

## Disabled and elderly to suffer most if paper billing ends

By Gabriella Swerling, Social Affairs Editor

BANKS should keep paper billing despite the digital revolution, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) has warned, as it revealed that more than five million adults still do not use the internet.

While the gap between the internet averse and their tech-savvy contemporaries is narrowing each year, a report has emphasised the need for analogue alternatives to vital internet-based services such as banking and billing.

The ONS said that not only would this “enable everyone to participate fully in society” but it would also prevent pensioners and disabled people from becoming “digitally excluded”.

The report said those who cannot access services on the internet could miss out on earnings opportunities and employability benefits, money savings when shopping, and the ability to communicate with friends and family.

The ONS report, published yesterday, found that since 2011 the number of UK adults not using the internet has been steadily declining, with the majority being over 65 years old.

However, 5.3 million British adults had either never used the internet or had not used it within the past three months, according to the survey. More than half were at least 75 years old.

The ONS said these figures “reflect the pattern of the younger generations becoming more likely to be frequent internet users”. It also found that 23.3 per cent of adults not using the internet were disabled.

While the internet is increasingly being used to interact with public services or authorities, the report warned this has implications for those who are not equipped to take advantage of this technology, or are unwilling to do so.

The report said that while there are clear benefits to using the internet, not everyone is able to enjoy them.

“This is particularly the case among certain groups, including older people and disabled people, as well as potentially those not living in private households and who are unlikely to be well-reflected in this analysis,” it said.

“The fact that people remain digitally excluded also highlights the importance of ensuring that non-digital alternatives continue to be made available to enable everyone to participate fully in society.”