

Legislation is the law which has been created by acts of parliament. The following are important acts which have been made regarding the use of computers.

The Copyright, Designs and Patents Act (1988)

This act deals with **copying works** such as books, PDFs, documents, music tracks, television programmes, films or software. Anything which you design or write is automatically **copyrighted** and may not be copied without **permission** by you as the author. When you pay to download a music track you are normally buying a **license** to play that track on your personal devices, but not to share it with others unless the license gives you that right. **Downloading** or **sharing** software or music without the permission of the copyright owner is illegal. Punishments for **breach of copyright** are unlimited fines and up to 10 years in prison.

The Computer Misuse Act (1990)

This act prevents people from **misusing** computers and is made up of three offences.

1. **Unauthorised access to computer material** (up to 12 months in prison)
2. **Unauthorised access with intent to commit further offences** (up to 5 years in prison)
3. **Unauthorised modification of a computer or programs** (up to 10 years in prison)

If you guessed a friend's **password** for a school computer and logged in with their name you would be breaking this Act as you would have gained **unauthorised access** to the computer. Attacks such as writing and **distributing viruses** or **Trojan Horses**, **phishing** and **denial of service (DoS)** attacks would all be committing an offence under this act.

The Data Protection Act (1998)

This act aims to protect **personal data** stored about you by making sure it is **processed fairly** and **lawfully**. A person who has information stored about them is called the **data subject**. A person, company or organisation who decides how the personal data will be stored and processed is called a **data controller**. You have the right to see what data is stored about you and have any inaccurate data changed and it shouldn't be stored for longer than is necessary. You can be charged up to £10 for a copy of the data stored about you. Fines for breaching the Act are up to £500,000.

The Freedom of Information Act (2000)

This gives the public a right to access information held by **public authorities**. This includes government, schools and hospitals. You can request almost any information from a **public organisation**, but some areas such as security are exempt. For example, you could make a **freedom of information request** to find out how much is spent by a school in certain areas or how much money MPs claim on expenses. Replies to a request must be made within 20 working days.

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