Setting up an email account

Email is one of the most useful applications of the internet. It is the quickest, easiest and cheapest way to keep in touch with family and friends that are far away or just around the corner.

Using email you can send a message to the other side of the world in a matter of seconds and the cost will be much less than a postage stamp.

To send or receive email you first need to go on the internet and set up your own email address which is unique and specific to you. There are many websites that offer a free email account online. The most popular are MSN Hotmail, Yahoo, Google and AOL.

Registering your free e-mail account

When you visit the website of your email provider, you will usually see an option to register a new account. At www.hotmail.com this option is called 'Don't have a Hotmail account? Sign up'. This usually entails filling in a few personal details. These help the provider know a little more about you and help them keep the accounts more secure. Any information recorded by them will be kept confidential and cannot be disclosed to other parties without your permission, so your details remain private.

Email address - normally an email address consists of two parts: your user name and the domain name which are separated by @ symbol eg JohnSmith@hotmail.com

User name - In this example the user name is 'JohnSmith'. You can choose any user name you like; however, you cannot choose a name that somebody else has already chosen. Your username must be unique on your domain and there is a good chance that someone else is already using the user name you want. Try to think of a way of expressing your name or identity using numbers or other characters to make it unique.

Domain name - the domain name in the above example is 'hotmail.com'. Domain name is determined by the company that is providing the email account e.g. Hotmail.com, Yahoo.com, googlemail.com etc and it cannot be changed.

Password - you will need to choose a password for your email account. This ensures that only you are able to access your messages. Choose something that will be easy for

you to remember and is not too obvious. If it is too obvious like 'password' makes it easy for other people to guess. Ensure that you keep your password private so no-one can gain access to your messages without your consent.

Security - your email account will function like a postbox. When you log in to check your email or to write a message, you will be asked to type in your email address and your password. This helps keep your account private and secure. Your mail will wait there until you come in to read it. You need to know somebody's email address to be able to send them an email. When they receive your email they will see who it is from with your unique email address and be able to respond.

Don't give your email address out to anyone you don't want to contact you, as you may end up with an inbox full of junk mail and adverts.

Sending an email

Now that you've set up your email address you can go about sending your first message. Once you have logged into your email account you will see a menu on the screen where you can choose to read your electronic mail or to write a message to someone else.

1. Carefully type the email address of the recipient into the box at the top marked 'To'
2. Choose a title for your message, just like you would do for a letter
3. In the large box type in your message
4. When you have finished writing your message just click on the button marked 'Send' and your message will be sent over the internet to the email address you typed.

SPAM – unwanted email

After you have been using your account a little while, you might find that advertisements start appearing in your message Inbox. Increasingly, a large volume of email users with free accounts are bothered by the volume of SPAM or unsolicited junk emails which appear.

If ever you are unsure about a message, the best idea is always to delete it and don't assume that just because it has been mailed to you that it is addressed to you specifically. Spammers send millions of emails in the vague hope that they will hit a valid account. If you respond to a spam email - even if it's just to ask them to stop bothering you - it may just confirm that your email address is a valid one and the volume of junk mail could increase.

It is better just to block them or delete them.