



Digital Exclusion Survey

September 2023

1. Introduction

For the majority of people, the internet is a part of daily life. Most people use digital skills to connect with family and friends, to access health care, to buy goods and services, and to access bank and credit card accounts online. However, people who lack internet access or basic digital skills are finding themselves excluded from online services and they are missing out on a number of benefits that digital technology offers.

There has been various research conducted into digital exclusion within the UK, including from the Office for National Statistics (2019) who found that in 2018 there were 5.3 million adults in the UK described as “internet non-users”. More recent research conducted by Ofcom (2022) found that 6% of UK households currently do not have access to the internet at home.

Digital exclusion can have a substantial impact on financial and mental wellbeing, and the impact of digital exclusion increases as more aspects of our world move online. The Centre for Economics and Business Research (2015) identified five key areas in which individuals who acquire basic digital skills are able to benefit. These included increased earnings, improved chances of finding employment, saving money by making purchases online, communication benefits by staying connected to family and friends more frequently, and time saving benefits in accessing government and banking services.

In March 2023, the Research and Campaigns team at Citizens Advice Eastbourne created a digital exclusion survey to hand out to local residents. The aim of this survey was to gain an understanding of the extent and impact of digital exclusion, specifically within the area of Eastbourne.


The survey was distributed to local services that included Eastbourne Foodbank, YMCA Foyer, Age Concern Eastbourne, Old Town Community Library, Langney Community Library, Youth Employability Service, Salvation Army. Thanks to all for their assistance.

2. The Survey

Participants were asked to complete a paper survey. The survey included both multiple choice questions and questions that allowed a free form answer to be written. The survey was completely anonymous, although respondents were able to supply their telephone number if they wished to be contacted in future to complete further in depth research.

A total of 71 participants completed the survey. A demographic breakdown of the participants can be found in the Survey Results section.

A copy of the questionnaire can be viewed here

 Citizens Advice Eastbourne_ Digital Exclusion Survey 2023.pdf

3. The Survey Results

3.1 Demographics of participants

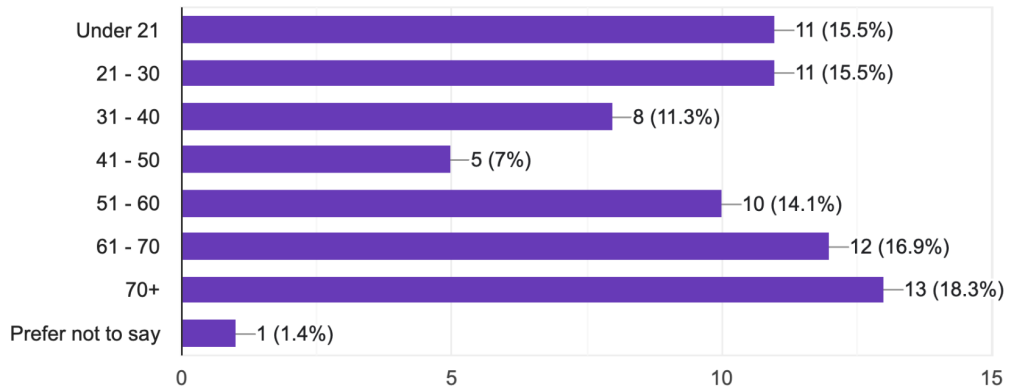
The following three graphs show the demographic breakdown of the participants who took part in the survey.

There were participants from all age groups and the participants were mostly spread evenly across these groups. The most underrepresented group was ages 41 years to 50 years.

The results are shown in the graph below.

Which age group do you belong to?

71 responses

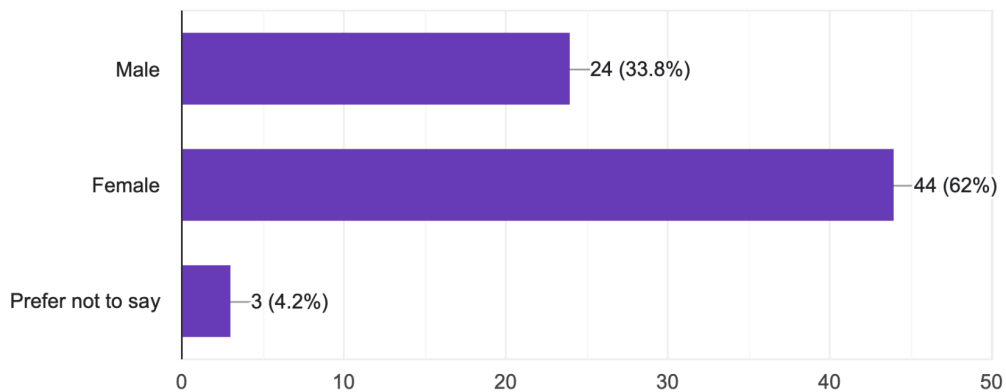


Of the 71 participants who took part in the survey, a majority of 62% were female, 33.8% were male, and the remaining 4.2% preferred not to disclose their gender. An additional option was included to allow participants to state an alternative gender if they did not identify as male or female, however no participants filled in this option.

The results are shown in the graph below.

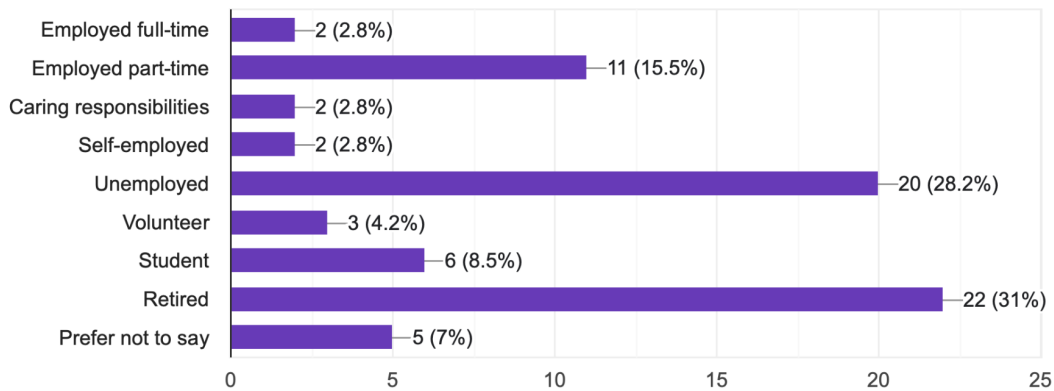
What is your gender

71 responses



What category best describes your current occupation? Please tick one.

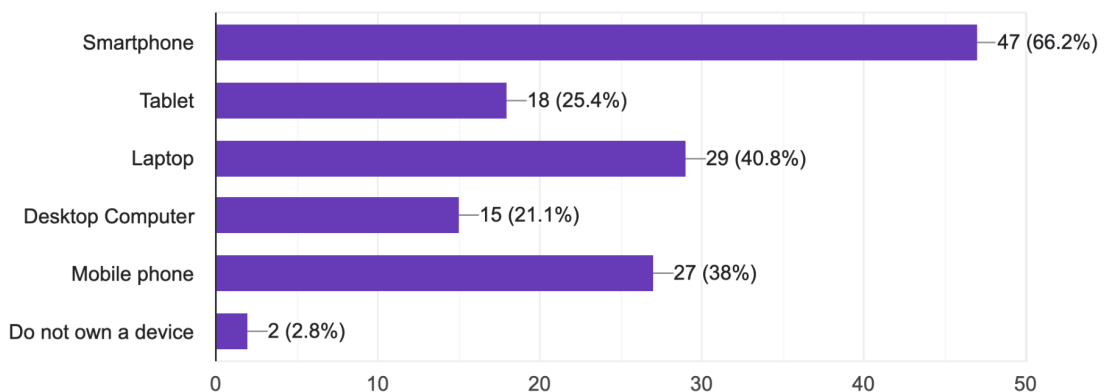
71 responses



Of the 71 responses describing current occupation, 31% of participants were retired, which corresponds with the age demographic noted in the first question. 28.2% of respondents described themselves as unemployed, whilst 21.1% were employed in some way, with 15.5% being part-time, 2.8% self-employed and only 2.8% employed full-time. A further 8.5% of respondents were students, 2.8% had caring responsibilities and 4.2% were volunteers. 7% of respondents selected the 'Prefer not to say' response to this question.

Which of these devices do you own? Please tick all that apply.

71 responses

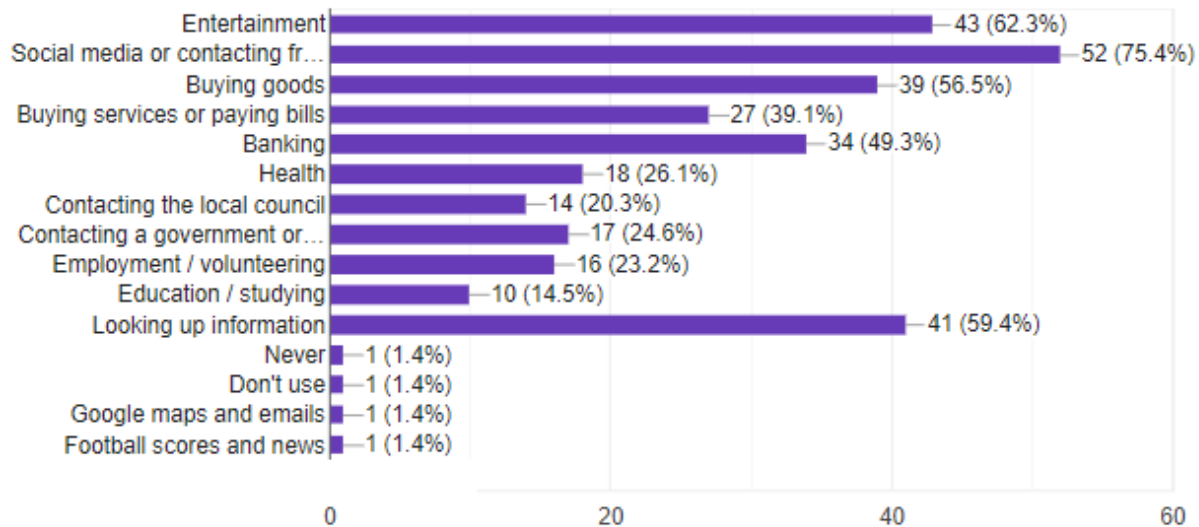


71 participants responded to this question, with some able to select more than one device that they own. Only 2.8% did not own any device, meaning that they are less likely to be able to access services that are available online. However, the remaining 97% owned at least one device (66.2% owned a smartphone, 25.4% owned a tablet, 40.8% owned a laptop, 21.1%

owned a desktop computer and 38% owned a mobile phone). Any respondents that owned only a mobile phone as opposed to a smartphone would not have access to online only services.

What do you use the internet for? If you don't use the internet, what would you use it for? Please tick all apply.

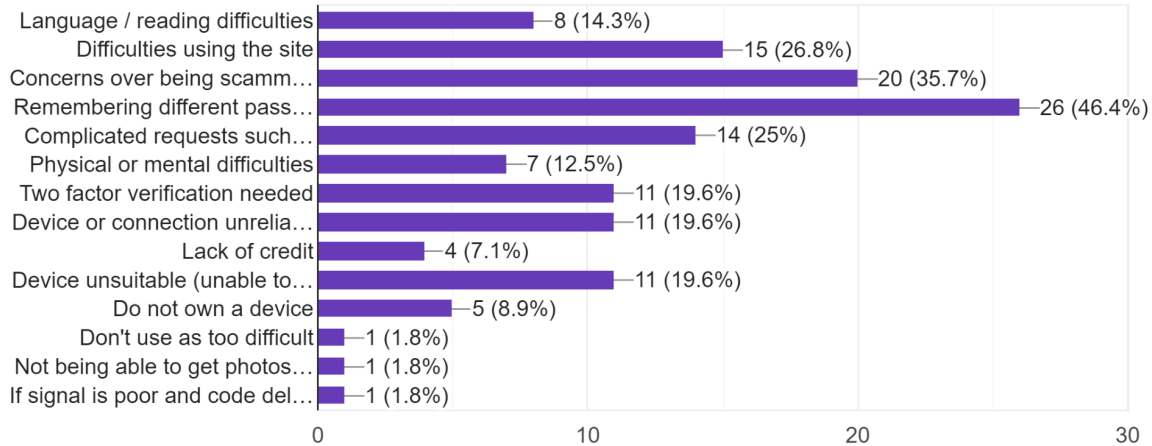
69 responses



69 participants responded to this question, where they were invited to select as many options as applied to their internet usage. The majority of respondents (75.4%) used the internet for social media or contacting friends/family, followed by 62.3% using the internet for entertainment. 59.4% of respondents used the internet for looking up information, 23.2% for employment/volunteering and 14.5% for education/studying. Usage of the internet for accessing services of various types included: 56.5% for buying goods, 49.3% for banking, 39.1% for buying services or paying bills, 26.1% for health. 24.6% of participants contacted government organizations via the internet and 20.3% used the internet for contacting the local council.

If you have experienced difficulties using online services, what do you think was the cause? Please tick all that apply

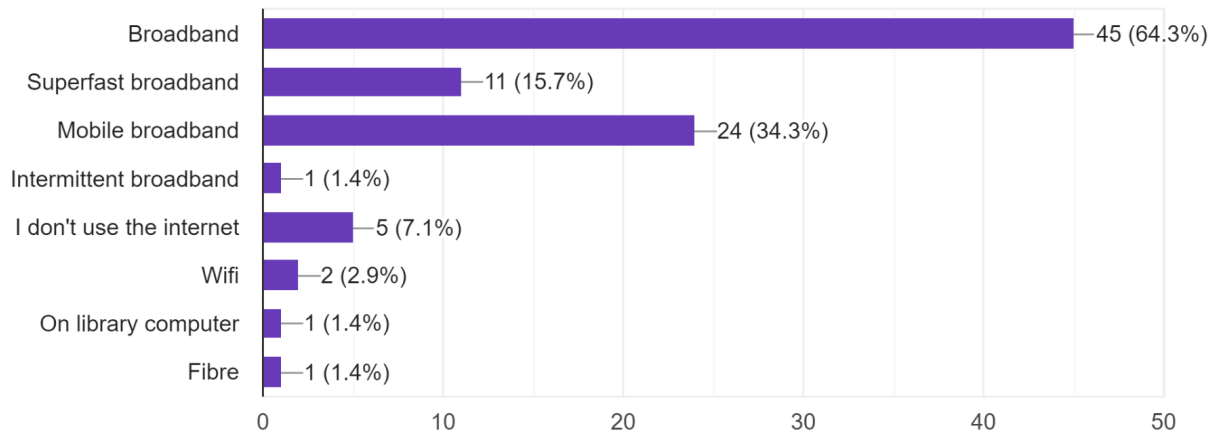
56 responses



Of the 56 responses to this question about difficulties using online services, almost half (46.4%) experienced difficulties remembering different passwords. 35.7% of participants noted that they were concerned about being scammed or other security issues. 26.8% had difficulties using sites and 25% noted complicated requests such as downloading an app caused problems for them. 19.6% of respondents said that each of the following caused their difficulties: two factor verification needed, the device or connection was unreliable, the device they were using was unsuitable (unable to upload or format incompatible). 14.3% of participants said their problems were caused by language/reading difficulties. 8.9% said they did not own a device.

How do you access the internet? Please tick all that apply.

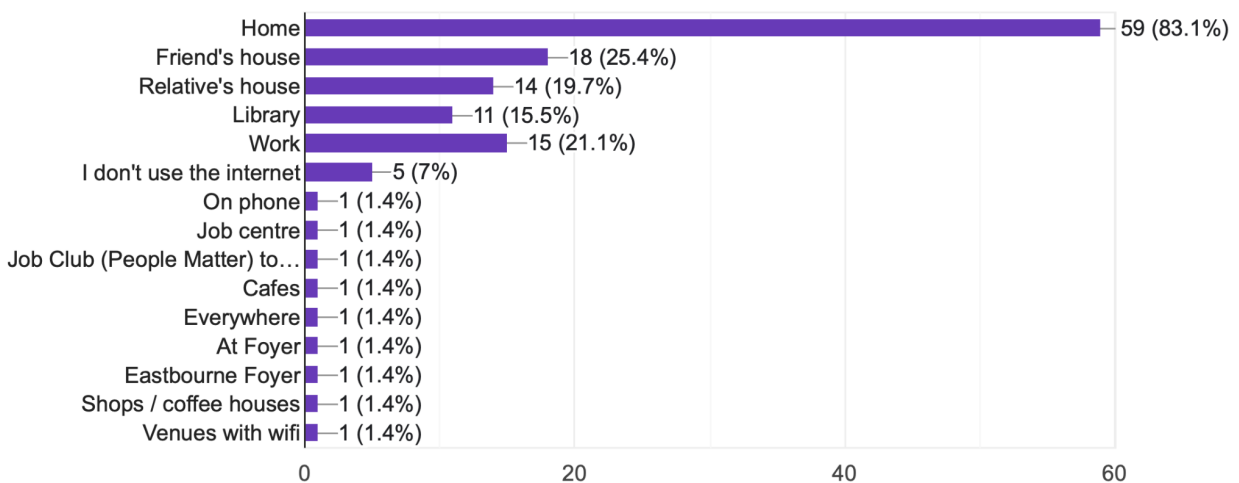
70 responses



Of the 70 respondents to this question, the majority (64.3%) used broadband to access the internet, compared with 15.7% who used superfast broadband. 34.3% used mobile broadband. 1.4% said their broadband was intermittent. 7.1% of respondents answered that they do not use the internet.

Where do you go online? Please tick all that apply

71 responses

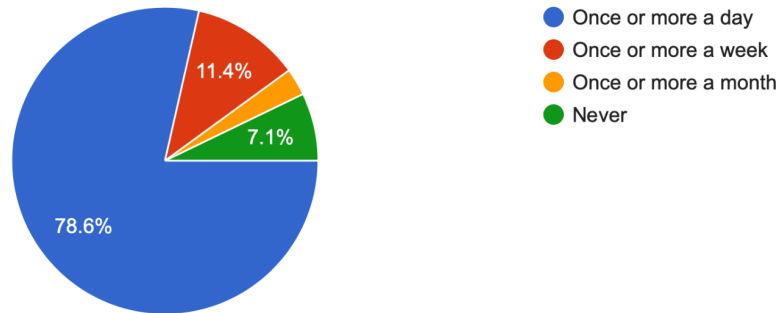


Respondents were able to select more than one option for this question. Of the 71 participants who responded to this question, the vast majority (83.1%) went online at home. Other options

chosen were: 25.4% went online at a friend's house, 21.1% at work, 19.7% at a relative's house and 15.5% at the library. 7% said that they do not use the internet.

How often do you use the internet

70 responses

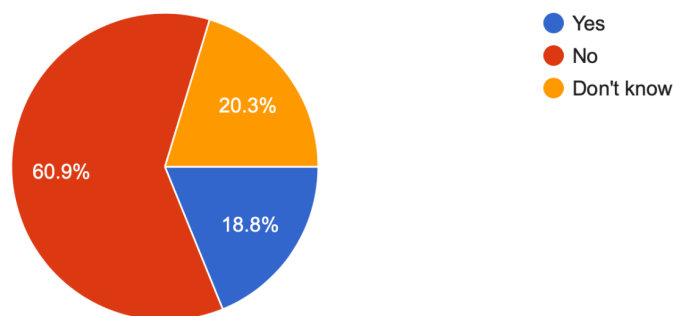


70 participants answered this question. 78.6% used the internet once or more than once a day. A further 11.4% used the internet once or more per week and 2.9% used the internet only once or more per month. 7.1% said they never use the internet.

The profile of those who said they Never use the internet or only use it once a month (or more) was predominantly people aged 51- 60, 61-70 or over 70 years old. The majority answering in this way were female and retired.

Do you find the cost of devices and/or broadband a barrier to using the internet

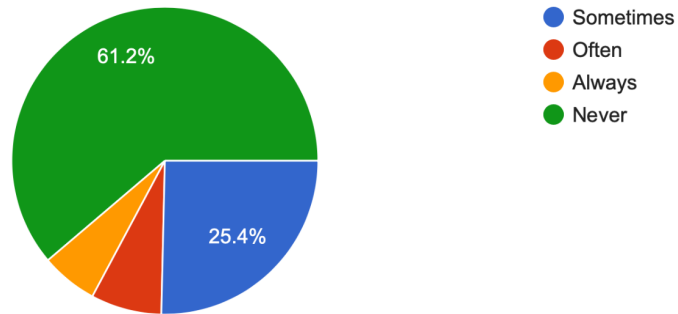
69 responses



69 people responded to this question. Interestingly, 60.9% of respondents said that cost was not a barrier to using the internet, compared with 18.9% who saw cost as a barrier. 20.3% answered that they did not know whether cost was a barrier or not.

Do you need others to help you access the internet?

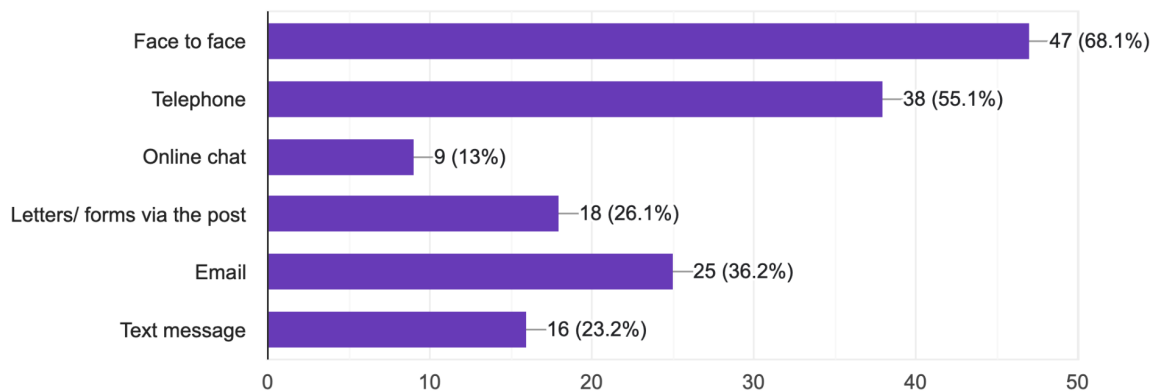
67 responses



Of the 67 respondents to this question, 61.2% said that they never need the help of others to access the internet and another 25.4% needed help only sometimes. Given the high proportion of respondents that use the internet once or more a day, this is not surprising. The remaining 13.4% were split evenly between often or always needing help to access the internet.

Given the choice, how would you prefer to communicate with organisations? Please tick all that apply.

69 responses



69 participants offered their preferences for how they would prefer to communicate with organizations. Again they could select as many options as applied to them. 68.1% expressed a preference for face to face communication, with telephonic communication being the next most popular means of communication (55.1%). 36.2% favoured communication by email, followed

by 26.1% wanting letters/forms via the post and 23.2% wanting text messages. Only 13% wanted online chat as their preferred means of communication with organizations.

Are there any services you wish you could access in some other way?

The following comments were made:

- Accessing government grant - was only online
- GP
Seeing my doctor
Doctors, can never get an appointment.
Doctors - face to face
Live chat for health service
GP, Audiologist
- Council
council can never see anyone face to face
Being able to talk to someone from the council regarding housing benefits face to face
- Most services require an email address as the only option to access or use the service. I don't want to use email
- Too many major companies only have internet access. I need a phone number and a person who speaks correct English at the other end so I can understand.
- I am not confident using the internet and would like tuition please

What do you think would make using an online service easier for you?

The following comments were made:

- Issues with passwords
- Different, better device
- Website design, ease of access on website
- Better wifi
- Not accepting cookies
- Do not force it to every single human being
- Faster connection speed, affordable power supply, memory retention of data entry by the service (app, website etc.)
- Access to chat online - not robot. Better access for deaf people
- Having been scammed once - I don't trust the system. A safer system would help
- A trust in online banking. Lesson at a bank or just a talk

- One to one tuition please
- Bigger print, no white writing on a blue background
- I don't, I think some things should be done face to face or by telephone
- Cheaper broadband

Is there anything you would like to tell us?

The following comments were made:

- Waiting times really long - normally have to wait over an hour on hold
- People may not have access to the Internet to be able to sort housing issues out. So being able to see someone face to face is always helpful
- I am concerned that banks are forcing people onto internet banking, not only by closing branches but by restricting the services available within the branch. E.g. Possibly removing the machines which enable customers to print off statements and make the transfer pay limits - already restricted to £2000
- I cannot access a broadband contract due to my ex-husband ruining my credit score. We have to use a hotspot signal which is poor at home.
- As a volunteer I work at a library and often members of the public young and old say they have difficulty using mobile phones and computers to access local services, bus passes, council information, and emails etc.

Conclusions

We are at a point in time when it can be assumed most people have access to the internet in the same way that we think everyone has a television set at home. However, our survey results have shown that, although the majority of those who responded had some internet access, a percentage have limited or intermittent access (14.3%) and a smaller amount (7%) responded saying they have no access or never use the internet.

The profile of those who said they never use the internet or only use it once a month (or more) was predominantly people aged over 50, 61-70 or over 70 years old. The majority answering in this way were female and retired.

Using devices like mobile phones to do things like complete online applications is proving challenging for many and often these are the only devices people have access to.

Many people in this situation need to turn to others for support including voluntary sector groups and organisations such as libraries.

Common themes in comments included people's desire to speak to people face to face especially GPs and Eastbourne Borough Council.

It is understandable why service providers gain efficiencies through the use of online systems and direct more people towards using these but it has to be accepted - these systems don't always work as they should. Encouraging increased usage of systems which are not reliable, is just guiding people into a dead end, creates increased frustration and requires more resources to correct.

We are grateful to the partner organisations who helped circulate the survey to their service users. Ideally we would have had a much greater sample size and is something we will look at in the future.

Recommendations

- Local charities which focus on digital inclusion by providing devices and training for people to improve their digital skills, need to be supported and their capacity increased. In Eastbourne, TechResort and Tubbs Computer Supplies are key players locally in providing much needed support for people who are digitally excluded
<https://techresort.org/>
<https://tubbscomputersupplies.org/>
- There should always be an alternative to digital communication e.g. phone number or paper form.
- Using non-digital means of application should not be a disadvantage e.g. the phone line should be adequately staffed or messages checked.
- If people are to be encouraged to use digital services then websites need to be safe, clear and efficient, systems and processes need to work.
- No one should be prevented from accessing the financial support which is available because of digital exclusion.
- Eastbourne Borough Council should review its client access approach including an Equalities Impact Assessment on the closure of the Customer Contact center in Grove Road. We welcome the plan to open a homelessness hub for client access but it is not clear who will be able to receive support there. One option would be for contact centres for specific subjects i.e. Council Tax issues or Housing enquiries.

- The closure of high street bank outlets is a concern for those who would have difficulty using online banking. A key reason stated by respondents was lack of trust in online systems having been scammed previously. Designing safe and secure systems for all remains a challenge for all involved in IT services.

For health services, we note the recommendations on NHS England's website which has ten top tips for digital inclusion

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/supporting-digital-inclusion-in-general-practice-10-top-tips/>

Which includes:

- Identify demographic groups who are at higher risk of digital exclusion.
- Co-design support offers with patients.
- Ensure website pages and digital tools are usable and accessible.
- Use multiple communication routes to tell patients about support offers.
- Always provide choice. When offering patients support to use digital tools or access routes, make it clear to them that they can continue to telephone or visit the surgery to request care.
- Offer patients and carers a variety of ways to get support with digital access and skills.
- Strengthen primary care network and VCSE relationships.
- Provide devices and data connectivity. The most digitally excluded people may not be able to use digital tools unless they are given access to a suitable device and free mobile or broadband data
- Give staff time to support patients.
- Appoint and train digital inclusion champions.

Survey Report produced by Eastbourne CAB Research and Campaigns team:
Michaela Van Der Merwe, Alan Bruzon, Janet Frame, Sarah Rose, Karen Costello-Mcfeat