

16 December 2003

**Coverage**

United Kingdom  
(household access)

Great Britain  
(individual access)

**Theme**

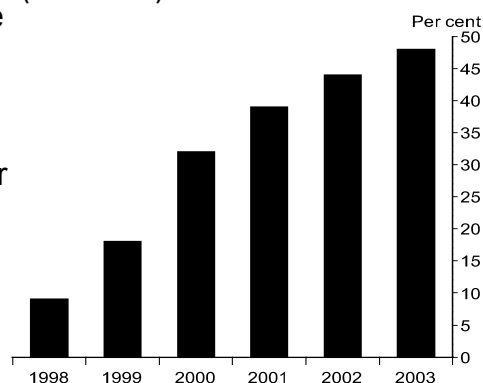
Social and Welfare

# Internet access

## Individuals and Households

Over the period July to September 2003 an estimated 11.9 million households in the UK could access the Internet from home, according to the Expenditure and Food Survey (EFS). That amounts to 48 per cent of all UK households.

UK households with home access to the Internet, July to September quarters (1998 to 2003)



The number of households that have Internet access is over five times the number in July to September 1998.

According to figures from the October 2003 National Statistics Omnibus Survey, an estimated 58 per cent of adults in Great Britain had used the Internet in the three months prior to interview.

### Households with home access to the Internet, UK (by quarter) <sup>1</sup>

|                     | Number of households with access to the Internet (millions) | Percentage of households with access to the Internet |
|---------------------|---|--|
| <b>1998</b>         |   |  |
| July - September    | 2.3   | 9  |
| <b>1999</b>         |   |  |
| July - September    | 4.5   | 18   |
| <b>2000</b>         |   |  |
| July - September    | 7.8   | 32   |
| <b>2001</b>         |   |  |
| January - March     | 9.2   | 36   |
| April - June*       | 9.2   | 38   |
| July - September*   | 9.5   | 39   |
| October - December* | 9.5   | 39   |
| <b>2002</b>         |   |  |
| January - March*    | 10.3  | 42   |
| April - June*       | 10.6  | 44   |
| July - September*   | 10.8  | 44   |
| October - December* | 11.1  | 45   |
| <b>2003</b>         |   |  |
| January - March*    | 11.3  | 46   |
| April - June*       | 11.7  | 47   |
| July - September    | 11.9  | 48   |

Source - Family Expenditure Survey (April 1998 to March 2001); Expenditure and Food Survey (April 2001 onwards)

<sup>1</sup> Data up to April 2000 show households with access to the Internet through a home computer only, from April 2000 the data include all means of access.

\* These data have been regressed to take into account the latest population estimates based on the 2001 Census. These data therefore may have changed from data published in previous First Releases.

Issued by  
National Statistics  
1 Drummond Gate  
London SW1V 2QQ

Telephone  
Press Office 020 7533 5702  
E-mail: [press.office@ons.gov.uk](mailto:press.office@ons.gov.uk)  
Public Enquiries 0845-601 3034

Statistician  
Emma-Jane Cooper-Green  
020 7533 5830  
E-mail: [eSociety@ons.gov.uk](mailto:eSociety@ons.gov.uk)

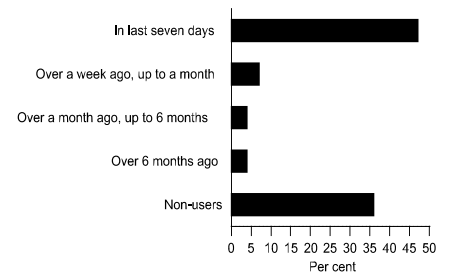
Internet  
[www.statistics.gov.uk/releases](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/releases)

**Individual use of the Internet**

Sixty-four per cent of adults in Britain have ever used the Internet at some time prior to interview according to figures from the October 2003 National Statistics Omnibus Survey. Fifty-eight per cent of adults in Britain have used the Internet in the three months prior to interview. In October 2003, 60 per cent of men and 55 per cent of women had used the Internet in the three months prior to interview. Fifty-five per cent of adults in Britain had used the Internet in the month prior to interview. While individual use of the Internet still appears to be increasing the rate of increase seems to be slowing down.

The percentage of adults who had used the Internet in the three months prior to interview decreased steadily with age and ranged from 88 per cent of people aged 16 to 24 to 16 per cent for those aged over 65.

**Proportion of adults by when they last used the Internet, October 2003**



**Adults who have used the Internet in the three months prior to interview in October 2003 by age and sex (Great Britain)**

|                     | Per cent  |
|---------------------|-----------|
| <b>All adults</b>   | <b>58</b> |
| <b>Age in years</b> |           |
| 16 to 24            | 88        |
| 25 to 44            | 76        |
| 45 to 54            | 64        |
| 55 to 64            | 45        |
| 65 and over         | 16        |
| <b>Sex</b>          |           |
| Men                 | 60        |
| Women               | 55        |

Source - National Statistics Omnibus Survey

**How individuals access the Internet**

Individuals can use a range of technologies to access the Internet but computers continued to dominate as the preferred method of access. In October 2003, 99 per cent of those who had used the Internet in the three months prior to interview had used a computer, of which 24 per cent had used a laptop computer. Approximately 11 per cent of adults who had stated they had used the Internet in the last three months had done so using a mobile phone. Use of other means of access to the Internet such as Digital Television were also reported but the sample sizes were too small to give reliable estimates.



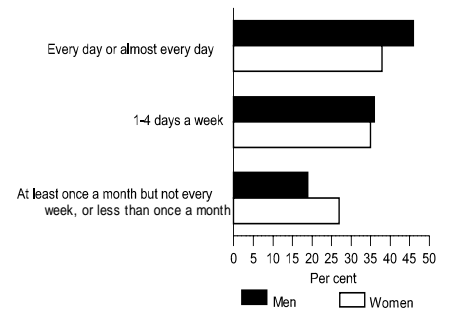
### Where people use the Internet

Individuals were asked where they had used the Internet in the three months prior to interview. A wide range of locations were reported with the respondent's own home being the most popular location (82 per cent), followed by their workplace (46 per cent) and another person's home (23 per cent). Other notable locations were people's place of education (14 per cent), public libraries (10 per cent) and Internet cafes or shops (six per cent).

### Frequency of access

Respondents were also asked how frequently they used the Internet. Men still use the Internet more often than women: forty-six per cent of all men who accessed the Internet in the three months prior to interview did so every day or almost every day compared with 38 per cent of women. Conversely 27 per cent of women tended to access the Internet at least once a month but not every week, or less than once a month compared with 19 per cent of men.

Frequency of access (adults who had used the Internet three months prior to interview), October 2003



### What people do on the Internet <sup>1</sup>

Among those who had used the Internet in the three months prior to interview 84 per cent of adults used it for e-mail, 80 per cent used it for searching for information about goods and services and 68 per cent to search for information about travel and accommodation. Over half of all adults (53 per cent) who had used the Internet in the three months prior to interview used it to buy or order tickets, goods and services <sup>2</sup>. Nearly half of all adults who had used the Internet in the 12 months prior to interview had accessed a government or public authority website. Eighty-seven per cent of these adults visited these sites to obtain information, and 27 per cent of them did so to download a form.

### Internet security

Adults who had used the Internet in the 12 months prior to interview were asked if they had experienced security problems in that period as a result of using the Internet. Forty-two per cent stated that they had received too many junk e-mails and considered this a security problem, 34 per cent had had a computer virus while 23 per cent had received offensive e-mails. Twenty-nine per cent stated that they had not had any problems at all.

<sup>1</sup> Respondents can report more than one category for each activity.

<sup>2</sup> Excluding shares and financial services

### Internet purchases

Respondents who had bought or ordered goods or services over the Internet, for personal or private use, in the 12 months prior to interview were asked what goods they had bought. The most popular purchases were travel, accommodation or holidays (52 per cent), books, magazines, e-learning or training material (38 per cent), tickets for events (36 per cent) and music or CDs (34 per cent).

---

#### Respondents who have bought or ordered over the Internet, for personal or private use, in the 12 months prior to interview, by types of goods and services, October 2003 (Great Britain)

---

|   | Per cent |
|---|----------|
| Travel, accommodation or holidays               | 52       |
| Books or magazines/e-learning/training material | 38       |
| Tickets for events                              | 36       |
| Music or CDs                                    | 34       |
| Clothes or sports goods                         | 32       |
| Videos or DVDs                                  | 30       |
| Household goods                                 | 24       |
| Computer software                               | 22       |
| Computer hardware                               | 19       |
| Electronic equipment                            | 19       |
| Food or groceries                               | 19       |
| Insurance                                       | 17       |
| Shares or financial services                    | 9        |

---

Source - National Statistics Omnibus Survey

Note: percentages do not add to 100 per cent as respondents may give more than one answer

Of those who had bought or ordered goods or services<sup>1</sup>, for personal or private use, in the three months prior to interview, 40 per cent reported spending a total of £100 or less in this period, while 24 per cent spent a total of over £500.

Thirty-seven per cent of those who had used the Internet for personal or private use had not bought anything over the Internet; their main reasons for not doing so were that they preferred to shop in person (28 per cent), that they had security concerns (25 per cent) or they had no need (25 per cent). Over three-quarters (78 per cent) of adults that had bought goods over the Internet in the 12 months prior to interview reported that they had not encountered any problems.

---

<sup>1</sup> Excluding shares or financial services

**People who do not use the Internet**

Those adults who had never used the Internet (36 per cent) were asked why they had not used it. Fifty-three per cent of these non-users said that they did not want to use, or had no need for, or no interest, in the Internet; 40 per cent had no Internet connection; and 39 per cent felt they lacked knowledge or the confidence to use it.

---

**Reasons for not using the Internet (adults who have never used the Internet), October 2003 (Great Britain)**

---

|  | Per cent |
|--|----------|
| Do not want to/need to/or have an interest           | 53       |
| No Internet connection                               | 40       |
| Lack of knowledge or confidence                      | 39       |
| Internet offers no benefits                          | 16       |
| Someone else uses the Internet for me                | 11       |
| Concern about security on the Internet               | 10       |
| Cost is too high                                     | 10       |
| Concern about the material available on the Internet | 9        |

---

Source - National Statistics Omnibus Survey

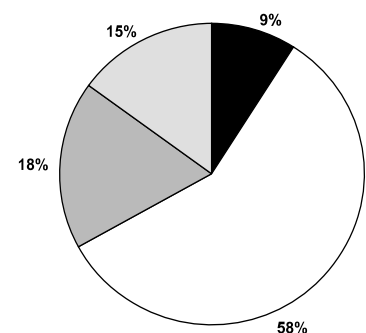
Note: percentages do not add to 100 per cent as respondents may give more than one answer

Adults that had never used the Internet were also asked which of four statements best described what they thought about using the Internet. Fifty-eight per cent of non-users chose the statement “I have not really considered using the Internet before and I am not likely to in the future”. This core group of non-Internet users represents 21 per cent of all adults.

**Household broadband access**

In the National Statistics Omnibus Survey people who stated that their household had Internet access were asked about the type of Internet connection used in the household. In October 2003, 73 per cent of households in Great Britain had a dial-up telephone line connection, and a quarter of households reported that they had a broadband connection. When asked how likely the household would upgrade to a broadband connection<sup>1</sup> in the next 12 months, 29 per cent stated that it would be very or quite likely, while 71 per cent stated that it would be quite or very unlikely.

**Statements that best describe the views of adults who have never used the Internet, October 2003**



- I have not really considered using the Internet before but I am likely to in the future
- I have not really considered using the Internet before and I'm not likely to in the future
- I have considered using the Internet and I might use it, or will use it in the future
- I have considered using the Internet and I probably won't use it in the future

---

<sup>1</sup> This question has been asked for the first time on the October 2003 National Statistics Omnibus Survey. Until this question has been repeated the data should be treated with some caution.

**Households with home access to the Internet**

The following information on household Internet access comes from the Expenditure and Food Survey (EFS). Over the third quarter of 2003 an estimated 11.9 million households in the UK could access the Internet from home, representing 48 per cent of all households. This is over five times the number five years earlier.

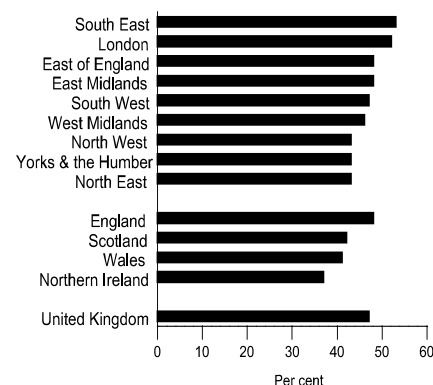
**Who has Internet access**

A more detailed analysis of Internet access has to be based on the full sample of the Expenditure and Food Survey over a twelve month period. While 48 per cent of households had home access in July to September 2003, the average for the twelve months, October 2002 to September 2003, was 47 per cent, therefore this 47 per cent provides the base for the following household data.

**Differences between the countries and regions of the UK**

Levels of access vary greatly between different parts of the UK. Over the period October 2002 to September 2003 the proportion of households with access was lowest in Northern Ireland (37 per cent). Proportions were highest in the South East of England and London where over half of all households had Internet access (53 and 52 per cent respectively).

**Home access to the Internet by Government Office Region and UK country, October 2002 to September 2003**



**Households with home access to the Internet by Government Office Region & UK country: October 2002 to September 2003**

|                          | Per cent |
|--------------------------|----------|
| North East               | 43       |
| North West               | 43       |
| Yorkshire and the Humber | 43       |
| East Midlands            | 48       |
| West Midlands            | 46       |
| East of England          | 48       |
| London                   | 52       |
| South East               | 53       |
| South West               | 47       |
| England                  | 48       |
| Wales                    | 41       |
| Scotland                 | 42       |
| Northern Ireland         | 37       |
| United Kingdom           | 47       |

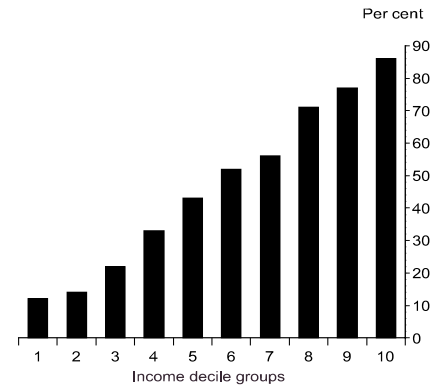
Source - Expenditure and Food Survey



**Differences between income groups**

For this analysis households have been divided into 10 equal groups (deciles) according to their gross income. Levels of Internet access depend very strongly on income. Over the period October 2002 to September 2003, levels of household Internet access increased rapidly across the income groups with the lowest two income decile groups at 12 and 14 per cent respectively rising to 86 per cent in the highest income decile group.

**Home access to the Internet by gross income decile group, October 2002 to September 2003**



**Households with home access to the Internet, UK by gross income decile group: October 2002 to September 2003**

|                      | Per cent |
|----------------------|----------|
| Lowest ten per cent  | 12       |
| Second decile group  | 14       |
| Third decile group   | 22       |
| Fourth decile group  | 33       |
| Fifth decile group   | 43       |
| Sixth decile group   | 52       |
| Seventh decile group | 56       |
| Eighth decile group  | 71       |
| Ninth decile group   | 77       |
| Highest decile group | 86       |
| All households       | 47       |

Source - Expenditure and Food Survey

## BACKGROUND NOTES

1. This First Release on Internet Access shows information about both households with home access to the Internet and about individuals' use of the Internet. This information comes from two different data sources. The main source for households is the Family Expenditure Survey (up to March 2001) and from April 2001 onwards, the Expenditure and Food Survey. The most recently available information from this survey covers the July to September 2003 quarter. The National Statistics Omnibus Survey is the source for individuals' use of the Internet. These data were last collected in October 2003 (See notes 4, 5 and 6).
2. The Expenditure and Food Survey (formerly the Family Expenditure Survey) is carried out by interviewing a nationally representative sample of households in the United Kingdom. About 1,700 households provide information each quarter, and estimates are subject to sampling variability, like those from all sample surveys. Quarterly estimates when first available are provisional and may be revised during end year processing when full annual datasets are produced. The 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate of the proportion of households with home Internet access in the quarter July to September 2003 were 45 per cent to 50 per cent (the survey estimate was 48 per cent).
3. Results from the Family Expenditure Survey/Expenditure and Food Survey are based on data that have been weighted in two stages to reduce the effect of non-response bias and to match population estimates (for more information see Family Spending - A report on the 2002-03 Expenditure and Food Survey available early 2004). The weights to match population estimates for data from April 2001 are based on data from the 2001 Census. All weights for data prior to April 2001 and non-response weights from April 2001 are based on 1991 Census information.
4. The National Statistics Omnibus Survey is a multi-purpose survey developed by the Office for National Statistics for use by government departments, other public bodies, charities and academics. It provides a fast, cost-effective and reliable way of obtaining information on topics too brief to warrant a survey of their own, and for topics of immediate interest. The Omnibus Survey is carried out eight times a year and each month the survey runs a random sample of about 1,800 adults, aged 16 and over, living in private households throughout Britain. Each month's questionnaire covers a variety of topics, and results are available to users within three weeks of the end of fieldwork. (For general information on the National Statistics Omnibus Survey, contact 020 7533 5310, [omnibus@ons.gov.uk](mailto:omnibus@ons.gov.uk).)
5. Questions on individuals' access to the Internet were included in the National Statistics Omnibus Survey for the first time in July 2000 and are being placed on the survey on a quarterly basis. Figures from the National Statistics Omnibus Survey presented in this release are from October

2003. The results from the National Statistics Omnibus Survey are subject to sampling error, like those from all sample surveys. The 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate of the proportion of individuals who had ever used the Internet in July 2003 were 61 per cent to 66 per cent (the survey estimate was 64 per cent). For the estimate of the percentage of individuals who had used the Internet in the three months prior to interview the 95 per cent confidence intervals were 55 per cent to 60 per cent (the survey estimate was 58 per cent).

6. The majority of data in this First Release are not directly comparable with data prior to April 2003. This is due to a review earlier this year of the Internet access questions on the National Statistics Omnibus Survey. Changes were made to achieve a more relevant and stable set of questions. For further information, contact Elaine Chamberlain on 020 7533 6123, ([elaine.chamberlain@ons.gov.uk](mailto:elaine.chamberlain@ons.gov.uk)).
7. The Office for National Statistics are currently reviewing and rationalising the publication arrangements for this release. Internet access data for households and individuals will continue to be released via Statbase on the National Statistics website (<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/>). The next set of figures are due to be published in April 2004.
8. This release should not be confused with the *National Statistics First Release Internet Connectivity*. This is a separate release which presents an index of Internet connectivity showing changes in the levels of subscribers to the Internet (business and non-business). This information comes from the monthly survey of Internet Service Providers.
9. Details of the National Statistics policy governing the release of new data are available from the press office. Also available is a list of the names of those given pre-publication access to the contents of this release.
10. National Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the National Statistics Code of Practice. They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure that they meet customer needs. They are produced free from any political interference. © Crown Copyright 2003.