# Laptop buying guide

*This guide was prepared for London Plus to support Volunteer Centres in London source new laptops with a grant from the London Community Response Fund in May 2020.*

We have put this guide together to help you choose optimum specification laptops to give great performance and longevity, at best value current prices which have seen a recent rise.

When buying your laptop now, it's worth thinking ahead about its use post lockdown and this likely prolonged period of working remotely and increased online service delivery.

- Will you want to use it for outreach?  In which case smaller, lighter weight laptops that are a bit more expensive, would be best (look for smaller, 14 inch screens).
- Will you want to demo websites or enable interaction e.g. searching for volunteering opportunities in person?  In which case you might want to consider a touch screen.
- Or will you want them ultimately to replace PCs in the office?  In which case weight isn't so much an issue, and larger screen size may be more of a priority (look for larger, 15.6 inch screens)

# Recommended hardware specification

We are recommending the following specification for any laptop you purchase with the LCRF funding.

- **Processor:** i5 and above
- **Memory:** 8GB RAM and above
- **Storage:** 240GB SSD and above

These are our recommended specs for running Windows 10 Professional (see page 3) and will give you optimum user experience when using the laptop for work, as well as a more cost effective longer lifetime.  Read on for an explanation of the above jargon!

### Warranty

Most laptops will usually come with a 1 year warranty.  If possible and within budget, we would recommend you upgrade to a 3 year warranty.

# Jargon buster

### Processor - Central Processing Unit (CPU):

Think of the CPU as the 'central brain' of your laptop!  The overall computer processing performance relies on this processor. The better the processor, the more your laptop can perform simultaneous multi-tasks without any delays.  A processor is not usually upgradable - the one you buy is the one you keep, so it's worth getting right.

We'd recommend the Intel Core i5 processor as this will run multiple processes at one time and has other performance improvements compared to the Intel Core i3.  Intel processors are released in "generations", the latest being the 10th generation, denoted by the i5-10320 number.  Each generation generally improves speed and reduces heat, so if you can, choose the latest generation available.

The other brand of processors available is AMD.  Their Ryzen 5 processor is almost equivalent to the Intel i5, and is usually a bit cheaper.

### Memory – Random Access Memory (RAM):

Think of RAM as your main working table or area – the bigger it is, the more space you have to work.

Higher RAM will allow more apps to be run at one time or left open in the background, before your laptop slows down and has to 'cache' (save to disk) when moving between apps.

To run Windows 10, 4GB is an absolute minimum and 8GB is highly recommended. It is usually possible to upgrade memory from 4GB to 8GB at a later date, but this is harder to do in a laptop and requires spare slots to mount the memory.

### Hard disk – Solid State Disks (SSD):

Think of your hard disk as a cupboard – you take out what you need when you need it, and put it back when finished.

Traditionally computers had hard disks that contained mechanically spun 'platters' (HDD).  These are now being replaced with SSD (Solid State Disks) which have no moving parts and are basically like a large amount of memory. SSD's allow speedy access when things are opened or saved to disk.  This will give the general feel that your laptop is able to start and respond quickly.  It is possible to upgrade from an HDD to an SSD by transferring the data over to the new disk, taking a couple of hours to do.

# Recommended Software

## Operating system

We recommend you purchase your laptop with Windows 10 Professional (not Windows 10 Home) as the operating system. This is because Windows 10 Professional includes additional security features which you should be using and in particular disk encryption via the Bitlocker software (see our blog post here).

There may be a greater choice of laptops on sale with Windows 10 Home installed, and although you can upgrade to a Windows 10 Professional licence from Charity Digital Exchange costing £17 ex VAT, by the time you have ordered this and installed it, there would arguably be hardly any difference in cost.

If you are an Office 365 user, or are considering a move to this, then the newer fully donated package for which you get 10 free licences - M365 Business Premium, includes Windows 10 Business (equivalent to Windows 10 Pro).

## Office software

For Microsoft users, you can access Office 365 at no cost via a number of options. M365 Business Premium mentioned above, also comes with desk top versions of the office applications and is free for the first 10 licences. This also includes EMS including Email Encryption and Advanced Threat Protection – safe links, safe attachments and anti-phishing (see our blog post here). Find out further information at Charity Digital Exchange.

Alternatively, or if you require additional desk top licences, you can either opt for another Office 365 package which includes desktop applications (circa £2.30 per user per month), or the free Office 365 subscription and buy the Office 2019 Standard desktop application at a one off cost of £34 ex VAT from Charity Digital here. If you need to use Access, you can buy this as an add on. Further information about the various Office 365 licences with non profit discount here.

## Antivirus

This will depend on what you're already using for your organiastion's anti virus software. You may have spare licences you can use already, or you may need to include costs of additional licences in your budget.

We'd recommend a paid for antivirus package and Bitdefender is a good option and available through Charity Digital here, costing £9 ex VAT annually for 1 licence and reducing in cost when buying in bundles (e.g. circa £4.50 per licence when you buy 3).

# Accessories

Don't forget to think about what accessories you will need.  Either add to your laptop order, or order from another supplier, keeping to the £750 budget you have been allocated or topping up with budget you can use from elsewhere.  .

- **Case** – opt for more of a sleeve type case to protect the laptop if your preference is carrying in another bag, or choose a laptop case or backpack

- **Connectors & cables**– if you will be needing to connect the laptop to a projector you'll need to check what ports your laptop has and if you need other types e.g. HDMI or VGA, remember to order a connector.  Newer laptops may come with USB-C ports only, so if you are used to charging your phone from your laptop, you may want to buy some spare USB-C cables too

- **Docking station** – if in future you will be using the laptop in place of an office PC, think about whether you want to connect to a monitor or your network.  A docking station will give you this capability e.g. it will include a LAN port, and you'll also be able to charge your laptop through this device

- **Keyboard & mouse** – using a trackpad and smaller keyboard for long periods of time isn't great. So think about adding a wireless mouse (and possibly keyboard if you have the budget)

- **Extra portable screen** – if you regularly working on multiple windows, you can buy an extra screen (looks just like a tablet) but will enable you to see two windows at once if you don't have a spare monitor to connect to

- **Pens** – if you opt for a laptop with a touch screen, then many will offer a pen / stylus that you can use to e.g. use when demoing a site or annotating / using notes or drawing packages

- **Clicker** – again if you will be using the laptop a lot for presentations, a clicker is a must

- **Extra charger** – if you are using the laptop out and about, you could have a charger at work and a charger at home and never get caught out with no power!

# Making your purchase

Please note we've found laptop prices are currently higher than pre Coronavirus times and delivery time is likely to be much longer – so this is definitely something to check before you place your order.

We regularly source laptops and accessories from the following suppliers: Laptops Direct, ebuyer, Technoworld, Dell Direct or HP Direct or Amazon.

First decide whether it's a larger screen size or lighter weight laptop you need and then to save you time, look at our list of recommended laptops – all great value and available at varying price points, as of June 3rd 2020.

# Setting up your laptop

You may already have an IT support contract in place and can ask your provider to set up your laptop remotely for you.

We will be working on a laptop set up guide so that you also have the option to follow our step by step sheet, and contact us if you need any support.  London Plus will be in touch with further details on this.

Please note that setting up your laptop may take a bit longer if you are doing from home where broadband speeds may not be as fast as in the office (e.g. you are likely to have to download Windows 10 updates).