This article investigates the effects of age, gender and prior experience upon attitudes towards computers in 278 secondary school pupils drawn from the 11-12 and 15-16 years age-groups. The participants were asked to complete a survey in school time, under the supervision of their class teachers. They were also asked to provide ratings of their experience in specific uses of computers for word processing, music, programming, maths/calculations, drawings/graphics and computer games. Findings show that boys were found to use computers at home more frequently than girls, and younger pupils used computers more than older pupils. The use of computers by boys is similar for the two age-groups, but that use by older girls is lower than that by younger girls. All applications showed that males reported greater use than females, with the exception of using a computer for music. Older pupils reported using a computer for word processing and programming more frequently than younger pupils, while the reverse was true for maths and games. Boys showed greater liking for computing than girls overall, and boys’ level of liking did not differ between the two age-groups. However, whereas younger girls reported liking computers almost as much as younger boys, older girls were less positive. According to the authors, two possible explanations for these findings are: i) Girls simply lost interest in computing as they got older, and ii) The younger girls could be ‘catching up’ with the boys and generally taking more interest in games and home use of computers than the older girls in the survey did at the same age. Since the main experience of computing for many female pupils occurs within an educational framework, the authors suggest that the role of the school in fostering positive attitudes may be of particular relevance.

Keywords: Gender; Computer attitudes; Experience of computing.