



Introduction to Digital Access

A guide to common issues and how to resolve them

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The purpose of this document?

This publication is intended to give advisers some basic background knowledge about the problem of digital access (also known as digital inclusion). After starting with a general overview, we show some of the practical problems that a lack of digital access can cause clients. In each case we also illustrate some of the ways that advisers can help clients to solve these problems. This publication is accompanied by another piece, The Digital Access Resource Guide, which is intended as a quick reference guide. The Resource Guide is intended for advisers in the East Lothian area but may also be of use to those in other areas.

What is digital access and why is it important?

When you have digital access you are able to use the Internet to take full advantage of your rights, to fully carry out your responsibilities and to help you live a fulfilling life.

When a client lacks digital access, this causes problems for them. In an increasingly online world, exercising basic rights (e.g. to benefits) becomes either much harder or, where there is no offline option, impossible without help. Being offline in an online world also makes it harder for people to fulfil their obligations such as managing their work journal on Universal Credit or creating a CV. Individuals can face institutional consequences when they fail to fulfil these obligations, compounding existing socio-economic disadvantages.

There is a range of ways that being online can make people's lives easier and more fulfilling. Many of these are ways that those of us who are online now take for granted. To list them all would be impossible, but they include:

- using social media and video calling to lessen social isolation;
- quick communication with friends and family over distance using email;
- reducing your energy and shopping bills by using comparison websites;
- being able to join forums of people with similar interests across the world.

In this introduction we look at the causes of digital access problems as well as some specific issues and solutions.

Why do people have digital access problems?

Many of the problems you will encounter are the result of three barriers to digital access: digital literacy, connectivity and hardware. The good news is that there are things you can do to address these barriers and start breaking them down.

By digital literacy we mean the ability to operate the basic controls of a device (keyboards, mice, touch screens) and use these to accomplish basic online tasks like searching for information, navigating to a webpage and managing emails. By connectivity and hardware, we mean having an Internet connection and an Internet enabled device with which to make use of that connection.

Internet connections

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Home broadband is still relatively expensive, with some unable to afford it. As a result, many clients will have an inadequate connection to the Internet with a smaller, but significant, group having no access at all. Some clients get online through their smartphone and this can be adequate for some small communication tasks. However, if used extensively, it can become expensive.

In most cases the best solution is to remind the client that they have access to free broadband at their local library, where they can use the library machines or connect their own device to the library's Wi-Fi network. Librarians are always available to assist clients if they need a little help.

Due to limited opening hours and the absence of libraries in some areas, clients should also be made aware of free public Wi-Fi connections available at many local cafes and other spaces. In recommending these to clients, however, advisers should emphasise that the looser security involved in public Wi-Fi makes it unsuitable for many sensitive tasks. Essentially, online activity here should be limited to general browsing of websites and should not involve online shopping or the entering of sensitive details such as user names and passwords. Using the library's own machines (not the library's Wi-Fi) is a better choice for more sensitive tasks because of the increased security of the library's network. We do appreciate, though, that there are many private browsing activities that clients may not feel comfortable doing at the library.

It is for this reason that home access is ideal. Where a client has some money to spend on an Internet connection, the following guide from Ofcom is a good resource for more budget friendly broadband:

<https://www.ofcom.org.uk/phones-telecoms-and-Internet/advice-for-consumers/costs-and-billing/managing-your-costs-broadband>.

BT provides a budget broadband package for under £10 called BT Basic and Broadband which (unlike most packages these days which are unlimited) is limited to 15GB a month. To qualify for BT Basic you must be getting one of the following benefit: Income Support, Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Pensions Credit (Guaranteed Credit), Employment and Support Allowance (Income related, Universal Credit (and are on zero earnings). At the time of writing, we are not aware of other providers with a similar offering but this may change in the near future and it would be worth checking.

<https://btplc.com/inclusion/ProductsAndServices/BTBasic/BTBasicBroadband/index.htm>

Be aware that clients may overestimate the speed of the broadband connection they need. The cheapest broadband packages (which at the time of writing provide around 10Mbps) are absolutely fine for everyday online activities. As with gas and electric, clients will get the best broadband deal by shopping around on comparison websites and then regularly switching providers or renegotiating their deal every year or two to avoid being moved onto more expensive packages. Ofcom has a list accredited price comparison websites for easy reference.

<https://www.ofcom.org.uk/phones-telecoms-and-Internet/advice-for-consumers/costs-and-billing/price-comparison>

The availability and reliability of broadband coverage in rural areas varies considerably, with some pockets effectively “dead zones” or “notspots”. Ofcom’s free app will let clients check the availability of different speeds in their area as well as test the strength of an existing broadband connection and suggest common solutions for any problems it identifies. The app is available on the Google Play and Apple App Stores, however the checker can also be run at <https://checker.ofcom.org.uk>.

If the client has mobile data on their smartphone, it may be possible to enable the “hotspot” feature that effectively turns the phone into a router that other devices (like a laptop or tablet) can connect to. This provides a secure and private connection but, as previously mentioned, phone data can be an expensive way to access the Internet. In light of this, clients should only hotspot if they have a broader knowledge of how to manage their data allowance.

As with broadband, the strength and reliability of phone signals in rural areas varies a lot. In light of this, clients should check whether a phone network adequately covers their area before signing up for a contract. Ofcom’s free broadband and mobile checker app can be easily installed on any Apple or Android device and displays the signal strength in an area of all mobile providers

<https://www.ofcom.org.uk/phones-telecoms-and-Internet/advice-for-consumers/advice/ofcom-checker>.

Hardware

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Clients may often have a device that is either not Internet enabled or inadequate.

Reasons for no device

There are two main reasons for a client not having an Internet enabled device - cost and skills. Often the client feels they simply cannot afford a device, however lack of skills can also contribute to the lack of an Internet enabled device for the simple reason that people are naturally disinclined to buy a tool they don’t know how to use.

The lack of an Internet enabled device of their own unfortunately then also makes the acquisition of digital skills harder as the client has nothing to practice on at home.

Reasons for inadequate device

In other cases, the client will have a device but it is inadequate for their needs. For example, older clients may have a laptop or desktop PC that is too old to cope with modern computing tasks. It is true that most people overestimate their computing needs and are unaware that virtually any laptop, desktop or tablet from the last five years will be perfectly adequate for most tasks; however, there is a limit to this and even high end devices from 10 years ago will struggle to run basic programs and tasks in a reasonable timeframe.

Younger clients may only have access to a smartphone and this may be shared with another person such as a partner. While this is perfectly adequate for everyday communication tasks such as texts, messenger apps and short emails, the small screen and keyboard make the filling out of official forms like benefits and job applications extremely hard, if not impossible.

It's also worth noting that the concept of an 'adequate' device is relative to the user. Clients with disabilities may own a high performance machine that is inadequate for their needs due to a lack of assistive software or hardware, for example.

Hardware solutions for clients

Clients may be unaware of the availability of cheap and reliable refurbished devices. You can introduce used devices as an option with the caveat that they should only be purchased from a reputable seller. As with anything else, you can find such sellers by running relevant searches on the Trusted Trader site recommended by Trading Standards Scotland and Police Scotland

<https://www.trustedtrader.scot>.

Disabled clients are also often unaware of their full range of assistive computing options and the fact that they can apply for funding to help with the purchase of a device. They are also sometimes unaware of the accessibility options available on their current device, e.g. voice control that allows users to send emails, use search engines and more using just their voice. Disabled clients have a diverse range of needs and so, for guidance on the technological options available, individual advisers should consider contacting the charity AbilityNet, who offer free and impartial advice on the best solutions for a client.

<https://www.abilitynet.org.uk>

Further sources for funding can be found by searching online. The following pages are very useful:

<https://www.disability-grants.org/grants-for-ipads.html>

<https://www.disability-grants.org/assistive-technology-grants.html>

If a client is a veteran then it's always worth looking into whether there is funding available for hardware from the armed forces. For example, at the time of writing Project Semaphore is giving a long term loan of iPads to digitally isolated Royal Navy veterans over 65:

<https://www.royal-naval-association.co.uk/about-us/case-studies/project-semaphore/>.

The Not Forgotten Association runs a similar project for younger veterans:

<https://www.nfassociation.org/single-post/2018/01/24/Tablets-for-the-Digitally-Isolated-NFA-Beneficiary>.

In the future, other branches of the armed forces may have similar offers. The best place to start looking for these is Age Scotland's online guide to veterans' resources:

<https://www.ageuk.org.uk/scotland/what-we-do/supporting-older-veterans/age-scotlands-veterans-project/best-of-the-net-for-older-veterans/>.

Tablets are a good solution for many clients. This is because the lack of a keyboard or mouse makes basic operations more intuitive and most things can be controlled by a series of taps or swipes. The other great advantage of tablets is that, through the use of apps, they can keep the client signed into email and other programs which they can reopen with just a single tap. This means clients don't have to try and manage large numbers of passwords which, combined with low digital skills, may lead to them being locked out of their account.

As mentioned in the connectivity section, it's worth reminding clients that the library has its own computer hardware which they can use to access the Internet. Again, this is not a perfect solution due to the limited opening hours of libraries, the limited privacy and the fact that many areas do not have a library. Access to a library machine is, however, immeasurably better than access to no machine. Printing at the library can often be expensive, so it's worth noting that many libraries offer free printing for anything related to Universal Credit. Free printing is often also available at Jobcentres and Skills Development Scotland branches.

If you work for an organisation which sees clients in your offices, ideally your organisation will have free Wi-Fi available for clients. This allows them to use their own devices to access accounts for which they may not remember passwords and also has the added digital literacy benefit of them learning how to do more with their devices. If access is made to a new service, e.g. Universal Credit, through a desktop computer, the client may not be able to later log in on their own device, as they may struggle to reach the correct URL or to remember log in credentials.

Digital Literacy

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Probably the greatest of the digital barriers is skills, with 21% of the UK adult population lacking basic digital skills.¹

Older clients are often happy to declare their lack of digital literacy, though this is not the case with younger people (15-25) who may be quite ashamed of any skills deficit and be less comfortable sharing this with advisers. It's important not to assume that young people are digital natives, for 300,000² also struggle with essential online tasks. Where younger people tend to have digital skills, these may be strengths on communications tasks and mobile devices that mask weaknesses in other crucial areas such as word processing or touch typing. These areas of weakness are, unfortunately, often essential to apply for and hold down many skilled jobs.

Teaching clients basic digital skills is something that takes time, patience and a little experience. For this reason, clients needing this support should be referred to an experienced local digital literacy programme or computer club; your local library likely runs one of these programmes. When referring to these you should consider any additional needs (e.g. disability) that the client has and whether there is a specialised digital literacy programme available in the area.

Hooks

While you may not have the time to teach a client basic digital skills, you can make a huge contribution to a client's digital literacy by helping to motivate their learning.

The best way to interest someone in digital literacy training is indirectly. Rather than trying to persuade someone of the utility of the Internet in general, you should look to use a hook to encourage them to get online with something that they are already interested in. What this interest is will vary from individual to individual, however whatever the interest you can usually connect it to digital literacy with something as basic as running a search on Wikipedia or a search engine.

For example, if you have a client who is interested in a particular football club (let's say Manchester City), you can run a quick search on Wikipedia that shows the history of the club as well as information about the current set up. Wikipedia is good because it quickly and obviously shows the value of hyperlinks where you

¹ See the 2017 Carnegie Report “#NotWithoutMe: A digital world for all?”

<https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/digitalworld/>

² Ibid.

can quickly click on something to get more information, a feature that is fairly new and undoubtedly useful to traditional readers of print journalism. This attempt to create hooks must obviously be balanced with not appearing to be pushy.

Often you will encounter clients at a crisis point in their life where computers and the Internet are part of an unpleasant experience, e.g. being forced to apply for or maintain benefits online. There is a real danger that their negative feelings arising from such a process is transferred to the Internet in general. By connecting the Internet to something that they already care about, you can help to lessen this effect. It's also worth noting that learning through play is powerful. The skills someone needs to browse Wikipedia are the same skills they need to fill out official forms and documents. No engagement with the Internet is too trivial.

When doing digital skills training with clients you should, where possible and practical, have the client provide the actual input (swiping, typing etc.) to the device. Not only is this "hands on" approach better for learning but the client is more likely to feel in control of the process.

Some area specific digital access problems and how to help fix them

Benefits

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Accessing UC Journal

If a client can independently manage their UC account, this dramatically reduces the chances of them getting sanctioned. There are some things to consider when supporting them on the journey to self sufficiency.

Does the client have an email address and can they access it?

It's important to remember that an email address is required to apply for Universal Credit. In the case of clients with low digital skills, they may either not have one or have lost access to it. The good news is that setting up a new email address for someone is quick and very straight forward. If, as often happens, the client has an email address but cannot remember the password, resetting this password is also usually quite straightforward so long as the client has the phone number used to set it up.

Navigating to the UC application page or sign in page

Rather than teaching clients to enter full web addresses or use bookmarks, it is simpler to teach them to go to a search engine and search for "apply for Universal Credit" or "sign in to Universal Credit." This is easier for them than remembering URLs which are complex and can change over time. As an added benefit it also introduces them to the use of search engines, which will hopefully stimulate their curiosity and appetite for further digital learning. When doing this, make sure to actually go to the search engine webpage. You may find it easier to type "apply for Universal Credit" directly into the URL bar, but this can be confusing for many clients. It's easier for them to understand what is happening if they explicitly go to google.co.uk, bing.co.uk or some other search engine first.

When helping clients with Universal Credit or any other government form, you should remember that sometimes the client will have done nothing wrong and the form can just be "glitchy". This can be extremely frustrating for clients who have, after much hard work, learned the correct steps to log in.

Online Resources from the DWP

Once you are on the UC application page, the process is reasonably user friendly; if you need some guidance however, the DWP has walkthroughs on YouTube which should always be up to date. You can find these by searching for "Universal Credit in Action" on Youtube or by using this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC7Km4IXfVJB1n8SQUmkJD0Q>.

UC Drop in Sessions

It's worth checking to see if the Jobcentre in your area runs regular drop in events at the local libraries or other venues. As well as help managing journals, these offer the possibility of some help for clients with the application process but this is dependent on how busy the drop in is and so shouldn't be relied on.

Education

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Lack of digital literacy is obviously a barrier to pursuing further or higher education. Not only do applications for most colleges and universities require completion of an online form, but engagement with the course and university during study will inevitably include digital components.

The good news is that stepping stones exist to bridge this gap. Some colleges offer a range of courses for people returning to education to build their digital literacy. Some of these are broader courses which contain a digital component while some are more narrowly focused like The European Computer Driving License which will give beginners a broad introduction to computer use including email and browsing. You should check with colleges and universities in your area to see if they offer something similar.

Work

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Using job sites to look for work

By enabling someone's access to the Internet, you open up to them new employment possibilities.

[Indeed.co.uk](https://www.indeed.co.uk) is a very useful site to introduce to those looking for work. This is because it effectively functions as a sort of "jobs search engine" that allows you to search all the different job sites from one location. Email alerts can be set up to show when certain phrases (e.g. "librarian") show up.

CVs and Digital Skills

Often a client will be required to create a C.V, but lacks the skills to do so. In these cases, the client should talk to their work coach at the local Jobcentre as this is a service they provide. Contact your local Jobcentre to check if they provide training or support to people looking to develop their digital job seeking skills.

Debt and money

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When dealing with debt cases it's important to spot when issues with debt are connected to issues with digital literacy. There are several ways that a lack of digital literacy makes people's lives harder financially.

Wi-Fi, data and budgeting

Many clients do not understand the difference between using Wi-Fi/broadband to access the Internet and using their mobile data (3G, 4G or 5G) to access the Internet. This can cause problems for the client given that broadband contracts do not usually include overage charges, but mobile data contracts usually do. If a client is using mobile data when Wi-Fi is available, for example, they may be incurring easily avoidable charges. A broadband contract usually involves paying a fixed amount each month with an unlimited data allowance. In contrast, with a mobile data contract you will usually have a data allowance (say 1GB) and if you go over this you then incur charges. It's not necessary for the client to understand the technical differences between Wi-Fi/broadband and mobile data (3G, 4G, 5G), however it's important that they understand the main differences between the two.

Once clients understand data allowances, they can start to worry about going over the allowance so much they never use any of it. The fear and worry can not only make them unhappy but also become a cause of digital exclusion in itself by limiting their access to the Internet. The solution to this is to show clients how they can monitor their data usage and see how much they have left in a billing cycle.

On an iPhone you can see how much you've used so far by going to Settings > Mobile > Mobile Data Usage. There's also information here about how much data individual apps are using, as well as an option to stop any one of them from using data. On Android phones you can monitor data usage under Settings > Connections > Data Usage, though the exact path may vary by model. Here you can also see usage by apps and restrict data usage on an app by app basis. Data usage can also be monitored by apps from the client's mobile provider or using third party apps that some find more user friendly. Android devices also have the ability to entirely avoid extra charges by setting a data cap so that your device will simply stop using data when it hits a certain point. There is currently no

equivalent feature on iPhones, but could be implemented by using a third party app. Clients could also be shown how to turn off data so that if they are already over their allowance they can make sure they do not incur additional charges.

Scams

When you encounter a client with debt issues, it's important to watch for signs that the client has become, or is at risk of becoming, the victim of a scam. Sometimes that scam will be offline and sometimes it will be online. For more information see the information on Scams in the Consumer section.

Income Maximisation, budgeting and saving money

Being online can save clients a considerable amount of money as well as time and energy. One reason is that it enables people to use price comparison websites to save money. Clients can use www.mysupermarket.co.uk to see which supermarket is cheapest for their weekly shop. There are also sites to compare your gas and electricity suppliers and sites to compare your car insurance. In the case of utilities, clients who are offline and therefore have never switched providers are likely to be paying over the odds on a standard variable rate for gas and electricity.

Citizens Advice Scotland resource on switching utilities:

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/scotland/consumer/energy/energy-supply/get-a-better-energy-deal/switching-energy-supplier/>

Citizens Advice Scotland resource on switching broadband, phone or TV provider:

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/scotland/consumer/phone-Internet-downloads-or-tv/switch-broadband-phone-or-tv-provider/>.

If the client calls Citizens Advice Scotland on 0800 845 7145, an adviser will check these but will also look at other opportunities for income maximisation such as seeing if the client is claiming all the benefits they are entitled to.

Online banking

The increasing closure of bank branches means a shrinking of banking access over time for those who are unable to bank online.

In addition to greater access, there are several more specific benefits to online banking for clients. Some banks may charge for additional printed statements, so moving to online banking could represent a consistent small saving. Printing off extra copies on a home printer is also easier than finding access to a photocopier. Mobile banking apps can also make it easier for a client to stay on top of monitoring their cashflow without needing to query an ATM or call up their phone

banking service. As with utilities, an online account makes the process of switching accounts easier which can give the client access to higher interest saving accounts, ISAs etc.

Many clients, especially older ones, have security concerns about banking online and avoid it for this reason. Though clients may worry more than they should, it is important that they are given advice that enables them to engage safely in online transactions. Ideally a Paypal account will be connected to a credit card rather than a debit card or bank account. This is because credit cards normally come with a degree of fraud protection so that losses can be refunded in a way they may not be when a debit card or bank account is used.

Mobile banking apps are at least as secure as banking through a browser and a much more accessible method for clients with limited digital skills. As with other apps, there's no URL to remember or store so the client just needs to tap the app icon to get started. It is, of course, crucial to make sure that the correct app is used as a fake app could be used to harvest log in credentials. For this reason, banking apps should always be installed from either the Google Play Store or the Apple App Store as these stores have checks in place to try and eliminate fake apps. Ideally the client would be given advice and support on installing and using the app directly from staff at their bank branch.

If a client attends the bank in person, banking staff will be happy to offer support on the day to get the person fully set up with an online account and show them how to manage it. This also gives them somewhere they can go back to and get more support later if they need.

Consumer

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Staying Safe Online

Many of your clients may be wary of going online because they view the Internet as an unsafe place full of scammers, viruses and other malware. They may not fully understand a lot of these terms, but feel they know enough to be wary. While a little caution online is great, the level of fear many clients have ends up serving as another barrier to digital access for them.

To give clients basic online safety advice, you don't need to know a huge amount about computers or the Internet. The basics of Internet safety are actually very simple and go an extremely long way to making sure that we are safe online. Three steps we would recommend are:

Keep your computer updated

Both Microsoft and Apple do a lot of work to keep their operating systems secure. When they find security problems with the operating system, they send updates, also known as patches, to fix any vulnerabilities. The most recent version of Windows, Windows 10, will install these updates automatically by default but you need to make sure the device is used regularly to allow it to do this. While Apple does not automatically install updates by default, it will prompt you when updates are available and automatic updates can be enabled.

Don't click on suspicious links. Hang up on cold calls.

The main dangers online are actually quite low tech. They are mostly people trying to trick you into giving them access to your system or details either by clicking on a link in an email that doesn't go to the place you expect (phishing) or by calling you and pretending to be from a tech support company (vishing). To protect yourself, don't click on suspicious email links and put the phone down on anyone who calls you out of the blue about your computer.

In advising clients about malware, the good news is that the risks are far lower than they think. Malware is simply a catch all term for any malicious software that is harmful to a computer. This includes, but is not limited to, viruses, spyware, adware etc. These days both Apple and Windows come with powerful malware scanners built into the system that are turned on by default and will take care of almost all malware issues that may arise.

Any discussion of security with clients needs to strike a balance between giving them the information they need to keep themselves safe and telling them so many frightening things about the Internet that they leave the conversation even more paralysed by fear than when they entered it. It's for this reason that we've stuck to the basics of Internet safety. Visit <https://www.getsafeonline.org> for more information.

Scams

Many of the dangers online are low tech and just new versions of old problems. You may encounter clients who:

- Have been scammed (whether or not they know it)
- Are worried that a relative has been scammed
- Are worried about scams in general

The Citizens Advice website contains great general advice on common scams, spotting them and reporting them.

Common scams:

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/scotland/consumer/scams/common-scams-s1/>

Spotting scams:

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/scotland/consumer/scams/spotting-a-scam/>

Reporting scams:

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/scotland/consumer/scams/reporting-a-scam/>

These are great resources for clients, but we would encourage advisers to also think long term.

Suffering from computer or Internet scams is sometimes a symptom of low digital literacy. By referring the client to a digital literacy project, they can build the skills and knowledge that will provide them with longer term protection against scams. Worrying about scams can cause clients to begin to avoid the Internet and digitally exclude themselves. The increased confidence gained from a digital literacy program can also reduce the chances of this self-exclusion.

Family and friends

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Keeping children safe online

Allowing children to benefit from the Internet while protecting them from its risks can feel overwhelming to parents. Often clients feel they don't know where to start. The good news is that the NSPCC has great advice:

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/>

Specifically, the NSPCC has guidance on:

- how to talk to your child about staying safe online
- how to set up parental controls
- how to keep children safe on social networks
- how to keep your child safe when they are online gaming
- how to keep your child safe when using Internet connected toys
- guides to the apps children are using
- a Freephone number for advice on any or all of this

The client's Internet service provider (e.g. BT, Virgin etc.) will also be able to provide them with instructions for how to use that provider's specific parental controls.

If the client has either an Apple or a Samsung device, both these manufacturers offer in store training on all device features including parental controls.

Social isolation

Much is made of the Internet's potential to create social isolation and the idea that we are too busy staring at screens to properly engage with each other. This view, though, fails to appreciate that in-person engagements can be difficult for many people, especially those with limited mobility. For these people and those who simply have few real life friendships, the Internet and particularly social media can provide relationships and social interactions that they might not otherwise have. Many people have friends and family, but they may live far away from them; in which case social media and things like video chat can help them maintain and deepen existing relationships. When encountering clients who you think may be socially isolated, ask yourself if they might benefit from a digital literacy service or computer club.

Housing

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Switching Utilities

Because energy companies offer better deals to new clients, existing clients can often get moved to expensive "standard" tariffs if they fail to regularly switch providers. Comparing offers from providers online and switching is exceedingly straightforward using tools like that offered by Citizens Advice (<https://energycompare.citizensadvice.org.uk/>). However, attempting such comparisons without access to these online tools is difficult. Because of this, many digitally excluded clients never switch and end up overpaying significantly for their utilities. Consider referring all digitally excluded clients to a service like ChangeWorks, who will facilitate comparison and switching for them.

Considerations for Special Groups

Disabled People

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It's important to be aware that in some areas there may be a gap in service provision with the usual services for digital literacy not being equipped to help many people with disabilities. The good news is that there are many specialist services available that you can refer clients to.

If a disabled client is looking to purchase hardware, bear in mind that it's normally easier and cheaper to make a tablet or phone accessible than it is a desktop or laptop. Windows, Android and Apple devices come with a lot of built in accessibility features and there are many free and paid apps that extend accessibility even further.

Whatever your client's disability, you can get free expert advice on their technological options from AbilityNet (<https://www.abilitynet.org.uk>).

Visual Impairment

The RNIB (Royal National Institute of Blind People) is a great resource when it comes to accessible technology for those with visual impairment. Scottish War Blinded also offer the accessible Synaptic tablets to members.

When working with clients with visual impairment, be careful when sending them PDFs. If the PDF is a photocopy or an image file (.jpeg, .png, etc), their screen reader will be unable to read it. Visually impaired clients may also benefit particularly from help with form filing as even digitally fluent blind people may really struggle to fill out online forms.

Physical Disabilities

Clients with mobility issues should be made aware of the option to control their devices by voice. However, where the client has some mobility they may find it easier to use a combination of voice and hands. Some of our clients have found it useful to be able to do their shopping online and have it delivered to the house.

Tablets are often a better solution for older and physically disabled clients but many find that the touch screens are not as sensitive to older fingers. If this is a problem, styluses can often be an inexpensive and effective solution.

Many doctor's practices are shutting down their telephone lines for ordering prescriptions. Instead prescriptions can be managed online either through the browser or through apps. Where this has happened the only remaining offline option is to physically come in to the practice or chemist and this is obviously a problem for people with physical disabilities.

Mental Health

When working with clients with mental health issues, some conventional digital inclusion programs may not always be the best solution for the client. Those with anxiety may not find group sessions conducive to learning for them. Many conventional digital inclusion programs are also staffed by volunteers who may not have the necessary experience of working with people with mental health issues. Perhaps most importantly, those with memory issues may struggle to remember passwords and so some special arrangements may need to be made to manage this. When deciding how to respond to this challenge you will need to make sure to work within your organisation's guidelines and protect yourself from liability.

Offenders/Ex-Offenders

Last updated 11/07/2019

These clients often have low digital skills. Internet access while in prison is severely restricted and there is zero access to social media. Some prisons operate an indirect system called Email a Prisoner where friends and relatives can send an email, which is then printed out and given to the prisoner. In some prisons, the prisoner can reply using the reverse method. Each email costs 40p. This system not only makes digital learning impossible but may lead to an erosion of any existing digital skills. The longer a person's sentence, the more this effect is compounded. While traditional Digital Literacy programs maybe a good option for such a client, there may also be providers in your area for Digital Literacy training that are specifically targeted at supporting ex-offenders.

Young People

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As discussed in the digital literacy section, it should not be assumed that all young people are digital natives at ease with any and all technology. As many as 300,000 young people (15-25) in the UK lack basic digital skills.³ The skills they do have can often be imbalanced, with high aptitude in one area (e.g. mobile) hiding low aptitude in others (e.g. word processing). This can also mean that many young people who lack digital literacy don't see themselves as having a skills deficit, so their digital confidence outstrips their skills. This is, of course, in contrast to older people who may be very comfortable admitting IT skills deficits. Where young

³ See <https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/digitalworld/>

people are conscious of their lack of digital skills, they may avoid admitting this in order to escape embarrassment.

Veterans

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Social isolation is a problem in all corners of society, but is particularly pronounced in the veteran community, with one in four of respondents to a British Legion survey reporting feeling lonely either "always" or "often" and 70% agreeing this is a problem in the armed forces community. Through things like forums, video chat and social media, digital inclusion can help tackle this problem and so can be of particular benefit to veterans. With clients who have served you should consider the mainstream digital inclusion providers but also be aware that there are some specialist funding sources and programmes available for veterans which your client may not be aware of.

These include:

Project Semaphore, which loans iPads to naval veterans

<https://www.royal-naval-association.co.uk/about-us/case-studies/project-semaphore/>

Scottish War Blinded, which provides some members with accessible Synaptic tablets:

A range of other resources for veterans can be found here:

<https://www.ageuk.org.uk/scotland/what-we-do/age-scotland-projects/age-scotlands-veterans-project/best-of-the-net-for-older-veterans/>

You can get specialist advice over the phone on a variety of veterans' issues including funding from Citizens Advice Scotland's Armed Services Advice Project (ASAP) at <http://www.adviceasap.org.uk/>

Domestic Abuse Cases

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There is unfortunately a digital component to domestic abuse. While in the past abusive partners would be limited to physically following people around, there is a growing trend of digital surveillance where abusers will install hidden tracking software on a person's phone. The same software can also be used to monitor calls and texts, as well as acting like an old fashioned bug that listens in on nearby conversations. If there is the slightest suspicion that such digital stalking is taking place, the best solution is to perform a factory reset of the device which will delete everything except the basic apps the phone came preinstalled with. Further

background on this issue as well as guides to dealing with online harassment and stalking can be found on the women's aid website.

<https://www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/what-is-domestic-abuse/onlinesafety/>

Digital Access Rights: The Right to Internet Access

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In 2011 a United Nations report declared that Internet access should be a human right; it also stated that disconnecting or denying Internet access is a human rights violation and against international law. The report subsequently gained support from a wide audience of governments and industry leaders⁴.

The UK Government plans to introduce a Universal Service Obligation (USO), giving everyone the legal right to request a minimum broadband connection speed of 10Mbps by 2020, raising the current minimum of 2Mbps significantly. This places access to fast broadband on a par with other essential utilities such as gas, electricity and water.

While the Scottish Government recommends a USO of 30Mbps to keep in line with superfast broadband speeds (defined as being a speed of at least 24Mbps), defining a broadband USO for the UK as a whole is reserved to the Westminster government. However, in conjunction with the Scottish Government's R100 (Reaching 100) programme, the £600m Digital Scotland's Superfast For All project successfully delivered the Scottish Government's USO to 95% of Scottish households at the end of 2017 with a target of 100% coverage by 2021⁵. There have been some challenges in delivering 100% coverage owing to Scotland's geography, some coverage is being delivered by a wide variety of infrastructure solutions including 4G, fixed wireless and emerging technologies such as TV White Space.

For households and businesses yet to benefit from the rollout, the Better Broadband scheme is a UK wide interim solution consisting of a voucher scheme to subsidise hardware, installation and connection costs to ensure first year costs are no more than £400. Premises that have a download speed of less than 2Mbps and will not benefit from the R100 rollout within the next 12 months are eligible.

⁴ https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/17session/A.HRC.17.27_en.pdf

⁵ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/reaching-100-superfast-broadband/pages/0/>