

# Internet Users, 2015



Coverage: **UK**

Date: **22 May 2015**

Geographical Area: **European (NUTS)**

Theme: **People and Places**

## Main points

- In quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2015, 86% of adults (44.7 million) in the UK had used the internet in the last 3 months (recent users), an increase of 1 percentage point since the quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2014 estimate of 85%.
- 11% of adults (5.9 million) had never used the internet, falling by 1 percentage point since quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2014.
- The South East had the highest proportion of recent internet users (90%) and Northern Ireland was the area with the lowest proportion (80%).
- In quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2015, the proportion of adults who were recent internet users was lower for those that were disabled (68%), compared with those that were not disabled (92%).
- In quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2015 the proportion of adults aged 16 to 24 years who were recent internet users was lower for those that were disabled (95% recent users) compared with those that were not disabled (99% recent users). The proportion of adults aged 75 years and over who were recent internet users was also lower for those that were disabled (27% recent users) compared with those that were not disabled (40% recent users).

## Overview

This is the first annual publication of quarterly estimates of internet use by adults aged 16 years and over in the UK. This release has replaced the Internet Access Quarterly Update that was last published on 14 May 2014. This was discontinued following our [consultation on statistical products](#) that took place in 2013. [Our response to the consultation on statistical products](#) explained that in future, the estimates of internet users would be published on an annual basis.

Following the outcome of our consultation on statistical products, we conducted a further [consultation on the future of statistics to measure the digital economy](#). This included questions on the format of this new annual internet users release. The majority of respondents indicated that their

preference was to include all quarterly periods rather than just 1 quarter from each year. Therefore, this annual release contains all quarterly periods from quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2014 to quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2015.

Estimates in this release show how internet use is correlated to various socio-demographic characteristics, such as age, sex, disability and geographical location. As a result of user needs, this release has also introduced a new breakdown of internet users, into adults who have used the internet within the last 3 months (recent users) and adults who last used the internet more than 3 months ago (lapsed users). These replace the simpler definition of internet users as "adults who have ever used the internet" that was used in the discontinued internet access quarterly update.

The estimates in this release are derived from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and are not seasonally adjusted. The detailed regional estimates contained in Tables 5A and 5B are included to meet user interest. These estimates are based on smaller sample sizes than the higher level regional estimates in Tables 4A and 4B and are therefore subject to a greater degree of sampling variability, so should be treated with caution. In addition, in Tables 5A and 5B the categories of "last used the internet more than 3 months ago" and "never used" have been combined due to the small sample sizes at this level of geography.

On 7 August 2014, we published the annual [Internet Access - Households and Individuals 2014](#) statistical bulletin. This provides more information on the range of activities carried out on the internet. However, while the estimates in the Households and Individuals annual bulletin are more detailed, they are derived from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey, which has a much smaller sample size than the LFS. Therefore, any comparisons made between estimates in this release and the existing annual Internet Access Households and Individuals publication should be undertaken with caution.

## Your views matter

We are constantly aiming to improve this release and its associated commentary. We would welcome any feedback you might have; please contact us via email: [esociety@ons.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:esociety@ons.gsi.gov.uk) or telephone Cecil Prescott on +44 (0)1633 456767.

## Recent, lapsed and non-users

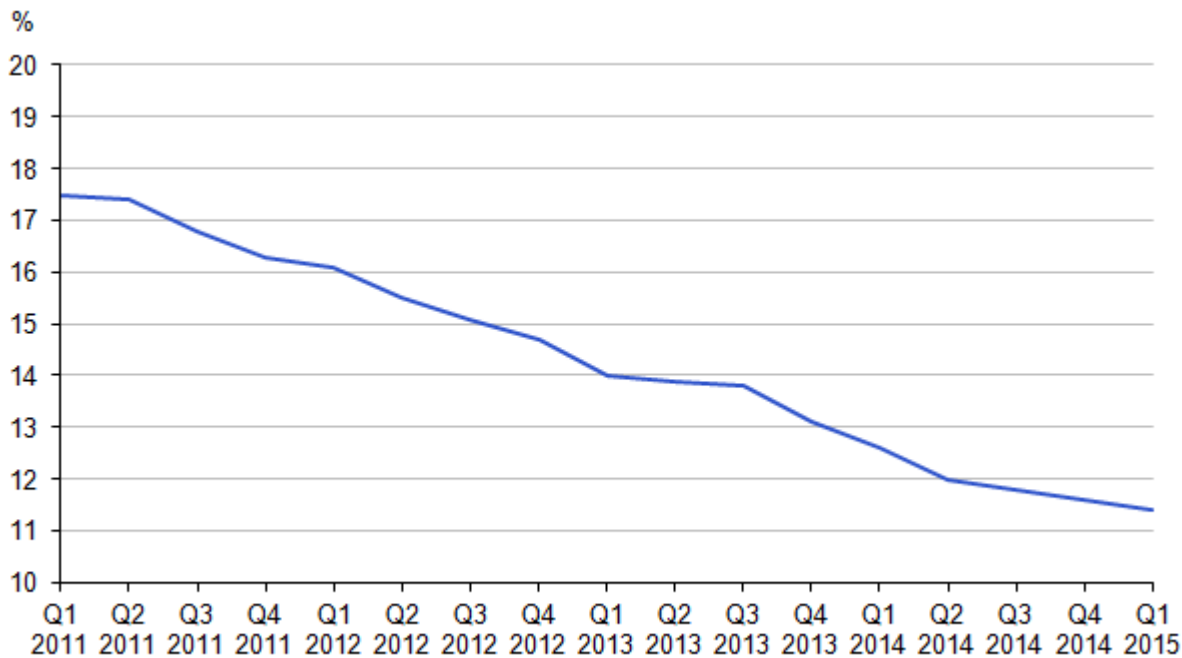
In quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2015, 86% of adults (44.7 million) had used the internet in the last 3 months. While 2% (1.1 million) had last used the internet more than 3 months ago, 11% (5.9 million) had never used it.

The percentage of adults that were recent internet users has increased from 80% in quarter 2 (Apr to June) 2011, when comparable records began, to 86% in quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2015.

The percentage of adults who have never used the internet has decreased from 17% in quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2011 to 11% in quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2015.

## Figure 1: Internet non-users

UK, quarter 1 2011 to quarter 1 2015



Source: Office for National Statistics

### Notes:

1. Q1 refers to quarter 1 (Jan to Mar), Q2 refers to quarter 2 (Apr to June), Q3 refers to quarter 3 (July to Sept) and Q4 refers to quarter 4 (Oct to Dec).

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## Age

Age is a factor as to whether an adult has used the internet. Since the survey began in 2011, adults aged 16 to 24 years have consistently shown the highest rates of internet use, with each successively older age group reporting a lower rate of use.

In quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2015, almost all adults aged 16 to 24 years were recent internet users (99%), in contrast with 33% of adults aged 75 years and over. Although recent internet use is notably lower in the older age groups, the proportion of adults aged 75 years and over who had never used the internet, decreased from 76% in quarter 2 (Apr to June) 2011 to 61% in quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2015.

Adults aged 75 years and over also had the highest rate of lapsed internet users in quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2015 at 6%, compared with 0.3% of adults aged 16 to 24 years. This suggests that,

although more adults aged 75 years and over are becoming internet users, they are not necessarily continuing to use the internet.

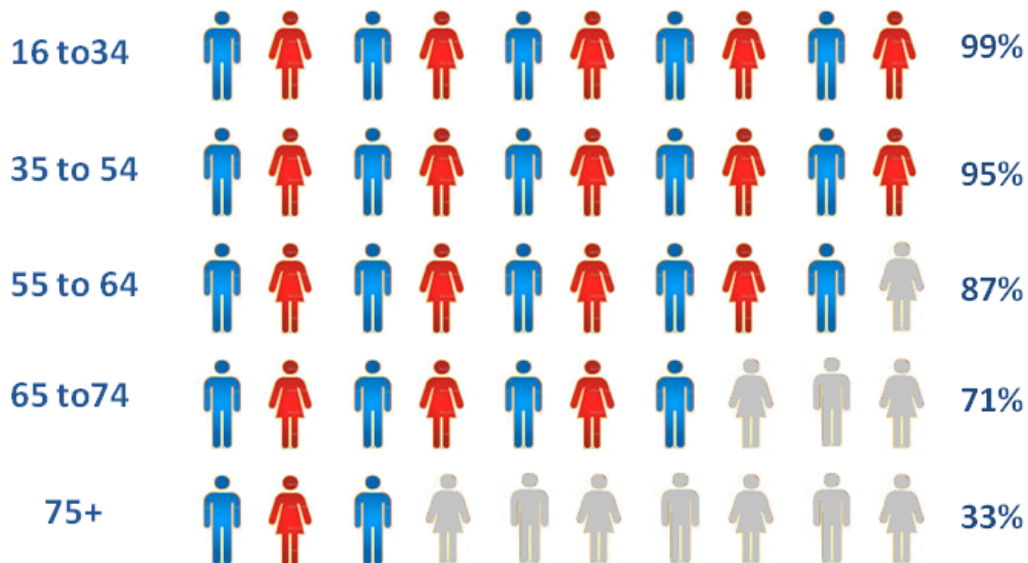
Of the 5.9 million adults who had never used the internet in quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2015, just over half (3.0 million) were aged 75 years and over.

### Recent internet users by age group, quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2015



Almost 9 in every 10 adults in the UK have used the internet in the last three months (86%)

Almost all adults aged 16 – 54 years have used the internet in the last three months ...



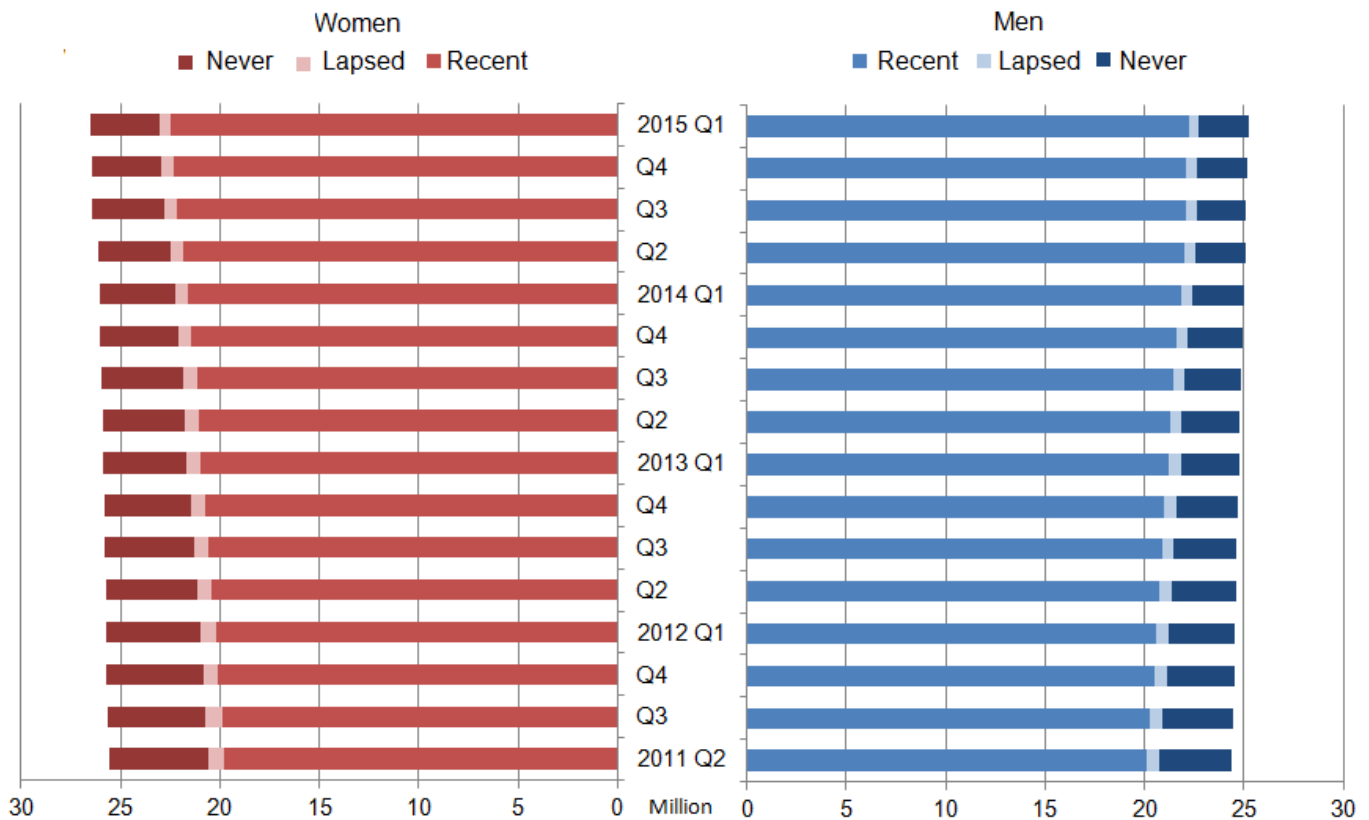
... but just 3 in every 10 adults aged 75+ have used the internet in the last 3 months.

## Sex

In quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2015, 88% of men (22.2 million) and 85% of women (22.4 million) were recent internet users. Since quarter 2 (Apr to June) 2011, the proportion of men and women who were recent internet users has increased by 6 and 8 percentage points respectively.

**Figure 2: Internet users by sex**

UK, 2011 quarter 2 to 2015 quarter 1



Source: Office for National Statistics

**Notes:**

1. Persons aged 16 years and over
2. Q1 refers to quarter 1 (Jan to Mar), Q2 refers to quarter 2 (Apr to June), Q3 refers to quarter 3 (July to Sept) and Q4 refers to quarter 4 (Oct to Dec).

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Men in the oldest 2 age groups are more likely to use the internet than women in the same age groups. In quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2015, 41% of men aged 75 years and over were recent internet users compared with 27% of women.

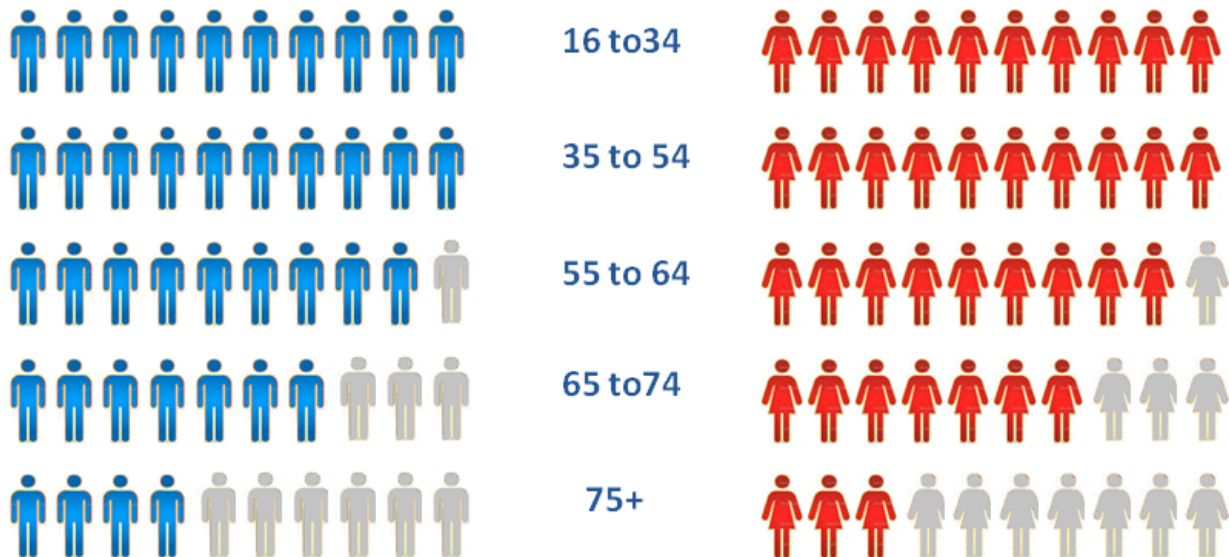
There is little difference in the rates of internet use between men and women in all age groups under 65 years of age.

### Recent internet users by sex and age group, quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2015



Almost 9 in every 10 adults in the UK have used the internet in the last three months (86%)

Almost all men and women aged 16 to 54 years have used the internet in the last three months ...



..but just 4 in every 10 men and 3 in every 10 women aged 75+ have used the internet in the last three months.

## Disability

Estimates of adults with a disability are presented from quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2014 as defined by the Equality Act. The term "disabled" is used to refer to those who self-assess that they have a disability in line with the Equality Act.

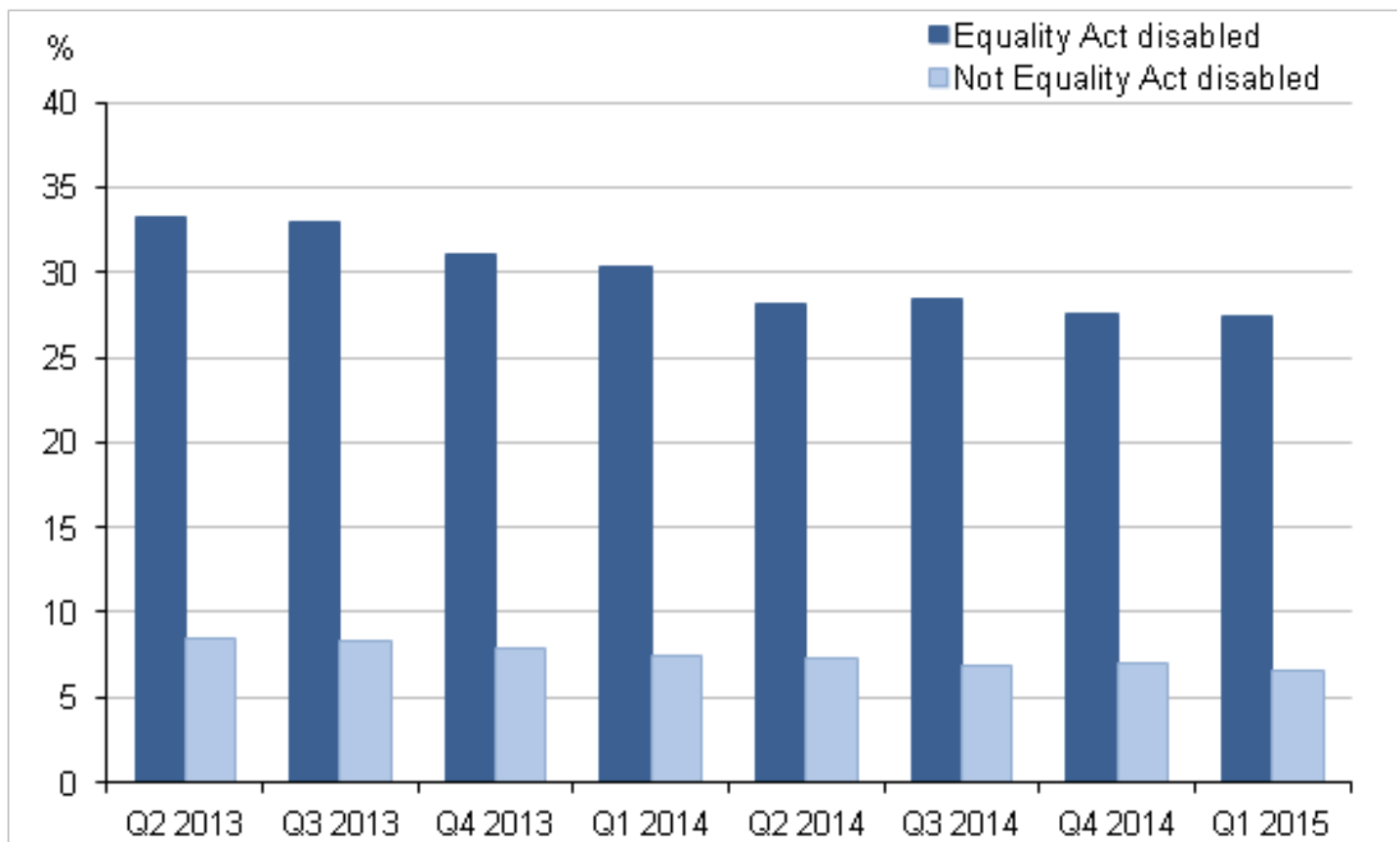
In quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2015, 27% of disabled adults (3.3 million) had never used the internet. There were 0.5 million disabled adults, who had last used the internet over 3 months ago, making up 48% of the 1.1 million lapsed internet users.

In quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2015 the proportion of adults aged 16 to 24 years who were recent internet users was lower for those that were disabled (95% recent users) compared with those that were not disabled (99% recent users). The proportion of adults aged 75 years and over who were recent internet users was also lower for those that were disabled (27% recent users) compared with those that were not disabled (40% recent users). Across all age groups, the proportion of adults who were

recent internet users was lower for those that were disabled, compared with those that were not disabled.

### Figure 3: Internet non-users by disability status

UK, 2013 quarter 2 to 2015 quarter 1



Source: Office for National Statistics

#### Notes:

1. Persons aged 16 and over
2. Equality Act disabled refers to those who self-assess that they have a disability in line with the Equality Act definition of disability.
3. Q1 refers to quarter 1 (Jan to Mar), Q2 refers to quarter 2 (Apr to June), Q3 refers to quarter 3 (July to Sept) and Q4 refers to quarter 4 (Oct to Dec).

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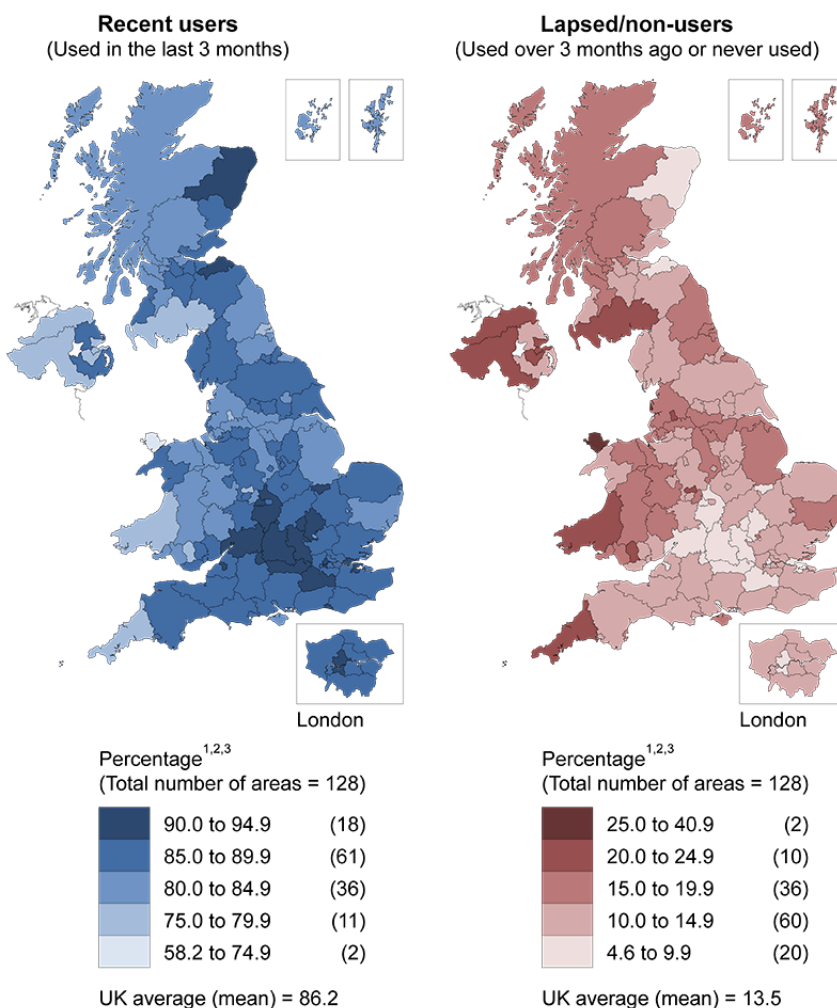
## Ethnic Group

In quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2015, the ethnic group with the highest percentage of recent internet users was the mixed or multiple ethnic background (97%). However, it should be noted that there is a higher degree of sampling variability around some categories of ethnic group and internet use, due to the small sample sizes used to compile the estimates. Therefore these estimates should be treated with caution.

## Regional Distribution

The South East had the highest proportion of recent internet users (90%) and Northern Ireland was the area with the lowest proportion (80%).

### Internet use, Q1 2015, by NUTS3 area, United Kingdom



1 Percentage of adults aged 16 or over.

2 NUTS 3 is an abbreviation for 'nomenclature of territorial units for statistics', level 3.

3 Highlands and Islands NUTS level 2 area has been used instead of the respective NUTS level 3 areas in Scotland, because of small sample sizes.

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## Download map

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(451.6 Kb)

The [NUTS Classification](#) is a hierarchical system dividing up economic territory of the EU for the purpose of regional statistics. There are 3 NUTS levels, all of which are used in this release.

While [Tables 4A and 4B \(471 Kb Excel sheet\)](#) are presented at NUTS 2 level, Tables 5A and 5B are presented at the more detailed NUTS 3 level due to user needs. The estimates in [Tables 5A and 5B \(471 Kb Excel sheet\)](#) are based on smaller sample sizes than the higher level regional estimates in Tables 4A and 4B and are therefore subject to a greater degree of sampling variability, so should be treated with caution (see Background note 6). The categories of “used over 3 months ago” and “never used” have been combined in Tables 5A and 5B due to the small sample size at this level of geography.

The maps show the proportion of internet use by NUTS 3, the most detailed geographical classification available. While there is sampling variability around these estimates, in quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2015 the area with the highest proportion of adults who had last used the internet more than 3 months ago, or who had never used it, was the Isle of Anglesey (41%).

## Background notes

### 1. Main issues specific to this bulletin

This is the first annual release of quarterly estimates about internet use by adults aged 16 years or over. This release supersedes the internet access quarterly update which was last published in May 2014 referencing quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2014.

The latest period covered in this release is quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2015. We began publishing quarterly data on internet users and non-users for quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2011, to enable more timely information on internet use to be made available. The source of the information is the Labour Force Survey (LFS). A [quality report for the LFS \(227.1 Kb Pdf\)](#) is available on our website.

The new question added to the LFS in quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2011 was “when did you last use the internet?” This is the same question that was used in the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey to collect data for the annual publication “Internet Access Households and Individuals”.

The term “disabled” is used to refer to those who self-assess that they have a disability in line with the Equality Act. Prior to quarter 4 (Oct to Dec) 2013, the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) definition of disability was used. Respondents who did not answer whether they had a disability have been included in the category “Not Equality Act disabled” in Tables 1A, 1B, 3A and 3B.

“Don’t know” responses are not separately identified in this bulletin. Therefore, percentage breakdowns sum to less than 100%, reflecting the small number of “don’t know” responses to the internet use question.

## 2. National Statistics

Until the quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2012 reference period, these estimates of internet users were published with experimental statistics status.

The UK Statistics Authority reviewed the statistics in this release, in their report "[Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics: Statistics on Internet Access](#)". This review recommended that the statistics published in the internet access quarterly update be designated as National Statistics, subject to ONS carrying out certain requirements. We carried out the necessary work to comply with the requirements set out in this report and as a result of this, the UK Statistics Authority confirmed that from the quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2012 reference period, the estimates within the internet access quarterly update release had National Statistics status.

## 3. Revisions

There are no revisions to estimates previously published.

## 4. Users and uses of the data

The organisation Race Online 2012 was established to help more people get online for the first time by 2012. This organisation needed more frequent statistics on people who had never used the internet, but this could not be met by the annual Internet Access Households and Individuals Statistical Bulletin. Therefore, we started publishing an experimental quarterly update on internet users and non-users. This quarterly release was designed to fill this information gap.

In 2012, Race Online 2012 was replaced by a new partnership organisation, Go ON UK.

Within the UK there is wide interest in these estimates from researchers, public bodies, the media, charities and academics. The UK Government is moving towards a policy of “digital by default” in the provision of a range of public services. This is where the internet becomes the preferred method for the delivery of services. The statistics in this release make it possible to monitor the number of people who are not online, and who are unable to access public services that are delivered online. These statistics may also be used to help inform the wider debate about digital and social exclusion.

As well as user interest in adults who have used or never used the internet, there is also interest in adults who have used the internet but not recently. Therefore, in quarter 2 (Apr to Jun) 2012 limited new estimates of “recent” and “lapsed internet users” were introduced, showing adults who had used the internet within the last 3 months and more than 3 months ago. This concept has been expanded in this release following user demand, with the breakdown of “used in the last 3 months”, “used over 3 months ago” and “never used” the internet now forming the basis for all the tables excluding Tables 5A and 5B (see Regional distribution section for more detail).

Do you make use of our estimates of internet users? 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.

## 5. Coherence

The results published in this annual bulletin focus on recent users (used in the last 3 months), lapsed users (used over 3 months ago) and never used. These results are not directly comparable with the estimates contained in the annual [Internet Access – Households and Individuals 2014](#) statistical bulletin, published on 7 August 2014, which contains a wide range of information about internet access and use, but from a smaller sample than the LFS.

The annual Internet Access – Households and Individuals statistical bulletin is compiled from approximately 3,000 interviews conducted for the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey, whereas approximately 41,000 households respond each quarter to the LFS. The larger sample size in the LFS allows for more detailed and accurate socio-demographic analysis than is possible with the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey.

It is also important to note that the estimates in this bulletin are on a UK basis, whereas the Internet Access – Households and Individuals statistical bulletin results relate to Great Britain only.

## 6. Sampling variability

The quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2015 confidence intervals tables show estimated 95% confidence intervals for UK estimates of adults who had never used the internet, by age group and sex (Table A) and estimates of adults who had last used the internet more than 3 months ago/never used the internet ([Tables 5C and 5D \(471 Kb Excel sheet\)](#)), by NUTS 3 geography areas. The estimates, included as part of this statistical bulletin, come from survey data and so have a degree of statistical error associated with them. Confidence intervals are an indication of the reliability of the estimate; the smaller the interval, the more reliable the estimate is likely to be. With regards to '95% confidence intervals', if the survey was repeated 100 times, 95% of the time (95 times out of 100), the true population value would fall within the range of these confidence intervals.

**Table 1: Internet non-users: 95% confidence intervals, 2015 Q1**

	Never used the Internet		
	Lower limit	Survey estimate	Upper limit
All (thousands)	5,878	5,894	5,910
All (%)	11.1	11.4	11.7
Age group (years; thousands)			
16-24	31	31	31
25-34	66	66	66
35-44	138	138	139
45-54	400	402	403
55-64	750	755	760
65-74	1,491	1,505	1,519
75+	2,939	2,997	3,055
Age group (years; %)			
16-24	0.3	0.4	0.6
25-34	0.6	0.8	0.9
35-44	1.4	1.7	1.9
45-54	4.0	4.4	4.8
55-64	9.7	10.3	10.9

	Never used the Internet		
	Lower limit	Survey estimate	Upper limit
65-74	23.3	24.2	25.1
75+	58.7	60.6	62.5
Sex (thousands)			
Male	2,453	2,462	2,471
Female	3,419	3,433	3,446
Sex (%)			
Male	9.4	9.7	10.1
Female	12.5	12.9	13.3

**Table source:** Office for National Statistics

**Table notes:**

1. Q1 refers to quarter 1 (January to March).

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The larger the sample that is used for a particular estimate, the narrower the confidence interval will be. The more detailed regional estimates in Tables 5C and 5D are based on smaller sample sizes than the higher level regional estimates therefore the quality of the estimates in Tables 5C and 5D are lower.

**7. Rounding**

In all tables, totals may not equal the sum of independently rounded components.

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## 9. Special events

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### Publication policy

10. 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)

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