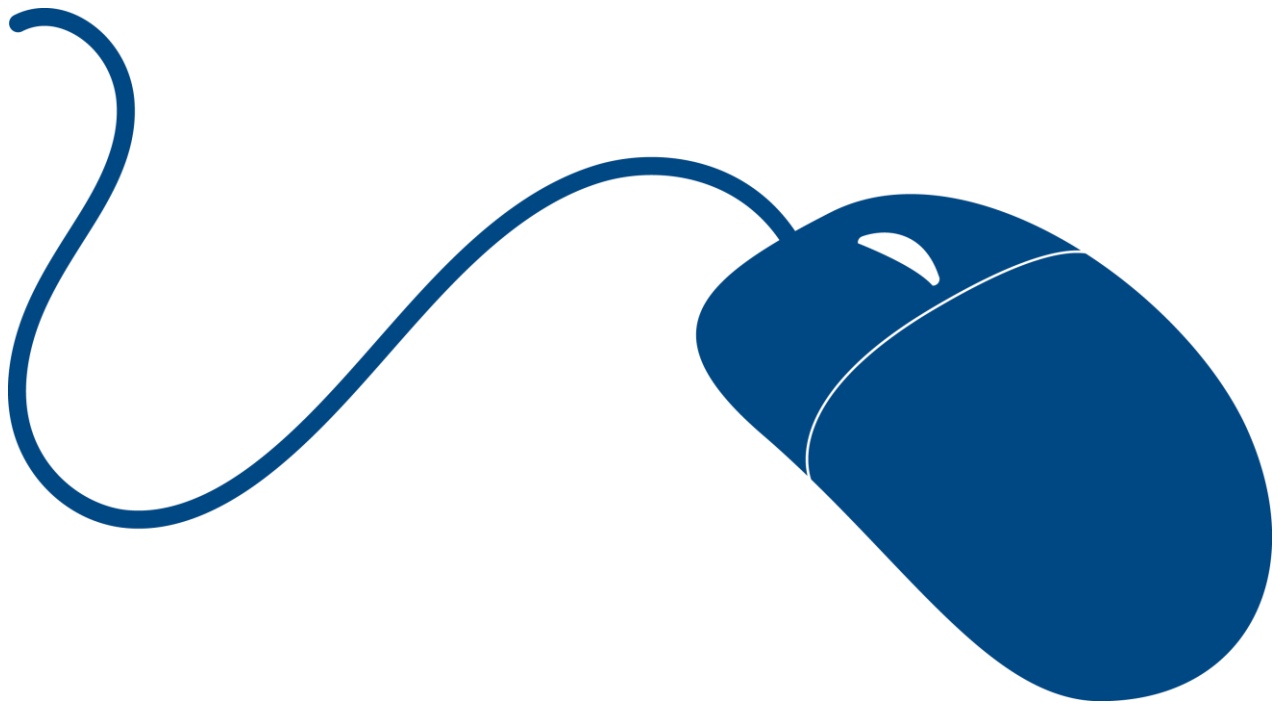


The digital divide

Nottinghamshire Citizens Advice research survey



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Nottinghamshire Citizens Advice Research Survey

The digital divide

Summary and recommendations

- Vulnerable groups and individuals need help and support if they are to be able to access facilities and information that is only available to those who can use the internet
- Support and training must be tailored to the needs of those who do not have access at present
- Adequate funding will be required if the voluntary sector is to play a part in such training

Background

The Citizens Advice Research and Campaigns Forum in Nottinghamshire meets to share information, carry out joint research, and to co-operate on local campaigns. This research investigates access to the internet amongst our clients.

The research was carried out by Citizens Advice in Ashfield, Newark, Nottingham & District, Ollerton, Retford and Worksop. We are grateful for the experience and knowledge gained from the research previously carried out by CABroxtowe. Much of north Nottinghamshire is a rural area which has poor or no internet access, although this should improve as Better Broadband for Nottinghamshire is rolled out.

The topic of ease of access to the internet by CAB clients was chosen because:

- It was perceived by all participants that the provision of services over the internet was an increasing problem. Other options such as face to face or telephone advice or help are decreasing as increased efficiency is sought by the public, private and voluntary sectors
- The Government is strongly in favour of people getting all their information from gov.uk and then communicating with HMRC or DWP through websites
- People who use websites or automated telephone systems need to be capable of applying general information to their own circumstances

- As Universal Credit (UC) is introduced in stages throughout Nottinghamshire, applicants have virtually no choice but to use the internet. It is unlikely that computers in libraries will be of help because of the time taken for an application and the fact that an application cannot be saved when partly completed and returned to later. This means that applicants either have to have their own access, or to use a DWP computer
- Those claiming Jobseekers' Allowance or UC will be expected to make job applications as set out in their Jobseekers' Agreement or Claimant Commitment and will be at a disadvantage if they do not have their own access to the internet. Claimants cannot afford bus fares to visit a library frequently even where bus services are available
- Fewer sources of support are available for vulnerable clients – for example, Nottinghamshire County Council has abolished their Welfare Rights department. Those most affected are clients with mental or physical problems which affect their concentration, learning difficulties, poor literary skills (particularly if jargon rather than plain English is used) and those for whom English is a second language.
- Increasingly clients need the internet to get the best financial deal, for example to use comparison web sites or to get discounts from energy providers

Our concern was that there is now a digital divide between those who have access to the internet and the skills to navigate it, whether by him or herself or with the help of family and friends, and those who do not. This research was to see if that concern was justified. As UC is introduced for clients with more complex problems, the strain on advice providers could be considerable. We noted that Citizens Advice nationally had already commissioned three pilots in areas where UC had already gone live. They had found that 66% of clients were not able to get advice and manage their benefit claims.

Survey method

The survey was carried out from 5 – 29 May 2015. Clients in reception were asked to complete the form while waiting to see an assessor who would determine the level of help they would need from the bureau.

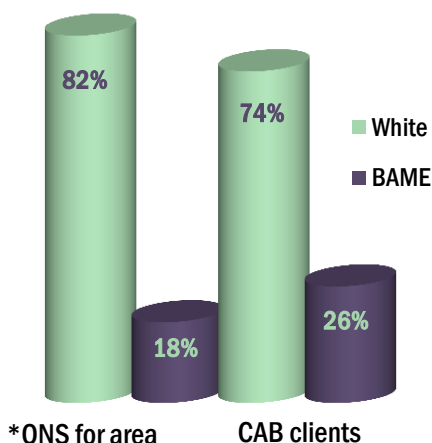
Citizens Advice clients

CA clients differ in some ways from the general population. Older people, who have retired, may have less change in their lives once they do not have employment problems and their income is subject to less change than those of working age. They may consult advice services specifically for the over 50s. Younger people often use advice services aimed at them, such as those provided by student unions. The better off, especially those short of time, may pay for advice. They may also be more experienced at getting and interpreting information from the internet.

Many of our clients, for a wide variety of reasons, find complex information in English difficult.

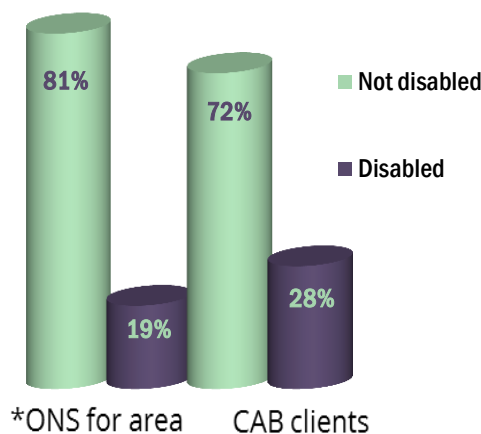
As examples of these differences, the following graphs compare the ethnicity and disability profiles of Citizens Advice Nottingham & District's clients in Nottingham City, Gedling and Rushcliffe. The profiles will vary in other parts of the county.

Breakdown by ethnicity



* Office of National Statistics

Breakdown by disability



Our results

The bulk of replies came from those in the age group 25 - 64 (see table C2 in Appendix). For those in this age group, 97 of the 319 (30%) people who answered this question did not have access, and 222 (70%) did. The only age group in which those who did not have access was greater than those who did was the 65+ group. Of the 41 in this group who responded, 24 (58%) had no access and 17 (42%) did.

We asked people about their income. Although a significant number of those completing the survey refrained from answering this question, of the 265 who did, access to the internet increased with increasing monthly income (see table C3):

Monthly income	Clients with access	Clients with no access	Ratio access / no access
Less than £400	17.4%	9.4%	1.9 : 1
£400 - £999	24.1%	11.3%	2.1 : 1
£1000 - £1999	20.8%	7.2%	2.9 : 1
£2000 +	8.3%	1.5%	5.5 : 1

The full results in numeric and graphic form are given in the Appendix. The highlights are:

- Those surveyed were divided into two groups – those who had access to the internet personally through their owned- device (laptop/PC, tablet or phone), 64% of the total, and those who did not, 36%. With one exception, the two groups were asked different questions
- The exception was that both were asked if they would like help to improve their skills. Of those with their own access who answered this question, 74% said no, and 26% said yes. For those without their own access, more wanted help – 56% said no, and 44% said yes (see tables A2 and B4).
- This is in accord with the poor ability to use computers claimed by those without access – of those who answered this question 55% said their ability was non-existent or poor, and only 45% thought it was average or good (table A1). Of the 51 without access who gave a reason, 5 (10%) said they had no desire to do so (tables A2 and A3)
- Over half of those who did not have their own access relied on family or friends. Nearly one third used libraries or community centres. For the 17% who had no access, the major reason, given by 50% of them, was that they had no computer or no wi-fi access (table A3)
- For those who had their own access, 63% used a mobile phone. This accords with the recent statement from Ofcom that access to the internet using phones has now overtaken that from computers
- 60% used laptops, 36% tablets, 9% PCs and 1% other methods. (Clients could and did give multiple answers to this question) (table B1)
- The most common use of the internet was for email, closely followed by social media, shopping and banking, finding information, and news and entertainment. Nearly one third had used it for work and one third for job applications (table B2)
- The greatest difficulties were experienced with form filling. Other problems arose from dyslexia, poor literacy, and problems with English and use of unfamiliar words or phrases. We learnt ourselves from this exercise that questions need to be very clear and that forms need a trial before a full survey goes ahead (table B3)

Our concerns

It would appear that income could be the greatest factor in dividing those with their own access to the internet, and the skills to negotiate it, from those who cannot. The costs are likely to be greatest for those on the lowest incomes; despite this there is increasing pressure for those on means tested benefits to use the internet as the sole method of making complaints, for a variety of application forms, and for job applications as part of their jobseekers' agreements or claimants' commitment.

Age is another factor, with more of the over 65s being excluded. Those on the lowest incomes can experience problems with contracts/PAYG charges limiting access and data usage. They may also have problems with printing of documents and keeping records of documents.

Our conclusions

- Our clients who fall on the wrong side of the digital divide, and who we believe are also some of the most vulnerable in society, are:
 - The elderly – but this is likely to change as access becomes easier and more intuitive, and as the population ages
 - Those with mental or physical problems which affect learning, reading and writing
 - Those who have little social support from family, friends or community centres
 - Those with little disposable income
- The need for free or affordable training should be addressed by statutory providers, including national and local government and the health sector, if public services are to be increasingly delivered digitally. Those providers need to work with the voluntary or the private sectors to ensure training is provided
- Support will always be needed for the vulnerable who may be unable to acquire new skills or be unwilling to do so. Other options should be readily available for such people
- Training must be tailored to need. Research carried out by CA Broxtowe showed that training in their borough was very limited and not able to meet demand. It relied heavily on volunteer trainers and on library staff finding time to help people. Some clients had enrolled for college courses but had found them too structured as they did not cater for the individual learning speed
- The voluntary sector, if it is to play a major role in either training or in supporting those who cannot access such services without help, will have to have its need for equipment and facilities recognised. Funding which is consistent and easily accessed will be needed

- Unless people have Wi-Fi at home or access to free Wi-Fi elsewhere, the cost of accessing the internet on phones and tablets, increasingly the preferred method, can be prohibitive. The provision of free Wi-Fi, such as the partnership between Nottingham City Council and BT to provide 20 free hot spots in the City Centre, sets a good example. For example, public buildings should consider providing free Wi-Fi for all
- Access in rural parts of the county has in the past been poor. Nottinghamshire County Council and funding partners including BT are rolling out the Better Broadband for Nottinghamshire initiative. 98% of the properties in the county should be able to access fibre broadband by 2018 when increased access in the rural areas of Newark and Sherwood and Bassetlaw has been provided. Go ON UK, a charity monitoring access to basic digital skills throughout the UK (go-on.co.uk) has produced a map which shows that the likelihood of digital exclusion is low for those living in Nottingham City but medium for those in Newark and Sherwood, Ashfield, Bassetlaw, Gedling and Rushcliffe. They define basic digital skills as those needed to complete online tasks such as safely carrying out transactions or avoiding malicious websites
- Although use of computers in libraries may be free, prior booking may be needed and other costs and difficulties, such as bus fares and the frequency of bus services, may make their use impractical. Coffee bars are not a solution for those who cannot afford an expensive drink
- For those who do not have their own access, much of the cost (in money, time, and help or training), should that support be available, is transferred to friends or relatives
- Our results showed the most frequent way of accessing the internet was on mobile phones. This is in accord with the recent statement from OFCOM. Although apps are developing rapidly, using a phone to access the internet is only suitable for certain functions. Forms are difficult. Applications for benefits would be very difficult. Those designing websites should take into account who will be accessing their material, and which devices are likely to be used
- Vulnerable people must be supported and given help to access the internet in the manner most appropriate to their needs. It is not clear that this is happening at present

The research has raised further questions

- Do users understand any security implications for any data which they enter and send to websites or by email?
- Are providers making sufficient efforts to ensure data can be sent securely and to ensure users are aware of how they can protect their own information?
- Do users have a way of saving data in case it needs to be referred to in future?
- Who is to provide help and training for those who need it, and how is it to be funded?

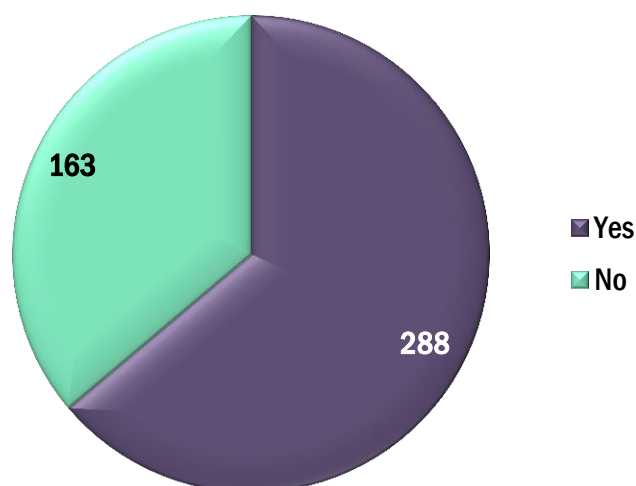
Appendix

Nottinghamshire Citizens Advice research survey The digital divide

Note that due to rounding, totals may not appear to add to 100%.

Do you have access to the internet using YOUR OWN laptop, phone etc.?

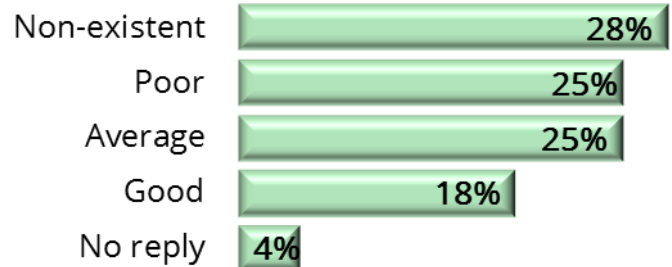
Yes	288	64%
No	163	36%
Total	451	100%



A. People with NO access to internet using OWN phone, laptop etc (163 in total):

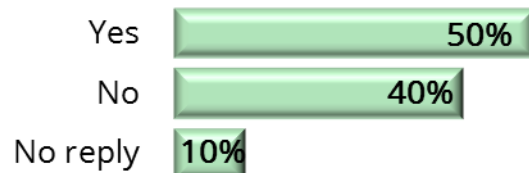
1. How do you rate your ability to use a computer?

Non-existent	46	28%
Poor	41	25%
Average	40	25%
Good	30	18%
No reply	6	4%
Total	163	100%



2. Would you like to improve your computer skills?

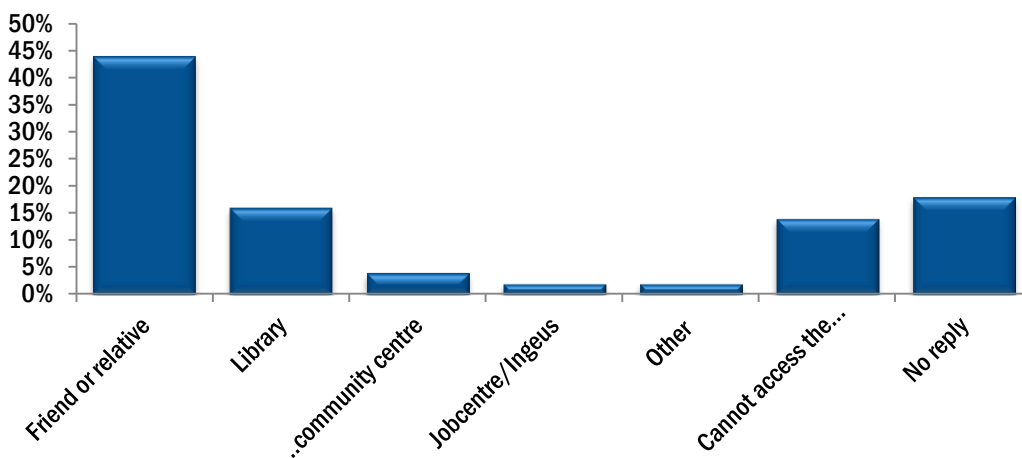
Yes	82	50%
No	65	40%
No reply	16	10%
Total	163	100%



3. Can you use the internet with help from.....

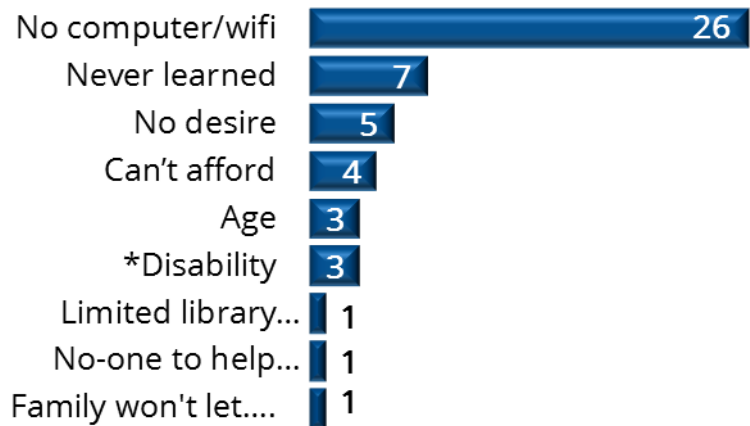
Friend or relative	72	44%
Library	26	16%
Local community centre	7	4%
Jobcentre/Ingeus	3	2%
Other	3	2%
Cannot access the internet at all	23	14%
No reply	29	18%
TOTAL	163	100%

"Other" include: *College; Framework; Home computer*



3(a) Reasons for being unable to access the internet: *(More than one reason may have been given)*

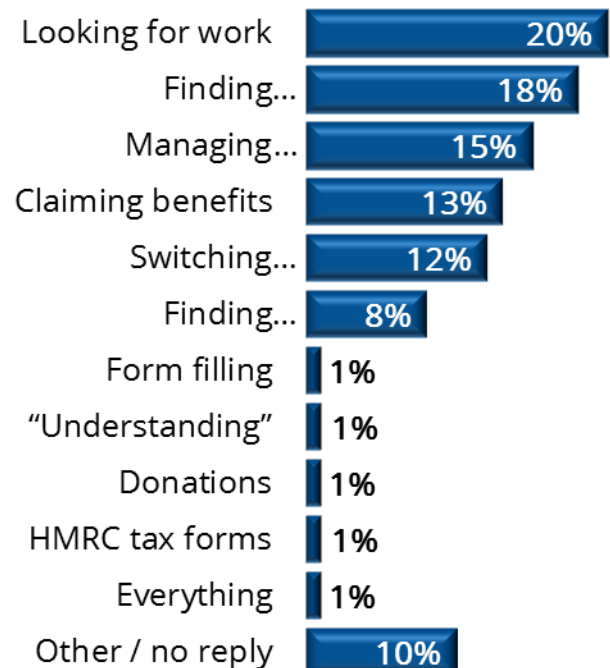
No computer/Wi-Fi	26
Never learned	7
No desire	5
Can't afford	4
Age	3
*Disability	3
Limited library hours	1
No-one to help me	1
Family won't let me use their computer	1
TOTAL people answering	48



*Disabilities listed include: *Dyslexia; Reading difficulty*

4. Have you ever had a problem or felt disadvantaged with any of the following due to lack of access to the internet or a computer?

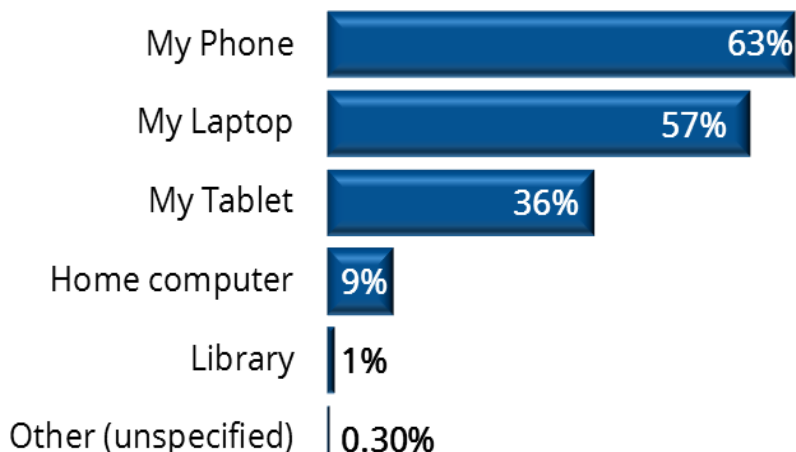
Looking for work	32	20%
Finding information	29	18%
Managing your money & paying bills	25	15%
Claiming benefits	22	13%
Switching your energy supplier	19	12%
Finding Accommodation	13	8%
Form filling	2	1%
"Understanding"	2	1%
Donations	1	1%
HMRC tax forms	1	1%
Everything	1	1%
Other / no reply	16	10%
TOTAL	163	100%



B. People with access to internet using OWN phone, laptop etc. (288 in total):

1. How do you usually access the internet? (Note that there were multiple answers to this question, e.g. Library use was in addition to access with a phone etc.)

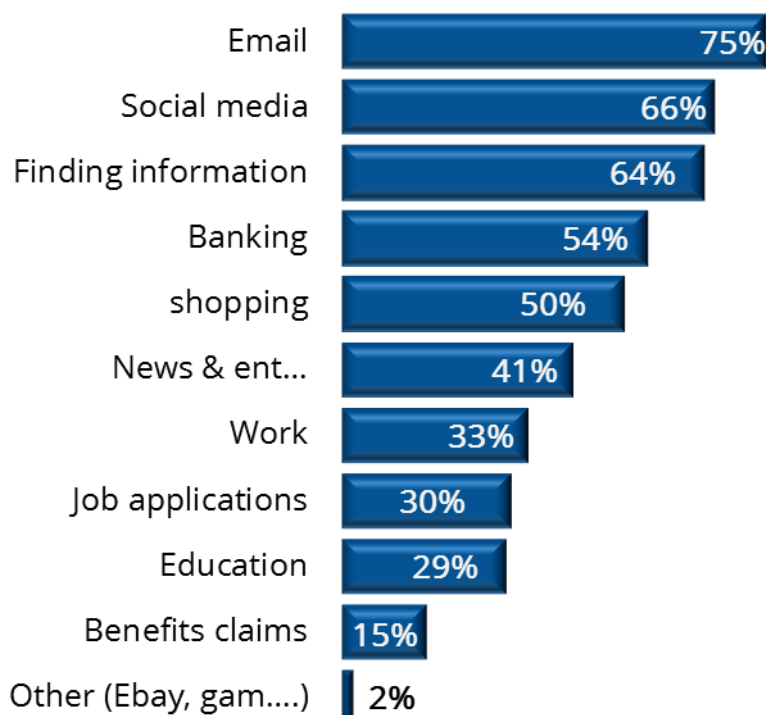
My Phone	181	63%
My Laptop	164	57%
My Tablet	105	36%
Home computer	25	9%
Library	2	1%
Other (unspecified)	1	0.3%
TOTAL people surveyed	288	



NB 61 people (21%) accessed the internet by mobile phone ONLY

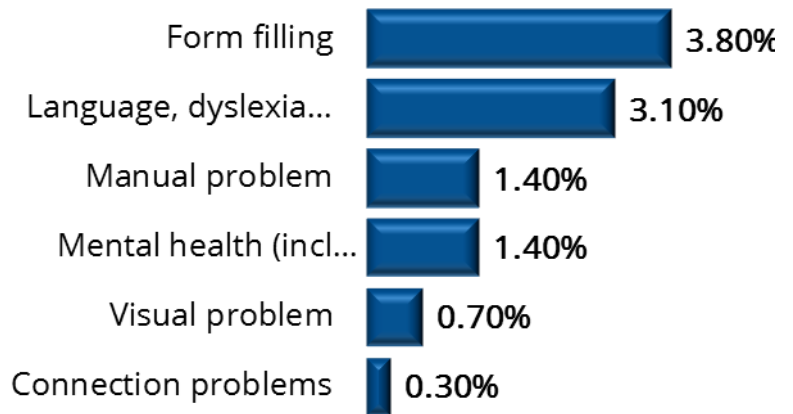
2. What do you use the internet for? (Multiple answers given)

Email	217	75%
Social media	189	66%
Finding information	183	64%
Banking	156	54%
Shopping	143	50%
News & Entertainment	117	41%
Work	94	33%
Job applications	86	30%
Education	84	29%
Benefits claims	42	15%
Other (Ebay, gaming, college coursework....)	5	2%
TOTAL people surveyed	288	



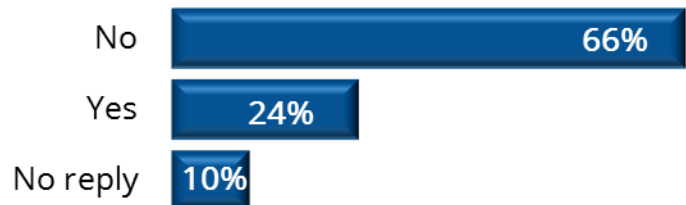
3. Do you have difficulty with any functions e.g. form filling.

Form filling	11	3.8%
Language, dyslexia, reading & writing	9	3.1%
Manual problem	4	1.4%
Mental health (incl. concentration)	4	1.4%
Visual problem	2	0.7%
Connection problems	1	0.3%
TOTAL people surveyed	288	



4. Do you feel you would benefit from an opportunity to improve your computer skills?

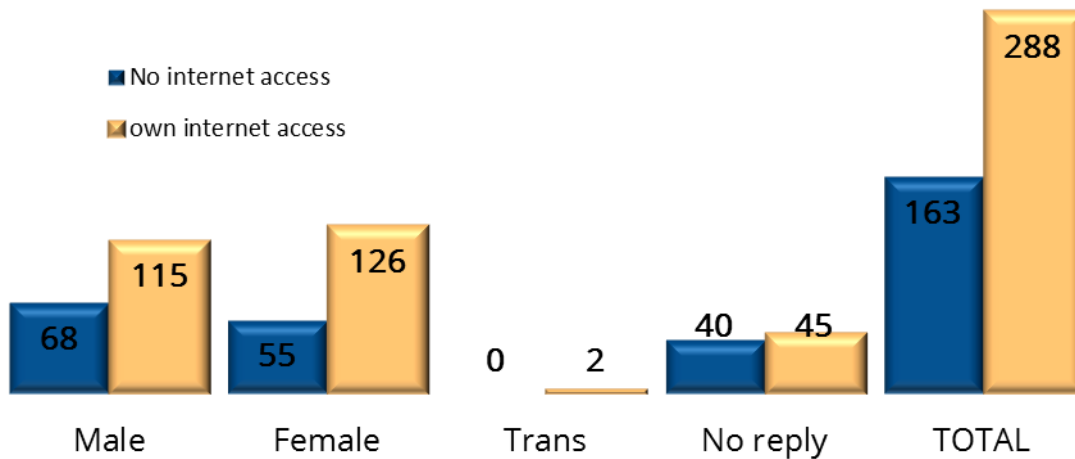
No	191	66%
Yes	69	24%
No reply	28	10%
TOTAL	288	100%



C. Profile of survey respondents:

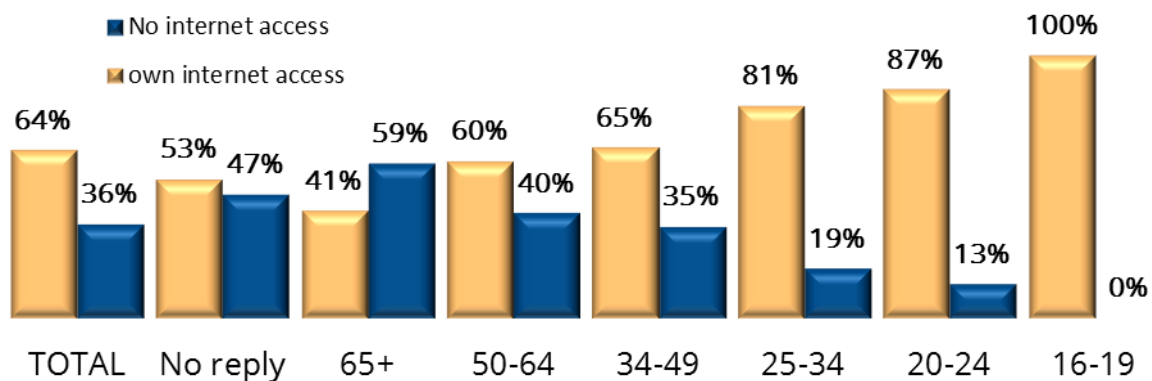
1. Gender Profile

	No access to internet		Own access to internet	
Male	68	37%	115	63%
Female	55	30%	126	70%
Trans	0	0%	2	100%
No reply	40	47%	45	53%
TOTAL	163	36%	288	64%



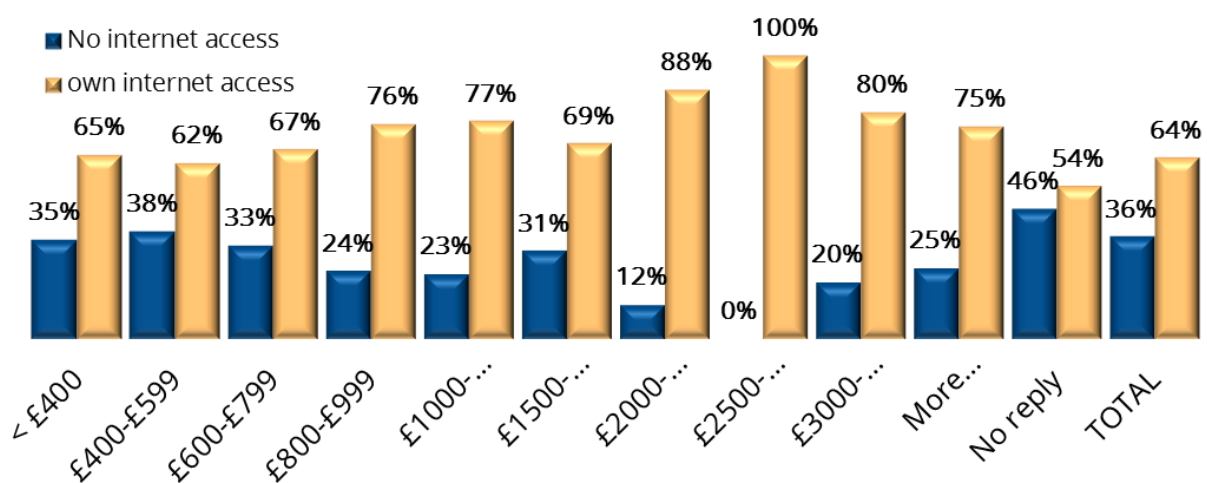
2. Age Profile

	No access to internet		Own access to internet	
16-19	0	0%	2	100%
20-24	4	13%	27	87%
25-34	14	19%	61	81%
34-49	42	35%	78	65%
50-64	37	40%	56	60%
65+	24	59%	17	41%
No reply	42	47%	47	53%
TOTAL	163	36%	288	64%



3. Household monthly income profile

	No internet access		Own internet access		TOTAL	
< £400	25	35%	46	65%	71	16%
£400-£599	16	38%	26	62%	42	9%
£600-£799	6	33%	12	67%	18	4%
£800-£999	8	24%	26	76%	34	7%
£1000-£1499	11	23%	37	77%	48	11%
£1500-£1999	8	31%	18	69%	26	6%
£2000-£2499	1	12%	7	88%	8	2%
£2500-£2999	0	0%	5	100%	5	1%
£3000- £3999	1	20%	4	80%	5	1%
More than £4000	2	25%	6	75%	8	2%
No reply	85	46%	101	54%	186	41%
TOTAL	163	36%	288	64%	451	100%



4. Disability

a) Do you consider yourself disabled?

	No internet access		Own internet access		TOTAL	
Yes	51	38%	84	62%	135	30%
No	65	29%	156	71%	221	49%
No reply	47	49%	48	51%	95	21%
TOTAL	163	36%	288	64%	451	100%

