Pupils who used a computer for homework are:

- **more likely:**
  - to have broadband newspapers at home
  - to have more than one computer at home
  - to feel in control of their health
  - to enjoy physical activities
- **less likely:**
  - to feel lonely at night
  - to have drunk alcohol last week

Pupils who used the Internet at home last month are:

- **more likely:**
  - to have broadband newspapers at home
  - to have more than one computer at home
  - to feel in control of their health
- **less likely:**
  - to feel lonely at night
  - to drink alcohol last night

Pupils whose use of the Internet is usually supervised are:

- **more likely:**
  - to have hours
  - to have high self-esteem
  - to be at ease with opposite sex
- **less likely:**
  - to feel in control of their health
  - to drink alcohol last week

Computer use is by no means associated exclusively with inactivity, shyness and unsociability; the most common associations seem to be with a more affluent family background. It seems that computer use is a common part of many young people's lives, whether they are rich or poor, active or inactive, shy or sociable, risk-takers or abstainers. The growth in computer use should not be thought of as being a good or a bad thing of itself, but be seen in the context of young people's lifestyles. If they have a good mixed diet of computers and friends, of home life and exercise and rest, then there need be no reason for concern.

**How can you track individual pupils anonymously?**

Angela Balding is Survey Manager at The Schools Health Education Unit and leads the Unit's work with the Fit to Succeed project.

*Project reported in Education and Health, 19(1), pp. 7-19, and also on the website: www.shelu.org.uk*

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In our Health-Related Behaviour Questionnaire surveys, we usually recommend the practice of surveying in Year Groups spaced two years apart: say, years 6, 8 & 10. This anticipates the possibility of doing another survey two years on, when the pupils which were in year 6 will be in Year 8, and those in Year 8 will have moved on to Year 10. A further survey two years on will pick up the Year 6 pupils when they are in Year 10.

This study of a cohort is enormously useful. It depends upon a representative sample being selected from the cohort on each occasion. Individual pupils are not identified, but to do so would further enhance the power of the research. This can be done in several ways.

**Self-supplied pupil code**

The practice here is to ask pupils to come up with their own code, which they write on their scripts at each survey. For example, we might suggest they use part of a telephone number (2986) or old car number plate (LD69). We use this technique for our HRA service, where it is used to communicate feedback on test scores to individual pupils, while retaining their anonymity. This certainly works in the short term, but has the disadvantage that over longer periods of time they will forget what code they chose.

**Identification through stable survey items**

David Foxcroft (Foxcroft & Love, 1995) in his study used the answers to questions that would be stable to match pupils — for example, their age in months, the number of older brothers, the type of housing, and so on. In his study, this uniquely identified most (85%) but not all of the individuals. A rate of 85% is certainly a very respectable outcome.

**Additional specified information**

A number of researchers request pieces of personal information which collectively produce a code for the respondent - for example, the third letter of their mother's name, their own eye colour, and so on. Again, this can uniquely identify the larger part of the sample, but perhaps not all. [The rate can be boosted a good deal by using postcodes.] The questions asked in this approach are often rather public, and may require careful handling in a presentation to pupils — even if the resulting database is most unlikely to come into the wrong hands, the pupils may be less trusting and so less forthcoming.

**Pupil roll number**

In schools these days, all pupils already have a unique identifier: their school roll number, which teachers have listed. Although this is more complex to administer, it was the most convenient in our Fit to Succeed study* for collecting and matching results from National Assessment tests ("SATs") which are already attached to roll numbers. The method adopted protected the identity of each boy or girl but enabled their results on separate occasions to be linked accurately.

*If you are interested in using any of these approaches in your own surveys, you might like to contact me at the Unit.*