



Disconnected

Understanding digital inclusion
and improving access

February 2018





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Executive summary

With the world becoming ever more digitised, Scottish citizens are seeing more and more services moving online. There is a risk that people without sufficient access to the internet, or skills to engage with digital content, will be left out. In some instances, this can be to the detriment of their basic and fundamental rights.

Citizens Advice Scotland undertook a paper-based survey about digital access, and over 1,200 people took part. The people surveyed sought advice in June 2017 from one of the 33 participating Citizens Advice Bureaux in Scotland. Respondents were asked about using computers, what devices they use to go online, where they go online, their abilities to perform basic tasks such as completing electronic forms, and any barriers they faced trying to use the internet.

Findings indicate that there are still a significant number of bureaux clients who face digital exclusion. The level of digital exclusion varies between a number of factors including people's age and where they live. A lack of access to hardware and internet services, poor digital skills, the cost of going online, and connectivity issues, are all reasons which contribute to the on-going group of people who are either not online, or unable to access digital services without support.

Key findings: access

- One third of respondents either had difficulty using a computer (18%) or simply cannot use one at all (16%)
- Almost one in every five respondents never use the internet (18%)
- One in every five respondents who accessed the internet only did so using a smartphone (20%)
- Almost three out of every ten respondents using the internet had either limited (22%) or no ability (7%) to access the internet privately

- Forty percent of respondents who could access the internet privately could only do so using devices other than a computer or laptop
- Respondents seeking advice on benefits matters were some of the least frequent users of the internet, with 31% of those seeking benefit advice reporting they either hardly ever (12%) or never (19%) used the internet

Key findings: skills

Emails

- One in five respondents did not have an email account (21%)
- More than one in four respondents with email accounts only checked their emails either monthly (6%) or very rarely (23%)
- Half of all respondents could not attach and send documents by email independently (50%)

Online form filling

- Around half of respondents could not download, complete, save, or upload electronic forms independently. On average around 31% of respondents are not able to undertake these tasks at all, and 21% require help. A small proportion of respondents (11%) were able to manage these skills on their own, but experienced difficulties doing so
- Only one quarter of respondents seeking benefits advice could apply online for a benefit with no problems at all (25%), with almost two-thirds either needing help (32%), or not able to manage at all (32%)
- Respondents seeking help with a health and/or disability related benefit were some of the most likely to experience difficulties when trying to apply for benefits online:
 - Only one in every five of these respondents seeking advice on a health/disability benefit could complete a benefit application online on their own with no problems (21%), compared to one in three respondents seeking advice about other types of benefits (33%)

- > Almost half of all respondents could not scan documents privately to provide supporting evidence for online claims (46%), with a further 16% requiring help to do so

of respondents who told us that poor broadband signal was a barrier to them accessing the internet lived in rural areas, which is almost double the number of respondents living in such areas (22%)

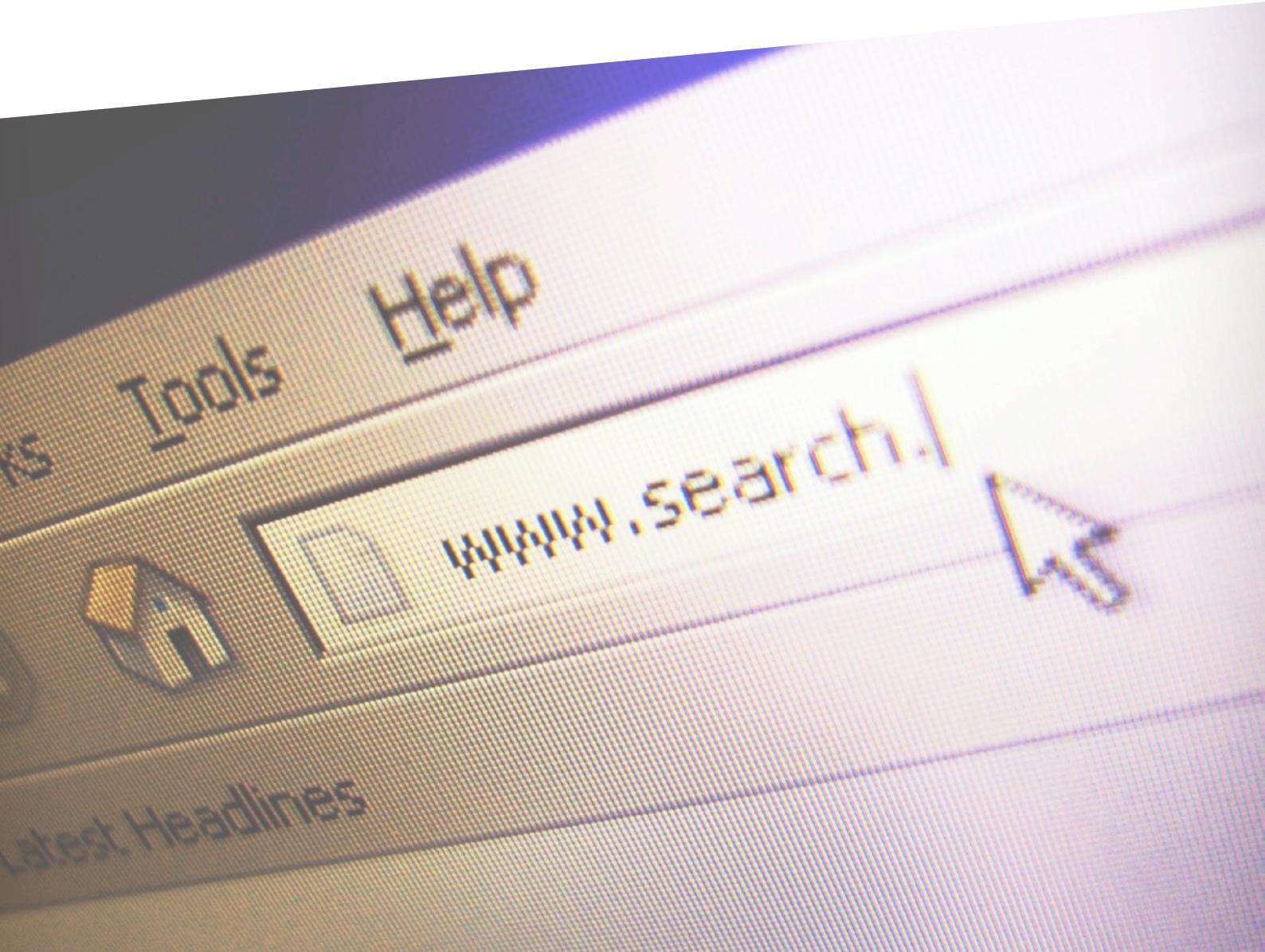
Key findings: barriers and opportunities

Barriers

- > Two of the three most common barriers preventing respondents from using the internet related to money. Broadband costs were a barrier for 18% of respondents, while phone and data costs were a barrier for 17% of respondents
- > Seventeen percent of respondents simply had no interest in going online
- > Respondents living in rural areas more commonly reported that their internet signal or connection was an issue for them; that is, 41%

Opportunities

- > Forty five percent of respondents would take advantage of free training to improve their digital skills; a further one-quarter (25%) were not sure if they would, and 30% did not want to receive training to improve their digital skills
- > The respondents who were the least proficient users of computers were generally the least willing to take advantage of free training to improve their digital skills:
 - Only 22% of people who cannot use a computer at all would take advantage of training opportunities. Almost half (49%) would not take part in free training



Acknowledgements

Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS) would like to acknowledge all the time and effort provided by the staff and volunteers across the 33 Citizens Advice Bureaux who helped survey people for this report:

- > Aberdeen CAB
- > Airdrie CAB
- > Bridgeton CAB
- > Castlemilk CAB
- > Citizens Advice and Rights Fife
- > Central Borders CAB
- > Clackmannanshire CAB
- > Clydesdale CAB
- > Dalkeith & District CAB
- > Denny and Dunipace CAB
- > Drumchapel CAB
- > Dumfries and Galloway Citizens Advice
- > East and Central Sutherland CAB
- > East Ayrshire CAB
- > East Dunbartonshire CAB
- > Easterhouse CAB
- > East Kilbride CAB
- > Edinburgh CAB
- > Grangemouth & Bo'ness CAB
- > Greater Pollok CAB
- > Hamilton CAB
- > Inverness, Badenoch & Strathspey CAB
- > Maryhill and Possilpark CAB
- > Moray CAB
- > Motherwell & Wishaw CAB
- > North and West Sutherland CAB
- > Peebles & District CAB
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- > Stirling CAB.

Citizens Advice Scotland would also like to thank the survey respondents who took the time to tell us about their ability to access and use online content.

1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 The Citizens Advice network, comprised of Citizens Advice Scotland; Consumer Futures Unit; Citizens Advice Bureaux; the Extra Help Unit; the Citizens Advice Consumer Service; and the Advice for Scotland website, form Scotland's largest independent advice and advocacy network. Citizens Advice Scotland ('CAS') is the umbrella organisation for Scotland's network of 61 member Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB). These bureaux deliver frontline advice services at almost 300 service points across the country. During 2016/17, they provided advice on over 930,000 issues to almost 250,000 people.
- 1.2 Citizens advice bureaux provide free, confidential advice across a range of issues including benefits, debt, consumer problems, employment, housing and utilities. A dedicated team of almost 2,400 volunteers contributed their time, knowledge and experience to the CAB services across Scotland alongside almost 940 paid staff providing management, administration, support and specialist advice work. Support from the CAB service not only helps clients to achieve financial gains, but supports them in avoiding negative outcomes such as homelessness, unemployment, bankruptcy, and mental health problems.
- 1.3 The majority of Citizens Advice Bureaux in Scotland use a real-time electronic case recording system. Along with providing a central resource for the collection of advice and client data this system allows bureaux to submit 'Citizens Alerts', which are brief summaries of client queries that illustrate potential social policy issues. The Citizens Alerts allow the Policy Team at CAS to monitor emerging issues, as well as providing a rich source of evidence in relation to client experiences.
- 1.4 Over 7,000 Citizens Alerts were submitted during 2016/17. Through the identification and analysis of Alerts relating to digital issues it was possible to provide additional context to the research behind this report.

The research in context

- 1.5 In recent years the world has increasingly become digitised, with enormous growth of the internet as well as the services and markets enabled by this. It is now possible for individuals to undertake day-to-day tasks, such as stocking up on groceries or managing bank accounts, from the comfort of their own home. As an illustration of how widespread this practice is, the Office for National Statistics reported that over three-quarters (77%) of adults in Great Britain had bought goods or services online in the last year.¹
- 1.6 For the most part the modernisation of markets embracing online opportunities has been a positive development for the majority of consumers. There are, however, a notable minority who do not have full access to the internet, and the services available therein. For example, in 2017 Ofcom reported that internet usage in Scotland was significantly lower than in the rest of the UK, with 20% of the population falling into this category². In addition, it was also reported that 23% of Scottish households do not have access to the internet at all³.
- 1.7 In November 2012 the UK Government launched their digital strategy which set out the policy intention to move towards a service delivery model of "digital by default"⁴. This included the roll out of Universal Credit as

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- 1 ONS, *Internet access – households and individuals: 2017*, August 2017. Available to download at <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/householdcharacteristics/homeinternetandsocialmediausage/bulletins/internetaccesshouseholdsandindividuals/2017> at p.9
 - 2 OFCOM, *Internet Use and Attitudes Bulletin 2017*. Available to download from https://www.Ofcom.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0018/105507/internet-use-attitudes-bulletin-2017.pdf
 - 3 OFCOM, *The Communications Market Scotland 2017*; information at <https://www.Ofcom.org.uk/research-and-data/multi-sector-research/cmr/cmr-2017/scotland>
 - 4 UK Government, *Digital Strategy*: November 2012. Available to download from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-digital-strategy>

- the new working age benefit, which can only be administered online, with the expectation that 80% of all benefits applications would be completed online by 2017.⁵
- 1.8 At the same time, the move towards digitising services and the challenges that this posed for people without digital access, was becoming increasingly evident through Citizens Alerts.
 - 1.9 At times, those without digital access can find themselves feeling pressured to try digital services, even when other options might be available.

⁵ DWP, *Digital Strategy*, December 2012. Available to download from <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/dwp-digital-strategy.pdf>



Citizens Alert: An individual came into their local bureau for help after receiving information about their personal pension. Further details of their pension could only be accessed using the internet, and they had no access to a computer.

The bureau called the company and negotiated for further communications with the person to be by post.

- Citizens Alert:** A 57 year old sought advice from his local bureau. He was entitled to a tax refund of £400, which he'd been told he could claim by applying online to have it paid directly into his bank account.

He was not comfortable using a computer or the internet. When the bureau tried to make a claim for him, they found it would require setting up an online account with HMRC. He did not want to do this, as he wouldn't be able to thereafter access or manage the account himself.

Online, the bureau found a telephone number to make contact with HMRC

directly. They had to go through a number of automated questions and pre-recorded messages encouraging them to apply online. When the bureau managed to speak with a person, they were again asked to apply online instead. During this conversation, they were also put on hold with another pre-recorded message which encouraged them to apply online.

The bureau was eventually able to get a cheque sent out by post to the person they were helping, but the client had felt very pressured to go online when he felt he couldn't.

- 1.10 The areas where digital exclusion is of acute concern are where the services are essential for people to access their basic rights, such as their rights to social security and justice. Moving social security procedures online by default presents a risk of causing significant detriment to potentially vulnerable people who require income.
- 1.11 Universal Credit's partial and phased roll out in Scotland began in February 2016, with further areas joining in April 2016 and thereafter.⁶ Bureaux in Scotland in the full service areas have reported a number of issues with the roll out, which have impacted on both clients and advisers. While the issues with Universal Credit are multiple and complex, only being able to apply for it online is one of the many factors which has caused some people difficulties. For example, one survey respondent stated that:
- "It took.. five and a half hours to complete [the] universal credit application online by myself as my hand tremors meant I constantly pressed the wrong buttons... it timed out three times because I was unable to type fast enough."*
- 1.12 While digitisation of the claims process is not the sole, nor necessarily even the key, issue with the roll out of Universal Credit, the effects of creating barriers to people trying to access their basic social security entitlement are a real concern. This is especially the case for those who find themselves in a vulnerable position.

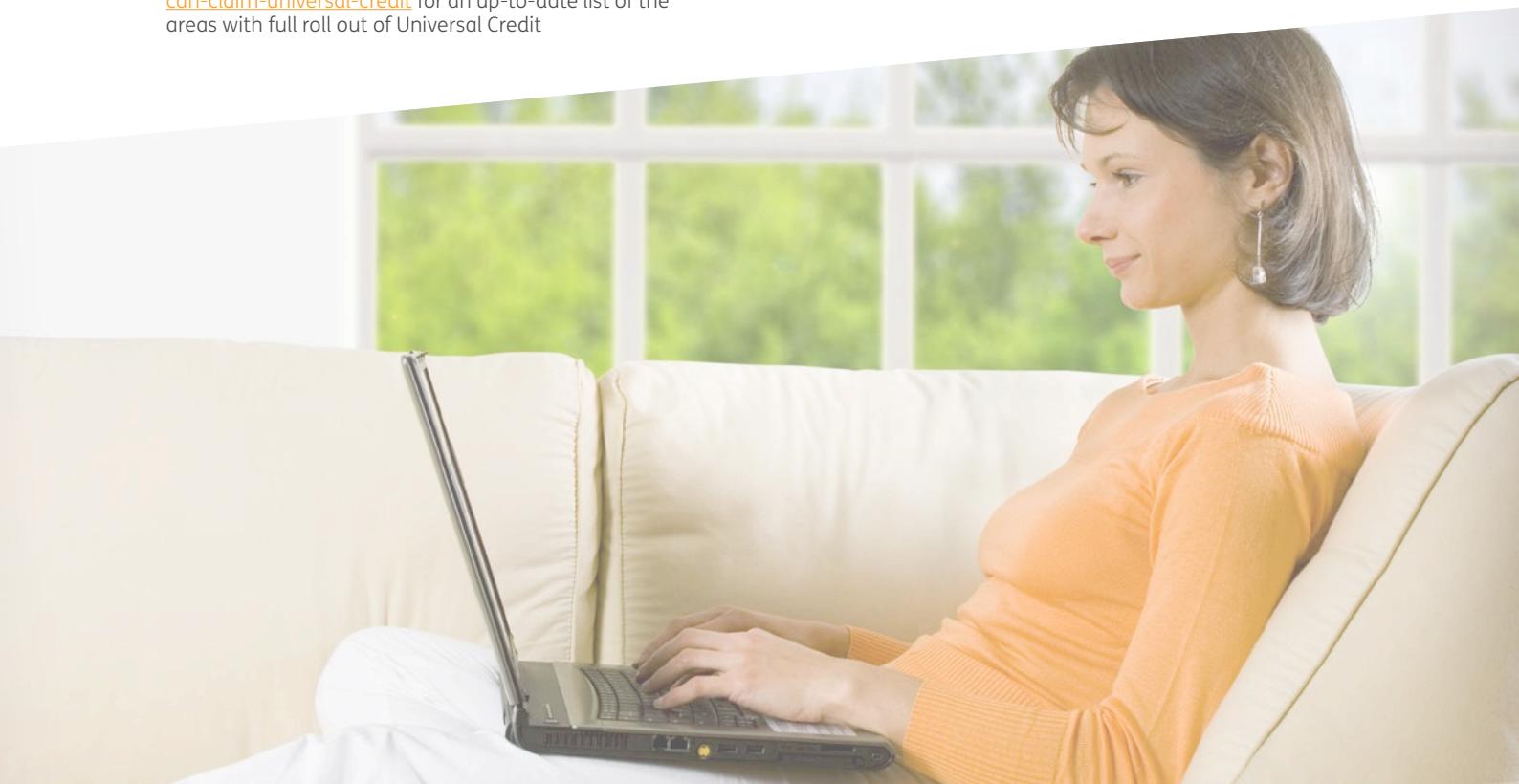
⁶ See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/jobcentres-where-you-can-claim-universal-credit> for an up-to-date list of the areas with full roll out of Universal Credit



Citizens Alert: A bureau outreach adviser met a person in hospital two weeks after a serious car accident. Suffering from multiple broken bones, he needed a further four weeks of bed rest, and recovery was expected to take up to a year. He wanted to know if he could claim benefits to help cover his rent.

Because he was single and lived in a Universal Credit (UC) area he could not apply for Employment and Support Allowance; instead, he had to apply for UC online. Not having access to a computer while in hospital, he called the Universal Credit helpline but was not supported to claim via this route.

The adviser tried phoning the Universal Credit helpline but had to end the call after 20 minutes of waiting. She suggested he try calling the helpline again later to make a claim, but by this point he was extremely tired as he was on strong pain- killers. He confirmed he would call later to try again.



- 1.13 In relation to justice issues, for many court and tribunal users across Scotland a modern online-based system would allow them to raise and respond to claims, and thereafter monitor and manage their cases online, in a quicker and more convenient manner than traditional procedures based in paperwork and person can offer. There is a risk, however, that modernisation may come at the cost of creating barriers for those who are unable to access and use online content without difficulty.
- 1.14 In August 2014 the Scottish Government undertook to work towards a fully digital justice system.⁷ They published updated visions and priorities for the justice system in July 2017, where one of the key priorities identified is to:
- “modernise civil and criminal law and the justice system to meet the needs of people in Scotland in the 21st Century.”⁸*
- 1.15 The report goes on to list digital and IT reforms under the Justice Digital Strategy as a key enabler to help meet this wider priority.⁹
- 1.16 There are many clear benefits to modernising elements of the justice system. These include looking to have more readily available information about legal rights and procedures, as well as making court and tribunal decisions accessible online. Such changes would also provide an opportunity to have a quicker, more responsive justice system, streamlined by procedures being more efficiently managed online for people who choose to engage with the justice system electronically.
- 1.17 Despite this, it is likely that some will remain disadvantaged by a system that functions primarily online.

 **Citizens Alert:** A joiner fitted a new kitchen for a customer last year, but the customer refused to pay the invoice of almost £1,000 for the work done. The joiner wanted to go to Court to claim for their money. When they went to the Sheriff Court for some help and to pick up forms, they were told that all the information was available online. When the joiner explained that they did not have a computer, they were told they “must know someone with a computer that can help.”

The joiner later came to their local bureau for help. The bureau printed off a set of forms, as well as some guidance notes to help the joiner understand the Court procedure. He was also offered a return appointment for help completing the forms.

⁷ Scottish Government, *Digital Justice Strategy*, August 2014. Available to download from <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2014/08/5429>

⁸ Scottish Government, *Justice in Scotland: Vision and Priorities*, July 2017. Available to download from <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0052/00522274.pdf> at p3

⁹ Ibid. at p31

- 1.18 While the previous Citizen Alert may or may not be an isolated incident, it highlights the risk of moving forms and procedures online even when paper forms are supposed to be made available as an alternative. It is essential for a working justice system to ensure that alternative services and support are provided to people seeking justice who are unable to competently do so online.
- 1.19 Finally, there are two independent reviews currently running in Scotland which are each likely to consider elements of modernisation in the future justice system. The first is a legal aid review¹⁰, and the second a review of regulation of legal services¹¹; both are due to report to the Scottish Government in 2018.

The current research

- 1.20 Concerned about the implications of such policies for people without digital access, CAS undertook research in both 2013¹² and 2015¹³ into the levels of digital access of people who had attended a Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB) in Scotland for advice on a benefit-related matter. Findings from these surveys included that around one-quarter of those clients could not make applications online without assistance, while at least 30% would not be able to make such applications at all.

10 <http://www.gov.scot/About/Review/legal-aid-review>

11 <http://www.gov.scot/About/Review/Regulation-Legal-Services>

12 CAS, *Offline and Left Behind*, May 2013. Available to download from <http://www.cas.org.uk/publications/offline-and-left-behind>

13 CAS, *Bridging the digital divide*, May 2016. Available to download from <http://www.cas.org.uk/publications/bridging-digital-divide>

- 1.21 This report presents findings from a further run of that research carried out during June 2017, exploring the digital access levels of those seeking advice from 33 citizens advice bureaux during that time¹⁴. In a change to the previous research, the scope was expanded to include all of those seeking advice, rather than solely focussing on benefits clients.

- 1.23 In brief, the 33 bureaux involved in the research asked all of those who came for advice during the survey period (which was one full working week during June 2017) if they would be willing to complete the survey questionnaire. As a result over 1,200 bureaux clients provided information on their use of the internet and digital capabilities, along with any barriers to accessing online services. Other than basic demographic information, all surveys were completed anonymously.

- 1.24 The demographic data gathered in the survey presented a profile of bureaux clients similar to that found in the regular client profile work conducted by CAS. Therefore, while the survey sample cannot be said to be fully representative of the Scottish population as a whole it is nevertheless fair to state that the sample provided a close approximation to this in terms of age; gender; and urban/rural classification¹⁵.

14 The full methodology, along with survey materials, can be found in the supplementary report that accompanies this document

15 See Section 2 of the Supplementary Report accompanying this publication for further detail

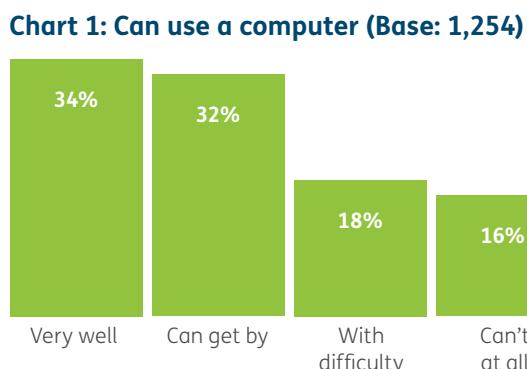


2. Survey Findings

Computer Use and Internet Access

Using a computer

- 2.1 Findings indicate that almost one-third of those surveyed either have difficulty using a computer (18%) or simply cannot use one at all (16%). The remaining two-thirds of respondents were divided almost equally between those who felt that they could 'get by' in using a computer (32%) and those who use a computer very well (34%).



- 2.2 In terms of respondent age, over two-thirds of those aged 18 to 24 years (72%) reported being able to use a computer very well, compared to only 12% of those aged 65 to 79 years. Conversely, only 3% of respondents in that younger age group reported not being able to use a computer at all, compared to 38% of those in the older age group. This finding is supported by other research, including that by Ofcom referred to above.

2.3 Findings regarding computer use were also examined in relation to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD 2012) categorisation. The SIMD 2012 is a tool which identifies areas in Scotland where there are concentrations of deprivation across seven domains, including housing; income; and access to services. Survey respondents living in the least deprived SIMD areas were almost twice as likely to report being able to use a computer well (52%) than those in the most deprived areas. Similarly, only 9% of respondents from the least deprived areas reported that they could not use a computer at all, compared to 19% of those located in the most deprived areas.

- 2.4 In contrast to the marked effects age and area deprivation appeared to have on a respondent's ability to use a computer, only small differences could be found in relation to urban/rural classification. This may imply that the known rural internet access issues in Scotland do not impact on bureaux clients to the same extent as others in the population. Of course, this is not to say that internet issues are related in any way to an individual's ability to use a computer.
- 2.5 Considering gender, findings indicate that females are slightly more likely to be able to use a computer very well (36%) compared to their male counterparts (34%). Marginally fewer females also told us that they cannot use a computer at all (14%), compared to 16% of males.
- 2.6 Also considered were the top four areas people came in to their local bureau for advice on, and whether this had any relationship to their ability to use a computer.

Chart 2: Computer use by advice type

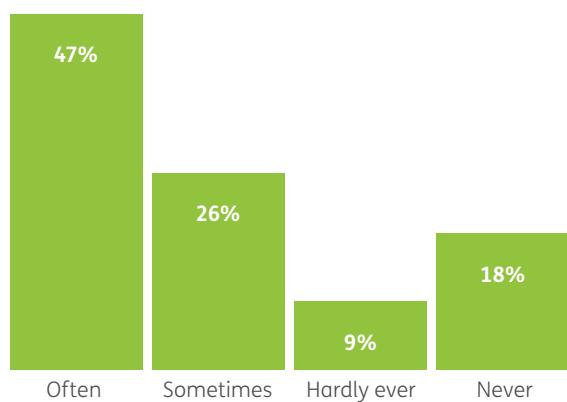


2.7 As can be seen in Chart 2, those seeking advice about work were generally the most capable of using a computer. This potentially reflects the reality that, in the modern day employment market, more and more employees are required to have at least some ability to work with computers. Those seeking advice about benefits reported the lowest abilities when it comes to using computers, and this will be explored in further detail later in this report.

Using the internet

2.8 The survey also considered individual ability to access the internet. Almost one in five respondents (18%) reported that they never use the internet; this is marginally higher than the 15% reporting not using the internet in the Ofcom report¹⁶. A further 9% of survey respondents hardly ever used the internet, while one-quarter (26%) only used it sometimes. The largest proportion of respondents used the internet often (47%), though this was still fewer than half of all those surveyed.

Chart 3: Internet use among survey respondents (Base: 1,254)



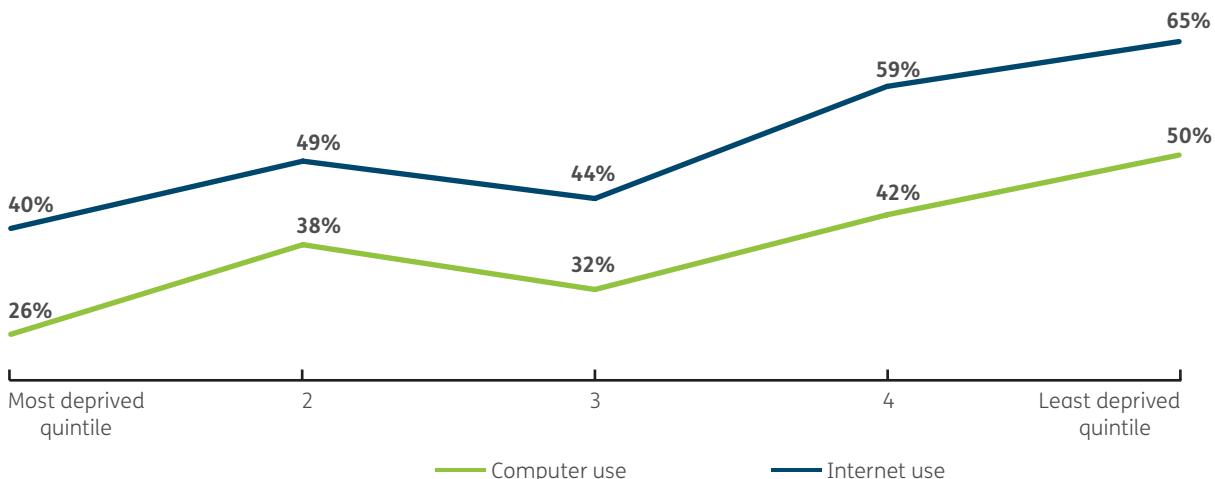
2.9 As might be expected, findings indicate that how often a person uses the internet is closely linked to their ability to use a computer. The more capable someone feels using a computer, the more likely they are to be a regular user of the internet. For example, 93% of people who can use a computer very well told us that they use the internet often.

2.10 In comparison, 93% of respondents who were unable to use a computer at all never used the internet. For those who could get by on a computer, 92% either used the internet sometimes (52%) or regularly used it (40%). Finally, of those respondents who found it difficult to use a computer, three-quarters either hardly ever used the internet (39%) or only sometimes used it (36%).

2.11 As may be expected, and in accordance with the survey findings on respondents' ability to use a computer, internet use appears to be linked with age. For example, survey findings indicate that four out of five respondents in the 18 to 24 age group used the internet often (82%), compared to only one in every four respondents (25%) aged between 65 and 79 years. Only 1% of respondents aged between 18 and 24 years reported that they never use the internet, compared to almost half of those aged between 65 and 79 years (46%).

2.12 In relation to areas of deprivation, survey findings show that only two in five respondents (40%) living in the most deprived areas use the internet often, compared to two in three respondents (65%) using the internet in the least deprived areas. In addition to this, one-fifth of respondents (21%) living in the most deprived areas reported never using the internet, in comparison to only 8% of respondents living in the least deprived areas. These, and the findings in relation to computer use, present a stark picture for bureaux clients living in the most deprived areas; as is illustrated in Chart 4 below.

Chart 4: Computer and internet use by SIMD quintile¹⁷



¹⁷ At this time the apparent ‘dip’ at the third SIMD quintile cannot be explained using available data, and so will be monitored elsewhere.

2.13 As with computer use, only minimal differences were found in relation to urban/rural classification and internet use. However, internet use in the most rural areas was nevertheless still a concern for some respondents:

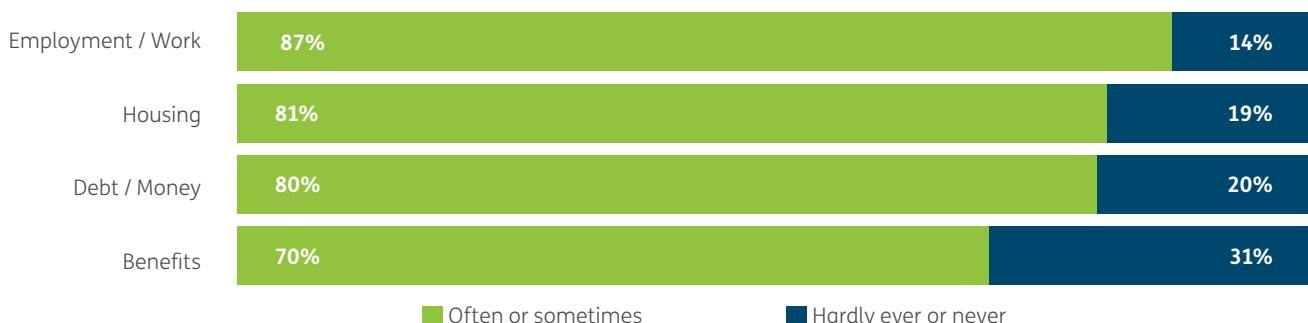
“Local authorities and the DWP are encouraging people to create online accounts and complete forms online. I do not have the skills or hardware to do this. I don’t even shop online, despite the nearest town being 100 miles away.”

2.14 With respect to gender, differences in internet use amongst survey respondents were slightly

more pronounced in relation to internet use than ability to use a computer. More than half of all females surveyed (52%) use the internet often, compared to only 43% of their male counterparts. Similarly, only 14% of females never used the internet, compared to one in five males (20%).

2.15 As was found in relation to computer use, the type of advice being sought by survey respondents had some relationship with their likelihood to use the internet. For example, as can be seen in Chart 5 those seeking advice in relation to employment were more likely to use the internet than those seeking advice in relation to benefits.

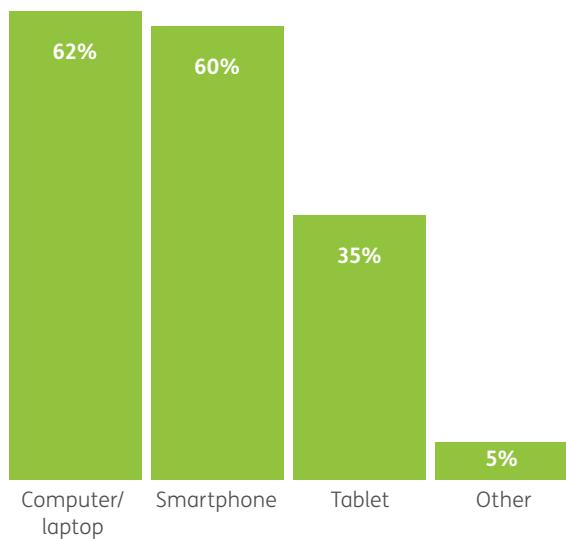
Chart 5: Internet use by advice type



Devices used to access the internet

2.16 Survey respondents were also asked about what types of devices they used to access the internet. Excluding those respondents who reported that they never used the internet, findings showed that there were almost equal proportions of respondents accessing the internet via a computer/laptop as those using a smartphone.

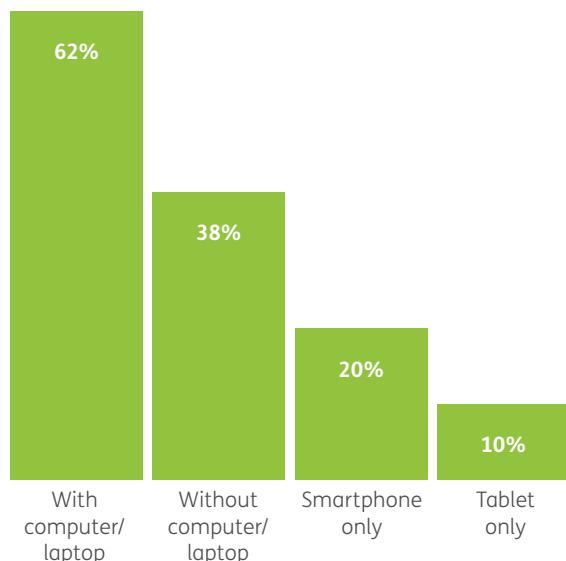
**Chart 6: Devices used to access the internet
(Base: 1,034)**



2.17 Findings in Chart 6 indicate that 38% of survey respondents access the internet using devices other than a computer or laptop, which is notably higher than the 24% stated in the Ofcom report¹⁸

2.18 Fewer than one in seven survey respondents (14%) with access to the internet were able to do so using all three main devices¹⁹. As can be seen in Chart 7, over one-third of respondents (36%) accessing the internet do so without using a computer or laptop, while a not inconsiderable 20% accessed the internet using a smartphone only. This finding highlights the importance of service providers ensuring that their electronic content is fit for purpose and able to be suitably accessed and used via devices with smaller interfaces.

**Chart 7: Internet access by type of device
(Base: 1,034)**



2.19 Through consultation with bureaux advisers who regularly assist clients with benefits claims, it is known that this task can take more than one hour to complete due to the substantial amount of information an individual is required to supply during this process. Given the proportion of respondents accessing the internet only via a smartphone, completing benefits forms may be particularly challenging in these circumstances.

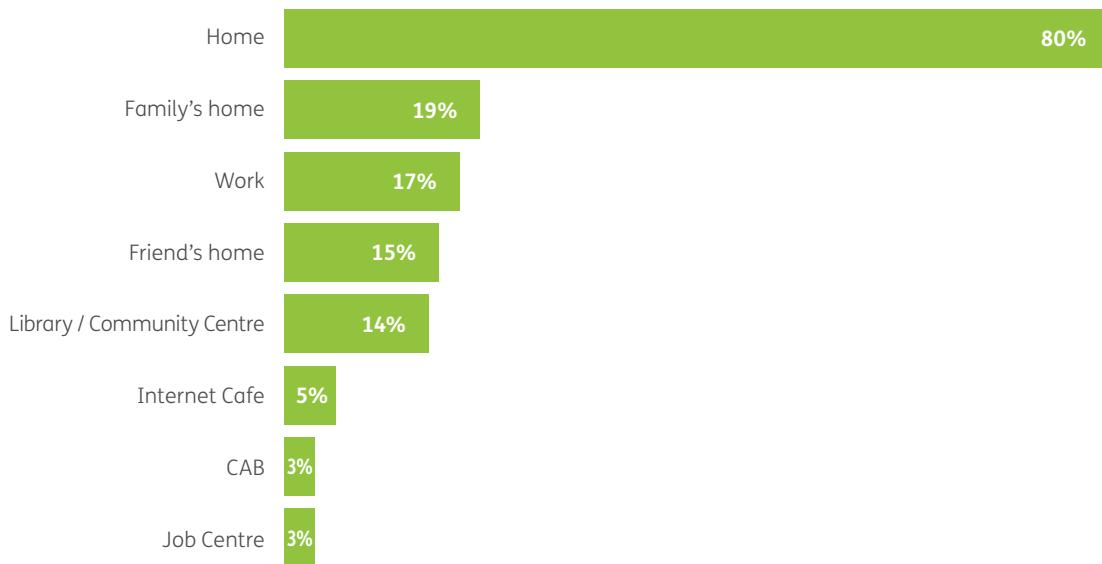
2.20 A further example of where only being able to access the internet via a smartphone may create considerable difficulties is in relation to raising a claim in the Sheriff Court for £5,000 or less under simple procedure rules. The simple procedure claim form runs for eleven pages before any information is entered by the user, and the forms include text boxes where parties need to input fairly large sections of text to explain the relevant circumstances of their case to the Court. In addition to the forms themselves, prudent parties may seek to refer to the legislation which sets out the procedural rules and standardised forms, which come to over 200 pages when printed.

2.21 Screen size and the lack of having a larger keyboard mean that smartphones present the biggest challenge to service providers when thinking about whether they can sufficiently condense and present information to service users. As one survey respondent reported:

"I can access [the internet] easily on my phone, but if I have to fill in forms etc. I'm not confident that I can do this properly."

¹⁸ Ofcom, Internet Use and Attitudes Bulletin, 2017

¹⁹ By "main devices" we are referring to a (i) computer/laptop, (ii) smartphone, and (iii) tablet device

Chart 8: Where the internet is accessed from (Base: 1,034)

Where the internet is accessed

2.22 Survey respondents were also asked where they accessed the internet from. By far the highest proportion of respondents (80%) reported accessing the internet at home, a marginally lower figure than that reported (82%) in the 2016 Scottish Household Survey²⁰.

2.23 For respondents who relied on internet access outside of the home there could be additional challenges. One respondent reported, for example:

"I cannot afford to access internet/email etc, I have to visit the library to use it. I live 5 miles from town, so this creates problems with travel."

2.24 The cost attached to using some public Wi-Fi hotspots, such as those on trains, was also mentioned by survey respondents as a barrier to internet use, as well as the cost of having a broadband connection at home. A further constraint to those not able to access the internet at home is the reliance on opening times of such as libraries, and the goodwill of others when the only access route is via the homes of friends or family. Timings are especially relevant to those who also had to accommodate child care or work commitments. One survey respondent reported:

"limited access to services in the area - the libraries are only open some hours"

Accessing the internet in privacy

2.25 Respondents were also asked if they could access the internet privately. This is especially relevant where sensitive information may have to be provided online as others may be able to view what is being entered. In addition, there may be no way to ensure that the internet connection is secure.

2.26 The majority of survey respondents (71%) that could access the internet (n=1,018) reported that privacy was not an issue, while a further 18% reported that private internet access was sometimes possible. The remaining 11% hardly ever, if at all, had private internet access.

2.27 The largest proportion of those who could access the internet privately (64%) did so via a smartphone, compared to 60% of respondents using a computer or laptop. However, over one-fifth of respondents (22%) who could access the internet in private could only do so via a smartphone, which may compound the difficulties highlighted above in relation to completing forms where sensitive personal information must be provided.

2.28 Having key public services online without an alternative option (such as paper forms or a telephone service) could present issues not only to those without internet access, but equally to some internet users. For example, lack of private access to the internet coupled with the need to access free and publicly available Wi-Fi could result in having to enter public information while sitting next to someone on a train or in a busy coffee shop.

20 Scottish Government; Scottish Household Survey 2016

Computer skills

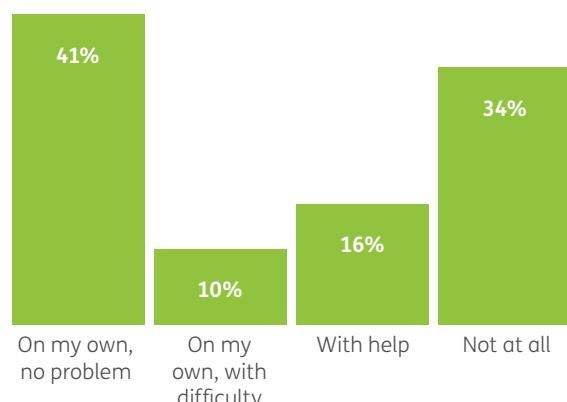
2.29 In addition to exploring computer use and internet access, the survey also asked respondents about their ability to undertake certain basic tasks online. The survey focussed on the type of tasks that are commonly associated with completing official forms, such as e-mail use; downloading forms and editing the same; uploading completed forms; and scanning documents in order to submit particular types of evidence.

E-mail use

2.30 A little over one-fifth of respondents (21%) reported that they did not have an e-mail account, which is marginally higher than the 18% who stated that they never used the internet. This may imply that a very small proportion of respondents who *do* use the internet do not access e-mail via this route. Of those respondents who *did* have an e-mail account, 50% reported that they accessed this on a daily basis, compared to 29% who did so monthly or less.

2.31 Survey respondents were also asked if they were able to send electronic attachments via e-mail, which could be considered one of the most basic e-mail related tasks. As can be seen in Chart 9, over one-third of respondents (34%) reported that they were unable to undertake this task.

Chart 9: Ability to attach and send documents via e-mail (Base: 1,256)



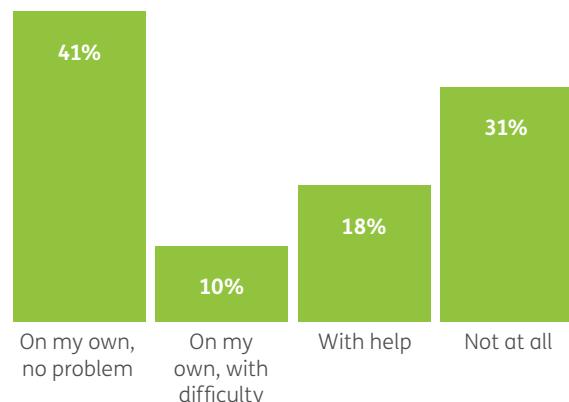
2.32 Chart 9 also shows that half of respondents (50%) could not attach and send documents independently, which illustrates that skills can be as much of a barrier to using online services as lack of internet access can be.

Completing forms

2.33 In order to use some online services it is necessary to download and complete forms. For some services, such as making a claim under simple procedure rules in the Sheriff Court, although forms can be completed electronically the finished article must be printed and submitted in hard copy. This is an additional complication for those who either access the internet away from home or via a smart phone.

2.34 As part of the digital survey respondents were simply asked if they could download and save an online document. While over half (51%) reported that they could achieve this, occasionally with a little difficulty, the remaining 49% could not complete such a task unaided, if at all.

Chart 10: Ability to download and save an online form (Base: 1,215)



2.35 Respondent skills in relation to uploading forms were fewer in comparison to download skills, with 59% unable to carry out this task unaided.

Chart 11: Ability to upload a form online (Base: 1,180)

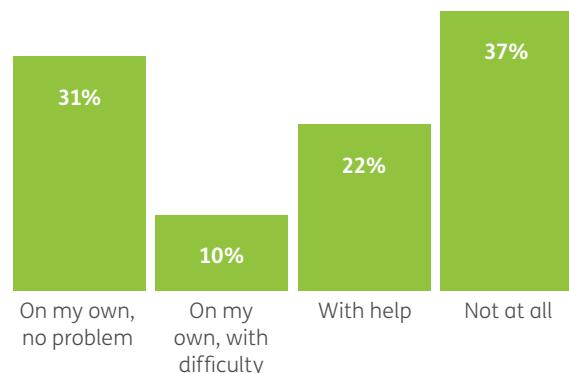
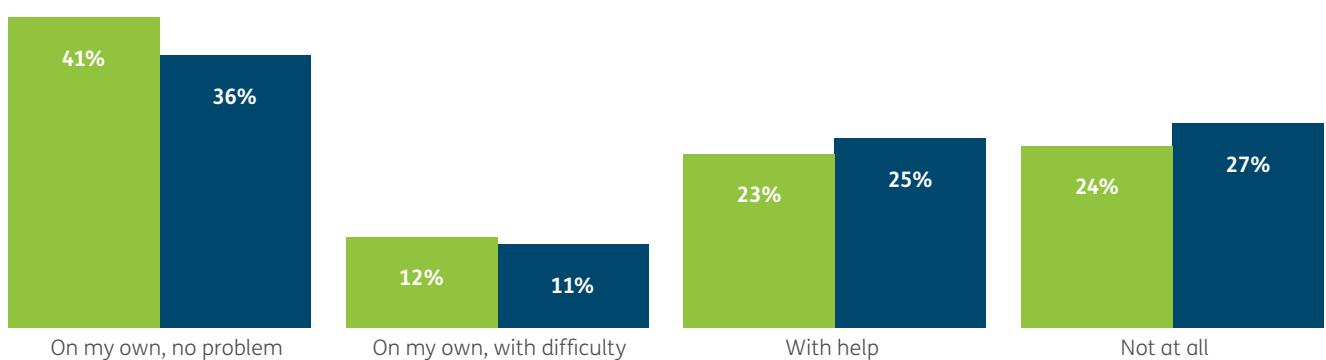


Chart 12: Completing generic or benefits forms online (Base: 1,180)

2.36 Along with completing a downloaded form, in looking at the skill set of all survey respondents it was clear that fewer than two in five (38%) could undertake all online form-related tasks without any assistance.

2.37 Survey respondents were also asked if they could complete a benefits form online. A similar pattern to that found in relation to generic form completion was evident, if slightly more pronounced, in relation to benefits forms, as a little more half of respondents (52%) felt that they could not complete such a task without assistance.

2.38 Under the Scotland Act 2016 the powers over benefits for carers, disabled people and parts of the Social Fund are to be devolved to Scotland.²¹ When these powers are transferred, the governments and agencies which administer the benefits people receive will differ depending on the benefit. Generally speaking, the benefits relating to health and disability will be managed by the Scottish government and Scottish agencies, while the other benefits will be managed by the UK government and UK agencies.

21 A list of the devolved benefit powers is available to download from the Scottish Government website <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/People/fairerscotland/Social-Security/Powers/Devolved-benefits>

2.39 Two sub-categories of benefit clients were therefore considered, namely those seeking advice for health and/or disability related benefits, and those seeking advice for non-health/disability benefits²². In Chart 13 it can be seen that those seeking advice regarding health/disability benefits were less likely to be able to complete online forms without assistance (68%) than those claiming other benefits (58%)

2.40 These findings, if reflected in the wider population, could present a challenge to the Scottish government in how they can best meet their undertaking to build a social security system that is fair, equal, and responsive for all people in Scotland, particularly considering health and disability claimants may face additional challenges when it comes to accessing digital services.²³

22 The sample sizes used to produce these findings are comparatively smaller than the sample sizes of our wider survey findings (health/disability: 368; other: 196), however they are still large enough to produce relatively robust indicative findings

23 CAS, *Designing a Social Security System for Scotland: Consultation on the new powers 2016*, October 2016, available to download from <http://www.cas.org.uk/publications/future-social-security-scotland-debate>

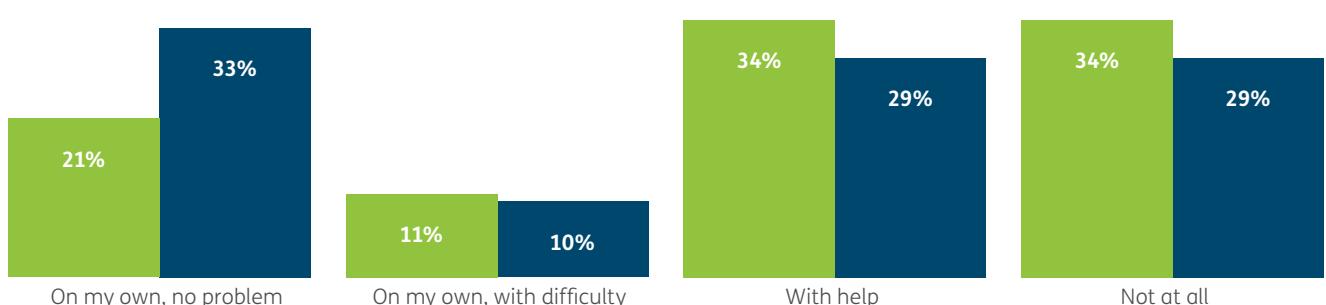
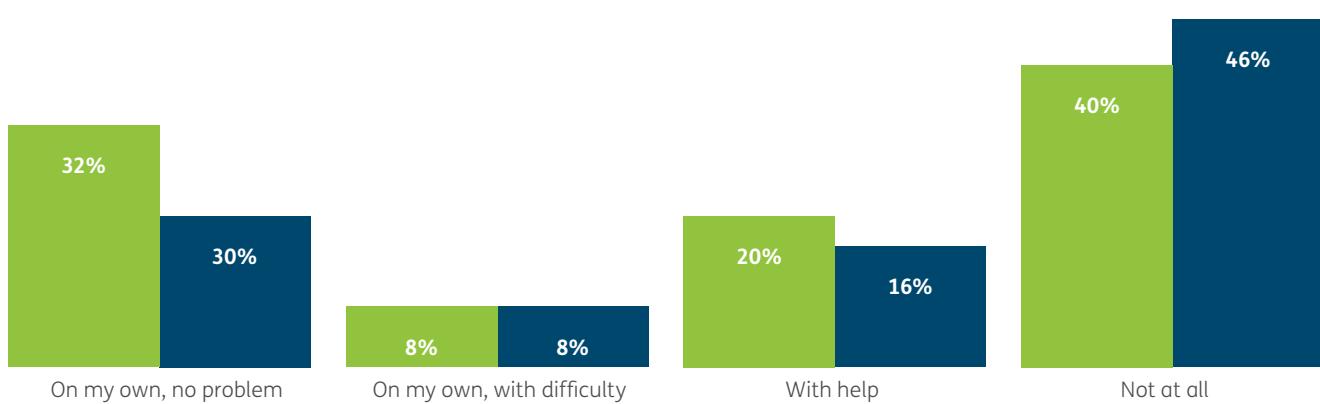
Chart 13: Completing a benefit form online, by type of benefit

Chart 14: Ability to scan documents and do so in privacy (Base: 1,181)

Scanning documents

- 2.41 The final skill addressed by the survey was the ability to scan documents in order to produce electronic copies where it was necessary to submit information only available on paper. If the social security and justice systems are to eventually move online, in whole or in part, it follows that people will need to be able to submit copies of supporting evidence with their submissions.
- 2.42 The survey findings (see Chart 14) indicate that scanning documents unaided would not be possible for 60% of bureaux clients, with a slightly higher proportion (62%) unable to do so in private. Of course, part of the issue here may be due to lack of access to appropriate hardware rather than skills alone, but this does not diminish the essence of this finding.

Barriers and opportunities

- 2.43 Having considered levels of access and skills amongst bureaux clients in regards to using online services, the survey also asked what barriers clients faced in regard to digital access. It was clear from the findings that the reasons some bureaux clients struggle to use the internet are often multifaceted in nature. Respondents were also asked if they had ever had any kind of IT training, or would be interested in taking this up were it to be provided free of charge.

Barriers to internet use

- 2.44 The reasons preventing bureaux clients from fully accessing the internet were wide-ranging and often linked, in various ways, to their life circumstances. These included respondent age and accommodation status. For example, one respondent noted:

"I am 73 years old. I have no IT skills and I worry each time I contact government agencies and am told to 'look online' or 'fill in a form online' as I have neither the skills or equipment to do this."

- 2.45 In relation to accommodation, another respondent reported:

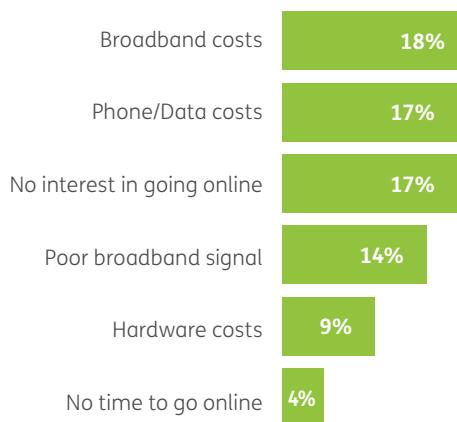
"I have struggled to get online, which is difficult as the job centre wants me to go on my universal credit account every day! This is especially bad as I've been really busy with finding a flat as I'm homeless and the job centre doesn't get it."

- 2.46 As may be expected, however, two of the three most common barriers preventing survey respondents from using the internet were financial in nature. This was succinctly summarised by one respondent who simply stated that they had:

"No computer, no phone line, and no money."

- 2.47 A little less than one in five respondents (18%) reported that broadband costs were a barrier for them, while 17% noted that phone and data costs were a barrier (see Chart 15). A further 17% of respondents simply had no interest in going online, with this being the third most common reason for survey respondents not accessing the internet.

Chart 15: Barriers to using the internet (Base: 1,267)



- 2.48 Poor broadband or internet signal (14%), hardware costs such as the cost of a computer, tablet or phone (9%), and having no time to go online (4%) were also reported as barriers to internet access.
- 2.49 Survey respondents living in the more deprived areas, as defined by SIMD 2012 quintiles, faced more barriers than their counterparts living in the least deprived areas. The only exception to this was in relation to quality of broadband signal, which was half as likely to be an issue in the most deprived quintile (16%) than any other barrier (average 31%). One respondent noted:
- "I am waiting for my benefits claim to be processed and I have been unable to access the internet at this time as I have been unable to pay my mobile bill and pay for internet. I am also unable to pay for internet in my flat as I have no money for this."*
- 2.50 Being unable to meet bills for internet use could also have knock-on effects for some:

"sometimes our internet services are restricted if our bill is over-due, usually by 4-5 days."

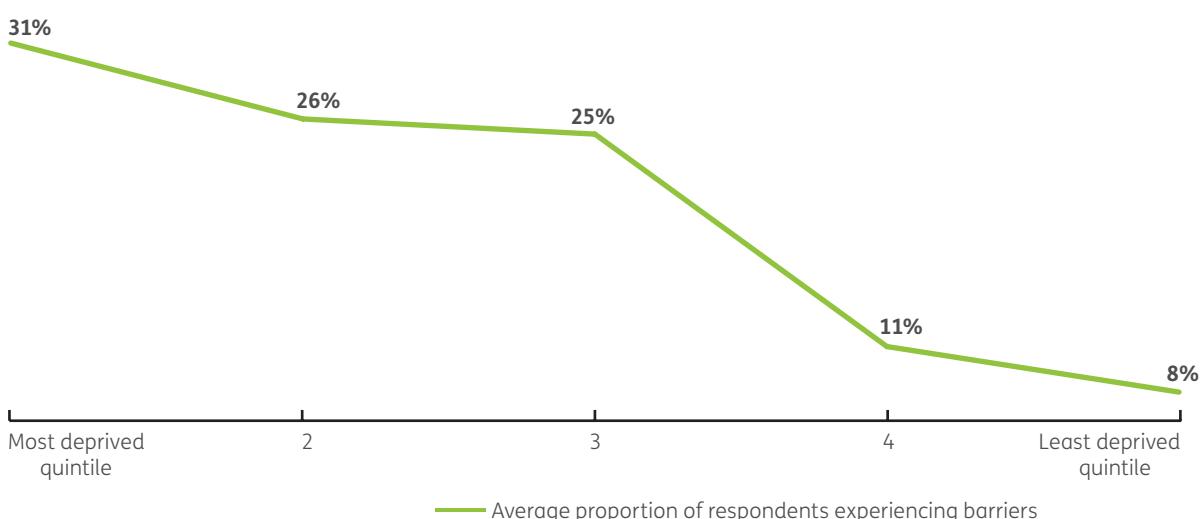
- 2.51 Broadly speaking, for survey respondents the likelihood of facing barriers to internet access declined with level of deprivation in that area.
- 2.52 For example, only 16% of the people who told us broadband costs are a barrier for them live in one of the two least deprived quintiles. Similarly, only 15% of the people who listed phone/data costs, and 15% of people who said that they have no interest in going online, live in one of these two quintiles.

Urban/Rural differences

- 2.53 As noted above, 14% of bureaux clients surveyed reported that poor broadband or internet signal was a barrier to using the internet. One respondent, for example, noted that their signal was "exceptionally poor" and, as a result:
- "setting up a new payee on digital banking took me 3.5 hours due to loss of internet connection."*
- 2.54 Although numbers are small in comparison to the survey sample as a whole, of the 135 respondents who reported poor broadband signal²⁴, this was more likely to be experienced in remote small towns or remote rural areas than in any other area type. One rural respondent noted:
- "my internet signal is only available at the top of my garden, so I can only access it with a tablet."*

24 This relates only to respondents who provided full postcode data, so the actual incidence may be slightly higher.

Chart 16: Average proportion experiencing barriers to internet access, by SIMD quintile (Base: 947)



Opportunities for training

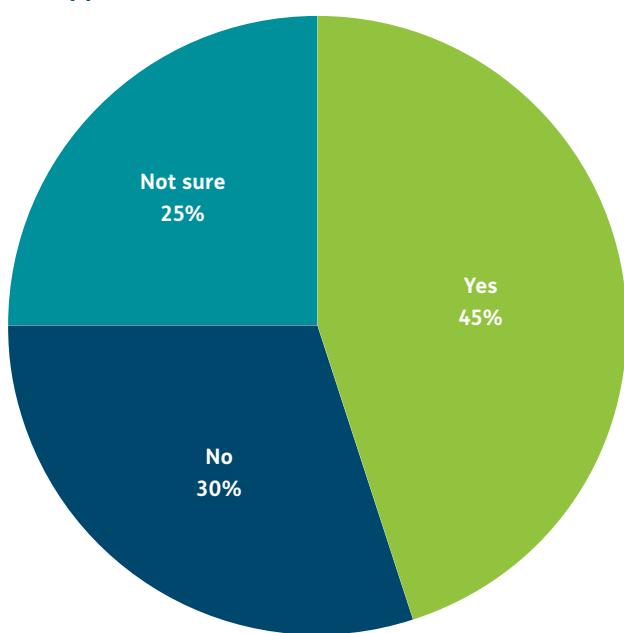
2.55 While almost one third (31%) of respondents²⁵ reported that they had had training or support to use computers or the internet, the largest proportion (64%) had not. The remaining 5% were unsure if they received had training or not.

2.56 Respondents were also asked if free training was made available to them to improve their digital skills, would they take advantage of this. For those who are currently digitally excluded, it could be argued that such training would clearly be beneficial. For example, a respondent reported:

"It's a bit hard to find what you're looking for [on the internet] as I don't really understand it."

2.57 Training individuals to improve their skill sets, confidence, and familiarity with digital content could help to overcome some of the barriers they currently face. However, less than half of the survey respondents (45%) reported that they would be willing to take up an offer of free training or support, while 25% were 'not sure'.

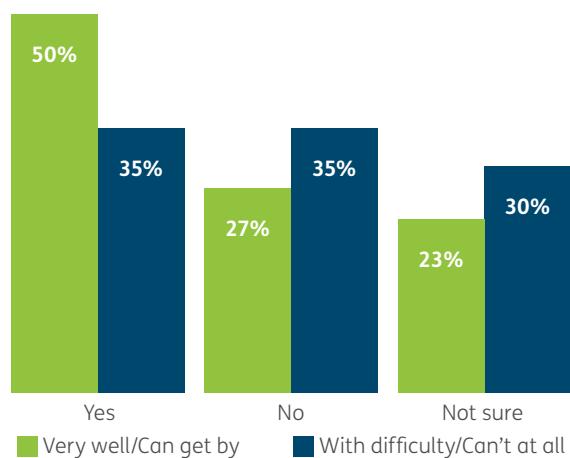
Chart 17: Likelihood to accept free training or support (Base: 1,174)



25 Of 1,175 valid survey responses

2.58 In considering different levels of skill in relation to computers, it might be anticipated that those with the lowest skill levels would be most likely to be interested in training opportunities. However, in relation to survey respondents the opposite was true as those who could only use a computer with difficulty, if at all, were less likely to say they would accept such training.

Chart 18: Computer skills by willingness to undergo training (Base: 1,173)



2.59 However, it is of interest to note that the average age of respondents who stated that they would not be interested in computer training was 65 years, with the following being an example of comments provided by older respondents:

"Due to my age [77] and having never used a computer, I have no interest in learning."

2.60 Nevertheless, those who are digitally excluded in any respect present a real and ongoing challenge for all service providers and organisations looking to lessen the digital divide.



3. Policy implications and concluding remarks

- 3.1 One of the primary findings of this research exercise is that many clients of Scottish citizens advice bureaux cannot currently access services that are online, and that they may not have the skills to do so even if they could. Although the sample for this survey cannot be said to represent the Scottish population as a whole, this finding nevertheless may indicate that Scotland is not yet at a stage where key services can be moved entirely online without excluding a proportion of society from these services.
- 3.2 While providing free training opportunities for people willing to improve their digital skills may lessen the digital divide, findings here indicate that this may not be a full answer to the problem as those respondents most digitally excluded were also those least likely to engage in training opportunities. In addition to this, even if more individuals do learn and improve their digital skills, this does not resolve practical barriers such as being able to afford the devices and internet connections necessary to access the internet in private.
- 3.3 There is also an opportunity to reduce the digital divide at a quicker rate than the natural improvement that will come about through generational change. That is through the provision of free and accessible training opportunities for people who are willing to improve their digital skills. Future reforms and modernisation of services in Scotland need to move with consumers, but at the same time still prioritise the needs of people who do not have access to digital and online content to ensure that they don't lose access to essential rights and services as a result.
- 3.4 One answer may be to look to local advice and support organisations such as Citizens Advice Bureaux, to support the most vulnerable in this regard. While such services do, and will continue to, play an important role in supporting individuals to access and protect their rights, complete reliance on these organisations is not a full or satisfactory answer. These services will always have limitations to their capacity and resources, and it is vital that prospective users of the social security and justice systems are afforded the opportunity to access their basic and fundamental rights independently, which for some would mean offline.
- 3.5 It is therefore suggested that all key public services should, therefore, continue to have alternative options available to people who are not able to competently use online services. This might include having contactable telephone numbers, and public access points where people can request paper forms and speak directly to someone face to face. Forms should also be available to download online, so that local organisations can print paper copies for people who need them.
- 3.6 Administrative staff within public services should be able to either process submitted paper forms as they are, or alternatively have a procedure where they scan received paper copies onto their internal online system (if that would allow them to better process them).
- 3.7 While this would be more burdensome on administrative staff than having all forms processed online, it is anticipated that the majority of service users would opt to use online options, provided they are well designed and publicised. The requirement to undertake this extra level of administrative processing would be considered a proportionate and necessary measure to protect key principles such as maintaining access to justice. This option would still involve less administrative work than the majority of paper-based systems.

- 3.8 It can also reasonably be expected that over time the levels of digital access in Scotland will improve, given the variations found between younger and older generations' abilities to access and use technology and the internet. The digital divide should therefore decrease naturally over time, which will lessen the impact of policy positions such as "digital by default" which currently has a disproportionately negative impact on people who are not fully online.
- 3.9 Ultimately, all those entitled to it should be able to obtain a minimum level of income from the social security system if they require it. Similarly, all people should be able to seek justice through a court or tribunal. Ensuring people have access to these basic and fundamental rights is essential if we are to live in a fair and just society.

3.10 While Citizens Advice Scotland and the wider citizens advice bureaux network does not have all the solutions, it is nonetheless hoped that the service can continue to be part of the ongoing work of many stakeholders (including the Scottish Government, Digital Scotland, and the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations) to improve people's digital skills and levels of digital access.

3.11 It is hoped the findings presented in this report can provide an up to date and accurate picture from which to progress the initiatives and work already underway by various organisations to lessen the digital divide in Scotland. It is also hoped that these findings can help provide a baseline from which to measure the effectiveness of this type of work going forward.



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