

Computer Purchase – What Should I Buy?

The first thing to consider when buying a computer is your budget. Decide how much you want to spend and then see what you can get for that price. Don't forget to include application software in your calculations (*see below*).

Next you should decide what requirements you have if any. Some courses may require that you run specific software. If you need nothing more than a word processor and web browser, then any modern computer will be more than adequate for your needs, but if your course has some specialist requirements such as heavy use of statistical analysis software, or image processing then you may need something more powerful.

Make sure your computer has a network card if you intend to connect it to the College network and the Internet (*see below*).

Desktop or Laptop?

There are advantages to both desktops and laptops, so the choice of machine type is yours. Desktops generally offer more for your money, are more robust, and are cheaper to repair and upgrade. Laptops on the other hand are obviously more portable and take up less space so may be more convenient to use and to transport. You could take your laptop to the library or to your department to work.

If you opt for a laptop then pay special attention to the section on care and security (*see below*) – laptops are certainly more prone to accidental damage and, unfortunate but true, occasional theft.

Where to buy?

We are unable to recommend where to buy (or where not to buy), but can offer some recommendations: Visiting high street shops is a good place to look at a range of computers and see them up close. You could see the size and weight of a laptop, or the quality of a screen. You would also be able to take one away there and then. However, you can normally get much better prices if you look online, either direct from the manufacturer or from an online retailer. If bought from the manufacturer you can often customise the computer specification to your exact requirements.

Network Cards

If you are bringing a desktop computer, then you will need an Ethernet network adapter installed (this is pretty much standard on every modern computer), and an Ethernet network cable – 5m should be long enough to reach the Ethernet socket in most rooms.

Almost all laptops and tablets come with wireless networking which should allow access from most of College although the signal strength may vary. Some laptops come with Ethernet adapters built in if you want to use a faster and more secure wired network connection when in your room, or it is possible to buy an adapter for those models that don't.

It is strictly against College IT rules to install your own wireless access point or router in your room.

Important: Please make sure that you bring all manuals, driver disks, Operating System installation disks and license numbers with you when you come to Keble, or else we may not be able to help you if you have problems connecting to the network.

Software

As well as an operating system (such as Windows) which is normally included with most new computers, you will probably want other application software. The University has site licenses or academic discounts for some software packages through the IT Services shop. This now also includes access to the student edition of Microsoft Office 365. If you prefer, you can also use the free office suite, Open Office (*available for download free of charge from <http://www.openoffice.org>*).

Please note that many new computers come with trial versions of antivirus software installed. This will not protect you once the initial trial period runs out. It is essential that if you do not wish to pay for the subscription service for the bundled software, you remove it and install other antivirus software which will keep itself updated and continue to offer protection. The University offers a free site license for Sophos Antivirus.

Care and Security

If you are investing a great deal of money and time in choosing and buying your computer, there are a number of things you should do to take care of it:

First, we strongly recommend getting a 3-year warranty if possible, particularly for laptops. If the screen on a laptop fails, you may be looking at almost the cost of a new laptop to repair it. Desktops typically use standard parts and are therefore easier to repair than laptops but some parts can still cost over a hundred pounds if they fail. Manufacturer's warranties are the best, and many will offer on-site engineers or next day collection. High street stores offer 'extended warranties' but they can be expensive and often do not have the best of reputations. Check online to see if anyone has any good or bad experiences and check for exclusions. If you already have a computer, the University has a contract with an external warranty company and students can purchase annual hardware support for their computer or printer reasonably cheaply through IT Services.

Insurance is also essential for full peace of mind. Warranties only cover hardware failure rather than accidental damage or theft. If you intend travelling overseas or are an international student then check that both warranties and insurance provide cover outside your home country.

Theft of a computer, while very uncommon, unfortunately does happen. To reduce the risks of theft, you should consider some of the following steps:

- Never leave your computer unattended in a public place such as a library, and never leave the door to your room unlocked or windows open while you are away from the room. Most thefts are opportunistic rather than planned.
- Make a note of the serial number of your computer, as well as the make, model and any identifying features. If possible have it marked either with a non-removable label or an ultraviolet pen with your surname and postcode. This won't prevent theft but may deter a potential thief and may also lead to your computer being recovered by the police.
- Use a security device such as a Kensington Lock, particularly with a laptop if you use it in a public place. Most modern laptops and a few desktops have a small oval hole somewhere on them which is designed to take a Kensington Lock connection. The other end of the cable should be attached to a secure immovable object.

You should also keep regular backups of your work and any other data files that are not easy to reinstall. If your hard disk fails, or your computer is stolen or seriously damaged then there is very little that we can do to recover your work. Use cloud storage services such as Dropbox, or buy an external hard disk and make sure you keep backups of important files. **Tutors do not accept computer failure as sufficient reason for not completing work on time.**

You should also ensure that you have antivirus software and keep up to date with software updates for your Operating System and applications. These should be kept current. Antivirus software which hasn't been updated for a couple of months is almost as useless as having none at all.