

Guidance for Assessment Centres

Specification checks for Student's existing computers

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to assist Needs Assessors to determine whether a student's privately purchased computer is suitable to support their DSA funded software for the remaining years of their course. This guidance applies to equipment supplied by companies to students who are in receipt of DSA support administered by Student Finance England and Student Finance Wales.

Details of the student's existing computer should be obtained in advance of the Needs Assessment interview. The student should be advised to bring their existing computer with them to their assessment, where possible, plus any manuals, receipts or other paperwork.

The below process is a suggested way of obtaining the necessary information to allow a Needs Assessor to determine a computer's suitability.

In instances where a student will be using their own privately funded machine they should be advised by the Needs Assessor to ensure that it has suitable warranty and insurance cover for the remainder of their course. SLC will be able to reimburse them for this full cost, providing that the cover is purchased after their DSA2 letter is issued.

Students who will be using their own privately funded machine should be made aware that should their machine fail and it is not covered by warranty and insurance, they should contact their Needs Assessor in the first instance. The Needs Assessor will then be able to contact SLC for advice and to discuss the most cost-effective option for resolution.

WINDOWS MACHINE

STEP 1: VIEW THE COMPUTER'S SPECIFICATIONS

If the computer is using a Windows operating system below Windows 10, it is NOT SUITABLE.

A Chromebook does not run Windows OS, so is NOT SUITABLE.

To do this without a mouse – hold down the Windows key, press the 'X' key, release both, then press the 'Y' key.

STEP 2: DETERMINE THE PROCESSOR

Click on 'Processor'.

i) For Intel processors

Processor number will be in a format such as:

- Celeron 4305U
- Pentium 4417U
- Core i3-8145U
- Core i5-8259U

- Core i7-8565U
- Core i9-9880H

If the processor is; i5, i7 or above, then move to STEP 3, all lower level processors are NOT SUITABLE.

NB – If the student is being recommended specialist software for visual impairment the process must be i7 or higher, all lower level processors are NOT SUITABLE.

ii) For AMD processors

Processor number will be in a format such as:

- AMD A6-9225
- AMD A8-6410 APU
- Ryzen 3 3200U
- Ryzen 5 3500U

If the processor is a Ryzen 5 (or higher), then move to STEP 3, all lower level processors are NOT SUITABLE.

STEP 3: DETERMINE THE COMPUTER'S STORAGE CAPACITY

The type of hard drive should be determined first:

- Go to the search pane by the Windows icon on the bottom left.
- Type the word “defragment” and hit return.
- The “media type” will be listed:
 - SSD will have their media type listed as “Solid State Drive”
 - HDD will have their media type listed as “Hard Disc Drive”

It is possible for a computer to have both.

If the computer has only a HDD then it is NOT SUITABLE.

- The size of the drive then needs to be established:
 - Press and hold the windows key, then type the “r” key
 - Type “msinfo32” in the run dialogue box that appears
 - Using the menu on the left hand side, click the + to the left of ‘components’. From the newly revealed menu click the + to the left of ‘storage’. From the new menu click on ‘disks’
 - The hard drive size is displayed

If the computer has both SSD & HDD the total available internal storage should meet or exceed the minimum specifications, as set out in the Computer Specification Matrix and the SSD should be at least 120GB.

The required size of the hard drive is dependent on the type of machine which would be recommended.

If the student would be recommended a WKH, WCR or VI specification machine and their current computer does not have 200GB or more formatted space available for storage, then the computer is NOT SUITABLE.

If the student would have been recommended a UWCR specification machine and their current computer does not have 128GB or more of formatted space available then the computer is NOT SUITABLE.

If the type and available space of the hard drive is suitable move to STEP 4.

Students should be encouraged to source access to cloud storage to help their machine run more effectively. Additional cloud storage is available to the majority of students via their Microsoft 365 account.

STEP 4: DETERMINE THE COMPUTER'S MEMORY (RAM)

If the computer's memory (RAM) meets the minimum specification for the computer recommended, as set out in the Computer Specification Matrix, move to STEP 5.

If it does not meet the minimum specification for memory then the computer is NOT SUITABLE.

In circumstances where the student's machine does not meet the RAM requirement but is upgradable the student can opt to have a RAM upgrade, by their Assistive Technology Provider, funded via their DSA or receive a DSA contribution to a new machine. In circumstances where the RAM upgrade is the student's preferred route the Needs Assessor should request quotes for this from the Assistive Technology Provider.

STEP 5: DETERMINE THE COMPUTER'S AGE

The following calculation should be used:

Age of computer (years and months) + remaining course years

If the sum equals less than 5 years, the computer IS SUITABLE, move to STEP 6.

If the sum equals exactly 5 years or higher, the computer is NOT SUITABLE.

If a computer does not meet the age requirement, but is of suitable specification, the assessor should advise the student that new, partly subsidised computer is available via the DSA. If following this the student wishes to continue using their own machine, this decision should be noted in the NAR.

STEP 6: DETERMINE THE COMPUTER'S CONDITION

It is the student's responsibility to ensure that their computer is in good condition and functioning correctly at the time of the specification check.

It is the Needs Assessor's responsibility to discuss with the student whether the computer is in sufficient condition to make it likely that it will last the duration of the student's course and this should be noted within the Needs Assessment Report. In cases where the physical condition of the computer means that it is unlikely to last the duration of the course then a partly subsidised machine should be recommended.

APPLE MAC COMPUTERS

STEP 1: VIEW THE COMPUTER'S SPECIFICATIONS

Click on Apple Symbol on top left corner of the screen. Go to "About this Mac".

The first page is an overview which will provide operating system details along Processor and Memory information. There is a storage tab which will outline the computer's hard drive capacity.

If the computer is not using or cannot be upgraded to operating system Maverick (10.9) or above, it is NOT SUITABLE.

This link shows which models can run which system <https://support.apple.com/en-gb/HT210222>

We are aware of software which can only run on 10.15.1 and above, so Assessors should ensure that they check the specifics of the software that they are recommending. As software publishers change their recommended specs you should verify on their website that the student's machine is suitable for the software which you are recommending.

STEP 2: DETERMINE THE PROCESSOR

If the processor is; i5, i7 or post 2020 M1, then move to STEP 3, other processors are NOT SUITABLE.

STEP 3: DETERMINE THE COMPUTER'S STORAGE CAPACITY

If the computer's hard drive meets the minimum specification for the computer which is required, as set out in the Computer Specification Matrix, move to STEP 4.

If the computer has only a SSD it must have 200GB or more formatted space available, less is NOT SUITABLE.

If it does not meet the minimum specification for storage then the computer is NOT SUITABLE.

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