

## Contribution from Valerie Thompson, Chief Executive, e-Learning Foundation

The e-Learning Foundation was founded in 2001, and aims to ensure that every schoolage child has access to digital learning technologies (a computer, Internet at home and at school, and the right software) to help them maximise their educational potential and develop the digital skills they need both for their time in education and for when they reach working age and enter the digital economy. Our experience therefore is based on working closely with schools and parents to improve access to technology for learning across the curriculum, and for developing digital skills.

1. If democracy is to "go digital" then the issue of access to digital resources as it affects young people must be considered to avoid adding to the impact of the digital divide rather than helping overcome it. The digital divide comes in three forms as far as school age children are concerned. These are explained in the recent submission made to Michael Gove and Matthew Hancock, and are attached. The publication that resulted from the work is also attached.

The statistics I rely on are from the ONS Family Spending Survey and the Ofcom surveys; I have monitored the FSS figures since 2001.

2. For digital engagement of any kind to be successful there are three essential factors, and **all three** have to be in place for engagement to be effective and sustainable. They are motivation (ideally positive), access (to a computer and Broadband) and skills. So many government funded initiatives address one or two of these, but only rarely is the whole picture recognised and addressed. This model certainly applies to the use of technology for the democratic process, and applies to adults as well as young people.

3. Forms of engagement. My observation of the 2010 election was that young people dominated the queues that formed half an hour before the polling stations closed their doors, typically the teenagers left it to the last minute! Unfortunately their first experience of casting their vote could have been one of being turned away - not a good start! My view is that if you want young people to engage with the process then it has to be available in forms that they are used to; Facebook, YouTube, cartoons, rap music, over the phone.

4. Smart phones are owned by very large numbers of young people and they use them for texting, social networking, and finding out basic information. Tablets are growing in popularity, and in schools the iPad has achieved almost total dominance of the tablet market with thousands of educational apps available from the iTunes store. However for meaningful school work a keyboard and screen are usually basic requirements making the smartphone a useful tool but not the major learning device.