**Unit 11 Computer Networks**

**Uses and benefits of a computer network 2**

All organisations need to have large amounts of storage space on their networks, while software applications available on a network will vary depending on the needs of the users.

Networked systems also have many features to help users be more productive at work and which can support the user experience.

**Storage**

Network servers have large amounts of disk space which can be used to store many files and folders containing a wide range of information. Storing data on the same server makes backing up much easier than if the data is held on many computers.

Some organisations keep their files in a data centre which is usually off-site. A data centre offers a secure building in which server computers are set up with good communications links, and if there is a power cut, a backup power supply keeps the data centre up and running.

**Applications**

Workstations in a network usually run standard office desktop applications, such as word processing software. Depending on the type of business, specialist applications may also be available, for example, architects need design software. Users can save to their network space or to areas shared with other users.

There are also networked online systems that can be run from individual workstations. Databases and spreadsheets are often shared by users in an organisation. The data they use is held on shared disk space.

Other applications include the organisation’s intranet and extranet. When an intranet is opened up by authorised users outside the organisation, it becomes an extranet.

**Productivity and user experience**

Networks offer a range of features to help users improve their productivity and user experience.

**Record keeping** is made easier, as several people can work on the same database together at the same time, and records are stored in a central place.

**Speedy access to information**. A network enables information to be brought together quickly from different sources. For example, a user can get sales figures from a database on a computer on the same network, even if the sales team is in another building. Without a network, they would have to go and fetch the data by hand.

**Information can be shared securely**. Files can be protected with passwords, or access to network folders can be restricted to a certain group of users.

**Regular data backups**. These are not seen by users, but provide extra security. If you change or delete a file by accident, you can always restore the original version from the backup.

**Networks can keep individuals informed**. In most organisations, the first thing users see after log in in the intranet, which often has news items on the home page to keep individuals up to date with information about the organisation. There are also network apps that allow users to talk to others, enabling instant communication.

**Collaborative working**. Already covered in Uses and benefits of a computer network 1.

**Gaming in multi-user environment**. Already covered in Uses and benefits of a computer network 1.