

P6 – Data Security Laws

Anybody dealing with information in IT systems must follow laws on data protection. In the UK, there are three Acts that cover the use of data. They are:

Data Protection Act 1998

This act governs the use of information about individuals. Anyone who processes personal information must register with the DPA registrar and follow eight laws, which state that information must be:

- Fairly and lawfully processed
- Processed for limited purposes
- Adequate, relevant and not excessive
- Accurate and up to date
- Not kept for longer than is necessary
- Processed in line with your rights
- Secure
- Not transferred to other countries without adequate protection.

These laws ensure people are not harmed by misuse of personal information.

Freedom of Information Act

The Freedom of Information Act is about access to official information. It gives individuals or organisations the right to ask for information from any public authority, including central and local government, the police, the NHS, colleges, and schools. They then have 20 days to provide the information requested. They may refuse if the information is exempt from the Act. Examples of exemption are if releasing the information could prejudice national security or damage commercial interests.

Computer Misuse Act

As most information is now stored digitally, it is important that there are laws regarding the use and access of digital information. The Computer Misuse act makes it illegal to:

- Access any computer program or data without permission – the most common form of this is using someone else's user ID and password
- Gain unauthorised access with intent to commit a serious crime
- Modify computer contents without permission. This means impairing the operation of a computer, a program, or the reliability of data. It also includes preventing access to any program or data. Examples of this are the introduction of a virus, modifying or destroying another user's files or changing financial or administrative data.

The act also makes DOS and DDOS attacks (spamming a server with dummy requests to overload it) illegal, as it prevents people from accessing to information, which falls under the third law of the Computer Misuse Act.