News from the Unit

It's here at last! Due to a particularly hectic start to the year we have all been working hard to keep up with the demands for our services. We therefore apologise for the delay in the publication of this issue.

In 1994 we had our biggest sample yet of young people responding to the questions contained in the Health Related Behavioural Questionnaire. In all, 48,297 pupils between the ages of 11 and 16 answered a variety of questions about their lifestyles. If you would like to know how they responded, Young People in 1994 is now available from the Unit.

The 'routine' of processing questionnaire scripts, returning the data to participating schools and their co-ordinating Authorities, reports writing, the after-care associated with all survey initiatives, and of course planning new or repeat surveys across the country continues. Version 17 of the Health Related Behavioural Questionnaire is now in use, and if you would like a free information pack containing a copy of this questionnaire together with details of its use and application, please phone the Unit.

Anne, David, Di and John have been working on the cross-curricular projects in environmental and alcohol education which are both at an exciting stage. The support and enthusiasm of the pilot schools is much appreciated. Surveys have been completed and the lessons delivered. The summer task is a final revision of the modules, plus the creation of guidelines for co-ordinators in order to prepare for publication.

Anne continues her report writing for Health Related Behavioural Behavioural Survey in the Isle of Wight and Liverpool. The preliminary analysis has also started for the eventual publication of Very Young People in 1993-94.

Some Unit publications...

Young People and Illegal Drugs
1989-1995

Drug use is increasing, and this study uses the Unit's survey data to examine future trends.

Toothbrushing in Adolescence
A study of the toothbrushing habits and motivation of 7770 15-16 year olds, revealing unexpected links between dental care and features of their home background and daily life.

Video pack: 'The Extra Gust' £14.68
This well-received 'alcohol' video depicts a teenage party, and the materials include background information, suggestions for its use, workshop masters, and overhead transparencies. (Price includes VAT.)

Results from 7,837 very young people between the ages of 8 and 12, who completed Version 4 of our Primary Health Related Behavioural Questionnaire.

Young People in 1994.
The latest of our annual reports, with results from 48,297 young people between the ages of 11 and 16, who completed Version 16 of the Health Related Behavioural Questionnaire.

Cross-Curricular Sex Education.

We Teach Them How To Drink.
A study of the alcohol habits of 33,459 pupils. The data shows that the home is the principal source of drink. How can parents promote sensible drinking?

Alcohol Education in Schools.
A report on current alcohol education practice in a nationwide sample of secondary schools, with an evaluation of some widely-used resources and recommendations for good practice.

These prices include postage and packing.

S.F.
Talking Brain

A personal character who appears in our younger-aged programmes to help children learn more about the incredible potential of their brains, as well as finding out about each of their personalities and about feelings. This is a fun way to introduce concepts, which will be built on later, particularly when we examine the effects that various substances have on the brain.

Star Ceiling

A special feature of our mobiles is the twinking star ceiling used in some of the programmes to help set a mood or scene, for example blasting off to the Planet Conformatron. The star ceiling and dimming light system help our educators to create an atmosphere which is both stimulating and exciting. The star ceiling allows for focus on the external and internal environment.

TAM (Transparent Anatomical Manakin)

Our educators use TAM to help the children discover the magic and wonder of their bodies. Each organ can illuminate, so that children can easily see its location and size.

Children

Child motifs are often featured on the outside of our mobiles in honour of our main target audience.

The 'three attitudes' to drugs

Within any group of Year 6 children there will be a range of attitudes and experiences with respect to drugs and their use. For example, some will never misuse any drug, while others may do depending on the situation and influences upon them. For the rest, nothing appears to be able to change their situations they may already have started smoking, drinking alcohol, taking something else.

For the first group the aim is to empower them to influence others in a positive way so that they will encourage others not to misuse drugs. [See David Emmett on empowering the anti-drug majority in Education and Health Vol 12 No 5 — Ed.] For the middle group it is to help them examine the situations they may find themselves in. We discuss why they would or would not take a drug from friends, the consequences of their actions, and their views on their friendships. By looking at the situation before it
John Balding

10 years of surveys of young smokers

After ten years of supporting hundreds of surveys of young people, and with responses from a third of a million of them recorded in our data banks, we feel entitled to take a longer view than is possible from a single year's data.

We carried out a shorter-term exercise in 1988, based on about 70,000 responses received since 1983, and published the results under the heading Teenage smoking: are the levels falling at last? (Balding 1988).

This observation was based on the steady overall fall in the percentage of young people between the ages of 11 and 16 that could be described as 'smokers' according to their answers to three separate questions contained in early versions 8-11 of the Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire survey summaries.

In Figure 1, below, we display results from four successive years of cumulative data (1985–1988) from surveys from different parts of the UK in each year. The results displayed are for boys, where the change is most marked; it is less clear in the data for girls. These same four rows are presented again in Figure 2.

It should be noted that each successive year's accumulated data is derived from a different population and is 'accidental', in that it is outside the control of the Schools Health Education Unit. Recent discoveries from a planned cohort study in process in Yorkshire indicate that, for many behaviours at least, results in one region are a good predictor of results elsewhere in the country (Balding 1994, Balding 1995).

Two of the questions from versions 8–11, slightly modified, have been retained through subsequent updates up to the current 17th version, and a 10-year analysis of one of them, How many cigarettes have you smoked in the last 7 days?, is presented in Figure 2. This gives '3D' plots for every available year group from 7 to 11, over the decade 1985–1994, that responded that they had smoked at least one cigarette in the last 7 days. It represents the results of well over a thousand surveys.

These series of columns tell a different story according to the way they are 'read':

1. Reading across. Going from left to right, the changing heights of the columns show how the percentage of smokers in each year group survey sample has changed from one year to the next.

2. Reading up. This shows the changing smoking levels from one year group to the next within each calendar year of the decade sur-