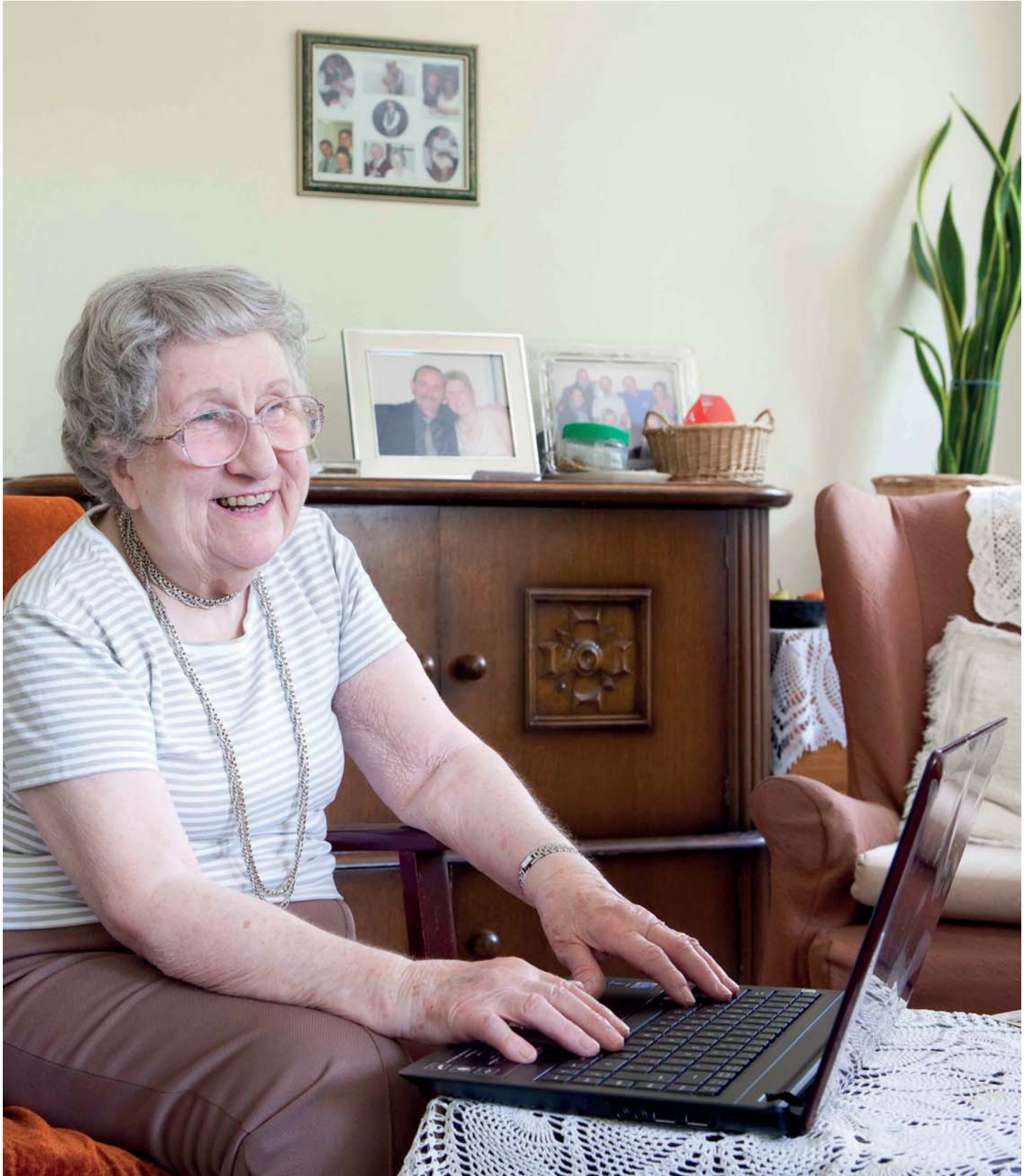


# Later life in a digital world



# About Age UK

Age UK is the country's largest charity dedicated to helping everyone make the most of later life.

We believe in a world where everyone can love later life and we work every day to achieve this. We help more than 5 million people every year, providing support, companionship and advice for older people who need it most. The Age UK network includes Age UK, Age Cymru, Age NI and Age Scotland and around 165 local Age UK partners in England.

## **About this report**

Age UK has long been committed to increasing digital inclusion in later life and many local Age UKs across the country run services that help people learn digital skills and benefit from using the internet. However there are many older people who do not use the internet and some are starting to feel disadvantaged in an increasingly digital world.

In this report our focus is on access to public services although many of the issues raised also apply to essential private services. To inform this work we have been gathering information about the impact of public services going online. We have also commissioned research and invited views about later life in a digital world, drawing on the experiences of internet users, non-users and service providers.

We would like to thank the people who contributed to the qualitative research and those who took the time to complete our questionnaire or provide information in other ways. We are also grateful for the feedback we have received from local Age UKs and other organisations.

## **Author**

Sally West

## **Editorial and design**

[oysterdesign.co.uk](http://oysterdesign.co.uk)

**December 2015**



# Contents

Foreword  
**04**

---

Summary  
and recommendations  
**05**

---

1 The move to online  
public services  
**06**

---

2 Support for those who are  
not online  
**14**

---

3 The digital divide in later life  
**18**

---

4 Exploring the benefits  
and barriers  
**28**

---

5 Getting people online  
**38**

---

Appendix  
**44**

---

## Foreword



Digital technology is transforming our lives. It affects how we communicate with each other, how we work, how we carry out our daily activities and how we spend our spare time.

Change has been fast. The first call from a mobile phone in the UK was made in 1985 – now two-thirds of adults in the UK have a smart phone.<sup>1</sup> Familiar activities are changing – for example traditional television viewing is falling with more people watching catch up TV or using subscription services. Technology is also affecting health and care services, where it can be used to support independent living and monitor health conditions. And digital transformation is seen by the Government as an important part of public sector reform with the aim of increasing efficiency and providing a better service for users.

Much of the growth in information and communication technology has been driven by the development of the internet and most younger people would find it difficult to imagine a world without it. Many older people have also fully embraced digital technology, but there remains a stark difference in internet use between the youngest and oldest age groups. Virtually all (99 per cent) of young adults have recently used the internet but this falls to just 33 per cent of those aged 75 and over.<sup>2</sup>

While many who do not use the internet say this does not interest them, given the speed of change there is a risk that they will be left behind in our increasingly digital world. We hope that this report will give service providers and others greater insights into the role of the internet in the lives of people in later life. We want to increase the numbers of older people benefiting from digital technology, but crucially we want to ensure that those who are not online do not miss out on, or find it harder to access, essential goods and services.

**Caroline Abrahams**  
Charity Director, Age UK

## Summary and recommendations

To achieve its true potential, digital technology needs to meet the needs of all groups, including people in later life. Age UK believes that older people should be supported and encouraged to get online but those who cannot or do not want to do so should continue to be able to access services and support in a way that suits them.

Moving public services online without adequate support is making it harder for some who do not use the internet to access services, could deter people from seeking the support they need, and can increase dependency. Some groups are at particular risk. Three out of ten people aged 65 to 74 and two-thirds of those aged 75 and over are not online. There is also a link to social disadvantage. For example, while only 15 per cent of people aged 65 to 74 in socio-economic group AB do not use the internet, this rises to 45 per cent in group DE.

In order to ensure that those who do not use the internet are not disadvantaged by digital transformation in the public and private sectors, we need three complementary approaches: greater support to increase digital inclusion, user-friendly technology and design, and appropriate alternative access for people who are not online.

Above all, we need to start from a strong understanding of older people's attitudes and experiences. There is a big difference in the way that people live their lives depending on their use of technology. Many who are not online say they are not interested in the internet. Although some feel this is starting to affect their lives, the barriers to getting online generally outweigh any perceived benefits.

Some people will never be able to gain digital skills but others could with the right help. And we need to consider what can be done to maintain skills throughout life, given that more than one in twenty older people have used the internet in the past but have stopped doing so.

The speed of change requires renewed efforts to help people get online, and stay online, with adequate and sustainable funding. Building on good practice, initiatives need to find ways to engage people's interest, provide tailored training, ensure there is follow up support, and address concerns about security and costs. We also need equipment and services which are well designed and easy to use.

The Government should be clearer about the savings that moving services online will bring and how much of these will be reinvested in alternative ways to access services and support to help those who are digitally excluded. Without these complementary approaches, we risk consigning many older people to a world of second-class services.

# 01

## The move to online public services

---

Moving public services online without sufficient support is making it harder for some who do not use the internet to access services, could deter people from seeking the support they need, and can increase dependency.



Public services are moving online. The Government wants ‘to deliver redesigned, user-friendly public services, fit for the digital age as well as delivering efficiencies across the public sector.’<sup>3</sup> The pace of change is speeding up as part of the continuing drive to save money and increase efficiency – and to provide a better service for individuals.

While some central government services have offered online access as one option for some time, increasingly they are moving to ‘digital by default’ services which are designed and based around a digital system. Local authorities are also moving services online.

For people who use the internet, including many older people, the move to online public services can provide quicker, easier and cheaper access. However the Government recognises that not everyone is able to access digital services and departments must ensure there is ‘assisted digital’ support for people who cannot use online government services on their own.<sup>4</sup> (See page 15.) Local authorities do not have the same specific guidance around setting out an assisted digital strategy. However a Local Government Association report on transforming local services points to the role of local authorities in providing assisted digital support to those people who are unable or unwilling to use technology.<sup>5</sup> Public bodies also have responsibilities under the Equality Act. For example the Public Sector Equality Duty requires public sector organisations to promote equality of opportunity between groups with protected characteristics, including age and disability.

## Access to information and services

Increasingly information about public services is predominantly on the internet and the GOV.UK website is described as ‘The best place to find government services and information.’<sup>6</sup>

Local authorities are also providing more information on their websites. Although there should always be access for people who do not use the internet, we have received feedback from individuals and local Age UK organisations expressing concern that some services are becoming harder to access. For example an Age UK Information and Advice Manager told us:

‘Exclusion from online services... is a growing problem and people are sent to us to help. Telephone lines are busy and you are directed to online communication for almost everything – benefits, gas and electricity, tax, Blue Badges etc. Our local authority wants most changes reported online and they offer very little face-to-face service and are reluctant to take changes over the telephone (if you can get through that is). For sites that require an email before you proceed this is more of a problem as most clients don’t have one.’

And as more providers encourage online access, older people who do not use the internet have told us they find it harder to get through on the telephone or get hold of paper application forms. In some situations people find themselves in the ‘catch 22’ position of being told to go online to print off forms.

For example, while it is possible to request a paper tax return, HMRC encourages online returns and those completing the form online have later deadlines.



### HMRC tax returns

In response to the Age UK questionnaire on internet use, one man wrote ‘HMRC – I rang for a tax return as I had not received one. I am told they wish to encourage people to submit tax returns online... They agree to send a [paper] return. I am still waiting but have received a letter telling me to complete a tax return online or if I wish to submit a paper return to print it off – online.’

A woman contacted the national Age UK national advice line because she had been unable to complete her self-assessment return online. She had requested a paper form but was anxious that it would not arrive in time.

The charity Tax Help for Older People has come across similar cases. They have also noticed delays in processing paper returns which have led to calls from older taxpayers worried that their tax return may not have been received.



## HMRC Marriage Allowance

An example of a new digitally designed service is the Marriage Allowance which started in April 2015 and lets people who are married or in civil partnerships transfer unused personal tax allowance to their partner. For the first few months of the tax year the only way to register and make a claim was online. At one stage those ringing to find out about the Marriage Allowance heard a recorded message directing them to the website and stating that staff could not give any further information. By November 2015 it was possible to claim by telephone. However people would only know this if they held on to speak to a member of staff before which they are likely to have heard a recorded message saying it may take 35 minutes to answer their call. At the time of writing the telephone option had not been publicised although we understand this will happen.

Age UK and Tax Help for Older People have been contacted by people who are not online and need information or practical help to apply. Both organisations remain concerned that some people will miss out on this tax reduction because they were given to understand that applications could only be online. And while we are pleased that when people contact our organisations we can provide information and support, this does mean that some people seek help solely because they do not use the internet, when normally they manage their own tax affairs.

## Getting an EHIC card

Another example is the European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) which used to be available through Post Offices. The website encourages people to claim online.

There is an automated telephone claim service but the only way to get a paper form is to download it from the website.



### EHIC card

A man who does not use the internet told us that he had gone to the Post Office to renew his card as he had done in the past but staff could not help and could only give him an internet address for more information. Despite being very capable of dealing with his own affairs he had to ask someone else to go online and find out how to apply. He did not want to use the telephone service because, based on previous experience, he did not have confidence in voice recognition systems. So he then had to rely on an internet user to print the form out for him.

Age UK and Tax Help for Older People have been contacted by people **who are not online and need information or practical help.**



## Local authority services

Pressure on budgets, and the aim of improving access, is driving many local authorities to promote online services. While we have not carried out a survey to look at the position in all areas, we have heard from some older people who do not use the internet and who have had difficulty accessing services including the Blue Badge scheme (which provides parking concessions for disabled people), residents' parking permits, help to pay the council tax and housing. In some situations advisers have told us that although there are ways to access services by telephone or written application, people are not always informed about these.



### Blue Badge

An Age UK adviser told us they had particular difficulties with Blue Badges. The online system is hard to use and the local authority does not offer an alternative way to apply. She has intervened and persuaded them to offer an appointment in some situations, but other older people simply accept they cannot apply and have left the matter.

One man who contacted his local authority to inform them that he was changing address was told he had to do this online. In the end he managed to get someone to drive him to an office where he could do this in person.



### Council tax

A man who was moving to another area contacted his local authority to sort out his council tax. He was told his only option was to do this online or go in person to make arrangements at his new local authority which was some distance away.



## Benefit claims

An Age UK Information and Advice Manager reported that, prompted by financial pressures, their local authority has moved to a system of online claims for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction. A telephone call back service was provided but they could not arrange a specific time so it was not possible for an Age UK adviser to be with the applicant to help with the claim. The local Age UK has now managed to negotiate special access and the local authority says it will provide a direct telephone service. However it is still saying that any papers must be scanned and sent electronically or taken in person to an office – not posted. This will continue to be a major deterrent to claimants, particularly those without support.

An Information and Advice Manager in another part of the country reported that their local authority told people that they could only apply for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction online and if people were not able to do this they should ask for help from someone such as a family member. The local Age UK complained about this and argued that the local authority should be providing paper forms. It has now agreed to do so for Age UK so they can help their clients apply, but if individuals ring the local authority directly they are told the only way to claim is online. When this was questioned, the member of staff said they could go to the library where they would receive help.

## Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction

People with low incomes can claim Housing Benefit to help towards their rent, and Council Tax Reduction (also called Council Tax Support) to reduce their council tax bill. Both are administered by local authorities and increasingly we are hearing that local authorities are encouraging online contact for claims and to report changes and some do not provide paper forms. The local authority may offer support through a home visit or telephone call, but we have also heard of cases where people are encouraged to get help from family or friends to claim online, or otherwise are told they need to go to a library or local authority contact point to make a claim.

We know that many older people are already reluctant to claim the support to which they are entitled. For example, older people miss out on £3.7 billion of Pension Credit and Housing Benefit every year.<sup>7</sup> People may feel they are not entitled to help, be put off by having to provide financial information, or be reluctant to ask for help. Pressure to claim online is likely to be an additional barrier to those who do not use the internet. An estimated 260,000 low income older tenants are entitled to Housing Benefit but not claiming it, and this figure could rise if local authorities expect people to claim online.

Older people miss out on  
**£3.7 billion of Pension Credit  
and Housing Benefit** every year.<sup>7</sup>

## Housing

We have heard about a range of housing activities where older people can face difficulties because they are not online. These include applying for social housing, swapping properties and requesting repairs. Two examples are given below – one relates to a local authority and the other to a housing association. Both came through local Age UKs who were then able to help, but if people in this situation do not receive help from an advice agency or relative, they could be left in unsuitable accommodation.



### Applying for sheltered housing

An Information and Advice Manager told us about an 85 year old client in respite care who was told she would have to apply online for sheltered housing. After Age UK's intervention the local authority will now carry out a home visit where it is clear the person cannot apply online.



### Changing property

Another Age UK adviser saw a tenant of a major social housing provider who wanted to down-size but was told he had to apply online and referred him to a digital inclusion team. The adviser felt this was inappropriate as the man lacked basic skills and was unlikely ever to be able to use digital technology.



## Increasing dependency

Some people will seek help from family and friends to access online services on their behalf. As described later in this report, many older people welcome help from others but in some situations this can bring feelings of embarrassment and inadequacy, and there are particular concerns if they are dealing with personal or financial matters.

As in some of our earlier examples, people may turn to advice agencies. While these are there to provide support, people may not feel comfortable having to ask for help.

### Benefits after redundancy

‘I have just received a call from a 58 year old who has been made redundant. He went to the job centre. He described how they “palmed him off” in terms of assisting with possible benefits entitlement. They said that there was no access to the telephones and that he would need to do everything online but they weren’t able to provide support as requested by him. They simply said go and see Age UK – which he found upsetting and dismissive and felt that he shouldn’t have to go to see a charity for such assistance.’

### Email from Age UK Information and Advice Manger

There are also concerns among some local Age UKs that online access is putting increased pressure on their resources. Local Age UK organisations want to help and if someone approaches them about an online application this could also enable them to provide information and advice about other issues or to offer them support to increase digital skills. However many Age UKs and other voluntary organisations are already having difficulties meeting demand and maintaining funding for their services.



An Age UK offering a range of computer courses noted that some people have come to them in order to get help with tasks such as renewing a driving licence or applying for the HMRC Marriage Allowance. For some this acts as a spur to gaining digital skills, but others have no interest in learning to use the internet and simply need help to access a particular service.

As one Age UK Information and Advice Manager said ‘We want to provide this support but we are concerned about the pressure this puts on our service.’

# 02

## Support for those who are not online

In order to ensure that those who do not use the internet are not disadvantaged by digital transformation in the public and private sectors, we need three complementary approaches: greater support to increase digital inclusion, user-friendly technology and design, and appropriate alternative access for people who are not online.

The Government's current Digital Inclusion Strategy lays out the key barriers to digital inclusion – notably around a lack of access, basic digital skills, trust and motivation, and it sets out a range of actions to reduce the number of people who are digitally excluded. The strategy focuses on bringing together different sectors to deliver these actions and outlines an ambition to reduce digital exclusion so that the proportion of the adult population lacking basic digital skills falls from 21 per cent in 2013 to 9 per cent by 2020.

However even if this ambition is achieved there will still be 4.7 million people lacking digital skills and the strategy recognises that these people 'may never be able to gain basic digital capabilities, because of disabilities or basic literacy skills.'<sup>8</sup> And if people use the internet for some activities they may not feel confident or comfortable doing so to access public services.

All redesigned services will need to have appropriate assisted digital support in place before they can be used by the public. The Government Digital Service manual for departments creating digital services says assisted digital support should not be a paper based service but could be:

- Help to guide someone to use the digital service – for example by sitting alongside them in an office location or the user's home.
- A telephone service where the individual is helped to use the service themselves, or where they give information that is then typed into the system on their behalf.<sup>9</sup>

As part of the service people should be given help to gain digital skills so they will be more likely to access services alone in the future. The Digital Training and Support Framework will enable government departments to commission digital inclusion and assisted digital services rather than provide them directly. Suppliers will apply to be on the framework which departments can use to buy the support they need.

# Making assisted digital work

Age UK broadly supports the assisted digital approach but to meet people's needs the following should happen:

- Providers should ensure that people who are not online can access services in a way that suits them – this should include paper applications where appropriate. Choice and independence should be maximised.
- It is important that any move to encourage online access does not deter people from claiming support and take-up should be monitored.
- While individuals may choose to get help from family or friends, providers should recognise that this is not always possible or appropriate.
- We agree that people should be offered support to gain digital skills where they are willing and able to benefit from this, but this will not be right for everyone.
- Service providers should monitor the impact that digital services are having on advice agencies and if this is increasing demand they should work with the organisations to see what support they need.
- People should always be made aware of other options. For example information about, and access to, alternative ways of claiming the HMRC Marriage Allowance should have been available from the start.

Lastly it should be acknowledged that many people who are not online are perfectly capable of accessing services independently through other methods. To this end the term 'assisted digital' should be avoided and access to services for those who are not online should be described and promoted in a way that does not imply people are in need of help.

## Local authority services

Local authorities do not have the same requirement to set out an assisted digital strategy. However, we believe they should always clearly set out the different ways that services can be accessed and our views on the approach to assisted digital services apply equally to local authority services.

Many people who are not online are **perfectly capable of accessing services independently** through other methods.



## Helping people get online

Age UK has long worked to increase digital inclusion and many local Age UKs provide training and support.

As more services go online, this could drive people to learn digital skills, even if reluctantly at first. Having done so, they may discover other advantages to being online. For example, library staff have told us that as government and local authorities move more services online this has prompted people to seek their help to gain the skills to be able to access these. Local authorities also run initiatives to support residents, including older people, to gain digital skills.

Even if people are interested, providers of digital services need to recognise that people may need a considerable amount of support to gain sufficient skills and confidence to be able to access online services. The following two chapters look more generally at later life in a digital world and provide insights into the barriers to going online. In chapter 5 we look at approaches to increasing digital inclusion and ways to help people start to use, and continue to use, digital technology.

## The cost of support for consumers who are not online

Moving to digital services will provide substantial financial benefits for public service organisations especially if these are developed in a way that makes them easy to use and therefore maximises take-up.

We welcome the initiative to enable public sector organisations to commission digital inclusion and assisted digital support. However we believe the Government needs to be clearer about the savings that digital transformation will bring and how much of these will be invested in providing other ways to access services and support for increasing digital inclusion.

# 03

## The digital divide in later life

There is a range of national survey data about internet use and non-use but it is also important to look at the experiences of the people behind the figures. There is a big difference in the way that people live their lives depending on their use of technology.

# The national picture on internet use

Based on national data we know that around two-thirds of people aged 75 and over and three out of ten aged 65 to 74 do not use the internet. As set out below we also know that older men are more likely than older women to use the internet and better off groups are more likely to be digitally included.

Survey information about internet use is published regularly by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and the communications regulator Ofcom. As set out in the chart below, ONS figures show that while the proportion of older people in the UK who have not used the internet has fallen over the last few years, nearly a quarter (24 per cent) of people aged 65 to 74 and just over three-fifths (61 per cent) of people aged 75 and over have still never used the internet.<sup>10</sup> In comparison, less than 1 per cent of people aged 16 to 34 have never used the internet.

And not everyone who starts to use the internet continues to do so. While around two-fifths (39 per cent) of people aged 75 and over have used the internet at some point, this falls to a third (33 per cent) when people are asked if they have used it in the last three months. So around 6 per cent of people aged 75 and over have given up using the internet or do so very infrequently. A similar proportion (5 per cent) of people aged 65 to 74 have used the internet in the past but not in the last three months.

Internet use is also part of the annual Ofcom questionnaire on media use which asks whether people use a range of different devices to go online at home or elsewhere.<sup>11</sup> In line with the ONS figures on recent use, this finds three in ten (30 per cent) of people aged 65 to 74 and around two-thirds (67 per cent) of those aged 75 and over are non-users of the internet.

## Percentage who have never used the internet 2011–15: all adults and age 55+



# Who is more likely to be excluded?

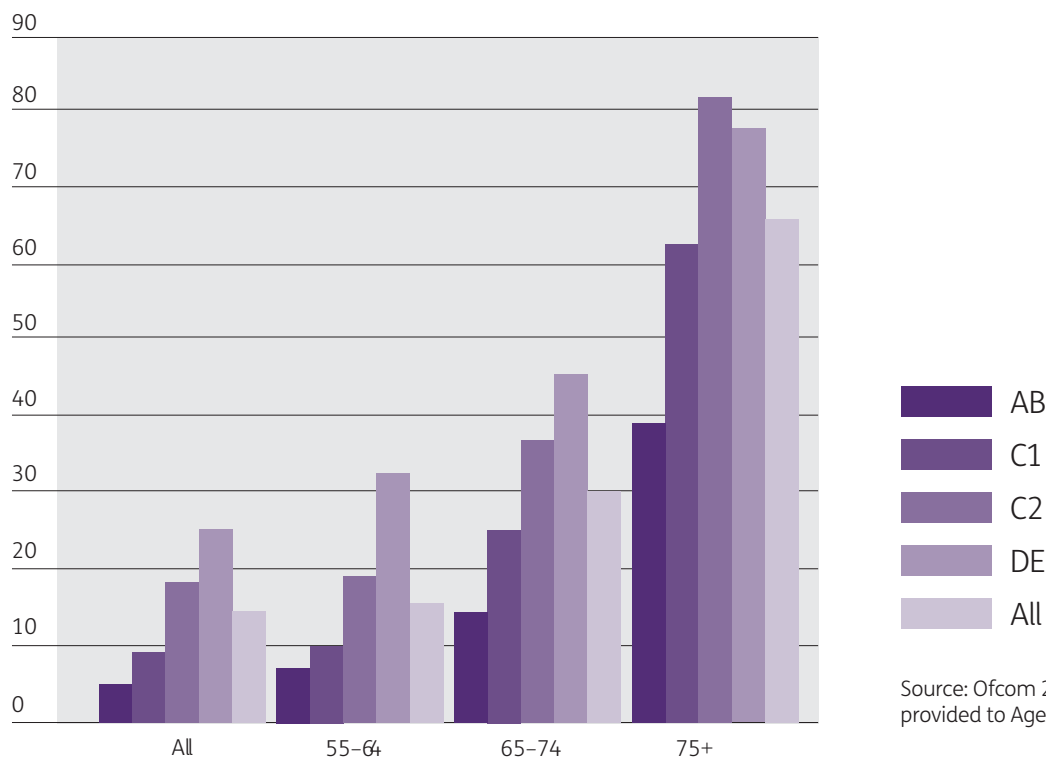
In looking at support needed, it is important to understand and target those less likely to use the internet to access information and services.

Older women are less likely to use the internet than older men. In 2015 around two in five (41 per cent) men aged 75 and over were recent internet users compared to just over a quarter (27 per cent) of women aged 75 and over. However there is little difference in the rates of internet use between men and women under the age of 65.<sup>12</sup>

Internet use is also linked to socio-economic group and the table below shows how this combines with age. So for example, around four out of five people aged 75 and over in groups C2 and DE do not use the internet compared to two out of five in the highest group.

Go ON UK, the digital skills charity, has published the findings of a study looking at digital capability across the UK. The data has been used to produce the Digital Exclusion Heatmap which gives details of access and digital skills by local authority area and shows how this varies across the country.<sup>13</sup>

## Percentage of each group who do not use the internet (2014)



Source: Ofcom 2015 – data provided to Age UK

## The people behind the figures

We used a range of ways to find out more about the impact that the internet has on the lives of users and non-users. These are summarised here and more information is given in the appendix.

- **Feedback from individuals and organisations**

This report draws on the views and experiences of individuals who have contacted us at a national or local level. It also includes feedback from a number of local Age UK staff running Information and Advice services or Digital Inclusion services and from other organisations working in this area.

- **Qualitative research**

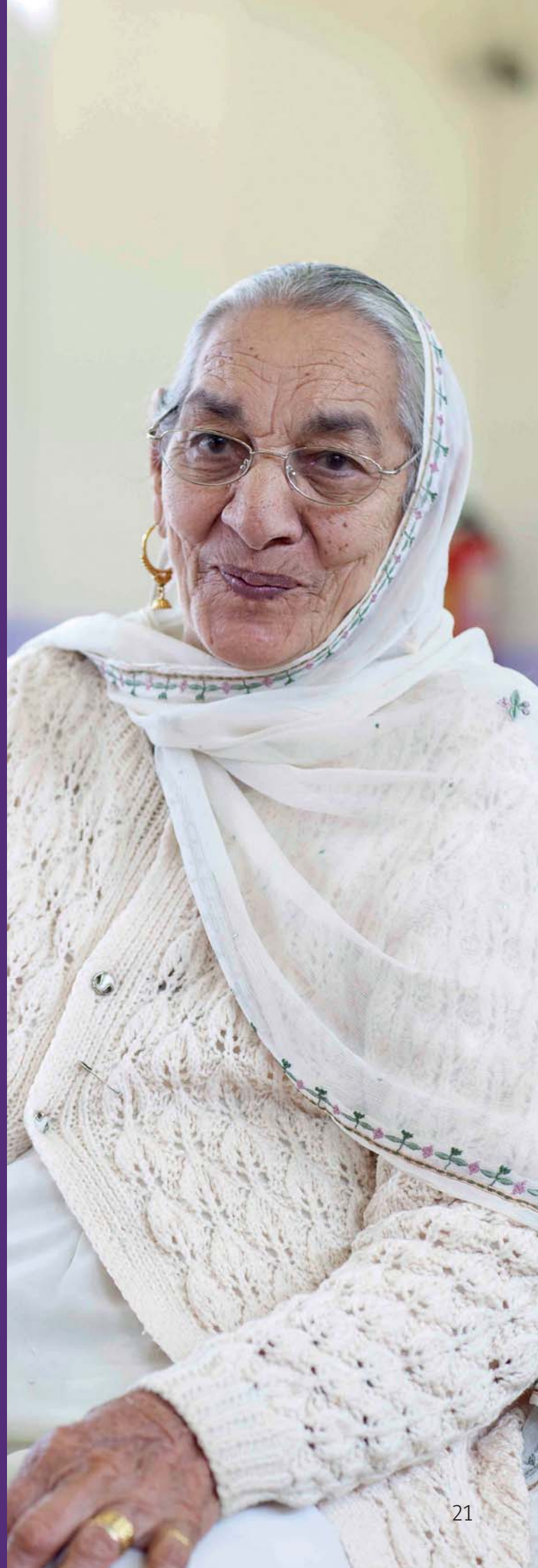
Age UK commissioned BritainThinks to carry out qualitative research with people aged 55 and over who are not online or who make very limited use of the internet. The research – published separately as *Life Offline* – explores how they live their lives currently and their views and feelings about living in an increasingly digital world.<sup>14</sup>

- **Age UK Internet Use Questionnaire**

This was distributed electronically and in paper form through age sector membership organisations and older people's forums. Nearly 950 people returned the questionnaire, the majority of whom use the internet. It is not, and was not intended to be, a representative survey but provides information and views about digital use and non-use.

- **Age UK's Engagement Panel**

This is one of Age UK's national engagement platforms and those who volunteer to participate can take part in surveys at home via telephone, post or online.



# Understanding life offline

Many who are not online say they are not interested in the internet. Although some feel this is starting to affect their lives, the barriers to getting online generally outweigh any perceived benefits.

This chapter looks at the views and experiences of older people who do not use the internet based on our qualitative research *Life Offline* carried out by BritainThinks, and the feedback we had from non-users who completed our Internet Use Questionnaire.

## A lack of interest

People who are not online do not generally feel there is anything lacking in their lives. Just over 100 people who completed our Internet Use Questionnaire did not use the internet and around two-thirds of these said they 'would rather do things without the internet' and/or they were 'not interested.' This is in line with national ONS data which shows that around three out of five (61 per cent) of non-users aged 65 and over in Great Britain say they don't need the internet.<sup>15</sup>

'I have a (dial) telephone and I can read and write – totally adequate and without stress and wasting time pushing buttons.'

**Internet Use Questionnaire, male 65–74**

'I find the internet and anything else connected completely unnecessary for life. I have lived a long and happy existence and will continue to do so. I am still active, alert and involved in things that matter. Long live the so called dinosaurs!'

**Internet Use Questionnaire, male 75–85**

## Main qualitative research findings

Our qualitative research provides some important insights into what lies behind such views. While we have called it *Life Offline*, this is our description, not that of the participants. For most they were simply living their lives in a way that was familiar to them. They were not necessarily opposed to the internet but faced major barriers to being online that outweighed any benefits.

The key barriers, which are explored further below and set out in more detail in the full research report, are:

- A lack of basic skills, knowledge and experience of the internet.
- Low to no 'top of mind' awareness that they are missing out by not being online – typically they felt satisfied with their life as it is and could not imagine what they would use the internet for.
- A perception that the internet is 'not for them' – while they might see advantages for some other people, it was not necessarily something for them at their life-stage.
- A strong feeling that using computers/the internet is very much outside their comfort zone.
- A feeling that the internet is an 'unsafe place.'
- A perception that the cost of equipment and internet connection were prohibitive, notwithstanding knowledge that you can save money shopping online.
- A feeling that using the internet could have disadvantages such as not getting out of the house, or reduced time meeting people face-to-face or talking on the phone.
- Not needing to be online because they could use the internet 'by proxy' through family, even though this had some disadvantages.

### **But there are concerns and frustrations among non-users**

While many non-users do not feel they want or need to use the internet, it is clear that there are times when people feel it is difficult living in an increasingly digital world.

The Internet Use Questionnaire asked those who were not online if they ever found it frustrating or difficult to do things because they did not use the internet. Around a third of the respondents said this happened either 'often' or 'sometimes' and some gave examples.

'Companies who do not any more give the telephone number of the company only the email... I don't use the internet at all. Then I feel (rightly or wrongly) that jaws drop when I say "I am not online and you cannot email me" – I feel that I am no longer wanted and have no further right to be on this earth – yes really.'

#### **Internet Use Questionnaire, male 65–74**

'It's a deliberate attempt by most official business and organisations to force everyone to use the wretched thing.'

#### **Internet Use Questionnaire, male 75–85**

While at face value, participants in our *Life Offline* qualitative research tended to see the internet as 'nice-to-have' rather than essential, with further discussion there emerged a feeling that the internet has started to encroach on their lives and that the increasing move to doing things online might mean that they were at a disadvantage.

One mentioned that since her GP surgery took online bookings it was harder for people who rang up to get appointments and others talked about shop assistants telling them to order the size they wanted online.

'I don't even use a computer. I feel so out of date right now, it's like you're going up a hill and everyone's jogging and you're lagging behind.'

#### **Life Offline qualitative research, male 65–74**





## **Internet by proxy**

Some of the participants in our qualitative research accessed the internet via friends and family. This support was often given (and accepted) willingly and seen as part of the general reciprocal support provided within families.

‘My son in law found everything out about the train tickets and that was alright – I feel fine about asking him to sort it, I take him a pork pie as a favour.’

**Life Offline qualitative research, female 65–75**

‘I do not access emails, I get my wife to do it, I am really not interested in computers.’

**Internet Use Questionnaire, male 65–74**

But not everyone has that support or feels comfortable asking. When the research groups started to discuss how they felt receiving help, some expressed negative emotions. Participants said they worried about being a nuisance or felt ashamed and embarrassed to ask. They talked about a lack of control and frustration at having to rely on others to complete a relatively simple task. People described how this made them feel using terms including ‘old-fashioned’, ‘stupid’ and ‘vulnerable’.

There were particular concerns about asking someone else to carry out online tasks that revealed personal information relating to their finances or health.

‘I feel horrible really, I’m having to ask someone to do it for me and I don’t like asking anyone to do anything for me – it’s your independence it’s gone, you feel embarrassed, asking your son to pay for something for you, or show you how to do something... I feel like such a dinosaur.’

**Life Offline qualitative research, male 55–65**

‘It makes you feel vulnerable, because you can’t do it yourself, and have to divulge a lot of your business to that individual.’

**Life Offline qualitative research, male 55–65**

In conclusion, while there are situations when people are able and happy to access the internet through friends and family, this is not always appropriate and can lead to people feeling uncomfortable and embarrassed at having to ask for help. More seriously, people could be put at risk of financial abuse if they hand over information such as bank account details to someone who is not trustworthy. It is therefore important that anyone providing an online service does not assume that people can always ask family or friends to access the service on their behalf.

# Understanding life online

People who use the internet told us it made things easier, quicker, more convenient and cheaper. It helped them keep in touch and meant they were better informed. For most it was a part of everyday life and some said they could not imagine life without it. A minority had concerns or were ambivalent about its impact.

## Online activities

While the focus of this report has so far been on those who do not use the internet, for many older people it is a very important and positive part of life. People aged 55 and over in Great Britain are most likely to be using the internet for email and finding information about goods and services.<sup>16</sup> The next most common activities include: reading online news and magazines, internet banking, using services related to travel, looking up information, and, particularly for the 55–64 age group, social networking. The national picture is also reflected by people who completed our Internet Use Questionnaire. Those online used the internet for a range of activities linked to:

- social contact – email, social media, Skype
- day-to-day activities – shopping, finding out information for practical purposes, banking, administration
- general interest – looking for information, hobbies and interests
- entertainment – TV, music, games
- looking into and arranging travel
- work and voluntary work.

As part of the questionnaire, we asked participants an open question about the difference that the internet makes to their life. Many made comments and the great majority were positive. Frequently people talked about how the internet made things easier, quicker, more convenient and cheaper. It helped them keep in touch with friends and family and meant they were better informed. Some also said that it made life more interesting and fun.

## It's just a way of life

For many participants the internet was simply a part of their normal everyday life – for some it was difficult to imagine life without it.

*‘If I did not have internet access I would feel totally lost. It is an essential part of my life and could not manage my affairs so easily without it.’*

### Internet Use Questionnaire, male 75–84

*‘I cannot live without it. It was cut off for two days earlier this year, and it was like not having electricity. Free access in M&S is a poor substitute!’*

### Internet Use Questionnaire, male 65–74

## **Digital adopters**

Whereas younger people have been brought up with computers and the internet this is not the case for the people we engaged with for this report. They were all aged 50 or older – some much older – so had all experienced life before and after the internet. Some will have been familiar with digital technology during their working life, others learned the skills when they were older. A few comments referred to newly discovered benefits or highlighted the difference starting to use the internet had made.

‘It is an endless source of information, communication and entertainment. It brings the world to me and I love it.’

**Internet Use Questionnaire, female aged 92**

‘I was reluctant to use the internet for a long time, my son persuaded me. Now I love it, wish I had started earlier, it is so useful and enjoyable.’

**Internet Use Questionnaire, female 75–84**

## **But some users were ambivalent**

While most of the comments we received from respondents who used the internet were positive, around a fifth noted one or more barriers to using it more. These issues are explored later. A few expressed ambivalence or a grudging acceptance that they needed to use it.

‘It is useful up to a point. I spent many hours using it at work – now it’s a case of having to use it. It is more a case of remaining in control of it rather than the other way round.’

**Internet Use Questionnaire, male 50–64**

‘Would be nigh on impossible to cope without it – which is not to say I like it.’

**Age UK’s Engagement Panel**

# 04

## Exploring the benefits and barriers

People who are not online face a range of barriers to using the internet and do not necessarily value the potential benefits that users describe.

## Social inclusion and isolation

Keeping in contact with friends and family was seen as one of the most important benefits of the internet by many who completed our questionnaire. It was also recognised as an advantage by some *Life Offline* qualitative research participants.

‘Skype is amazing – I can talk to my son and daughter in Australia and New Zealand at no cost, and see them. It makes them feel so much nearer.’

**Age UK’s Engagement Panel**

However some who are not online (and a few who are) commented on the negative effects of digital communication and emphasised the importance of people getting out and about, having some exercise, and a chance to meet people.

‘As I live contentedly on my own I prefer to have human contact with people rather than inhuman machines.’

**Internet Use Questionnaire, female 85+**

‘Sometimes I meet people [shopping] I haven’t arranged to, you bump into them, stand and chat.’

**Life Offline qualitative research, female 65–75**

‘With the internet you lose personal contact with people, you do even with your family because they email you or text you and you think it would be nice to hear your voice.’

**Life Offline qualitative research, female 75+**

There were also general concerns that increased use of technology made people, particular younger people, anti-social.

‘Your grandchildren come in use their phones, they don’t talk to you and apart from being rude, I can’t believe they’ve got such an interest in this thing.’

**Life Offline qualitative research, male 55–65**

## Time and convenience

Many internet users who completed our questionnaire said the internet saves time and makes life easier but non-users were generally happy with how they lived their lives.

The comments below are typical of many internet users.

‘Convenience – cuts time – speeds communication – makes life easier – peace of mind to know you have immediate contact with others.’

**Internet Use Questionnaire, male 75–84**

‘It makes many aspects of daily life so accessible. I live in a semi-rural location and it saves me countless trips into town.’

**Internet Use Questionnaire, male 65–74**

Participants in our *Life Offline* qualitative research recognised these benefits but tended to see them as more relevant to younger people with jobs, families and many demands on their time.

‘People lead such busy lives now, the internet is so much quicker.’

**Life Offline qualitative research, female 65–75**

They did not feel the same pressure on their own time or the need to carry out practical tasks out of normal office hours. In general they undertook activities such as shopping and banking based on routines that they had established over time and considered to be the most convenient and easiest for them.

‘I’m quite happy with the time it takes... it takes as long as you want it to... you don’t take it into consideration really, it doesn’t matter now you’re retired.’

**Life Offline qualitative research, female 65–75**

While there were negative aspects to carrying out their day-to-day activities offline, such as queues or carrying heavy shopping, these were generally accepted as just part of getting things done rather than a reason to start doing tasks online.

And a few who filled in our questionnaire noted that the internet could also waste time.

‘Too time consuming and addictive. Better things to do than waste my time tweeting and texting.’

**Internet Use Questionnaire, male 65–74**

‘Time saver but can be a time waster.’

**Internet Use Questionnaire, male 75–84**

## Costs and savings

Using the internet and digital technology were highlighted as both an expense and a way of reducing costs.

Many questionnaire participants told us they managed their finances, saved money and could get better deals online, and also referred to cheaper communication for example spending less on postage and telephone calls.

Some non-users who completed the questionnaire objected to the higher costs they could face.

‘I prefer to speak face to face with people when I buy anything. It is totally wrong that we pay higher prices just because we use cash or cheques e.g. gas, electric or trains.’

**Internet Use Questionnaire, female 75–84**

*Life Offline* qualitative research participants also recognised that it was possible to get better financial deals using the internet particularly for things like holidays and buying expensive items, and some felt this was unfair. However this did not seem to provide sufficient motivation to make them want to get online. They preferred doing things in the familiar way and there were major security concerns about paying for things online (see page 32).

‘You can see the quality [shopping in person] and sometimes you get bargains you can’t see on the internet.’

**Life Offline qualitative research, male 75+**

In contrast the cost of equipment and internet access were raised as barriers by some of those who took part in the qualitative research or filled in the questionnaire.

‘Unfortunately, if you need things or to enquire about things everyone expects you to have the internet. Even contacting the doctor. Therefore I could not experience a comfortable life without internet access. The cost of obtaining internet is far too expensive and eats into my disposable income tremendously.’

**Internet Use Questionnaire, male 50–64**

‘Convenient but frustrating when it goes wrong and expensive to put right.’

**Internet Use Questionnaire, male 75–84**

‘First of all you’ve got to know how to use a computer, then you’ve got to go and buy one. They’re so expensive... you’ve got to go into debt to buy one.’

**Life Offline qualitative research, female 65–75**

There was also a view that moving services online saved money for the organisation not the individuals.

‘People do not realise that costs wise internet providers, banks, phone providers etc are the ones who benefit financially not the user.’

**Internet Use Questionnaire, male 75–84**

While clearly there are costs in getting equipment and an internet connection, the research participants were not necessarily aware of what these are. With a cheap internet package, and taking into account potential savings, as mentioned later it may be that the expense is not as great as people assume.

## Security, fraud and error

Some non-users who completed our Internet Use Questionnaire highlighted concerns about fraud and security as a reason for not using the internet and some users were also concerned about this.

Security also came up a number of times in the *Life Offline* qualitative research. There was a strong feeling among participants that they would not feel safe banking online or shopping and entering their credit card details. In some situations relatives had bought goods for them online and they reimbursed them in cash. People were concerned about fraud but also that they might make a mistake that would be hard to correct.

‘But I wouldn’t do any banking because as I said to you before I’m not that confident. Because you’re dealing with money – that just frightens me. Lots of friends of mine said don’t buy anything on the internet.’

**Life Offline qualitative research, female 75+**

Some of the comments from the Internet Use Questionnaire reflected similar concerns.

‘The internet is not secure... an unwary click on the wrong email could cause untold damage. It could allow a virus into my computer or access to my financial affairs.’

**Internet Use Questionnaire, female 65–74**

‘Online shopping is great for me living in a rural village. Do not feel secure enough to do online banking.’

**Internet Use Questionnaire, male 65–74**

## Lack of knowledge, skills and support

The *Life Offline* qualitative research participants had little knowledge or confidence in using computers. Those with no experience of the internet expressed a lack of basic skills such as not being able to use a keyboard, mouse or internet search engine.

Among questionnaire participants who did not use the internet around a half said one of the reasons was because ‘I don’t know how to use it’, and over a third said it was ‘too complicated’. In response to a question about what would help them start to use the internet around a quarter said ‘help to learn’ and a similar proportion said if there was ‘ongoing support when things go wrong.’ One woman after ticking the box to say she was aged over 85 added ‘and keen to learn!’ So clearly some participants, albeit a minority, were interested in gaining skills.

However finding, and getting to, a suitable course is not always easy. One of the *Life Offline* participants said:

‘I paid to go on a crinkly, silver surfer type thing, and I paid, but it all moved too quick and I couldn’t keep up, it was useless.’

**Life Offline qualitative research, female 65–75**



Another woman we contacted after she had returned the questionnaire, explained that she and her husband had attended two terms of a free course that was advertised in the local paper but although it was for beginners they got very little help and didn't feel they had learned anything. They had also put their name down for courses in the library but had not heard anything so had now signed up for a beginner's adult education course.

One man in responding to the Internet Use Questionnaire noted that he did not use the internet because 'There is nobody available to teach me how to use the internet, with patience.' He had attended a one-off taster session run by Age UK in his area but they did not have the funding or resources to provide ongoing sessions.

Even if there are suitable courses there may be barriers in attending due to lack of transport, health problems or caring responsibilities.

'I am a full time carer I cannot attend courses or talks because I am tied to my home.'

**Internet Use Questionnaire, male 85+**

Among those who used the internet but gave barriers to using it more 'If I had ongoing support for example when things go wrong' was the most common response given by over half, while a third ticked 'If I had help to learn about it'.

Half of the participants who did not use the internet said one of the reasons was because **'I don't know how to use it,'** and over a third said it was **'too complicated.'**

'In many ways life is easier but I would like help when things go wrong and I have no-one to ask.'

**Internet Use Questionnaire, male 75–84**

'When things go wrong I have not got a clue.'

**Internet Use Questionnaire, male 65–74**

For some people family and friends were on hand to help out but others either did not have anyone to help or their relatives were not nearby. And family members are not always the best teachers.

'My IT knowledge is hit and miss with my IT tutor – my 8 yr old great grandson now living 300 miles away I have great difficulty.'

**Internet Use Questionnaire, male 75–84**

'My daughter, she's such a quick learner, she says, "how many times am I going to have to tell you?" I feel like an idiot.'

**Life Offline qualitative research, female 55–65**

## The internet and disability

For some people with physical, sensory or cognitive impairments, digital technology can be difficult to use. However the internet can also make life easier.

A Government Office for Science report summarises a number of studies which highlight difficulties in using technology due to physical impairments, deteriorating eye sight and cognitive decline.<sup>17</sup> Appropriately designed, and in some cases specialist, equipment can help overcome some of these difficulties but as the Government Digital Inclusion strategy notes, the loss of physical or mental capacity is one reason why some people who have used the internet in the past stop doing so.

On the other hand digital technology and the internet can bring benefits to disabled people, for example, in terms of social contact and carrying out day-to-day activities as shown by comments from people who completed our questionnaire.

‘I am nearly 82 years of age, the less mobile I become the more I use it.’

**Internet Use Questionnaire, male 75–84**

‘I can’t hear much and can’t use the phone, I communicate by email and text only.’

**Internet Use Questionnaire, female 65–74**

One section of the older population who we did not learn much about from our research and questionnaire were those living with dementia or cognitive impairment. One of the questionnaire participants remarked that using the internet helped him find information when his memory failed, on the other hand other older people have told us about difficulties remembering passwords and other information needed to use computers.

While cognitive decline is not an inevitable part of ageing, and there is considerable variability between people, on average there are age-related declines across the population in particular with certain functions.<sup>18</sup> Many people will experience greater difficulties with their memory and with their processing (or thinking) speed. It is therefore likely that people with some cognitive decline will find it harder to learn and retain digital skills.

## Access if someone does not have the internet at home

While nationally over 90 per cent of people under the age of 55 have internet access at home, this falls to just 40 per cent among those aged 75 or over.<sup>19</sup>

Those who have some digital skills but do not have the internet at home can access the internet in a range of public places. For example, most areas of the country have libraries with computer access where staff may be able to provide support. As many older people visit libraries or attend activities there, it can be a good place to introduce people to technology. There are also other organisations that can provide access and digital support.

However there will be older people who have difficulty getting to somewhere with internet access – perhaps because they have health problems or they live in an isolated area, or there is limited public transport. And there may be an issue about privacy if people need to provide personal information – for example to make an online purchase or applying for a social security benefit.

All but a couple of internet users who completed our questionnaire had access at home. However one man who did not said:

‘I only have access to the internet at my local library. However, due to Government cuts... it will be reducing the number of days it is open.’

**Internet Use Questionnaire, male 65–74**

One local Age UK that offers computer training said they wanted to expand the sessions they ran in the library but was told this was not possible due to the demand for computers from unemployed people who have to search for jobs online.

On the other hand representatives from the Society of Chief Librarians pointed out that as more people use tablets and smartphones and can take advantage of free wi-fi in libraries (which is already widely available in libraries and should be fully available across England by March 2016) this frees up library computers for those who need them. Retired people are often able to be more flexible in their library visits to avoid the busiest times.

## Access and broadband speed

For some people who returned our questionnaire the frustration was not around their own abilities or interest in using the internet but broadband access in the area where they lived, particularly in rural areas.

Reception for mobile internet is also poor in some areas. Many local Age UKs can offer a home visiting service to provide information and help with applications. Some have laptops which they can take on visits but in some areas they cannot use these for online applications because the signal is poor or service too slow.

While broadband access is not something considered further in this report it is clearly essential that there is universal access to fast broadband as more services move online.

## Overview of benefits and barriers

Those running initiatives to increase digital inclusion need to take into account the range of barriers that prevent people getting online and the factors that are most likely to encourage interest.

Many older people who do not use the internet do not feel this is something lacking in their lives and when asked also highlight issues such as a lack of digital skills and concerns about security. And while those who use the internet often point to advantages such as convenience, saving time and getting cheaper deals, these are not necessarily seen in the same way by non-users. For example, saving money online does not appear to be a great incentive to learning to use the internet, but on the other hand there are concerns about the cost of getting online. Keeping in contact with friends and family is seen as a major benefit for users and recognised as an advantage by some who do not use the internet. However they also point to negative aspects such as loss of personal contact and not speaking to people face-to-face.



# 05

## Getting people online

---

The speed of change requires renewed efforts to help people get online, and stay online, with adequate and sustainable funding. Building on good practice, initiatives need to find ways to engage people's interest, provide tailored training, ensure there is follow up support, and address concerns about security and costs. We also need equipment and services which are affordable, well designed and easy to use.

## Support and training

Developing digital skills brings benefits to the individuals involved and to government and others who want people to use their online services. Age UK has long been committed to increasing digital inclusion in later life.

We are a partner of Go ON UK, the UK's digital skills alliance, and many local Age UKs across the country run services that help people learn digital skills and benefit from using the internet. There are around 165 local Age UK organisations in England and just over a half indicate that they provide digital skills training and support. This is done in a variety of ways, for example: short courses for individuals or small groups, one-to-one tailored training, home visits, training around a particular activity, regular drop in sessions, and taster and promotional events. Some initiatives are specifically focussed on gaining skills, some provide access to equipment with help on hand when needed, while others combine social and digital elements.

Age UK is part of a consortium led by Digital Unite which has received funding from the Big Lottery Fund to test a community-based 'saturation' approach in two geographical areas to increase digital inclusion among people aged 65 and over. This will involve working with a wide range of organisations, businesses and networks, using an approach based on community outreach and a network of digital champions. There is already a lot of good practice and useful resources which this new project will draw on and which already informs much of the work that is currently being carried out. We cannot cover it all here but in this section we look at how some of the barriers discussed earlier can be addressed based on feedback from individuals and Age UK staff working in this area.

### Getting people interested

Some people will seek out support in gaining digital skills perhaps because they want to maintain contact with grandchildren, pursue a hobby or just because they are interested to know what it is all about. Others will reluctantly ask about training, maybe due to pressure from family members – sometimes armed with the tablet they were given for Christmas and cannot use. But many older people, like those in our research, are not sufficiently interested in learning digital skills to proactively contact Age UK or another organisation. Organisations therefore need to reach out and engage people.



#### **Six Age UKs took part in a project called *Down Memory Lane*.**

They ran a range of pop up sessions in public places showing people the wealth of information on the internet – such as old films, music and local photos engaging people in a fun and entertaining way. These proved popular and acted as a hook to taking part in taster and experience sessions.<sup>20</sup>

## Meeting different needs

Providers have to take into account individual needs and preferences. While some people enjoy being part of a small class, a number of Age UK staff managing projects told us that many people need one-to-one training tailored to their interests, capabilities, previous experience and pace of learning. In some cases support needs to be through a home visit.

Some Age UKs offer a course of around five or more sessions covering basics including security. After that, while some people decide it is not for them, many will be interested in learning more – for example, gaining skills in specific areas such as digital photography or social media. Or after the initial training, they may then practice their skills and come back for refresher sessions at a later date or to develop new skills. One digital manager said new learners were often very wary about providing financial information but once they were more confident might come back to learn about shopping online.

Particularly where people are starting to have difficulties with their memory, it can be important to go over the same things a number of times. Trainers understand this and patience is an important quality – whereas relatives, however well-meaning, may not be as understanding! People are sometimes given simple step-by-step written instructions that they can take away. One Age UK encourages people to keep a learning journal where they record what they have done in a way that will help them remember for the next time.

## Providing ongoing support

As discussed earlier older people are often concerned about how to get affordable and reliable help when needed. This could be in setting up systems, dealing with problems with an internet connection or equipment, help if they get viruses, or difficulties with particular websites or programmes. Technically minded family members may be able to help but are not always on hand. To address these issues some Age UKs are able to offer help with problems either in their offices or through home visits.

## Try before you buy

Participants in the *Life Offline* qualitative research spoke about computers as the main way to access the internet whereas many new learners find tablets easier and more intuitive to use. However it is important that people have the products that suit them. People worry about going to a store and being sold something more expensive than they need or can afford, or feeling intimidated by very knowledgeable, often young, staff using terms they do not understand. Some Age UKs can provide information about the sort of products that would meet people's needs and they may have a range of computers and tablets that people can test or be able to lend equipment to use at home for a trial period. Such initiatives give people a good idea what they need before they buy.

## Costs

As discussed earlier the cost of equipment and an internet connection can be a concern – although sometimes this may be more expensive than they assume. As with choosing equipment, getting a broadband package that meets someone's needs is important. One man who completed the Internet Use Questionnaire runs weekly sessions in a local church hall on a voluntary basis helping people gain digital skills. He told us that he often comes across people who are paying higher telephone bills than they need to. So sometimes he can help them get a package including the internet for around about the same cost – or even lower – than they were previously paying for telephone alone.

However there will be some people who will find the costs difficult to meet. While there are places such as libraries and voluntary organisations where people can get free access this is not as convenient as using it at home especially if people have difficulty getting out – for example due to mobility problems or caring responsibilities. Given the link between digital exclusion and socio-economic group some people may need financial support to get online.

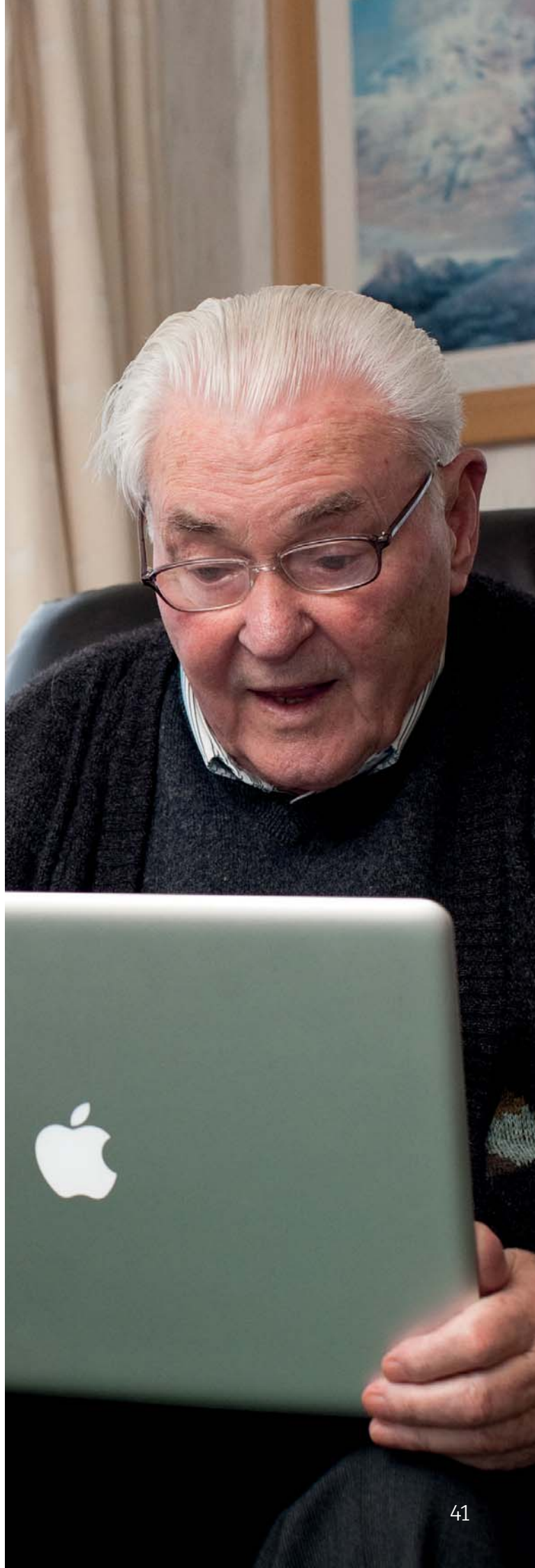


## Sustainable support services

Funding digital inclusion services is an ongoing issue for local voluntary organisations who often spend considerable amounts of time and energy applying for grants and other sources of funding in order to maintain services. Often support is only for short-term projects. Many Age UK services rely on volunteers but there are still considerable costs involved in running services including making sure volunteers have appropriate training, checks and support.

When Age UKs have funding to run digital support services they can provide these free of charge but in other cases they may have to make modest fees for training or technical support. Fees contribute to, but do not necessarily meet all of the costs of running a service. Some older people may be happy to contribute but organisations are aware that the cost may deter some people. One Age UK told us that they had dropped charges having found that the numbers applying for digital training fell when they were introduced. However having lost an important funding stream they are now considering how to maintain the service.

In conclusion, sustainable and adequate funding is essential for Age UKs and other organisations to provide ongoing digital training and support. There is a role for government support given the efficiency savings that can be achieved and private sector organisations can also play their part in supporting initiatives. Go ON UK has partners from the private sector and some Age UK digital inclusion projects have been sponsored by private companies.



## Improving technology and design

Easy to use equipment and websites benefit us all but particularly those who are trying to get to grips with using technology.

A key theme of the Government Digital Service is that those responsible for the digital by default services should 'Build services so good that people prefer to use them'.<sup>21</sup>

User testing and ongoing review and improvement is part of the process. This approach should be part of the development of all websites and technology, and applies equally to public service and private providers.

Some of the feedback we had to our questionnaire on internet use highlighted the difficulties some people have in finding their way round websites or using equipment.

'Some of the websites are poorly constructed so that it is not always easy to navigate the site to where you need to be... I often think the designers have been lazy or do not put themselves in the seat of the end user who is not a technical whizkid!'

**Internet Use Questionnaire, female 65–74  
– who had previously worked in IT**

'Hard to access or find the relevant part of a web site I am searching. Also unable to understand how to use my laptop fully as the jargon and symbols used make no sense to me.'

**Internet Use Questionnaire, male 65–74**

Research by Age UK London looked at how easy it was for older people living in London to find local information online about topics such as health, public transport, housing, parking and roads, and social care and benefits. As part of this study they timed 30 older people who had a basic level of computer literacy to carry out 11 tasks on the websites of public bodies. There was a wide variation with one individual completing all 11 tasks in less than two minutes while another took nearly 30 minutes to find the answer to just four questions. People found some sites easier to use than others and in general those over the age of 70 tended to have more difficulty. One of the report's recommendations is to involve older people in the design and testing of websites.

In conclusion while there should always be offline options, the easier it is for people to use websites and online services, the more people will choose to do so. Those designing equipment, websites and online services should work to ensure these are easy to use and suitable for those with limited digital skills or have specific needs. Systems should be tested with users and reviewed on an ongoing basis

## Going forward

As set out in this chapter there is much that can be done to help people benefit from digital technology and increasingly people entering later life will have used the internet at work or elsewhere.

However technology is always changing. For example people not only need to learn how to use a computer or tablet, they need to update their skills regularly. One woman who completed our questionnaire explained that she had used a computer when she was at work but only for the specific tasks she had been taught to do. Now she was feeling 'left behind' when she saw the computers and phones her grandchildren used.

We have seen earlier that around 6 per cent of people aged 75 and over have used the internet but not recently. We need to explore the reasons behind this. For example is it due to lack of interest, not keeping up with technology, or increasing disability? With appropriate support and easy to use technology it may be possible to help people retain skills. We must continue to work to increase digital inclusion among older people who are able, and want, to benefit from using the internet. However as emphasised throughout this report Age UK believes it is also important to ensure that older people who do not use the internet are able to access goods and services in a way that suits them and not made to feel like second class citizens.

# Appendix

---

Information for this report was collected in a range of different ways.

# Ways used to gather information

## **Life Offline qualitative research**

Age UK commissioned BritainThinks to carry out qualitative research with older people who are not online or who make very limited use of the internet. There were four discussion groups with people aged 55 to 74 and five in-depth interviews with people aged 75 or over.

The research explored a range of questions including:

- What day-to-day life is like without using the internet?
- How older people think and feel about not being online in an increasingly digital world and the implications for them?
- What their reactions would be to services moving online and what support they would need.

The full report is available on Age UK's website.

## **Age UK Internet Use Questionnaire**

This questionnaire was distributed electronically and in paper form through age sector membership organisations and older people's organisations. It asked about internet use and activities. Those who did not use the internet were asked to indicate the reasons for this and all participants were asked what (if anything) would encourage them to start using the internet or to use it more. Non-users were asked if they ever found it frustrating or difficult to do things because they did not use the internet while users were asked what difference the internet makes to their lives.

Just under 950 responses were received. Although this is a large number of responses it is important to note that it is not, and was not intended to be, representative. Many received the questionnaire electronically so by definition were online and a large proportion of responses came from members of two organisations – the Civil Service Pensioners' Alliance and the National Association of Retired Police Officers. Overall around nine out of ten used the internet. Around three-quarters of respondents were male and half were aged 65 to 74. Although the survey is not representative, it provides a range of useful information and insights about the impact of the internet on the lives of people aged 50 and over who use it, and about the views of those who are not online.

## **Age UK's Engagement Panel**

Age UK's Engagement Panel is one of Age UK's national engagement platforms and those who volunteer to participate can take part at home via telephone, post or online on a regular basis. The March 2015 survey asked members of Age UK's Engagement Panel if 'advances in technology, such as internet, smart phones, tablets/iPads, Skype and email has improved your own life' and why panel members feel that way.

# References

- 1 *The Communications Market Report*, Ofcom, Aug 2015.
- 2 *Internet Users 2015*, ONS, May 2015.
- 3 *Summer Budget 2015*, HMT, 2015.
- 4 [www.gov.uk/service-manual/assisted-digital](http://www.gov.uk/service-manual/assisted-digital)
- 5 *Transforming local public services using technology and digital tools and approaches*, Local Government Association, 2014.
- 6 [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)
- 7 *Income-related benefits: estimates of take-up – Financial Year 2013/14 (experimental)*, DWP, 2015.
- 8 [www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-digital-inclusion-strategy/government-digital-inclusion-strategy](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-digital-inclusion-strategy/government-digital-inclusion-strategy)
- 9 [www.gov.uk/service-manual/assisted-digital](http://www.gov.uk/service-manual/assisted-digital)
- 10 *Internet Users 2015*, ONS, May 2015.
- 11 *Adults' media use and attitudes*, Ofcom, May 2015.
- 12 *Internet Users*, 2015, ONS, May 2015.
- 13 [www.go-on.co.uk](http://www.go-on.co.uk)
- 14 *Life Offline – What life is like for older people who don't use the internet*, A report prepared by BritainThinks on behalf of Age UK, 2015.
- 15 Age UK analysis of ONS *Opinions and Lifestyle Questionnaire*, Internet Access Module, 2014.
- 16 *Internet Access Households and Individuals 2015*, ONS, Aug 2015.
- 17 *What are the likely changes in society and technology which will impact upon the ability of older adults to maintain social (extra-familial) networks of support now, in 2025 and in 2040?* Foresight, Government Office for Science, 2015.
- 18 *Dementia and cognitive decline – A review of the evidence*, Age UK, 2014.
- 19 *The Communications Market Report*, Ofcom, Aug 2015.
- 20 *Down Memory Lane – A Project Level Evaluation*, Age UK, 2014.
- 21 [www.gov.uk/service-manual](http://www.gov.uk/service-manual)
- 22 *Tell me! Improving information-provision for older Londoners*, Age UK London, 2015.



## **Age UK**

Tavis House  
1-6 Tavistock Square  
London WC1H 9NA

**0800 169 80 80**

**[www.ageuk.org.uk](http://www.ageuk.org.uk)**

Age UK is a charitable company limited by guarantee and registered in England and Wales (registered charity number 1128267 and registered company number 6825798). Registered address: Tavis House, 1-6 Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9NA. Age UK and its subsidiary companies and charities form the Age UK Group, dedicated to helping more people love later life. ID202857 11/15