

Internet use in sheltered housing

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Internet use in sheltered housing

Older people's access to new media and online service delivery

Maria Sourbati



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Summary

This report presents the findings of a study conducted with the support of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation into the ways older people who live in sheltered homes use information and communication technologies in their everyday lives and the emerging relationships between older people and the Internet.

The context of the study

In 1999, the UK government published its *Modernising Government* White Paper (Cabinet Office, 1999), which introduced an information technology strategy for change in the way public and government services are delivered. The 'e-government' strategy was designed to permeate all levels of central and local government, and the year 2005 is now set as the target date for having all government services available electronically by means of Internet technologies. In March 2001, the Prime Minister committed the government to ensuring that 'everyone who wants it has access to the Internet by 2005' (Office of the e-Envoy, 2002, p. 6) via a range of platforms at home and in the community, including public terminals and street kiosks. Possible access channels for public services that are enabled electronically and delivered online include networked personal computers and digital interactive televisions.

This study is concerned with older people in sheltered homes, a category of citizens who are traditionally heavy users of public and welfare services such as social housing and health and care support. It considers whether Internet access presents any benefits to older tenants in sheltered homes. Furthermore, whether access to health and social care related services delivered in electronic form, for example the transfer of medical prescriptions and information about social care or health support, might be an option for older home-centred users, and in which ways it might be so.

Methods

The methodology for this research involved semi-structured qualitative interview discussions with 18 older tenants and six members of staff in two sheltered accommodation schemes in North London. Both sites had resident wardens and communal facilities. Additionally, one of the two sites employed care staff (community support officers) on a 24-hour basis and made available to customers a range of organised recreational and social activities, and a free Internet facility.

Interviews sought to explore, first, current experiences of media access and, second, the perceptions of tenants and care staff about the potential of online access, against which the emerging relationships of frail older users with the Internet and electronic service delivery can be examined.

Study findings

The perspectives of tenants – older media technologies: the television and the phone

- The television and the telephone were routinely embedded into the daily lives of all older tenants, who were accustomed users of landline telephones and analogue broadcast technologies and services.
- The watching of television was particularly significant to frail, home-centred viewers as a form of company and comfort, as a choice in leisure and as a means of knowing about the world beyond the confines of the home.
- Some respondents had used their television to access information services (i.e. the teletext service) and a minority of pay-TV subscribers, to buy goods via shopping channels. However, they tended to utilise less of these TV-enabled services than previously.

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- The telephone was used both as a means to interact (i.e. have a conversation or request information) and, in some cases, as a means to transact (e.g. buy consumer goods from catalogues), though tenants tended to perform fewer purchases via their phones as they got older.
- In contrast with the redundancy of earlier telephone shopping patterns, some respondents were willing to take up new telephone-based transactional services that facilitated the continuation of daily routines. This was the case of a teleshopping service that enabled tenants to order their food shopping via the phone.
- Landline telephones became increasingly indispensable in later stages of life as instruments for communication tasks associated with health risks and security. Older users made calls 'when needed' to reach out to social and health services, and support workers, such as the pharmacist, the GP or the district nurse.
- The mobile phone was used as a secondary medium for calling a relative or a service when on the move and in case of emergencies.

The perspectives of tenants – computers and the Internet

- Older tenants in sheltered homes become increasingly aware of communal Internet access points and training schemes in the community.
- Some respondents had tried the Internet, mostly through attendance at free introductory courses or during visits to relations, and some aspired to do so after becoming motivated by family and friends who were already online or by care workers.
- However, their mode of access, quality of access experiences and the way new or prospective users viewed the Internet were defined largely by media skills they already possessed, their

inclinations and abilities to acquire new technical competencies as well as their understanding of current needs and interests. These varied across the sample of tenants but tended to follow three distinct patterns:

- 1 *Assisted computer contact*: this was the case of a small minority of frail older tenants who were not familiar with computers but had given the Internet a try on one or two occasions with assistance from community workers or family relations. These respondents were not confident in their ability to learn how to interact with computer technologies without assistance from experienced users. Although none of these users perceived Internet access as a priority in their lives, some saw some scope for using communal online access facilities as a new leisure activity, provided they had some assistance from care staff.
- 2 *Basic self-service computer contact*: some respondents, who were among the youngest in the sample and had acquired a level of basic computer literacy via attendance of short courses such as those run in the context of the Learndirect initiative, were very keen to access the Net. They mostly valued communication services (email, chat rooms) and Web browsing, and tended to have rather high expectations regarding the benefits of Internet access but no clear idea of either content options or costs. These aspiring users saw considerable scope for communal Internet access facilities as a means of engaging with new forms of leisure and companionship, and were keen to join Internet training that was tailored to their needs.
- 3 *Competent self-service contact of networked computers*: a notable exception in the tenant sample was the case of one respondent who had a home Internet connection. This respondent was routinely using the email

facility for social communication and browsed the Web occasionally to look for information relating to her interests. Gradually, and not without reluctance, this user was appreciating the potential of electronic service delivery in enabling home-centred users to reach services.

- Tenants were at best ambivalent towards the idea of online delivery of health and social care related services, which they perceived as a substitute for physical activity and social contact, and a threat to their further isolation.
 - 1 Many frail older tenants who were using care support services could neither conceive nor accept the idea.
 - 2 Negative attitudes were also evident in the group of respondents who were very keen to access the Internet.
 - 3 Some were worried that electronic service delivery would replace traditional forms of service provision.
 - 4 However, a few respondents appreciated that remote access to health or care support services could enhance user independence in the later stages in life.

The perspectives of staff – online media access and electronic service delivery

- Discussions with staff indicated that, although not a priority need in social housing schemes for older people, Internet adoption could improve access to health, medical advice and care support information for community care professionals. Remote access to specialist social care or health-related services (e.g. home shopping, GP appointment booking and electronic transfer of medical prescriptions) could improve service administration and economise on staff time. It could as well contribute towards improving the quality of life of older customers if implemented as a complement to established practices in care provision.

- Staff interviews indicated that realisation of any long-term benefits accruing from Internet access and the electronic administration of aspects of care support can be inhibited by the lack of Internet literacy among front-line care workers, lack of time on behalf of the front-line staff to acquire relevant skills through training, non-availability of relevant training and lack of time to use new facilities as they become available.
- Staff pointed out that, unless current priorities for recruiting more qualified front-line care workers and allocating extra care hours to frail older tenants are met, Internet access cannot be integrated into care provision: 'there is no point in having a prescription that involves no time'.
- Beyond time and skill shortages, the integration of Internet access into the routines of care provision would require culture change: most community support staff are not aware how Internet access can be useful to their work.

Conclusions

Analogue TV sets and telephone connections play an important role in the lives of older tenants as part of a web of people, technologies and services that support independent living, particularly for users whose mobility is restricted. For some isolated, frail, older tenants their TV, their phone and their carer represent their social universe in its entirety:

I've got everything I want here. My TV, the phone, no need for anything, and my girl [the carer] comes up to see me every morning.

(Ronnie, 85)

Older people who have never encountered computers before, a situation that applies to the majority of older tenants currently in sheltered accommodation, can become interested in trying the Internet, mainly as a new option in leisure, usually after encouragement by family and social relations.

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However, it appears very unlikely that many older tenants, especially those who use care support services, can develop technical competencies that would allow them to use standard market devices (e.g. complex computer keyboards and digital TV remote control handsets), navigation software and on-screen text display to select online content choices on a self-service basis for the following reasons.

- 1 The majority of older tenants are not interested in becoming involved in Internet learning, as they do not feel the need to use new online media technologies and services.
- 2 For many of the tenants who do become interested in trying new online media services, access is hindered by a complex set of constraints. These include lack of suitably designed equipment, unavailability of training that is tailored to their needs and abilities, and unavailability of relevant support and assistance from community care staff.
- 3 The idea of online access to care support services can alienate inexperienced users who tend to think of online service delivery in terms of threats rather than opportunities.

The fact that those older users whose family and social networks have adopted Internet access are more likely to become interested in joining the online world is indicative of inequalities in access opportunities. But, viewed in a social care context, it also underlines the role of care staff in facilitating (or discouraging) frail customers' access to a new service. Professional carers can perform a gatekeeping role in introducing older people to new services – not least because, for many older tenants, their ability to take advantage of any novel forms in welfare service delivery would be conditional on the support of staff. Also because professional carers may be the only human relationship that some isolated, homebound older people have.

If considered against the complexity of barriers to Internet access and the attitudes of older tenants towards online service delivery, the telephone, which is the most familiar and trusted interactive medium, has considerable potential to improve access to services for older, home-centred users. The importance of the telephone as a channel for tele-access becomes evident if the phone is compared with newer interactive delivery channels, i.e. networked computers or networked digital televisions, which most older residents have never encountered in their lives.

1 Introduction

This report presents the findings of a study undertaken with the support of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation into the ways older people relate to older and newer electronic information and communication technologies and services. The study set out to investigate established routines of electronic media use by older people who live in sheltered homes and the incentives and barriers to Internet access experienced by older tenants and community support staff who work with older tenants. The research was concerned with investigating whether developments in e-government, which essentially centre on the use of interactive communication technologies for the delivery of public and welfare services, present any opportunities to older citizens.

The main questions examined were as follows.

- What media technologies and services do older people who live in sheltered homes use in their everyday lives, and how do they feel about them?
- What are the emerging patterns of Internet access among older tenants?
- What are the attitudes of customers and staff in sheltered accommodation schemes towards the Internet and Internet-based services?

- What can these tell us about the potential benefits of, and the obstacles to, the introduction of Internet access and online service delivery in sheltered accommodation schemes for older people and, more generally, in the field of social care?

This report is structured as follows. Chapter 2 introduces the background to the study, the design and aims of the research, and the fieldwork sites. Chapter 3 examines the results of qualitative interview discussions regarding patterns of media use in the sample of older tenants. The interview topics covered the two most pervasive electronic media technologies, namely television and the telephone, both of which are potential channels for electronic service delivery. Chapter 4 reports on interview discussions that explored experiences of Internet access in the sample of tenants and their perception of Internet-based services. Chapter 5 examines the results of interviews with community support staff. Interviews with staff explored the views of participants regarding electronic administration of aspects of social care provision and health care support (e.g. hospital or GP appointment booking and transferring of repeat prescriptions) as well as their perceptions of the benefits of Internet access and the factors that may impede the take-up of Internet technologies in the field of social care. Chapter 6 discusses and concludes the findings of the study.

2 About the study

Policy background: e-government, electronic service delivery and universal Internet access

Interest in the use of computer networks to deliver government information and information-based services began in the early-1990s. Electronic service delivery, or, more precisely, the use of computer networks for the administration of service delivery, became a priority government aim towards the end of the 1990s under the New Labour government.¹ The e-government strategy was introduced in March 1999 with the publication of the *Modernising Government* White Paper (Cabinet Office, 1999) as an IT-based strategy, designed to permeate all aspects of central and local government, in order to contribute towards a transformation in the way public services are delivered and the efficiency of government itself. At the beginning of 2000, the Office of the e-Envoy was established as an office that reports directly to the Prime Minister to oversee and drive forward e-government (www.e-envoy.gov.uk).

In September 2000, the *E.gov* report (Cabinet Office, 2000) set out an action plan for electronic service delivery by means of Internet technologies. Central government and English local authorities subsequently adopted the target of making all government information and information-based services available online by December 2005. With regard to public services, *general services*, *health services* and *transport* have been earmarked as priority areas for electronic delivery. Examples of services that will be enabled electronically are social benefits advice, the booking of hospital and GP appointments, the issuing and transferring of medicine prescriptions² and online access to medical records (www.e-envoy.gov.uk/Responsibilities/ThingsYouCanDoonline/fs/en).

In March 2001, the Prime Minister committed the government to ensuring that 'everyone who wants it has access to the Internet by 2005' (Office of the e-Envoy, 2002, p. 6). This target is for *near* universal Internet access, that is, access from a

range of channels at home and in the community, comprising personal computers, digital interactive televisions and mobile telephones as well as public terminals such as street kiosks. In addition to these platforms, potential delivery channels for e-government are telephone call centres and area offices.

The objective of getting Britain online is pursued through the UK Online campaign, a programme targeted at both the business sector and 'the people', which was launched by the e-Envoy in September 2001. With regard to the people, at the time of the fieldwork, the campaign was focusing on 'digitally divided groups', in particular 'those on low incomes, the elderly and people with disabilities' (Office of the e-Envoy, 2002, p. 71) who are traditionally heavy users of public and welfare services such as social care, health and housing. In its 2002 report, the e-Envoy reaffirmed the commitment to promoting the take-up of Internet access by raising awareness of the Internet and the benefits of online services, promoting affordable Internet access via a variety of channels in the community, investing in a network of public Internet access points, and encouraging acquisition of new information and communication technology skills among those who lack them (Office of the e-Envoy, 2002).

At the time of writing, the contribution of different technology devices to the attainment of universal Internet access is unclear, and so is the relationship between Internet access and e-government. Digital interactive television, for example – which was hoped to play a key part in the attainment of the universal Internet access objective³ – currently enables access to a 'walled garden' environment, consisting of a certain amount of interactive Web-based services. This level of online capability would suffice for the delivery of many e-government services to the home but not for full Internet access. Electronic service delivery and the take-up of Internet access remain key objectives of government policy, though a disaffection with the

2005 targets as a strategic framework for change in the delivery of public services through the application of digital technologies is beginning to emerge among the media and policy circles (Kearns, 2003). An important feature of the current landscape is a shift in policy away from having all services online by 2005 and towards one based on priority services and service take-up rates (Office of the e-Envoy, 2003, p. 29). Naturally, this should entail a focus on different groups in the population and a deeper and broader understanding of their needs and wants, and their perceptions of electronic service delivery.

Older people and new media technologies

Policy discourse on e-government has picked up on lack of awareness – taken to mean lack of information – as a key barrier to adoption. The UK Online campaign has been seemingly deployed on the basis of an assumption that the benefits of Internet access are clear and undisputed, yet consumers do not acquire new media skills, buy an Internet connection or purchase a digital interactive television set because they do not know what the benefits to them will be. A common assumption on benefits is that Internet access can improve opportunities for home-centred users to contact people and services, increase their sense of security and support independent living in the community.

This perspective is challenged by research into how people actually use new information and communication technologies. Once questions of ‘how’, ‘how well’ and ‘why’ people interact with the media are taken into consideration, a different set of concerns enters the study of access. Awareness, understood as the knowledge and ability to recognise that what may be needed in a given situation is a particular service, is one.⁴ Another is the question whether, and under which preconditions, any potential benefits can be realised for users – whether people can take advantage of

any alternative service options by using the Internet in a way that makes sense to them (cf. Garnham, 1999; Mansell, 2001, p. 3). Research into patterns of Internet use has indicated that the possibility to take a share in any content/service options that become available online also depends on the ability of users to understand and engage (Burrows *et al.*, 2000, p. 118; Bonfadelli, 2002, pp. 65–84).

The few existing studies into the ways in which older people relate to new information and communication technologies have identified a number of economic, social, cultural and technology-related barriers that may inhibit access to the Internet. Constraints on access comprise a lack of new media skills and difficulty in acquiring them, general literacy problems, the cost of new technology devices (e.g. personal computers), costs charged by Internet service providers (ISPs), telephone expenses and lack of suitably designed equipment (cf. Blake, 1998; Gilligan, 1998). Studies of older users have indicated that a major disadvantage faced by older adults who are unfamiliar with the Internet and associated services is a difficulty in relating these to their current routines and preferences (Blake, 1998, pp. 34–5). The only available qualitative study of how recently retired UK residents⁵ use a range of older and newer entertainment, information and communication media has highlighted barriers deriving from lack of familiarity and incompatibility with the values and lifestyles of users (Haddon and Silverstone, 1996). This study found that usage patterns and the utilities people exert from electronic media are preconditioned by both life histories and the particular socio-economic circumstances currently experienced in a way that makes it unlikely that home ownership of radically new technologies will be seen to offer much that is either useful or acceptable in enhancing the quality of older people’s lives (Haddon and Silverstone, 1996, pp. 160–4).

Study design, aims and approach

The present study set out to explore current practices of old and new media use in sheltered accommodation schemes for older people, whose ability to sustain independent living may be conditional on social and health care support. More specifically, this study sought to examine how older people use different electronic media (TV, telephone, computers and the Internet) at their home and in communal areas, and what are their perceptions and attitudes, and those of care staff, towards the Internet and online service delivery. The aim of the research was to consider whether Internet access via networked computers or televisions presents any benefits to older tenants in sheltered homes and, furthermore, whether access to health and social care related services delivered in electronic form might be an option for older home-centred users, and in which ways it might be so.

The methodology for this study involved observational research and qualitative interviews with 18 tenants and six members of staff in two sheltered accommodation complexes in North

London. One of the research sites is an extra care housing scheme. This housing complex has a capacity of 50 flats, employs care staff on a 24-hour basis and makes available to its customers a free-of-charge Internet facility, which is operated by the Housing Trust, and a phone-based teleshopping facility, which is operated by the local council as a home-help service. The communal Internet facility is set up in the tenant activity room. Interested customers (i.e. tenants) can join a weekly Internet Club to attend basic keyboarding and Internet navigation lessons and to surf the Net for free. At the time of the research, the Internet Club had been running for 18 months. During this period, only four out of 48 tenants joined the Club on a few occasions, to get online with the assistance of a member of staff who runs the Club. The other housing complex has a 250-flat capacity and does not employ professional community care staff other than wardens. This second scheme was not wired up at the time of the research but used to operate a communal Internet access facility two years before the research took place. The facility ran for a few months on computer equipment donated by Age Concern but was subsequently withdrawn.

3 The perspectives of tenants – old media and technologies

The tenants who participated in research interviews used a variety of electronic communications and entertainment media, with analogue free-to-air television and fixed-line telephones being the most popular. All except two respondents owned a television set and all but one had a fixed-line telephone connection in their flat. In addition, seven out of 18 respondents owned a mobile telephone, three a digital versatile disc player (DVD) and two a personal computer (PC). Two of the mobile users, who were a couple, shared the same phone and another three had been offered their mobiles as a gift from a relative. Two of the DVD players and one computer had also been gifts from family or friends (see Table 1).

Interviews with tenants sought to obtain personal accounts of media use, i.e. what media did the respondents use, what did they use the media for, how well did they manage this and what were

their underlying beliefs, as well as their attitudes towards a range of older and newer information and communications technologies and services. This chapter explores how tenants related to two of the most pervasive media technologies, the television and the telephone, both of which are potential channels for the delivery of interactive services.

Access experiences and the utilities of TV viewing – ‘It’s sort of a family thing. I like that, you know’

All respondents were watching television and all but two owned a TV set.¹ Four respondents were subscribing to pay-TV. It should be noted, however, that two of them had bought cable to improve the quality of broadcast reception, which was very low in one of the two housing complexes, and the other

Table 1 Media ownership in the sample of tenants

	Television set	Landline telephone	Mobile phone	Multi-channel television	Video cassette recorder	Digital video player	Personal computer
John (83)	*	*	*	*	*	Gift	
Rosalynn (80)	*	*		*	*		
Maureen (85)	*	*					
Mary (74)	*	*	Gift		*		
Nancy (66)	*	*	*			Gift	
Margaret (76)	*	*	Gift (returned)		*		
Tom (77)	*		*				
Bill (76)	*	*		*	*	*	
George (71)	*	*			*		
Ronnie (85)	*	*					
Arthur (80)	*						
Vera (70)		*	Shared				*
Kathy (92)	*	*					
Joe (67)	*	*	Gift	*	*		Gift
Joyce (75)	*	*			*		
Bob (75)	*	*	Shared		*		
Elsie (73)		*					
Pam (67)	*	*	Gift				

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two had bought pay-TV for extra choice in channels, although none subscribed to any premium services.

Viewing took place mainly in the private domain. Tenants preferred watching the programmes they liked in their own flat, as opposed to watching from the communal television set. The latter was perceived as a restriction of viewing choice:

The programmes they watch [in the lounge] are a lot different to what I want to watch.

(John, 83)

I prefer watching my own because, as I said, you can switch on to whatever you want.

(Rosalynn, 80)

Most older respondents stressed that they switched on their TV only to watch particular programmes:

I don't just have it on. If I want to watch a particular thing, I switch it on for that.

(Rosalynn, 80)

The viewing preferences of respondents appeared rather settled, with fiction (soaps, movies, murder mysteries, action crime), wildlife and history being the top content choices among all respondents. Programme selection was made against familiar programme schedules and followed set viewing patterns:

I know what's on. I know my set programmes: is two o'clock, Columbo. Then there's Professionals and Kojak ... then I have the news on, then I go back to Cable TV whatever I find in The TV Times.

(John, 83)

I have it on Channel 1 in the mornings because they have interesting programmes. The afternoon, I have it on for a while until about 20 past three, I think. And at six o'clock, I turn over to Channel 5 for Home and Away and Family Affairs, you know. I like them two.

And then I come back to Emmerdale, I like that and Coronation Street, I see them.

(Maureen, 84)

The viewing of TV broadcasts provided a form of company and comfort, and a means of knowing about, and relating to, the world outside the home.²

It's like, you know, the stars or actors will come into your living room, it's company. It cheers you up, you know, especially if you're a bit lonely or you're living on your own.

(Nancy, 66)

While it's on, you feel as if you've got somebody there don't you? It's like, I can't explain it, you don't feel as if you're alone so much, do you?

(Mary, 74)

It's like EastEnders, and you can identify with their family because the family's just breaking down here isn't it, everywhere I suppose.

(Margaret, 76)

Well I get information and I see it how the world is working and see what the political situations are and how they develop in various countries around the world and locally.

(Tom, 77)

I get a lot of information I can't pick up myself.

(Bill, 76)

Besides the watching of broadcasts, some respondents were using the teletext facility occasionally to obtain information about the weather, sports, betting results, flights and the news, and one respondent used to shop via a dedicated pay-TV service. Interviews indicated, however, that usage of these information services and shopping channels tended to diminish towards the later stages of life:

I used to shop by QVC sometimes. I used to use them to buy extra little things that I wanted. Not any more. I don't know why, I just don't.

(Rosalynn, 80)

Representations of television viewing – ‘I’ve had to be in hospital without a telly’

The viewing of television programmes was thoroughly integrated into the daily routines of all tenants. Many older respondents described their television as a ‘lifeline’ and most felt they would almost certainly miss watching if deprived of this choice, though, in most cases, they could not give a specific reason why, other than the general habit of watching:³

My television is like my lifeline, you know, I mean I love my television.

(Mary, 74)

I’d be lost without it but I’m not sort of one of these people who sits and watches it all day long.

(George, 71)

I’d miss it. Although I don’t watch it that much, I mean I like it to be there for when I want.

(Rosalynn, 80)

Interview discussions indicated that viewing in the home was linked to the sustaining of individual choice and the capacity to act independently. The core utilities of viewing – the creation of a sense of company and comfort, the provision of information about the world beyond the confines of the home and a choice in leisure – appeared particularly significant to home-centred viewers:

I do like watching TV actually. Well as I’m like this, nothing much else to do ... I’ve had to be in hospital without a telly. And I used to rent one in the hospital then, you know, I mean I was in hospital once for four weeks without a telly, you know. I’ve been in the hospital many times you know.

(Maureen, 84)

It would be terrible without watching because I don’t get out of here. I have to have assistance to get out of the flat. To get dressed and what have you. So I don’t, I’d be lost without it.

(John, 83)

I’d be lost. I’d be completely lost, I would. That’s on all the while now. All the while. Since I had the accident I keep that on. Day and night ... Oh yes, that does. That’s all I live for. Yes, that’s great that is to me. Everything I want is on there.

(Ronnie, 85)

I’ve nothing else to do ... I have a television and that’s all I need.

(Arthur, 80)

One respondent, who had been resisting TV ownership, felt that this may not be a viable choice at later stages in her life:

... if I’m a bit more confined in the future I might get a small one.

(Vera, 70)

Watching television: barriers experienced by older users

The viewing of a selected TV programme was an action almost all older tenants pursued without relying on assistance from care staff. All respondents were (or had been) accustomed users of standard analogue remote controls. Almost all navigated through different channels with confidence and made their programme selections themselves:

I find it all right. There’s no drawback to it. Once you select it you’ve got it.

(Arthur, 80)

That said, some tenants needed assistance to operate their remote control, as was the case with an older respondent who was suffering from a type of dementia disease:

I try and get it and I can’t. I get the carers to get the picture ... I have to wait. Wait until they come in.

(Kathy, 92)

The multi-channel viewers in the sample explained how they became familiarised with their new remote controls in an incremental fashion.⁴

Cable was a bit difficult at first to learn it but, once I got into it, it was fine.

(Rosalynn, 80)

They just give you a few lessons, then it's trial and error, but you soon get the hang of it, that easy.

(Joe, 67)

Some respondents were using assistive technologies, such as hearing aids and induction loops, and some occasionally used the subtitling function, in order to improve comprehension of the spoken elements of a broadcast, e.g. during night-time viewing when they had to keep their TV sound low.

In terms of viewing choice, most respondents were fairly content with the analogue free-to-air TV programme offerings. (As already noted, two of the four multi-channel subscribers in the sample bought cable to improve the quality of broadcast reception.)

However, many respondents anticipated that a widescreen television set would improve the quality of their viewing experience. The acquisition of this more advanced reception equipment was inhibited by a combination of cost factors and space limitations:

... if someone bought me a telly with a bigger screen than that I'd grab it with both hands.

(Maureen, 84)

I'd like a bigger [TV set] but there's no room in here. I am restricted to the size I have really. Hmm, you don't want it too big, because it's only a small room anyway, and it's no good for your eyes is it?

(Joe, 67)

We're all in the same position, we haven't got the room, but I'd love one.

(Margaret, 76)

The telephone: access experiences and utilities – 'I do it by myself. I'm not afraid of the phone'

Fixed-line telephones were highly appreciated by all respondents in the tenant sample as technologies that supported them to manage many aspects in their lives without depending on the help of another person. The telephone enabled older tenants to stay in touch with their family and social relations, to obtain information, to reach services and to carry out transactions from their home. Respondents in the tenant sample primarily used their phone to receive calls from other family members, call up existing friends and contact a relative or reach a service if a problem arose:

Well my son, I have a son and a daughter who rings me, rings me regularly to know I am all right.

(Rosalynn, 80)

My family phones to see how I am and all that. When my twin sister was alive, I used to phone her.

(Maureen, 84)

Basically for my family or when I need to use it ... It's handy to have a phone. It's like yesterday, I went to pick a prescription up and my neighbour was in a panic. I said well you'd better phone the chemist, because she wanted tablets.

(Nancy, 66)

... directory enquiries or perhaps the cinema or something to find out a programme.

(Joyce, 75)

In addition, some respondents had used their phone to buy goods (e.g. household goods or clothing) from catalogues. Some recently retired tenants who possessed credit cards were using their phone to book entertainment and leisure services. However, interviews indicated that older consumers tended to perform fewer telephone-enabled transactions than in the past:

Yeah, I've sometimes booked a holiday over the phone. You know, get the brochure, phone them up, ask what I want, and just give them the card number.
(Joe, 67)

If I need something for my flat because it's cheaper really, because, as a catalogue there's no interest. So you buy. And I use the phone for it.
(Nancy, 66)

No, yes, yes, catalogue, yes. Mostly like, a toaster or, you know, what's the last thing I bought, I can't remember.
(Mary, 74)

In contrast with the redundancy of earlier telephone shopping patterns, some older home-centred tenants in one of the research sites had recently taken up a telephone-based food shopping service.⁵ Those who used the teleshopping facility found the system convenient and easy to operate:

I do it on the phone. I do it by myself. I'm not afraid of the phone.
(John, 83)

They deliver, you know, you just phone for whatever you want and they deliver it.
(Rosalynn, 80)

I use the phone to shop for the simple reason, I don't travel out very much because I've got bad eyes and it hurts every time I go outside, very painful and I've got angina. I've got to be careful, I don't travel far.
(Bill, 76)

The mobile phone was basically used by older respondents as an ancillary medium. Those tenants who owned a mobile, which in many cases had been a gift from relatives, were utilising only a limited set of functions, i.e. telephone calls as opposed to text messages, primarily for contacting a relative or a service when on the move and in case of emergencies:

When I go out on me scooter, I take that with me, so if I break down or anything like that.
(John, 83)

I use my mobile just for emergencies when I'm out ... If I'm going to my family and the train is late or they're worried about me if I don't turn up or whatever.
(Nancy, 66)

Representations of the telephone – 'Well that's another lifeline isn't it?'

Described by tenants as another 'lifeline', the telephone played a very important role in the life of older respondents. It ensured contactability in situations that were perceived as emergencies, making it possible for tenants to establish immediate contact with people or services from their home. Access to a telephone created a sense of security by enabling the provision of emergency support and the convenient reach of health and care services, such as their GP, pharmacist or the district nurse:

Well that's another lifeline isn't it? You've got to. I mean if anything happens, you know, you've got to have a telephone.
(Mary, 74)

There are times when you need to get in touch with someone urgently and you must have telephone for that.
(George, 71)

The phone also alleviated loneliness by enabling regular contact with family and social relations:

I'd be very lost without my phone because that helps me to get in touch with my family.
(Maureen, 84)

Internet use in sheltered housing

All my family is in there. I phone my daughter. And my sons. I just press the number. They say 'Hello mum'.

(Kathy, 92)

Well especially when you live alone, you know, to connect you to people ... If you are in any problem, you can phone up a friend or a relative say if you've got one.

(Rosalynn, 80)

Reliance on the telephone (or what some studies have interpreted as a perception of dependency on the telephone)⁶ and appreciation of its usefulness appeared to increase following a perception of increased health risk in users' lives:

I think it's pretty vital. Because of, first of all, my illness. I'm a diabetic and asthmatic and in the wintertime, sadly, I do need medical attention. And so, if I need to phone the doctor, the clinic, well just takes the stress out of my life. I know if I can contact people fairly quickly and easily, it takes the worry away from having to go there, go down the road, maybe see them, maybe queue up.

(Bob, 75)

I've got a nurse looks after me, comes in to see me. I've got her personal phone number. If I ever want her, I just pick that up and phone her up.

(Ronnie, 85)

Using the telephone: barriers experienced by older people

Interviews indicated that, despite familiarity with landline telephone services, not all older people are able to use them. Contactability may be impossible to establish via standard telephone apparatuses if users experience a decline in their hearing or speech ability. Arthur, who was the only

respondent without a telephone connection in his flat, explained that his deteriorating speech made it impossible to use the phone in a convenient and dignified way:

I don't want it. It's not convenient. If you had a better telephone, yes, a lot easier because there's nothing worse when you've got to repeat yourself. You've got to repeat yourself. There's no point, no point in having a conversation.

(Arthur, 80)

Technology design was more of a restriction in the case of the mobile phone. Those tenants who owned a mobile telephone found their handsets difficult to handle because of their size and shape, the size and location of the buttons, confusing symbols, complicated instruction booklets and incomprehensible terminology:

Half of these mobile phones aren't much good to me because I mean they're too small.

(Bill, 76)

All the functions, I find, the symbols, I even found them difficult to read ... I've got a little book but I still find it's complicated. It's too advanced for me.

(Nancy, 66)

I don't really know how to use it to be honest. I know how to do a phone call but it's never turned on. I've got the book but it might as well be in Greek.

(Mary, 74)

In one case, the mobile technology was too much of a nuisance, so the user rejected it altogether. Margaret explained why she could not accept a mobile telephone she was offered as a gift:

I had one for a present but I gave it back to my daughter. I couldn't get on with it at all.

(Margaret, 76)

4 Older people, computers and the Internet: modes of access, types of use, emerging relationships

This chapter reviews discussions with tenants on computers and the Internet. Interviews sought to explore, first, experiences of computer use and Internet access, and the perceptions of the Internet among tenants, especially those tenants who had either accessed the Internet or were interested in doing so. Second, what respondents in the tenant sample thought of the idea of accessing a social or health care support service online, via a computer or a networked television.

A significant percentage of residents who participated in the research had at least one experience of computer and/or Internet access. Out of a total of 18 older participants, ten had interacted

with a computer at least once and six had accessed the Internet via a networked computer at least once (see Table 2). This rate of online access experiences is not typical of the situation of older people in sheltered housing. This bias in the sample of tenants and the choice of research sites that are not too representative of the current situation in sheltered homes for older people – as, for example, one runs a communal Internet facility – made it possible for the study to examine what happens when communal Internet access facilities become available and to explore emerging relationships of older users with the Internet.

Table 2 Computer and Internet access experiences in the sample of tenants

	During visit to family	Communal on-site facility	Local library training	Workplace (before retirement)	Social Security training	Other community: Learndirect	Home: own equipment/facility
John (83)		Internet					
Rosalynn (80)		Internet					
Maureen (85)							
Mary (74)	Internet						
Nancy (66)					Computer		
Margaret (76)			Internet				
Tom (77)		Internet					
Bill (76)							
George (71)				Computer			
Ronnie (85)							
Arthur (80)							
Vera (70)				Computer			Internet
Kathy (92)							
Joe (67)						Computer	Computer
Joyce (75)							
Bob (75)							
Elsie (73)				Computer			
Pam (67)							

Access experiences

All except three home-centred and very frail respondents had heard about the Internet via family or social networks, or through announcements made by staff in the sheltered homes, day centres, local libraries as well as through the press and the news, and many knew about free training sessions. Five respondents had experienced the Internet at least once through attendance at introductory courses run by the sheltered housing schemes or community centres, or during visits to relations, and one, who owned a networked computer, was regularly accessing the Internet from home (see Table 2). Another two respondents, both of whom had acquired basic keyboarding skills, were very keen to access.

Those tenants who had tried the Internet or aspired to do so had relatives or other social contacts who were already online. Interview discussions suggested a positive relationship between 'independence', defined in relation to people's ability to organise their lives independently of someone else's timetable and against reliance on human assistance,¹ active engagement in social activities, encouragement by family, social relations or care staff and an interest in engaging with Internet learning. Interview analysis indicated three patterns of user-computer interaction: *assisted contact*, *self-service contact of basic functions* and *competent self-service contact*.² It moreover indicated a correlation between different modes of engagement with a computer, with differing experiences of online access, expectations from the Internet and perceptions of its usefulness.

Older people with no computer skills: assisted contact of 'the one with the mouse'

Four older respondents had recently accessed the Internet with assistance from community support workers or family members. This first Internet access experience was also their first encounter with a computer. John and Rosalynn had joined the

onsite Internet Club at their sheltered housing complex, Margaret had taken her first computer lesson in the local library and Mary had one experience of 'what do you call it, you know, the with the mouse' at her son's house in France. All four tenants were employing a variety of communications and entertainment media (see Table 1). Although not all in this group were fully mobile (one was using a wheelchair and one relied on a Zimmer frame), all four tenants were engaging in social activities outside their home, for example in day centres. Their involvement with Internet learning had been encouraged by relatives and by community workers. The two tenants from the research site that operated a communal Internet facility (John and Rosalynn) had been personally invited to join the Internet Club by their keyworker:

Well my keyworker asked because I knew it was there and my keyworker said 'Do you want to?', you know, and I think he spoke with [the instructor] and they arranged for me to have some lessons.
(Rosalynn, 80)

At the time of the interviews, these respondents were being shown how to perform basic actions such as typing in a password to log on and using the mouse to control functions. They all felt overwhelmed by the technology and reported difficulties in relating to this new application. Despite encouragement, motivation and assistance, access was far from straightforward – Internet access remained an awkward experience:

I find it very awkward at the moment ... I'm a new boy. I'm not all that keen on it at the moment, I've just gone into it.
(John, 83)

We go on Fridays yes, I haven't quite mastered it yet, I'm still learning.
(Margaret, 76)

I'm trying to learn it but I don't think I'm doing so well. I am a beginner. Right beginner, yes. Well [the instructor] tries to make it as simple as she can, you know, but I think I seem to be getting a while to. I don't seem to be getting.
(Rosalynn, 80)

Older people with basic computer skills – 'I would love to be able to use the Internet'; 'Well I used them at work, but I'm not frightfully interested now'

Five respondents from the housing complex that did not run an Internet facility at the time of the interviews had developed computer competencies during their latter employment or after retirement. Those tenants were younger than most in the sample (their average age being early-seventies) and maintained active involvement in social networks outside their place of residence. They had heard about the Internet from the news and advertising campaigns ('through the television and the media'), had social contacts who were connected to the Internet and were aware of free Internet training schemes and communal access points such as local libraries and Internet cafes.

George and Elsie had become familiar with computers through work. Joe had acquired his first laptop computer, a freebie from his former employers, in spring 2002 and had then joined the local Learndirect centre ('a little computer course to learn the basics') after advice by a friend. Nancy had joined computer skills training arranged by the Department of Social Security before she retired, 'some years ago'. Tom, who was co-ordinating a campaign to reinstall an Internet access facility in the communal library, had experimented with the Internet in 2000 when a networked computer was made available to tenants. Those who had first encountered computers at work were not interested in applying their skills to access the Internet. Elsie and George associated computer-based applications with workload pressure and had no interest in becoming more involved:

Well I used them at work, but I'm not frightfully interested now. I did an awful lot of computers at work you see, so perhaps it's too much like work for me, it's like typing.
(Elsie, 73)

The more I learn about computers the more I'm going to get lumbered to do up there [at the Bowling Club].
(George, 71)

Those who became familiarised with computers either after retirement (Tom and Joe) or not within an employment context (Nancy) embraced the idea of Internet access with enthusiasm:

I'd love to be able to do everything on the computer.
(Joe, 67)

Well it's interesting. Most people today, if I go to friends' houses and they've got it, you know, I think I'd love one of them at home, you know, and they sit for hours on the Internet.
(Nancy, 66)

Competent users with a home Internet connection – 'I'll hopefully know more by then ... it won't be a shock in other words'

Vera was the only respondent who routinely accessed the Internet from home. She had familiarised herself with computers at work, bought her first computer after retiring in 1996 and made her first subscription to an Internet service provider in 2001. She explained her decision to acquire an Internet connection in terms of both opportunities and threats. Getting online was partly a matter of maintaining her lifestyle and her involvement in her social environment:

Once I left work, I thought, I don't know, it might be nice to have a computer. And so, I've got a very good friend who helped me sort of choose it and set it up for me. And then after, I think it was a colleague of [my partner] said, 'God, you haven't got an email address' and I thought, well yes, this is rather old-fashioned, so then I got that. I think most people I

come across are linked up to the Net or something like that so in that sense one feels quite up to date, you know.

(Vera, 70)

Getting online was equally an investment in the future. This user was worried that, in the near future, online delivery of services, including transactions, would replace established physical/material forms of service delivery. In that sense, her familiarisation with Internet-based systems was a matter of future security – it mitigated her fears of exclusion:

Another reason I thought it was a good idea to have access to the Net, I thought there may come a time in a few years when one will have to bank on the Net and it might become compulsory and I might just as well have it all set up and be able to, you know, I'll hopefully know more by then and I'll be able to sort of – it won't be a shock in other words.

(Vera, 70)

Internet access became part of Vera's everyday routines on a gradual basis. She used the email facility primarily for social communication and to carry out communication tasks associated with her voluntary activities:

I've got a computer and I have got an email number and I enjoy that very much. I mean if I opened up now and somebody was just asking me a question, because I do a little bit of voluntary work, I mean it's just so quick isn't it ... And it's lovely to keep in touch with people who live a long way away, live abroad.

(Vera, 70)

More recently, she started searching the Web for content relating to her leisure interests, following prompting from a radio programme:

And because I listen to a lot of music and I'm particularly interested in a particular period of music and there was a programme [on Radio 3] and they gave this address out and said that, if you're on the

Net, you can access. So I did. I thought it was wonderful. I was so thrilled. They had all this sort of information for the four programmes – it was just four programmes on baroque opera – the CD numbers and I thought, God this is just marvellous.

(Vera, 70)

A few weeks before this research interview, Vera had her first experience of searching the Web for holiday accommodation, something that she described with mixed feelings:

A few weeks ago I went to Devon and I got my holiday accommodation. I thought that was quite an achievement for me because I'm in an age group where you're, I like looking things up in the library, so it's quite a sort of a bit of a come down really for me but I can see it does.

Perceptions and attitudes: computers are for business and the Internet for?

Representations of the computer were not positive among older people, who tended to see it as a business technology and a source of hazard:

Oh it's fantastic for all kinds of things. Well for business I'm thinking of.

(Elsie, 73)

My eldest daughter, she uses computer a lot and she finds it makes her eyes ache. She had to have glasses for it.

(Maureen, 84)

By comparison, tenants' views on the Internet tended to be more diverse and more positive. The Internet was variously perceived by those who had either tried it or aspired to do so as a form of entertainment, a source of information, a learning opportunity, a means of communication, an opportunity to meet new people and to keep up to date and in touch with the modern times, and a necessary evil.

Those tenants who had occasionally tried to use a computer with assistance from experienced users saw the Internet as potentially useful – though not necessarily to them – mainly as entertainment, for example in relation to the pursuit of hobbies. Their interaction with a new technology apparatus, the computer, the keyboard, the mouse, was in itself an interesting, novel activity:

I've got a digital camera. I want to put it through the computer. I'm not interested professionally as such. I'd rather use it as, interested in it as a gimmick ... It could be useful but not for me at the moment.
(John, 83)

As regards applications, some found the idea of obtaining information online vaguely useful. The idea of exchanging emails with younger family members also appealed to one respondent in this group, mainly as a cheaper form of remote communication:

Information like Ask Jeeves, I like just for the information I think would be of value.
(Rosalynn, 80)

I'd like to select [the books] on the computer. And send photographs.
(Margaret, 76)

My son's got one in France and my granddaughter and grandson are in Los Angeles and they say you can send messages for next to nothing and you can send all sorts of ... You know, you can commute, communicate, you know, for like, cheaper than the telephone.
(Mary, 74)

The tenants who were very keen to access were enthusiastic about what they thought of as the life-improving potential of the Internet. These aspiring users tended to have rather high expectations regarding the benefits of the Internet on their quality of life but no clear idea of the costs of access. They perceived the Internet as an

opportunity to engage with new forms of leisure, an enhancement of choice in information services, a form of companionship, a learning opportunity, an opportunity to communicate with, or even meet, other users and to maintain contact with modern society:

I would love to be able to use the Internet. Because that's tomorrow, I mean, if I wanted something, if I had a few bob and I wanted to buy something, I'd buy an up-to-date computer, I'd buy the Internet ... There's all sorts of things on the Internet as you know. I'd use it as an entertainment, I could tap into information, companionship. Rather than me sitting at home lonely, it would be something in the corner I could turn on, I can use, I can enjoy, that's the word.
(Nancy, 66)

What it offers is amazing, you know, all the information, you want to get stuff about anything around the world, and it's so educational ... Life here would improve vastly. The computer is so ideal because there's nothing else happening here. Well, see there's nothing else to do here in the evenings, there's no social activities taking place, there's nothing at all.
(Tom, 77)

Well it's great! For fun, to get in touch with new people, find out about new things ... Well you talk to different people don't you, you get in touch with different people. I mean people spend hours on the bloody thing don't they. Which can get you hooked evidently. So I've been told.
(Joe, 67)

To the experienced home user, the Internet was primarily a means of carrying out social communications routines and, to a lesser extent, an alternative way of obtaining information. Vera was mostly utilising the email facility, which had partly replaced the telephone as a medium of social communication, but only browsed the Web on an ad hoc basis:

Internet use in sheltered housing

I use email a lot, I usually sort of check it at least once a day. I probably don't use the telephone as much since I've had email partly because email is very efficient. But I'm not terribly interested in spending hours surfing the Net. It's very nice if you've got a specific thing you want to search occasionally.
(Vera, 70)

This respondent would further explain that, while she found the email a convenient way of maintaining contact with her social relations who were online, she resisted browsing the Web as she felt this did not fit into her media routines nor her sense of gathering information:

I think most people I tend to come across and because I keep up with my old school for the reason that there are quite a lot of us now who are on email ... I just don't want to sit at hours, printing things up or looking at the screen too much to read things. It will probably come in time, I think I'm a bit of an age group who's a certain kind of person that resists it because I like books, you know, I like the page, you know, like going to the library to search for things that way.
(Vera, 70)

Despite the variance in their perceptions of the Internet, all tenants who participated in the research felt alienated by the idea of online access to services. The older respondents who were receiving care support could neither conceive nor accept the idea of accessing health and care related support online. The ordering of prescriptions or the booking of an appointment with their GP via a networked computer or television was not something they felt they needed or wished to do; they pointed out that their carers were already arranging for them to access these services:

I order, the receptionist, I order what I want. Yes and she, she puts the prescription and then it's ready, and my carer she collects it from the pharmacists.
(Rosalynn, 80)

The district nurse ... Have you got any, anything to worry about you can tell her. And she arranges to see a doctor.
(Arthur, 80)

Well carers here help me that way as well. They can phone my GP if I want them to come.
(Maureen, 84)

Many of the younger, recently retired tenants, including all Internet enthusiasts, shared an ambivalence in their views about the online delivery of social and welfare services. A sense of alienation was also evident here, as respondents tended to think of online access to services as a substitute for physical activity, human interaction and social contact and hence a threat of isolation:

I think it gets terribly insular. You know, when everything is round a small screen that you live your life without interacting with other people then it's not life anymore.
(Bob, 75)

It's sort of cutting off something social that you go out.
(Vera, 70)

Some would moreover question the objectives behind electronic service delivery, thinking this was a way of cutting back on public expenditure on human resources:

My suspicion is it's to do with a very – a much more limited way of communication and obviously cutting down money, very much so.
(Vera, 70)

At the same time, a minority of respondents appreciated that remote access to, for example, medical advice and support could be beneficial for homebound users. They could envisage a future where electronic service delivery enabled older users to overcome mobility-related barriers provided that users were familiar with the systems:

Yes, well, for people who are handicapped or something like that you know, it would be useful yes.
(Tom, 77)

I think the [online] booking of appointments and delivery of prescriptions would be an excellent service to be used. I feel that, when you're ill and you have that ability to ask for help, when you really do feel ill, fine, great but not as a way of life. The new elderly if you like, the people that have had some even small amounts of knowledge of the Internet service and computer systems are far more ready, able to use it and feel safer with it. But there is a certain age group that I think you'd probably never convince that it's a good idea. And if they've lived 60, 70 years without it, so what, why have it?
(Bob, 75)

Respondents would strongly question the value and utility of transactional interactive applications, of which they did not have a clear idea. Joe, who had been confident in using his credit cards to transact over the telephone, had signed up for Internet banking 'because you also get better interest as well' but did not plan to use the service as he was anxious about errors and unintended consequences:

I am frightened that, if I hit a key, and I've got quite a bit of money in there, if I hit the wrong key it'll disappear, that's what I'm worried about!
(Joe, 67)

Tom, another Internet enthusiast, explained that his low level of trust towards online transactions derived from lack of familiarity:

I don't know, I'd like to see it working first, I don't really need it, but I mean you never know until you become familiar with it how it operates and that kind of thing.
(Tom, 77)

A couple of respondents, including the tenant who had a home Internet connection, felt that their

distrust of technology was underpinned by ethical concerns regarding, for example, e-commerce:

Despite the fact that one knows it's a good idea and it's efficient and all that, I don't want to shop online. On the whole, I have a bit of a suspicion about big business and I haven't yet been brave enough to put my credit number on a transaction.
(Vera, 70)

I mean the news that you get from the media today and what you read in the main press, it's fraudulent transactions constantly being reported so that hardly gives anybody a feeling of trust. I just feel that where you have elderly people and I'm only talking for elderly people at the moment who have probably had to work all their lives for whatever little bit of money they have and worked really hard under incredibly difficult circumstances. Why should they risk something that they don't have to risk, why bother?
(Bob, 75)

Doing it online: constraints on access

Some respondents from the housing scheme that was not online at the time of the interviews felt that lack of equipment, unavailability of training and, more generally, the absence of a facilitating service culture that encouraged involvement in social activities were major barriers to Internet access. Two of the three participants who expressed a strong interest in joining the online world and one participant who had a limited experience of guided Internet access considered the provision of communal Internet facilities and of introductory Internet courses that ran on the premises to be a worthwhile investment:

I put my name down for classes, you know, they were going to have classes here but that fell through ... I'm not a very good walker you see. I've got a bad back. It takes like forever to walk anywhere.
(Mary, 74)

Internet use in sheltered housing

If the facility was there I'd use it, I'd be pleased to use it, you know, but the opportunity's not there. We were going to have lessons and teach people how to use the computers in the library. But there's no attempt to encourage greater use of anything, there's no neighbourhoodness in this place, there's no social activity, there's no encouragement.

(Tom, 77)

I think most of the people that I've spoken to here, that when we got a taste of [the Internet] here said that we loved it but we needed training. And it would be lovely if we had somebody to train us, only once a week, we don't need to rush it.

(Nancy, 66)

The two respondents who owned computers experienced a different set of problems. Joe felt he lacked the expertise to deal with even the most common software-related problems despite having attended an introductory computer course. He explained that he would like to join training that met his needs:

Someone gave me that computer, and it's not downloaded properly. I mean you switch it on, and there it's gone into safe mode. How it's gone into safe mode, I don't know ... I've been on a bit of a computer course, Learndirect. Mmm, Learndirect it's good and it isn't. Because, say there's ten people in the room, everyone's at a different level. And they haven't got time to sit down with you, one-to-one and go through it properly. I mean, me, I'd like say, say you're the computer person. I'd like you to sit with me and explain things! But they don't. They didn't. There were ten people in the room and there was only me who's never touched a computer before. I mean some of them were really 'in front' with the computer bit.

(Joe, 67)

Vera, the respondent who was routinely accessing the Internet via her PC, talked of problems regarding system capacity, the need for technology upgrading and technical support:

I used to have a very nice lady who came along and we, I'd sort of keep a list of problems and then she'd come but unfortunately she's gone to Canada, so I have to find somebody else. I don't easily solve problems on the computer.

(Vera, 70)

She also faced cultural-linguistic obstacles deriving from computer terminology and, being a home user, she was constrained by the price of connection:

Just the whole language of computers. It's different. It doesn't relate to how I see, how I relate to literature or anything like that. So it's a struggle ... It's quite an expense to do, isn't it. I'd love it to be free, I would use it more.

(Vera, 70)

However, beyond the different barriers mentioned so far, research evidence also indicated that, even when access facilities, basic training, free surfing time, staff encouragement, assistance and support were made available, self-service Internet access may not be a meaningful option for frail older people who are unfamiliar with computers. The few customers who had tried the Internet with assistance from staff or relatives found the Internet difficult to use and difficult to relate to their past media experiences and the media skills they already possessed. This was partly because of technology-related constraints – frail older tenants found it hard to interact with what was to them a new, different and complex technology:

When I first started using the teletext I found it easy. The only thing I find hard now, which I've only ever used once is the what do you call it, what do you call it, you know, the, with the mouse. The mouse, you know, it was a bit, it kept going here, there and everywhere.

(Mary, 74)

Leaving aside usability issues, online access remained largely outside the conceptual horizon of many respondents – access to the Internet was simply not something that all tenants could make sense of nor something they felt they needed:

It's totally new to me and I'm having some problems grasping it.

(Rosalynn, 80)

I don't I don't understand it and I'll call it a day – I'll back out of it.

(John, 83)

5 Internet access and electronic service delivery: the views of staff

This chapter reviews interview discussions with six members of staff from the extra care housing scheme, the research site that offered its tenants a free Internet facility. The staff sample comprised three front-line community support officers (CSOs) and three senior members of staff including a member of the management team. All respondents possessed basic computer skills and all had professional experience of care provision to older people. Interviews with staff invited personal accounts regarding Internet use at work, the views of staff about the electronic delivery of certain care-related services (food shopping, GP appointment bookings, the online ordering of repeat prescriptions) and their opinions about the introduction of Internet access to tenants and its potential in improving the quality of service delivered to their frail older customers.

Internet access and care provision – ‘There are a lot of good services out there but accessing them is still missing’

Although none of the staff interviewed considered Internet access a priority in the day-to-day operation of the sheltered housing sector, those who were using the Internet, at work or in their private time, foresaw longer-term benefits. Senior staff and a minority of front-line community workers acknowledged the potential of the Internet in improving access to specialised health care information and medical advice. They appreciated that, in the longer term, access to online services could contribute towards an improvement of service delivery to older tenants. However, they pointed out that shortages in skilled staff, time shortages and work cultures inhibited usage of online resources:

... there are a lot of good services out there but accessing them is still missing.

(Julia, senior officer, disabilities team)

Internet access is really useful but it's not a priority by itself. The reason is that as a whole we lack resources to improve people's quality of life in sheltered accommodation or even in more supported accommodation and extra care ... If you don't have anybody to be able to use the Internet and you do not have time to use it, and if tenants are isolated in their flat and can't have an escort for the hospital – the human factor cannot be substituted – then it's not the first priority to have it.

(Sarah, management team member)

Barriers to adoption – ‘A matter of time, a matter of skills, a matter of understanding the link to their work’

Internet access was not a routine practice among front-line care workers. Only senior, office-based staff, who were using the Trust's internal network on a daily basis to perform administrative tasks and to communicate with other departments and business stakeholders, would occasionally use the communal Internet facility to look for specialised information and advice:

If there is something I need broader knowledge on, like support services for tenants, or if there are activities I think that I can find on the Internet, then I'll have a look on there. Also, for general health advice, we have a look on the Internet, for tenants.

(Julia, senior officer, disabilities team)

While many professional carers lacked the operational skills involved in using a keyboard and software packages, particularly browsers, shortages in staff time impeded skill acquisition through formal training or informal learning at work. Moreover, as noted by the member of staff who was running the Internet Club, the information technology (IT) training available for staff development was not geared around accessing online information, nor around supporting an older person to use the Internet:

Staff are encouraged to log on the Internet but, to be fair with them, they don't have enough time. I would like to see resources being put aside for training. And staff to have the time to attend training courses and combine this information so as to be functional and useful.

(Sarah, management team member)

I'd say more than three-quarters need training. Most of the front-line staff don't feel comfortable and they don't know how to use the computer well enough yet.

(Julia, senior officer, disabilities team)

There would be a few of us in need of training, and I include myself. I would because my knowledge of cruising the Internet is very basic. I only learned how to open up my emails a couple of weeks ago.

(Zoe, community support officer)

I have to try and find ways of teaching [the tenants] how to use the keyboard and the mouse. It's really difficult when they've had nothing to do with computers.

(Daphne, community support officer, learning difficulties team)

Senior staff would also raise the issue of organisational complexities within the social services sector, pointing out that the low level of Internet usage was by no means a local problem. Online access is not currently a routine in the broader health and social care sector. The day-to-day work of social workers, community support officers, home helpers and district nurses does not involve the use of online information and communication technologies:

So far Social Services in general aren't sort of huge subscribers to email ... I think, I imagine that there isn't a culture of people going into their office in this work and switching on their PC to use the Internet.

(Paul, senior staff member)

It's a matter of time. It's a matter of skills, it's a matter of [staff] understanding how important it is and link it to their work.

(Sarah, management team member)

The benefits of online service delivery – 'Save time, make it simpler, avoid mistakes'

A form of remote access to a care support service that was already available at the time of the interviews was a telephone-based food shopping facility. Set up by the local council as a home-help service, the teleshopping service enabled older tenants to choose what they wanted to buy by ticking a list of goods and then placing their orders via the phone. Shopping was delivered to the home on a weekly basis. Many of the tenants who were assessed as eligible for home help were using the service, some of them on a self-service basis (i.e. by interacting with the system themselves) and some with assistance from their carers. Interview discussions invited the views of staff about the usefulness of teleshopping and their thoughts about the online administration of health and community care related services, such as hospital or GP appointment booking and the issuing and transfer of repeat prescriptions via e-pharmacies.

All front-line staff who participated in interviews would agree that the usefulness of teleshopping lay in its convenience and ease of use:

Teleshopping, it's easy because it gets to the door isn't it. Some tenants can't get out. Some of them probably don't feel safe enough to go out and carry shopping back, you know, it's just convenience having it delivered straight to your door.

(Lorna, community support officer)

Views diverged, however, when it came to the delivery of services via Internet technologies. Those community care officers who had a level of Internet literacy, tended to anticipate time management gains:

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That would be great if we could do repeat prescriptions over the Net because that would save a lot of time and effort. The way we do it is usually over the telephone and it takes ages because you're not just phoning up for one person, you're phoning up for like several people and because you do not always get through to people at the chemist. So, if you're ringing say at one o'clock, you can't get through to them because they're having their lunch. Our mornings are very busy here, so you tend to do your phone calling in the afternoon, when it's quite inconvenient because you're trying to get the lunches done and it's just very time consuming because you're trying to squeeze it in. But the Internet would be great. If we could get prescriptions on the Internet, it would be fantastic.

(Zoe, community support officer)

We could organise ourselves so much better. It would save time to do other things.

(Daphne, community support officer, learning difficulties team)

Others were dubious about the idea of online access to services as they could not see any practical gains:

Saving time for carers, that's a tricky one. Teleshop is good as far as I can see but to the others, I mean, prescriptions. No, because they are going to need to see the doctor anyway aren't they for prescriptions to be [issued]. So I don't see how that's going to save time, I don't know.

(Lorna, community support officer)

Senior staff appreciated the potential of online delivery of repeat prescriptions in terms of economies of staff time and a reduction in the rate of mistakes in health and community care service administration:

It would be a way forward to save time and make it simpler ... be more precise, avoid mistakes.

(Julia, senior officer, disabilities team)

However, interview discussions indicated that the online delivery of such services would not contribute towards an improvement in the quality of tenants' life if adopted as a means for reducing expenditure (i.e. expenditure on 'care hours', that is, time allocated for care provision to older people). As in the example of teleshopping, remote access to services would benefit tenants only if implemented as a complement to established practices of care provision, not as a substitute for face-to-face contact or for the physical activity of the tenant:

Teleshopping is helpful when people cannot go out. When mobility is restricted and tenants wouldn't go out anyway. So time is not spent by the support staff to go and do the actual shopping. So the time, which is so precious and expensive, is saved. On the other hand, if people are mobile or have mobility equipment and they are interested in doing so, it's nice to go out and do their shopping.

(Sarah, management team member)

Tenants' access to the Internet – 'But I think there is something about being able to tap into that'

The communal Internet facility had been set up in the tenants' activity room from the opening of the housing scheme in December 2000. The service had been promoted by the Housing Trust¹ as an empowering social activity for older customers. Use of the facility was free for customers. The Internet Club was established by members of staff in spring 2001:

[The Trust] said they were going to try and empower people and get them all using the Internet and different technologies. To get more in control of their lives so that they didn't rely on other people.

(Daphne, community support officer, learning difficulties team)

The Internet Club here is based on really one or two members of staff who have really made it up as they've gone along.

(Paul, senior staff member)

At the time of the interviews, the Club had been running for 18 months on a weekly basis. During this period, only four (out of 48) tenants joined the club on a few occasions, to get online with the assistance of a member of staff.² Against this reality of low Internet attendance, many members of staff questioned the rationale behind the introduction of the communal Internet facility:

That is the main thing they promote themselves: the Internet is something really good for the clients. But I mean my comment on that is that it has been introduced really in a superficial way. Without any tenant involvement.

(Sarah, management team member)

Without being negative or sceptical, there's a trend towards sort of having, you know, IT skills and older people, you know, that's a current sort of trend ... There's nothing wrong with breaking down boundaries and dispelling fears off, but also there's no point doing it for the sake of it. People are just not interested and I think there are questions about, you know, why should people be interested.

(Paul, senior staff member)

All staff were concerned about the accessibility of new interactive services to older people and all shared considerable reservations over the empowering qualities of information technology. However, in their assessment of benefits potentially available to tenants, front-line staff and senior officers tended to adopt different perspectives.

The Internet Club instructor held the view that, with regard to frail older tenants who were not familiar with computers, the Internet had more potential as an entertainment and learning activity. Drawing on her experience with tenants, she pointed out that involvement in learning how to

perform basic keyboarding tasks and the guided use of a networked computer could be a stimulating activity in itself:

They are just so happy if they can just manage to turn a computer on and type in the password and then getting to control the mouse ... Finding out the information is a complete second to that. They're just fascinated, they can use this and it works.

(Daphne, community support officer, learning difficulties team)

Senior staff tended to take a longer-term view of the Internet as an information and communication resource that enhanced older people's choice of content relating to personal interests, hobbies and cultural identities:

As a user of the Internet myself, I sort of hesitate to use the word empowering, but I think there's something about being able to tap into that information that's quite specialised according to your interests.

(Paul, senior staff member)

It's very subjective but I think there are many areas. Tenants could gain information-wise, have contact with friends from their generation. I mean many generations later, they will start to trust the systems more and come downstairs and use the facilities.

(Sarah, management team member)

Access barriers: culture, competencies and technologies

Discussions with staff identified two sets of social and technical parameters that could have shaped usage of the Internet facility by the tenants. Some front-line staff raised the issue of cultural and attitudinal barriers. According to this line of thinking, insofar as the exercise of customer choice has not been a characteristic of inherited cultures of care provision, older tenants, many of whom had moved to this pilot housing unit from residential care establishments, had low expectations

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regarding access to and usage of services. This, in turn, impeded their involvement in novel activities such as Internet learning:

I mean we can't get half of them to come down and play bingo here, so you know.

(Zoe, community support officer)

Tenants are not so independent. A lot of them came from residential care and they just haven't, they've lost some of their identity somewhere and they're not demanding. They've stopped doing anything for themselves.

(Daphne, community support officer, learning difficulties team)

Other members of staff held the view that tenants did not attend the Internet Club because they did not fancy changes in their routines:

I don't know, it's something new and I think they don't like changes really, do they, the elderly ... For the elderly of the today and now, not that it's not a good idea but I don't think they'd be willing to participate, one or two, but the vast majority, no.

(Lorna, community support officer)

Nevertheless, tenant attendance, however low, did not indicate an intrinsic incompatibility between advanced age and an interest in new services. The member of staff who ran the Club stressed that encouragement, reassurance and invocation of existing interests could motivate involvement in new activities. Those few tenants who joined had been encouraged to do so by their keyworkers³ and their families:

Yes, you've got to be enthusiastic, you've got to make it as clear and normal as you possibly can. Think of something that they enjoy doing that they perhaps can't do anymore, they can't get out and do, and then show them how they could, you know, use the Internet to make that viable.

(Daphne, community support officer, learning difficulties team)

A different set of barriers to access concerned technology design. As noted by all respondents who were working with frail older people, or had been in the past, unless keyboards, monitors and software apparatuses were specifically adapted to the needs and capabilities of particular users, some older tenants would not be able to use them:

When we're talking about frail older people, I'm talking about people who might have sort of some level of dementia or their sight is quite poor, then it still stands to reason that a keyboard needs to have as few buttons on it as possible ... I think it has to be so basic and it has to be simple.

(Paul, senior staff member)

Users who experience arthritis-related dexterity problems or whose eyesight is poor find it very difficult to carry out keyboarding functions, let alone learn how to perform them, on devices that are designed for able-bodied and/or differently skilled users:

The keyboard is a problem because we have people here with arthritis. So you can imagine typing a word and stuff, they can't do it because fingers are hurting.

(Zoe, community support officer)

I think a heavier mouse would be really useful for them to have more control. A bigger keyboard with less on it ... We have no equipment. We've got nothing to make it accessible and make it look easy for people who have got a disability. And you can't lower the keyboard for people with wheelchairs.

(Daphne, community support officer, learning difficulties team)

Respondents in the staff sample emphasised that, for online access to become widely adopted as an extra choice for customers in sheltered homes for frail older people, service users should be offered suitably designed reception equipment and navigation software – 'technology [that] was simple and adapted' (Paul, senior staff member) – and the option of assisted contact. Those tenants who

wished to use a service but needed assistance should be supported by staff:

If we do have the Internet as access we need to make it suitable and accessible for the tenants. Most of the tenants here, they call it an extra care sheltered housing unit. You get people who are very frail here, with bad mobility and differing levels of Parkinson's and Alzheimer's. With quite moderate learning disabilities. So you're not getting people that can access that easily.

(Julia, senior officer, disabilities team)

I mean, there's nothing different about me experiencing the Internet than someone who's in their eighties experiencing that, providing they can use the equipment and that they, you know, as in anybody that's coming new to a particular sort of technology, that there are people supporting you to use it.

(Paul, senior staff member)

6 Conclusions

This chapter discusses the findings of the research against the main questions of the study.

- What media technologies and services do older people who live in sheltered homes use in their everyday lives and how do they feel about them?
- What are the emerging patterns of Internet access among older tenants?
- What are the attitudes of customers and staff in sheltered accommodation schemes towards the Internet and Internet-based services?
- What can these tell us about the potential benefits of, and the obstacles to, the introduction of Internet access and online service delivery in sheltered accommodation schemes for older people and, more generally, in the field of social care?

Older people and the 'old' media: the television and the telephone

Home access to analogue, free-to-air television and landline telephones was taken for granted by all respondents in the tenant sample who had been accustomed users of analogue TV broadcasting and voice communication services. The television and the phone were useful to older people in more than one way.

The watching of television was valued by all tenants as a form of company, a means of knowing about, and relating to, the world beyond the confines of the home and a choice in leisure. Although some respondents had used their television to access information (teletext) and one pay-TV viewer to buy goods from a shopping channel, they tended to utilise less of these services than in the past. Television viewing was particularly significant to some homebound users, who experienced greater isolation.

Access to landline telephones was very important to older people, who described their phone as a lifeline that made it possible for them to stay in touch with other people and reach out to services quickly and conveniently. The telephone was becoming increasingly important in later stages in their life as an instrument for communication tasks associated with health risks and security. Some tenants had utilised their phone both as a means to interact (i.e. have a conversation, request information) and as a means to transact (e.g. buy a holiday). However, interviews indicated that older consumers performed fewer transactions over their phone than in the past. Nevertheless, research evidence also indicated that, in contrast with the redundancy of earlier telephone shopping patterns, older users are willing to take up new, telephone-enabled services if these allow them to continue performing daily routines without relying on support by carers.

The combination of these two media technologies played an important role as part of a web of people, technologies and services that supported independent living, especially for users whose mobility was restricted. For some isolated frail older tenants in the sample, their television, their phone and their carer represented their social universe in its entirety:

I've got it here. I've got everything I want here. My TV, the phone, no need for anything, and my girl [the carer] comes up to see me every morning.
(Ronnie, 85)

Older people, the Internet and electronic service delivery

Interviews with tenants indicated that older UK residents are becoming increasingly informed about communal Internet access points and training schemes in the community. Moreover, that encouragement from family, social networks and care staff can play an important role in generating

interest, among older people, regarding trying the Internet. However, what new older users actually do or wish to do online is a different story.

The mode of access, the quality of access experiences, the obstacles faced by prospective, new or existing older users and their perceptions of the Internet varied across the sample. These are difficult to generalise, not least because the population in the tenant sample was diverse in terms of educational background, levels of income, social status, physical condition and age range; also because the online experiences of tenants were too limited. However, interview analysis indicated that what individual service users did or wished to do online and what they perceived as the benefits of Internet access varied according to their media skills and the competencies they already possessed, their current routines, their understandings of current needs and their inclinations and abilities to acquire new media skills. In a loose sense, lack of familiarity with computers, reduced social contact and deteriorating health status indicated a declining level of interest or ability to use the Net.

A minority of the very old and frail tenants who occasionally tried to use a networked computer with the assistance of relatives or care staff saw the Internet as potentially useful, especially in relation to the pursuit of hobbies and recreational activities, albeit irrelevant to their lives. They found the computer difficult to use without assistance from experienced users. Some of the younger, recently retired tenants were very enthusiastic about the prospect of joining the online community. To them, Internet access represented an opportunity to engage in constructive leisure, communicate with other users and maintain contact with modern society. These tenants were keen to join free training schemes and use communal access facilities but had no clear idea of the costs involved in connecting to the Internet. To the user who had a home Internet connection, online access (i.e. the email facility) was primarily a convenient way for

carrying out social communication routines. This user would gradually accept the Internet as a new means for remote access to information-based services.

Interviews conveyed a strong sense of alienation towards the idea of electronic service delivery by means of Internet technologies. Most of the older tenants who were receiving care support could neither conceive nor accept the idea of accessing services online. Tenants were at best ambivalent towards the idea of online information and service requests, which they tended to think of as a substitute for human contact and physical activity that reduced social contact and further isolated older people. Far from seeing electronic service delivery as an extra option in service access, some participants were worried that online delivery would replace traditional forms of service provision. At the same time, a minority of recently retired tenants could see benefits in services that prolong the ability of users to carry out daily routines independently of care support. Some respondents appreciated, for example, that remote access to health care advice and support could be useful to homebound users.

The views of staff on Internet access and the online delivery of services

Mixed responses were also evident among staff. Those respondents who were using the Internet – mainly senior officers and a minority of front-line care workers – appreciated the potential of online access to information in improving the administration of care provision and economising on staff time. Internet adoption could deliver benefits in terms of easier and faster access to information and more co-ordinated use of health and medical advice by community care staff.

At the same time, respondents in the staff sample pointed out that, first, Internet access was not a priority in care provision. Second, it was

necessary to draw a line between the possibility of efficiency gains, an improvement in the effectiveness in service delivery and an improvement in the quality of life for tenants. In order for older tenants to see benefits, any saved care hours should be allocated back to users in need of extra care support. Staff further qualified their views on benefits by emphasising that realisation of any long-term benefits could be inhibited by a complexity of barriers. These include a shortage of Internet navigation skills among front-line staff, time shortages (time taken for training is time allocated for the provision of care support) and a lack of awareness of the relevance of online information services to the provision of care support – online work culture is presently foreign in the care sector.

Older people, Internet access and the online delivery of social care services: barriers and opportunities

To conclude, the interview data indicate that older people who have never encountered computers before, a category of users that represents the majority of older tenants currently in sheltered accommodation, are becoming interested in trying the Internet, mainly as a new option in leisure. However, as revealed in interview discussions with users and staff, to simply provide a communal Internet facility, free computer lessons and information on service availability does not in itself facilitate their access to new interactive services. Older users' involvement in Internet learning can be inhibited by technology design – for example, users who suffer from arthritis find it very difficult to manipulate standard market devices such as complex keyboards. More importantly, the acquisition of new media competencies is not something many older respondents either feel the need for or see as an opportunity.

At this point, it is important to emphasise that, of the many obstacles faced by those tenants who showed an interest in Internet access, only technology-related usability problems had to do with physiological changes, for example a decline in vision and a slowing of movement, which are associated with the biological process of ageing. Barriers deriving from shortages in new media skills, lack of awareness, on behalf of potential users, as to the relevance of Internet access to their lives and a failure to link new media-based applications to their everyday communication and information media routines were experienced by both tenants *and* care staff. Likewise, both tenants and staff shared an ambivalence towards online service provision. This suggests a problem of user definition. It is impossible to map patterns of user participation and exclusion in e-government policy development and to account for the diversity of circumstances currently faced by tenants, and, more generally, the range of needs, different aspirations, degrees of fitness or levels of income in the cohort of 'older people' – commonly defined as 'those over 60' – without building complex socio-demographic definitions.

A finding that reflects, at least partly, the social positioning of older users concerns the ways tenants became motivated to try the Internet, that is, through encouragement by family, social contacts and community care staff. The fact that those users whose family and social networks have adopted Internet access are more likely to become interested in joining the online world is indicative of inequalities in access opportunities. But, viewed in a social care context, it also underlines the role of care staff in facilitating (or discouraging) frail customers' access to a new service. Professional carers, who may be the only human relationship that some isolated, homebound older people have, can perform a gatekeeping role in introducing older people to new services.

Another crucial issue concerns the relative merits of different technology platforms. The positive response of some very old and frail tenants towards a teleshopping service that enabled them to order their food shopping via the telephone is indicative of the potential this very familiar medium has in improving access to services for home-centred users. The role of the telephone as a channel for remote access becomes evident if this medium is compared with newer interactive delivery channels, such as networked computers and digital interactive televisions,¹ that the majority of older people have never encountered in their lives.

The overall message of this study is that, for any potential benefits accruing from Internet access to be realised for older people in social housing and/or in care support, the introduction of communal

interactive access facilities has to be matched to investment in appropriately designed reception components (monitors, keyboards/handsets/remote controls, software), relevant skill training, staff and customer learning. It is also important to bear in mind that attainment of the policy commitment for universal Internet access, as made in the statement 'everyone who wants it has access to the Internet' (Office of the e-Envoy, 2002, p. 6), would depend on availability of human assistance. The option of assisted contact, whereby experienced users support other users to navigate through online content options, should be offered to those who wished to access a particular electronic service but needed some support. Above all, the embedding of online access into the routines of care provision would entail culture change – and therefore time.

Notes

Chapter 2

- 1 For a critical examination of the concept of electronic service delivery and its application in the administration of public services, see Pleace and Quilgars (2002, Ch. 1).
- 2 E-pharmacies will be introduced in the context of the planned changes in the National Health Service. See, NHS (2000).
- 3 In earlier versions of the Digital Television Action Plan (DAP), for example, which was introduced by government in 2001 setting out a series of actions to ensure a 'switch over' from analogue to digital broadcasting is implemented by the year 2010, there was an expectation that digital interactive television would enable access to the Internet – www.digitaltelevision.gov.uk/consumers/html (visited January 2002). This major policy expectation is no longer shared by government. Updates to the DAP have underlined the need to 'clarify' and 'harmonise' the relationships between digital switch-over policy and Internet access (Department of Trade and Industry and Department of Culture, Media and Sport, 2003, p. 17).
- 4 Lack of awareness can be a barrier to Internet access. One of the first cross-national projects that examined the situation of older people in Europe during the mid-1990s noted that, insofar as this is the case, older people risk exclusion from the Information Society whether or not they experience poverty (Gilligan, 1998, p. 41).
- 5 The study looked at a cohort of 'young old' people, i.e. those of an age between 60 and 75.

Chapter 3

- 1 These tenants too were watching television. One was watching from the communal television in the lounge of her housing complex and the other watched TV at her partner's, who lived in the same housing complex.

- 2 On the utilities and values of television viewing to older people, see Tulloch (1989); Willis (1995); Haddon and Silverstone (1996, p. 134).
- 3 For the place of television watching in everyday life and its taken-for-granted presence in the vast majority of homes, see Silverstone (1994).
- 4 Technical competence in terms of navigation skills for new audio-visual media appears to build on past experience, with successive innovations in technological facilities such as remote controls or video recorders being accommodated to incrementally (cf. Haddon and Silverstone, 1996; Livingstone with Thumin, 2003, p. 17).
- 5 This teleshopping service was set up by the local council and run as a home help service available to tenants who experienced mobility problems (see Chapter 5).
- 6 See, for example, Haddon and Silverstone (1996); Haddon (1998, p. 6).

Chapter 4

- 1 This definition of 'independent living' draws on Haddon (1998).
- 2 For the purposes of this research, 'assisted contact' describes the situation where a user's interaction with a computer is assisted by community workers or family members and 'self-service contact' refers to the cases where individuals use computers for themselves. This distinction between 'assisted' and 'self-service' modes of access has also been adopted by Pleace and Quilgars (2002), who draw on Loader (1998).

Chapter 5

- 1 For example, in customer information packs available to potential tenants and their families, or during staff recruitment.

- 2 The Internet Club had also been visited by customers from a rehabilitation centre, which was located in the same housing complex. Most of these users were Internet literate and used the facility on a self-service basis, to browse the Web or send emails.
- 3 Research into the adoption of health care related technologies has also indicated that professional carers can play an important gatekeeping role in mediating the introduction of older users to technical innovations. See Barron, (1996); Barnes, (1997); Tetley *et al.* (2000).

Chapter 6

- 1 The proliferation and diversification of services in digital interactive television (DiTV) are associated with substantial usability issues concerning navigation equipment, e.g. remote controls and software design, such as electronic programme guides (cf. Freeman *et al.*, 2003). Access to DiTV can be furthermore inhibited by cost barriers. If considered against established routines of television use, it appears quite probable that, in the absence of policy-induced elimination of these constraints, the planned termination of all analogue broadcast transmissions and the switch over to digital broadcasting by 2010 (see www.digitaltelevision.gov.uk) will deprive older people of current levels of choice.

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