. All were familiar with the established classification system for films, and they found this reassuring even when, as sometimes happened, they used them flexibly and/or personally disagreed with a particular rating. Information about the rating and indications of the content were easily available. In addition, parents could take their own action. They might also have seen - or could preview - the film in question, and they could monitor their children's video collection and confiscate unsuitable material.

> *'The film rating is useful. To be able to establish the content, I've noticed on the videos now there is an indication of what you'll have in it. Sexual content, violence etc. That's useful as well.'*
> (Family/Younger and Older/ABC1/North/Multi-channel and internet)

> *'She is just coming up 10, if it has got a 15 rating, if we are watching it with her, fair enough, but I don't think I would chance letting her watch it on her own.'*
> (Parents and Carers/Younger/C2DE/North/Multi-channel and internet)

> *'There are some 18's that I do approve of, so it depends really, you know? I mean we're Bruce Lee fans here and Arnold Schwarzenegger and all them and I know some of them are probably only 15's, but there is the odd 18 which I would ... like a martial art sort of thing and although they're violent it doesn't come across to me because it's martial arts.'*
> (Parents and Carers/Older/ABC1/Midlands/Terrestrial and internet)

However, there were still some areas of potential concern in relation to videos. There were worries that younger children might gain unauthorised access to unsuitable videos belonging to parents or older siblings, and this raised again the whole issue of mediating between the various age groups within the household. In addition, when children were old enough to make unaccompanied visits to the video shop, there was potential for unsuitable videos being obtained.

> *'I usually ask what they've been watching in case they've been putting any* [of our] *videos on.'*
> (Parents and Carers/Older/ABC1/North/Multi-channel and internet)

---

12. *Viewers and Family Viewing Policy,* Dr. R. C. Towler; Broadcasting Standards Commission/British Broadcasting Corporation/ Independent Television Commission, 2001, p9, records 17% of individuals having DVD in their home.

'Sometimes they let us watch them with my friends, but sometimes they think it's okay, and then sometimes they watch it by themselves and tell us not to watch it.'
(Family/Older/C2DE/South East/Multi-channel and internet)

In relation to using the video to record television programmes for subsequent viewing, there were mixed views. The process was, of course, potentially beneficial in that it broadened choice and accessibility, and, specifically in relation to control, it enabled parents to preview programmes if they wished. However, there was also potential for misuse, especially around children's covert videoing of unsuitable programmes for later, secret viewing.

'A documentary about the mother and her two daughters who got murdered ... She wanted us to tape that, because she went to bed, and I watched it and I thought, "No, I'm not." We started taping it for her, but when we'd seen what the contents were ...'
(Family/Older/C2DE/South East/Multi-channel and internet)

'Television-wise, if there's a film that they see advertised on the telly and they say they want to watch it, normally I record it, see what it's like and then I let them watch it.'
(Parents and Carers/Younger and Older/C2DE/South East/Multi-channel and internet)

The greatest concern in relation to videos was reserved for 'away from home' consumption. There was anxiety that friends would egg each other on to acquire and watch unsuitable videos, and also that other parents might have different standards or operate laxer controls. This in turn might lead to pressure from children to lower the control threshold back in their own homes. Some of the child participants provided supporting evidence for their parents' anxiety, reporting that they did watch - and even store - 'unsuitable' videos and DVDs when visiting friends.

'She's been to parties and seen films that I thought were unsuitable, I must admit. She's come out and said, "I watched that at so and so's house," but then you can't control that.'
(Family/Younger and Older/C2DE/South/Multi-channel and internet)

Games consoles were in general very much the children's world, and there were clear signs that parents' motivation and ability to control this medium were limited by their naivety as to its technology and the content of games. So often their control was limited to the area of games purchase (as they often held the purse strings), but even this was not infallible. Games were often acquired as presents (either directly or using Christmas/birthday money), and there was also a great deal of (unsupervised) swapping of games between friends.

Where games were played through the living room television, or through a PC sited in a family room, then control was (potentially) easier because this was a public arena. However, games-playing in the bedroom was a much more secret affair and often subject to little or no control. Where parents did exert control, it seemed to be based on the amount of time

the child spent playing games or general issues of taste, rather than content suitability per se - and there was only low-key awareness and usage of the classification system. This seems to be an area where it is currently quite hard for parents to hold the boundaries.

There was a very low level of concern from parents about the radio, partly because it is a non-visual medium. Also, it was not necessarily children's favourite medium, and it was felt to be well monitored - although there was some low level concern about independent/ pirate/community radios operating in an unregulated environment. Such uneasiness as there was - but rarely reflected in strong parental control - focused on the attitude and 'adult' chat content of some DJs, language especially in rap music (and especially Eminem), late-night phone-ins and, for one or two, advertising.

Music was another area where most parents did not exert strong control over their children's consumption. Although parents were generally unaware of any censoring or advisory guidance in relation to language content, this issue had come more to the fore recently with particular artistes such as Eminem, Limp Bizkit and gangsta rap.

> *'I like Eminem ... You can get like Slim Shady, but you can get them without swearing and you can get the one with swearing.'*
> (Girls/Aged 10-11/C2DE/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

> *'I said to them, "Right, you can only listen to that track and that track and that track!"*
> (Family/Younger and Older/C2DE/South/Multi-channel)

There were occasional reports of parents confiscating records/tapes/CDs they felt were unsuitable, but the most common reaction was to limit the child's consumption of such music to their own room and/or through headphones - keeping it away from parents' and younger siblings' ears.

> *'I wouldn't stop him, but I tell him to turn down because it's not everybody's cup of tea and he opens his bedroom window and this thing is blaring.'*
> (Family/Older/C2DE/South East/Multi-channel and internet)

Overall, it was clear that many parents felt unwilling to lay down the law with regard to music, probably reflecting that this is traditionally an area where young people demonstrate their individuality and rebellious feelings, coupled with a desire not to alienate their children for the sake of something (relatively) trivial.

> *'She'll tell me what she wants and then I'll go and get it for her. So I still really have a lot of control there.'*
> (Parents and Carers/Younger and Older/C2DE/South East/Multi-channel)

'She came back with this CD - didn't even know what it was, did we till we heard the lyrics which had every other word as 'f'. I was surprised they sold it to her. She's still got it though, hasn't she?'
(Family/Younger and Older/ABC1/North/Multi-channel and internet)

There was, therefore, little call from parents for greater external regulation and control in relation to music. They felt that any problems were down to individual renegade artistes rather than a general trend, and that differences in viewpoint between themselves and their children were probably down to matters of taste. In particular, they felt that (stronger) point-of-sale regulation would be ineffective. In other contexts (videos, cigarettes), children have proven that they can evade the rules; with the established 'swap and tape' culture and more formal exchanges via the internet, regulation would be toothless.

The discussion of parental controls in relation to print media revealed a gender difference, with different attitudes to girls' and boys' magazines and their consumption.

With girls, there was some parental concern about the extent to which magazines covered teenage and indeed adult issues in publications aimed at a pre-teen audience - e.g. in the problem pages. Parents often felt that the content was 'too old' and, interestingly, many children agreed, especially as they did not wish to raise their parents' concerns unnecessarily.

'I think some of them just go over, you know, the things they talk about - boys and I think she's kind of young for that.'
(Family/Older/C2DE/South East/Multi-channel and internet)

'There is Girl Talk. *It looks like my thing. I went to get it and I said to my mum, "I am going to have this one." She looked at it and said, "You are not having that."'*
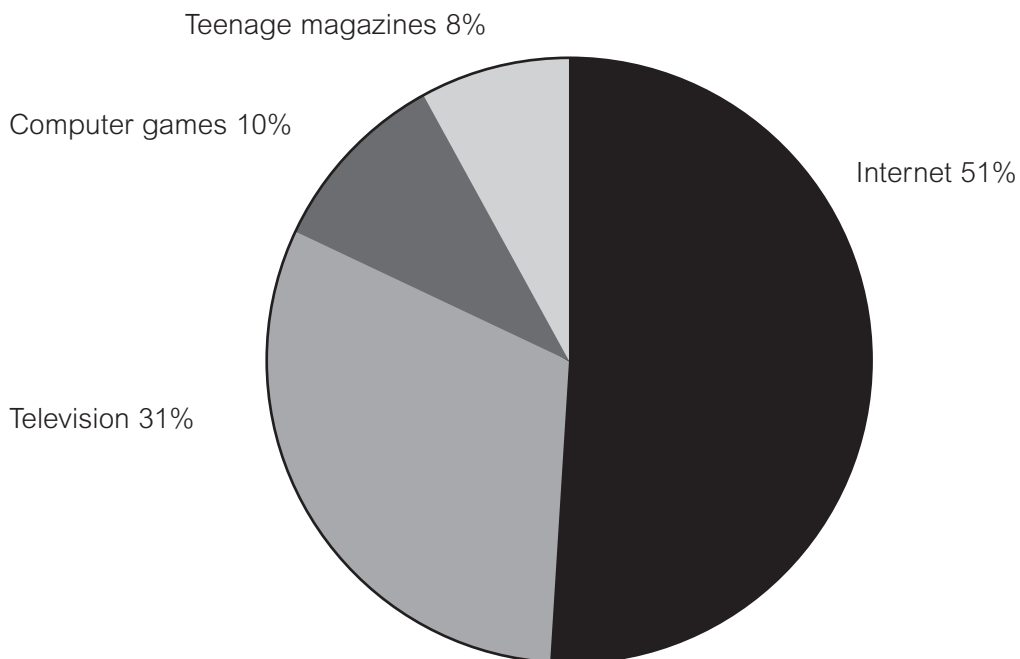(Girls/Aged 10-11/C2DE/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

Given these concerns, there was usually light monitoring of girls' magazine purchase and consumption. Parents tended to know what was being purchased and had some knowledge of the content, but there was also a propensity for children to keep it as part of their private world not discussed with their parents. Parents often went along with this, recognising the privacy element of the print medium and being unwilling to infringe this.

With regard to boys, there was on the whole less concern from parents. Boys were generally thought to be less into reading, and their magazines had less problematic subject matter, focusing on topics such as sport and computer games. However, boys did report clandestine reading of inappropriate (pornographic) magazines, and there was some suggestion of underlying parental suspicions which were suppressed for fear of embarrassment or because such things were a 'rite of passage' for boys.

Comparison of media

All survey respondents were asked which medium they were most concerned about: the internet, television, computer games or teenage magazines. The internet caused the most concern among parents, with one in two (51%) saying that they were more concerned about it than any other medium. The older the selected child, the more likely the parents were to cite the internet, rising from 37% for 5-9s to 65% for those aged 15-16. This probably reflects the fact that internet usage is more common and more advanced among teenagers. It is also interesting to note that there was no significant difference due to sex of child or social grade. Almost a third (31%) of parents said they were most concerned about television. Parents who had younger children were most likely to cite television: 38% of parents where the eldest child was 5-9 were most concerned about television, compared with 16% if the eldest child was 14-16. It is probably their greatest concern because young children are much less likely to use the other media than older children. Very few people were most concerned about computer games or teenage magazines, although (probably reflecting usage) computer games were of slightly more concern for sons and teenage magazines for daughters.

Chart 7: Media of most concern

Teenage magazines 8%

Computer games 10%

Internet 51%

Television 31%

Striking a balance: the control of children's media

The qualitative research also revealed differences in parental control in relation to the different media. The ground rules seemed to be most explicit in relation to television, perhaps because of its established and pervasive place within the home. In contrast, thinking in relation to the internet was much less developed.

The influence of others
This research focused on the extent to which parents controlled their children's media consumption within their own home, but during the discussions there were many stories of consumption outside the home that parents considered inappropriate, e.g. sleep-over video parties, accessing chat rooms in friends' houses or watching unsuitable films when a grandparent is babysitting. This caused some below-the-surface criticisms and occasionally more positive action, e.g. speaking out. But parents can feel powerless to exert control at a distance, being unwilling to restrict their child's social life or to affront other parents.

> *'Because, like, I sleepover Nan's loads of times and like she watches* Family Affairs *and* Brookside *and I want to see what other soaps there are and I want to see what they're like, and* Family Affairs *is like for 20-year-olds.'*
> (Family/Older/C2DE/South East/Multi-channel and internet)

> *'She did go to somebody's house, and she came back and she said that she'd watched* Scream *and I didn't like that very much, 'cause I mean I hadn't even seen it, but her dad had … so I was a bit upset about that, 'cause I wouldn't have let her watch it.'*
> (Parents and Carers/Younger and Older/C2DE/South East/Multi-channel and internet)

> *'We did talk through, because one of H's friends uses the internet for that* [chat rooms] *didn't she, and her mum and dad do quite a lot, and we have never been into that sort of thing.'*
> (Family/Older/C2DE/South East/Multi-channel and internet)

> *'I rang my niece up when she was with our S and I said, "What are you doing letting her watch that?" I went mad.'*
> (Parents and Carers/Older/ABC1/North/Multi-channel and internet)

Parents recognised that the danger of inappropriate media consumption was especially acute when children get together. Naughtiness becomes more fun in a group, and children tend to gravitate towards the laxest house among their circle of friends. Even if a parent is present, he/she can feel very much the outsider, unwilling to be an embarrassment to their child or impinge on their privacy and inhibited about reprimanding other people's children.

> *'The mums and dads don't tend to come in the bedrooms.'*
> (Boys/Aged 10-11/C2DE/North/Multi-channel and internet)

Consideration of child visitors and the effects of peer pressure tended to make parents more amenable to the idea of blocking mechanisms for television or the internet, as these would avoid the need for direct supervision and remove potential tension from the situation.

> *'If we were going out at night time and leaving them both in on their own, if they had their friends in, it is not to say that one wouldn't egg the other one on and they would watch the most goriest, horrific film they could find. I would be really annoyed to come in and find out something like that had happened. At least you have got that to fall back on, if they did try and get it on the cable and it was barred, they couldn't watch it, do you know what I mean? I don't think they would on their own, but if they had friends in.'*
> (Parents and Carers/Younger/C2DE/North/Multi-channel and internet)

4 Prompted reactions
to control mechanisms

After spontaneous discussion of their awareness of, attitudes to and usage of control mechanisms, participants were given a set of show cards which named a wide variety of mechanisms, including some currently available in the United Kingdom. These cards were backed up by information sheets which gave a brief description of the key features of each mechanism (see Appendix 2 for more detail).

Initially, participants thought about these mechanisms in relation to their family's current media consumption. However, in order to broaden their horizons and give some indications of possible future behaviour, some elements of future media scenarios were sketched in, allowing them the opportunity to review their responses. Given the pre-eminence of television and the internet in their spontaneous discussion, these media provided the focus of this prompted discussion.

Concerns often escalated through the course of discussion, as participants' vision of the future crystallised when they were forced to confront the issues. This suggests that there is a possible role for 'turning up the volume' on the issue to prepare parents for future changes.

Television - current scenario

Many participants maintained a *relatively* low level of concern about current television content, in the sense that they felt able to maintain 'internal' regulation, based on trust and discussion, as well as the Watershed. This was in the context of a belief that television is effectively regulated by external bodies and is 'safe' - notwithstanding some specific concerns (e.g. soap operas). In turn, this meant that the idea of *stronger* regulation or censorship was often unwelcome, although there was support for the control of *extremely* distasteful material - for everyone's protection, not just children's. However, what was not resolved was any consistent definition of what constituted the 'extremely distasteful'.

> *'The frightening thing about the internet, it's just open isn't it, you just don't know what they're getting access to. As far as television is concerned, and blocking what comes through on telly, I think you've got to be careful that you don't go over the top.'*
> (Family/Younger and Older/ABC1/North/Multi-channel and internet)

> *'I think, yes, when it's really violent or pornographic, things that could be disturbing to children like rape, yes, stuff like that you could iron out, say not for this age group. But I think things like nudity and whatever, I think you've got to come into the year 2000. I think sometimes your kids know more than you do. I think it's a very good idea, but what concerns me is the hard stuff, the really hard stuff.'*
> (Family/Younger and Older/ABC1/North/Multi-channel and internet)

Discussion of control options indicated that concerns were somewhat higher in multi-channel households than in terrestrial-only ones. These people may be more aware of the control mechanisms, and of the breadth of choice that is available and the potential for misuse, both in terms of viewing unsuitable material and unauthorised financial expenditure.

The prompted discussion also confirmed that concerns increase as direct supervision diminishes, with this often being a product of age, as children demand more privacy and eventually reach the age when they can be left at home alone. As before, there was felt to be especial risk when children were in the company of other children - the egging-on effect.

> *'If parents aren't in much I suppose* [control is necessary]. *If they are working late, nights or whatever ... We are very fortunate to be at home.'*
> (Family/Older/C2DE/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

Turning to discussion of the specific control mechanisms, review of the stimulus material relating to the Watershed confirmed the impression that this was a useful 'rough guide' to content suitability and furthermore was evidence that effort is being put into monitoring and regulation. However, participants were also aware that television content is inevitably changing with societal values and with moves by television companies to push at the boundaries, to the point where some participants predicted that the Watershed may eventually become obsolete. But in the current and foreseeable context, most participants were in favour of the Watershed's continuance.

> *'That Watershed, we do use it as a rule, don't we really, as a rough guide.'*
> (Family/Younger and Older/C2DE/South/Multi-channel)

There was significant support for the role of programme guides in offering better information of programme content and child suitability. This included listings magazines, teletext, channel guides and electronic programme guides (EPGs), reinforced, where appropriate, by on-screen warnings immediately prior to a programme being shown. These were seen to strike a good balance between external authority and parental freedom - empowerment rather than enforcement. They allow parents to improve their current effectiveness by making them better informed, with greater power to avoid accidental exposure to unsuitable material, embarrassment and family disputes. The call therefore was for consistent, objective guidance across all forms of programme information - perhaps using icons which would be recognisable in any context.

> *'I think a lot of the programmes now do sort of say ... this programme contains material of a sexually explicit nature ... It does make you think, it definitely makes you think.'*
> (Family/Older/C2DE/South East/Multi-channel and internet)

> *'I'd need to find out more, but I also wouldn't want somebody else making my decisions for me.'*
> (Parents and Carers/Older/ABC1/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

'I'd like to be given guidelines. Because a lot of things I wouldn't be aware of anyway.
So I'd like very similar to the cinemas where they give you guidelines to say this is
suitable for ... I would like to have guidelines and be able to sort of control it myself.
I think at the moment we've still got a little bit of control over it.'
(Family/Younger and Older/ABC1/North/Multi-channel and internet)

Age guidelines were felt to be the most pragmatic and feasible solution, as, despite their
limitations, they are familiar from film and video classification and allow some flexibility
for parents to tailor choices to the maturity of their own children. There were also requests
for back-up information on reasons for the rating, e.g. the presence of sex, violence,
language etc. This again allows parents to tailor viewing to their own family value system.

'Like you say there are certain issues in The Bill *that you're not happy with and yet they*
don't say anything, they just put The Bill [in TV magazine].*'*
(Family/Younger/ABC1/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

There was some feeling that, with the proliferation of channels (already being experienced in
multi-channel homes), pre-planning and the use of information sources was becoming more
challenging and that this could undermine the role of information in parental control.
However, it may well be that the ingestion and application of information may be assisted
by the new(er) technologies such as EPGs and NextView.

The concept of parental lock mechanisms which would filter, block and prohibit television
content was often unattractive at first sight - both to participants who were already aware
of them and to those for whom the research was their first introduction to such
mechanisms. Over and above the practicalities of installing these (which are a real issue),
participants often seemed to feel that such mechanisms were an admission of family failure
and perhaps even a sign of bad parenting.

'I think that says they don't trust the child. It is like they are trying to say, "I don't want
you watching this. I don't think you will, but you might." My mum and dad wouldn't
do that. They trust me.'
(Family/Older/C2DE/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

'I just feel that we've got a lot of trust already with our kids, and I just hope
it stays that way.'
(Family/Younger/ABC1/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

There was also a fear that prohibition would seem like a challenge to children and would
encourage family tensions and secret sampling - again undermining the desired family values
of trust and openness.

'It's like banning a record, guaranteed top number one.'
(Parents and Carers/Older/ABC1/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

'When you put a complete ban on something, they go out to find it. I think if you let the lead out a little bit, but explain it as you go along, you get a little bit more respect from them.'
(Family/Younger and Older/ABC1/North/Multi-channel and internet)

In some instances, there was evidence of reluctance to install control mechanisms at the point of acquisition of cable/satellite/digital television. This may have been because it ran counter to the reasons for - and the excitement generated by - acquiring multi-channel television i.e. greater choice and more access, rather than limitation and prohibition.

As indicated above, there were also some practical and technological barriers at this point. Parents needed to familiarise themselves with the basic technology required to run the system, and they often did not initially explore all the add-on functions, including parental control. They also did not, at this early stage, know the nature and content of the additional channels they had acquired, so potential anxieties had not yet been triggered.

Q: Did you know whether there's a lock on your television or not?

'On the Sky? I don't know. I've never really known about anything like that. If there was, I would put it on.'

'It's a bit harassing. People like me when you're harassed and it's all new and you're putting that on and you're confused.'
(Parents and Carers/Older/ABC1/North/Multi-channel and internet)

A further factor may be that, in the interviews, it was often the mother who expressed more concern about children's viewing and was more often responsible for enforcing control. But she was also likely to be the parent who was less comfortable with the technology and less willing or able to explore technical mechanisms. In addition, on a personal level, parents may be unwilling to jeopardise their own viewing freedom, being ignorant about flexibility and the ability to turn control mechanisms on and off, e.g. via a password.

Once cable/satellite/digital was established in the home, there was a different type of resistance based on disinclination to mess around with the controls and a sense of inertia and wanting to avoid hassle. They and their families had often become adjusted to the wider range of choices offered by multi-channel television, and arguably it was more difficult to remove elements at this stage. Even so, there does seem to be a possible role for a reminder to parents to investigate parental control once multi-channel is established in their home, when content is more familiar and the technology is understood.

Initial responses to parental lock mechanisms were therefore sometimes rather dismissive, but on further consideration there was a degree of recognition that there are danger spots where a mechanism could act in loco parentis. Examples of this would be when parents are out, when other children visit, at specific times (e.g. late nights) and if children have multi-channel television in their bedrooms.

> *'People like to watch things like violence and the sex on television, and I think there should be a certain channel. On my cable, you can lock the channels so you can't watch it, and there are channels we don't have.'*
> (Girls/Aged 10-11/C2DE/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

> *'If they happen across them, then I would investigate some form of blocking of information coming through at all. I think then you've got to be very careful that you're not blocking all information. Good as well as bad.'*
> (Parents and Carers/Older/ABC1/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

This greater enthusiasm for parental lock mechanisms was often coupled with a clear demand for simplicity in everyday operation. In this context, PINs were felt to be somewhat cumbersome (and at risk of being discovered by the children), but there was more enthusiasm for smart card-based systems which would act as a parental 'key'.

> *'My brother one day left it off the lock and it was off all day, and then my sister was watching and my mum said, "How did you get off there?" and she said, "It was off already."'*
> (Girls/Aged 10-11/C2DE/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

> *'I remember thinking that was good because it was saying something like, "Are you sure you want to go ahead or pop your pin number in again" or something like that and I thought aaah ...'*

> *'I suppose the idea is that they should not know my pin number* [on-demand movie].'
> (Parents and Carers/Older/ABC1/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

There is also what might be called a 'positioning' issue, in that the language and imagery employed for such mechanisms is often very negative: blocking, prohibiting, restricting. The level of interest in, and acceptability of, control mechanisms might be improved by a change in focus towards a more positive image of choice, active control and parental empowerment to identify and encourage 'family favourites'.

Blocking by *channel* was seen as a comparatively manageable and feasible strategy: not a perfect solution, given its broad-brush nature, but effective in damage limitation and justified in extreme cases. (It is also interesting to note in this context that there were some instances of packages having been curtailed because parents had become unhappy with

certain channels - this being an alternative strategy to blocking.) Related to this, there was also scope for information about channel ratings to be given by suppliers, to inform choices made about channel packages. This could include advice about differences between daytime and evening content where applicable.

Information about the V-chip system (available in the United States/Canada) was used to explore the principle of ratings-driven blocking of *programmes* in the current and possible future viewing scenario. The idea was appreciated by some parents with higher levels of concern: they felt that it enabled the parent to take and keep control, and allowed for tailoring of the mechanism to family values and preferences. However, the majority of participants were less enthusiastic, reading into the limited information provided that it would be very complicated to set up and too rigid in operation. They found the prospect of formalising their family values into pre-set levels of acceptability too challenging, and they felt that this predictive approach was too far from the current flexibility and reactivity of real life.

> *'For the simple reason if you're a family and there's only one television. If he comes in and puts in his PIN, what's to say* [younger sister's] *not in the room.'*
> (Parents and Carers/Older/ABC1/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

> *'Only problem is you could actually take out* [an entire] *programme for one bad word.'*
> (Family/Younger and Older/ABC1/North/Multi-channel and internet)

Programme-based filtering using an *age guidance* system was, however, seen as more feasible and appealing. As indicated earlier, age guidance is familiar to parents from films and videos, it is simple to understand and it allows for some flexibility. Such an approach would also allow for consistency with the provision of ratings within information sources.

The sample included some households with access to interactive television, but as yet few of them were making extensive use of the interactive features. This meant that children were not (yet) heavily involved in interactivity, and so control over such features was not (yet) top of mind. An exception was where the family had explored interactive services involving payment, where there had been more of an incentive to explore control issues and to activate passwords. As mentioned earlier, the prospect of listed bills for such services can provide a monitoring tool for parents and a deterrent for children.

> **Q: So you could order anything on the television then?**

> *'Yes, but I know I wouldn't. It would come up on the bill.'*
> (Girls/Aged 10-11/C2DE/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

> *'They would find out when the bill comes. It shows exactly what is going on.'*
> (Boys/Aged 12-13/ABC1/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

A few participants had experience of the 'walled garden internet' through interactive television, and although, as reported earlier, there were negative comments on the technical quality, the concept was felt to be appropriate and safe.

> *'I think it only allows you access to certain websites ... That's a good idea.'*
> (Family/Older/C2DE/South East/Multi-channel and internet)

Television - future scenario

Participants were aware that - technically and in terms of its content - television has changed and will change over the years. But their awareness of upcoming changes was limited, and they needed to be given information in order to enable them to understand the detailed implications of these changes and to counteract some of the difficulties of speaking about things in the abstract. They were told about likely developments such as the analogue switch-off, convergence, multi-channel television throughout the home, the growth of interactivity, greater access to foreign stations and lighter touch regulation.

For some, this sounded a horrifying prospect, and while there was a range of reactions overall, there were predictions of a possible backlash resulting in calls for stronger regulation again.

> *'I believe British television is still the best in the world and it's the closest monitored ... American television's completely different and I know European television is completely different.'*
> (Family/Younger/ABC1/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

The expected proliferation of channels meant that parents would need help just to manage television choices, let alone control their family's viewing. This might be achieved by a more à la carte approach to channel acquisition, enabling parents to choose the channels they really wanted and create their own child-friendly 'walled garden'.

Where participants knew about innovative hardware/software (personal video recorders such as TiVo and its variants), they recognised that this could make a significant contribution to future television management: it would fit well with appropriate filtering systems and enable tailored choices to be made. However, there was some wariness about the implications of licensing one's television to record all programmes in a particular category, as this might let in material that one would prefer to avoid.

Overall, while consideration of the future context increased participants' interest in control mechanisms, there was a continued preference for simpler blocking mechanisms, while recognising that this might involve compromises in terms of sophistication and subtlety. As before, the consensus was that age-based ratings, with levels decided by external bodies, was the most feasible way forward.

A further possibility to help with parental control in the future was the development of a 'history button' for television, analogous to that already available for the internet, as a mechanism for checking and deterrence.

Returning to the four-segment matrix based on the dimensions of knowledge and confidence (p35), in the current situation most people seem to believe that they are reasonably knowledgeable about television and confident that they have it under control (most of the time). However, changes are happening in television without parents always being fully aware of them or rethinking their attitude to control. As their anxiety is raised, control issues and demand for more detailed programme information gain a higher profile, and increased awareness and technical information help people across the barrier and into acceptance of simple (age-based) filtering mechanisms. As experience and confidence increases, then a further stage is reached when more sophisticated mechanisms can be envisaged and accepted. This process is illustrated in the diagram below.
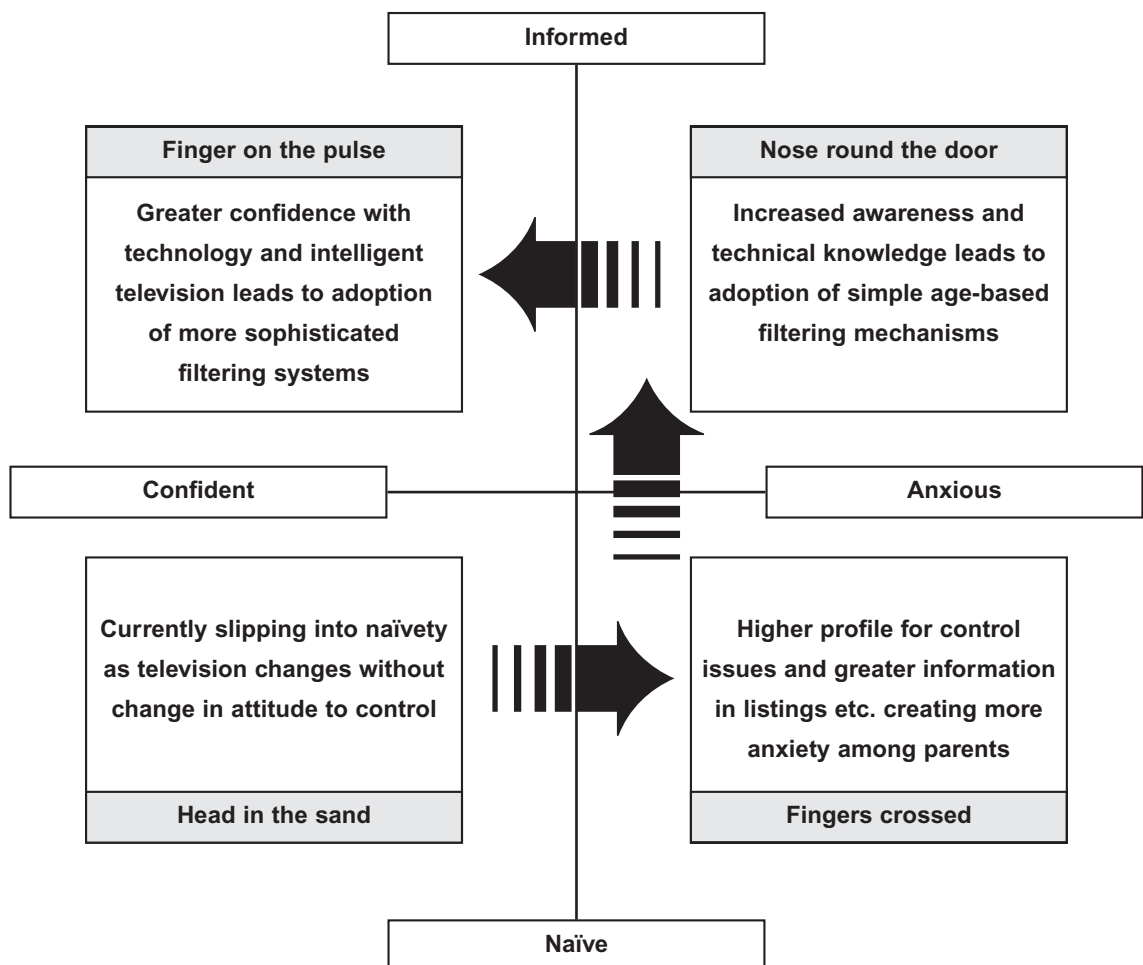
Internet - current scenario

As with television, simple factual stimulus material related to control mechanisms for the internet was used to explore awareness of current mechanisms and reactions to possible future mechanisms (see Appendix 2). Again the initial discussion was in the context of participants' current attitudes towards and usage of the internet, but they also took a future perspective about how the internet might develop.

This prompted discussion confirmed the impressions gained from the earlier spontaneous discussion that there was a significant degree of parental concern about the internet (higher than that evidenced for television). This affected uptake, location and the extent of regulation - although the level of supervision did not always match the degree of concern because of lack of technical knowledge as to how to achieve better control.

Because the propensity for 'accidental exposure' is greater than on television, and the dangers perceptually more immediate, the desire for control is less inhibited by the family trust issue. This allows a more ready response that 'something must be done'.

> *'There has to be something. Because at the moment you can't live your life running up and down stairs.'*
> (Family/Younger and Older/ABC1/North/Multi-channel and internet)

> *'I think the whole issue of censorship and control has been left way behind technology, because as soon as people got the internet into the house, there was something so new and so different and potentially so dangerous for children in people's houses and I don't think ... either the law or protection has caught up really with that ... There is nothing that works really, but maybe it is password protection, I don't know.'*
> (Parents and Carers/Younger and Older/C2DE/North/Multi-channel)

Many were keen to see official, independent policing of the internet, but others were aware that this lacked feasibility, being counter to the ethos of the internet and not achievable given the huge number of sites and their proliferation.

> *'The problem is the internet is an unregulated media. There is no regulatory authority and I don't think there ever could be because it is such an international medium. I cannot foresee that there will ever be a regulatory authority.'*
> (Parents and Carers/Older/ABC1/Wales/Terrestrial and internet)

Some participants were aware of and were using the history button to deter deliberate misuse. There were some drawbacks: one could not necessarily gauge the detailed content of the site from its name, it did not prevent 'innocent' exposure and it could be overridden or deleted. However, there was much interest among more naïve parents when this mechanism was explained to them, and it was seen as a simple way of keeping a check on the family's use of the internet.

Site warnings were felt to be useful as a guide for children who were prepared to self-regulate and for preventing genuine accidents. In this they fulfilled a role analogous to information in television listings and pre-programme warnings. However, they were not felt to be a sufficient control mechanism because the warning could be ignored (especially if the parent was not directly supervising), and, indeed, they could be a temptation for curious children.

> *'I don't know whether that will be enough, having said that because … it gives you a warning and it sometimes draws you to looking at it.'*
> (Family/Older/C2DE/South East/Multi-channel and internet)

Similarly, top-level domain names, which indicate the content and child-suitability of a site, might be a helpful addition to the information landscape. But again they were not seen as the total answer because they were not a subtle enough mechanism to make informed distinctions between sites and therefore did not offer sufficient peace of mind in themselves.

Given that the internet was not going to be subject to external regulation, parents could see more justification for parental or server-based controls to block out sites which were not child-suitable. Within this, password protection was seen as a potential way forward (more so than for television), provided that it was made as 'childproof' as possible and did not hinder adult use of the internet when required.

To the less internet-sophisticated, the ISP/server-based solution seemed ideal, as it enabled parents to buy into a safe internet, supplemented if desired by other features such as blocking, on-screen warnings and walled gardens.

> *'I think again that's down to the ISP to set that up. They should be far more aware of what they're offering.'*
> (Family/Younger/ABC1/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

However, more internet-experienced parents were aware that determined 'tech-y' children could bypass mechanisms set up to restrict their access, and there were also doubts about the walled garden approach on the basis that this could be restrictive and contrary to the internet ethos. Among these participants, there was more support for barring of sites via the ISP - leaving free choice among remaining sites - than for a walled garden approach which would give access only to those sites within the garden.

Parental control mechanisms such as ICRA (Internet Content Ratings Association) were not at all well known among the sample, and while there was a muted undertone of pro-libertarian dissent ('censorship'), on the whole participants approved of the principle that there was at least one group looking in an organised way at this issue.

'I think it's nice to know that they are looking into it, because I think there has been a lot of access for children.'
(Family/Older/C2DE/South East/Multi-channel and internet)

But while the principle of putting control of levels of suitability in parents' hands was appreciated by some, from the outset many participants were concerned about their complexity and had grave doubts about feasibility.

'Yeah, it is quite detailed ... 'Cause I don't necessarily mind them seeing nudity as such, it's just like I say the sexual act that I think at the minute is not right for them.'
(Family/Older/C2DE/South East/Multi-channel and internet)

'I think it is a very good idea. I think I'd like to go for something that is quite easy to use.'
(Family/Younger and Older/ABC1/North/Multi-channel and internet)

'Probably what we looked at was a little too fine grained, a little too complicated, the ICRA. If it blocked out anything that's absolutely hideous it would be great, but any more than that is a little too restrictive possibly ...

'I think it's very difficult to cover every single topic of what you find offensive and I think it's hitting that balance, that somebody has to decide, it's really the difference between something that's a big major - because all that list - you think, "Oh, my God."'
(Family/Younger and Older/ABC1/North/Multi-channel and internet)

In addition, the credibility of any such mechanism was undermined if it involved sites rating themselves rather than being rated independently. This was exacerbated if (as with ICRA) there was no obvious channel available to complain about mis-rated sites and ask for them to be reviewed.

Parents went through the ICRA process[13] and found that in many instances it asked them questions which they found difficult or impossible to answer - at least at first sight. They were unable to conceptualise or visualise what might be involved in the different categories, making it difficult to decide what level might be acceptable - although the ICRA approach was felt to be better than its predecessor RSACI, in that it allowed a more sensitive tuning than simply a numerical approach.

The fact that ICRA offered the means to screen out and/or distinguish between chat rooms was appreciated, as was the opportunity to customise the mechanism to suit family and individuals' requirements. But any remaining appeal generally crumbled when information about the low proportion of rated sites and the implications of either allowing or not allowing unrated sites were discussed with participants. They felt that this seriously undermined the value of the system to the extent that the effort involved in setting it up would not be justified.

---

13. The ICRA system has since been updated: see www.icra.org

'So it would be across the board if we did that ... So there wouldn't be any point really, if you're going to allow everything through.'
(Family/Older/C2DE/South East/Multi-channel and internet)

As in other contexts, there was a feeling that a broader-brush age-related system might provide sufficient peace of mind with less effort - at least until parental confidence with regard to the technology of the internet has increased.
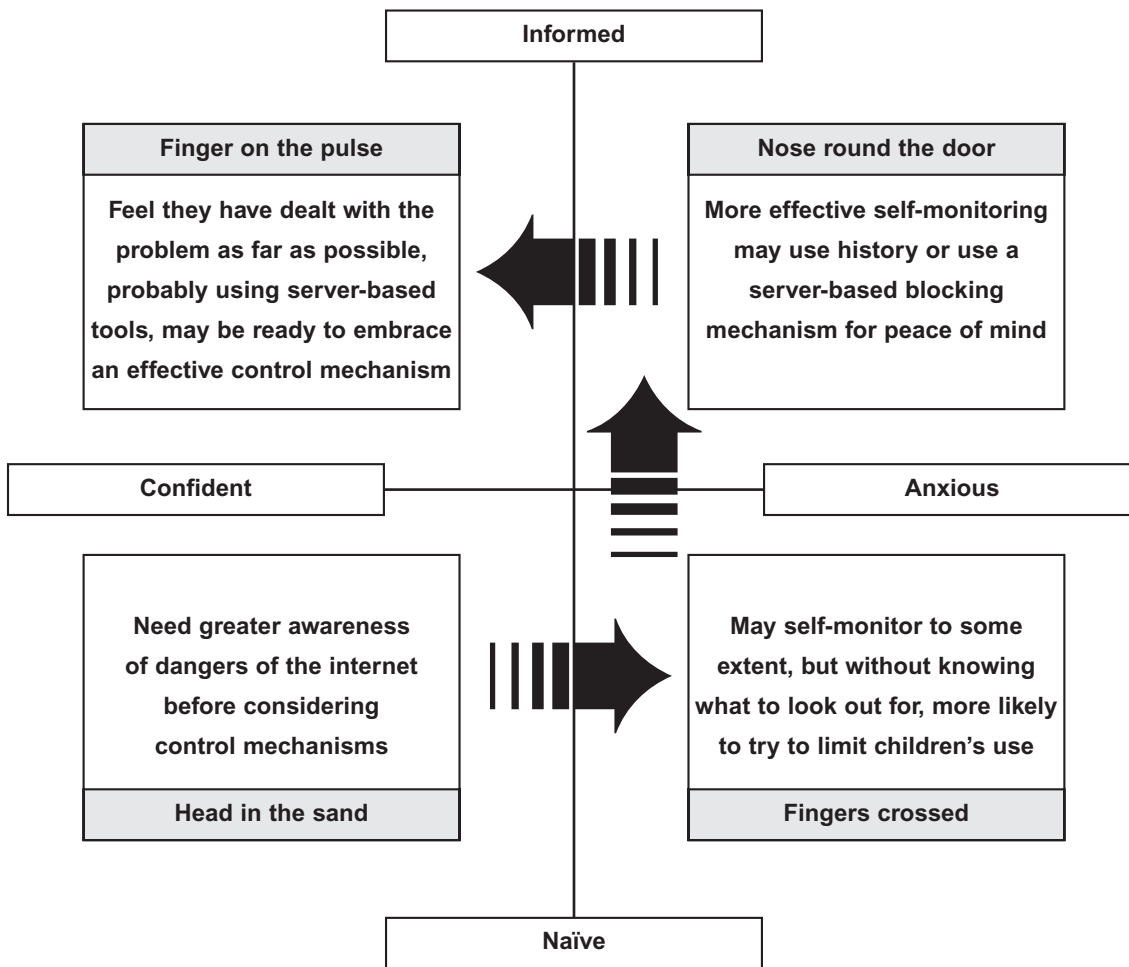
Information about internet zoning and privacy policies drew ambivalent responses. They were to be applauded in their encouragement of responsible attitudes among website authors, but there was significant discomfort about children identifying themselves as such when on line as it was felt this could be exploited.

'Put a block on addresses and home telephone numbers.'
(Parents and Carers/Older/ABC1/Wales/Terrestrial and internet)

Returning once more to the four-way segmentation, it seems that at present there is a significant sector of the public who would need greater awareness of potential dangers before they even consider formal control mechanisms. Another sector is more anxious, but still lack knowledge; they want to monitor, but are unsure what to look for and how to do it, so they may end up limiting child use of the internet in order to limit the danger. As parents become more knowledgeable, they may deal with their anxiety by using simple mechanisms such as the history button or server-based tools. As confidence increases they will then be ready to look at more sophisticated (and hopefully more effective) mechanisms in order to allow their children free use of the internet within appropriate boundaries.

This process is illustrated in the diagram opposite.

Informed

Finger on the pulse

Feel they have dealt with the problem as far as possible, probably using server-based tools, may be ready to embrace an effective control mechanism

Nose round the door

More effective self-monitoring may use history or use a server-based blocking mechanism for peace of mind

Confident

Anxious

Need greater awareness of dangers of the internet before considering control mechanisms

Head in the sand

May self-monitor to some extent, but without knowing what to look out for, more likely to try to limit children's use

Fingers crossed

Naïve

Internet - future scenario

As with television, consideration of future developments for the internet caused some concern and even horror. The possibility of children having access to the internet in their bedrooms, the delivery of the internet by mobiles and palmtops, the possible proliferation of pornography via these channels, and cheaper/always-on connection all combined to make the prospect of parental control of the internet even more daunting than at present. Naturally these fears were exacerbated by parents' relatively low level of awareness of parental controls already available to them.

> *'You will only introduce some of the tools in an environment where you can exercise control, i.e. in the home. A lot of kids today they're going to have WAP mobiles.'*
> (Parents and Carers/Older/ABC1/Wales/Terrestrial and internet)

However, there were some mitigating factors. Parents envisaged that their own knowledge of and comfort with the internet would increase as the years went by, and one specific change - delivery of the internet via the living room television - might actually make supervision easier. In addition, there were some hopes that the internet might become more organised or structured, and that this in turn would make it easier to control.

For most, however, thinking about the future development of the internet tended to increase their conviction that some form of filtering and control would be essential to protect their children from the internet's unwanted effects.

> *'I think that there should be a government regulation, you can firewall sites ... You can with the computers I use at work ...'*

> *'I think that they should be again like a site standard that should be a recognised symbol, not necessarily a word.'*
> (Family/Younger/ABC1/Wales/Multi-channel and internet)

Appendix 1: Research methodology and background

Qualitative research

- 12 family interviews
    - parents and children, interviewed together and separately
    - 2/2^1/$_2$ hours
    - in-home

- 12 parent/carer interviews
    - 8 parents/4 carers
    - 1 hour
    - in-home

- 12 children's interviews
    - friendship pairs
    - 45 minutes
    - 9 in-home, 3 in recruiter's home

Across the sample, the 36 interviews were broken down as follows:

- Media access
    - 12 multi-channel with internet
    - 12 multi-channel without internet
    - 12 terrestrial with internet

- Family and parent/carer interviews
    - 7 parents/carers of younger children (6-9 years)
    - 10 parents/carers of older children (10-17 years)
    - 7 parents/carers of both younger and older children
    - mix of boys and girls
    - including 7 single-parent families

- Children interviews
    - age range 8-15
    - mix of boys and girls

- Social class
    - 18 ABC1
    - 18 C2DE

- Location
    - Greater London, Eastleigh (Hants), Solihull, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Cardiff and Glasgow

The detailed content of each interview depended on the sample segment, but it always covers:

- pattern of media consumption and criteria for selection
- sources of information
- attitudes to control - areas of concern, mechanisms used
- prompted discussion of control mechanisms - the stimulus material used for this element is included in Appendix 2
- exploration of feasibility issues
- changes in attitudes and future intentions
- overall review

The research was carried out between 03 and 25 October 2001 by Wendy Hayward, Andrew Higgins, Jeannette Croft, Catherine Gammon and Jamie Gilroy of The Qualitative Consultancy.

Quantitative research

The quantitative follow-up was carried out by BMRB between 29 November and 05 December 2001. Using its face-to-face Omnibus survey, 1910 interviews with UK adults aged 20 years or over were achieved. Of these, 528 were conducted with parents of children aged 5-16. The data were subsequently 'weighted' to make it representative of all adults in the United Kingdom The research team was: Joel Williams, Sam Clemens and Anna Ullman.

Appendix 2: Control mechanisms - stimulus material

Listed below is the information material used in the qualitative research.

TELEVISION

Digital interactive services blocking mechanism

- Parents can block out specified sites using a code

Channel guides

- 'Channel guides' includes
    - listings magazines
    - teletext listings
- Guides can be used by parents to check for child suitability
- Information in guides can include:
    - film certifications
    - programme ratings

Electronic programme guides (EPG)

- EPGs appear on screen
- EPGs enable viewer to seek out and organise information about desired programming
- EPGs can include mechanisms for rating-based blocking of individual programmes and/or entire channels
- EPGs can be personalised for different members of the family via PINs

NextView

- Structured programme information matching choice and needs of viewer
- Often includes information on age suitability
- Gives information about specific programmes and schedules
- Offers means of recording programmes in advance
- Allows search for particular programmes by title or theme

Parental lock mechanisms - digital television

- PINs prevent access to channels
- Allow parents to block out:
    - specific channels, e.g. adult channels
    - films of a particular rating
    - viewing at a particular time of day
- Pay per view (PPV) - subscriber record for PIN settings checked against event classification

Password - digital interactive services

- Requirement to enter account number and password before accessing services

Smart card - cable/satellite

■ Can remove smart card to bar/lock specific channels

Teletext guidance

■ Such as pages 611 (BBC) and 116 (ITV)

■ Give general and specific guidance

■ Link with on-air announcements

Self-regulation

■ Parents sit with children when using television

■ Television in room where viewing may be monitored easily

■ Active prevention of access to certain programmes

■ Discussing programmes with children

■ Rules for television sets in bedrooms, e.g.:

    ■ unplugging aerial

    ■ not before school

    ■ not on school nights

    ■ no multi-channel access

    ■ only videos

■ Barring access to television in general at certain times, e.g.:

    ■ before school

    ■ school nights

V-chips

■ V-chips are electronic filtering technology inserted into television sets and protected by PIN-based security system

■ Television programmes are rated by broadcasters against national standards

■ Appropriate rating code is inserted electronically into programme

■ Parents can 'set' ratings levels on their V-chip to:

    ■ select programmes believed to be appropriate for children

    ■ block out programmes believed to be inappropriate for children

■ Once rating level is selected:

    ■ all programmes at that level and below are allowed to pass through the V-chip and can be viewed

    ■ any programmes with a rating above that level will be blocked and the screen will go blank

■ Rating levels can be changed:

    ■ temporarily to allow adult viewing

    ■ progressively, as children mature

Walled garden - digital interactive services

■ Enclosed environment controlling user's access to web content and interactive services

■ Those operating within walled garden have been vetted by digital operators ensuring suitability for television environment

Watershed

- Progressive approach
- Until 9.00 p.m. nothing should be shown that is unsuitable for children
    - the earlier in the evening the programme is shown, the greater the care required by the broadcaster
- From 9.00 p.m. to 5.30 a.m., material more suitable for an adult audience may be shown
    - there should be a gradual transition and care should be taken in the period immediately following the 9.00 p.m. Watershed.
- British Board of Film Classification video classifications should guide film scheduling:
    - '12' - normally not before 8.00 p.m.
    - '15' - normally not before 9.00 p.m. (8.00 p.m. on premium rate subscription services)
    - '18' - not before 10.00 p.m. (unless made more than 10 years ago and now suitable for earlier transmission)
    - 'R18' - not at any time
    - refused classification - not at any time
- Exceptions:
    - premium subscription channels - Watershed set at 8.00 p.m. (material of a more adult kind may be included between 10.00 p.m. and 5.30 a.m.)
    - Pay per view services with security mechanisms - Watershed waived. Caution must be exercised - no 'adult' sex material before 10.00 p.m. or after 5.30 a.m.

INTERNET

Monitoring mechanisms

- 'History' records sites accessed or attempted to be accessed
- Parent can review sites listed under 'History'

Parental-control tools

- 'Blocking and filtering' software which relies on rating systems, allowing parents to filter out sites:
    - with specific content
    - which are unrated
    - of a specific rating
    - which contain specific words in the content
- Includes ICRA and ERSBi, also Net Nanny and Cyber Patrol
- How it works:
    - sites are rated (by authors themselves or by independent raters) in line with guidelines
    - ratings cover issues such as language, nudity, violence
    - parents set browser to allow or disallow access to websites based on these ratings, according to their preferences for themselves and their children

- System can also control:
    - exchange of e-mail
    - access to chat-rooms
    - use of instant messaging features
    - time spent on web
    - file downloads
    - access to newsgroups
    - access to premium services

Self-regulation
- Parents sit with children when using the internet
- PC in room where on-line movements may be tracked easily
- Restrictions on time of day/night and total length of time spent on the internet
- Restrictions on types of activities performed on-line
- Allow access to moderated chat rooms, bar access to unsupervised chat rooms
- Checking history of sites visited

Server-based tools
- Child-friendly Internet Service Providers (ISPs)
- Commercial on-line services offering:
    - site blocking
    - restrictions on incoming e-mail
    - children's accounts accessing specific services
    - closed on-line services for children

Top level domain names
- Domain names incorporating parental control categories, e.g.:
    - .red - unsuitable (e.g. pornography)
    - .kid - positively suitable
    - others

Websites' privacy policy
- Before website collects personal information from child under 13, parent should be sent notice requiring his/her consent

Zoning
- Users have digital 'certificate' which identifies child users
- Certificate transmitted to site and announces user as child
- Site responsible for blocking access if content inappropriate

Appendix 3:
British Broadcasting Corporation

The British Broadcasting Corporation is the world's largest public service broadcaster providing programmes and content through digital, analogue, cable and satellite services, as well as on-line. It aims to be the world's most creative and trusted broadcaster, seeking to satisfy all of its audiences with services that inform, educate, entertain and enrich their lives in ways that the market alone will not. The BBC also aims to be guided by its public purposes, to encourage the United Kingdom's most innovative talent, to act independently of all interests and to aspire to the highest ethical standards. The BBC has a global reputation for setting standards, and the corporation's Editorial Policy team advises programme makers across the BBC on the most difficult editorial issues and helps them to achieve the highest editorial and ethical standards as set out in its public statement of standards and values, the BBC Producers' Guidelines. Editorial Policy also acts as the point of contact for outside bodies on editorial matters and, as with this report, undertakes research to enable the BBC to stay in touch with the views of its audiences on a wide range of broadcasting issues.

Appendix 4:
Broadcasting Standards Commission

The Broadcasting Standards Commission is a statutory organisation the role of which is to consider complaints on the portrayal of violence, of sex and of matters of taste and decency, and to consider and adjudicate on complaints of unfair or unjust treatment in programmes and unwarranted infringements of privacy in all television, radio, cable and satellite services. The Commission works as an advisory body, monitoring the content of broadcasting, producing Codes of Guidance for the broadcasting industry, considering audience complaints and reporting on public opinion which it tests by means of independent research.

Appendix 5:
Independent Television Commission

The Independent Television Commission licenses and regulates all television services broadcast
in or from the United Kingdom, other than services funded by the BBC licence fee and S4C in Wales.
It operates in the interest of viewers by: setting standards for programme content, advertising,
sponsorship and technical quality; monitoring broadcasters' output to ensure that it meets those
standards and applying a range of penalties if it does not; ensuring that ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5
fulfil their statutory public service obligations; planning frequency allocation and coverage for digital
terrestrial services; ensuring that viewers can receive television services on fair and competitive terms;
and investigating complaints and regularly publishing its findings.

£5.00