University Laptops and Tablets: Guidance Note on Ownership

There is no corporate policy covering the purchase, provision and sale of laptops or tablets to staff and students although there are thousands of devices bought and, therefore, owned by the University. A guidance paper was drafted and agreed by ULTSEC in July 2012 (see Appendix A) but this did not cover the issue of disposal of equipment when students complete /withdraw from their studies. A number of academic units have decided to provide laptops or tablets to students, either as a recruitment incentive or for educational reasons. For example:

- EEE: "To support our students with the specialist software and notes used in their studies ALL new Stage 1 undergraduates will be given their own pre-loaded laptop, guaranteed and supported for the duration of their course".
- GPS: "All new PhD students registering with the School of Geography, Politics and Sociology will receive a laptop to help them throughout their studies. The University will provide PhD students with a laptop to use for the duration of their studies. It will be of a good specification and would normally come in a bundle including external keyboard and mouse, along with an extended warranty".
- Computing Science: "All doctoral students will benefit from an annual stipend …., will be provided with their own personal computer/laptop …"

Many staff will also use a laptop/tablet purchased by the University either from core budget or via research accounts. The nature of these devices makes them 'personal'.

What happens to the laptop/tablet at the end of the period of study or employment? For students the assumption is that the University 'gifts' the device at the point of registration and no attempts are made to regain it. For staff the position is different. Laptops and tablets should be on the asset register. The device should be returned to the University when the individual leaves. Financial Regulations require that goods bought by the University must be either disposed of at the end of their useful life or to another party "at fair value". Further, much of the software on laptops will be licensed under the University's Microsoft Campus Agreement or other University licensing arrangements. In many cases it would be unlawful for the University to transfer ownership of licensed software to a former member of staff. The University must also comply with the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) Directive which covers safe disposal of electronic equipment.

The following rules are therefore proposed:

Students issued with laptops or tablets as part of the registration for particular programmes should retain such machines on the point of departure from the University.

Staff issued with laptops or tablets for work purposes, however funded, should return such machines when they leave the University's employment. Such machines are recycled where possible, or disposed of in accordance with WEEE regulations if obsolete.

Exceptions to this policy, where, for example, a member of staff who leaves but retains links to the University is allowed to purchase the laptop they had been using, require a record of transfer of ownership, authorised by the Head of Unit, including a declaration from the leaving member of staff that they accept the responsibility for:
- removing all university-licensed software
- removing all university data
- safe disposal under WEEE.

In this instance, please contact the IT Service Desk on 85999

Under no circumstances should computing equipment of any type be sold or transferred to serving members of staff.

John Hogan, Registrar, 7 May 2015

Briefing Note for Academic Units – What to consider when providing IT equipment to students
Guidance from University Teaching, Learning and Student Experience Committee

Prompted by innovations in teaching delivery and increasing focus on student recruitment, the provision of IT equipment to students has been piloted on some programmes for pedagogical and/or incentivisation purposes. While it is not the intention to constrain creativity, or to introduce unhelpful approval mechanisms, the guidance in this document should be taken into account when planning such an offering.
The guidance is intended for Research Institutes as well as Schools – hence the use of 'Academic Unit' in the document.

Student Expectations. Academic Units should consider:
1. Expectations regarding usage (e.g. for teaching), ownership, support, repair and replacement of equipment. These need to be made clear at the outset and carefully managed.
2. That if a device is broken, and cannot be readily repaired, the student may be placed at a real or perceived disadvantage in their ability to fulfil their academic work.
3. That perceptions may be negatively impacted where the University cannot resolve an issue with a device locally (or quickly).
4. The risks of 'contracting out' support (and therefore an aspect of our provision) to a third party via warranty arrangements.
5. That this provision is unlikely to remove the demand for University-provided computing such as clusters. Student feedback and research indicate that students do not always want to bring their own equipment to campus and rely on University facilities being available.
6. The reputational impact on your own Unit where negative perceptions are created for students on programmes which do not offer such devices. This risk arises particularly in modules which are taught across Units. Although provision differs between Units in many ways, IT equipment may be particularly visible. Where students from different Academic Units take common modules, alternatives must be provided for students who do not have the equipment. It is also advisable to discuss plans for providing equipment with staff in affected Academic Units.

Software & Support. Academic Units should consider:
7. That "best efforts" support - provided today for personal devices – is unlikely to be acceptable.
8. That there will be a cost to the University for supporting each individual type of device. Economies of scale can only apply where high-volume standardisation is in place.
9. That only devices owned by the University and loaned to students can use software licensed to the University (including Windows and Office) – this may incur additional charges. If equipment is given to students, University licensing must not be used. The test here is whether the student will retain the equipment at the end of the module or programme or return it to the University.
10. That support costs may be best managed by a third party warranty for the duration of the study programme (though note the impact on expectations/perceptions above.) Further, even with an outsourced support arrangement, there will be a related administrative cost to the University.

Cost. Academic Units should build into their business cases:
11. That purchasing devices through a University procurement framework is likely to be more cost effective and efficient, so this should be the expectation. It will also ensure that suitably 'green' equipment is purchased.
12. That local customisation of devices (for example, installing course-related software) prior to devices being issued to students will incur additional cost and time.
13. That whole-life support and staff costs should be taken into account in assessing the value and feasibility of new initiatives. The initial purchase price of a PC or other device is a small part of the three-year cost.

Project planning and feedback.
14. NUIT are pleased to support Schools and Institutes in assessing feasibility or cost. In the first instance, please contact the IT Service Desk on 85999.
15. So that the University has a record of all such initiatives, Heads are requested to inform eLearning Steering Group of their proposed initiative.
16. Heads are further requested to report back to eLearning Steering Group on the success of each initiative, including the impact on student satisfaction, after the first iteration. This allows the learning from each to be captured and disseminated to others who may be considering such a project.

Professor Suzanne Cholerton
Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Learning, Teaching and the Student Experience
19 July 2012