

Statistical bulletin

# Internet access - households and individuals, Great Britain: 2012 part 2

Internet access in Great Britain, including how many people have internet, how they access it and what they use it to do.



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# 1 . Main points

- In 2012, 33 million adults accessed the Internet every day, more than double the 2006 figure of 16 million, when directly comparable records began
- Approximately 87% of adults aged between 16 and 24, used social networking sites in 2012, compared to 48% of all adults
- Telephone or video calls over the Internet were made by 32% of adults in 2012, double the 2009 estimate of 16%, and four times higher than the 2007 estimate of 8%
- Access to the Internet using a mobile phone more than doubled between 2010 and 2012, from 24% to 51%
- In 2012, 32% of adults accessed the Internet using a mobile phone every day

## 2 . Overview

This release explores the use of the Internet by adults in Great Britain. It provides useful information for those interested in what adults use the Internet for, and on developments regarding mobile Internet access and use.

The estimates in this release were originally due to be published on 24 August 2012 in the [Internet Access – Households and Individuals, 2012 statistical bulletin](#). These estimates were delayed due to a data collection problem. Consequently, the bulletin published on 24 August 2012 solely focussed on household Internet access and adults' use of computers. A new survey for 2012 was carried out between August and October 2012, and the data collected have been used to compile this release.

The Internet has changed the way people go about their daily lives. Almost half of British adults accessed news via the Internet in 2012, while increasing numbers are using the Internet to watch TV or listen to the radio. Activities that were previously only available on the high street are now possible using the Internet. For example, in 2012 almost half of all adults banked online and two thirds shopped over the Internet.

This release reveals that adults aged 25 to 44 used the Internet more than any other age group to carry out a wide range of established 'every day' activities, such as personal banking; reading the news; buying groceries, household goods and clothes. However, for new activities such as social networking, which did not exist prior to the creation of the Internet, those aged 16 to 24 lead the way.

In the infancy of the Internet, the main way of access was via a personal computer. New ways of accessing the Internet have developed in recent years, with those adults aged 16 to 24 adopting these new technologies at a faster rate than any other age group, especially via the use of Internet enabled mobile phones.

The results in this release are derived from the Opinions and Lifestyles survey. On 20 February 2013, ONS published the latest quarterly statistics on adults who had ever or never used the Internet within the [Internet Access Quarterly Update, Q4 2012 statistical bulletin](#). The quarterly estimates are derived from the Labour Force Survey (LFS). The LFS has a much larger sample than the Opinions and Lifestyles survey and therefore allows for more detailed socio-demographic analysis to be undertaken. The Quarterly Update should be used as ONS's official source for the number of individuals in Great Britain accessing the Internet.

ONS first collected statistics on Internet access in 1998. Since then, a number of changes have been made to the Internet Access survey, including the publication of annual results since 2006. Where possible, comparisons over time are made in this release. However, the available coverage in time series comparisons varies, because the questions included in the survey vary each year.

### **3 . User engagement**

We are constantly aiming to improve this release and its associated commentary. We would welcome any feedback you might have, and would be particularly interested in knowing how you make use of these data to inform your work. Please contact us via email: [esociety@ons.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:esociety@ons.gsi.gov.uk) or telephone David Matthews on +44 (0) 1633 456756.

### **4 . Internet users and non-users**

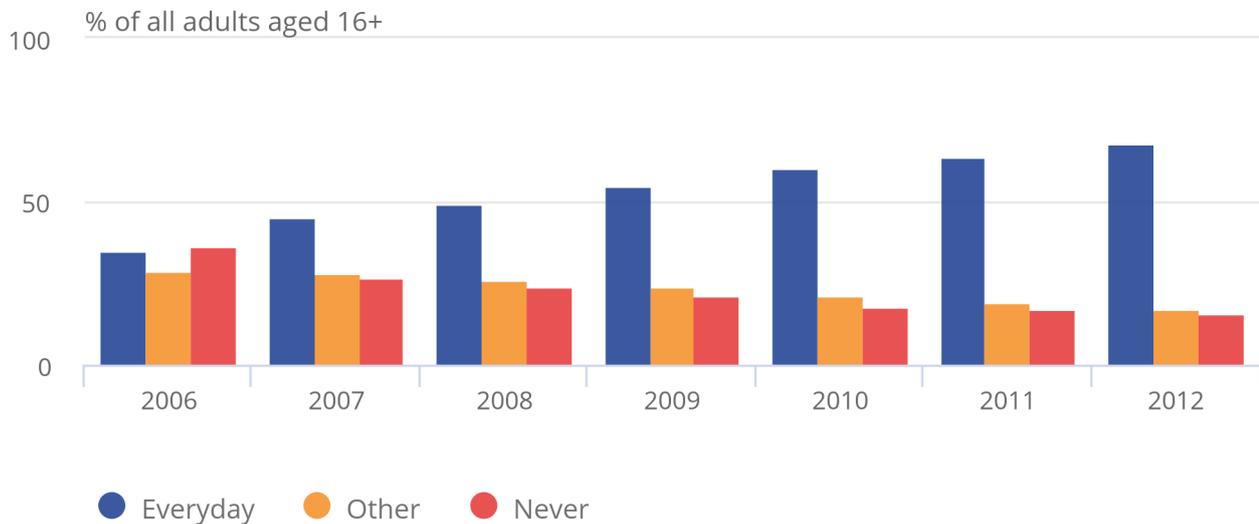
On 20 February 2012, as part of the Internet Access Quarterly Update, ONS reported that 42 million people in Great Britain have used the Internet, representing approximately 85% of the adult population.

### **5 . Frequency of internet use**

In 2012, 33 million adults in Great Britain used the Internet every day, or almost every day. This represented 68% of those aged 16 and over and was more than double the number of adults (16 million) that used the Internet daily in 2006 (when directly comparable records began). In contrast to the growth in daily Internet use, the number of weekly Internet users has declined since 2006, from 7.4 million (16%) to 5.3 million in 2012 (11%). This demonstrates that as the number of people using the Internet has increased over time, so has the frequency of use.

Figure 1: Frequency of Internet access, 2006 to 2012

Figure 1: Frequency of Internet access, 2006 to 2012



Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

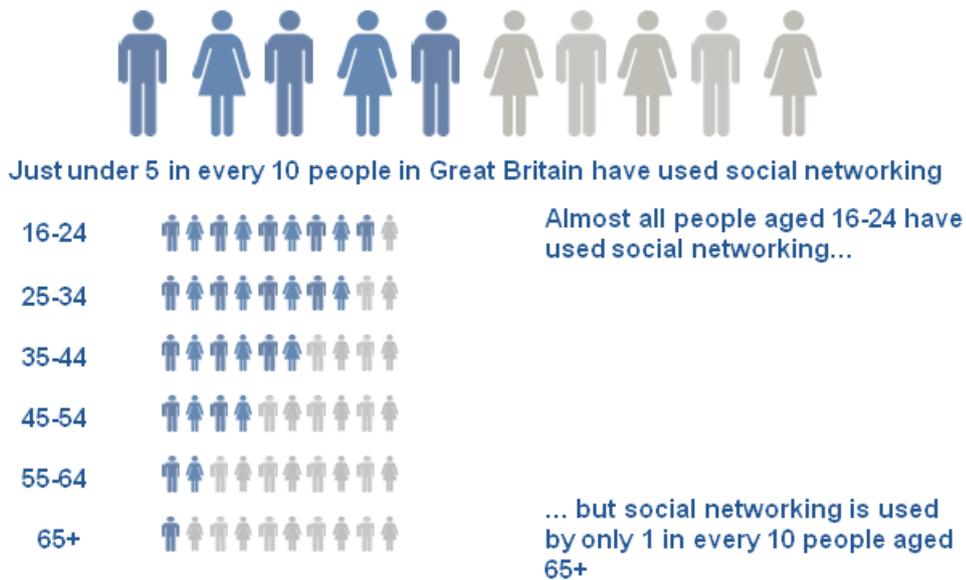
1. 'Other' includes Internet use options 'At least weekly', 'Less than weekly' and 'used over three months ago'.

## 6 . Social networking

A recent growth in social networking has been one of the largest changes to the way in which individuals communicate over the Internet. In 2012, almost half of all adults (48%) used social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. Within the youngest age group (16 to 24), 87% used social networking as a form of Internet communication. For those aged 16 to 24, social networking has replaced sending or receiving emails (83%) as the most popular Internet activity. This is the first time that email use has not been identified as being the top performed activity in any age group since comparable records began.

Social networking has broad appeal and, although its use declines as age increases, it is not exclusively limited to younger age groups. In 2012, 62% of adults aged 35 to 44, and 40% of adults aged 45 to 54 used social networks to communicate online.

**Figure 2: Social networking by age group, 2012**



Source: Office for National Statistics

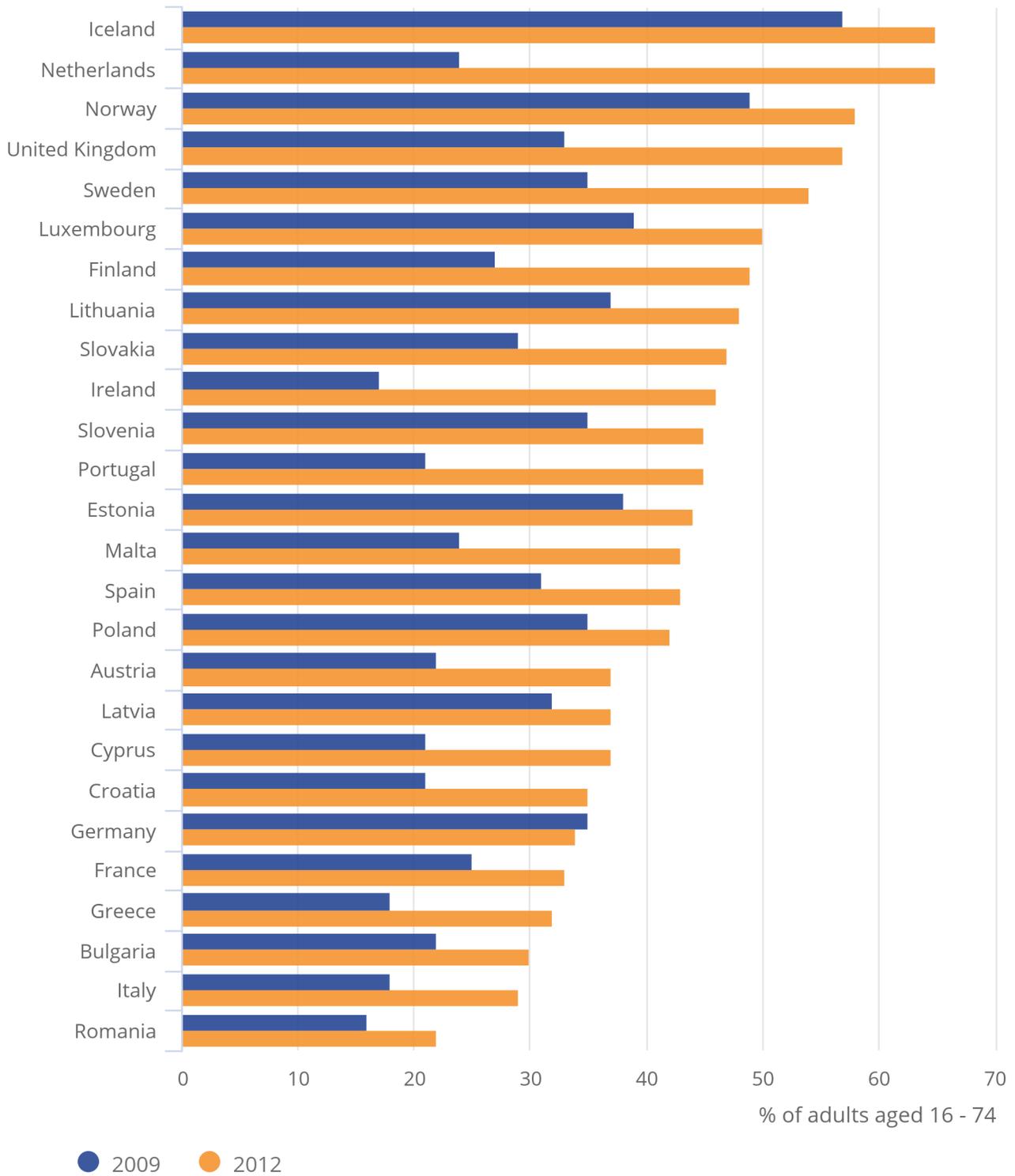
There is no difference in the use of social networking by men and woman, with 48% of both using social networking applications and websites.

This recent and large growth in social networking can partly be explained by increasingly mobile Internet use in Great Britain. In 2012, a third of all adults reported accessing social networking websites or applications via a mobile phone (or other handheld device such as a MP3 player, e-book reader or games console). Those aged 16 to 24 reported the highest use of mobile social networking with almost three-quarters (72%) of adults in this age-group reporting this form of access.

Using a slightly broader definition of social networking, in which 'posting messages to chat sites, blogs, newsgroups, discussion forums and the use of Instant Messaging (IM)' are included, Eurostat recently published estimates covering the period 2009 to 2012. Out of the 26 countries reported, all, with the exception of Germany, reported an increase in social networking over the period. In 2012, the UK was ranked fourth in respect of the proportion of adults who make use of social networking, behind Norway, Netherlands and Iceland.

Figure 3: Social networking, by country, 2009 and 2012

Figure 3: Social networking, by country, 2009 and 2012



## 7 . Internet activities

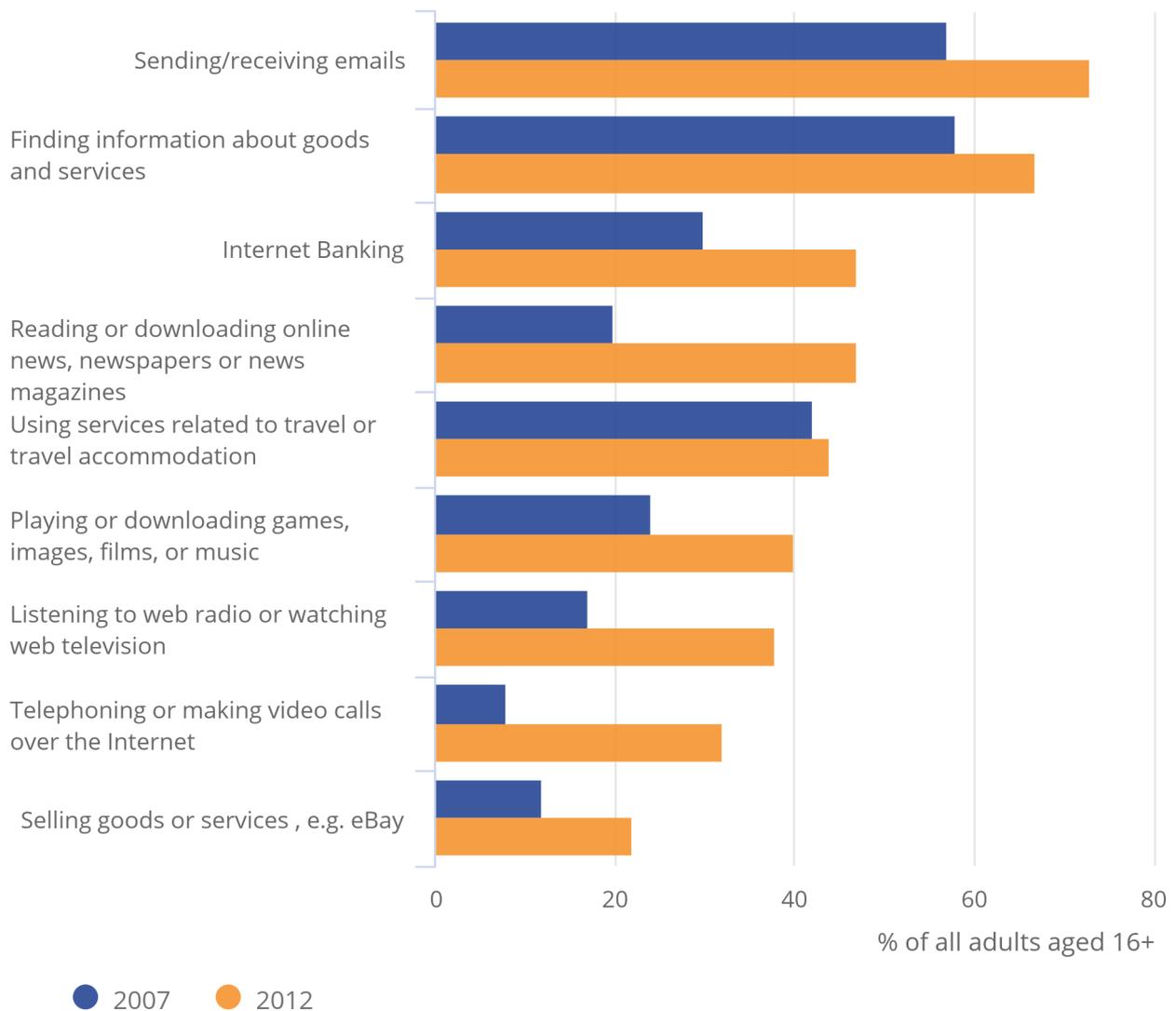
There are distinct differences in how individuals make use of the Internet when analysed by age. As 'early-adopters', it is of little surprise that those adults aged 16 to 24 are proportionately, the largest users of many of the available Internet activities. In 2012, this age group were most likely to engage in online activities that focused on leisure or recreation; especially new activities such as social networking (87%), posting messages to chat sites /forums/blogs (60%) or playing or downloading games/films/music (67%).

There is growing popularity among slightly older age groups; particularly those aged 25 to 34, to engage in online activities which are based on more 'established' activities such as personal banking or shopping. Previously, whereas people would have traditionally headed to the high street to shop, bank or send a letter, there are now new online ways of carrying out these activities via websites, or increasingly, mobile applications. Adults aged 25 to 34 reported the highest level of use in activities such as; online shopping (87%), use of email (87%), Internet banking (69%) and reading online news/newspapers (66%).

For most activities first surveyed in 2007 there has been a sizeable increase in use between 2007 and 2012. Of particular note, there has been a sizable increase in the proportion of adults making telephone or video calls over the Internet (e.g. Skype). From a slow uptake between 2007 (8%) and 2010 (18%), use has almost doubled over the past two years, to nearly a third of adults (32%) in 2012 now partaking in this activity.

**Figure 4: Internet activities, 2007 and 2012**

Figure 4: Internet activities, 2007 and 2012



**Source: Office for National Statistics**

The initial [Internet Access Households and Individuals 2012, Part 1](#) release reported that 93% of households with Internet access in Great Britain connected via a broadband connection. As people demand faster Internet connections it is unsurprising that multimedia activities such as watching web television or listening to web radio have increased in popularity, from 17% of adults in 2007 to 38% in 2012. This is likely to increase in the future as digital TV providers are increasingly offering more downloadable content via the Internet.

## 8 . Internet shopping

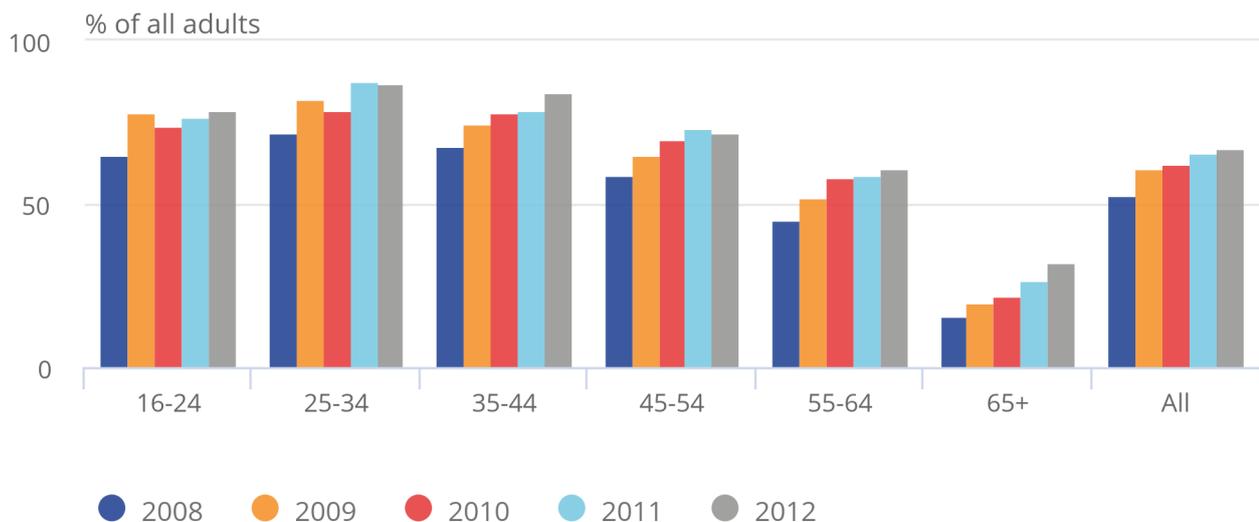
The convenience of Internet shopping has proved very popular in Great Britain. It is estimated that two thirds (67%) of adults bought goods or services online in 2012, up from just over half (53%) in 2008. Almost 9 in every 10 adults (87%) aged 25 to 34 shopped online in 2012; this was the highest proportion of adults across all age groups. Additionally, nearly a third (32%) of those aged over 65 also bought online, double the estimate in 2008 of 16%.

There is a noticeable difference in the type of goods bought online, when analysed by age. In 2012, only 18% of those aged 16 to 24 bought holiday accommodation online, compared with 42% of those aged 35 to 44.

Clothes or sports goods were the most popular online purchase in 2012, purchased by 42% of adults. Those aged 35 to 44 were most likely to buy these items (59%).

**Figure 5: Internet shopping in the last 12 months, by age group**

Figure 5: Internet shopping in the last 12 months, by age group

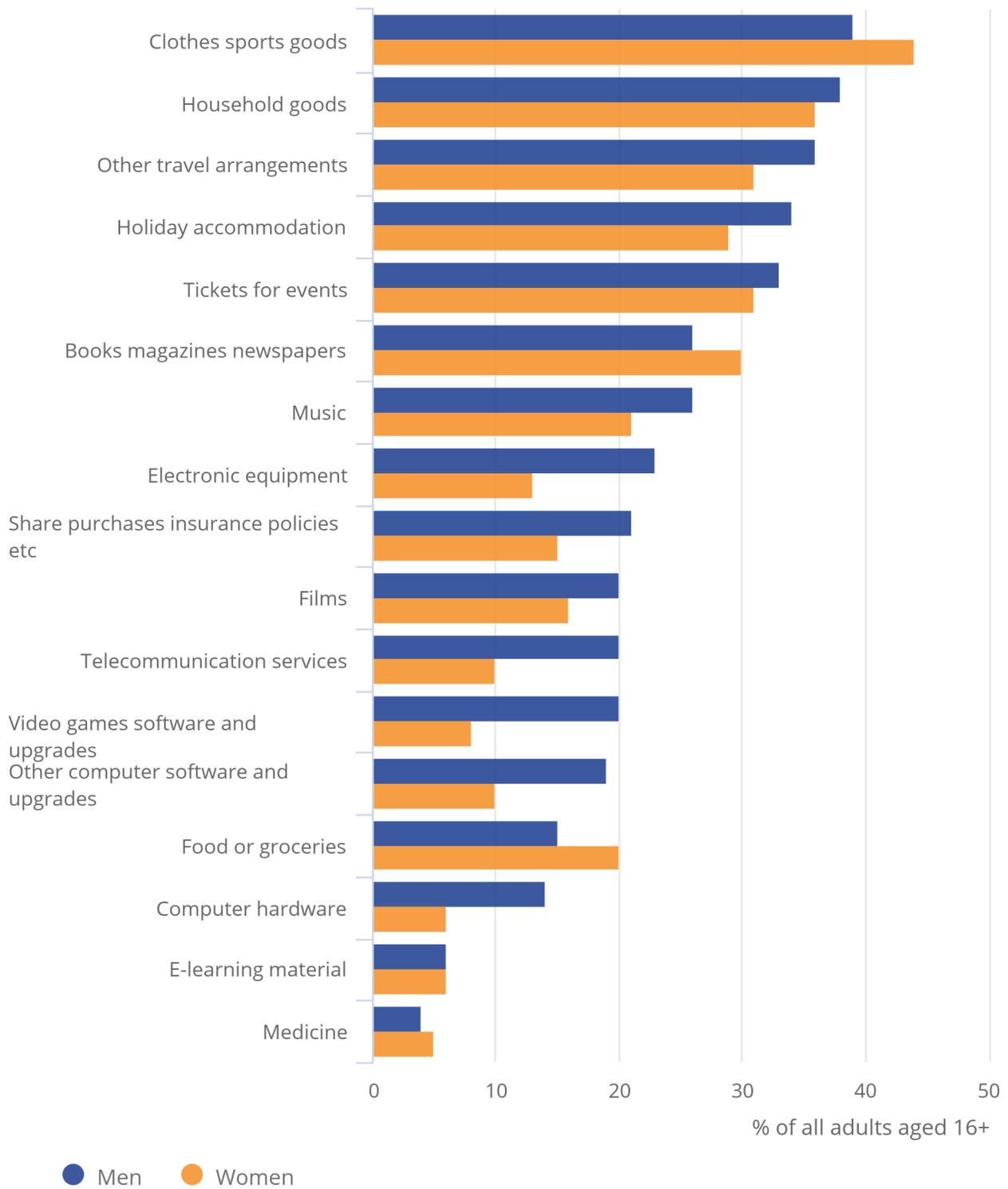


Source: Office for National Statistics

Proportionately, more women purchased clothes and sports goods, books, magazines and newspapers, food and groceries than men. In contrast, men purchased in greater proportions than women, across a range of categories, in particular electronic equipment, video games, films, and computer hardware and software.

**Figure 6: Purchases made over the Internet in the last 12 months, by sex, 2012**

Figure 6: Purchases made over the Internet in the last 12 months, by sex, 2012



## **9 . Internet use 'on the go'**

Over the past 10 years the way in which people access the Internet has changed. When the Internet first became available, the only way that the majority of adults could gain access was from their home or at work. Increasingly Internet use 'on the go' (outside of the home or work) has become a viable option and is now a popular means of accessing the Internet on a daily basis.

In 2012, almost six in ten adults (58%) accessed the Internet 'on the go', making use of Wifi hotspots or a mobile phone network. More than three quarters of adults (83%) aged under 45 used the Internet 'on the go', with the youngest group, those aged 16 to 24, reporting the highest use (89%). This was closely followed by those aged 25 to 34 (85%).

## **10 . Internet use over a portable computer (laptop, tablet, notebook and netbook)**

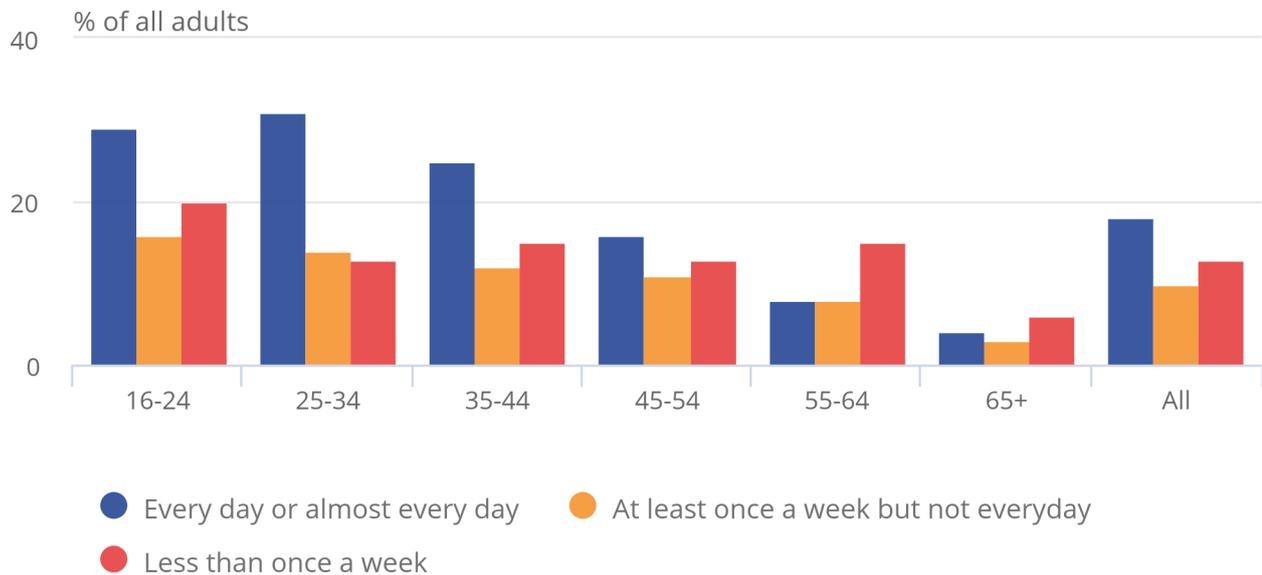
The term 'portable computer' used to be assigned to the use of a laptop, notebook or netbook. However, there has been very large growth, recently, in the use of tablet computers such as Apple iPads or Samsung Galaxy tablets. In 2012, 21% of adults used a tablet to access the Internet away from the home or work. This, again, was more prevalent among the younger age groups, with those aged 16 to 24 reporting the highest use (37%).

Despite this rapid growth in the use of tablet computers, more people (34%) still accessed the Internet 'on the go' over a laptop (or notebook / netbook) in 2012 making it the most popular form of portable computing. It will be interesting to see if this changes in future years as tablets seem to be continuing to increase in popularity.

In 2012, 18% of adults used a portable computer (tablet, laptop etc) every day to access the Internet away from home or work. More than a quarter of those aged under 45 accessed the Internet daily this way, with the highest use (31%) reported by those aged 25 to 34.

**Figure 7: Frequency of Internet use 'on the go' via a laptop, netbook or other portable computer, by age group, 2012**

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Source: Office for National Statistics

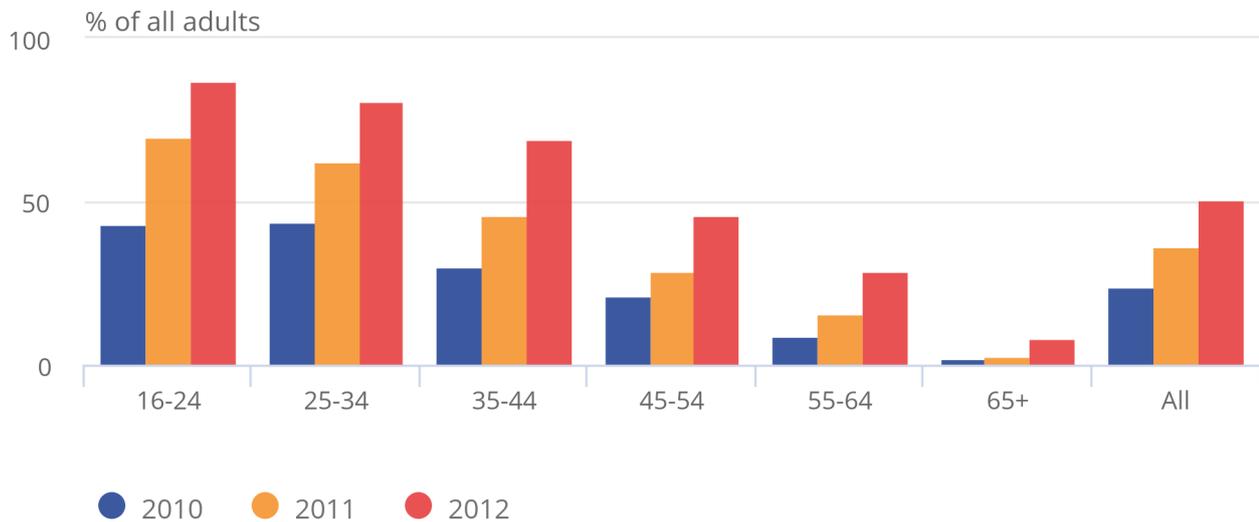
Wifi hotspots (at restaurants, hotels etc) were the most popular way adults accessed the Internet on a portable computer (69%). The use of a mobile phone network by adults to connect to the Internet on a portable computer was also popular, at 56%.

## 11 . Internet use over a mobile phone (or other handheld device)

In 2012, 51% of adults used a mobile phone to access the Internet. This is more than double the estimate of 24% for 2010. The two youngest age groups (16 to 24 and 25 to 34) both reported mobile phone Internet use above 80% in 2012. While still reporting the lowest usage, those aged over 65 have shown a four-fold increase in mobile phone Internet use from 2% in 2010 to 8% in 2012.

**Figure 8: Internet use over a mobile phone**

Figure 8: Internet use over a mobile phone



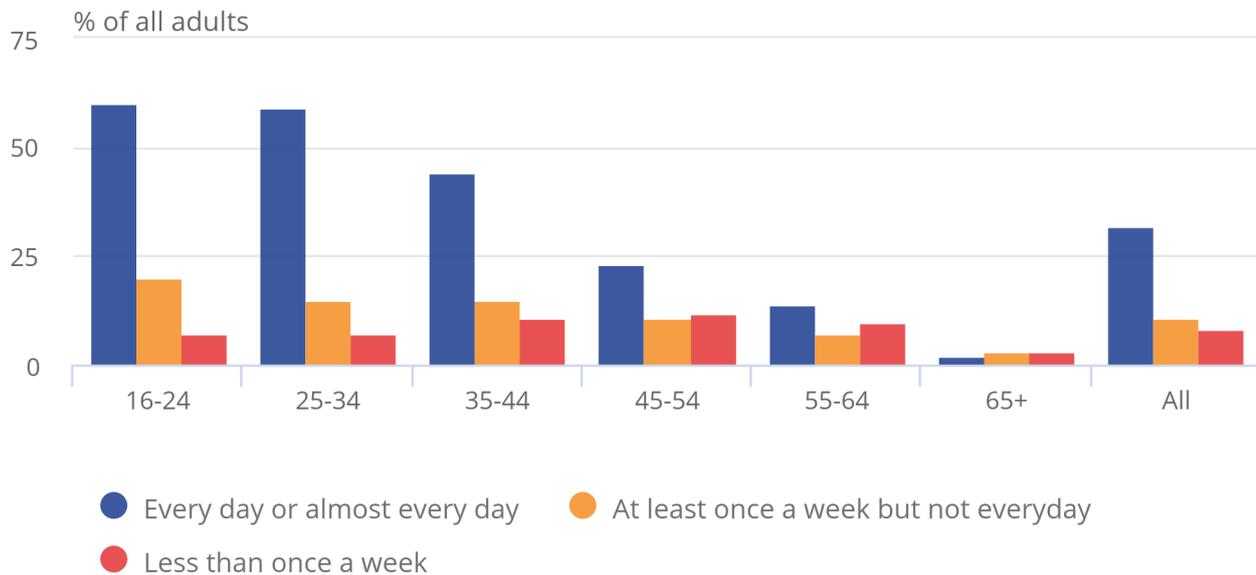
**Source: Office for National Statistics**

Men (56%) were more likely to use the Internet on their mobile phone than women (46%).

In 2012, almost one third of all adults used a mobile phone to access the Internet on a daily basis. Those aged 16 to 24 were most likely to use a mobile phone to access the Internet every day (60%). This is compared to just 2% of those aged over 65.

**Figure 9: Frequency of Internet use 'on the go' via a mobile phone or other handheld device, by age group, 2012**

Figure 9: Frequency of Internet use 'on the go' via a mobile phone or other handheld device, by age group, 2012



Source: Office for National Statistics

Adults who used a mobile phone to access the Internet most commonly used a mobile phone network to go online (85%). Just under half (49%) reported making use of wifi hotspots to access the Internet.

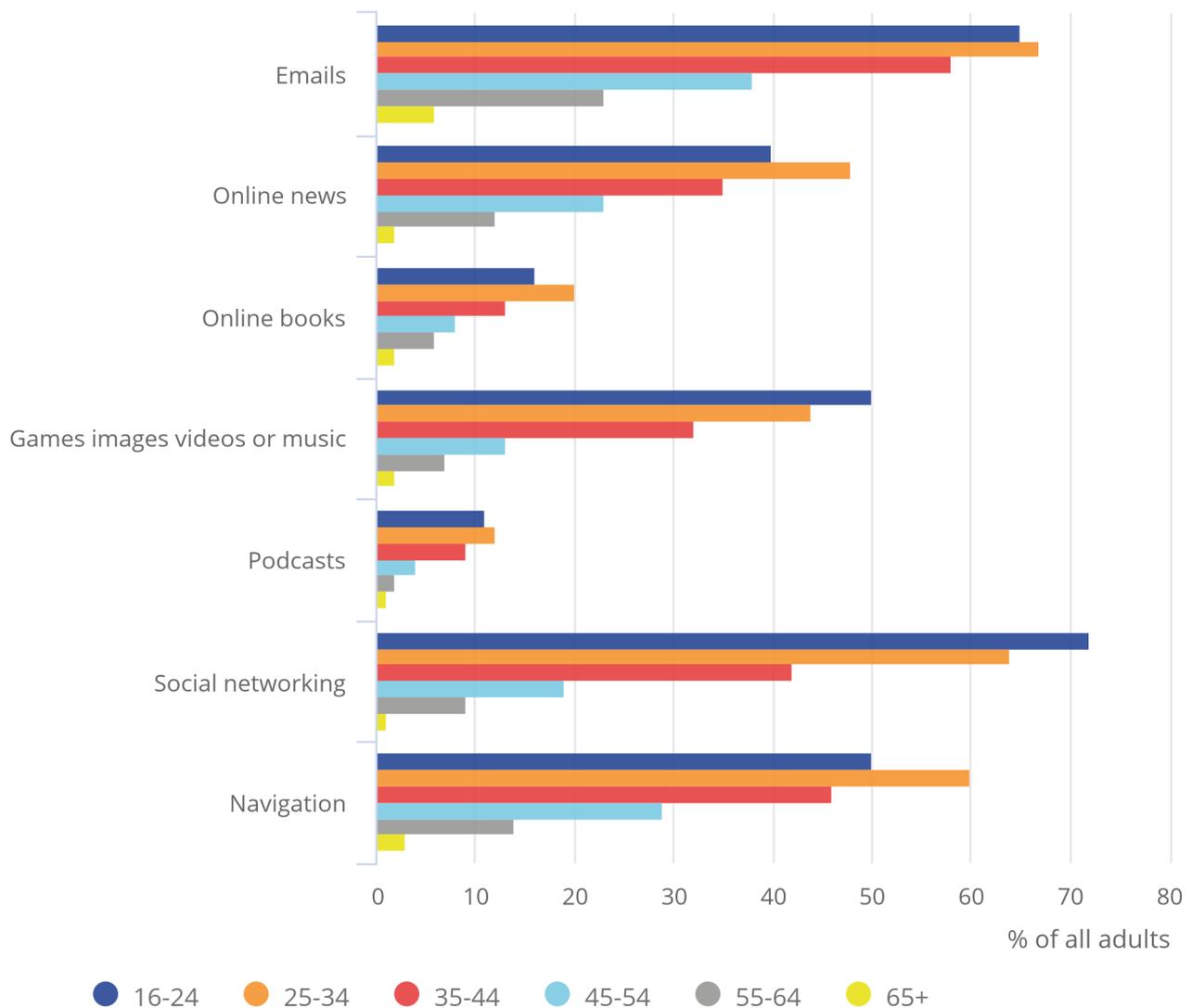
## 12 . Activities on a mobile phone (or other handheld device)

In 2012, the most popular activity carried out on a mobile phone, as measured by the survey, was the sending or receiving of emails (41% of all adults used a mobile phone to access their emails in 2012). A third of adults accessed social networks on a mobile phone. This was the most popular activity for those aged 16 to 24 (72%).

Almost a third of adults (32%) used location based applications such as Google maps on a mobile phone in 2012. These apps make use of a Global Positioning System (GPS) to plot a location or help a user find services nearby. Men were more likely to use these applications (40%) than women (25%). More than half of those aged under 35 used these applications; 50% of the youngest group (those aged 16 to 24) and 60% of those aged 25 to 34. This is in contrast to only 14% of those aged 55 to 64 and 3% of adults aged 65+.

**Figure 10: Activities using mobile phones or other handheld devices 'on the go' in the last three months, by age group, 2012**

Figure 10: Activities using mobile phones or other handheld devices 'on the go' in the last three months, by age group, 2012



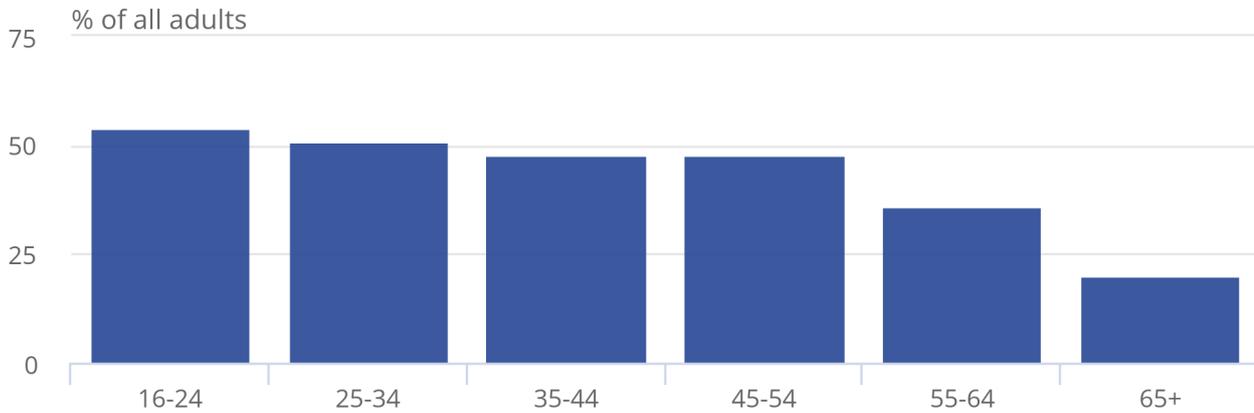
Source: Office for National Statistics

### 13 . Problems using the internet 'on the go'

'Frequent problems with a network signal' was an issue reported by 47% of those adults who made use of the Internet 'on the go'. Just over half (54%) of Internet users, making use of the Internet 'on the go', aged 16 to 24, indicated that this was a problem they experienced at least once a week.

**Figure 11: Frequent problems with mobile network signal, in the last three months, by age group, 2012**

Figure 11: Frequent problems with mobile network signal, in the last three months, by age group, 2012



Source: Office for National Statistics

## 14 . Reasons for not using the internet 'on the go'

In 2012, personal preference, rather than a barrier preventing use, was the main reason given for not using the Internet 'on the go'. For example, three-quarters of those Internet users who chose not to use the Internet 'on the go' reported that they 'didn't need Internet access away from home or work'. This increases to almost 8 out of every 10 Internet users aged over 65.

Almost a third of non-users (31%) aged 16 to 24 said that the cost of a portable web-enabled device or associated subscription prevented them using the Internet this way.

# 15. Background notes

## 1. Key issues specific to this bulletin

This statistical bulletin shows information about individuals' use of the Internet and how they access the Internet. On 24 August 2012, a partial release of the [Internet Access Households and Individuals estimates 2012](#) was published, containing information about households with access to the Internet and adults' use of computers. This release did not include estimates of adults' use of the Internet that have been included in this publication in previous years. This omission was due to a data collection problem which is believed to have been caused by a small wording change to a key question. As a result of this, the 2012 survey was re-run. This release is an extra publication containing the estimates that were not included in the bulletin published on 24 August 2012.

The source of this information is the Opinions and Lifestyle survey. The Opinions and Lifestyle survey is a multi-purpose survey developed by ONS 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 their own survey. The Opinions and Lifestyle survey is carried out each month on a random sample of about 1,800 adults, aged 16 and over, living in private households throughout Great Britain. After accounting for refusals and where no contact can be made, approximately 1,000 interviews are conducted each month. Further information about the Opinions and Lifestyle survey is available on the ONS website. For general information on the survey, contact telephone +44 (0)1633 455810, email: [opinions@ons.gov.uk](mailto:opinions@ons.gov.uk).

Data for this release are normally collected in January, February and March each year. However, due to the data collection problem with the initial 2012 estimates, this survey was run over August, September and October 2012. This will have a small impact on the comparability between 2011 and 2012 estimates in this release.

The annual release of estimates of Internet Access and use commenced in 2006. Internet Access results were originally published from 1998 onwards. Between 1998 and 2006, the results were published more frequently, but were based on smaller sample sizes. There were also various changes made to the survey in this earlier period of collecting Internet Access data, such as the survey vehicle used to collect the data. Some historical Internet Access estimates published before 2006 are available on the ONS website. However, comparing estimates in this release with those from prior to 2006 should be made with caution.

The estimates in the 2012 survey relate to Great Britain. For the period 2006 to 2010, this bulletin was published on a UK basis. Northern Ireland has not been sampled since the 2008 survey, but was included in the survey estimation process for the 2009 and 2010 results, which meant UK estimates were also produced for 2009 and 2010. Northern Ireland was not included in the estimation process for 2011; therefore the coverage of the survey was changed in 2011 from UK to Great Britain. All estimates in this bulletin have been reworked to be on a Great Britain basis. As in previous years, the Isles of Scilly and the Scottish Highlands (North of the Caledonian Canal) and Islands were not sampled but are included in the estimation.

## 2. Common pitfalls in interpreting series

The statistics presented in this release should not be confused with the quarterly estimates of adults who have ever or never used the Internet. These are published in an [Internet Access Quarterly Update](#) statistical bulletin. These estimates are derived from the LFS which has a much larger sample than the Opinions and Lifestyle survey.

References to 2012 in this release refer to data collected in interviews between August and October 2012. It should be noted that this differs to the period that the estimates are usually collected, which is January to March.

## 3. Revisions

There are no revisions to estimates previously published.

## 4. Users and uses of the data

[Eurostat](#) is the principal user of these statistics. The UK provides statistics to Eurostat measuring households' and individuals' use of the Internet and other forms of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in accordance with the ICT Regulation. The Internet Access estimates are used to

provide information that is consistent with other European Union (EU) member states, as part of progress towards measuring EU benchmarking indicators. These EU indicators compare the development and use of ICT across EU member states, and help to provide a better understanding of the adoption of ICT and the Internet by households and individuals at an EU level.

ICT is considered as critical for improving the competitiveness of European industry and, more generally, to meet the demands of society and the economy. Since 2005 the EU policy framework for ICT has been the i2010 initiative called '[A European information society for growth and employment](#)' which sought to boost efficiency throughout the EU economy by means of the wider use of ICT. Having undergone a mid-term review, an updated [i2010 strategy](#) was presented in April 2008, addressing key challenges for the period 2008-2010.

Within the UK there is also wide interest in these statistics from researchers, public bodies, charities and academics.

Do you make use of our estimates of annual Internet Access and use of computers estimates? If yes, we would like to hear from you ([esociety@ons.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:esociety@ons.gsi.gov.uk)) and understand how you make use of these statistics. This may enable us, in the future, to better meet your needs as a user.

## 5. Coherence

The results published in this bulletin focus on adults' use of the Internet. These estimates complement the estimates contained in the Internet Access Quarterly Update, which was last published on 20 February 2013. The Internet Access Quarterly Update focuses on adults who have ever or never used the Internet and includes detailed socio-demographic breakdowns. This release was compiled from approximately 3,000 interviews conducted for the Opinions and Lifestyle survey, whereas approximately 43,000 households respond each quarter to the LFS. Therefore the LFS estimates of Internet users are considered to be more reliable.

ONS's annual survey of [ICT and e-commerce activity](#) of business provides information on business e-commerce and ICT activity of UK businesses. The 2011 survey results were published on 30 November 2012.

## 6. Sampling variability

The Opinions and Lifestyle survey is carried out by interviewing a nationally representative sample of households in Great Britain. About 1,800 households are sampled each month and estimates are subject to sampling variability, as are those from all sample surveys.

The confidence interval tables show estimated 95% confidence intervals for selected estimates relating to Internet access and use. The estimates come from survey data and so have a degree of statistical error associated with them. Confidence intervals are an indication of the reliability of an estimate; the smaller the interval, the more reliable the estimate is likely to be. With regards to '95% confidence intervals', we mean that if we repeated our survey 100 times, 95% of the time (95 times out of 100), the true population value would fall within the range of these confidence intervals.

### Frequency of Internet use: 95% Confidence Intervals, 2012

	Lower limit		Survey estimate		Upper limit	
	Millions	%	Millions	%	Millions	%
Used within the last three months:						
Every day or almost every day	32.6	66	33.2	68	33.9	70
At least weekly	5.2	9	5.3	11	5.4	12
Less than weekly	1.5	2	1.5	3	1.6	4
Used over 3 months ago	1.2	2	1.2	3	1.3	3
Never used	7.5	14	7.6	16	7.7	17

Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Base: Adults (aged 16+) in Great Britain.

### Social networking in the last three months: 95% Confidence Intervals, 2012

	%		
	Lower limit	Survey estimate	Upper limit
All	46	48	51
Men	45	48	52
Women	44	48	51
Age group			
16-24	82	87	92
25-34	74	78	83
35-44	57	62	67
45-54	34	40	45
55-64	19	24	29
65+	6	10	13

Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Base: Adults (aged 16+) in Great Britain.

## Internet use on a mobile phone: 95% Confidence Interval, 2012

	%		
	Lower limit	Survey estimate	Upper limit
All	49	51	54
Men	52	56	60
Women	43	46	50
Age group			
16-24	82	87	92
25-34	76	81	86
35-44	64	69	74
45-54	40	46	52
55-64	24	29	35
65+	4	8	11

Source: Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Base: Adults (aged 16+) in Great Britain.

The larger the sample that is used for a particular estimate, the narrower the confidence interval will be. Estimates at Great Britain level (for example Great Britain adults using the Internet) will have a larger sample than estimates of sub-groups of the population (for example adults using the Internet broken down by age group). Therefore the quality of estimates of the whole population will be higher than that for sub-groups.

The voluntary nature of the survey means that people who do not wish to take part in the survey can refuse to do so. The sample is designed to ensure that the results of the survey represent the population. The risk of the survey not being representative is likely to increase with every refusal or non-contact with a sampled household (survey non-response). One measure of the quality of survey results is therefore the response rate.

The response rate for 2012 was 55%, the rate of refusals was 32% and 12% of the sample could not be contacted. The response rate for the 2011 survey was 60%, the rate of refusals was 29% and 9% of the sample could not be contacted.

### 7. Calibration

Weights are used in the analysis of the Opinions and Lifestyle survey data, for both households and for individuals. Each respondent to the survey is assigned a weight which is the number of adults or households that this person represents. These weights are derived by calibration, using population estimates for age group by sex and region. The weights are used to improve the accuracy of results by compensating for different response rates for different groups and by reducing the random variation in estimates.

As the responses are weighted to population estimates, weighted totals of individuals by age group, sex and region from the survey are guaranteed to match the fixed population totals.

### 8. Rounding

Percentages in the data tables may not sum to 100 or agree with related totals, due to independently rounded components.

## 9. International comparison

A comparable survey is run in all EU countries of the European Union (EU) and also in some non-EU countries. The measurement of household Internet access and adults' use of the Internet is under continuing review and development. The Statistical Office of the European Commission (Eurostat) plays a leading role in this and each year Eurostat leads a process whereby the data requirements for the Internet Access survey in all EU countries are reviewed and updated. Comparative data for EU countries can be found on [Eurostat's website](#).

## 10. Social media

Follow ONS on [Twitter](#) and receive up to date information about our statistics.

Like ONS on [Facebook](#) to receive our updates in your newsfeed and to post comments on our page.

## 11. ONS business statistics

To find out about official business statistics, and choose the right data for your needs, please use our [interactive guide](#). This will help you to find relevant statistics published by ONS. The guide allows you to choose the industry, feature of the economy and geography you are interested in, and returns a list of the available ONS indicators, together with guidance on their use, and links to releases.

## 12. Special events

ONS has recently published commentary, analysis and policy on 'Special Events' which may affect statistical outputs. For full details go to the [Special Events](#) page on the ONS website.

## 13. Release policy

Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available by visiting [www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html](http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html) or from the Media Relations Office email: [media.relations@ons.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:media.relations@ons.gsi.gov.uk)

These National Statistics are produced to high professional standards and released according to the arrangements approved by the UK Statistics Authority.