



# Developing your ICT

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The best use of information and communication technology (ICT) comes about from good management of this vital resource. Time must be spent considering the ICT needs of the organisation and planning for them. Appropriate financial and staff resources are necessary to manage and develop ICT properly in any organisation, no matter how small. All organisations must consider:

## Buying your ICT

**Hardware:** Hardware is the mechanical and electrical components of a computer. Decide on a minimum hardware specification and review this regularly as technology changes fast. All new computers, even donated ones, should meet this minimum specification.

**Software:** Software is the word used to describe programs used by a computer. Standardising the software in use across your office makes it possible for staff to support each other and to share files easily; both of which are very important.

**Networking:** A network consists of two or more computers/pieces of equipment linked together. A network helps staff to share information of all kinds more easily. In addition, tasks like virus protection and backing up can be centralised. There are different types of network and advice from an ICT professional is essential.

**Replacement schedules:** Computers usually need replacing every four or five years; replacements should be planned into funding bids.

## Day to day running

**Staff training:** Take this seriously; ICT systems are only as good as the staff that use them. Consider ICT training needs at induction and on an ongoing basis. Staff must be trained in the use of the particular systems of your organisation as well as undertaking more general ICT literacy training.

**External support:** Advice and troubleshooting support from an external agency will be necessary, unless you have an ICT professional on the staff. Make sure that any contract or agreement is with a company or individual that understands your needs and can communicate well with you.

**Management:** Proactive management of ICT is better than reacting when something goes wrong. The responsibility for strategic overview, housekeeping and management of the system must be clearly defined, especially if you don't have a dedicated ICT staff member.

## Protecting your ICT

**Backing up:** Regular back up (copying) of all the data held on computers is essential so that it can be retrieved in the event of fire, theft, computer failure or simple human error. Store back up disks/tapes off-site or in a fireproof safe.

**Confidentiality:** Set up computers in a way that prevents users from accessing confidential information (eg personnel records). Develop working practices that prevent visitors seeing confidential information displayed on monitors (eg using screensavers and passwords).

**Data protection:** The Data Protection Act 1998 covers the processing (which includes keeping a record) of personal information about people, whether on computers or on paper. To find out if your organisation needs to register/notify the Information Commissioner (previously the Data Protection Registrar) either go to the IC website: [www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk](http://www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk), phone 0303 123 1113 or write to: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF.

**Fire-walling:** If your computer or network is connected to the internet (for example via a broadband connection), it will be vulnerable to attack from outside the organisation. This could either be from hackers – people who deliberately break into your network – or from organisations hoping to piggy-back onto your organisation's email address in order to distribute junk mail. A fire-wall, either software or hardware, can prevent this from happening.

**Health and safety:** Develop a good health and safety policy and checklist for staff. Remember to consider suitable desks and chairs and make sure that staff do not use a computer for extended periods without a break.

**Virus protection:** Viruses are programs that stop computers from working properly. They are 'spread' via disks, email and the Internet from one computer to another; anti-virus software will protect against this happening. New viruses are created every day and virus protection is only as good as its last update, so anti-virus software must be kept up to date. Establish procedures for keeping it up to date.

## To find out more about ICT

[www.ichubknowledgebase.org.uk](http://www.ichubknowledgebase.org.uk) is designed to help community and voluntary sector organisations access the benefits of information technology. It is provided by LASA

[www.ichub.org.uk](http://www.ichub.org.uk) – NCVO's ICT Development Services picked up the work of the ICT Hub when the funding for it came to an end in March 2008. You can find all the ICT Hub's resources on the website

Download useful ICT publications free from [www.ichub.org.uk/publications](http://www.ichub.org.uk/publications) including

- A guide to managing ICT in the voluntary and community sector
- How to cost and fund ICT
- An ICT survival guide for trustees

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