Hardware and Software Required

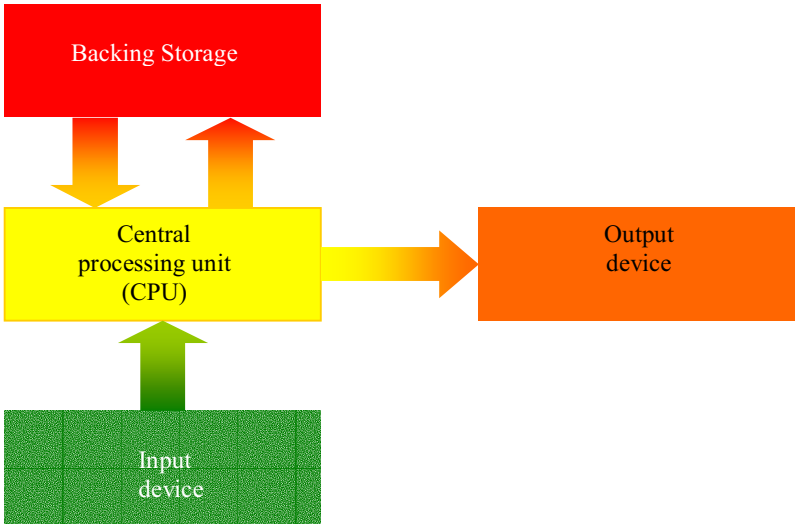
There are two main types of components required for a system to work. These are:

- **Hardware** – The parts of a computer that you can see and you can handle; the exterior components of the computer.
- **Software** – The actual programs that allow the hardware to do a useful job.

Hardware

The main components of an ICT system include the following:

- Input devices – these enable the data to enter the system. This could be through keyboard, scanner, digital camera, etc.
- Central Processing Unit (CPU) – the brain of the computer. This part of the hardware stores and processes data. It has three parts: ALU (arithmetic and logic unit; it performs all the arithmetic and logic operations), the control unit, and the memory.
- Backing storage – consists of the disk drives, tape drives, RW-CD (read/write compact disk), RW-DVD (read/write digital versatile disk), etc. used to store data when the power is switched off.



Software

Software is the general name for programs that can be run on computer hardware. There are two main categories of software: operating system software and applications software.

Operating systems are programs that control the computer hardware directly. The operating system I am going to choose for the new system will be **Windows XP**.

Applications software is used to perform a specific task. Applications software varies from word-processing packages used to write letter, prepare reports, etc. to specialist applications packages used only within one industry.

The applications I will be choosing for the new system will be:

- MS word – A word processing application. This will be used for word processing letters of confirmation, letters of payment, and mail merging letters.
- MS access – A database application. This will be used for taking details such as personal information, booking details, and payment details.
- MS excel – A spreadsheet application, this application can make calculations for you. This will be used for storing payment information, it will be able to work out how much a whole holiday package would cost for a family.
- Outlooks express – An email application. This will be used for collecting emails about holiday bookings, or letter requests. Also agents at foreign locations will be able to send pictures back of new hotel developments or new hotels they are offering.
- Internet Explorer (newest version) – A webpage viewer, they will be bale to use it to look at information when contemplating putting a new location on sale. They will also be able to use this to create and update a webpage about their organisation, or to book holidays online.

Input Hardware

There is quite a lot of hardware that we use to input information into databases, word processors, spreadsheets, etc.
Some of this hardware is:

- **Keyboards** – This could be used to type customers names, addresses, telephone numbers, etc. into the computer.
- **Mouse** – This could be used to select items on a monitor, or to load up programs they need to use.
- **Scanner** – This could be used for scan photos of new locations that will be on offer onto a computer. Or to scan letters or holiday information onto a computer.
- **Digital camera** – Could be used to take photographs of new locations, or accommodations that they are contemplating putting on the market.
- **Touch Screens** – Travel agents could use this to give information on holidays to people without having the customer having to use the sale assistant's time. Although the drawback with these screens is that the cursor doesn't always select the desired choice of the user.
- **Magnetic Stripe Reader** – These machines are used to read the information coded in magnetic stripes, e.g. credit or debit cards. Travel agents would use these to accept payment.

Ports and Cables

Cables – Cables are needed if the travel agent wants to run successfully. Cables are used to connect hardware devices, e.g keyboards, mice and other hardware. If the travel agent wants to operate their system in a network then they will need cables to connect all the terminals together. Most of these cables are fibre-optic; these cables offer high-speed connections with some of the best quality.

Ports – These are needed for the hardware to be connected to the CPU, if the travel agent did not have ports on their CPU's then they would not be able to operate.

USB – Universal serial bus is a way that allows external devices to be connected to a computer. These devices would include scanners, digital cameras, etc.

Hard Disk Drive

A hard disk drive is drive that stores data. Hard disks come in a range of sizes, the average size hard drive for a modern personal computer is roughly 40GB. Although a travel agent's are more likely to have 80GB hard drives installed on their computers. If the travel agents did not have hard drives then their computers would not run at all.

It is possible to purchase removable hard disk drives. These are good for travel agents because they can store personal or confidential information on the removable disk drive and then disconnect the drive. When the drive is disconnected they would then be able to put it in a fire-proof safe. This would protect against theft or damage by fire. Travel agents would use removable hard drives for storing confidential information on customers or customers paying information.

Floppy Disk Drive

Most computers come with a 3.5 inch floppy disk drive as standard. These disks are very cheap to buy but aren't useful for storing great amounts of data. A typical floppy disk holds 1.44 MB of data. A drawback with these disks is that they can become corrupt very easily. Travel Agents could use these to transfer documents from a personal computer to a work computer.

CD Drive