



DIGITAL YOUTH INDEX

2021



Introduction	01	Digital skills and careers	33
Foreword from Nominet	03	Left to their own devices	37
Key findings	04	Digital careers	40
An overview of the index	07	Digital skills from the perspective of parents, teachers, and young people	43
Digital access	10	Use of essential online services	45
Digital castaways	13	Use of essential online services in their own words	47
		Digital safety and resilience	50
		Risks online/support	53
		Internet safety	57
		Digital safety and resilience in their own words	60
		Digital wellbeing	64
		More connected, more isolated	65
		Digital wellbeing in their own words	68
		Conclusion	69
		Acknowledgements	71
		Appendices	72
Barriers to learning/quality devices	16		
Digital connectivity	23		
Broadband quality	25		
Fit for purpose devices	28		
The impact of poor connectivity in their own words	31		

CONTENTS

Introduction

The COVID pandemic is in full swing. The government has closed schools at the last minute. Children are asked to log into Teams meetings for their classes.

Parents give up their laptops to allow their children to log into a live class, making work life difficult. The broadband is buffering. The children lose their connection to their virtual lessons, again.

A boy is talking to his friends on Discord about their intense gaming sessions. Only, he hasn't been playing, because he doesn't have the device or internet connection at home to do so. He stays because he doesn't want to feel like he is missing out on this major form of social interaction. He wants to feel part of the crowd.

From the types of devices that young people can access, to the quality of their internet connection and the relationship they have with social media and their digital skills, there are many stories to tell.

A 10-year-old boy cries after being called names by players on Fortnite, and then his character is 'killed' in the game by his older brother or his brother's friends. Eventually, it becomes so upsetting, his mum bans him from playing.

An 11-year-old girl has her social media accounts constantly monitored by her mum as her parents are disturbed by the explicit images she receives from older men.

A parent is shocked to learn that her daughter's 'sext' has gone viral around her secondary school.

A 21-year-old works in a bar and stays late after work so he can use the computer in his workplace to complete compulsory compliance training. The training isn't smartphone-enabled and he needs to complete it to keep his job. He doesn't complete the non-essential training because he doesn't want to take advantage of his company's resources and doesn't want people to think he's 'poor'.

A group of friends combine their resources so they can buy mobile data to share to remain 'connected' online.

A university student has a laptop borrowed from her institution as she doesn't own a personal device and needs it for her studies. However, this laptop is old and obsolete; it's slow and doesn't have sufficient memory to download the design software she needs for her course.

These are just some of the stories that we have heard during our research.

The contemporary landscape of the digital world is deeply complex for all of us, but especially for young people. They exist as natives in today's digital ecosystems. But as with so much of life, not all the resources and benefits of this ecosystem are equally distributed. From the types of devices that young people can access, to the quality of their internet connection and the relationship they have with social media and their digital skills, there are many stories to tell.

The internet and digital technology have the power to transform lives by creating opportunities and providing support where it is needed most. But they also have the power to leave young people behind. Our research helps to demonstrate how and where this is happening.

The pandemic has shone a spotlight on spectrums of inequality when it comes to accessing digital technology. In particular, the extent to which spaces are designed in inclusive ways determines their meaningful use of digital resources by young people in all their diversity. Access to digital technology is not a linear process; while a young person may own a device, there is a complex multiplicity of factors and barriers which can intersect and prevent her access from being sustained. The urgent need to make sure that educators, policymakers, digital services companies, parents, and young people themselves are better informed and resourced has never been more apparent.

Nominet's Social Impact Team is excited that the first wave of the Nominet Digital Youth Index provides a way to bring some clarity to these complex issues.

It will become an annual measure of young people's use, experience of, and attitudes towards the internet and digital technology.

We also hope that the Index will help to highlight areas of disadvantage, inform policy-making decisions and, more generally, help to improve education and life outcomes for young people today, and in the future.

We look forward to you engaging with this report and the associated online materials, and joining the conversation as we support young people navigating today's and tomorrow's digital world.



**NOMINET
SOCIAL IMPACT**

Foreword from Nominet

We believe there has never been a more important time to understand the impact of digital on young people's lives. If we are to avoid leaving young people behind from the opportunities presented by the internet and digital technologies, we must better understand the complex realities they face.

Our digital lives mirror the inequalities of society; the current barriers of disadvantage further expand the divide between people who can benefit from digital technology and reliable internet access and people who are not.

We are delighted to partner with Opinium to launch the Nominet Digital Youth Index. This research programme aims to build a shared understanding and awareness regarding the behaviours, attitudes, relationships, and situations of young people when it comes to their digital lives. Our overarching question is: What needs to change to enable more young people to thrive in a digital age?

Over the years, we will track changes in access to technology and the internet, and the impact on young people's digital skills, use of online services, mental health, and overall well-being. By offering you our data and insights, we hope to help practitioners and policy makers to dig deeper into what it feels like to be a young person growing up in a digital world.

*Our overarching question is:
"What needs to change to
enable more young people
to thrive in a digital age?"*

Key Findings



The Nominet Digital Youth Index provides a way to measure young people's digital access and inclusion, their ability to conduct certain digital skills, how safe they feel online and their related physical and mental well-being. Through individual questions and combinations of questions spread across five broad pillars, this report helps us to understand these areas in greater depth, identify which young people are most at risk of being digitally excluded and sets a benchmark for us to measure how these things change over time.

Were all things perfect, the Index would have a score of 100. This first year's overall Index score of 65 provides a baseline for tracking and helps us to see that, on the whole, young people have adequate levels of access and feel safe online. However, connectivity and well-being are areas that have clear scope for improvement.

The people more likely to be left behind in the digital world are those without access to a laptop or desktop, people who don't primarily speak English or Welsh as their first language at home, those with special educational needs, those receiving free school meals, and those being looked after by a single parent or caregiver.

DIGITAL ACCESS



2.1 million young people are at risk of becoming digital castaways.



15% of young people have a smartphone but no access to a laptop or desktop.

DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY



A third of young people (32%) do not have access to home broadband.



Around 16% of over-18s don't have access to a laptop or desktop computer and **nearly half** rely on other ways to connect to the internet instead of home broadband.

DIGITAL SKILLS AND CAREERS



Almost half of young people (48%) are teaching themselves digital skills, equivalent to **6.9 million** young people across the UK.



Technology-related jobs are more appealing to younger children, young men, and those with higher income levels.

DIGITAL SAFETY AND DIGITAL



Most young people (94%) feel safe online, but parents and professionals working with young people are worried about their safety.



Nearly 3 in 5 (58%) young people in the LGBTQ+ community have experienced hate speech online.

DIGITAL WELL-BEING



A third of 17–19-year-olds (32%) say the internet has a negative impact on their mental health and **nearly half** of young people (44%) say they feel isolated.

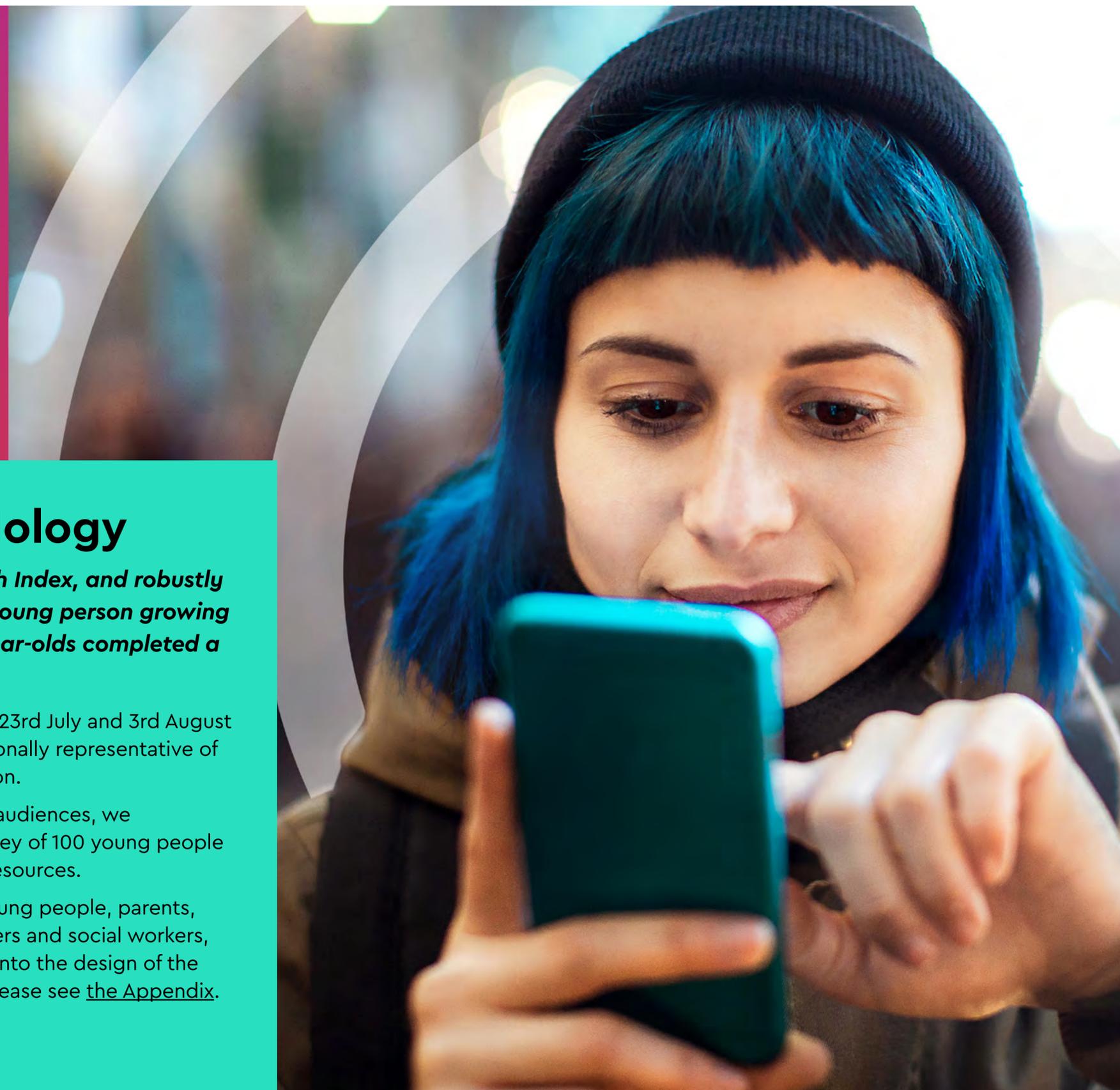
Research methodology

To create the Nominet Digital Youth Index, and robustly measure what it feels like to be a young person growing up in a digital world, 2,000 8-25-year-olds completed a quantitative survey.

The fieldwork was conducted between 23rd July and 3rd August 2021. The data was weighted to be nationally representative of 8-25-year-olds by age, gender and region.

To capture the views of disadvantaged audiences, we conducted an additional telephone survey of 100 young people who also had limited access to digital resources.

Exploratory qualitative research with young people, parents, secondary school teachers, youth workers and social workers, as well as secondary desk research fed into the design of the Index. For more on the methodology, please see [the Appendix](#).



An overview of the Index

The Nominet Digital Youth Index is designed to provide a holistic picture of young people's use of technology and the internet. The Index comprises five pillars covering access, connectivity, digital skills, online safety and digital well-being.



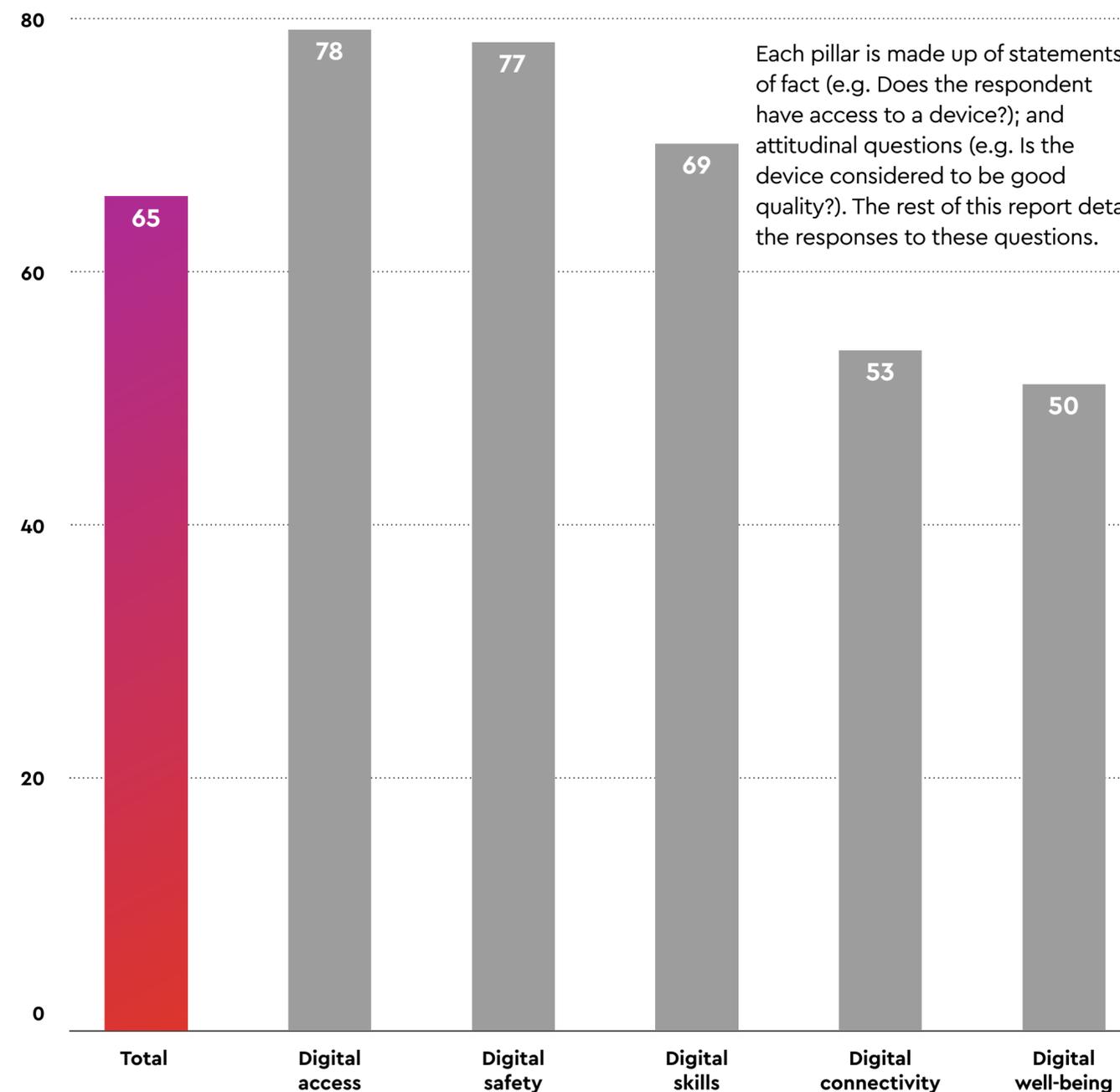
Combining a total of 63 data points across a sample of 2,000 young people, we will be able to show how these areas are changing over time, while also showing how different groups compare to one another. Not all the questions from our online survey were included in the Index and data from these questions are reported separately.

Using the questions we asked, we developed a framework covering behaviours, attitudes, relationships, and situations. For example, when thinking about safety, we looked at actual behaviour to keep safe, attitudes to being safe, who the participants felt safe or unsafe with and in which situations they might not be safe.

The Index provides a composite score derived from these pillars. Were a young person to have access to a laptop or desktop, home broadband, be fully satisfied with all these devices and connections, never have any problems with their devices or connections, and never experience upsetting things online, plus provide a perfect score on every other measure, they would achieve an overall score of 100.

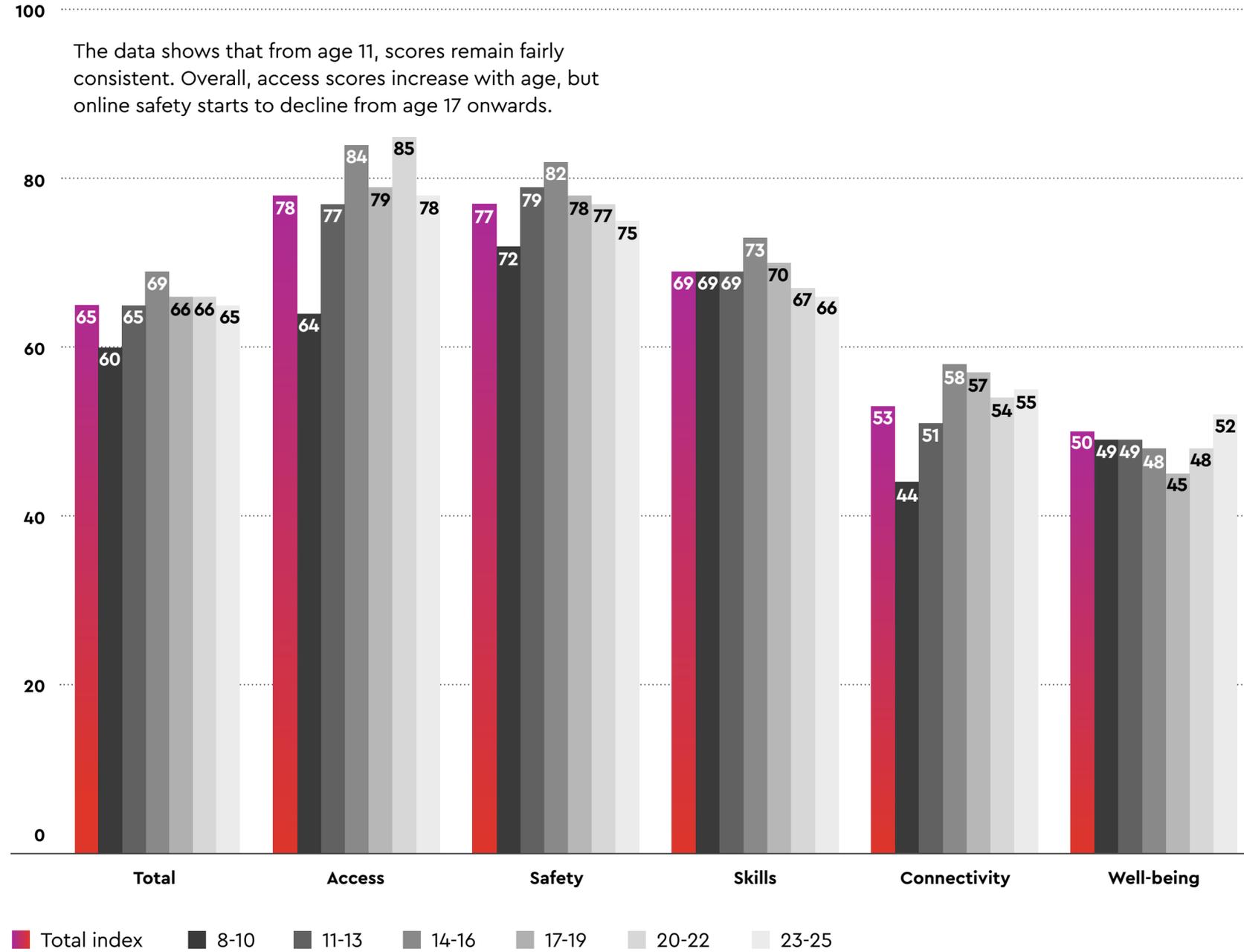
This first year's score of 65 provides a baseline for tracking and helps us to see that, on the whole, young people have adequate levels of access and feel safe online. However, connectivity and well-being are areas that have clear scope for improvement.

DIGITAL YOUTH INDEX SCORES – BY PILLAR



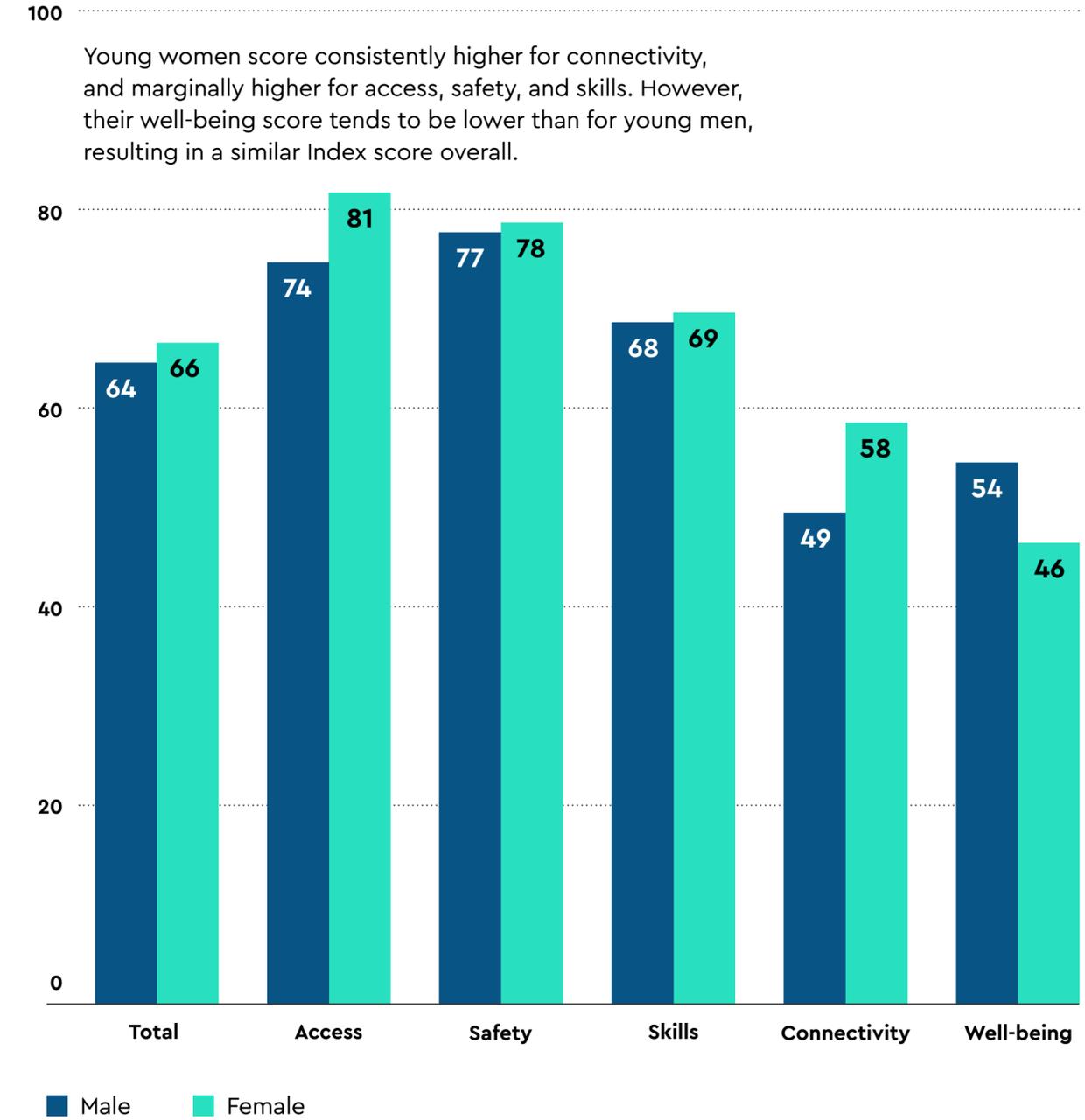
Average of Index measures. Base: all respondents (2,000)

DIGITAL YOUTH INDEX SCORES – TOTAL AND BY AGE



Average of Index measures. Base: all respondents (2,000)

DIGITAL YOUTH INDEX SCORES – BY GENDER

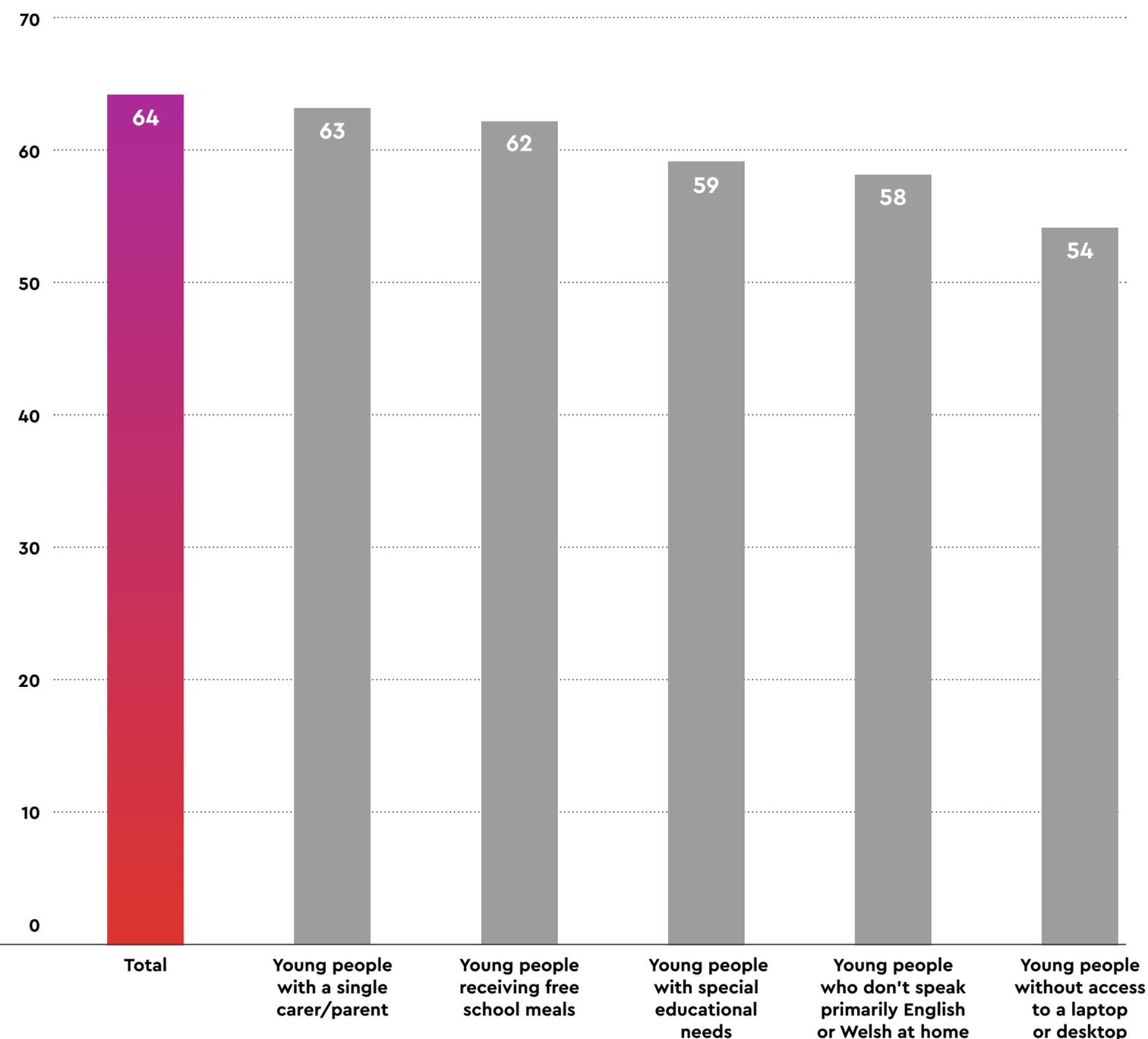


Average of Index measures. Base: all respondents (2,000)

When looked at together, the people more likely to be left behind in the digital world are those without access to a laptop or desktop, those whose household doesn't primarily speak English or Welsh, those with special educational needs, those receiving free school meals and those being looked after by a single parent or caregiver.

This is consistent with findings from The Children's Society, which explored the interconnected nature of the disadvantages that young people face. Exploring more than one area of deprivation can disproportionately affect other areas of deprivation faced by young people.

Running future waves of the Nominet Digital Youth Index will allow us to measure how individual metrics change, how the overall digital landscape changes and monitor progress among disadvantaged and disproportionately affected groups, in particular.



DIGITAL YOUTH INDEX SCORES - BY DISADVANTAGED GROUPS



[Click here to view the Good Childhood Report.](#)

Digital Access

The UK lockdowns and school closures during 2020 and 2021 led to an unprecedented reliance on digital technologies among young people. This reliance exacerbated device and connectivity poverty issues, with digitally disadvantaged young people being most at risk of being left behind in education, and socially, from their peers.

We saw an accompanying response from government, charity and community-led initiatives to distribute devices.

The Nominet Digital Youth Index highlights several critical insights from the impact of the pandemic – some reinforcing what was already known, some exploring more deeply the nuances around access to the right devices and connectivity across different groups of young people.

Devices are essential for young people to get online, to conduct tasks for school or work, or communicate with others. Although having a device is a necessary element of digital access, we know infrastructure alone is not enough. The Index illustrates throughout how initial access to a device is only one part of what it means to have access to a sustained, meaningful digital life.

OVERALL DIGITAL ACCESS SCORE	78
Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of my digital devices (% Agree)	91
I am able to use the internet to complete all the tasks I want to do (% Agree)	88
% who have access to a smartphone	87
% able to use a smartphone whenever they need to	81
% who have access to a laptop or desktop	80
I have enough storage space for my needs (% Agree)	77
% who do not share a smartphone	74
% able to use a laptop/computer whenever they need to	68
% who do not share a laptop or desktop	54

Young people without access to a laptop or desktop are likely to have some of the lowest overall Index scores (54).

Key findings



Most young people are satisfied with the quality of their digital devices **(91%)**...



...and can use the internet to complete all the tasks they want to do **(88%)**.



Four in five young people **(80%)** have access to a laptop or desktop, but many have to share their devices with others.



Two-thirds **(68%)** can use a laptop or desktop whenever they need to...



...and **54%** do not need to share a laptop or desktop.

Compared with universal comprehensive access to education this means that while 88% is 'most', it falls far short of 'all'.



John, 20 works in retail

John is a 20-year-old living in the West Midlands. He grew up in a home with a lower-than-average household income and received free school meals when he was at school.

He hasn't been to university, but he would like to one day. Right now, he's trying to hold down a retail job to pay for the room that he rents.

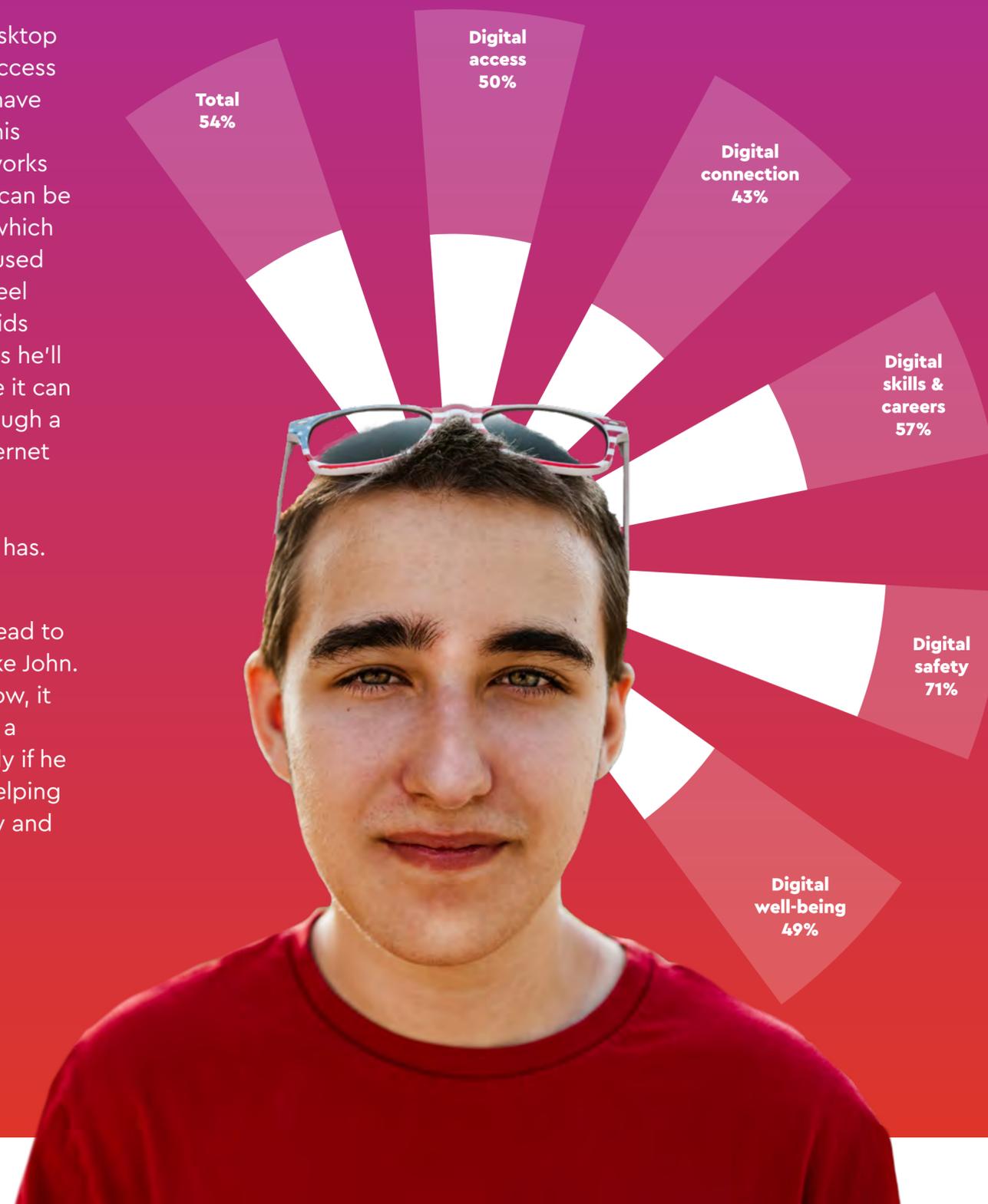
He feels happy with life in general, enjoying time with friends and seeing his family, but he has big ambitions; he would like to get a better job, or perhaps try and take on more responsibility, and hopes to work his way up to management level in his retail job in the long term.

His smartphone is the primary way by which he interacts in the digital world. He keeps in touch with shifts at work through a WhatsApp channel and communicates with friends and family on social media and chat apps. He generally feels safe and happy online, and in control of his online activities. He enjoys watching Netflix, and catch-up TV; however, his smartphone is the only device he owns, so he has to watch them on a small screen.

Nevertheless, he is used to this and often watches YouTube videos on the bus, to and from work. He's able to watch Match of the Day and his favourite programmes when he goes round to see his parents or friends.

John doesn't own a laptop or desktop computer and he doesn't have access to one at work. He also doesn't have home broadband, and relies on his mobile's data and free WiFi networks when he's out and about. These can be slow and unreliable, something which John finds frustrating. He hasn't used computers much so he doesn't feel confident with them, and he avoids applying for jobs where he knows he'll have to use one a lot more. Since it can be difficult applying for jobs through a smartphone, and with a slow internet connection, John avoids doing this, preferring to try to use the personal connections he already has.

Increasing access to a laptop or desktop at an earlier age could lead to changed outcomes for people like John. For those looking to help John now, it isn't known if providing him with a device now might help, especially if he is reluctant to use it. However, helping him to develop his digital literacy and skills is likely to be necessary.



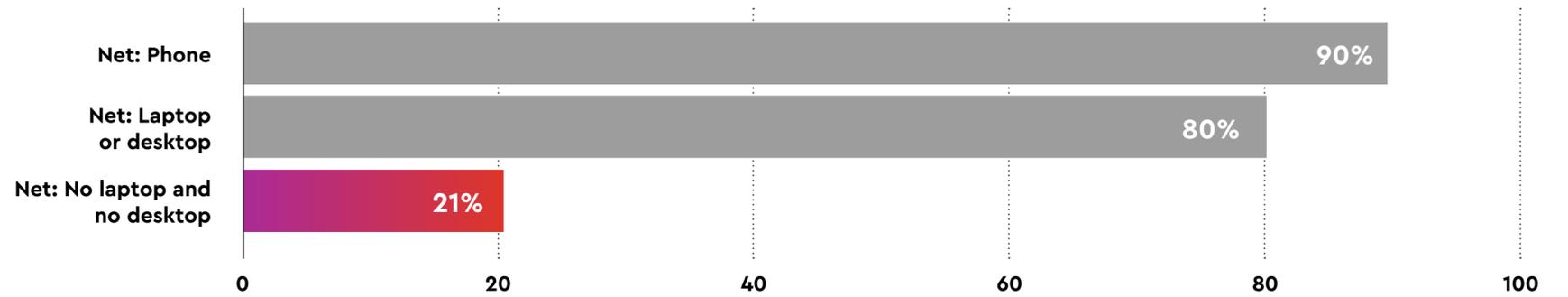
DIGITAL CASTAWAYS

Inequality in our digital lives: **How do we leave no one behind?**

This chapter explores how potentially 2.1 million young people are at risk of becoming digital castaways and the implications of 15% of young people having a smartphone but no access to a laptop or desktop.

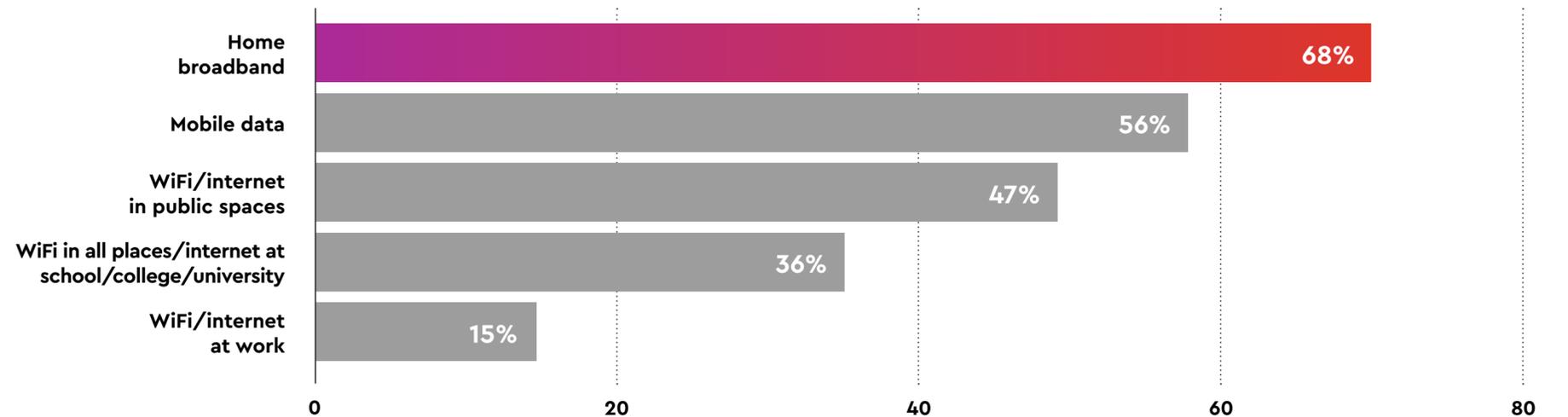
30% (2.1 million) of young people aged 8-25 are at risk of becoming digital castaways.

DEVICES YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE ACCESS TO (%)



Q1. Which of the following digital devices do you have access to? Base: all respondents (2,000)

CONNECTIONS YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE ACCESS TO (%)



Q8A. What kind of internet connections do you have access to? Base: all respondents (2,000)

Key findings



2.9 million young people (21%) do not have access to either a laptop or desktop computer...



...and **a third (32%)** of young people do not have access to home broadband.



Combined, this leaves **six million (42%)** young people without home broadband or a laptop/desktop.



It equates to **30%** of those aged 18 and above who are more likely to be living alone and...



...relying on work, colleges or universities for their IT needs - equivalent to **2.1 million young people.**



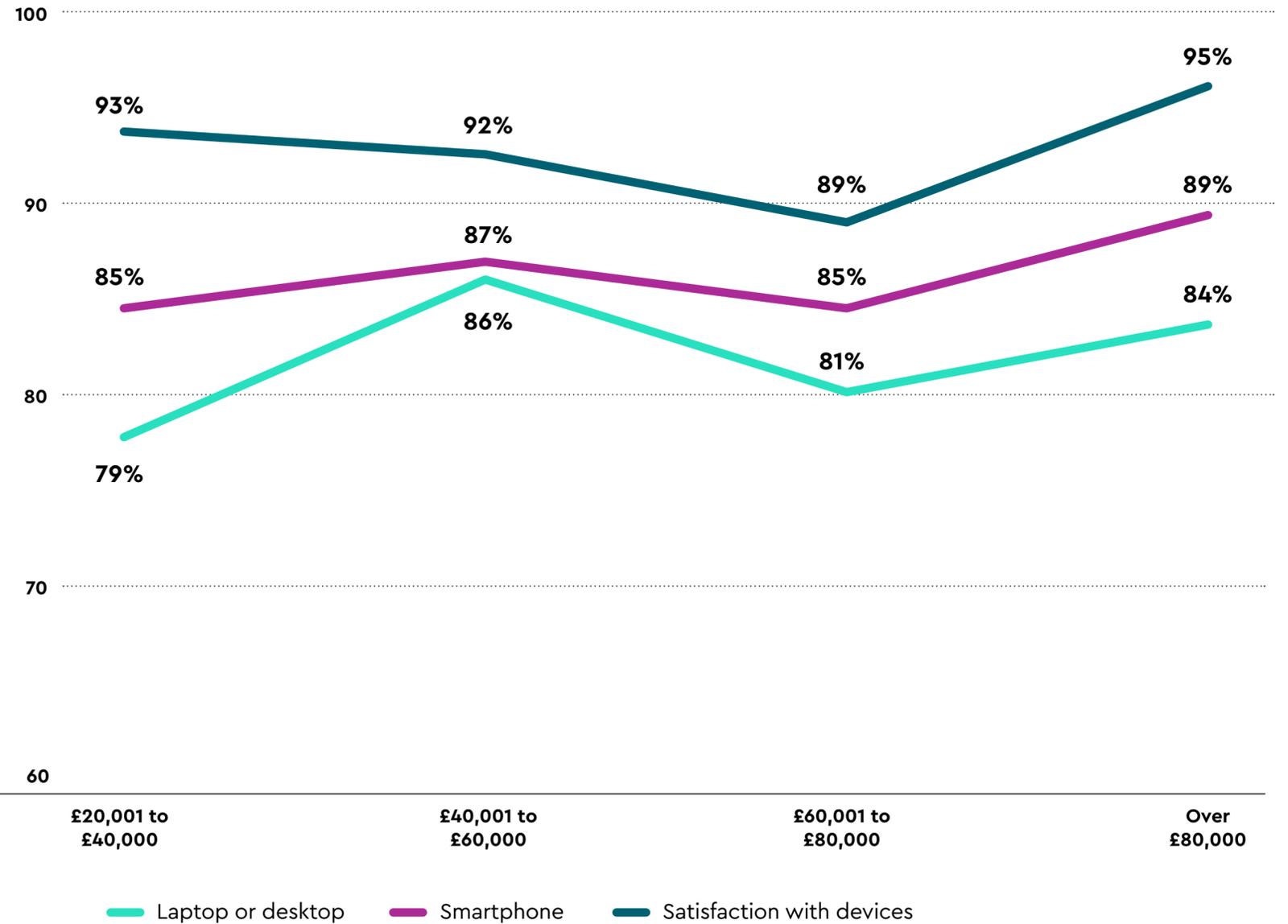
BARRIERS
TO LEARNING/
QUALITY DEVICES

Reverting to paper

Digital barriers compound for the most disadvantaged young people

15% (approximately 2.2 million) of young people have a smartphone but no access to a laptop or desktop and 32% of young people do not have access to home broadband.

DEVICE ACCESS AND SATISFACTION BY HOUSEHOLD INCOME (%)



Q1. Which of the following digital devices do you have access to?
Q3. Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of my digital devices
Base: all respondents (2,000)

Key findings



One in five (20%) young people do not have access to a laptop or a desktop computer...



...increasing to **26%** of those in C2DE social grades and...



...**30%** of those living in households with a combined income below £20,000.



15% (approximately 2.2 million) of young people have a smartphone but no access to a laptop or desktop.



A third (32%) of young people do not have access to home broadband.



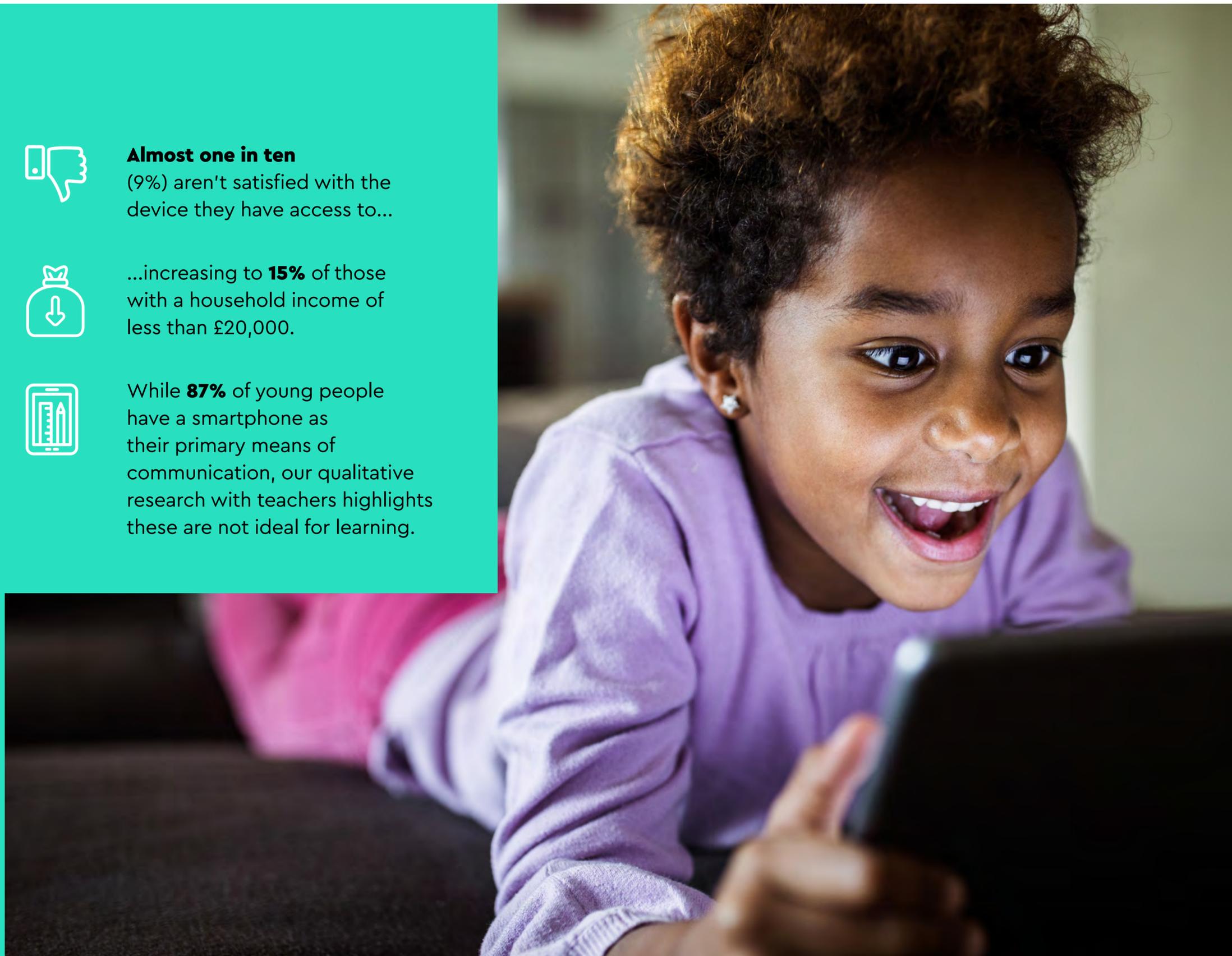
Almost one in ten (9%) aren't satisfied with the device they have access to...



...increasing to **15%** of those with a household income of less than £20,000.



While **87%** of young people have a smartphone as their primary means of communication, our qualitative research with teachers highlights these are not ideal for learning.



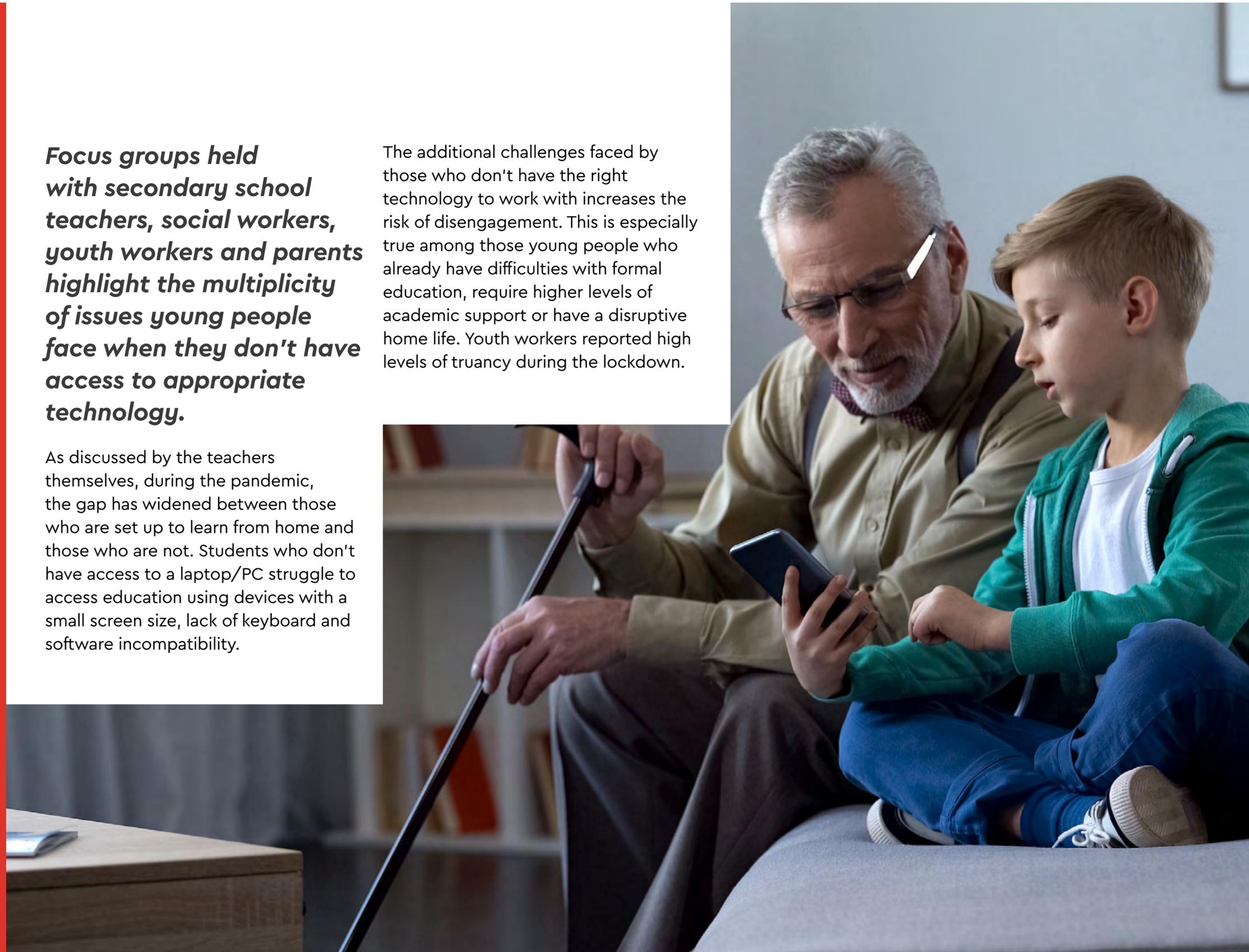
Digital access

from the perspective of professionals, parents, and young people.

Focus groups held with secondary school teachers, social workers, youth workers and parents highlight the multiplicity of issues young people face when they don't have access to appropriate technology.

As discussed by the teachers themselves, during the pandemic, the gap has widened between those who are set up to learn from home and those who are not. Students who don't have access to a laptop/PC struggle to access education using devices with a small screen size, lack of keyboard and software incompatibility.

The additional challenges faced by those who don't have the right technology to work with increases the risk of disengagement. This is especially true among those young people who already have difficulties with formal education, require higher levels of academic support or have a disruptive home life. Youth workers reported high levels of truancy during the lockdown.



The additional challenges faced by those who don't have the right technology to work with increases the risk of disengagement.

"Our issue was only having the one laptop so if anyone else needed the laptop for any reason and it was for something we couldn't do on our phones or tablets, that became quite challenging... We had to prioritise what was most important and if someone needed to do something at a specific time [my son] had to play catch-up on his work at a later time outside of normal school hours."

Parent (digitally disadvantaged)

"The parents are not engaged whatsoever. During lockdown, I had to call the parents of the children who didn't attend remote learning. About 80% of the parents had no idea that their children had not attended 'school' that day."

Youth worker

Some young people relayed how they had to share one device with their working parents; often, this device was a work-provided laptop. Sharing resulted in both parents and young people having to make compromises to get work done.

Individual WhatsApp interviews were conducted with young people who didn't have access to a laptop, tablet, or desktop computer, and/or had no home broadband. This was an important part of the research methodology to include the perspectives of those at the margins and it contributed additional insights. Young people in further and higher education shared how not having access to a laptop or PC made completing work difficult.

"Some students had no access to laptops during lockdown. They were just using phones, which wasn't ideal. It [teaching] has been harder. Trying to engage with the students was tough, as we only had audio, so we couldn't see them. The motivation from the students was practically non-existent."

Secondary school teacher

"The platform that the school chose to use was really hard to use and not compatible with iPads, so I ended up using my work tablet and then [gave] my work laptop [to my daughter] for her to do work on... [My daughter] did most of her work on paper in the end."

Parent (digitally disadvantaged)



Case study: **Macey, 16**



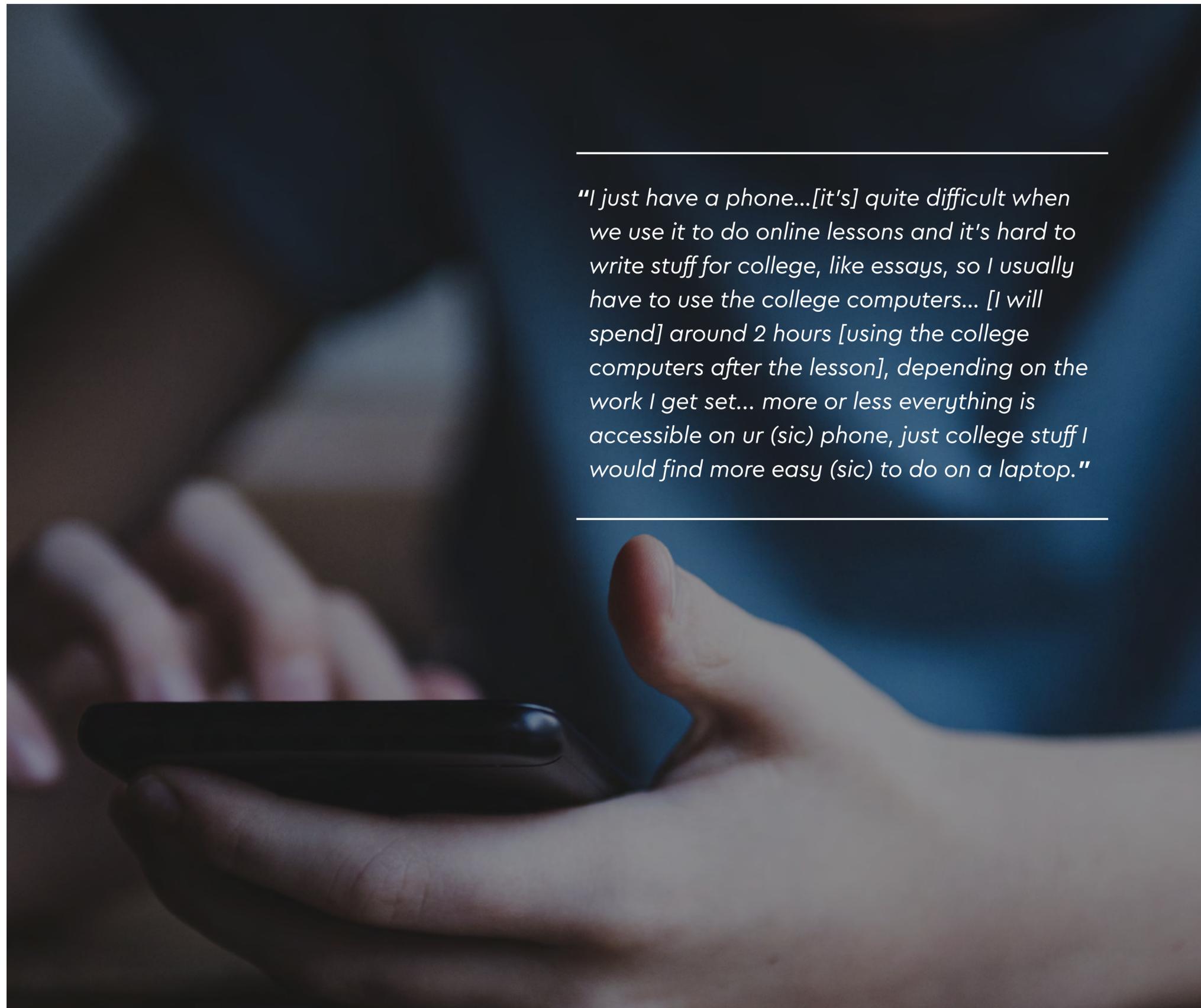
Macey is a college student who works two part-time jobs, one at a café with her mum.



Macey doesn't have a laptop and relies on her mobile for everything. In the main, she's OK with that but she does struggle when it comes to participating in lessons and completing college work.



She has to take extra time to use the college computers when writing essays, filling out personal forms or printing documents.



"I just have a phone...[it's] quite difficult when we use it to do online lessons and it's hard to write stuff for college, like essays, so I usually have to use the college computers... [I will spend] around 2 hours [using the college computers after the lesson], depending on the work I get set... more or less everything is accessible on ur (sic) phone, just college stuff I would find more easy (sic) to do on a laptop."

Case study: Lewis, 21

WhatsApp interviews conducted with young people also illustrate how an over-reliance on smartphone technology can introduce challenges around finding and applying for employment opportunities.



Lewis works full-time at a bar.



Not having access to a laptop at home makes it difficult for him to complete workplace training because the online courses aren't mobile-enabled.



He feels too embarrassed to use the workplace computer more than he has to due to his perception of stigma.

Young people used their phones to edit their CVs and to search for and apply for jobs. Lewis' story below shows how not having access to the correct technology impacts his workplace progression.

Lewis: *"There are online health and safety courses I have to do; 13 are optional, 3 are compulsory...I had to do them at work, as I don't have a laptop. I wanted to do them all in my own time, but I couldn't access them on my phone, so I just got the main 3 done and left the optional ones. I would do it at the library, but it's closed due to COVID. I used the work computer [for the 3 compulsory courses]. We have a good positive ethos and a team-fuelled environment, so no one was bothered :), but it did make me feel a bit bad..."*

Moderator: *"How come you felt bad?"*

Lewis: *"[Because] no one wants to be poor."*

OUR PROGRAMMES

The platform Reboot by Nominet, is a long-term approach to tackling device poverty. Reboot moves away from fundraising and appealing for new devices from manufacturers and funders, to supporting the hundreds of community groups addressing the issue locally by seeking out and 'rebooting' some of the millions of unused digital devices already in people's homes and offices



[Click here](#) to find support to close the digital divide with Reboot by Nominet.



Digital connectivity

Once young people have access to a device, they have the means to use the internet, which opens up access to potentially huge resources of knowledge, entertainment and communication. However, poor connections can limit what young people can do.

Connectivity is the second-lowest scoring area in the Nominet Digital Youth Index.

Overall, young people are less positive about their internet connections than they are with access to their devices. Only 58% of young people agree that their internet connection at home is good quality.

In an ideal world, all young people would disagree that there are things they want to do online but cannot due to the limits of their broadband or data allowance. However, around half of young people do agree with such statements, as shown here:

OVERALL CONNECTIVITY SCORE	53
% with home broadband	68
My internet connection at home/in my household is good quality (% Agree)	58
% with mobile data	56
There are some things I want to do online that I can't do because of limits to my broadband allowance (% Disagree)	51
My mobile data connection is good quality (% Agree)	48
There are some things I want to do online that I can't do because of limits to my mobile data allowance (% Disagree)	46
There are some things I want to do online that I can't do because of slow or no internet (% Disagree)	45



Key findings



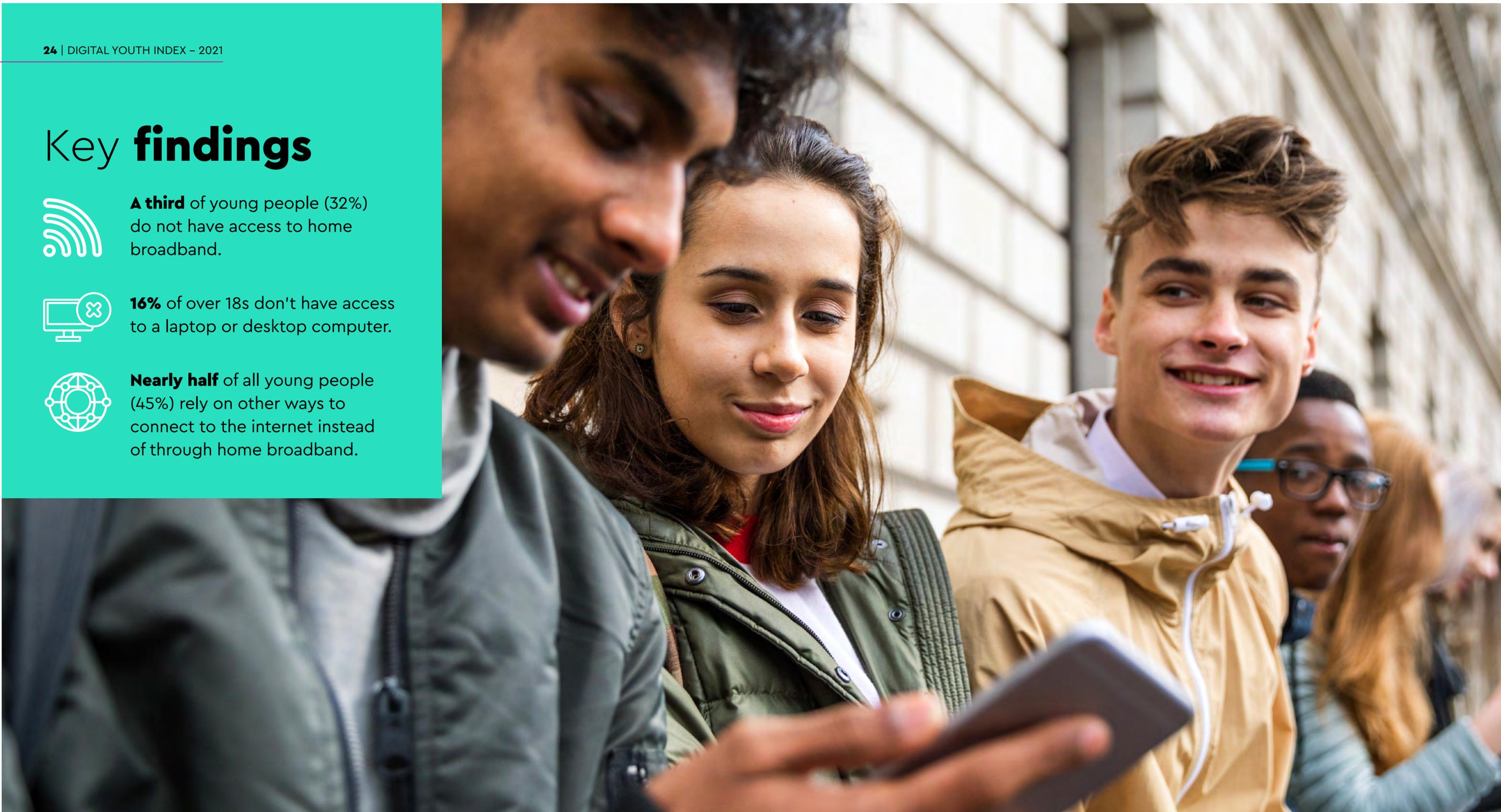
A third of young people (32%) do not have access to home broadband.



16% of over 18s don't have access to a laptop or desktop computer.



Nearly half of all young people (45%) rely on other ways to connect to the internet instead of through home broadband.



BROADBAND

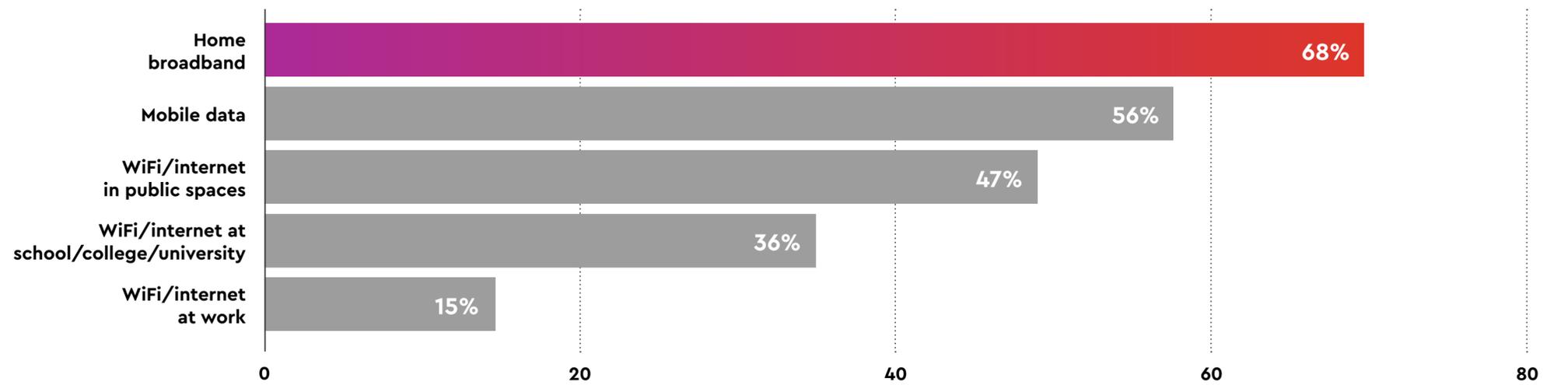
QUALITY

Connection loading

Having home broadband is necessary but not always sufficient for a good quality connection.

A third of young people (32%) do not have access to home broadband.

CONNECTIONS YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE ACCESS TO (%)



Q8A. What kind of internet connections do you have access to?
Base: all respondents (2,000)

ABILITY TO DO EVERYTHING THEY WANT ONLINE (%)
THERE ARE SOME THINGS I WANT TO DO ONLINE THAT I CAN'T DO BECAUSE OF SLOW OR NO INTERNET



Q9. There are some things I want to do online that I can't do because of slow or no internet
Base: all respondents (2,000)

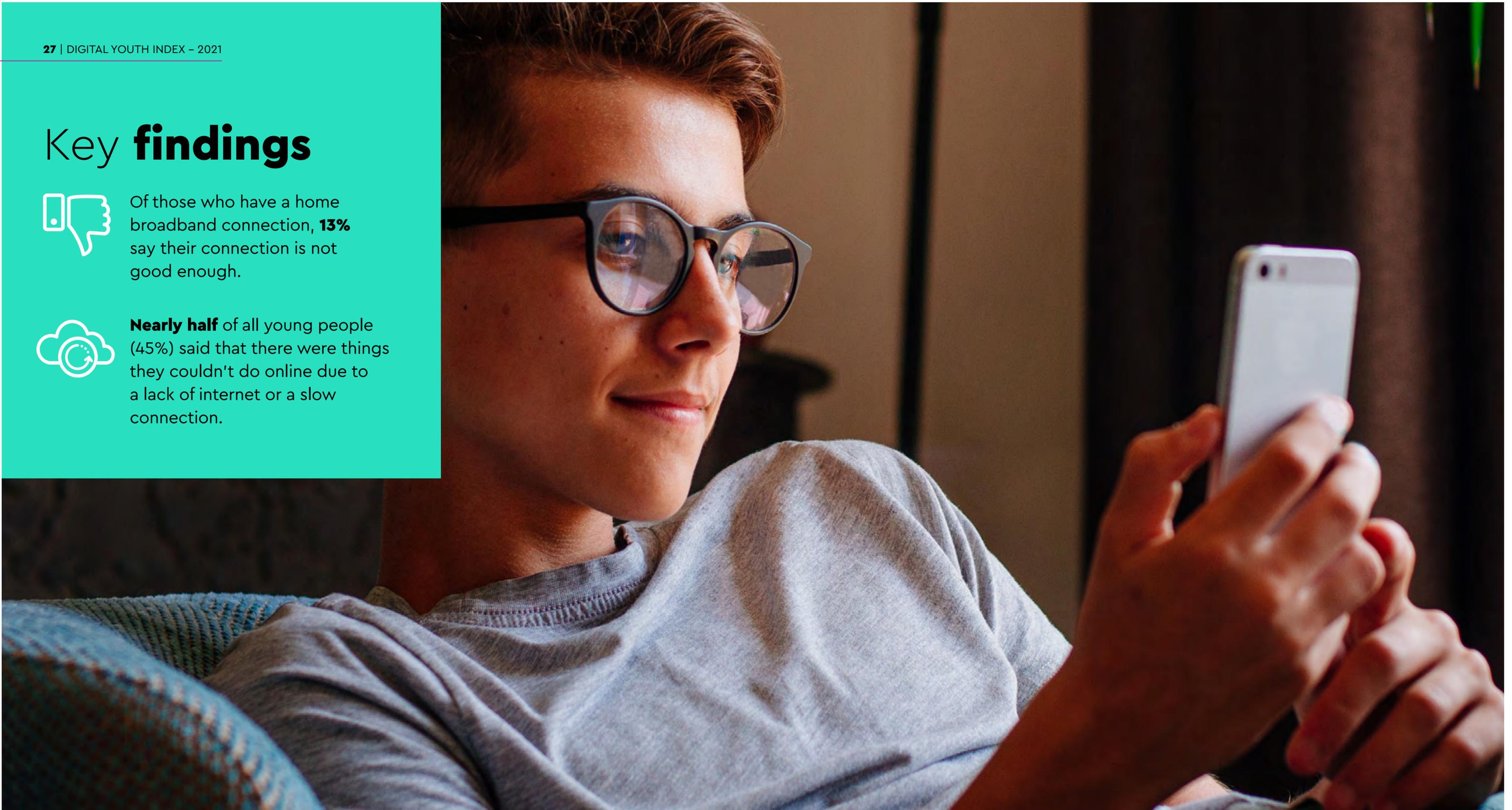
Key findings



Of those who have a home broadband connection, **13%** say their connection is not good enough.



Nearly half of all young people (45%) said that there were things they couldn't do online due to a lack of internet or a slow connection.



FIT FOR PURPOSE DEVICES

A device that won't suffice

Leaving home could mean leaving your digital set-up too. As is the case with device poverty, connectivity and data poverty not only refer to the ability to access the internet when you need to but to the quality of the connection. While the majority of young people with internet access at home say that they have good quality access to the internet, more than one in ten do not.

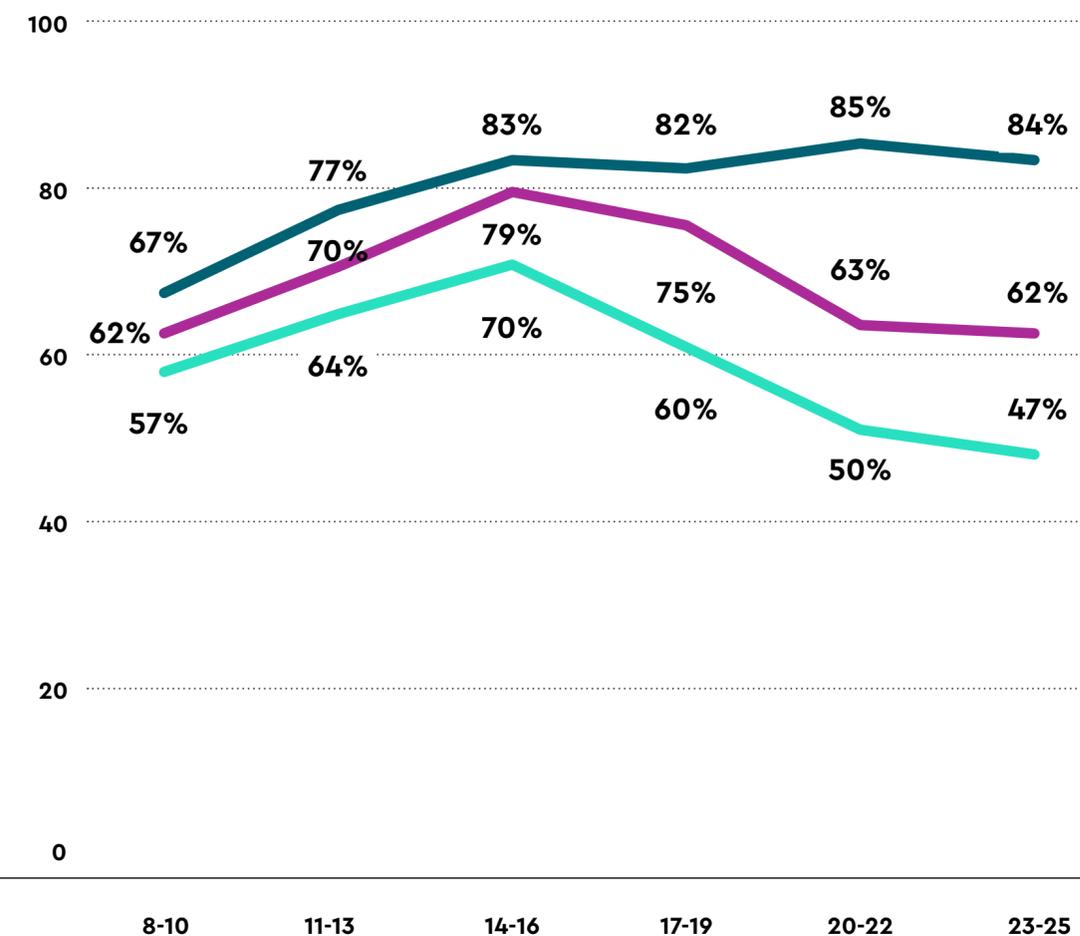
Around 16% of over 18s, equivalent to 1.1 million people, don't have access to a laptop or desktop computer and nearly half rely on other ways to connect to the internet instead of home broadband.

Many young people rely entirely on mobile data, especially as they become more independent and move away from home.

Heavy reliance on mobile data is also more evident in lower-income households, e.g. 18% of students who receive free school meals rely exclusively on mobile data for their internet connection compared to 15% of all young people aged 8-25. Reliance on mobile data also increases with age: e.g. 22% of 23-to-25 year-olds rely on it entirely compared to 13% of 14-to-16 year-olds.

This is assumed to be predominantly driven by a shift to independent living, and expense being a barrier to broadband installation.

ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY AND CONNECTIONS BY AGE



■ Access to laptop or desktop
 ■ Home broadband access
 ■ Reliant most on home broadband

Q1. Which of the following digital devices do you have access to?
 Q8A. What kind of connection do you have access to?
 Q8B. Which connection do you rely the most on?
 Base: all respondents (2,000)

Key findings



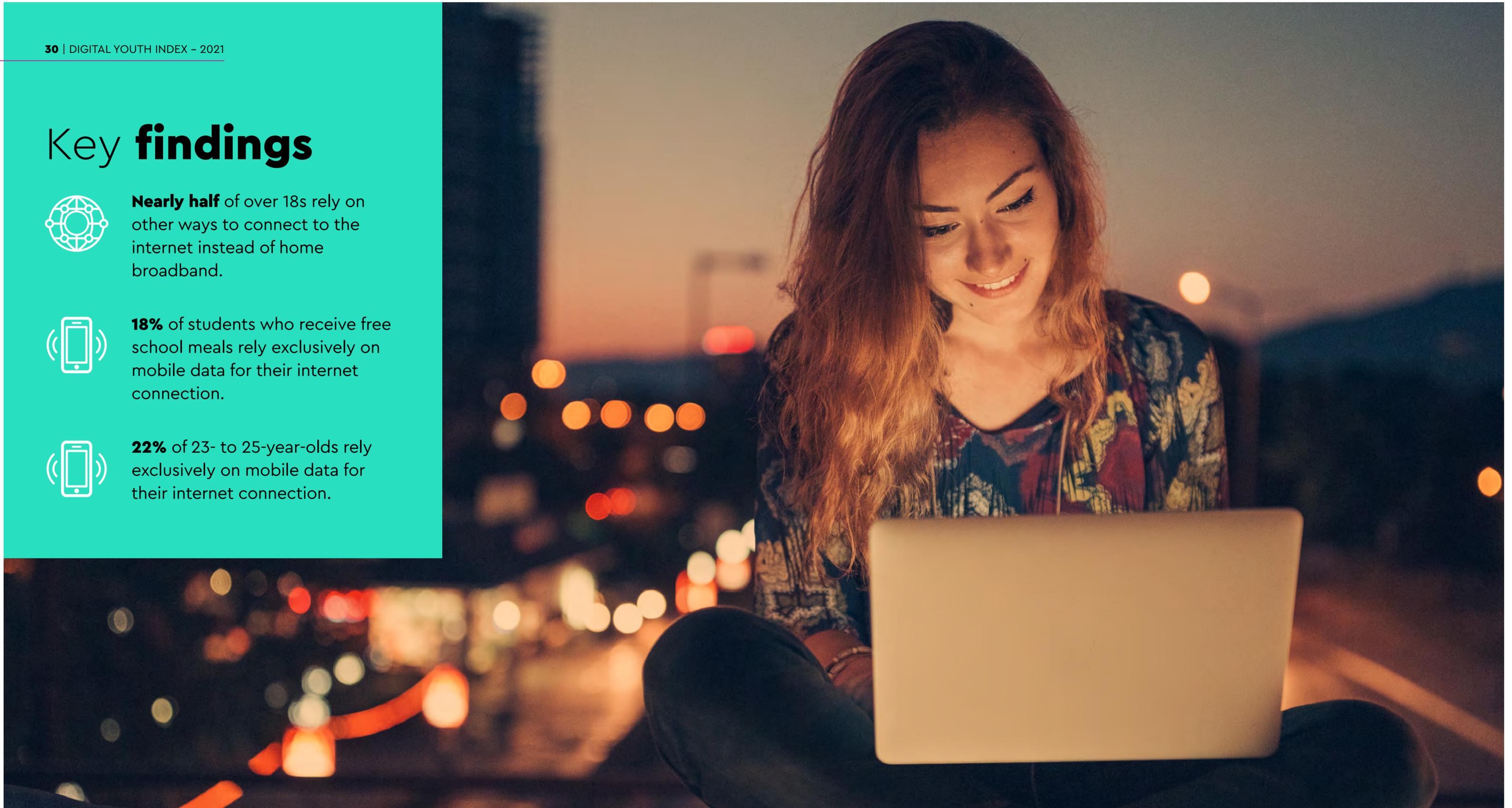
Nearly half of over 18s rely on other ways to connect to the internet instead of home broadband.



18% of students who receive free school meals rely exclusively on mobile data for their internet connection.



22% of 23- to 25-year-olds rely exclusively on mobile data for their internet connection.



The impact of poor connectivity in their own words

Focus groups conducted with parents shine a light on how disruptive a poor-quality internet connection is for some young people, and how it has made home schooling a very stressful experience.

A poor internet connection meant that young people constantly struggled to gain - or maintain - access to online content, and parents shared that when their child's connection to a lesson was broken, it caused emotional distress.

Parents and teachers found it difficult to re-engage young people in learning and several parents expressed concerns over the long-term implications for their children's academic performance and overall well-being.

Research conducted with young people highlights how a poor internet connection hinders assessment by preventing the successful upload and submission of work, the knock-on impact of which is to hamper overall motivation.

"My son thrives in [the] digital world. Anything technology he loves, and I think this is a strong point that he has. This has a big impact on him; especially if the WiFi goes, [it] can send him into a meltdown."

Parent (of a young person living with disability and/or SEN)

"My son has fallen behind massively due to poor internet connection and he now has to resit some of his GCSEs when he goes to college in September, although his predicted grades were a lot higher."

Parent (digitally disadvantaged)

"[Home schooling was] a nightmare!! The level of frustration was very high as we were all relying on the internet. I just pretty much gave up on trying to work effectively to enable my husband the WiFi strength!! The kids pretty much had to have whatever WiFi strength that was left while my husband did most of his work on Zoom and Teams. The kids certainly lost interest..."

Parent (digitally disadvantaged)

Case study: Natalia, 17

In one of the focus groups conducted with professionals working with young people, a youth worker shared a case where their poor internet connection had caused conflict in the family home which had resulted in the young person leaving home.



Natalia is finishing her second year at college, studying BTEC Fashion.



She has to share large image files as part of her course and a poor internet connection has made it difficult for her to complete coursework tasks.



She tries to use the library computers when she can, but limited accessibility means that it isn't always a possibility.

A poor internet connection had meant that the young person in question was unable to take part in online social activities, resulting in a feeling of isolation and loss, that was ultimately 'blamed' on the parents as they were unable to provide a good quality internet connection.

Natalia: "I feel like I don't get as much done as I used to as I find it hard to concentrate at home... [It's] difficult as the connection is not great, so it takes me a little while to get round to things, especially when trying to load images..."

Moderator: "Is there anywhere else where you could go to use the internet?"

Natalia: "Yes, but I have to book a slot in the library and sometimes there isn't any availability... [it is] very inconvenient!"

"They [young people] feel they are missing out on the social happenings online and they blame parents as they can't afford to provide WiFi all the time. One of my youths went to stay with a friend after arguing with family over WiFi."

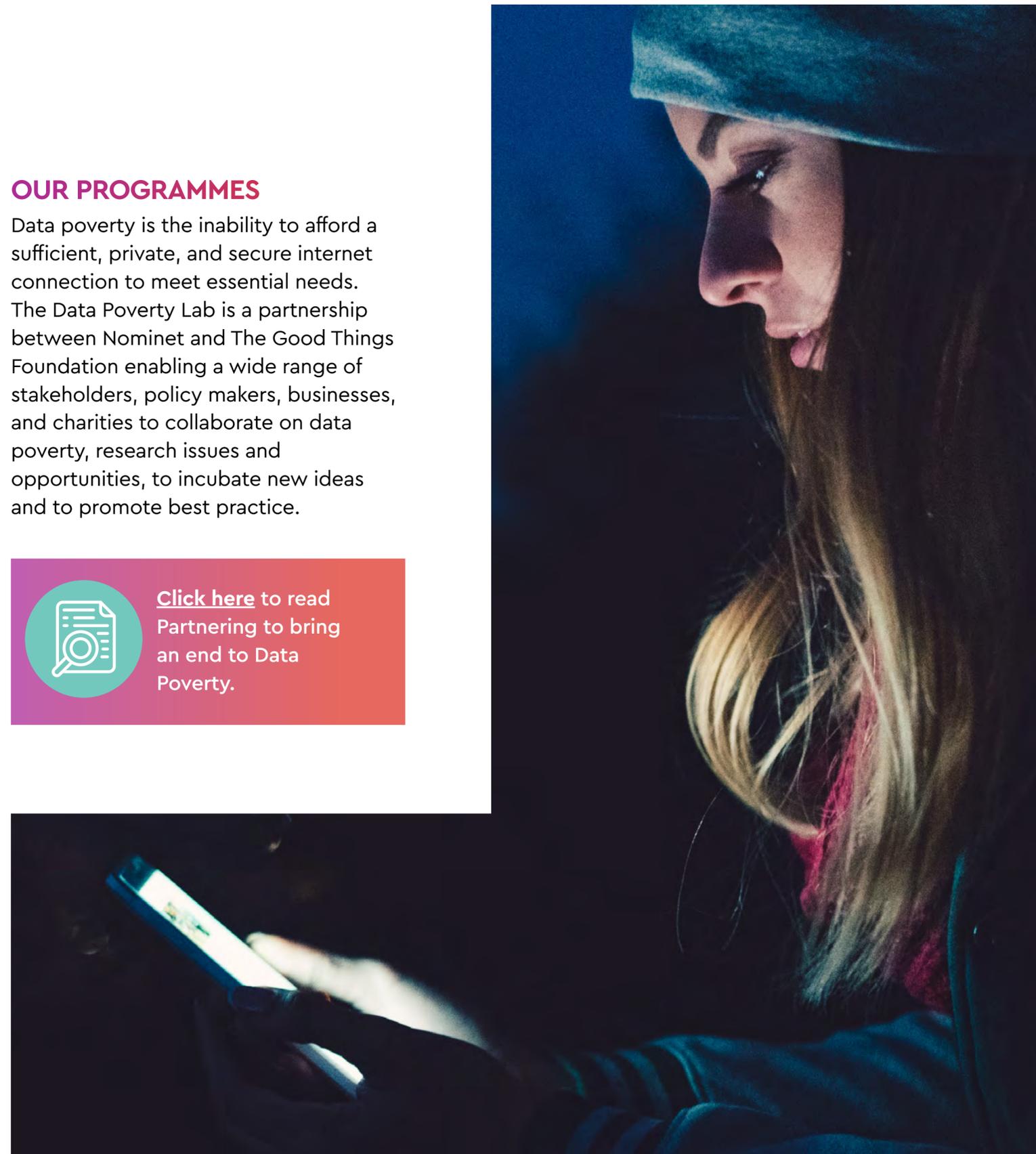
Youth worker

OUR PROGRAMMES

Data poverty is the inability to afford a sufficient, private, and secure internet connection to meet essential needs. The Data Poverty Lab is a partnership between Nominet and The Good Things Foundation enabling a wide range of stakeholders, policy makers, businesses, and charities to collaborate on data poverty, research issues and opportunities, to incubate new ideas and to promote best practice.



[Click here](#) to read Partnering to bring an end to Data Poverty.



Digital Skills and Careers

In an evolving digital world, proficiency and confidence in digital skills is vital for helping young people to develop into active, independent citizens. An ability to use digital skills with ease enables them to engage with the wider world. It supports them with both formal and informal learning, managing their schoolwork, and is critical for finding and applying for work.

For some, digital skills will form a cornerstone for their future career path. While young people are often seen as digital natives, the Nominet Digital Youth Index highlights some significant gaps in young people's digital skills.

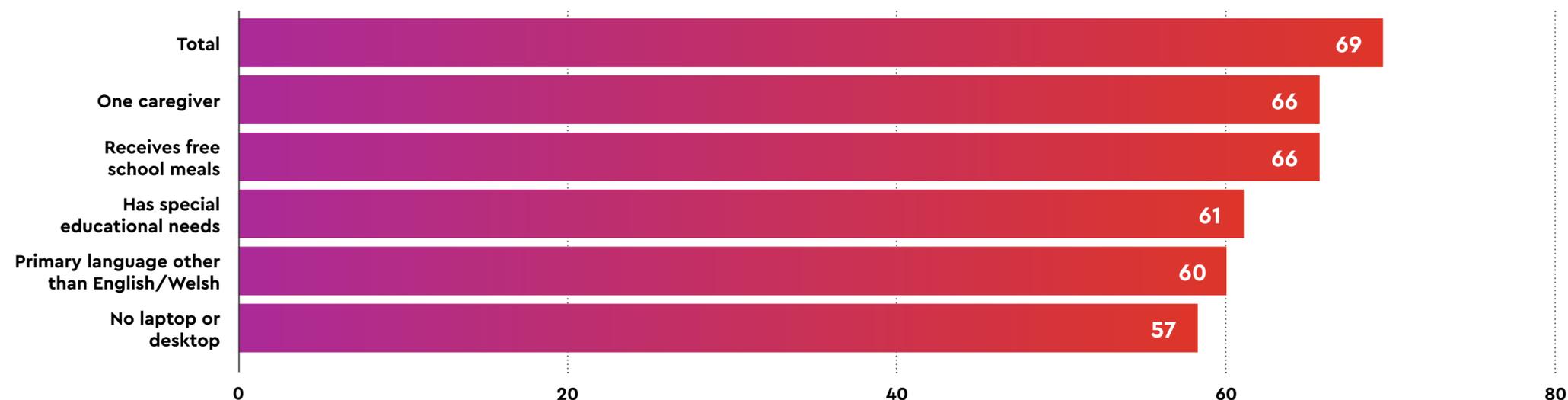
Schools aren't always seen to be teaching the basics, and parents aren't necessarily best placed to address these needs due to a disconnect in their own skills or their perception of their children's digital abilities.

While nine in ten (89%) young people do not need help when using a computer for school, university or work, fewer find it easy to do some of the core tasks required for learning and working in today's digital ecosystems. Around seven in ten find it easy to access a virtual work environment (68%) or a virtual classroom (72%). As with many of

the measures in our Index, these scores are lower for young people with single caregivers, special educational needs, receiving free school meals, living in a home where English or Welsh is not the primary language, and where they don't have access to a laptop or desktop.

Research that Catch22 are conducting in conjunction with Nominet will explore the breadth of digital skills – from foundational to advanced. The research seeks to find and address the barriers which are holding people back from gaining these skills.

AVERAGE DIGITAL SKILLS AND CAREERS SCORES



Average of Index measures for Digital Skills and Careers. Base: all respondents (2,000)

The data also shows how almost half of young people (48%) are teaching themselves digital skills, equivalent to 6.9 million young people, often with little input from parents or teachers. We also see that technology-related jobs are more appealing to younger children, young men, and those with higher income levels, despite most young people equally seeing technology as essential to their future jobs.

Almost half of young people (48%) are teaching themselves digital skills, equivalent to 6.9 million young people.

OVERALL SKILLS AND CAREERS INDEX SCORE	69
% who do not need help when you need to do something for school, university or work using a computer	89
% who receive/d good training from school to help me use technology	79
Find it easy to read or view documents or videos that my teachers send me	78
Find it easy to communicate with my colleagues by email or chat if I need help	75
Find it easy to use the internet to help me with school work	75
Find it easy to communicate with my teachers by email or chat if I need help	74
Find it easy to send schoolwork to my teachers by email or chat	74
Find it easy to send files to my colleagues or people outside my organisation by email or chat	73
Find it easy to read or view documents that my colleagues or people outside my organisation send me	73
Find it easy to access a virtual classroom/ lesson	72
Find it easy to use the internet to find out about future jobs and careers	69
Find it easy to access a virtual work environment	68
Find it easy to use the internet to help me with solving problems at work	68
Find it easy to use the internet to find a job	62
% whose parents taught them digital skills	39
% whose teachers taught them digital skills	32

Key findings



Nine in ten (89%) young people do not need help when using a computer for school, university, or work.



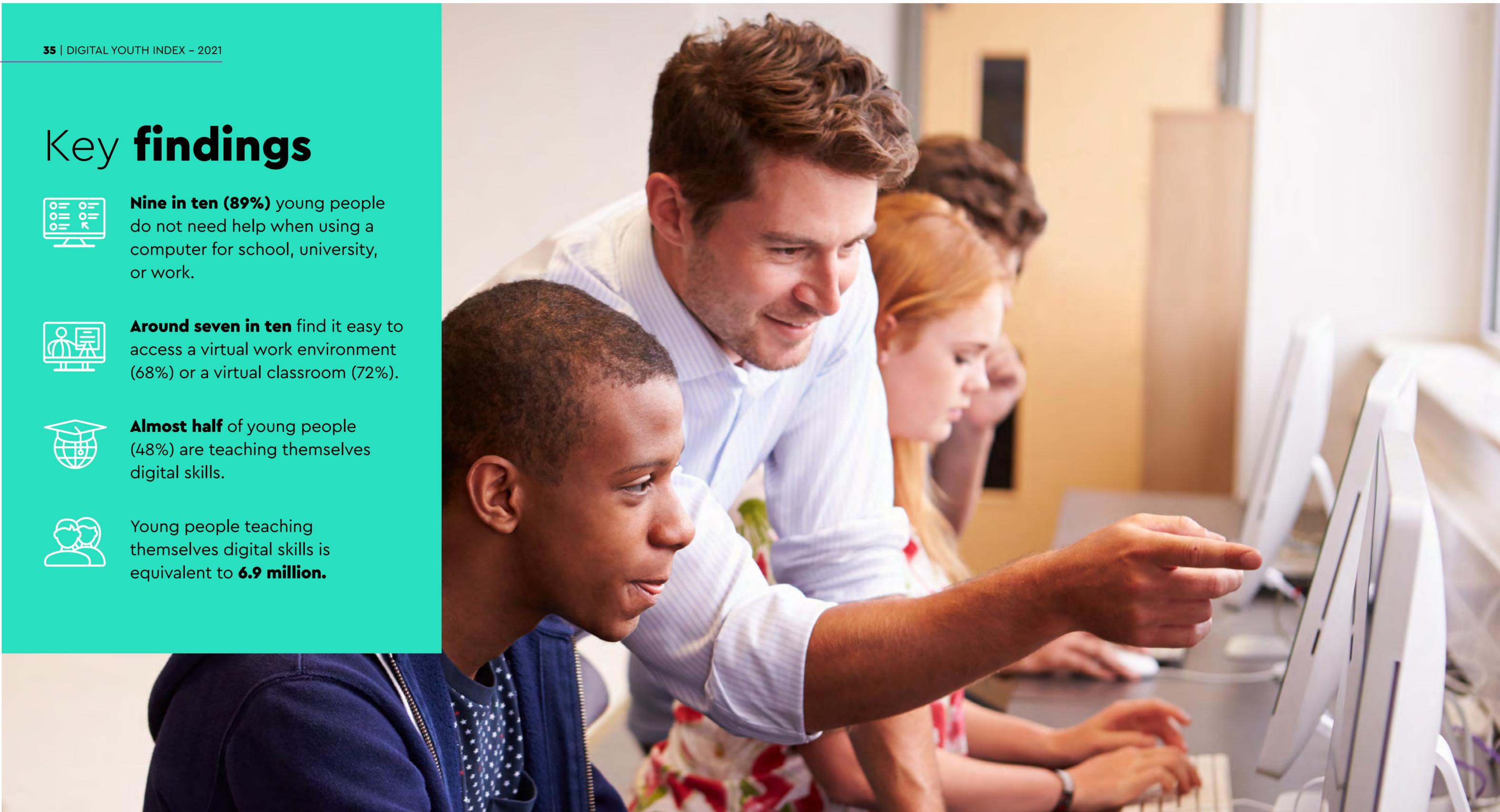
Around seven in ten find it easy to access a virtual work environment (68%) or a virtual classroom (72%).



Almost half of young people (48%) are teaching themselves digital skills.



Young people teaching themselves digital skills is equivalent to **6.9 million**.



Kiren, 14 school

Kiren is from London. Her parents are originally from India, and they mainly speak Punjabi when they are at home. She lives with an older sister and younger brother, plus her grandparents.

The property is rented from another family member; it's fairly crowded and she doesn't have much quiet space to herself.

Both her parents work part-time, doing multiple jobs, but their overall household income is below average. Her parents are keen to move to a bigger place that they own and are saving for the future. Kiren and her older sister both have mobile phones, but they are hand-me-downs from their parents as they can't afford the latest technology. Kiren and her sister get frustrated with these phones at times that they cannot use newer apps, and when the internet is running slowly.

She goes to the local academy school and enjoys her lessons. She has good friends, but her home and school lives are quite separate. She doesn't see her friends much outside of school, and instead, relies on communicating with them on her phone in group messages. She feels glad that she is able to speak to her friends in this way, and worries about how isolated she would feel without a phone.

At home, the family shares a single laptop between them.

During lockdown, this made doing schoolwork very difficult. She tried to log in to some lessons on Teams using an older smartphone, but the screen was small, so she struggled to engage with all the lessons and she ended up not doing full school days. This frustrated her, as she likes school and is keen to learn.

When she is able to use the laptop, she finds it easy to access and send education materials and complete assignments and homework.

When she has questions about how to do things, she asks her brother or sister or friends as her parents are hands-off when it comes to teaching her digital skills. Her extended family do not tend to use social media, chat, or video calls to keep in touch with each other, which meant during the lockdowns Kiren went a long time not speaking to family members who lived far away, which upset her as she missed being able to speak to those she loved.

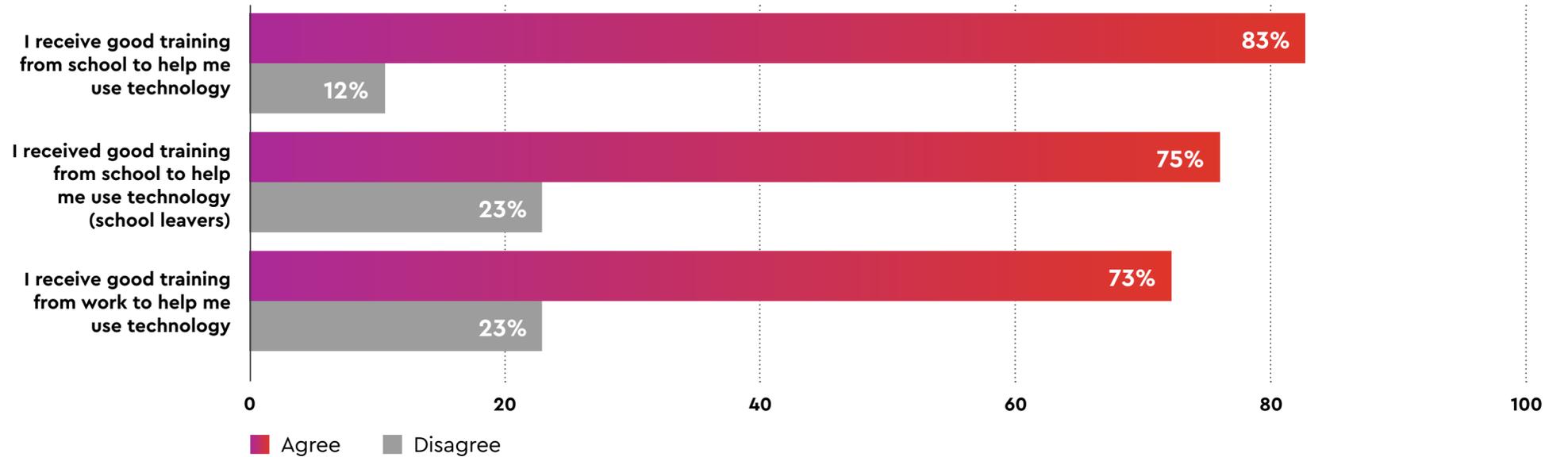


LEFT TO THEIR
OWN DEVICES

Young people are 'left to their own devices' when it comes to digital skills

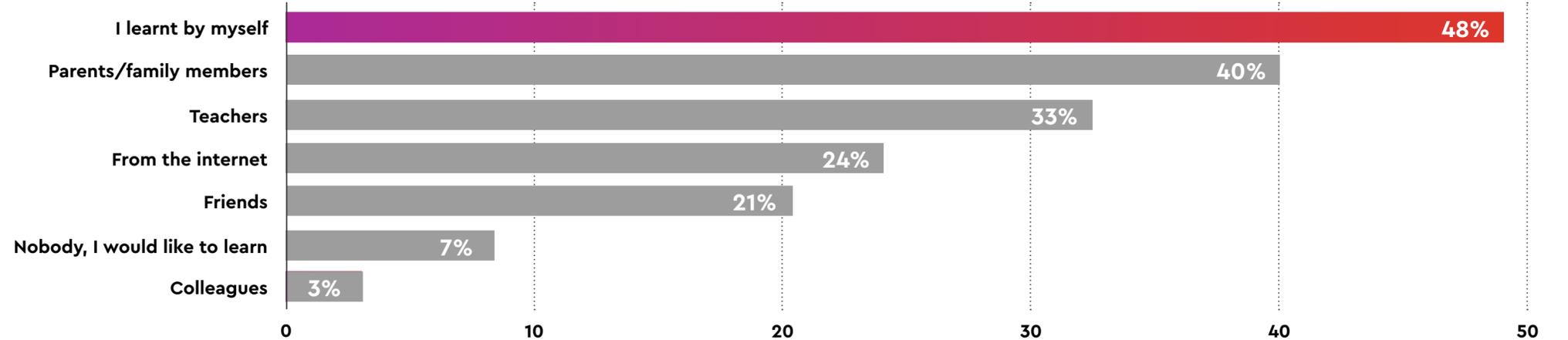
Almost half of young people (48%) are teaching themselves digital skills, equivalent to 6.9 million young people.

PERCEPTION OF TRAINING TO USE TECHNOLOGY FROM SCHOOL OR WORK



Q16_2. I received good training from school to help me use technology. Base: (1,000)
 Q16_6. I receive good training from school to help me use technology. Base: (1,000)
 Q16_5. I receive good training from work to use technology. Base: (601)

HOW YOUNG PEOPLE LEARN DIGITAL SKILLS



Q14. Who has taught you digital skills? Base: all respondents (2,000)

Key findings



Young people who are not in any form of education, employment or training are far more likely to be teaching themselves (**73%**) as are those in the C2DE social grade (**52%**).



There is a slight gender difference, with **54%** of young women learning by themselves, versus **43%** of young men.

7% of young people said that nobody had taught them digital skills, although they would have liked to learn - equivalent to almost a million young people (990,000).

However, in the eyes of young people, not all schools and workplaces are providing good digital skills training. 12% of school-aged respondents do not think their school provides good training and almost a quarter of those who have left school (23%) do not think their school provided good training in the use of technology. A quarter of those in work (23%) do not think their employer provides good training to use technology.

OUR PROGRAMMES

The Scouts have developed The Digital Citizen badge, funded by Nominet and which helps young people (aged 6-18) to perform tasks online, understand how digital technology works and be aware of the benefits and risks of being online. Digital skills covered by the badge include how to spot fake news, manage cyberbullying and protect privacy online.



[Click here](#) to read the Nominet Social Impact Report 2021.

DIGITAL CAREERS

You (probably) don't look like me

Tech jobs are least appealing to those most impacted by inadequate tech.

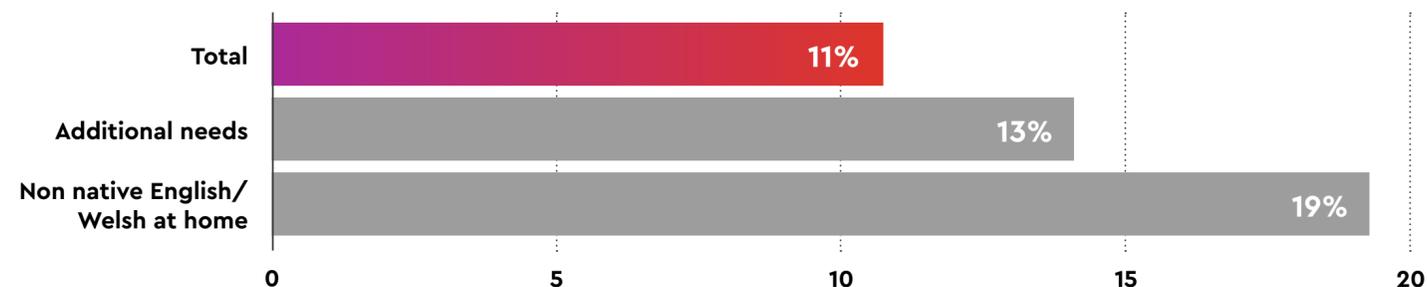
Overall, young people are attracted to the idea of having a job that involves technology and view digital skills as essential for their future career development. However, that desire is higher among young men (78% vs 64% for all young people).



Technology-related jobs are more appealing to younger children, young men, and those with higher income levels.

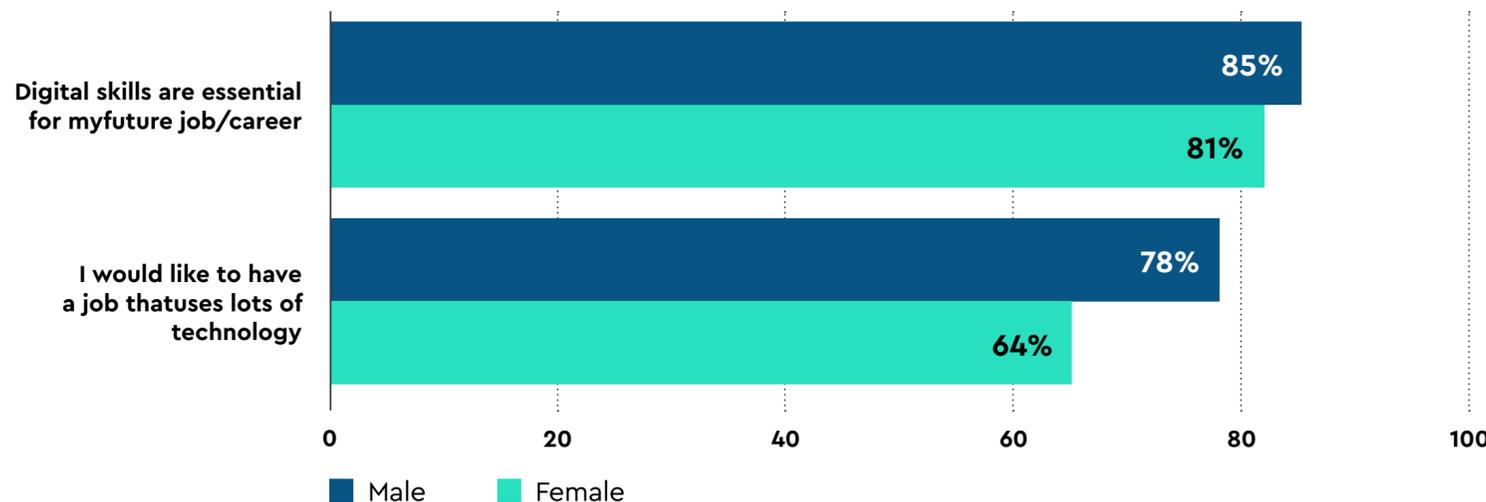
Young people view digital skills as essential for their future career development.

I NEED HELP USING A COMPUTER (%)



Q15. When you need to do something for school, university or work using a computer, which of the following best applies to you? NET: needs help Base: all respondents (2,000), additional needs (663), other languages (175)

TECHNOLOGY AND FUTURE CAREERS (%)



Q16. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Base: all respondents (2,000)

Key findings



Desire for a job that involves technology is higher among young men (78% vs 64% for all young people).



Digital skills from the perspective of parents, teachers, and young people

Qualitative research conducted with parents found that many feel confident about the digital skills of their children.

Parents don't have a reason to believe that their children aren't learning the right skills, especially when their children's technological knowledge and capabilities outweigh their own.

However, the teachers discussed a disconnect in perceived and actual digital skills across the student cohort. While many young people could use the devices and platforms that they engaged with frequently, there was a gap in digital literacy with some young people's keyboard skills being weak, and others being unable to complete relatively basic digital tasks.

"Our students are not tech-savvy at all. I had to do 3 weeks of upskilling in order to use websites, Google docs, etc. just so they could complete tasks before I did any actual online learning... Our students have suffered from not having an ICT department and as a result of this have poor computer skills. Students struggle with simple tasks such as sending emails or adding attachments. This became increasingly evident over lockdown as it was difficult to communicate with students. Even with provision of laptops, the students still didn't actually know how to use them."

Secondary teacher

"I think they learn so much at school with technology, I think they will do just fine."

Parent (digitally disadvantaged)

"The curriculum isn't often fit for purpose. It doesn't address real life or the students' needs... They have scrapped ICT teaching now for computing. It's a big mistake. They try to teach them coding but they can't even use email or Word anymore."

Secondary school teacher

"I think they have better skills than some adults... me included!"

Parent (digitally disadvantaged)

Young people's individual digital knowledge has had a big impact on their home schooling experience. Those with the skills they need to engage in virtual education have been able to access - and enjoy - online learning, while others have been left feeling incapable and exhausted.

"[Home schooling has] definitely affected the youngest two's confidence. [They] think they are stupid and dumb and the return to school was horrific, hence the part-time time table for the rest of the school year."

Parent (digitally disadvantaged)

"Some of the quieter ones could ask you questions in the chat. They would not always have put their hands up in lessons."

Secondary school teacher

"My daughter is aware she's falling behind due to lockdown... she has mentioned that she feels even more stupid and dumb, and I've tried explaining to her it's okay to struggle, everyone struggles in their day-to-day life, but since going back to school it has made her feel a bit better and has her much more focused on her schoolwork and education."

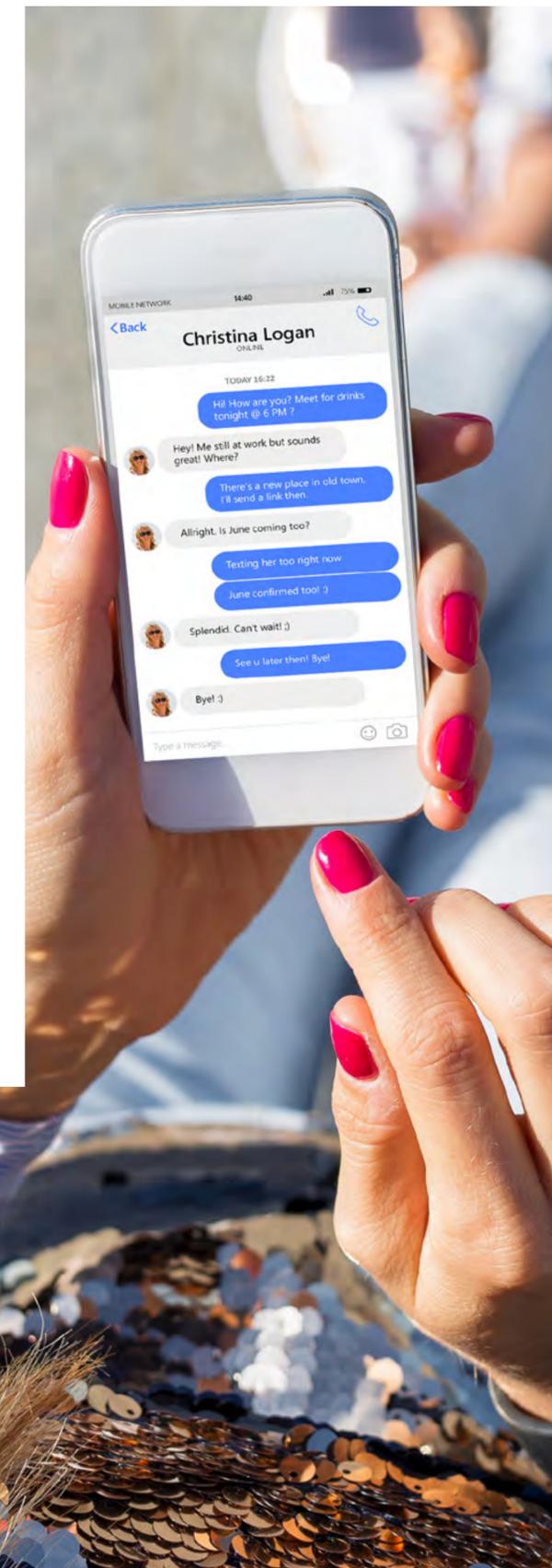
Parent (of a young person living with disability and/or SEN)

OUR PROGRAMMES

THIS IS HOW is the podcast series that was developed as a joint venture between Nominet and the creative business, Livity. It aims to reduce the digital skills gap in the UK. The podcast focuses on motivating young people (aged 16-24) to explore digital careers. The platform supports their progress towards gaining knowledge, skills, and qualifications in that discipline, including offering subsidised courses.



[Click here to find out more about THIS IS HOW.](#)



Use of essential online services

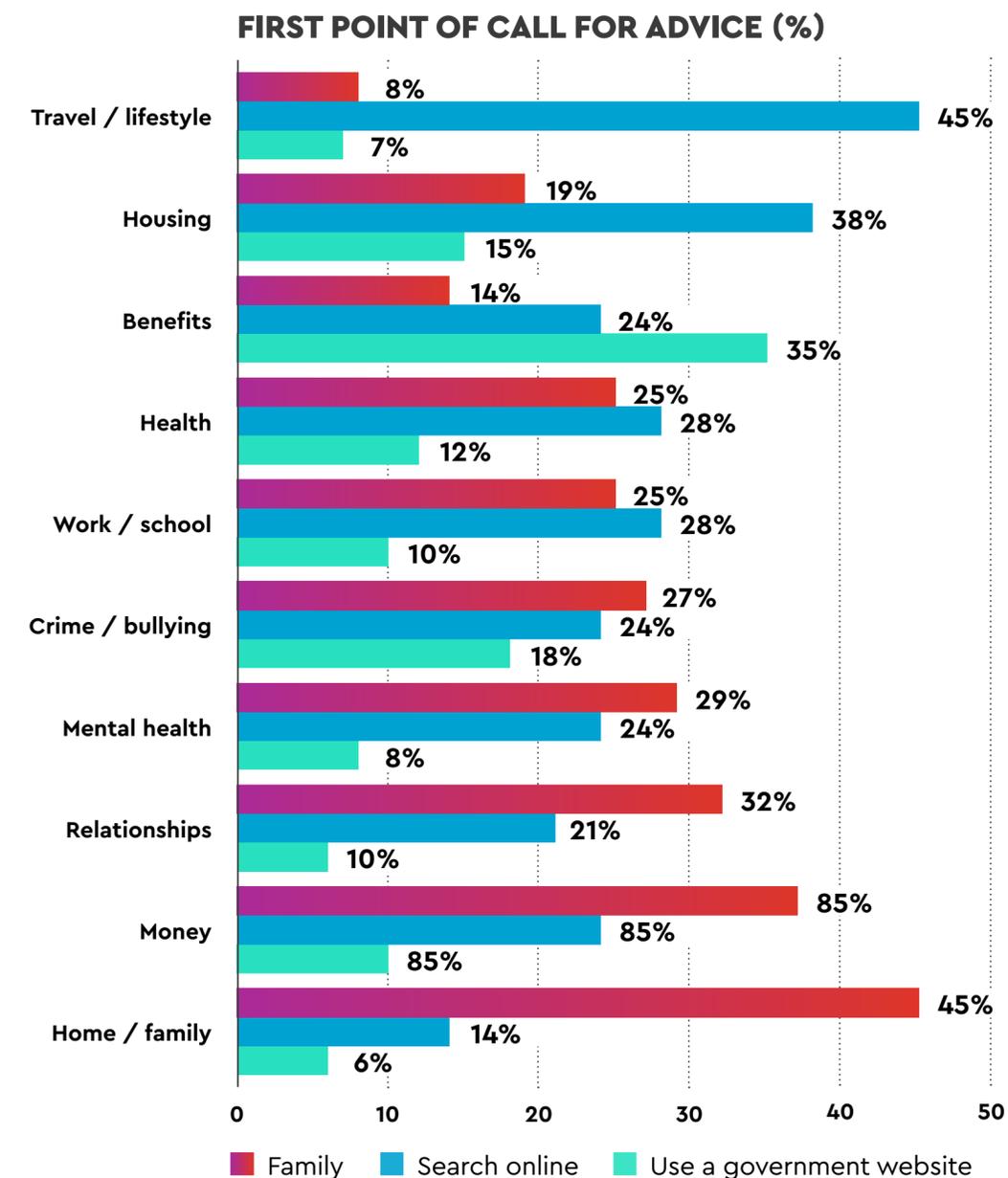
Young people navigating their way into adulthood told us that they gather advice on various issues relevant to their lives from a range of sources, particularly family, but increasingly online.

When asked where they would go first for advice on a range of issues, young people selected 'search the issue online' for four out of ten situations, including 'travel / lifestyle' (45%), 'housing' (38%), 'health' (28%), and 'work/school' (28%): issues that are factual or require a certain element of personal discretion.

Young people are more likely to turn to family for advice on more emotionally charged or complex topics, such as relationships, feelings, money, bullying, home and family. An example of this has been the partnership Nominet and Samaritans have formed, which focuses on digital access to mental health and well-being services.

Samaritans and Nominet entered the second year of their digital transformation partnership soon after the first COVID-19 lockdown was announced. Although 30% of the volunteers were unable to attend their shifts due to shielding or caring for a loved one who was shielding, Samaritans maintained 24-hour coverage of all services, with the only pause being for the face-to-face services. The reporting period encompasses the launch of two Nominet funded projects, the Online Chat and the Self-Help Tool, and the continued use of the volunteer dashboard.

The third most popular resources to turn to overall are government websites, which are more likely to be visited when seeking advice about specific needs such as benefits.



Q10. Where would you first go to for advice on the following things? Base: all respondents (2,000)

Being able to search for information and access essential services online empowers young people to get the help that's right for them. The speed and ease with which information can be found online are the main reasons young people use the internet to help with issues.



The perceived anonymity and secrecy offered by the internet are also key drivers for young people to use it to get help.

Almost a third of those using online services (32%) did so because they could remain anonymous and a quarter (26%) because they could find out information in secret. It also shows that one in seven young people who use an online service (15%) did so because they disliked talking to people in person.

The qualitative research explored these themes in more depth, exploring how greater access to online services and information, often found in secret and anonymously, needs to be combined with good skills to appropriately assess and analyse information.

OUR PROGRAMMES

Nominet launched its project #RESET, collaborating with partners who deliver online programmes that are working to meet the mental health needs of young people today. Whether it's transforming existing digital apps or services, integrating more features to existing products, or creating new tools that will offer better services to those they seek to help, #RESET aims to increase the reach and impact of mental health services for young people.



[Click here](#) to find out more about the Nominet #RESET Mental Health Programme.



Use of essential online services **in their own words**

The evolution of digital services can help young people access essential online services – the services' flexibility makes them easier to access.

Case study: **Dominic, 25**



Dominic lives with his partner and balances university study with working full-time hours as a waiter and volunteering.



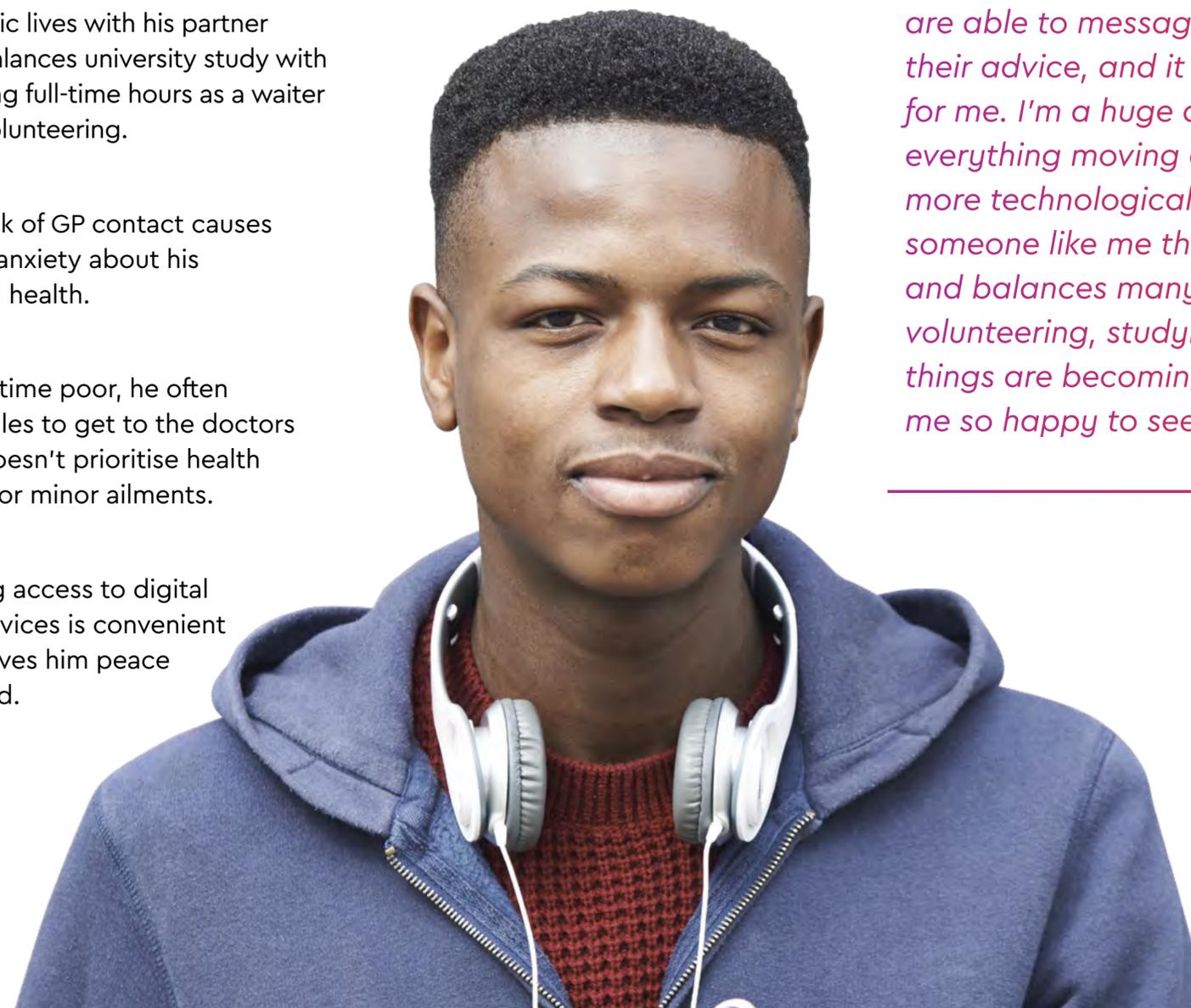
His lack of GP contact causes some anxiety about his overall health.



Being time poor, he often struggles to get to the doctors and doesn't prioritise health visits for minor ailments.



Having access to digital GP services is convenient and gives him peace of mind.



"Getting help online is the big one that has changed for me and improved my life so much more. I used to rarely go to the doctors, and I would worry about things because it was hard to get in the doctors, especially over something small. Now you are able to message them and ask for their advice, and it has been revolutionary for me. I'm a huge advocate for almost everything moving online and becoming more technologically advanced. For someone like me that has limited free time and balances many things such as work, volunteering, studying etc. I love that things are becoming easier and it makes me so happy to see these changes."

The added layer of anonymity provided by a digital interface is attractive to many young people, especially when seeking help around issues like mental health. Self-directed research is often the first port of call when older young people seek support.

However, concerns shared by young people highlight the importance of honing the critical skills needed to make sure they can evaluate what is most helpful and trustworthy, with what might actually be harmful.

Focus groups with secondary school teachers, youth workers and social workers also highlighted the knowledge gaps among professionals about reliable online sources that can be shared with young people. While some rely on a bank of resources provided by industry and charities, this knowledge is not standardised, and some feel overwhelmed by the volume of information that is available.

Qualitative research conducted with young people living with cognitive disability and their parents highlights additional barriers to accessing online services faced by those with additional support needs.

"It can be a source of comfort for students who do not want to talk about their problems and want to research particular issues."

Secondary school teacher

"If u [sic] can talk to a bot programmed by a therapist online that would be amazing..."

Male, 10, SEN

"If Google had better answers, I would love it."

Male, 10

"Getting help online by talking to strangers is quite weird and the strangers might be wrong."

Male, 10

"I'm sure there are hundreds [of resources] out there, it's just knowing about the resources."

Social worker



Case study: Bailey, 25



Bailey lives with dyslexia and mild cerebral palsy. She struggles with spelling, reading and writing, and is supported by a scribe at college.



Bailey is frustrated by the usability of websites and wishes that companies would integrate tech innovations to make their online services more accessible and user friendly.

"I would love voice-activated searches on websites, like shopping ones, and [for] it to talk back what's in the basket...I really struggle sometimes that the microphone on things doesn't recognise your voice; it [is] very annoying..."

"Everything you do should have a disability-friendly part. It can be awful sometimes and puts me off [using websites]. Also, I would like it to just be accessible [and] not a special thing you have to draw attention to. I don't want to be treated different (sic)..."

Moderator: *"I'm sorry to hear that. Please could you tell me more about the tasks that are particularly hard when they aren't using tools that are disabled friendly? When was the last time you had difficulty?"*

"Like when I'm searching for certain clothes and my spelling is a bit wrong or I can't spell it. It just says nothing found and I can't speak [it] and find it or doesn't read it out to me. So, I just close it."



Digital safety and resilience

Internet safety is a primary concern for both parents and professionals working with young people. They have broad concerns about young people's engagement in an unregulated online world, and grooming, sexual exploitation and online bullying are the main cited fears.

Furthermore, there is reference to the internet being a gateway to risky behaviours, such as online gambling. Professionals, in particular, are acutely aware that the digital landscape is fast-moving, and they recognise that skills and knowledge need to be continually updated to protect young people from evolving threats.

When young people themselves think of online safety, they are predominantly concerned with data protection and keeping their personal details safe. While this is an important issue, it highlights some naivety regarding wider safeguarding risks that young people are vulnerable to.

EXAMPLES OF POOR ONLINE SAFETY



From an online discussion with young people. The size of the word denotes the frequency of mentions when asking what online safety means.

OVERALL SAFETY INDEX SCORE	77
% feel safe online	94
% understand that my passwords and personal information need to be kept safely as they have value to others	91
% aware why I cannot take and use content (images and documents from the web) that belongs to others without their permission because I know that online material is subject to copyright and intellectual property legislation	89
% aware why it is important to keep my computer systems and security software up to date and I allow them to be updated when prompted	88
% aware that others can capture and use my data and that I can protect and secure my personal data against such threats through privacy settings	88
% aware that viruses can damage my computer and that security software should be used to prevent this	88
% who understand what 'internet safety' means?	87
% aware of the risks and threats involved in carrying out activities online and the importance of working securely	86
% aware that my online activity produces a permanent record which could be accessed by others and used both now and in the future	84
% aware that I must not share other people's data online without their consent	83
% who can keep the information I use to access my online accounts secure, using different and secure passwords for websites and accounts	81
% who can recognise suspicious links in email, websites, social media messages and pop ups and know that clicking on these links or downloading unfamiliar attachments could put me and my computer at risk	77
% who can set privacy settings on my social media and other accounts	72
% who can identify secure websites by looking for the padlock and https in the address bar	71
% whose parents have taught them about internet safety	54
% whose teachers have taught them about internet safety	54
% who have never experienced anything upsetting online	26

Chloe, 18 student

Chloe is in her first year at a campus university in the East of England. She's excited about the new independence away from her parents and already enjoying her course.

She has settled in fairly well to campus life. A big part of her life is spent using her brand-new laptop and smartphone, which her parents paid for just before she started. She uses the high-speed university WiFi across the campus, including in her university accommodation to communicate with friends and family back at home. She is doing well in her studies and, outwardly, seems happy. However, inside, she is struggling to connect with new people she has met at university, and she feels that she has not met others with similar interests to hers. Despite the ability to connect with people, she feels increasingly isolated from others, and looks online for her main emotional connections, both with old friends and people with similar interests to hers.

Chloe is part of the LGBTQ+ community and belongs to a lot of online groups that celebrate and discuss issues related to gender and sexuality.

She feels like she is using the right tools and settings to keep herself safe from harmful material online but is still finding herself exposed to things on social media that she finds upsetting, particularly of a graphic sexual nature. She has experienced significant online abuse from others, either directly to her or to people who are part of the LGBTQ+ community. She is also increasingly receiving unwarranted sexual messages and requests for sexual images from people she doesn't know, via TikTok and SnapChat, some of whom she suspects are other students. She talks about these things to her best friends but hides them from her parents. She is growing increasingly nervous every time her phone pings, worried about what the next message might be.

Chloe needs the right emotional and pastoral support to face these challenges, but inbuilt safeguards in the platforms that she uses would help too, making sure that she is less likely to receive unsolicited messages without her having to adjust all the settings herself.



RISKS ONLINE/

SUPPORT

***Nearly 3 in 5 (58%)
young people in the
LGBTQ+ community
have experienced
hate speech online.***

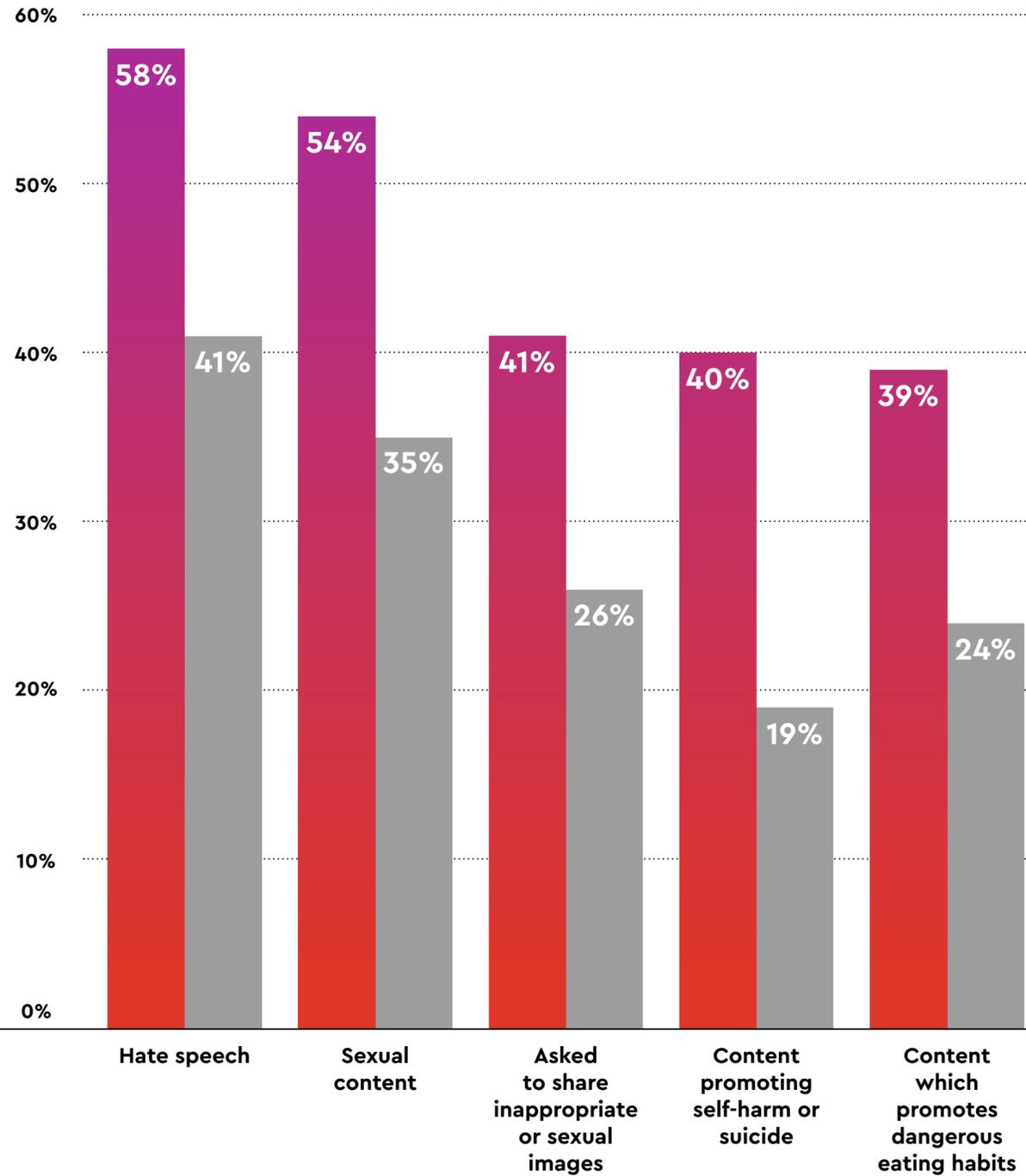
The young people facing most risks online may also rely most on online support.



Q22A. Have you ever seen or experienced anything online that made you upset?
 Base: (1559) total, (835) heterosexual, (107) NET: LGBTQ+, (1086) white, (443) Black, Asian and other ethnic minority

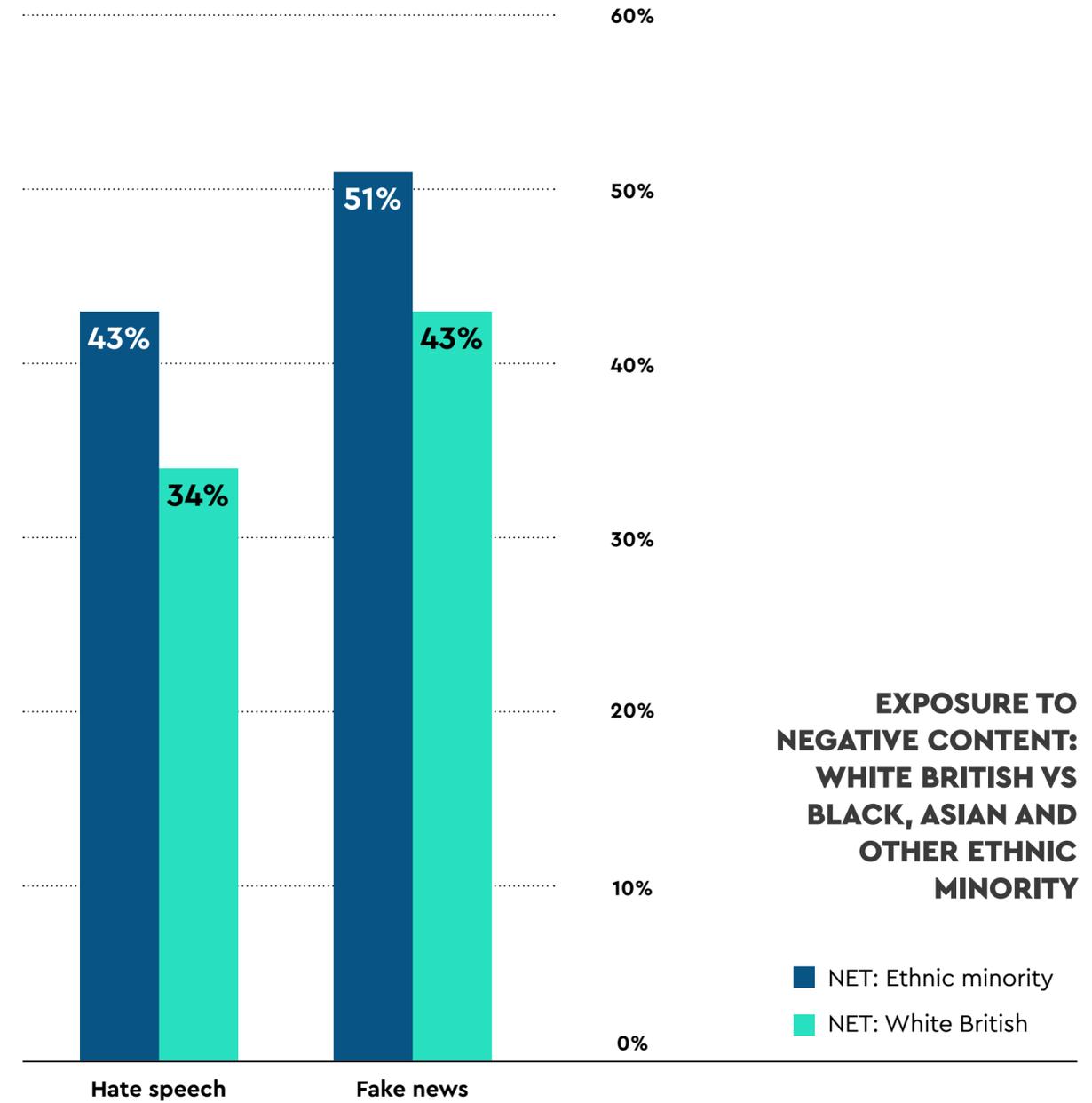
EXPOSURE TO NEGATIVE CONTENT: HETEROSEXUAL VS LGBTQ+ PEOPLE

■ Heterosexual / straight
 ■ NET: LGBTQ+



EXPOSURE TO NEGATIVE CONTENT: WHITE BRITISH VS BLACK, ASIAN AND OTHER ETHNIC MINORITY

■ NET: Ethnic minority
 ■ NET: White British



This section goes into more detail on the disconnect between young people's perception of safety and reality and who is particularly at risk.

The internet is an important way in which young people connect with their friends. One of the most common things young people do (55%) is to message friends and family, play online games (49%), and browse posts, videos, and images from others (48%).

Nearly 3 in 5 (58%) young LGBTQ+ people, and over 2 in 5 (43%) of young people who are Black, Asian or another ethnic minority, have experienced hate speech online, compared to 37% of young people overall.

Minority ethnic and young LGBTQ+ people are more likely to experience upsetting events online. Nearly 3 in 5 (58%) young LGBTQ+ people and over 2 in 5 (43%) young people who are Black, Asian or another ethnic minority have experienced hate speech online, compared to 37% of young people overall. This equates to 870,000 young LGBTQ+ people, 1.4 million young Black, Asian or other ethnic minority people, and 4.1 million young people overall.

Other research¹ shows LGBTQ+ individuals are more likely to have lower levels of well-being compared to their heterosexual peers and are more likely to find solace in online communities. However, LGBTQ+ young people are more likely to experience hate speech online (58% vs 41% of heterosexual people), see content promoting self-harm or suicide (39% vs 24%), be asked to share inappropriate or sexual images (41% vs 26%), and see content which promotes dangerous eating habits (39% vs 24%).

1. The digital development of LGBTQ youth: identity, sexuality, and intimacy, Hatchel, T. (2016)

Our research shows that young people who are Black, Asian, or from other ethnic minority groups are more likely to experience hate speech than those of white ethnicity (43% vs 37%).



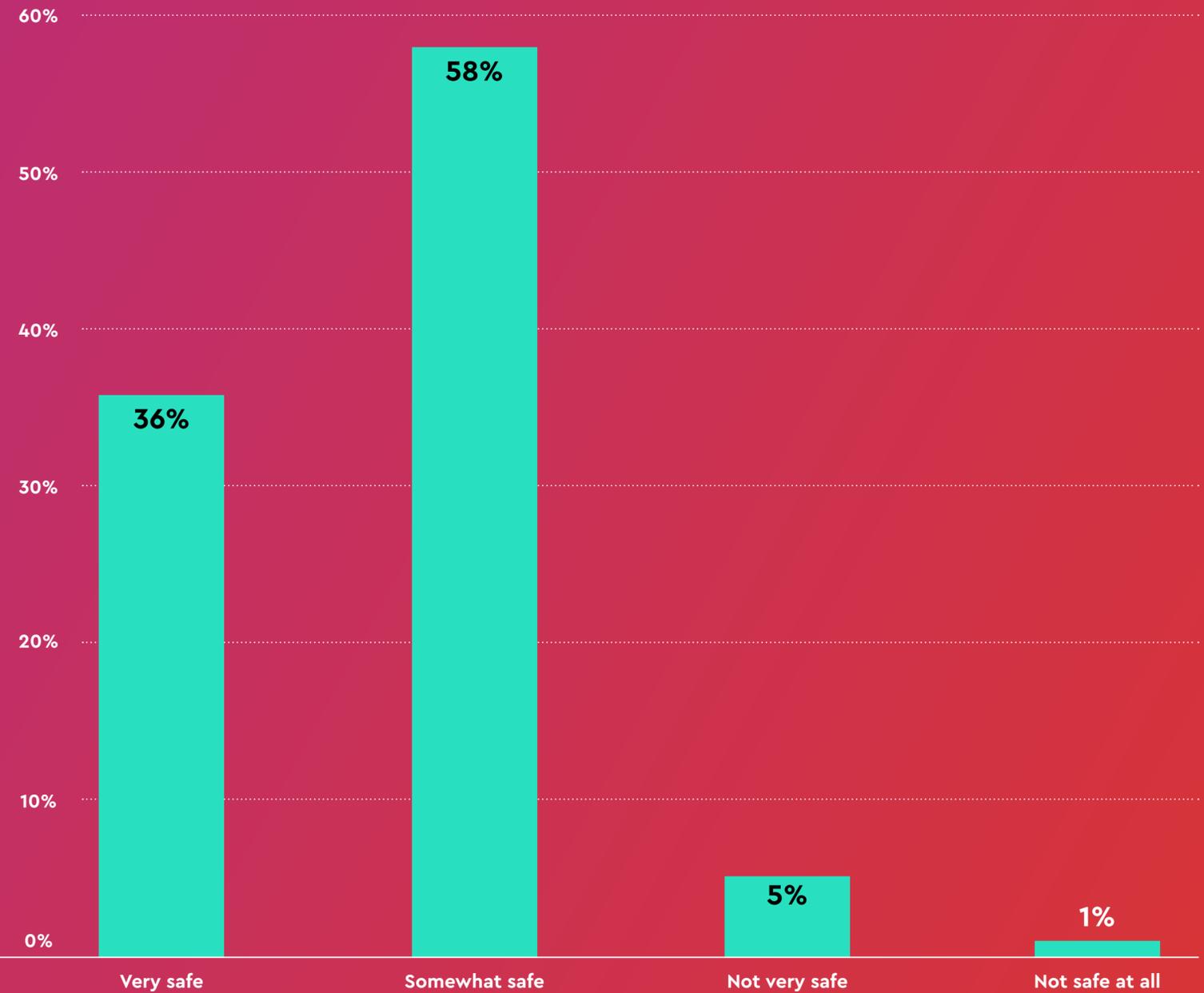
INTERNET

SAFETY

Young people and adults are poles apart on internet safety

Most young people (94%) feel safe online, but parents and professionals working with young people are less convinced.

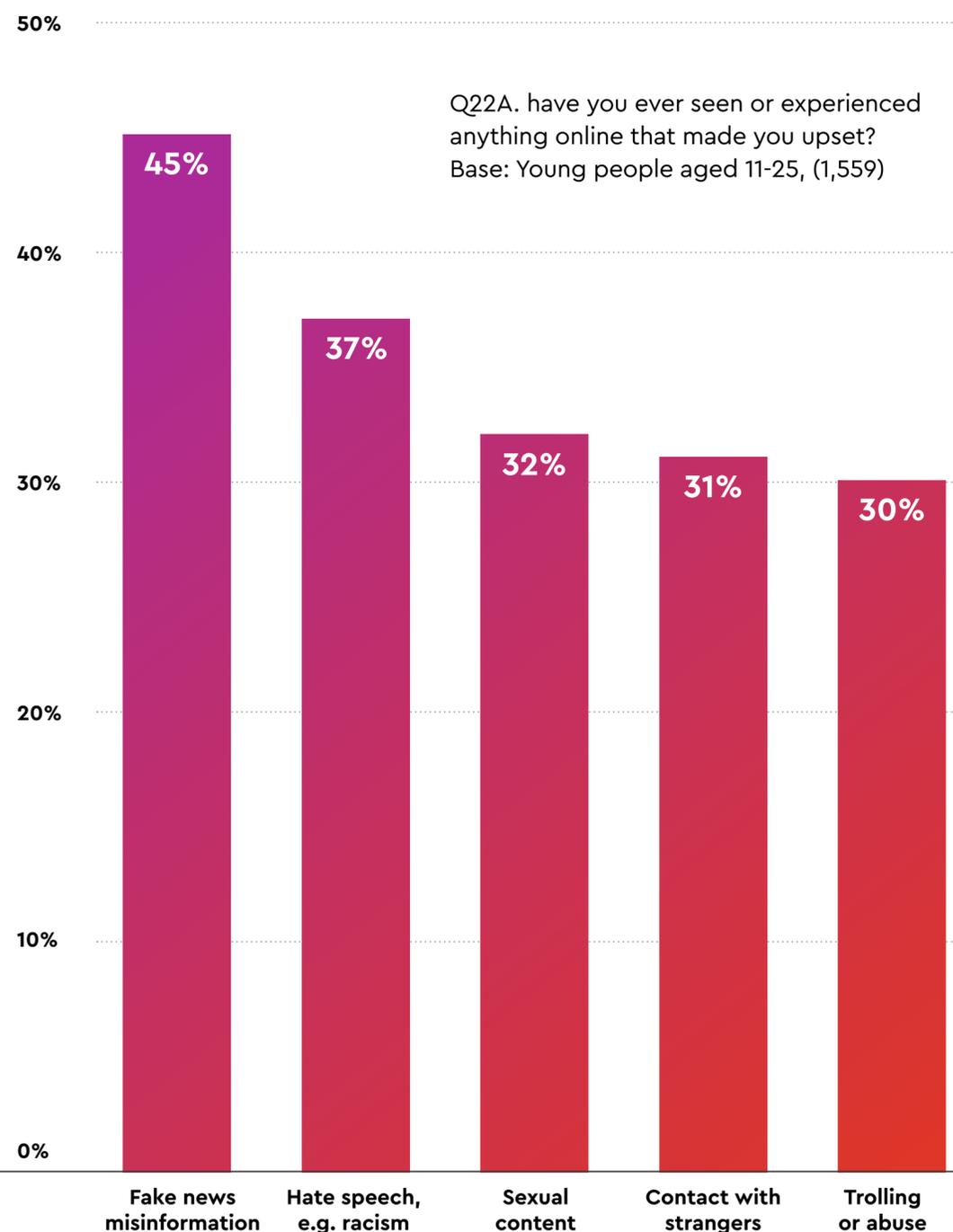
HOW SAFE DO YOUNG PEOPLE FEEL ONLINE?



Q21A. How safe do you feel when online? Base: all respondents (2,000)

Most young people (94%) feel safe online but 83% of young people aged 11 or above have experienced something that they found upsetting, including fake news, hate speech, sexual content and contact with strangers.

TOP 5 UPSETTING THINGS YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE EXPERIENCED ONLINE



When asked about online safety in the qualitative research, young people predominantly thought first about data protection and keeping their personal details safe. Among the 6% who did not feel safe, the most common reason for this was concern regarding theft of personal information or identity theft.

While a similar proportion of young men and women feel unsafe online (4% of young men vs. 6% of young women), young women are more likely to have seen or experienced something upsetting online. Nearly a third (30%) of females aged 12 years or over have been asked to share inappropriate or sexual images compared to 14% of males. A similar difference is also seen for content promoting dangerous eating habits: 27% of females have seen this vs. 14% of males.

Young people are aware of privacy settings across social media and gaming sites and, therefore, feel that the power is in their hands to accept or decline invitations.

However, throughout the qualitative research, we observed that young people's knowledge of and engagement in internet safety varied, and they sometimes spoke about superficial measures or beliefs such as that the brand of phone they use would keep them safe online.

Parents and professionals working with young people tend to be more aware of safeguarding issues and express concerns that young people may be naive about their vulnerabilities. Although parents may say that they are confident that their child would know how to respond to different situations, they are sometimes shocked at the choices their children make.

Digital safety and resilience in their own words

The qualitative discussions with young people found that when young people think of online safety, they are predominantly concerned with data protection and keeping their personal details safe.

Parents and professionals working with young people are, on the other hand, most concerned about safeguarding risks.

Throughout the research, we observed a disconnect in some young people's knowledge of internet safety, their engagement in risky behaviours and their perceived level of harm.

While young people are aware of the potential dangers, many express a false confidence concerning their level of protection from them, believing superficial measures – such as the brand of phone they use – would keep them safe. Professionals working with young people share the view that many are naive about their own vulnerabilities and require regular reminders about the risks involved.



Stranger danger

As young people become more independent, they enjoy freedoms around making new connections with like-minded people online. Many young people shared that they felt comfortable talking to – and in some cases, even meeting – online strangers, especially when these relationships had been developed through a shared passion for online gaming.

"I have trouble with young people meeting, making arrangements and going off to meet strangers."

Social worker

"I play with strangers and online friends because my real-life friends aren't on Fortnite anymore. I feel safe with the strangers and online friends though."

Male, 11

"My year 10 student was bragging about her international friends she has from a game called Discord. Another student promptly reminded her she could be talking to 75-year-old men."

Secondary school teacher



Exposure to inappropriate content

Parents worry about their children seeing inappropriate content online; both accidental viewing of disturbing content that has been published by others, and predatory content that their child has been targeted as a recipient for, such as illicit messages sent via strangers.

This is especially worrying for parents of girls/young women, some of whom have intercepted unsettling messages.

Perceptions that social media platforms are unwilling to intervene with paedophilic content do nothing to ease their concerns around the potential dangers.

Young people would feel confident in blocking requests for inappropriate images from people they don't know, however, the risks present themselves when requests come from people, they have an existing relationship with. Professionals working with young people have seen an increase in sexting activities and agree that young people aren't mindful of the consequences of sending photos until it's too late. One parent described their shock after learning their daughter had sent inappropriate images to another person because they thought their daughter was aware of the risks.

Conversations with teachers highlighted how schools took steps to address online safety throughout school years, but there wasn't a standardised way to address this topic in the curriculum. Some schools had specialist teachers for safeguarding topics, others delivered content through PSHE and relied on their own experience to springboard advice.

"This is sooooo common now. They will not often talk to friends as they are ashamed of even thinking about it. But they may confide in one friend, and they may talk them out of it. If it is a partner, then the pressure to send is often too great. They need to know the facts around the illegality of this act."

Youth worker

"I was shocked at some of the things I found out recently, it's dangerous. I thought my daughter had a head on her shoulders, too ... Some photos found their way onto Snapchat last year, then the boy shared them. Apparently, it's extremely common."

Parent (digitally disadvantaged)

*"I get worried about these kinds of things, but I feel better that my wife monitors my daughters' accounts because there are a lot of sick people out there. Fully grown men have sent d*ck pics via DM on Instagram to my 12-year-old daughter, which my wife has reported over and over, but Instagram don't seem to care about things like this. Because my wife has my daughter's accounts linked to her phone as well, every message, etc., comes up on her phone, so there isn't any way of our daughter getting around this, thankfully!"*

Parent (of a young person living with disability and/or SEN)

There is agreement that early education and repetition is important for embedding learning. Despite online safety being covered numerous times, the importance of some of the messages struggle to cut through to young people.

"At school. Way too often. I've done countless hours on it. It gets old."

Male, 16

"We have an officer assigned to our school who has CLEARLY stated the consequences of sending nudes to all years, and how students should deal with such a situation. It has not stopped students sending videos, which then spread across the school..."

Secondary school teacher

"My 13-year-old tells me he does one day a year in ICT about online safety, and nobody pays attention as it's 'the most boring lesson ever.'"

Parent (of a young person living with disability/SEN)

"I've been through some peoples' phones with them, and we have gone through friends they have. One young lady had about 45 requests from men she didn't know. She was able to see what a danger they were as they were all much older men. She was only 13. She agreed to block them all after completing some direct work with me."

Social worker



Digital well-being

Digital technology plays an important role in the well-being of young people; it's fundamental to developing and maintaining relationships with others and is a primary form of entertainment, downtime and escapism.

Overall, 70% of young people feel happy with life, which is fairly consistent with The Children's Society score of 7.6 out of 10 for the same.

Our research was focused on the role digital technology plays in well-being, rather than well-being on its own.



[Click here](#) to find out more about young people's overall well-being in 2021 in The Children's Society Well-being Index.

The following pages explore how, despite the potential of digital technology to strengthen relationships, nearly half of young people (44%) feel isolated and a third of 17 to 19-year-olds (32%) say the internet has a negative impact on their mental health.

The majority of young people are likely to agree that they are happy with the amount of time they spend on digital devices (66%), that digital use has a positive impact on their relationship with their friends (58%) and their school work (57%).

However, while technology can bring people together, it can make some feel more isolated than ever. Only 31% did not feel isolated from others and only 22% did not have FOMO – fear of missing out – while friends had fun without them.

When taken together, the scores for well-being are the lowest across the Nominet Digital Youth Index. How young people's use of the internet and social media has a more positive effect on their relationship with their family and mental and physical health will be key metrics to watch in future years.

OVERALL DIGITAL WELL-BEING SCORE	50
% who feel in control of what I see and do online	72
% who say being online helps me keep in touch with friends that I would otherwise not see	72
% who are generally happy with life	70
% happy with the amount of time that you spend on your digital devices?	66
% whose use of the internet and digital devices has a positive impact on my relationship with my friends	58
% whose use of the internet and digital devices has a positive impact on my school work	57
% whose use of the internet and digital devices has a positive impact on my work	55
% who think social media is a force for good	47
% whose use of the internet and digital devices has a positive impact on my relationship with my family	46
% whose use of the internet and digital devices has a positive impact on my mental health	44
% whose use of the internet and digital devices has a positive impact on my physical health	40
% who do not feel isolated from others	31
% who don't say social media has a negative impact on people like me	22
% who do not worry about others having fun without me	22

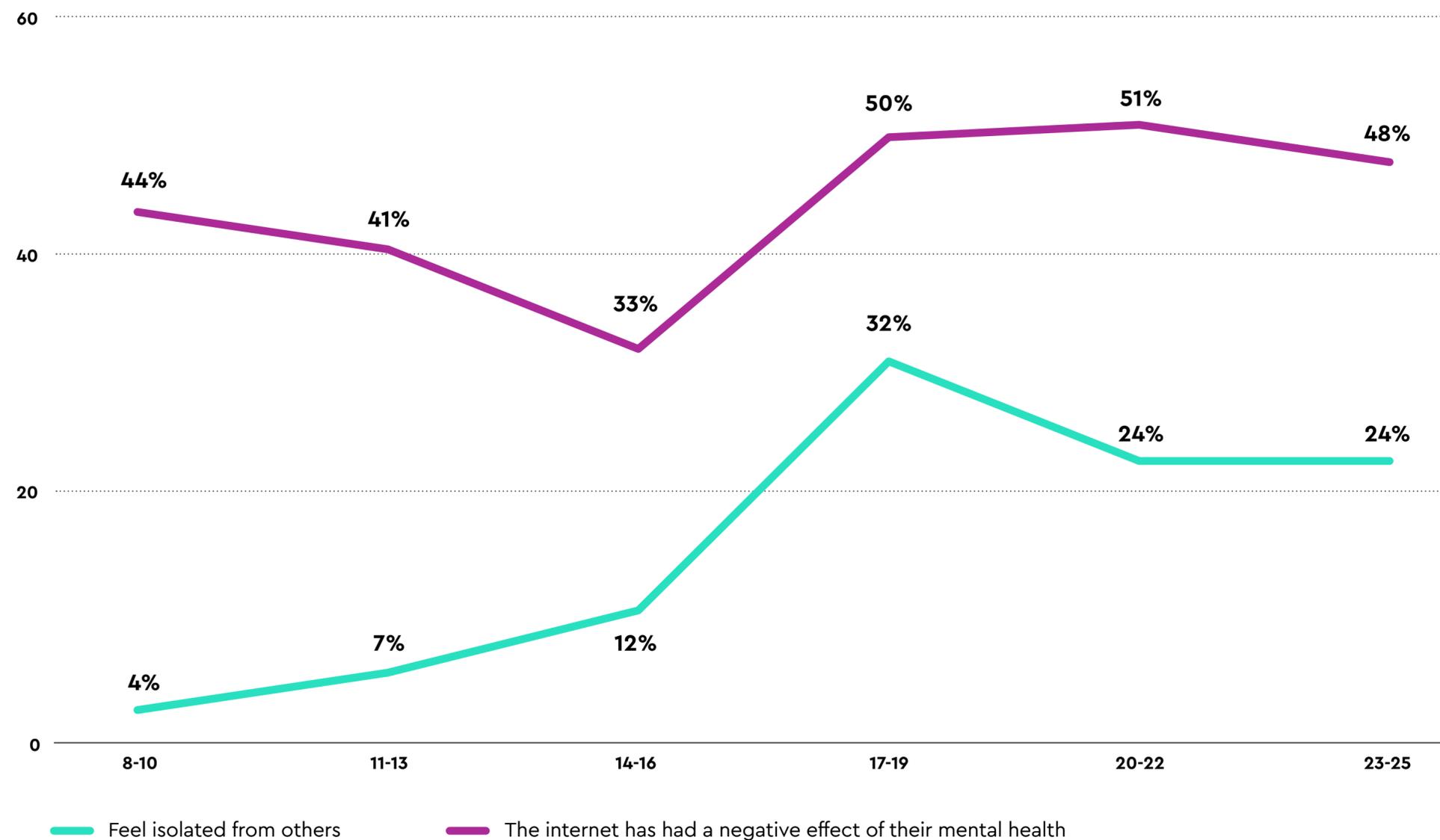
MORE CONNECTED,
MORE ISOLATED

Young people are more connected, yet feeling more isolated: What does this mean for digital mental health and well-being?

Despite the potential of digital to strengthen relationships, nearly half of young people (44%) feel isolated and a third of 17–19 year-olds (32%) say the internet has a negative impact on their mental health.



EFFECT OF TECHNOLOGY ON YOUNG PEOPLE



Q16. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Base: all respondents (2,000)

Digital access creates opportunities for connection but, at the same time, can exacerbate feelings of isolation.

55% of young people say they have been spending more time online due to the pandemic (the equivalent of 8 million young people). 17 to 19-year-olds were especially likely to have spent more time online due to Covid. 68% of this age group said they spent more time online while half (49%) said they felt isolated from others, and 59% worried about others having fun without them.

The qualitative research illustrates how social exclusion can seep into online gaming and messaging too; young people can become upset if their virtual avatars are treated unkindly, when they are excluded from group activities, removed from group chats, or are subjected to online bullying.

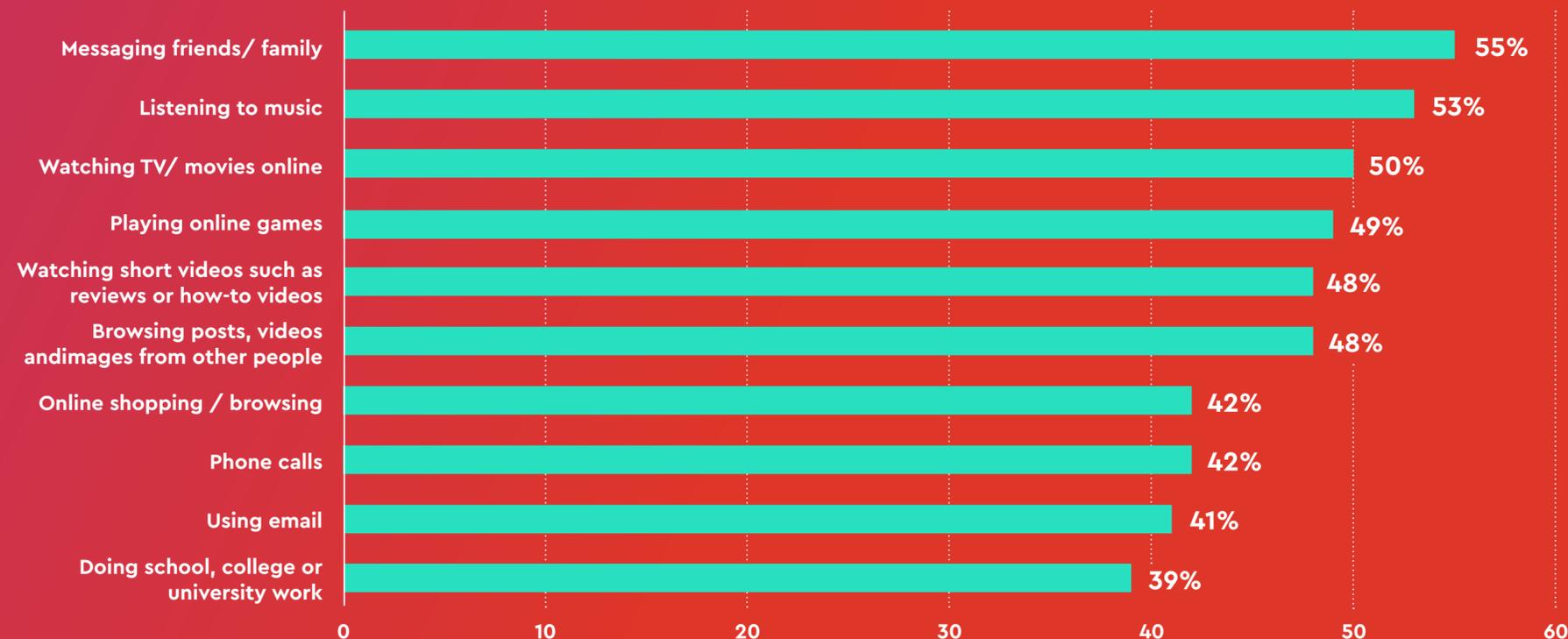
Our focus groups with parents and professionals working with young people highlighted some of the concerns adults have about young people becoming too dependent on online interactions, and the risk of this impacting how often they have face-to-face interactions in real life.

Overall, 17% of young people said their use of the internet and digital devices had a negative impact on their mental health compared to 44% who said it had a positive impact. At the same time, 44% of young people felt isolated from others. This is particularly apparent in those aged 18 or above, where there were higher feelings of isolation. Around half felt isolated and a quarter said that their use of technology and the internet was negatively impacting their mental health.

"[I feel sad] when [my brother] leaves me out or my friends kill me on Fortnite [and] when the internet doesn't work or when I have a tech ban. [I worry about] people being nasty to me on Fortnite. [My brother's] friend was mean to me, so mum banned me from playing with him."

Male, 10

TOP 10 ACTIVITIES YOUNG PEOPLE DO THEIR DEVICES



Q28A. What do you typically spend time using your devices for? Base: all respondents (2,000)

Digital well-being in their own words

The digital landscape is becoming an increasingly prevalent element of daily life and is constantly changing. Professionals recognise that their digital knowledge and skills need to be continually updated to remain relevant and applicable.

They recognise that, at present, the digital space is unregulated, and threats are evolving, albeit when the 2021 online safety bill comes into effect, perceptions may shift.

While there are positive opportunities that technology presents, such as connection, access to information, learning, and entertainment, professionals worry that too much technology erodes other life skills.

Specific areas of concern are young people who engage too much with technology, having a lack of social skills, impatience caused by the instantaneous nature of digital life, and poor concentration.

Among young people, we found that an online presence leads to connections as it is their primary method of communication. It also provides a space for individuals to develop their identity and connect with like-minded people, particularly among minority audiences who have similar lived experiences.

Other concerns professionals have regarding social media are online bullying, the damaging impact of evaluating self-worth based on the number of likes one receives, and it being a gateway to risky behaviours. They are also concerned that social media can exacerbate feelings of isolation, with boundaries of online and offline worlds becoming blurred. This was particularly the case in online gaming, particularly when those who cannot participate are left out.

"If I couldn't keep in touch through social media, it would be very boring, and I would feel quite lonely."
Male, 17

"I have had young people say to me, 'They don't hate me; they spend time talking to me so how do they hate me?'"
Social worker



Conclusion

Following an unprecedented 18 months, this first Nominet Digital Youth Index provides a baseline for young people's use, experience of, and attitudes towards the internet and digital technology.

While the Index reveals that - on the whole - young people have relatively good access to devices, we know that this alone is not enough.

The Index goes beyond infrastructure to incorporate the behaviours, attitudes, relationships, and situations of young people at the intersection of their digital lives.

While young people report they feel safe online, there is a disconnect with how online safety is interpreted, and half of young people are teaching themselves digital skills. We also see a contradiction, with concerns expressed by parents and carers around internet safety. Across the Index, connectivity and well-being are flagged as areas of concern, with a third of 17 to 19-year-olds (32%) saying the internet has a negative impact on their mental health. This all goes to show that factors affecting young people's digital lives are interconnected and cross-cutting.

Where the Index becomes especially powerful is how the data can illustrate specific contexts and demographics. We can see that the people more likely to be left behind in the digital world are those without access to a laptop or desktop, those whose household doesn't primarily speak English or Welsh, those with special educational needs, those receiving free school meals and those being looked after by a single parent or caregiver.

We are at the beginning of a journey as we plan to repeat this research annually and plot trends over time. Already, we can see different lines of enquiry and fields deserving of more attention and analysis. Here are just a few of the questions that we've been thinking about:

- What does a holistic response look like to factors that lead to digital exclusion?
- Do we think young people in the UK have a "right" to home broadband and a device to utilise this connection?
- Is distributing devices an appropriate response to the complex dynamics of unequal access, or what else needs to be included?

- How can we index a dynamic sense of access or connectivity, not just a static one?
- What are the different responses needed towards protecting groups from abuse and enabling the freedom to enjoy the benefits of the internet without fear?
- How can we build a shared language to ensure we're on the same page when it comes to internet safety?
- How are our digital connections affecting our in-person relationships and attitudes towards who we trust?
- What are the implications for employers and educators to optimise education and job sites for mobile use to meet young people where they are?
- How will the Online Harms Bill in the UK affect the duty of care for platform providers? How will this extend to cover both individual and societal harms?
- How can age-appropriate design mitigate negative experiences?

This is why the Nominet Digital Youth Index is also an invitation – to you.

Whether you are a commissioner developing policy, a designer in digital product development or a researcher evaluating the landscape, we hope the Index can support you to map variations in need and circumstances or back up design-led approaches with evidence.

Next steps

We will release the Nominet Digital Youth Index annually and continue to build on the research to explore some of the topics in greater depth as we accumulate trend data and conduct further analyses. We are especially interested in developing longitudinal comparisons. We welcome your feedback to help us understand how you are using the research and the data as well as what more we could do to support you to get the most out of it.

As a next step, we would like to invite you to explore the data yourself and check out our dedicated website alongside data snapshots, blogs, and further resources at www.digitalyouthindex.uk.



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Appendices

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Opinium conducted a multi-phased research programme to provide a breadth and depth of insight into young peoples' digital experiences, using both qualitative and quantitative research.

To create the Nominet Digital Youth Index, and robustly measure what it feels like to be a young person growing up in a digital world, 2,000 8-25-year-olds completed a quantitative survey.

The fieldwork was conducted between 23rd July and 3rd August 2021. The data was weighted to be nationally representative of 8-25-year-olds by age, gender and region.

To capture the views of disadvantaged audiences, we conducted an additional telephone survey of 100 young people who also had limited access to digital resources.

Exploratory qualitative research with young people, parents, secondary school teachers, youth workers and social workers, as well as secondary desk research, fed into the design of the Digital Youth Index.

Qualitative research:

To create the Nominet Digital Youth Index, and robustly measure what it feels like to be a young person growing up in a digital world, 2,000 8-25 year-olds completed a quantitative survey.

Fieldwork was conducted between 23rd July and 3rd August 2021. The data was weighted to be nationally representative of 8-25 year olds by age, gender and region.

To capture the views of disadvantaged audiences we conducted an additional telephone survey of 100 young people who also had limited access to digital resources.

- An online community was created with 32 young people, aged 8 – 25. The sample was split between an education/work phase and there was a positive skew towards disadvantaged groups; C2DE households, single-parent households, those living with special educational needs (SEN) including cognitive disability, physical disability and/or mental health needs, those in care, those with ethnic minority heritage, and those who identify as LGBTQ+.

- 8 x WhatsApp interviews were conducted with young people with limited digital accessibility. These young people either didn't have access to home broadband and/or didn't have access to a personal laptop / tablet.
- 3 x 90-minute online, text-based focus groups were conducted with professionals working with young people (8 – 12 participants per discussion). One group was conducted with secondary school teachers in state schools, one with social workers and one with youth workers.
- 2 x 90-minute online text-based focus groups were conducted with parents of young people aged under 18 (8 – 12 participants per discussion). One group was conducted with those who have SEN children, the other with parents of digitally disadvantaged children.



Nominet is driven by a commitment to use technology to improve connectivity, security, and inclusivity online. For 25 years, Nominet has run the UK internet infrastructure, developing an expertise in the Domain Name System that now underpins sophisticated threat monitoring, detection, prevention, and analytics that is used by governments to mitigate cyber threats. Our public benefit programme aims to improve the lives of one million people, providing support and opportunities to tackle some of the most important digital issues facing young people in the UK today.

nominet.uk/social-impact/



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