

# “Digital Strategy in Education”

NPCPP Survey Report  
August 2021



**NATIONAL PARENTS COUNCIL**  
**Post Primary**

COMHAIRLE NÁISIÚNTA TUISMITHEOIRÍ  
Iarbhuioideachas

**Today's world utilises digital activity in all aspects of life. Business, Industry and Academia are all reliant on those actively involved having a competent ability and knowledge sufficient to function effectively on a variety of digital platforms and through on-line activity.**

The first phase of the Department of Education’s Digital Strategy in Education rolled out over 5 years from 2015 to 2020. This period was used to ensure that all schools had sufficient access to devices and quality broadband.

The introduction of phase two of the DES Digital Strategy was interrupted in March 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic caused serious disruption to school life and school attendance. Online teaching and learning became a necessity to cope, as best we could, in the midst of a crisis.

The sudden arrival of this pandemic meant that there was ‘no time’ to train and adapt any of the users involved.

Education to meet the requirements of the future for our young people must deliver digital understanding, skills and competence in what has already become a Digital World.

Much could, and should, have been learned through the enforced default to online teaching and learning brought about by the Corona Virus.

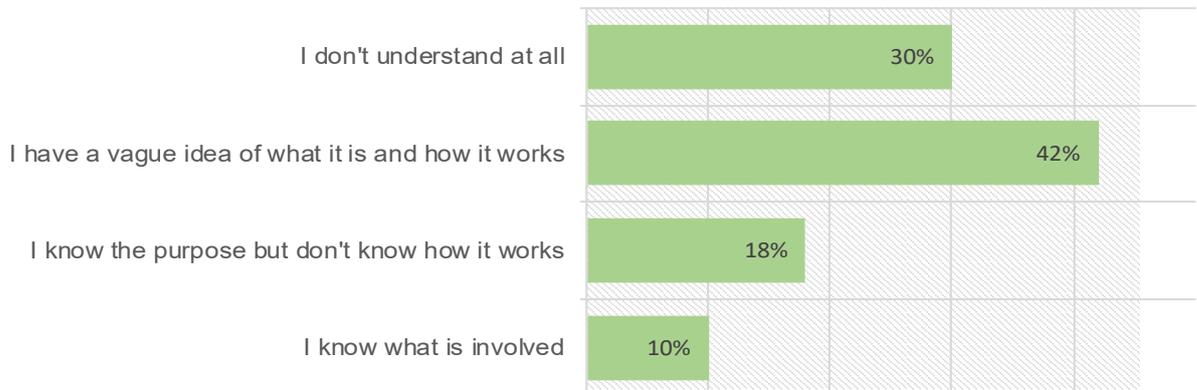
At a time when consultations around the DES “Digital Strategy in Education” have re-commenced NPCPP conducted this brief snap-shot survey in Summer 2021 to ascertain post-primary parents’ experience over the previous year together with their concerns and views on Digital Strategy delivery and progression in education across Ireland.

The survey was issued to over 1,250 post primary parents. The completion rate of 64% provides some significant insights into a number of key areas which demonstrate the current ‘state of play’ with regards to Digital Education for post-primary students currently and the concerns, opinions and ideas about further implementation into the future.

Responses were received from across the country: 30% Dublin; 32% Leinster (outside Dublin); 17% Midlands and North East; 11% West; 10% South. There is general acknowledgement that post-primary teaching and learning must incorporate education in digital technology to effectively prepare post-primary students for future study or career paths.

Further surveys and studies will be undertaken by NPCPP as the consultations and implementation of the DES Digital Strategy in Educations progress and develop.

**Q1** What is your understanding/knowledge of the purpose of a Digital strategy in relation to education and curriculum?

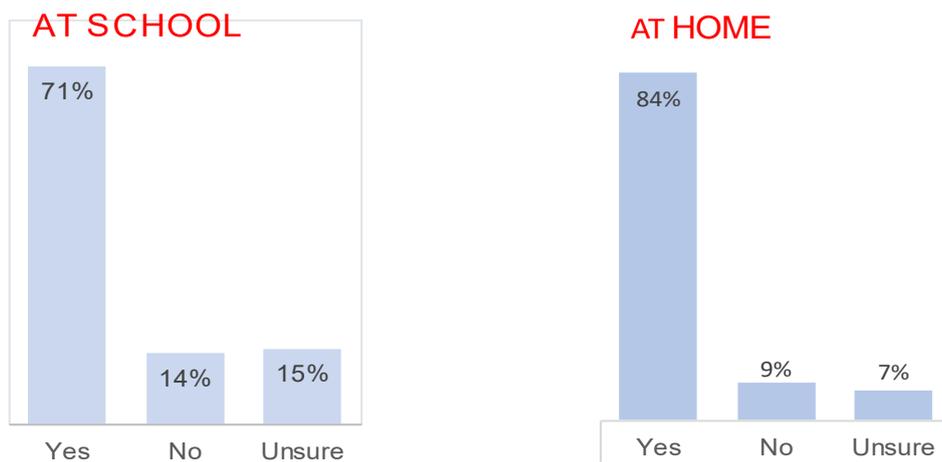


Less than 10% of respondents understand what the DES Digital Strategy in Education is while over 70% only have a vague idea or don't know what it means at all.

There is a very definite requirement for clear communication with parents to rectify this. Comments from respondents throughout the survey request training for teachers, students and parents to set the process off on a solid foundation.

Without the required training and support for all concerned responses suggest that this cannot succeed or be effective.

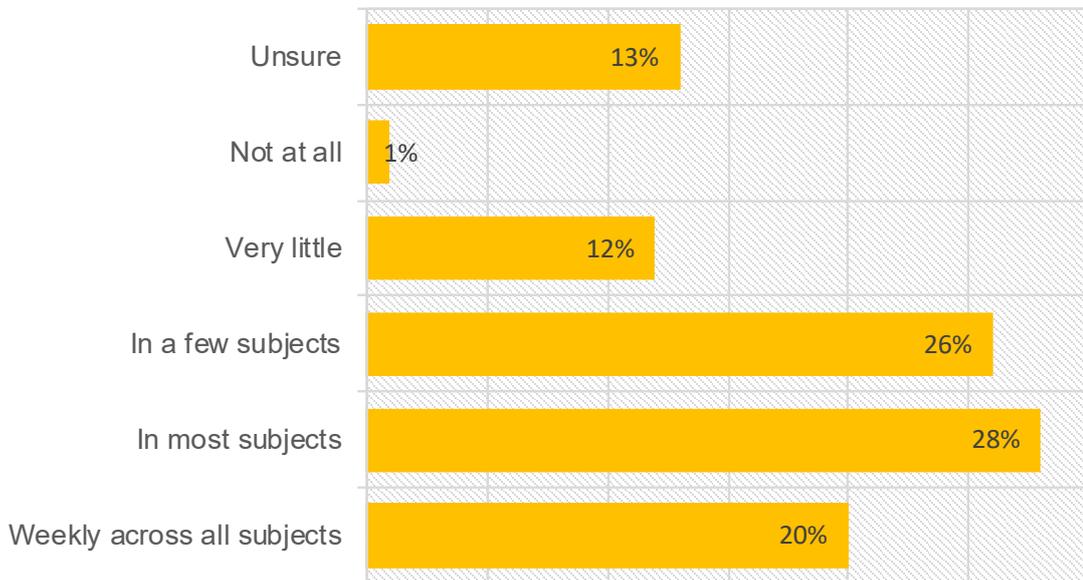
**Q2** Do the teaching methods at your child's school currently require the use of digital technology for education and learning?



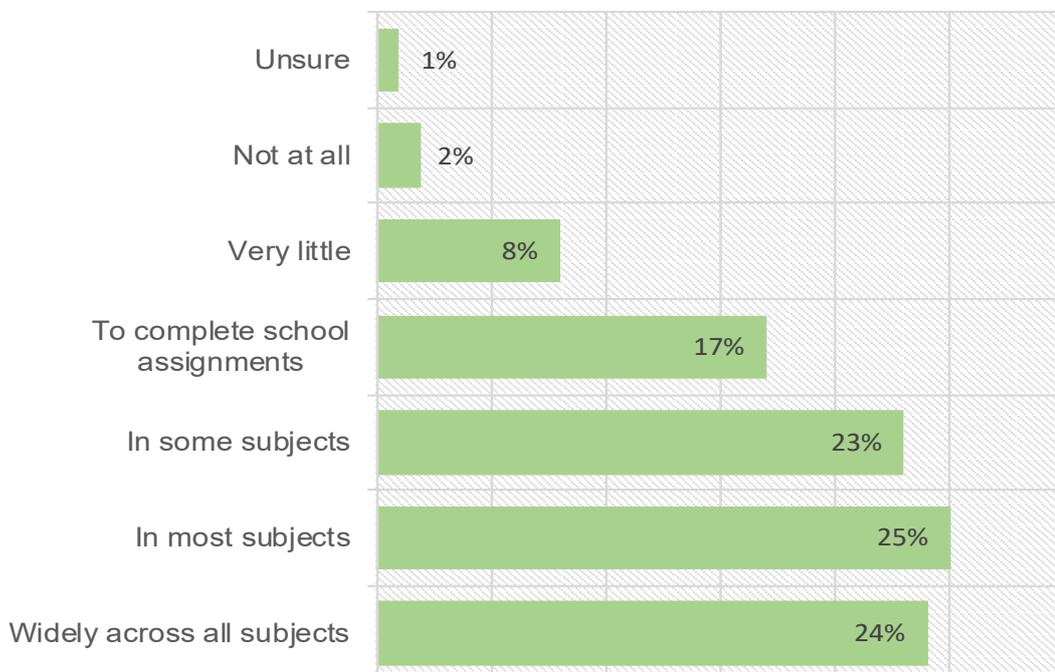
Responses demonstrate that current teaching methods already require digital understanding and skills for learning both at school and at home.

The 15% of respondents indicating that they are unsure of what digital strategy is in place at their child's school is a further demonstration of the requirement for clear communications and training to effectively implement this strategy.

### Q3 How extensively is technology used in your child's school?

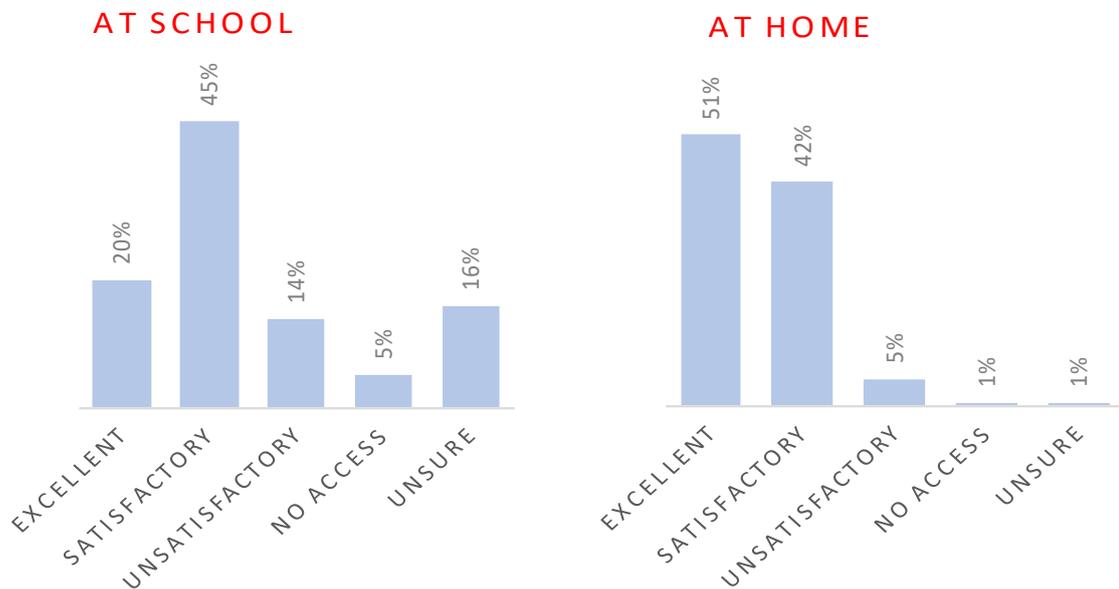


### Q4 How extensively does your child use digital technology for learning at home?



Responses to Q.3 and Q.4 indicate that at least 80% of students currently use digital technology extensively in their lessons and study.

## Q5 How extensively does your child use digital technology for learning at home?



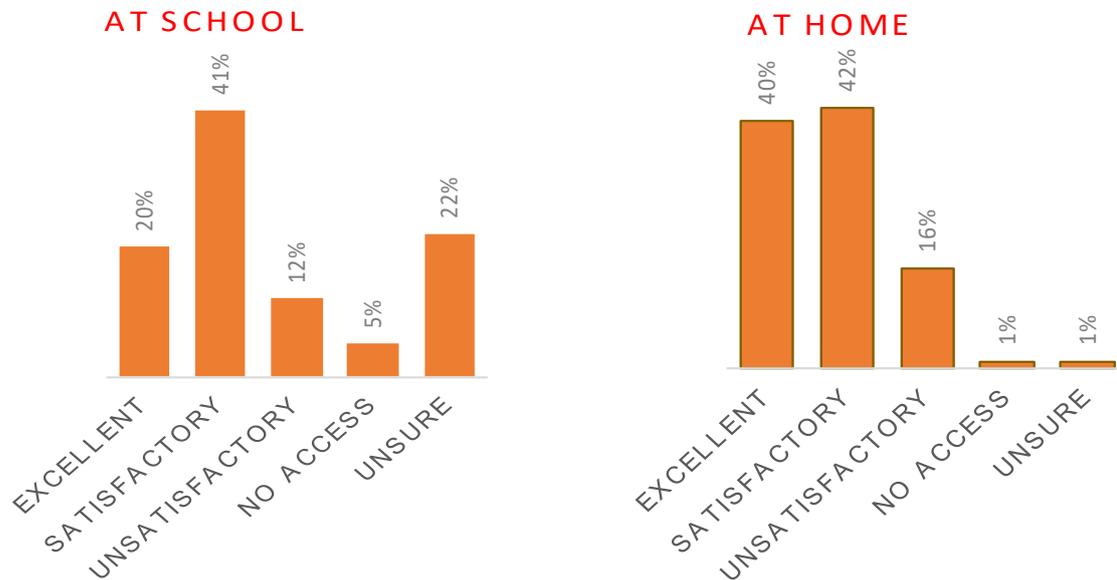
While it is encouraging to see that our survey suggests that more than 90% of students enjoy satisfactory access to digital devices at home 10% do not.

Concerns expressed through interaction between parents and NPCPP indicate that this 10% are most likely to be students from families already disadvantaged – hence further exasperating that disadvantage and their potential alienation.

Anecdotal reports and evidence also suggest that a considerable level of access for students is via mobile phones which will not be suitable when the level of digital educational activity increases.

It is disappointing however to see indication that, despite the first phase of the DES Digital Strategy seeking to ensure that all schools provide access to devices and broadband responses indicate that only 65% of students have satisfactory access to devices when in school.

## Q6 How satisfactory is the access to broadband?

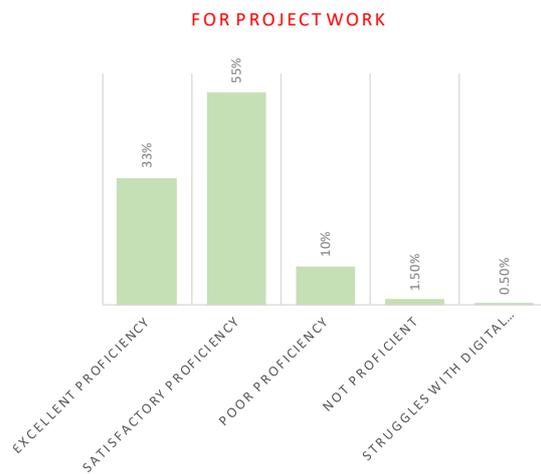
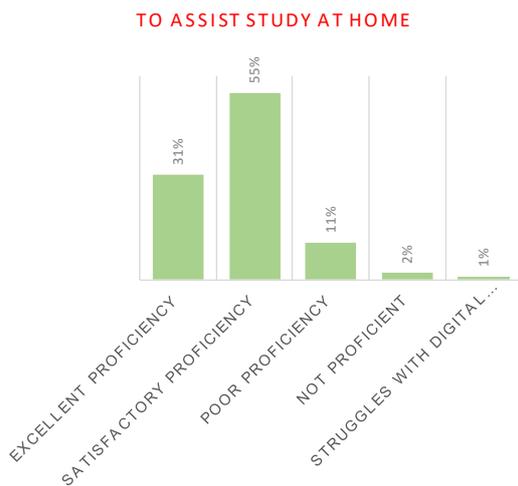
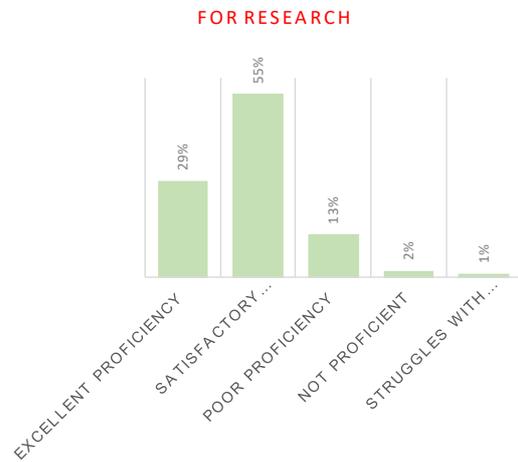
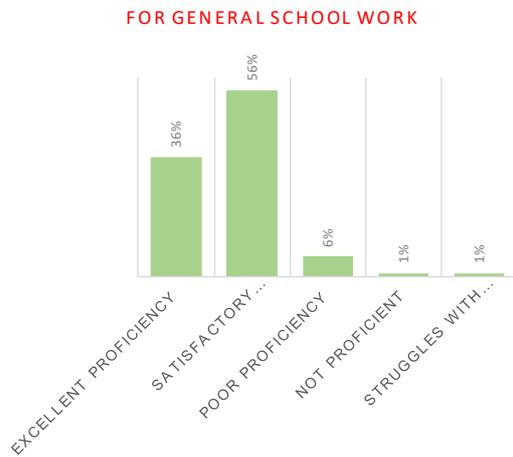


It must be noted that the close to 20% of respondents indicate poor or no broadband access are from rural respondents.

Following the 5-year first phase of the DES Digital Strategy, focused on accessibility for all, this is not an acceptable position from which to proceed as it represents a significant cohort of students and families severely disadvantaged.

Equity and equality of access must always remain as the benchmark for delivery of post-primary education.

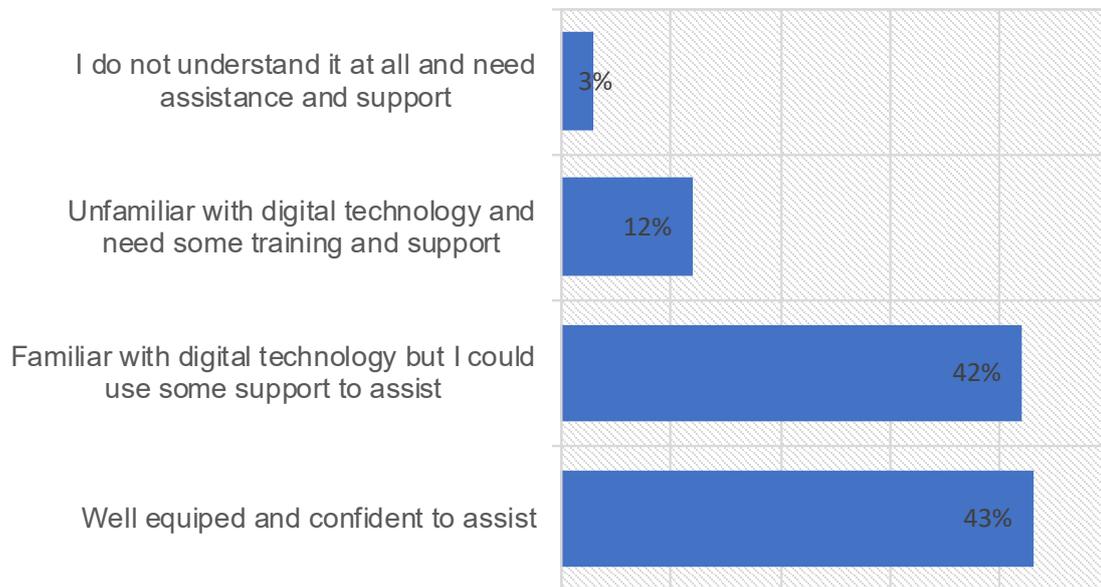
## Q7 How extensively does your child use digital technology for learning at home?



Overall the survey suggests that overall student proficiency in using digital technology is reasonably good. There is, however, a cohort of circa 10% indicating poor or no proficiency. Anecdotally this is likely to be those students who need maximum personal interaction to engage.

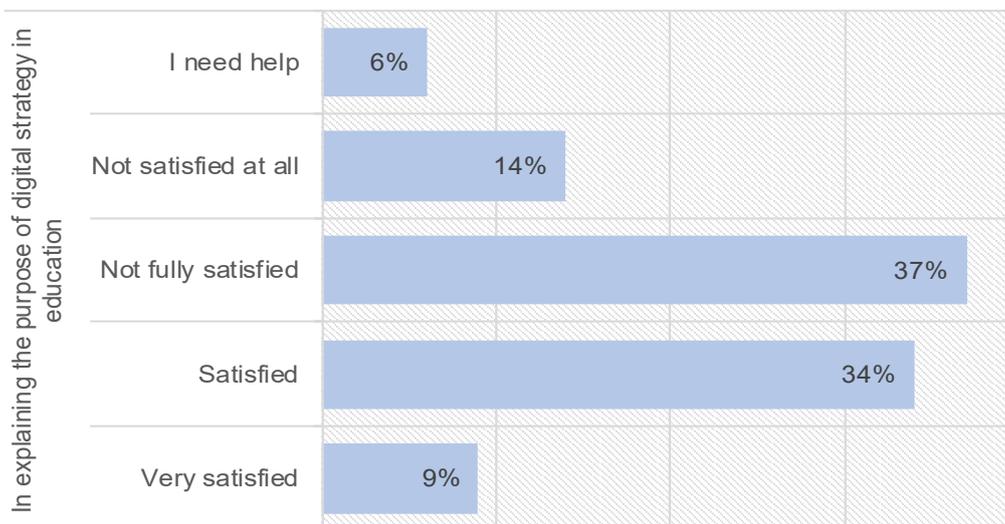
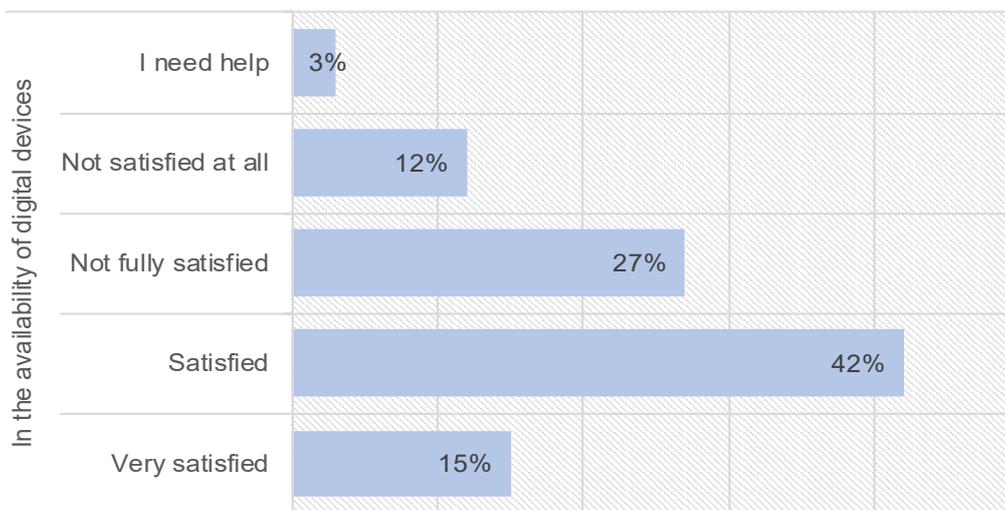
Maximum commitment and effort must be applied to ensure that all students have equal opportunity and encouragement to engage, develop and realise their potential through education.

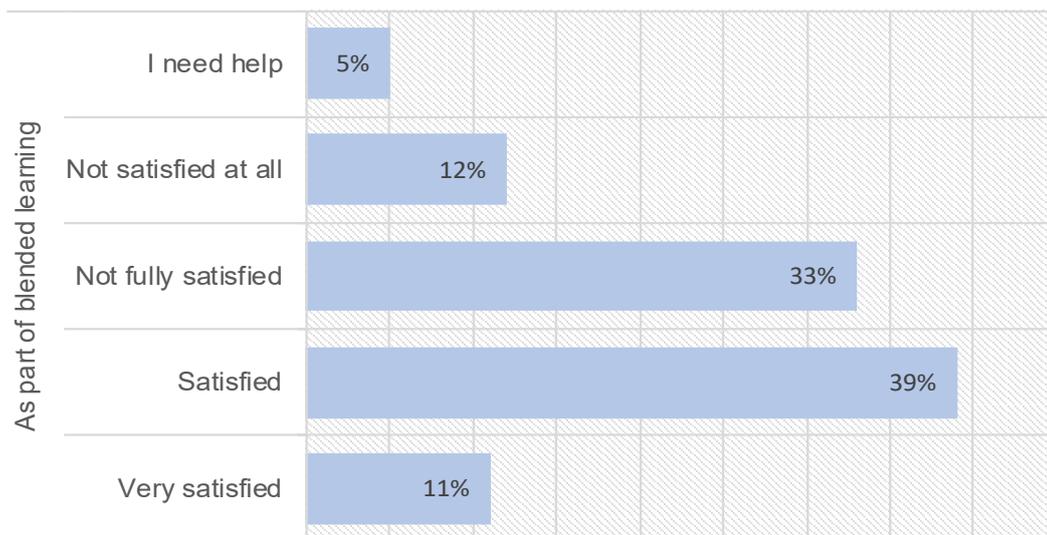
**Q8** How extensively does your child use digital technology for learning at home?



Almost 60% of respondents indicate that training for parents is required to introduce, familiarise and support digital study at home as an effective element of post-primary education.

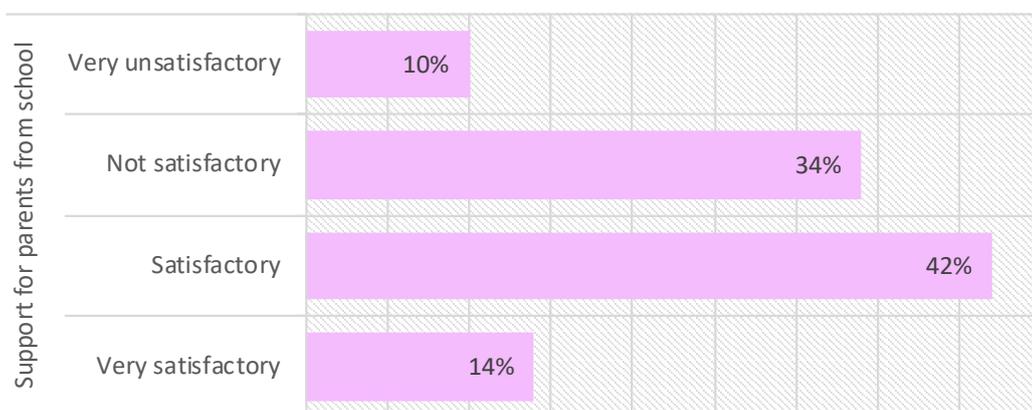
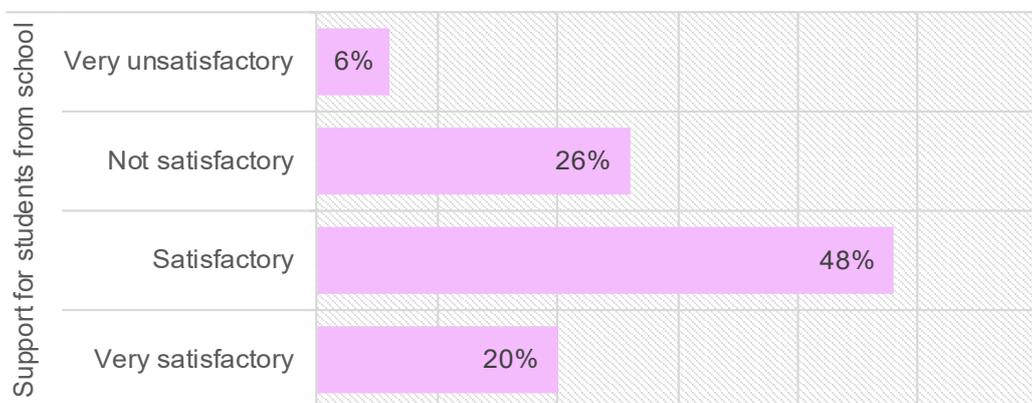
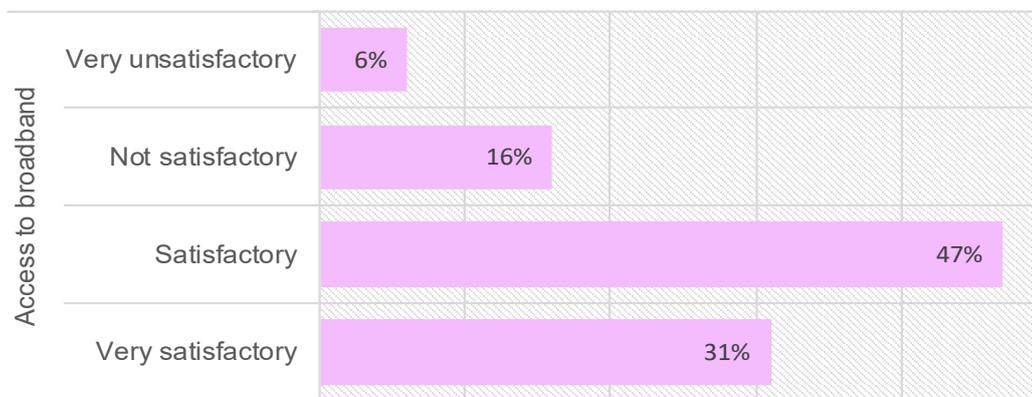
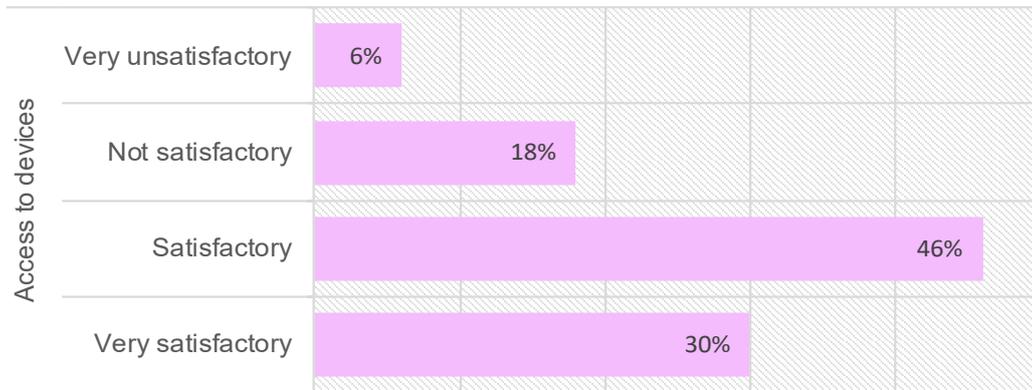
**Q9** How extensively does your child use digital technology for learning at home?

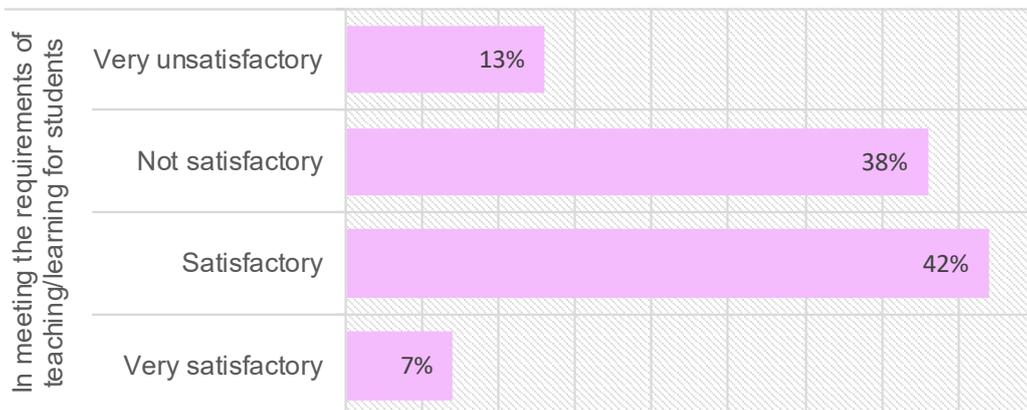
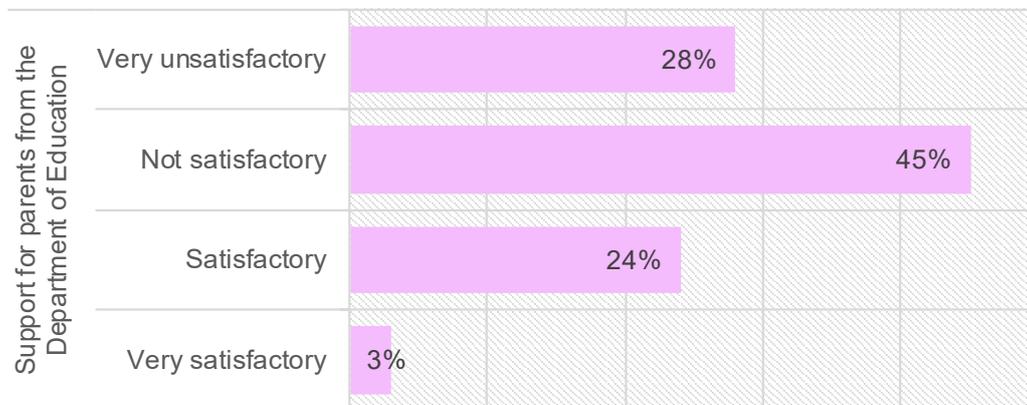
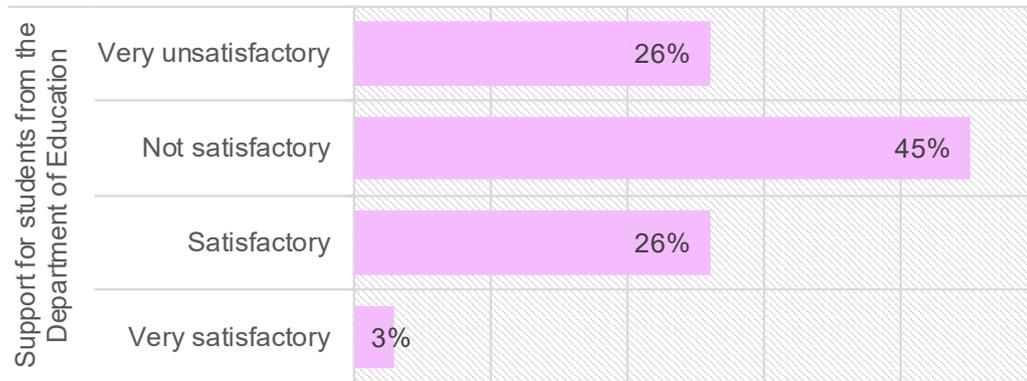




Responses clearly indicate a very significant portion – 40% - of parents who are not satisfied with the coordination and support between school and home. No model of blended learning, similar to that used during the pandemic, can proceed without this issue being addressed.

**Q10** How would you express your experience to date of blended learning during Covid-19 restrictions?



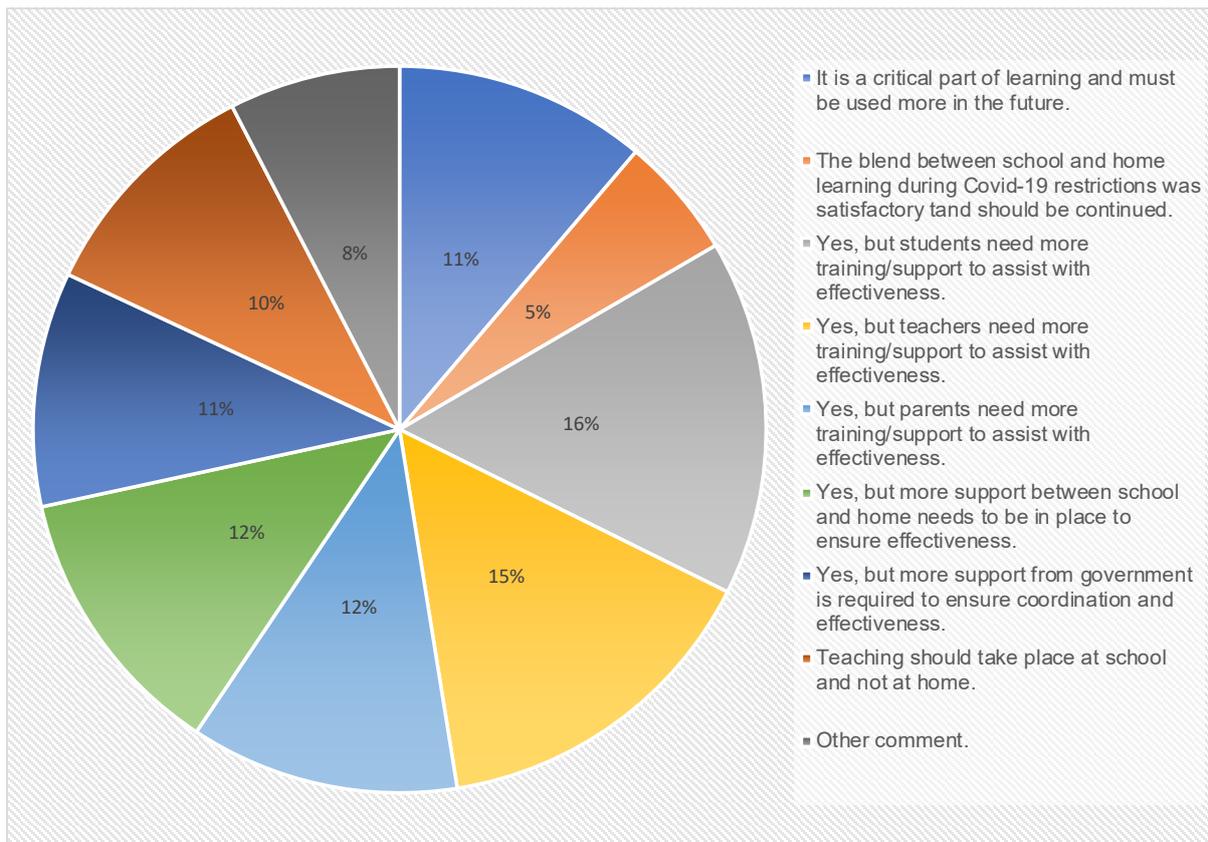


Reflecting on respondents reported experiences of digital online activity as a part of the blended education implemented during COVID restrictions, there is very significant indication (almost 20% of respondents) of dissatisfaction with access to devices and broadband. Alongside that, almost 50% of respondents feel that the support that parents/home receive from their school or from the DES is not satisfactory and needs to be in place to progress the digital strategy in education equitably or at all.

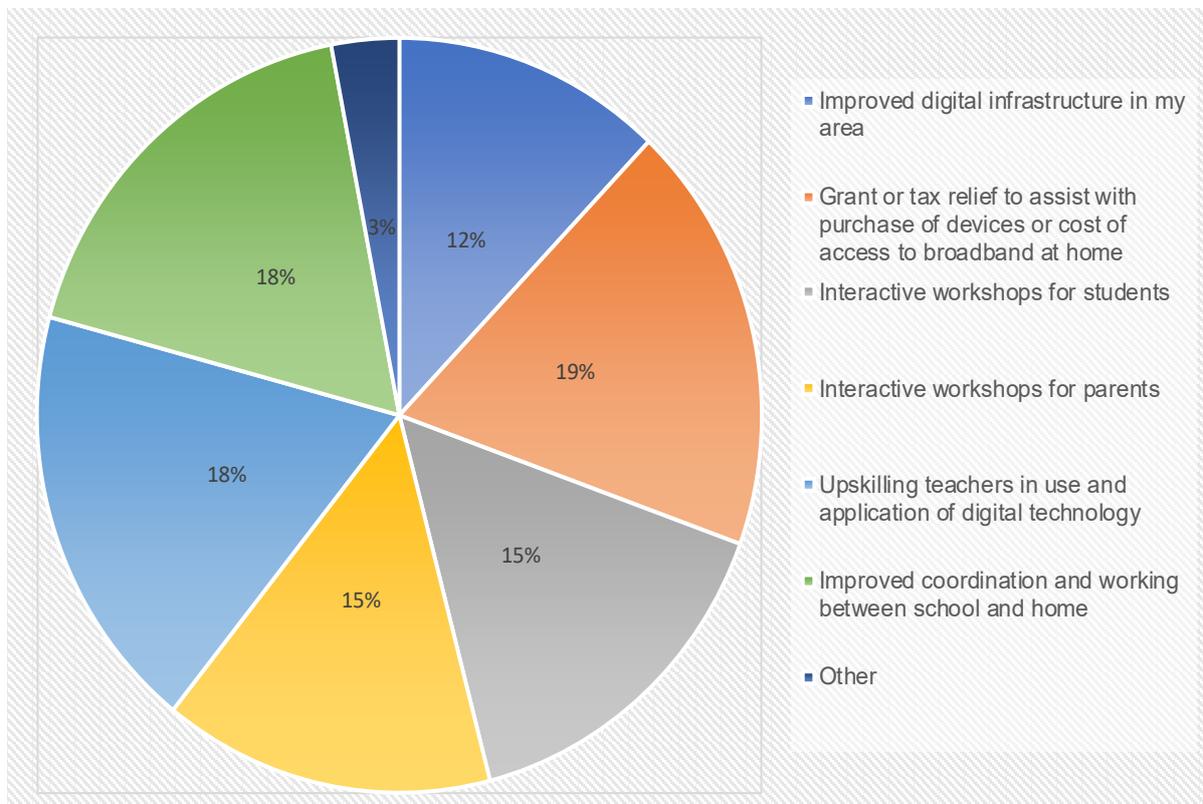
## Q11 & 12

Likewise, from commentary responses to Q.11 (best aspects of blended learning during COVID) and Q.12 (worst aspects of blended learning during COVID) and the responses to Q.13, it is very clear that, while respondents believe that digital education is an essential aspect of present and future post-primary education there are serious concerns around the lack of training, planning and for all involved – teachers, students, parents – about the lack of co-ordination between school/teachers and home.

## Q13 Do you believe that blended learning should be used in the future of post primary education



**Q14** What would best support you and your family in the implementation of the digital strategy in education? (multiple choice)

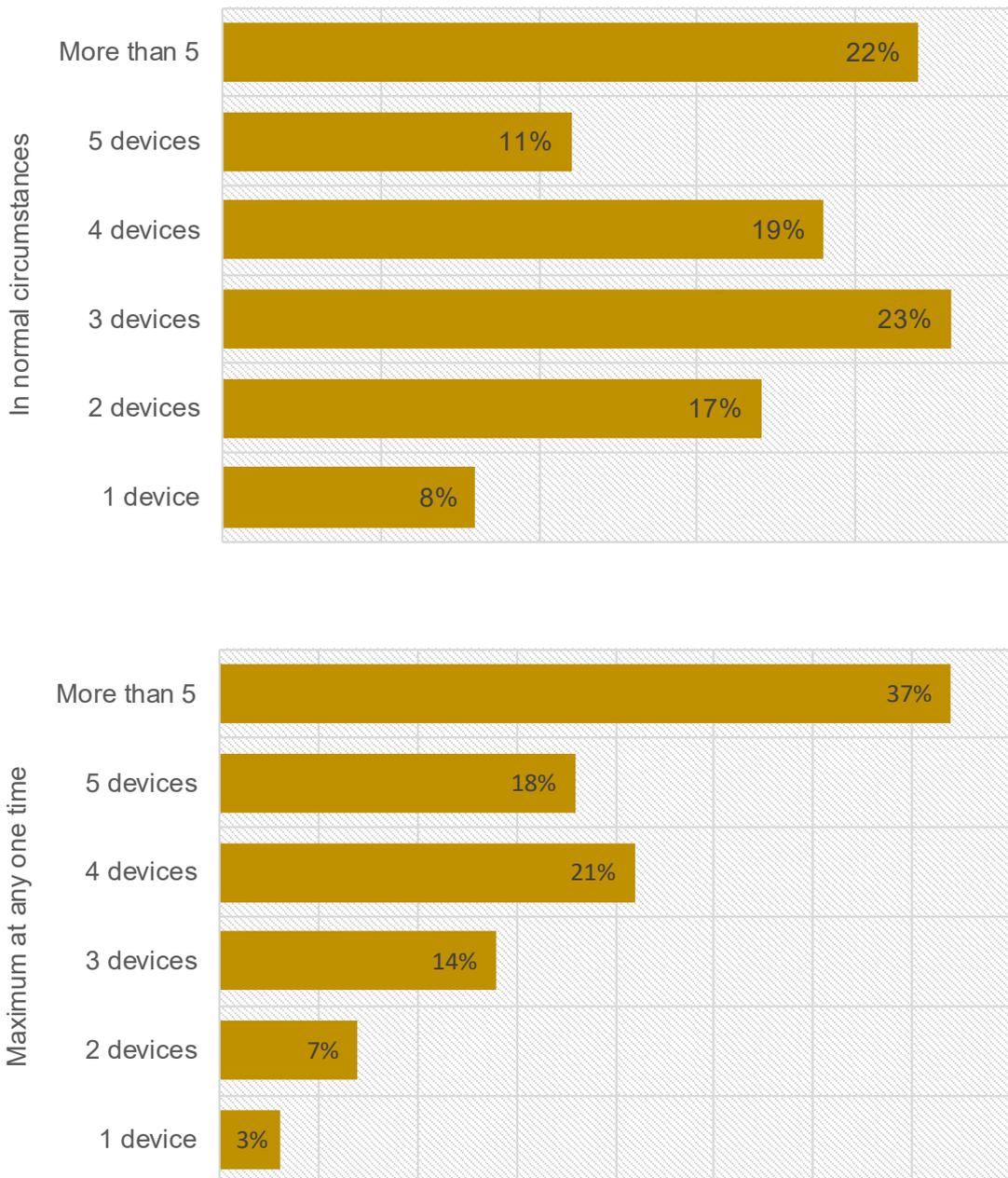


Respondents highlight the cost of providing adequate devices and the cost of providing adequate broadband for families. Support is needed to ensure that students have available to them what is required to properly implement any aspect of digital learning.

This cost is invariably borne by families – as indicated in Q.17: 90% of required devices are purchased by parents.

Support by way of tax relief for these costs is indicated as preferable by 55% of respondents. Almost 50% again reiterate the need for training for all involved.

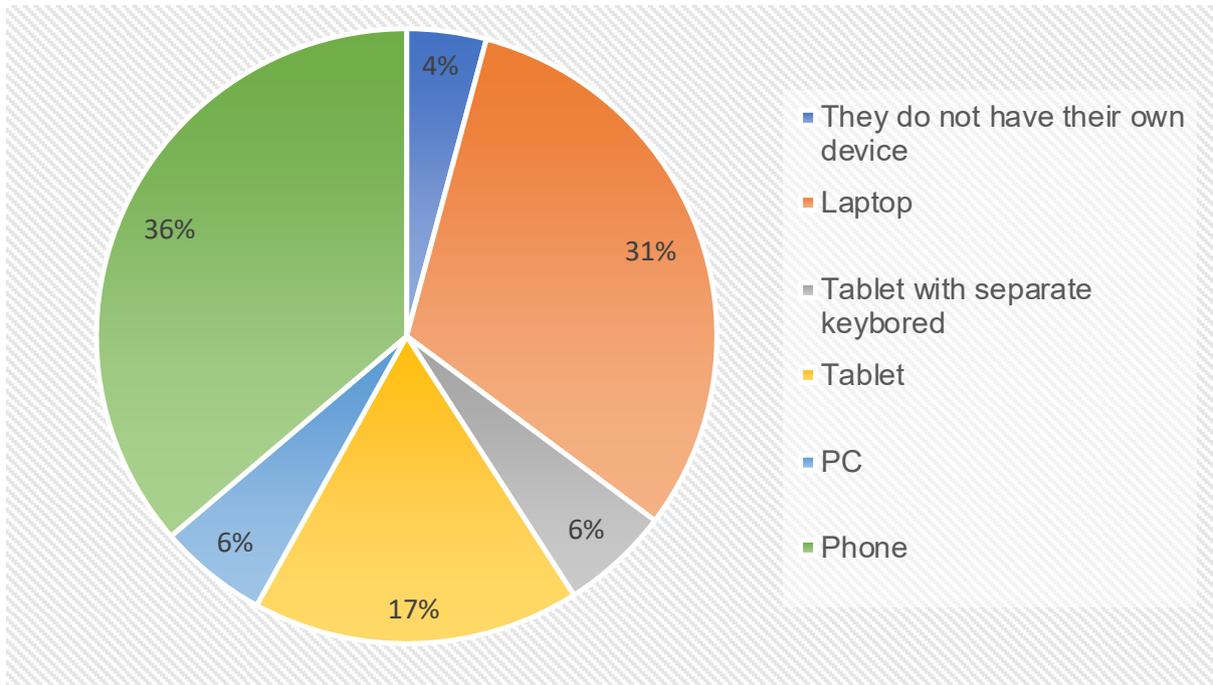
## Q15 How many digital devices are online at your home at any one time of the day?



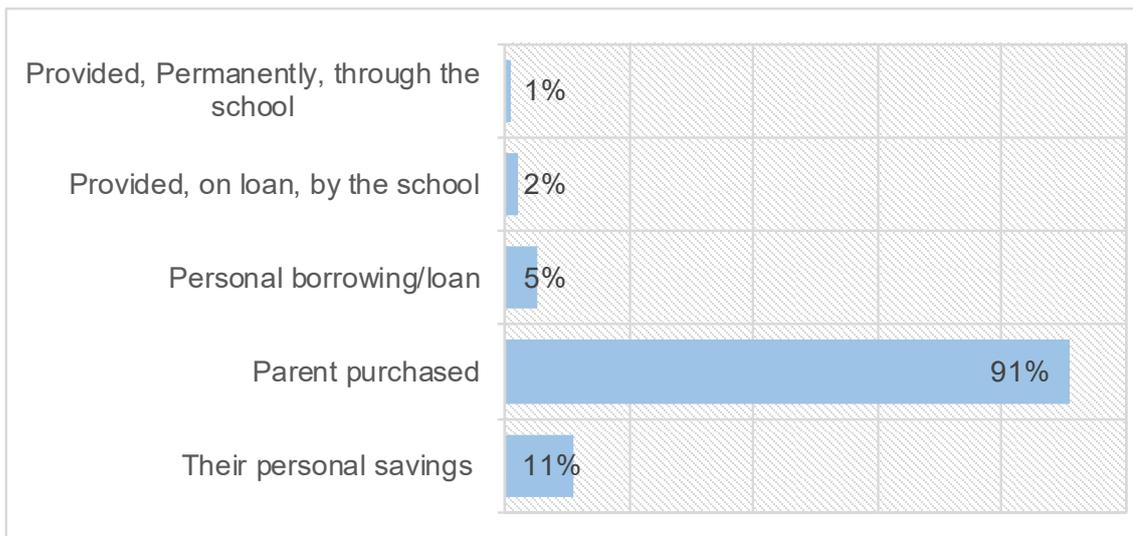
Brings a focus on the number of devices in use at any one time. 75% of respondents indicate that having 3 or more devices working on broadband is normal. This rising to 90% at times.

This puts severe strain on the quality of connection, particularly where poor signal is received. A very high number of comments also highlight just how common a poor signal is throughout the country. This inevitably has resulted in insufficient quality of signal or a systems crash for all users.

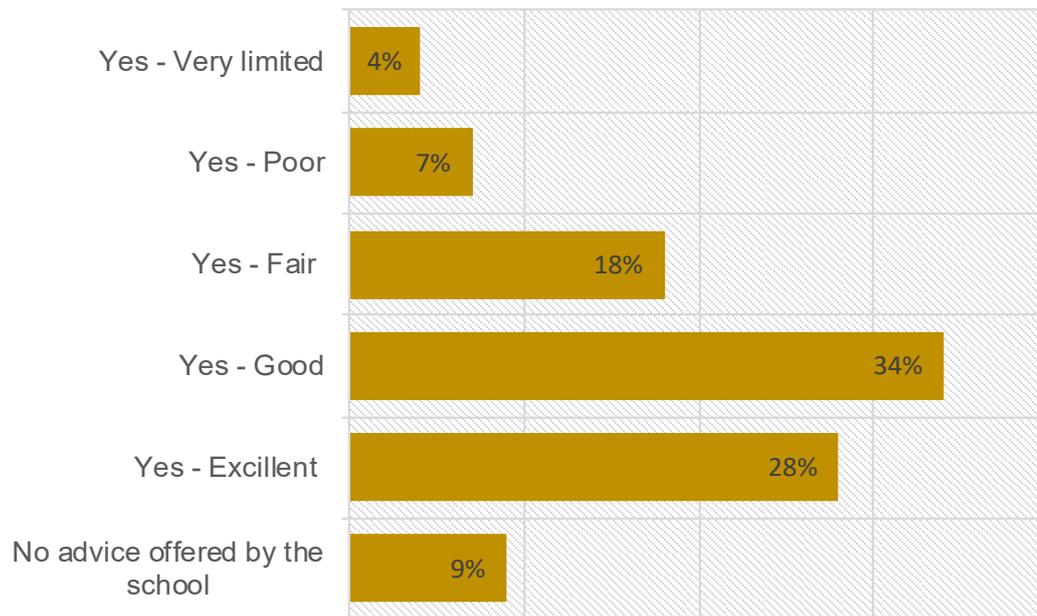
**Q16** Does your child have their own digital device? (multiple answers)



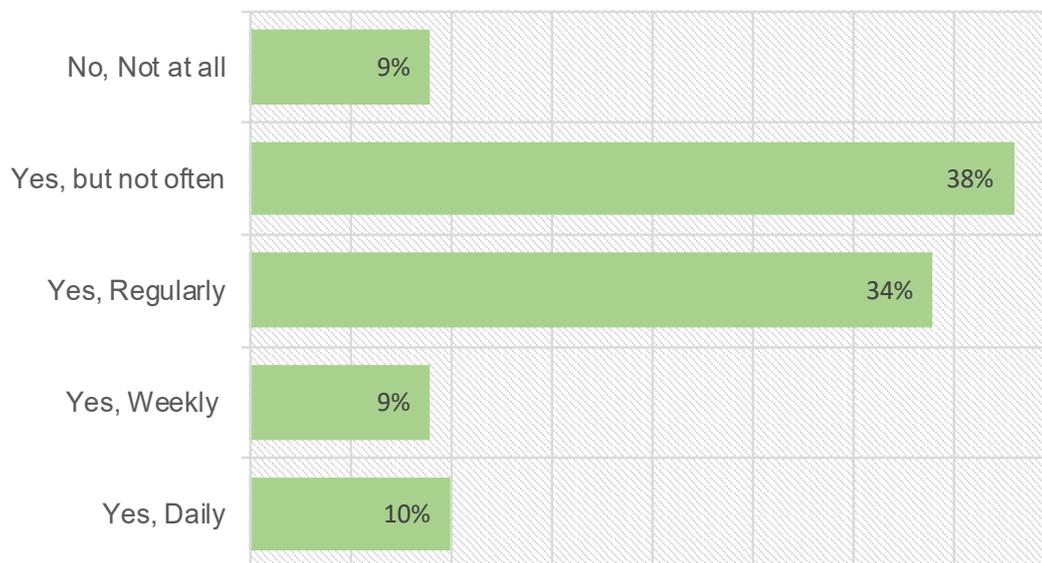
**Q17** Does your child have their own digital device? (multiple answers)



## Q18 Does your child have their own digital device? (multiple answers)



## Q19 Do you check on your child's internet use and ensure that they are aware of Privacy/Safety?



Q.18 and Q.19 demonstrate the importance that must be attached to the necessity to educate students and parents (and all users within the system) about on-line safety. This should be an integral part of training and workshops which are clearly called for and required.



Further commentary response was extensive and informative:

Further commentary response was extensive and informative:

There are serious concerns about there being no apparent consistency or cohesive ‘national policy’ emanating from the DES governing the provision of devices, the platforms to be used, curriculum, the guidance and monitoring of lesson delivery and participation or method of assessment.

Numerous comments from respondents highlight and question co-ordination and the ability to support any rollout when schools seem to be randomly using different devices, platforms and methods.

A summary of many comments highlights the impossibility to implement any digital strategy in education without:

1. First ensuring that there is adequate and equitable provision of hardware/devices to all students.
2. Ensuring the availability of sufficient and consistent broadband access across the country.
3. Nationally coordinating the tools to be used, platform for delivery and curriculums to be used.
4. Proper instruction and training for all involved.
5. Consistent oversight and monitoring by DES of delivery and outcomes.
6. The ability to respond and support users should any problems or issues occur.

Much of the commentary is supported by some of the discussions which have taken place at NPCPP outreach activities during 2021. Both sources indicating the severe difficulty to coordinate and deliver what is required or desired when all schools are using different hardware, software and methodology to deliver a curriculum which has not been defined.

## Quotations – taken from responses:

“The reality on the ground in Ireland is that each child can only have very limited access to devices. Even huge schools may only have 1 or 2 sets of ipads/laptops making the ratio of devices to children farcical”

“Even schools in urban areas struggle to connect 30 devices!”

“Many parents are not proficient enough to support their children when using IT. Training has never been provided to parents and very little training is provided to teachers”.

“There is negligible technical support provided to schools so schools rely on maybe one or two teachers who are ‘good’ with computers”.

“Even a year and a half into this pandemic, the Dept. has not established a learning platform for all schools to use. Instead schools fumble around to find free versions of Seesaw and the like”.

“Parents need some guidance and support to understand and assist in education. Better coordination between school and home is required”.

Albert Einstein: “In the midst of every crisis, lies great opportunity”.

Mark McCormack: “The best people know that there are two phases in every crisis: the one where you manage it and the other where you learn from it. To succeed you have to do both”.







NPCPP Digital Strategy in Education 2021,  
Compiled and produced by NPCPP. All rights reserved.