13   COMPUTING, THE LAW AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Chapter Summary

Computer systems are used for both personal and business purposes. The users of computers require that the systems, and the data they contain, are secure. A deliberate attempt to compromise the operating of a computer system, to access private data without authorization or to use a computer system for fraudulent purposes may well be an illegal act.

For most purposes, illegal actions performed on or using a computer system can be prosecuted under general legalization – this would include theft perpetrated using a computer system and breaches of the copyright of electronic media. One area where specific computing law has been drawn up is the area of computer misuse: in the UK this is addressed by the Computer Misuse Act (1990). A second area of concern, that has been brought to the fore by the widespread use of Information Systems, is that of personal privacy; this issue is addressed by an EU directive and, in the UK, that directive is implemented in the Data Protection Act (1998). The application of the law in the field of computing is reviewed in this chapter.

Computer systems have an environmental impact. The environmental impact of IT concerns how we build and distribute the kit, the energy used in operating the equipment and the disposal of the IT when it is no longer required. The environmental impact of an individual PC is small. The impact of all our computers: personal, business and the many servers in data centres is significant. Manufacturers and users of IT should take account of their impact – it makes sense for the environment and it makes sense economically.

The issue of computers and the environment – green computing – is also reviewed in this chapter.