

The Internet and Older People in the UK – Key Statistics

July 2016

This note sets out some statistics and information about internet use and older people drawing on national surveys. Details about the sources of information are given at the end of the note.

Internet use and trends over time

Internet use among older age groups has increased substantially over the last five years, but many are still non-users.

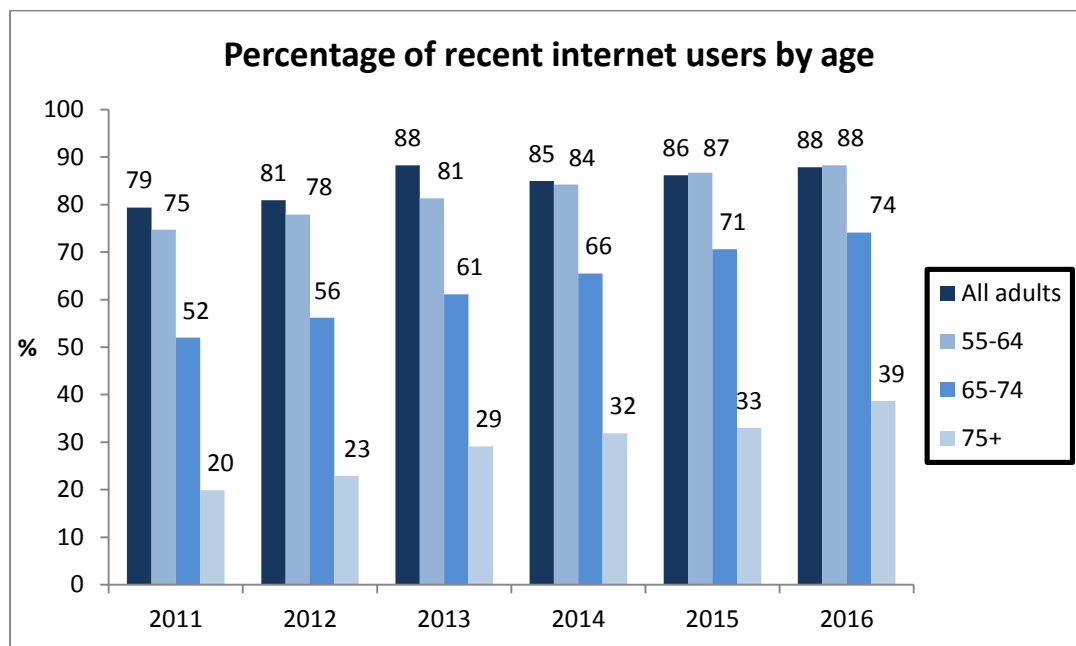
4.2 million people aged 65+ have never used the internet.

A quarter (26%) of people aged 65 to 74 and around three-fifths (61%) of people aged 75+ do not regularly use the internet.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) publishes information each year setting out the numbers and proportions of people who use the internet.ⁱ

- In the UK in 2016, 5.3 million adults have never used the internet while a further 0.9 million have used it, but not in the last 3 months.ⁱⁱ
- Among people aged 65+, 4.2 million have never used the internet and a further 0.5 million have used it, but not in the last 3 months.ⁱⁱⁱ

The table below shows that the proportion of people aged 75+ who have used the internet in the last 3 months has nearly doubled in the last five years (from 20 per cent to 39 per cent), and increased by around a half for those aged 65 to 74 (from 52 per cent to 74 per cent). However among those aged 75+, around three-fifths (61%) are still non-users.



Source: *Internet Users in the UK 2016*, ONS (table 1B). Recent users are people who have used the internet in the last 3 months.

There are differences within, as well as between, age groups

Older women are less likely to use the internet than older men. Among all age groups disabled people are less likely to use the internet than non-disabled people, and use is also linked to socio-economic factors.^{iv}

Gender

Older women are less likely to be recent internet users than older men.^v

- Nearly a half (47%) of men aged 75+ have recently used the internet compared to a third (33%) of women 75+.
- There is a small difference among those aged 65-74 (76% of men compared to 73% of women).
- There are no gender differences among younger age groups.

Disability

Across all age groups disabled people are less likely to use the internet than those who are not disabled.^{vi} For example:

- Nearly a half of people (48%) aged 75+ who are not disabled have recently used the internet compared to (31%) who are not disabled.
- Among those aged 65-74 the figures are 65% of non-disabled people compared to 79% of those who are disabled.

Socio-economic group

People in higher socio-economic groups are more likely to use the internet than those in lower groups.

- 5% of adults (all ages) in group AB and 8% in C1 use the internet compared to 20% of those in group C2 and 22% of DEs.^{vii}
- Among those aged 75+, nearly two-thirds of those in the highest socio-economic groups (65% of ABs and 58% of C1s) use the internet compared to just a fifth in the lowest socio-economic group (20% of C2s and 19% of DEs).^{viii}

Digital use is also linked to other forms of financial disadvantage. For example, analysis of the English Longitudinal Survey of Ageing (ELSA), which covers people aged 50 and over, shows that internet use increases with wealth, and that people living in the most deprived areas of the country are less likely to use the internet than those in less deprived areas^{ix}.

Some people give up using the internet as they get older

Around 1 in 20 people aged 75+ have used the internet in the past but not in the last 3 months.

While many people who start using the internet later in life continue to do so, a minority give up. The ONS finds that nearly 1 in 20 people aged 75+ (4.8%) and 1 in 25 aged 65 to 74 (4.3%) have used the internet but not in the last 3 months. So they have either stopped using it altogether or are infrequent users.^x

Evidence of falling use among the oldest age groups has been also found in analysis of ELSA which follows up the same individuals aged 50+ over time. Between 2002/03 and 2012/13 frequent internet use increased. However for the groups aged 75+ when first interviewed, while there was an initial increase in internet use, this started to fall over time.^{xi}

Older internet users carry out a narrower range of activities online

Even if older people are using the internet, they are less likely to be taking part in a wide range of activities online.

As seen above internet use reduces with age. Furthermore, older age groups tend to use it for a more limited range of activities. Ofcom asked people about their weekly use of the internet in 12 categories including: communication, browsing, social media entertainment and transactions. Among internet users, those aged 65 and over were less likely than younger age groups to do 11 of the 12 activities set out – the exception being ‘looking for health related activities’. The table below covers the five most commonly undertaken activities.^{xii}

Percentage of internet users who undertake certain activities each week by selected age groups

	All internet users	Age 16-24	Age 65-74	Age 75+
Communication	89%	97%	76%	63%
General surfing/browsing	86%	93%	65%	71%
Social media	71%	93%	37%	26%
Entertainment	67%	90%	45%	34%
Transactions	50%	42%	29%	29%

Older people who do not use the internet

People who are not online give a range of reasons for why they do not use the internet, but many feel it is not something that they need or want. For example around three out of five (61 per cent) of non-users aged 65 and over in Great Britain said they did not have internet access because they did not need it – for example because it was not useful or not something that interested them.^{xiii} Other reasons given include: lack of skills, cost, and concern about security. An Age UK report provides more information about the views and experiences of older people who do not use the internet, and the barriers they face to getting online.^{xiv}

Internet by proxy

The Ofcom survey asked people who did not use the internet if anyone else used it on their behalf – for example to send an email or purchase something over the internet. They found that a quarter (25%) of non-users over the age of 65, and two-fifths (41%) of those 16-64 did so.^{xv} There were no differences in proxy use by socio-economic group or by gender.

About these figures

Most of the information here comes from annual surveys carried out by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and the communications regulator Ofcom. The different reports published by these organisations cover a wide range of information including: who is using the internet, where, and for what purposes.

ONS and Ofcom use slightly different questions on internet use. ONS asks if people have used the internet in the last 3 months, used over 3 months ago, or have never used. While Ofcom - asks if people access the internet at home or elsewhere.

ⁱ *Internet Users in the UK 2016* ONS, 2016.

ⁱⁱ *Internet Users in the UK 2016* ONS, 2016. Table 1A

ⁱⁱⁱ *Internet Users in the UK 2016* ONS, 2016. Table 1A

^{iv} *Internet Users in the UK 2016* ONS, 2016.

^v *Internet Users in the UK 2016* ONS, 2016. Table 2B.

^{vi} *Internet Users in the UK 2016* ONS, 2016. Table 3B.

^{vii} *Adults' media use and attitudes* Ofcom, 2016. Fig 2, p24.

<http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/research/media-literacy/adults-literacy-2016/2016-Adults-media-use-and-attitudes.pdf>

^{viii} Ofcom 2016 – data provide to Age UK.

^{ix} *Understanding internet use in later life*, Matthews and Nazroo, 2015. Table 2 and table 23

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/495105/FullReport-UnderstandingDigitalEngagementinLaterLife.docx.pdf

^x *Internet Users in the UK 2016* ONS, 2016. Table 1B.

^{xi} *Understanding internet use in later life*, Matthews and Nazroo, 2015. Figure 1.

^{xii} *Adults' media use and attitudes* Ofcom, 2016. Fig 14, p 38.

^{xiii} Age UK analysis of ONS *Opinions and Lifestyle Survey, Internet Access Module, 2014*

^{xiv} *Later life in a digital world* Age UK, 2016.

^{xv} *Adults' media use and attitudes* Ofcom, 2016. Fig 169, p200.