

What are the computer requirements for this programme?

The MSc/Dip/Cert is an online programme. This means that you will be accessing materials, discussion boards and a range of tools via the internet.

While the programme team and the University's Information Services (IS) department provide distance learning support, please remember that you are still responsible for your own technical set-up.

You are not expected to be a technical whizz, and we provide guidance and training for the tools we use. However, we expect that you will take responsibility for your access to the programme, make back-ups of your work and organise alternative access if required.

You should have the following:

- **Access to a PC or Mac** that you are confident will be able to cope with the volume of online activity that takes place
- A back-up plan (**access to an alternative computer/internet access**) in place in case your computer fails at any point during the programme (see the **Preparation and Back-ups** section below)
- Access to a good internet connection – we strongly recommend that you have a **broadband connection**, though you will find that a wi-fi or wireless connection is sufficient for most activities
- An up-to-date web browser - we recommend using **Mozilla Firefox**, which can be downloaded for free from <http://www.mozilla.com/en-US/firefox/>
- **Up-to-date antivirus and computer security software** - free to students from: <http://www.ed.ac.uk/is/anti-virus>
- We use Learn as our virtual learning environment. Once you get access to Learn you will be able to test your **browser settings** for Learn.
- **Adobe Reader** installed on your computer: <http://get.adobe.com/uk/reader/>
- **Java** installed on your computer <http://www.java.com/en/download/testjava.jsp>
- **Adobe Flash Player** installed on your computer: <http://get.adobe.com/flashplayer/>
- **Headphones with a microphone** for live tutorials – we find using headphones with a mic rather than speakers minimises echo and feedback. A webcam is not required, but you may choose to purchase one

You should also be:

- Comfortable when using the internet (feel confident that you can do a basic search and navigate through web pages)
- Familiar with your computer set-up, and so be able to add new software to that computer (i.e. have a basic understanding of the operating system)

- Able to schedule your time so that you can log in **at least** three times per week during the timetabled courses
- Excited about learning how to use new online tools and software

Additional Resources

We also use the following tools on the programme, and you may wish to register for accounts and/or check the system requirements in advance. We will run introductory sessions for these tools during the induction week.

- **Skype:** <http://www.skype.com>
- **Second Life:** <http://secondlife.com/> (Easter Bush Farm: <http://bit.ly/bonlrK>)
- **Diigo:** <http://www.diigo.com>
- **Statistical software:** you will be expected to have access to a statistical software package (e.g. Minitab) for the Scientific Methodology course. Free 30 day trials are available from sources external to the University. We will give you further information about statistical packages at induction.

Preparation and Back-ups

We have all had experiences of losing an important file, often something we have been working on for a long time!

It is particularly important when contemplating an online programme such as this to ensure that the computer system you will be using for the programme is reliable and has up-to-date antivirus and computer security software. You should get into the habit of running regular scans of your system to catch any malicious software as early as possible.

You should also have set in place a number of file back-up options to ensure that, should your computer fail approaching assessment/dissertation submission deadlines, you do not lose your work.

These back-up options can include:

- a) External hard drive
- b) Pen drive (also known as a USB or memory stick)
- c) CD-ROM
- d) Cloud computing, e.g. Google Docs (<https://docs.google.com>), DropBox (<http://www.dropbox.com>) or email
- e) Paper printouts of draft copies – if all else fails, you can type it back up from the last draft print.

The last option is not very environmentally friendly, but it is particularly wise when preparing your dissertation. Electronic media may fail, but paper can usually be relied on to be accessible!

When using the online discussion forums on Learn, it is also a good precaution to compose your posts offline, e.g. in a Word document. Learn does not recognise typing as 'activity' and may time out while you are working, and your work is then lost when you post.

If you have the original as a file on your computer, it is easy to copy and paste it in to Learn and this easy step removes the frustration of losing your work.

Finally, if you are continuing with us through the full three-year programme, it is worthwhile considering **a full computer check-up during the summer months.**

- Back up any important files (including notes from that year) using one or more of the back-up options suggested above
- Clear out all old drafts or files that you have no use for
- Take your computer to a reputable computer technician and get a full check-up of all your systems, including your antivirus software.

This way, you should be ready for the next year with a system that is organised, secure and reliable and ready to support you as you work.

Happy computing!