

Computer Misuse Act (1988)

1. Unauthorised access to computer material

This makes it illegal to access a computing system unless authorised to do so. As such it makes the activity of "hacking" a crime. The hacking need not be directed at a particular computer, program or data. For example, it is unlawful, without proper authority:

- To use another person's ID and password in order to access a computer, use data or run a program.
- To alter, delete, copy, or move a program or data, or simply to output a program or data.
- To lay a trap to obtain a password

2. Unauthorised access to a computer system with intent to commit or facilitate the commission of a further offence.

This covers the situation where unauthorised access is gained with intent to commit a further offence. For example, a person may gain unauthorised access to a computer via another person's ID in order to transmit offensive material.

3. Unauthorised modification of computer material

This offence includes the deliberate deletion or corruption of programs or data. It also includes the introduction of viruses etc., where these result in the modification or destruction of data.

The first of these three offences would most likely be dealt with in a magistrates court, but the other two are considered to be serious and

would be referred to the Crown court where very large fines and/or jail sentences are possible.