What is software?

A basic definition of software

Software is a set of instructions that makes computers "work".

Every task you perform on your computer uses software.

Software is found in all types of computer devices: from personal computers, mobile (cell) phones and digital audio players to computers built into cars, aircraft and satellites.

Software vs. hardware

A computer consists of software and hardware components. The term "hardware" refers to the "tangible" part of computers: the circuit boards, chips, hard drives, keyboards, screens etc. Software is the digital, "intangible" part of computers; instructions that make computers do something useful.

Types of software

There are software products for all types of purposes. For personal computers, these include:

- **Application software:** Word processing, image editing, spreadsheets, presentation, business, etc.
- **Programming software:** Compilers and debuggers, etc.
- **System software:** Operating systems, device drivers, utilities, etc.

How is software created?

Software is created through a process called software development (also called *programming*). Programming involves writing code that tells a computer what to do. The code is then *compiled* - a process which converts the code into machine-readable instructions that computers can understand. There are many programming languages with which software can be coded.

The software development process also involves many other phases, including project management, user interface design, testing, deployment and more.

Where can I obtain software?

Some software is free, other software needs to be purchased. Software can be obtained from a variety of sources, including shops or online as a download.

Once you have obtained software, you need to install it onto your computer.

For more information about getting software online, please read the 'Buying Software Online' fact sheet, which is available from www.siprofessionals.org/consumers/ .

Software as a Service model

Software can also be deployed online over the Web as a "Software as a Service" model. The software is hosted remotely on a Web server and accessed on demand by users.