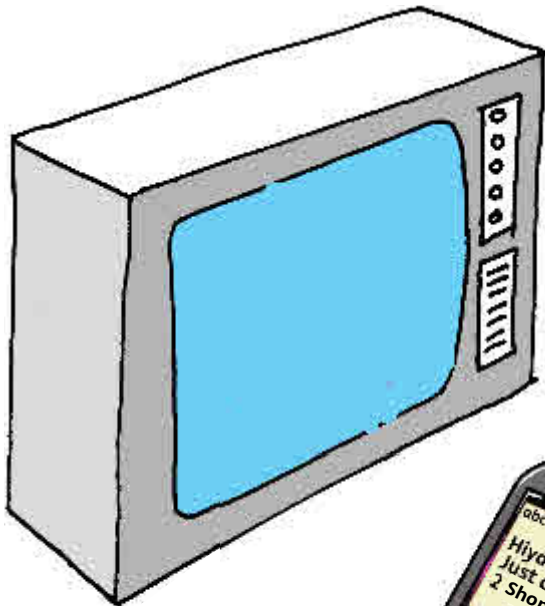


# How people with learning disabilities use TV, telephones, mobiles and the internet.



EasyRead version of the report:  
“People with learning disabilities and communications services.”



# What is in this report

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**What is this report about?**

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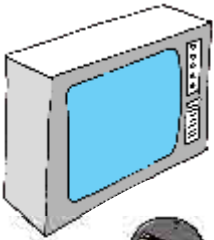
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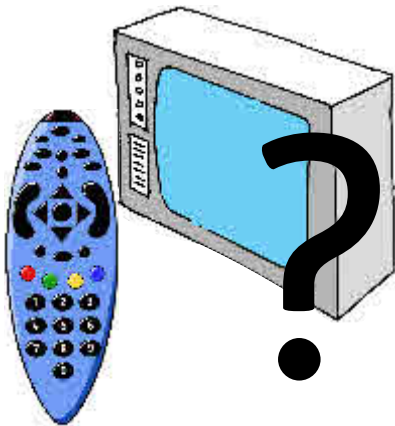
## What is this report about?



This report is about how people with learning disabilities use TV, home or work phones, mobiles and the Internet.



We wanted to find out what people thought about owning these services, how they use them and how they chose and paid for them.



We also wanted to know what problems they had when they used them and what people with learning disabilities found harder to do.

## Who are we?

We are Ofcom, the Office of Communications. We make sure TV, telephone, mobile and internet companies are obeying the rules and running a good service.



## Why did we do it?

The law says that we must understand if some people are being treated unfairly.



In June 2008 we asked a company called Ipsos MORI to talk to people with learning disabilities for us.



We wanted to understand if there are any problems that we can help with.



## Who did we talk with?

36 people with learning disabilities took part in the research. They lived all over the country.

We talked to all sorts of people:



- some could read and write, some could not



- some took care of their own money, some did not



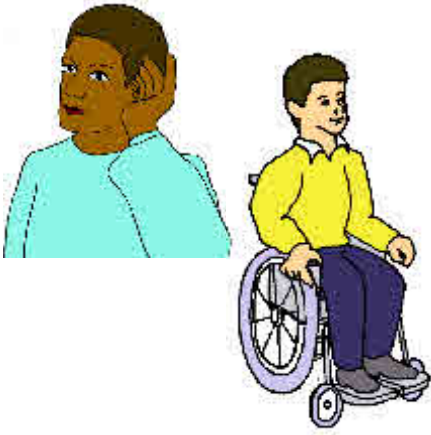
- some lived on their own, others lived with other people



- some were men and some were women



- some were younger people and some were older people.



Many people we talked with also had a physical disability, like not being able to see or hear well, or using a wheelchair.



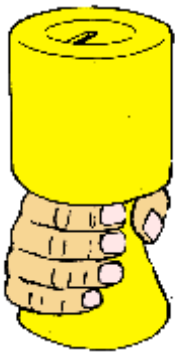
Many people told us they had problems reading, writing and counting. This made a huge difference to the way they used the TV, the telephone or the internet.

## Where did we find people to take part in the research?



We found people to talk with through:

- voluntary and community groups



- charities



- local disability support groups



- groups for linking up with others (networking).



We also looked for people with learning disabilities when walking around in the streets or going to the supermarket.



## How did people take part in the research?

We thought the best way to find things out was to talk to people face-to-face.



Most people took part on their own. Some people took part with a friend. They found it good to talk to each other about what they felt when watching TV, using the phone or the internet.



People could have their carer, parent or support worker with them if they wanted.



We also filmed some people while they were using TV, phones, mobiles and the internet.

We filmed them at home, when they went out, at a day centre and with their support workers.



We thought it would be good to see how people actually used these services every day and in different places.

## What are the main things we found out?



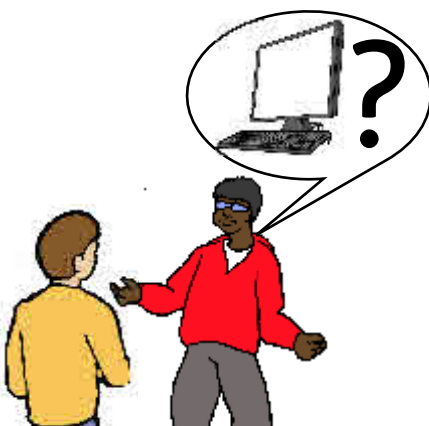
People didn't use TV, phones, mobiles and the internet as much as they could for many reasons.



One of the main problems was that some of these things are not easy to use for people with learning disabilities.



For example, using a keyboard on a computer or using the buttons on a mobile phone.



People told us they did not know how these things could help them in their every day life.



Even though using these things was difficult, most of the people we talked with found ways to get past the problems.



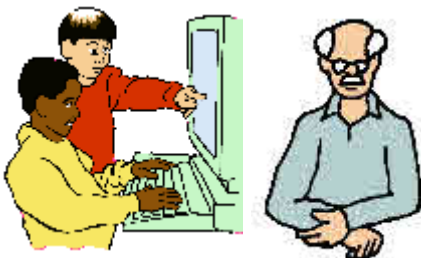
Most people thought that problems using TV, mobiles and the internet were just part of life.



A lot of people we spoke to were used to getting support from others to help them use these things. For example, carers, family and support workers.

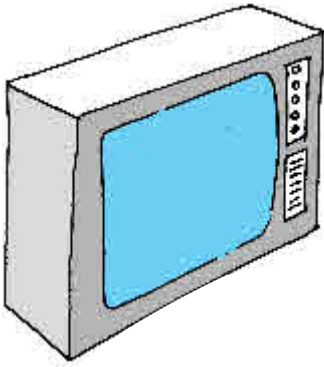


It did not seem to matter how serious someone's learning disability was when it came to using these things.



What did matter was whether they could get support to use them, how old they were and how much money they had.



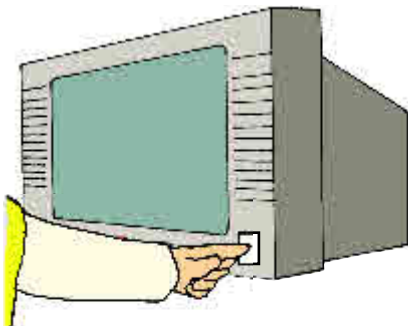


## TV

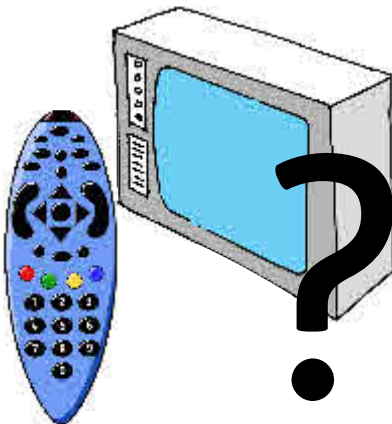
Everyone used TV the most. They found it easy to use and watch.



Many people had grown up with TV and thought of it as part of life.



Nobody had problems turning the TV on and off.



A few people found it difficult to use TV with all the additional channels when they first got the service. They said they needed time to get used to the new system.



Most people said they could use the remote control, but many were only using a few buttons.

A few people had problems with the remote control.

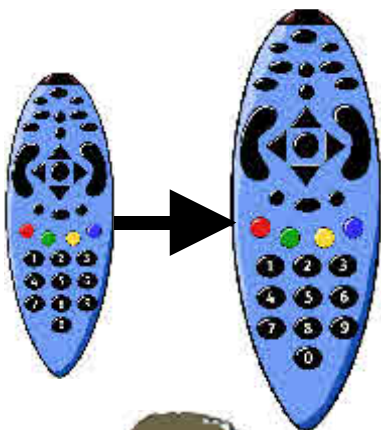
## A woman with mild learning disabilities said:



“There's all different coloured buttons on the one I've got and there's numbers as well so I found it really difficult to understand which is what button and the channels. I had trouble with the numbers switching them over, that's all, switching the numbers over, I didn't know which was which, but I know which is which now.”



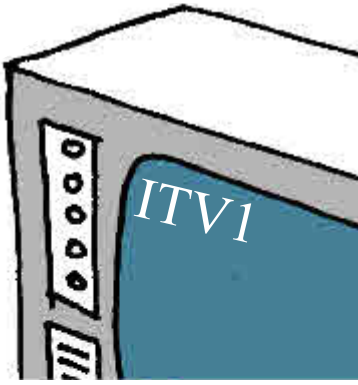
For some people who had problems with the remote control, this was because they had other disabilities, not their learning disability.



For example, because they had cerebral palsy or arthritis. They said that a bigger remote control would be easier to use.



For many people, flicking through the channels was the only way to find out what shows were on because they found it hard to read the TV guide.



Some people knew what TV channels they were watching from the channel logos on the screen.



Some just remembered what the numbers for the channels were on the remote. But when the channel numbers changed this was a problem for them. They had to find out what the new numbers were and remember them all over again.



Most people could not read the words on the TV screen. They had to ask someone to read them out for them.

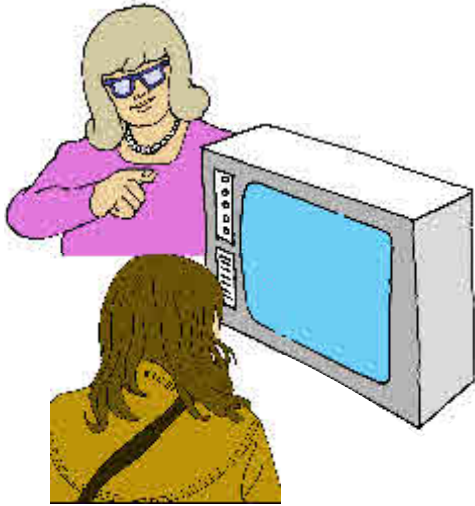


For some people this was because they had problems with their eyesight and not their learning disability.



Many people are used to asking people for help if they have problems with their TV. Even if this means waiting until someone came home who could help.

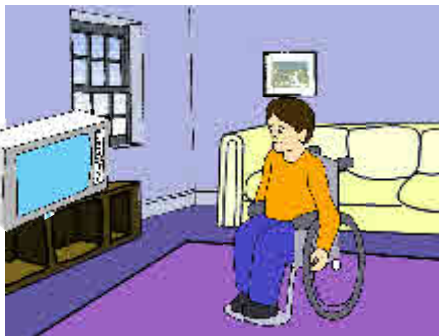
**A woman with mild learning disabilities said,**



“I'd ask my daughter ... I wouldn't mess with it... well you don't know what you're doing, do you, when you're messing with it, do you? Because you could mess it up and you could have no picture or nothing and I'd ask my daughter, to make sure.”



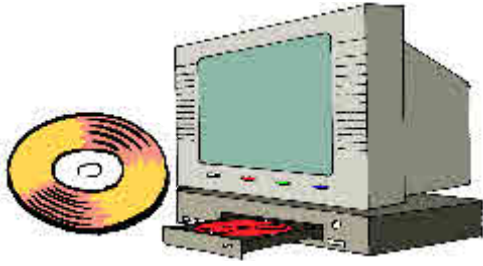
These problems did not stop people from watching TV but it did mean that sometimes they missed a programme they wanted to watch.



TV was very important to people who spent most of their time at home.



Because they did not go out much and could not read well, TV lets them see what is going on in the world.



A lot of people had videos and DVDs which they liked to watch a lot.

Like most people in the United Kingdom, people's favourite TV shows were soaps, sport and music.



The shows people liked were: Charmed, Crimewatch, Question Time, X Factor, Poirot, Sky Sports News, Heartbeat and Two Pints of Lager and a Packet of Crisps.



They said that they liked them because:

- they liked the people, like the Mitchell brothers in EastEnders



- they liked the plot, like in Poirot



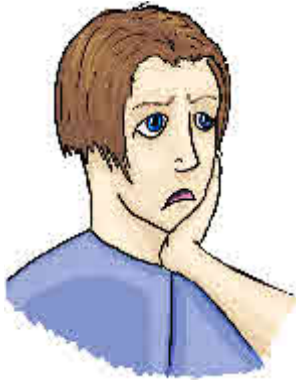
- they thought the shows were funny.



A few people liked documentaries because it showed them about different countries, cultures and places.



Most people did not like watching the news.



Some people found it upsetting. Most people found the news boring.



Many people told us they did not like to see images of violence or nudity on TV. If they found something upsetting they just changed the channel.



Most felt they understood what they watched.

## Phones and mobiles



Some people had a landline phone in their house. The people that did not, had mobiles instead.

Some people had both a landline phone at home and a mobile.



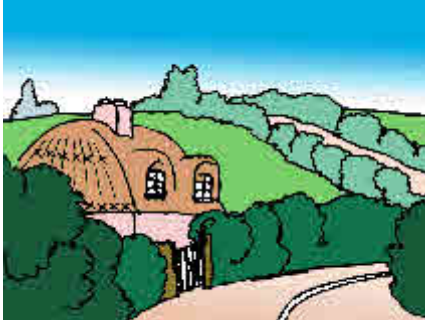
Mobiles were very important for keeping in touch with friends, family, support workers and work.



This was most important for people who lived away from their family.



People who did not have mobiles said they did not need one.

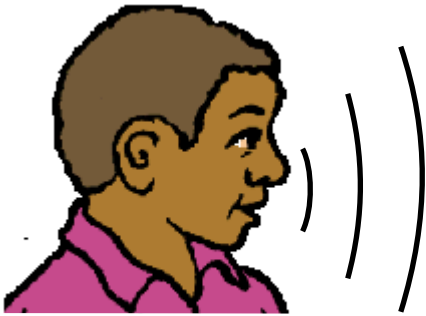


We found out that it was also because:

- they lived in a place that didn't get mobile signals



- they thought it was too expensive



- they had difficulty with speaking



- they could not use a mobile because they could not read



- they had a problem with their hands.



When it comes to what people with learning disabilities used their phones for they were no different to everyone else. But it was harder for them to do some things.

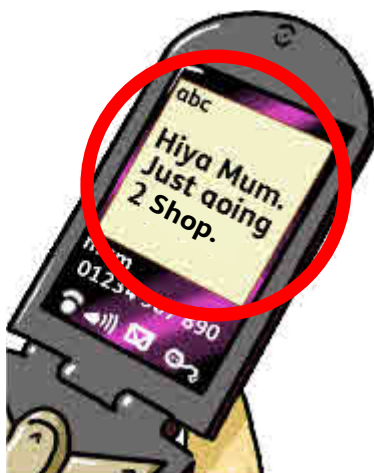


A lot of people found mobiles harder to use than landline phones.

They thought that mobiles came with too many other uses which they didn't need.



A lot of people found the buttons on mobiles too small. People who had trouble seeing or using their hands found this very hard.



People who could not read very well found it hard to use mobiles because there are lots of words on the screens.



Some families and carers told us that mobiles with more pictures would be better.



Younger people liked using mobiles more than landline phones.



This is because they had to share a landline phone at home but they didn't have to share their mobiles.



They liked having a phone all to themselves and they could talk in private.



Younger people also used their mobiles to play games, listen to music and take pictures.



Older people usually found landline phones easier to use.



How much it cost did not make a difference to whether people would use their mobile or their home phone.



A lot of people thought mobile numbers were more expensive to call. But most people did not know how much calls cost and did not know how to tell if a number was a mobile or a landline number.



How easy it was to use the phone was more important when deciding which phone to use.



Not many people used their contacts list in the mobile. Mostly because they would not be able to read people's names, or because they did not know about it.



People remembered the numbers they used the most in their head. If they needed a number they did not know, they would ask someone to look for it.



Some people saved the numbers in their mobile but asked someone to help them find the number they needed.



Not many people used voicemail because they found the instructions confusing.



A lot of people got their mobile as a birthday or Christmas present from their family.



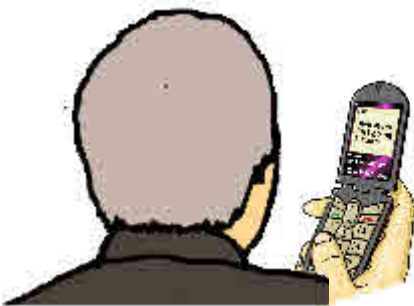
The person who received the mobile as a present usually chose their own handset.



The person giving the phone chose the network, and the type of service (contract or pay as you go). Very often, the same person paid for the calls as well.



Like most people in the United Kingdom, people liked to change their mobiles, for example, to get a nicer or a better one.



A lot of mobiles may look the same but are different in the way you use them. This means people had to learn to use to a new phone when they changed their mobile.



But this did not stop them from getting a new phone.



Most people used their mobiles for calls. Not many used it to text.



People did not use texting much because many could not read or write well.

But this did not stop them from texting completely.



One person who had problems remembering things told us that he texted by breaking the text up into small pieces and saving his message in drafts. He could get them back if he forgot what he was replying to.



Others told us they asked their family, sometimes their children, to read out their text messages and reply for them.



All this may seem like a problem, but people with learning disabilities told us they are used to doing things this way.



They got around the problems well. Younger people did not care about the problems. For many of them a mobile was cool.



Whether it was easy or difficult to use was not something they thought was important.



Some people could not use a mobile but they did not mind very much. Since they had never used one they did not see how it would help them and were happy not to have one.



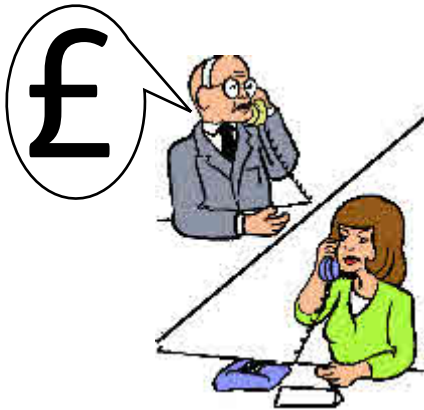
Some people did not know what they could do on their phones.



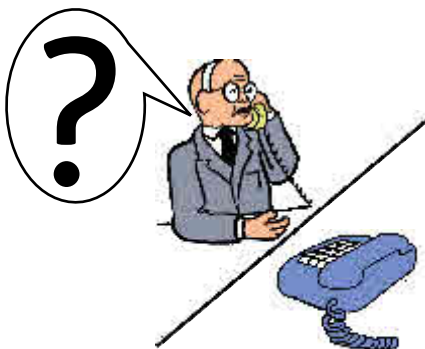
They just didn't know about the things that could make using a mobile or a landline telephone easier.



For example, people who had problems dialling did not know about speed dial. Speed dial stores a number into a button on the phone. You just press that button and the phone dials the number for you.



Many people said they were annoyed with nuisance calls and telephone sales people.



But only one person knew about the Telephone Preference Service. This service stops people who want to sell you things from dialling your number.



Everybody needed someone to tell them about these things.

## A man with severe learning disabilities in England said,

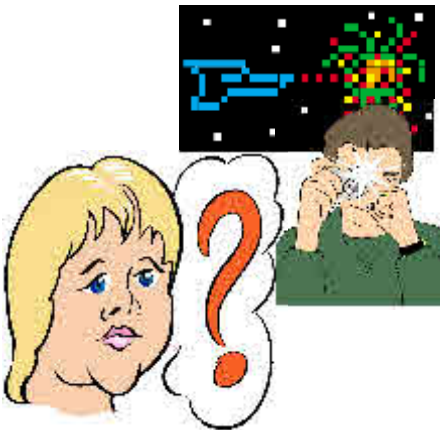
Hiya Dad.  
Just going 2 shop.



"My daughter just bought a phone and when you get a text you press a button and it talks to you...I haven't got one yet...I'll probably end up with her one."



People did not use the guides that come with their phones. They found them too difficult to use and usually just asked someone if they needed help.



This may be why most people did not know very much about what their phones could do.



People who lost their phone never told their supplier, they just bought a new one.



## Internet

People didn't use the internet as much as they used TV, landline phones and mobiles.



A lot of people couldn't afford to have a computer and an internet connection. It was cheaper to have a mobile or free TV with lots of channels.



Many people found the internet difficult to use and didn't know enough about it.



Many people found watching TV much easier.



Most people who used the internet were younger.



People used it mostly to:

- keep up to date with their favourite band, celebrity, TV show or football team



- watching video clips (for example YouTube)



- look up pictures of their favourite celebrities and animals.

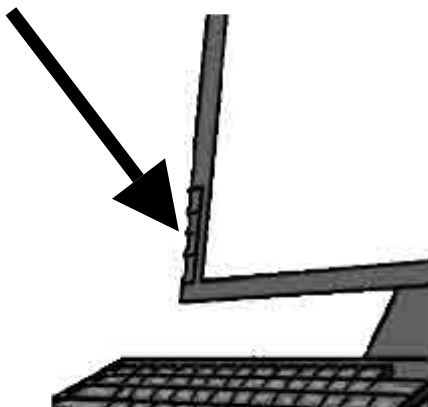


Not many people used it for work or study.

People used the internet at home, in college, at the library, in an internet café or at a day centre.



People who could read or write better used the internet more. One person told us he wanted to do a course to make internet pages, and some people said they helped their parents use it.



Some people who used the internet needed support. For example, turning the computer on and off. Some told us they asked their carers, family or support workers to spell out words to help them use the internet.



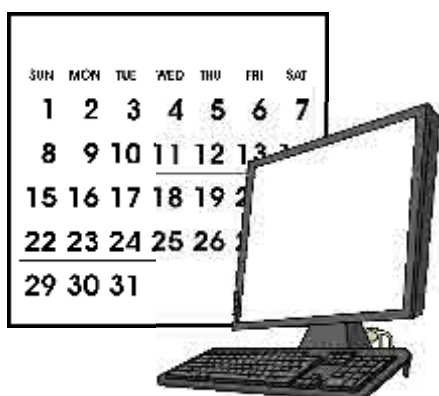
Some people could only use the internet if someone used it with them and explained anything they did not understand.



Many parents thought the internet was dangerous. They were usually parents who did not use the internet.



They worried that their children may be tricked or hurt. They did not see how the internet could be any use at all.



Some people used it once a week, some every other week and a few used it every day.



Those who used it every day used it to:

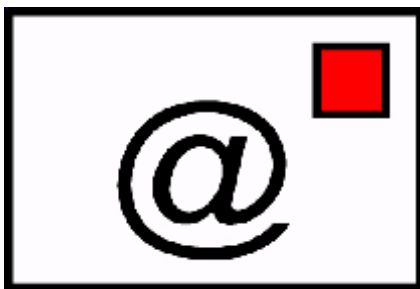
- look up tickets for the theatre



- check flights and holidays



- get music (for example *iTunes*)

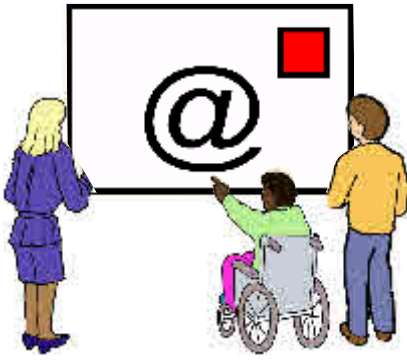


- e-mail and messaging (for example *MSN®*) friends and family

hi5

bebo

- meet people on friendship sites (but not meet them in person) like MySpace, Bebo and hi5.



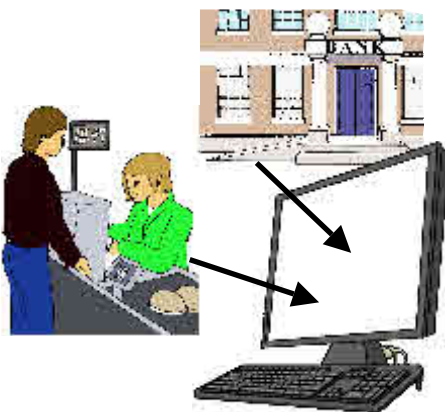
Very few people had an e-mail address and used it. This is because they had problems reading and writing. Those who had an e-mail address often asked other people to check them.



They had an e-mail address because they needed it to use some websites.



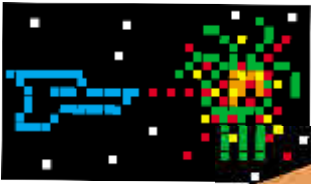
They did not use their email address to keep in touch with friends.



Most people did not know that you can use the internet for lots of helpful things like banking, shopping, booking tickets or finding information.



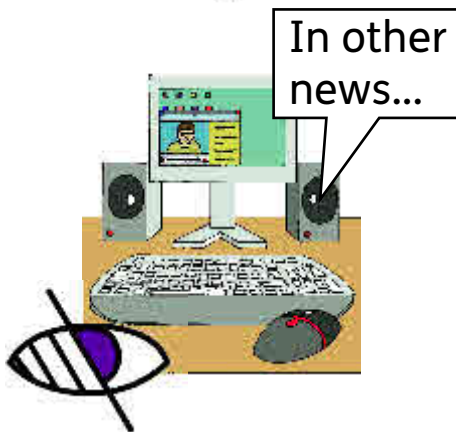
We think this may be why the people who didn't use the internet did not think they were missing out.



Most people thought the internet was just for fun. They didn't think of it as something they can use to find things out.



Most people did not know that the internet could help with their disability.



For instance, people who had problems with their eyesight or who had problems reading did not know about screen readers. This is a computer programme that reads out the words.



Many said they did not know what they could do on the internet because nobody had shown them.



People found it hard to say what could make it easier for them to use the internet.

They did not see how the internet could make their lives better so were happy not to have it.

## Bills and dealing with suppliers



Checking bills and dealing with suppliers was usually done by friends, family or support workers. Suppliers are the businesses that run TV, telephone, mobile and internet services.

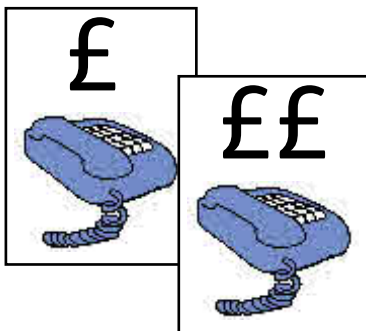


Most people who had to read bills found it hard to understand them.

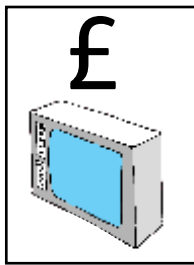
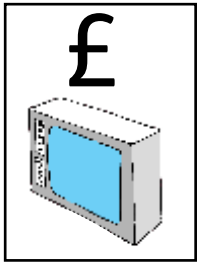
People who lived in shared houses would not often check to see if their share of the bill was right.



Some never looked at bills, because someone else took charge of them.



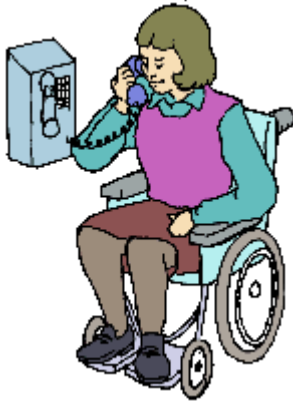
Most people did not know how much money they needed to keep aside for their landline phone bill because the bills changed from one to the next.



Television bills where you pay for additional channels were easier because they were the same every month.



When a supplier needed to be called, someone else usually did it. We think that carers, family and support workers help keep people safe by dealing with suppliers and checking their bills.



Not many of the people we spoke with ever called their suppliers. Most people who had called their supplier were happy with the service they got.

**A man with severe learning disabilities in London said,**



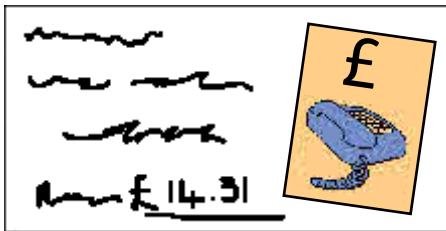
“On the mobile network the one good thing there was that I was registered as disabled, so as soon as I rang it went through to ...somebody. It didn't go through, press this number, press that number... it put me straight in contact with a person to talk to. And I was, it come up on their computer screen that they was handling someone with a disability... they asked if it was OK to record this information on their system and I said, yeah of course it is.”





Most people liked to pay with cash and over the counter.

They paid at post offices and local shops.



They felt that it was safer because they could get a receipt or a stamp on their bill.



They would not get this if they paid over the phone or on the internet.



Many people told us they had problems looking after their money. Some did not have a bank account.

**A man with severe learning disabilities in England said,**



“My girlfriend has control of the finance because it’s not done with pound notes like my Dad’s day. It’s done with credit cards and all that, and writing and filling out forms.”

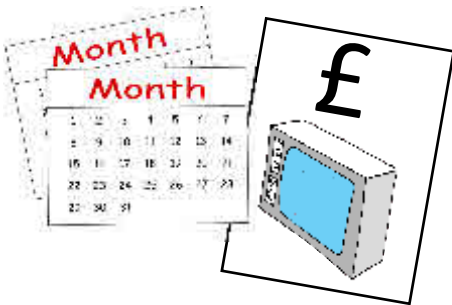




For them, how easy it is to pay for a service was more important than how much it costs.

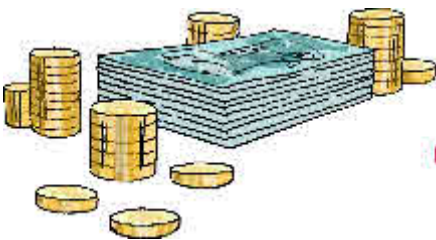


Because of this, many people told us they liked to pay for their services up front, like Pay As You Go.



They did not like having bills at the end of the month because they may not have the money to pay by then.

**A woman with mild learning disabilities in Scotland said,**



“It’s money I have a problem with...  
It’s just much easier for me to pay  
as you go.”





Not many people who talked to us and had a mobile, were paying monthly.



Most people thought Pay As You Go was easier to pay for and felt that their money would be safer.

For example, if they lose their phones, with Pay As You Go they would not get charged for calls they didn't make.



Some people told us they found it difficult to top up their phone. They had problems reading the long number and entering it into their mobile.

## Useful contacts and information



If you want to complain about your TV, telephone, mobile or Internet, we have notes that can help.



Did your landline phone company change even though you didn't ask for it to change? We have helpful notes for you too.

To get them sent to you call:



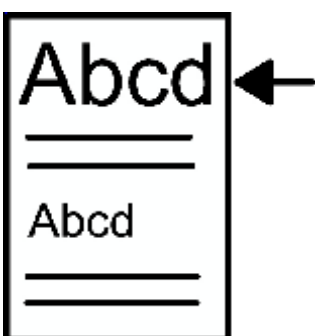
**Ofcom Advisory Team**



**Telephone: 0300 123 3333**



**Website: <http://www.ofcom.org.uk>**



You can ask for Large Print copies as well.



**If you are getting nuisance calls  
and want these to stop, call:**



**Telephone Preference Service**



**Telephone: 0845 0700 707**



**Website [www.tpsonline.org.uk](http://www.tpsonline.org.uk)**

# Thank you

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