

# REVIEW

## The latest releases for your classroom put to the test

### RM ASUS MINIBOOK

Reviewer: **Joseph Devo**, editor, *ICT for Education*

**Cost: £169 (£199 for 4GB machine)**

**B**y 'eck this thing looks nice. Open up the box, pull out the RM Asus miniBook and you will honestly struggle to resist a 'wow', a 'cor' or some other suitable exclamation. It's not just a pretty face either. More tablet PC than laptop, not least in its utterly petit dimensions – 225mm x 165mm, weighing under a kg – and unimposing 2GB storage, it also offers much of the performance most school users will need. Oh and then there's the price: at £169 (£199 for a 4GB storage option) this thing is more mobile phone than anything else, yet offering functionality that most pupils could undoubtedly utilise to fairly significant effect.

The miniBook comes complete with a number of pre-loaded software applications, including a version of Open Office for use in producing text documents or spreadsheets, and enables students to play MP3 files, make Skype phone calls and, of course, offers wi-fi web access. The keyboard is, inevitably I guess, rather tricky to navigate, since the keys are two thirds of those on a standard laptop – great if all your fingers are like your little finger or if they belong to children – which is rather the point with an education product, so not necessarily bad news. The screen, at seven inches across, is

bizarre to behold but – and I hate to turn all potential negatives into 'it doesn't matters' – really quite acceptable for most purposes.

The limited memory, a consequence of the use of a flash drive rather than a standard hard drive, will undoubtedly deter some educationists but (sorry, I know this is getting repetitive) with three USB ports it is possible to augment the memory using plug ins, such as simple old memory sticks, and should satisfy most requirements if backed up to alternative PCs, which this creature most definitely isn't an alternative to.

The Asus miniBook is a complementary, not a wholesale replacement, technology but one that brings the prospect of one-to-one PC access much closer to the reach of all schools, or homes – a one stop shop for government minister Jim Knight in his quest to secure home internet access for all pupils in the foreseeable future? It is the ideal device for standard classroom usage: even the desktop illustrates the point, with about 11 icons, including Google Docs, Webmail, Web, Internet Radio, Skype and Wikipedia; all simple, accessible and bloody obvious – how could a user go wrong? Well, actually I did when trying to hook it up to wi-fi access, persistently opting for the WEP rather than WPA approach, but that was just a blonde moment from a greying, dark haired magazine editor.

Overall, this device is unlikely to be the end of innovations within this techno genre and could soon be usurped by other similarly priced machines offering greater memory and broader utility but RM seems to have got to a critical stage in the development of this market before its rivals and deserves a good shot at signing up a mass of school users for the sort of bog standard classroom or field trip based work that would consign paper and pens to history. Personalisation doesn't come pre-packaged in a nice box but if it did it might look bit like this.

And in case I didn't make it clear, it really is bloody gorgeous. Creamy white and utterly light, the Asus miniBook is like the yoghurt of the hardware world.

#### SUMMARY:

I have kept mine for far longer than RM wanted. Sorry and all that but next time don't make review machines so very pleasant

9/10