

Seniors and the Internet

A Briefing written for the National Pensioners Convention, Digital Working Party
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Introduction

This report has been created as a result of the continuing serious issues seniors are experiencing with technology in order to communicate with the community, family and friends and for essential services and supplies such as food and medical attention.

It's highly unlikely that the pioneers of computing and the internet realised the harm that their inventions were going to cause in the future although much valuable technology has advanced during and since the world wars. Certainly they didn't expect the loneliness and isolation that has been caused.

This report will also attempt to show how Internet providers **should take more responsibility** for security, design of websites and the technical language used, content, privacy for the user and the fees they charge for using their products, whilst exploiting the users data.

There seems to be a total disregard for the standards set out in 2017. **W3C standards** define an Open Web Platform for application development that has the unprecedented potential to enable developers to build rich interactive experiences, powered by vast data stores, that are available on any device.

The following is an article published in The British Computer Society's Magazine IT NOW 2020, written in collaboration with Maureen Childs.

The older generation and computers – an unresolved challenge of our time

Imagine primitive computers, the size of a room, used exclusively by top companies, universities or government agencies. No internet exists and nobody knows what 'social media' is supposed to be. To call somebody you use a rotary-dial telephone attached to a socket in the wall. You have three or four TV stations but they shut around midnight. To get your news, you purchase your favourite newspaper in print. To buy anything, you pay by cash or perhaps by cheque. If you are young and love music you might carry a cassette Walkman around with you. And nobody can contact you if they don't know where you are.

Fast forward a few decades to arrive in a world where computers have become ubiquitous and where their use has changed the world beyond recognition – at least if you're part of a generation that has known life and work without them.

So, are today's seniors just annoying relics of a bygone era; people who should just adapt to all that exciting new technology and accept the realities of this Brave New World? That isn't a fair assessment – there are plenty of people in their 70s and older who have taken enthusiastically to new technology, there are many more who confidently grew into the computer-age during their careers but might be baffled and

annoyed by the constant introduction of new apps and ever more communication formats – and then there are those who struggle with basic aspects of the digital age. There might be health reasons or a disability making it difficult for them to use computers unaided, there might have been a lack of opportunities to gain exposure to computers during their lives, there might well be an element of apprehension involved as well.

It is a sign of a compassionate society that endeavours to have an inclusive attitude towards its more vulnerable members by assisting those that are struggling to achieve a dignified level of digital access. There are still too many occasions where older people are simply excluded from social activities or even meaningful and useful work experience because they do not receive the comparatively modest assistance and encouragement that would enable them to fully participate in society.

We also need to ask where digital technology is leading us. There are many useful aspects that we would not want to lose again – not everyone is a passionate gamer but many of us enjoy having access to web links about science, culture, literature and a democratic level of political involvement that is enabled by digital media. Almost everyone has an email address these days to communicate. And what about those amazing miniature computers we carry around with us – calling them a ‘phone’, or even a ‘smart phone’ almost does not do them justice.

But are we sure we know all the potential consequences of the digitalisation of our lives? Can we be confident with the structures in place that are supposedly safeguarding our digital activities? Can we be assured that our data is not being misused? Have we not had ample evidence recently about manipulative advertising on social media to influence voters’ attitudes? Can we honestly say that this enormous phenomenon called ‘social media’ is automatically a force for the good?

And if the attempts to move the entire payment structure onto digital platforms are successful, removing our access to cash at the same time, would we really be comfortable with the potential for abusive control of our digital visibility? Similar questions can be asked about any of the other digital information pieces about us, floating around in cyberspace, be they of a medical, professional or political nature.

We have long arrived at a point, where **questioning our almost total reliance, or perhaps even obsession, with computers and digital media** should be part of a civic debate. And I would argue that the life experience of today’s seniors should have a voice. They carry the wisdom of a life without any of that technology; they can tell us how to have a human-to-human relationship not involving screens, keyboards, passwords, apps, facebook or twitter. **For the modest assistance needed by some elderly computer users, that generation can more than pay back all of society, if only we start taking them seriously as mature and insightful members of an inclusive society.** (Erwin Schaefer – West Central London Green Party and Green Seniors Media Officer)

Each following topic is headed with quotations from Members of the National Pensioners Convention, and other interested parties. There is a list of quotations available from Maureen Childs collected as a result of a request to National Pensioners Convention regional members.

Costs

Quote: It's too expensive, I have to buy an ipad and pay for wifi.

Quote: No-one should have to choose between food and data – it's heart breaking that so many have faced that choice. Data poverty and the lack of affordable devices is something we can fix. At Good Things Foundation we're focused on data poverty and are moving from emergency solutions – like DevicesDotNow – to exploring sustainable solutions through the Data Poverty Lab we're setting up with Nominet. Helen Milner CEO The Good things Foundation

The plan to build back London after the pandemic cannot ignore the contribution of older Londoners. As volunteers, carers, community leaders and active citizens, older Londoners play an important role in the city's social and cultural life. Through paid work alone, older Londoners contribute at least £47 billion to the capital's economy.

The Wealth of the Technology Companies: Can they afford to give concessions to seniors?

Whilst many seniors are having to decide between eating and the internet the following companies are well aware that their products are essential communication tools necessary for existing in today's communities. At the same time they seem ignorant of the fact that many, including seniors, do not have the means to acquire these essential tools.

According to the Fortune Global 500 list shows companies identified by Fortune as being in **the technology sector**, ranked by total annual revenue.

TOP 8 Most Valuable Companies in the world

- #1. **Saudi Aramco**. \$2,458 bln (billion).
- #2. **Apple Inc.** \$2,213 bln.
- #3. **Microsoft**. \$1,653 bln.
- #4. **Amazon Inc.** \$1,596 bln.
- #5. **Delta Electronics (Thailand)** \$1,435 bln.
- #6. **Alphabet Inc.** \$1,203 bln.
- #7. **Tesla, Inc.** \$834 bln.
- #8. **Facebook**. \$757 bln.

Average internet connection from many companies for the general public quote approximately £25 per month. £25 is the weekly food budget for a senior on basic state pension.

When choosing an internet service for the first time how many of us actually understand what we are buying?

We understand unlimited text and unlimited telephone time but what is a 'Gb'. It sounds like a lot of something.

Dictionary definition:

A 1GB (gigabyte a unit of online storage) data will allow you to browse the internet for around **12 hours**, to stream 200 songs or to watch **2 hours** of standard-definition video.

A Zoom (online meeting software) call takes **1.2 gigabytes of data for a 1 hour meeting**.

You do not need a degree in mathematics to realise that a sim (subscriber identity module) only deal, of 2 gigabytes of data will not allow you to get you through a second zoom hour despite a misleading offer of unlimited text. And thereby hangs the crux of the problem for seniors.

Unfortunately, many now call online meetings 'Zoom' meetings. Zoom uses far more data than is necessary for an online meeting. It is therefore essential to consider which program is used for an online meeting as their choice forces users to use it. Metro newspaper: 23.04.21

Headline: *Your on mute 'Councillor 91' fired for not Zooming'*

A parish councillor 91, has been axed after 50 years for not attending meetings on Zoom because he does not have a computer.

Denis Baxter was disqualified by Strensall and Towthorpe Council, North Yorkshire along with Raymond Haher who has a computer but 'doesn't do zoom'. Chairman Tony Fisher said the rules are clear. 'If a member doesn't attend for 6 months without good reason, they must be disqualified'.

Seniors' initial choice of service may find themselves with bills they were not expecting. People who generously offer devices for families and seniors maybe placing them into debt.

There is alternative software, e.g. Microsoft Teams, takes **225 megabytes** of data per hour (roughly a quarter of a gigabyte) which is a lot easier on data allowance but still more than expected.

The media 'promotes' the use of the internet as if it's as cheap as the air you breath. Everything promoted by TV programs pressurises viewers to think that using the internet is normal! Many take the internet for granted without realising the difficulties for **17 million** people who do not use the internet. 45% of whom are seniors.

New Data Poverty Lab

An ambitious project launched on 21st April by the Good Things Foundation and Nominet, the Data Poverty Lab will bring together people, groups and ideas from across the UK to help end data poverty by 2024.

The Lab will explore sustainable solutions to data poverty, with the aim of ensuring the internet is affordable for people on low incomes and free for those on very low incomes. It will work with people with lived experience of data poverty to ensure policies are designed with their needs and ideas in mind.

See article [Partnering to bring an end to Data Poverty \(goodthingsfoundation.org\)](https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/partnering-to-bring-an-end-to-data-poverty)

The Lab will engage with MPs across the political spectrum, particularly through the recently launched [Data Poverty APPG](#), and with other organisations who are working to end data poverty.

The Data Poverty APPG website says: “The APPG is currently working with the internet service companies to understand how quickly they can offer a social tariff, and what the difficulties might be in doing that.”

They say they will publish regular updates on the progress internet service providers are making as well as updating Ministers and the regulator on the problems that might arise, and that they would like a social tariff to be available “urgently.”

They define social tariff as “a rate of payment for a service that is affordable for people on low incomes. This means that people can get online access at a price they can afford.”

Calls for a social tariff have increased during the pandemic lockdown, led by the BEIS Select Committee chair, Darren Jones MP. (Though there has been no publicity and so the UK population know nothing of it and therefore cannot benefit).

A recent popular TV programme illustrated the point that Internet Service providers gain valuable data gathered by cookies, small programs that glean information from the use of the program. This valuable data is sold to interested businesses. So users not only pay for their service but also give their data free to the service providers to sell on at great profit.

Below is a list of leading internet billionaires as of March 2020, by net worth (in billion U.S. dollars)	Net worth in billion U.S. dollars
Jeff Bezos , Amazon	113
Mark Zuckerberg , Facebook	54.7
Larry Page , Google	50.9

Combined with this list of internet billionaires and the Top 8 companies, these facts must be considered when leaders and spokes persons are negotiating fees for Internet Access, for vulnerable seniors and other vulnerable groups..

They can well afford to allow concessions for seniors and even allow free access.

Jargon and IT language

Quote: Regarding internet reception, I have a problem with mine and find it's very difficult to get it fixed because it's difficult to understand the people answering the phone.

Quote: Luckily one member of our house is "good with computers" otherwise I would be truly floundering.

Quote: I have great difficulty with using it, i can email and receive emails and thats about it being a manual worker all my life i had no need of it, because of no face to face meetings i have attended a lot of zoom meetings. I am fortunate in the sence my partner is not bad at using the system and logs me in to all zoom meetings

All trades and professions use jargon as a means of communicating with like minded colleagues BUT the **computer industry seems not to realise that many people have not had computer training**. Essential computer and internet communication has been thrust upon all of us regardless of this fact whether we like it or not.

More thought should be considered in the design, creation, code, reviewing (testing) software and websites that are intended for the public use, especially if the product is intended for senior use. Technology expressions, such as an acronym should have an explanation, e.g.: ISP (Internet Service Provider).

Did you know (DYK) that before the Deaf community became the first adopters of text messaging.

DYK disabled people made London transport digital?...

DYK that Steve Jobs was a refugee.

DYK The herstory of coding is woman's work?

DYK SMS(Short Message Service) was an add-on companies thought would go out with the pager?

The digital world is an entirely different medium to a novel, newspaper or journal...Plain English should always be used with an obvious glossary

Some ICT (Internet Communication Technology) allows footnotes and definitions to appear with a wave of a cursor. Thoughtful use of URL's (Uniform Resource Locator) code, can sometimes be used to clarify the address to find a website. Sometimes referred as a website address. e.g. this URL – <http://www.HEARequality.org.uk> - can be read as He Are Quality if all in lower case (a very different meaning). Capitalising part of the address means the message won't be misunderstood.

There are several helpful glossaries available on the internet if you are capable to search for them: i.e. Ofcom Glossary and abbreviations

There are of course numerous examples but designers must examine their products to ensure seniors understand what they are buying and using. The most cynical of us feel that jargon is deliberately used to mislead the customer!! There are numerous examples of this. See quotes above.

Security

Quote: But I find that a lot of the elderly and vulnerable that I volunteer with are always being bombarded with offers weekly/monthly even from the company they are tied to and the offers are not always to their benefit. One of my ladies gets messages, letters, emails etc hounding her offering her faster better service, she is 88 years old, with a mobile phone and wheelchair bound nearly deaf and registered blind she thinks they are wanting her to pay more or the bank has missed a payment she is so stressed and some of her neighbours are feeling the same way. I bought her a magnifier for her to at least have a chance of see who is pestering her and cancel their calls. One of the biggest things is finding a number for them who to contact when trying to cancel deals etc., most you have to email or if their is a number it is a premium line costing a lot of money and taking them round the garden and getting no farther forward.

The new online safety laws being proposed by the Government will give Ofcom the power to crackdown on social media companies - but **will fail to cover online scams and fraud**. This means **millions of us are being left as sitting prey to online fraudsters**.

It's a shocking omission, **given the HUGE spike in online financial scams** since the start of the pandemic. And with all of us increasingly being forced to turn online for everything, from paying our bills to ordering our groceries - **protecting our finances from online fraudsters has never been more important**.

Being scammed online is a nightmare scenario. What's worse, a survey by the Money and Mental Health Policy Institute found that **those with mental health problems are three times more likely to have been the victim of an online scam**.

Martin Lewis, MoneySavingExpert.com founder, said 'scams don't just steal people's money, **it often takes their self-respect and mental health too.**'

Seniors do not necessarily know that they can set up a certain amount of personal protection on their own systems but having said this there is also **a lot more the service providers and technology can do**.

If Which? Consumer company can offer security advice then why are the service providers not doing the same?

The Football Associations are bombarding the Minister for Sport with requests to protect football players in particular for race hatred crimes. Why not the population as a whole?

The Dark Net: Online practices where people's personal details are 'stolen' and used to deprive them of their finances.

Incidents of fraud such as attempts to steal someone's identity should be reported to:-

<https://www.protectseniorsonline.com/resources/cybersecurity-best-practices/>
<https://www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/work-learning/technology-internet/internet-security/>

A few public Companies provide free internet security. Services such as Which? and Dyson. Many seniors are more afraid of scams on the telephone and are afraid of doorstep scammers. Which provide some videos on their YouTube channel 'Things to say to doorstep scammers' but how are seniors to access this information!!

There's now a much easier way to make users aware of scams directly with a [scam sharer tool](#). Sharing details of scams helps to protect. Examples of security breach include phishing emails, fake texts, cold calls and other types of fraud.

Malware

Malware is short for malicious software that can damage your computer. Different types of malware include:

- Viruses, which can delete information on your computer
- Spyware that gathers information from your computer and passes it on to another computer
- Ghostware is a stealthy piece of code that's been cloaked, and so is used by criminals to sneak undetected on to your computer where it then hides other malicious code
- Blastware is designed to automatically destroy or disable a system if you find it on your computer
- Ransomware could lock your computer or hide important information to you until you give the criminals a fee to return it

Phishing

Phishing is the practice of sending emails that look as though they're sent from a reputable company to trick you into revealing personal information like passwords or credit card numbers.

- Spear-phishing is like phishing, but targeted to trick you personally. Spear-phishing might be even harder to spot, as the email could even be one you're expecting to receive.
- Whaling is like spear-fishing, but targets a high-profile mark, like a CEO of a company, in order to get hold of the company's financial details.

Poor privacy – much of what we do digitally is as an individual. If you are reliant on shared resources or 'help' to access the digital world then your right to privacy is infringed. Maintaining your data rights and knowing if your online and IRL movements can be monitored is an important part of digital inclusion. Intersectional and poorer people are less likely to insist on their confidentiality or IRL alternatives and often feel compelled to give up their data rights even when they understand the risks... Online forms rarely allow you to 'prefer not to say'.

Risk – digital exploitation, harassment, theft and exclusion from statutory services, even those required for safeguarding, is of major concern. rather than harnessing the egalitarian potential of the digital revolution, we are embedding and exacerbating the discrimination and marginalisation that already exists.

Training the trainers

Most colleges and Universities offered courses for seniors called, in most cases YANTO (You are never too old) But economic recession forced Universities and colleges to close these ideal courses. These courses were particularly precious because seniors were included in the general student and adult population. Seniors felt part of the Community, essential for wellbeing. These courses should be re-established. Training done by volunteers in small unregistered centres creates a post code lottery and may even prevent seniors becoming online. A further suggestion is to have a central advice point access where seniors can get instant professional advice.

Access to the internet and having digital skills are essential for people's health and wellbeing, an NHS Digital-led programme 'digital health hubs' has shown.

Authors of the final report from the NHS' Widening Digital Participation Programme have said the coronavirus pandemic has further exposed the "digital divide" – the links between digital exclusion and social and economic disadvantage.

The report includes a recommendation to create a network of 'digital health hubs', after several were set up through the project to build digital health literacy and improve access to services. The report also calls for further work to harness the benefits of digital inclusion, for example by supporting people to try out different devices and assistive technologies to boost their health.

Further recommendations are:

- That improved data on the links between digital inclusion, health care and outcomes should be collected
- That people's digital health literacy should be improved, including supporting safe and healthy internet use
- That work to build digital skills in health and care staff should continue, and networks of digital health champions should be created
- That digital inclusion should be an integral part of health, care and wellbeing strategies

Under the programme, delivered by NHS Digital, 23 pathfinder projects were set up throughout England between 2017 and 2020.

Social change charity Good Things Foundation, the leading organisation for seniors computer training, ran the pathfinders, which tested different ways of using digital technology to improve the health of the most excluded people in society.

Digital Inclusion is about more than 'skills' – it is pretty unusual to find someone in London with no experience using digital technology... digital inclusion is about using ICT (Internet Connective Technology) when you want, for what you want, logging off when you want, when you can create your own online world and networks.

Other organisations offering computer Training for seniors include Age UK, University of the 3rd Age. **Some Community Centres offer computer training, but lacked the skills of experienced trainers, and rely on volunteers.** These courses are useful, some better than others, but it has created a fragmented service a post code lottery as the Centres are few and far between.

Excerpt from an email to North London Branch BCS

Chris Winter

Mar 29,
2021

His email refers to the work he has done for The British Computer Society, The Institute for Electronic Technology and the All Party Parliamentary Group.

‘However, I have been busy on this topic working with a number of organisations, including the BCS(British Computer Society) and the IET(Institute Electronic Technology). I hope that this afternoon’s webinar is, in part, a result of a presentation that I made to the BCS Council in January. (Available on BCS website)

In addition I am currently contributing to the following:

- Parliamentary POST on Digital Skills.

<https://post.parliament.uk/approved-digital-skills-for-life/>

- Leaving no one behind – Introducing the Inclusive Data Taskforce
<https://blog.ons.gov.uk/2021/01/11/leaving-no-one-behind-introducing-the-inclusive-data-taskforce/>
- All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG): Digital skills
<https://connectpa.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Digital-Skills-APPG-report-2020.pdf>
- Chris Winter chriscwin@aol.com.

Conclusion Human Rights

Quote: I think wifi/internet is now a commodity or utility like electricity. Cant do without. Sometimes there’s just no choice available like electricity, they all charge the same, and same awful customer services.

‘Where digital for life and work has become the new normal, it isn’t OK to leave millions of people behind.’ Helen Milner CEO The Good Things Foundation
According to Lloyds Consumer Digital Index 2020, 9 million adults in the UK can’t use the internet without help.

Digital Inclusion is about more than ‘skills’ – it is pretty unusual to find someone in London with no experience using digital technology... digital inclusion is about using ICT (Internet Computer Technology)when you want, for what you want, logging off when you want, when you can create your own online world and networks.

Digital tools are just tools – there is a drive and assumption that the only benefits of getting people online are getting them into work... The benefits of digital inclusion are far beyond the world of work. They now include the global civilisation including seniors.

Advertise people's rights and ways to IRL (in real life) alternatives – public services have a duty to provide services and make **'reasonable adjustments'**.

Burying a phone number, complaints procedure or office opening hours deep in a website is bad for business, and for public sector providers, breaches their statutory duties.

When someone comes in or calls, they should not be directed to a website

We don't know all the answers <https://www.digitalhealth.net/2020/12/digital-inequalities-are-everyones-problem-but-we-dont-know-all-the-answers/>

"We recognise the importance of people being connected and that's why we've already taken action to broker a major deal with the mobile and broadband companies to provide essential support for vulnerable consumers who may be affected by coronavirus," said **a spokesperson for the department of digital, culture, media and sport.**

Yet anti-poverty groups such as [the Aple Collective](#), a network of people who have experienced poverty, say not enough is being done. *"We welcome the positive and compassionate moves being made by government and the telecommunications industry to seek to buffer the effects of Covid-19 on those on low incomes"*, they said in a statement.

"However, what is little mentioned so far are the voices and responses from those who are completely excluded from the digital world."

Following report by Misha Nayak-Oliver. 2021

Campaigns and Advocacy Lead for the charity, Just Fair. Just fair is a Human Rights Group

Individual users need greater protection. They must have redress against large platforms through an ombudsman tasked with safeguarding the rights of citizens.

Transparency of online platforms is essential if democracy is to flourish.

Platforms like Facebook and Google seek to hide behind 'black box' algorithms which choose what content users are shown. They take the position that their decisions are not responsible for harms that may result from online activity.

This is plain wrong. The decisions platforms make in designing and training these algorithmic systems shape the conversations that happen online. For this reason, we recommend that platforms be mandated to conduct audits to show how in creating these algorithms they have ensured, for example, that they are not discriminating against certain groups.

Regulators must have the powers to oversee these decisions, with the right to acquire the information from platforms they need to exercise those powers.

Platforms' decisions about what content they remove or stop promoting through their algorithms set the de facto limits of free expression online. As it currently stands the rules behind these decisions are poorly defined. Their practical operation should reflect what the public needs. In order to protect free and open debate online, platforms should be obliged to publish their content decisions making clear what the actual rules of online debate are.

Alongside establishing rules in the online world, we must also empower citizens, young and old, to take part as critical users of information. We need to create a programme of lifelong education that will equip people with the skills they need to be active citizens. People need to be taught from a very young age about the ways in which platforms shape their online experience.

The public needs to have access to high quality public interest journalism to help inform them about current events. This requires fair funding to support such journalism.

Platforms must also be forced to ensure that their services empower users to exercise their rights online. The public need to understand how their data is being used. We propose that this obligation of fairness by design should be a core element in ensuring platforms meet their duty of care to their users.

Parliament and government at all levels need to invest in technology to engage better with the public.

Electoral law must be completely updated for an online age. There have been no major changes to electoral law since the invention of social media and the rise of online political advertising. As the Law Commission recently pointed out, a wholesale revision of the relevant law is now needed. This should include rules that set standards for online imprints on political advertisements so that people can see who they come from and advert libraries that enable researchers and the public to see what campaigns are saying. The Electoral Commission needs the powers to obtain the information necessary to understand when individuals are breaking the rules and to be able to set fines that act as a real deterrent against flagrant breaches. We also need to ensure that there is greater clarity around the use of personal data in political campaigns; the Information Commissioner's guidance should be put on statutory footing.

We take the Nolan Principles of Public Life as our guide in this Report, and as the standard to which individuals in public life should be held. In turn, platforms and political parties should aspire to the same high standards.

We believe this Report sets out a way whereby digital technology is no longer in danger of undermining democracy but rather where the wonders of technology can support democracy and restore public trust.

Recommendations

Seniors should have an independent Older People's Commissioner for England – like Scotland and Northern Ireland – who can voice senior needs, able to campaign for internet access as a Human Right, and compelling broadband providers to offer a free or social tariff for vulnerable people and those in poverty, and ensure data protection.

DHSC and NHS Digital should set out a detailed plan on how they will improve access to and join-up NHS data systems to ensure quick and secure access to all patient records.

A new report from Age UK, Digital inclusion and older people – how have things changed in a Covid-19 world, says much more investment in digital skills training and IT hardware is needed to support older people who are digitally excluded to get online safely and improve their skills. Without it, many older people will simply be left behind, with some struggling to access basic goods and services.*

Age UK director, Caroline Abraham's concluded: "If government really wants to see a rise in the number of older people using computers, sustained investment is needed."

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Footnote *From latest news item: Football fans realise the impact their ban on using social media will have. They know that the Internet and IT Industry will suffer financially if the fans go through with the ban. Unfortunately excluded seniors do not have the same choice!!*

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Full Report online, search for **'What the UK Government should do now'**.

Internet and broadband terms and speeds explained

SAM COOK, DATA JOURNALIST.