

## How much is enough for the Internet?

'While the battle for digital access is being won in Britain, government and business now face a struggle to convince everyone that the Internet is worth using', concludes Professor Richard Rose of the Oxford Internet Institute from the new Oxford Internet Survey (OxIS). The survey was designed to learn who does and does not use the Internet and why. A nationally representative random sample of 2030 persons aged 14 and up was interviewed face to face between 23 May and 28 June 2003.

The OxIS survey found that the average person has access to the Internet in at least two out of four places: home, work, school or at a public library. Only 4% of the British population lacks ready access to a place where they could sign on to the Internet. The lack of a computer at home is not a major obstacle, since the average Internet user goes on line away from home as well as at home. Nor is having a computer at home a sufficient reason for using the Internet.

Among Britons aged 14 and over, 59% currently use the Internet. The biggest difference between users and non-users is age. Among those still in school, 98% are Internet users and among people of working age, 67%. By contrast, only 22% of retirees use the Internet. Educational differences are less important. All youngsters, whether or not they are numerate or literate, appear able to click on the Internet, and a majority of working age people without any O-level or GCSE qualifications now use the Internet.

Once on line, the average person finds multiple uses for the Internet. The most popular are to get information, browse the World Wide Web, email, and shopping, and youths tend to make more use of the web for studies than for music or entertainment. Between a tenth and a fifth of users employ the net to get news, banking or public services.

The OxIS survey shows that among the two-fifths who don't sign on the Internet there is no fear or dislike of using electronic technology. For example, more prefer using a bank card machine than dealing with a bank teller. 'People who don't use the Internet don't see how it will help them in their everyday affairs', states Rose. 'For example, older people have been educated, earned a living, shopped and paid bills for most of their lives before the Internet came along'.

Among the two-fifths who do not use the Internet, half are informed but indifferent; they know someone who could send an email or get information for them but have not bothered to ask for this to be done. An additional 7% are proxy users, who have asked for a friend to sign on the Internet on their behalf. One in seven are excluded because they do not know anyone who could get on the Internet on their behalf, and this group divides equally into those who are anti-technology and those who are apathetic.

'Government and commerce will have to wait a generation or more before nine-tenths of Britons regularly use the Internet', declares Professor Rose. If all the people who told the Oxford Internet Survey that they were definitely or likely to go on line in the next year did so, this would still leave 34% off line.

'Growth in Internet use can continue in Britain', notes Professor William Dutton, director of the Oxford Internet Institute. 'As individuals learn how to use the Internet over the years, they become more confident in this new medium and spend more time on a wider variety of activities'. Eleven percent of the population now has Internet access to broadband at home. The diffusion of broadband Internet services will increase the versatility of the Internet while also opening the prospect of a new digital divide between those who are on broadband and those who are not.