

STATES OF JERSEY



HAND-HELD DEVICES IN THE STATES CHAMBER: TRIAL (P.77/2011) – AMENDMENT

Lodged au Greffe on 28th June 2011
by Deputy D.J. De Sousa of St. Helier

STATES GREFFE

HAND-HELD DEVICES IN THE STATES CHAMBER: TRIAL (P.77/2011) –
AMENDMENT

1 PAGE 2, PARAGRAPH (a) –

For the words “(but not laptop computers)” substitute the words “and laptop computers”.

2 PAGE 2, PARAGRAPH (b) –

For the word ‘before’ substitute the word ‘at’.

DEPUTY D.J. DE SOUSA OF ST. HELIER

REPORT

The first point to make is that what the Privileges and Procedures Committee is proposing is **only a trial**. After 31st March 2012, if the proposition is adopted, it will be necessary for the Committee to report back to the States with evidence from the trial having consulted on the views of Members first. I welcome both the proposition and this methodology.

Given that this is, after all, a trial, it is *extraordinary* that laptops have been left out of the equation. Paragraph 3 of the report quotes the words of the Bailiff who, on 20th January 2010, said that the future use of laptops in the chamber was *ultimately a matter for elected members to decide and that his ruling could only apply until the Assembly considered the matter*. However, what PPC are proposing does not even give the Assembly the opportunity to debate the matter of usage of laptops, let alone monitor how their use in a trial period would pan out.

Several arguments are given for not including laptops in the trial, and I will take these in order, but first I would like to put forward the positive arguments for including laptop computers in a trial.

Arguments for:

- (1) **Laptops are issued to all States Members**, so there is no risk that some members will be disadvantaged due to material factors relating to the fact that they cannot afford and/or are not provided with the latest i-Pad, Blackberry or i-Phone.
- (2) **Laptops are more commonplace than other emerging hardware**. Following on from the above, it seems logical that if we are going to trial equipment, the purpose of which is ultimately to help members carry out their duties in the Assembly more effectively, then we should be targeting it at equipment that is already well used by most members, rather than only include items which a large majority may not/never use.
- (3) **Consistency**
 - (i) Computers are already tolerated in the Chamber in the form of Blackberries, i-Phones and other hybrid devices. Indeed, Ministers and Assistant Ministers are actually issued with Blackberries, and they can and do access e-mail and Internet services during States Meetings. Permitting laptops in the trial would give equal access of information to those States Members not issued with departmental Blackberries.
 - (ii) Laptops are easier to read and quicker at accessing information, as they rely on a DSL network rather than the mobile network.
 - (iii) Because of this, they do not send out the signals that create audio interference with the BBC broadcast as mobile phones/Blackberries do.

- (4) **States Members would spend more time in the Chamber.** Members who are not fortunate to be in a position to own or be issued with authorized Internet-ready devices are obliged to leave the Chamber if they want to look up information which is relevant to a debate (this may include Hansard, Question Time answers, etc.). The trial of laptops would allow members to stay in the Chamber and access the relevant information *quickly* and efficiently.

Counter-arguments:

(5) ***‘Laptops are too large’***

- (i) The comments of PPC suggest that laptops are too large to fit on desks. This is not the case. Even a fairly large laptop would fit comfortably on the desk, and this is certainly the case for ‘standard issue’ States laptops. There are also a variety of smaller laptops on the market, some of which are the same size as a medium-sized book.
- (ii) There would be a reduction in the need for paperwork (which would be consistent with the States *eco-friendly* policy), files, calculators and dictionaries – which DO clutter up members’ desks.

(6) ***‘The desks are not suitable’***

PPC’s comments focus on the unsuitability of desks, but it ignores the fact that **the Chamber is actually very well-adapted** for the transition to laptop usage. There are plug sockets under the desks and a wireless Internet signal can be accessed from within the Chamber. **The fact that the desks are sloping can be seen as a positive:** it will mean that members are more likely to show moderation in the usage of their computers.

(7) ***‘Power leads for laptops could provide a trip hazard.’***

This is a flawed argument and based on a spurious statement that *‘the battery life of some laptops is relatively limited.’* Firstly, it is wrong to presume that an ordinary laptop will have less battery life than an i-Pad, the use of which is being promoted during the trial. The opposite is true, as touch-screen devices actually use *more* electricity than contemporary laptops. It is also strange that PPC believes that members will only be tempted to plug in laptops, but not i-Pads, i-Phones or Blackberries.

(8) ***‘The keyboards will be too noisy.’***

This is perhaps the argument that of most concern to members, but I would argue that these concerns are unfounded. Firstly, laptop keyboards should not be confused with PC keyboards. The latter, it is true, are capable of being very disruptive, as we know from experience, but laptop keyboards are by design, much quieter. This should be no surprise as they were designed for use by business people and students, often in a context which requires silence. This is why the Attorney General’s typing does not interfere with proceedings, whereas the note-taking typing for Hansard on the standard PC sometimes does.

Lastly, there is an inbuilt safeguard in the proposition, in paragraph (a) with the words '*provided that the devices are silent and can be used without disturbing other members.*'

Conclusion

There are clearly many other arguments which can be used for the inclusion of laptops in the trial. My own feelings on the *actual* use of **all** these devices are mixed, but the results of the trial will be very useful in providing an informed basis for any future decision. Given both the accessibility and common use of laptops in the modern world, it would be remiss of us not to include these in such a trial.

This amendment is brought with the support of Deputy R.C. Duhamel of St. Saviour.

Financial and manpower implications

There are no financial or manpower implications for the States arising from the adoption of this amendment.