

The Magazine of the Consumers' Association of Ireland

# Consumer Choice



[www.thecai.ie](http://www.thecai.ie)

FEBRUARY 2016



## Supporting Your Local Lotto

With a lack of consumer regulation in this area, is it a safe bet?

### € MONEY

- PRICE ROUNDING
- LOCAL PROPERTY TAX VALUATION

### ☀ LIFESTYLE

- PFCS IN FOOD PACKAGING
- GYM MEMBERSHIP

### 📺 PRODUCT TESTS

- PUSHCHAIRS
- TABLET PCS

## The Consumers' Association of Ireland

The Council is the policy-making body of CAI. Members are elected from within the CAI's membership at the Annual General Meeting.

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## February 2016

Dear Members,

It is election time and hordes of people you have not seen in years, if ever, will be calling to see you with a positive attitude and the offer to grant wishes.

Therefore, as we commence our 50th Year of Independent Representation and Education, it is important that you do understand and hopefully support what are the Top 5 Priority Election Issues for Consumers and Ireland (CAI):

**1: Motor Insurance - We must have an independent review to determine the true cause of a 30% average increase in 2015 alone - and put a halt to it;**

**2: Food Labelling - Our health is our wealth and we must have detail and assurance of the origin, source, content and safety of our meat, our vegetables and the packaging in which we buy it;**

**3: CE Marking - We have unsafe products being sold in Ireland which bear the so-called CE Mark of safety. CE Marking denotes only compliance with prevailing legislation - it has nothing to do with standards. We must have a guarantee of the highest standard;**

**4: The means through which the DAA retains VAT on consumer purchases at the airport is unacceptable. We must see this matter tackled;**

**5: As the CAI piloted the Small Claims Court procedure we believe it is time for change and we must, for example, review its operation to promote Mediation in case handling.**

Make it Count!



Dermott Jewell



## Our Reports

Reports in *Consumer Choice* are based on market research, laboratory tests or user surveys, all of which are independently and scientifically conducted. Free goods are never accepted for testing - all samples are purchased. Occasionally items may be borrowed for review purposes only.

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## Consumer Choice

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# News Briefs

The latest information  
on the world of the  
consumer

## Shoocra

Members of the European Parliament have delivered a veto to a European Commission proposal to allow up to 30% of sugar in baby food. This really played havoc with the expectations and plans of industry as the resolution, while never expected to be supported by a majority of MEPs at plenary stage, was never considered to be rejected entirely. If I am to be honest I do not understand why not, as 30% of sugar is red flag to a bull territory! The European Commission will now have to table an entirely new action. That said, they already warned that there is no firm timetable for producing a replacement for the rejected act. Indeed, it is now their suggestion that a lengthy impact assessment will probably be required, in line with the Better Regulation Agenda. Sweet!



## Wi-Illumination

They are not entirely new to the market but, certainly here in Ireland, they are a relatively unknown and rarely mentioned product – I am speaking of wi-fi boosting bulbs. Too often I am contacted by consumers who outline how, in certain rooms or parts of their homes, their wi-fi struggles to pass through thick walls or rooms to the back of the house. These bulbs screw into the socket as normal; provide light as normal; but also amplify the signal – ideal or what?! The product I have seen is at [www.sengled.com](http://www.sengled.com). Let me say from the outset that, as this particular brand is coming from the US, the cost (\$44.99 + \$22.25 postage) is a price challenge. Ooh, but the benefit.....!

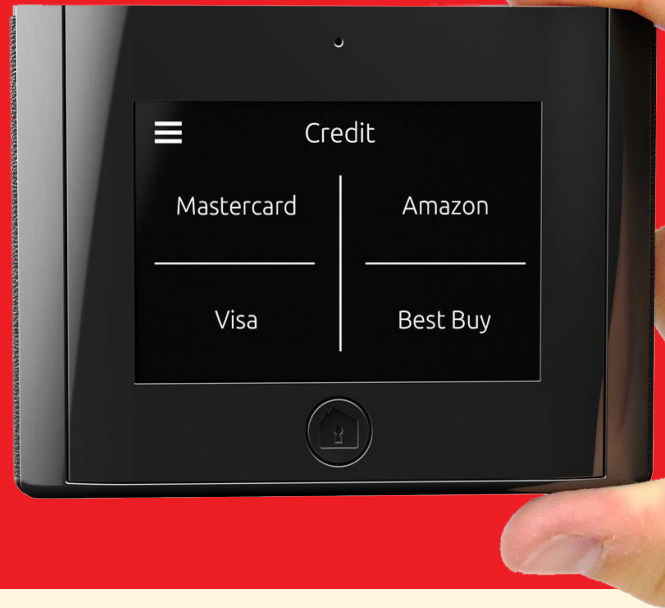
## THE JURY'S OUT



The European Commission has launched the EU-wide Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) platform for resolving consumer issues with online transactions. There is a running in period to allow what are Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) entities to register and familiarise themselves with the system before it goes live to consumers and traders on February 15th. In Ireland, it is the European Consumer Centre that is exchequer funded to provide the service. Applying is free with the resolution process, which must be completed within 90 days, coming at a 'low cost' (Irish consumers will have little previous experience of this pricing phenomenon), the specifics of which are unknown at this stage. Queries should be sent to [info@odr.ie](mailto:info@odr.ie).

## Insider Information

If you liked the wi-fi bulb then you will love this! There is a form of secure credit card wallet on sale nationwide that contains a deflective panel which protects your cards from hacking or phishing. However, the Wocket Wallet is very different and impressively so. There is no need for you to carry your cards at all because once you swipe your cards into the Wocket you are ready to go and are protected with encrypted biometric technology. You cannot lose your cards or have them stolen and the card-sized Wocket is guaranteed to be secure and unhackable. All you need to do to purchase is to select your preferred card on the unit's touchscreen and close the transaction. I like this - very much.



### NEW FOOD LABEL - CONTAINS: *(NO)NOTHING ODD*

I learn from our BEUC colleagues that an EU study has found that labelling products from clones and off-spring would be too costly. The study further outlines the economical burden that labelling meat and milk products derived from cloned animals' offspring would have on the EU agri-food sector. A key in the format was how the European Commission asked the consultants to work under a "negative labelling policy" hypothesis, meaning that they assumed that that all meat and milk products would need to carry a label indicating whether or not they were derived from a clone or clone descendant.

Before you think I have lost my marbles can I remind you that this is contrary to what exists for GMOs and nano food ingredients, where "positive labelling" puts the onus on those manufacturers favouring these production methods - which most consumers reject - to bear the traceability and labelling costs! The study was carried out to inform future Council discussions on the draft cloning laws.

Member States are in the initial stages of discussing the cloning proposals and were awaiting publication of this study's results. The European Parliament already voted on the proposals and called for a comprehensive ban on cloning and the sale and imports of clones and their descendants, their reproductive material and food derived from them - plain and simple.

### I Spy with My Apple i

A relatively new app is 'Find Friends'. The idea behind this is to allow family and friends to share their location and plot it on a map. It immediately comes to mind how this can be a great tool if wanting to keep a safe watch on young family members. It would also really work for holiday journeys where partners or the group may split up and need to find the nearest place to meet or get to in the event of a problem arising. This app comes pre-loaded on the iPhone 6S but will automatically upload also when you update your phone to iOS 9. The unfortunate side to this is that, for now, it is solely available for Apple phones, tablets etc. You can put money on it though that the other providers will all follow suit - and without delay as 'friends' who buy phones can be hard to find!



# Food & Health

 by Clodagh O'Donoghue

## Action Plan

As winter retreats and we edge towards spring, the thoughts of many start turning to increasing their activity levels with a view to improving overall health. It is timely then that Ireland's first-ever National Physical Activity Plan was recently launched with the ambitious target of getting at least half a million more Irish people taking regular exercise over the next ten years.

We noted in last month's issue of *Consumer Choice* the growing awareness of the health risks associated with physical inactivity and, specifically, sitting for long periods. The Get Ireland Active website offers a calculator to help users assess the number of hours they remain seated on a daily basis - whether that is on their commute to and from work, behind the wheel of their car, at their desk or in front of the TV - and, as the site notes, you may well be surprised at how quickly the hours mount up.

On the plus side, the website is a fount of information on how people of all age-groups - from pre-schoolers through to older adults - can "get up, get out

and get active". Its Places to Get Active database offers information on local amenities, outdoor activities and indoor venues - users need only input their location and their preferences to find a convenient location to suit their needs, whether that is a park, playground, forest walk or run, cycling trail, swimming pool or playing pitch.

The [getirelandactive.ie](http://getirelandactive.ie) website will be further expanded to become a one-stop-shop for physical activity under the new National Physical Activity Plan, which will put in motion a range of other key features including:

- a new annual campaign to encourage people to become more active, more often
- support for 500 new community walking groups and an extension of the Active School Flag Programme to a further 500 schools
- a drive to get employers to introduce healthy workplace initiatives, such as

exercise activities and standing desks

- the development of new guidelines on sedentary behaviours
- greater promotion of healthy lifestyles in primary and secondary schools
- the introduction of new initiatives like Get Ireland Running or Get Ireland Swimming following the success of the Get Ireland Walking project

The national plan comes in the wake of research that shows that seven out of ten adults in Ireland do not get enough exercise, with current recommendations set at 30 minutes of moderate activity five days a week. So, perhaps, 2016 will see more of us getting out and about to enjoy the many free amenities and activities on offer. And for those who think that joining a gym might be the way to go in their quest to become more active, in our current issue we look at the cost of gym membership and what you need to consider.



## Bitter taste added to detergent capsules to reduce poisoning risk

All liquid detergent capsules now must have a bitter taste added that will ensure that children who put them into their mouths will spit them out in less than six seconds. In the April 2015 issue of *Consumer Choice*, we noted the poisoning dangers to small children presented by increasingly popular liquid detergent capsules. These colourful pods contain liquid detergent and can be mistaken by small children for toys or sweets. The poisoning risks of such capsules have been well-documented in recent years and awareness campaigns have been run across the EU and in individual member states to highlight the need for adults to keep these products out of children's reach.

A report published in the *Irish Medical Journal (IMJ)* at the end of

2015 reviewed all cases of accidental ingestion presented at Temple Street Children's University Hospital in the years 2010 and 2011 and found that liquid detergent capsules accounted for 9.2% of the cases and were the second most common substance involved in these presentations, after paracetamol (14% of cases). Describing liquid detergent capsules as "an emerging threat", the *IMJ* report noted that accidental ingestion of the capsules can have varied and severe consequences, affecting the eyes, upper gastrointestinal tract and respiratory system.

The soluble packaging on the capsules dissolves quickly when moist, releasing the liquid detergent within. Since June 2015, all manufacturers have had to ensure that the capsules

are coated in a "bittering agent" that will make children spit them out within six seconds. In addition, stronger packaging must be used to make it more difficult for small hands to open and larger warnings must be displayed alerting consumers to the dangers posed to children by these products. Capsules placed on the market before June 2015 could be sold until the end of last year, but as of 1st January 2016, all products for sale on the market must comply with the EU regulations. Similar EU measures taken in relation to scented lamp oil and coloured lighter fuel that might also be accidentally drunk by children, especially those in the one-to-three-year age range, have proved successful in reducing the number of poisoning cases.



# Money News



Money News by *Róisín Moloney Weekes*

## Undervaluing your home for the LPT

The Local Property Tax (LPT), which came into force in 2013, is an annual self-assessed tax charged on the market value of residential properties in the state. As most of us are only too aware, each property owner was tasked with choosing a bracket in which to place their home based on its market value. The options included €0 to €100,000, €100,001 to €150,000, rising in increments of €50,000 to €1 million and each value had a corresponding tax attached for homeowners to pay.

How did you value your property? Were you, like many others, estimating the value of your home on the light side? Given the resistance to this tax that was so consistently documented in the media, we can say that taking a pessimistic view of your property value was common. With a backdrop of protest and claims that many would never pay this tax, perhaps many of us felt justified in taking such an approach. Maybe this is not your case - maybe you are one of the many homeowners who paid the tax due and you estimated the value of your property in a fair light. Perhaps since 2013 you have been paying more than some of your neighbours? In order to avoid Revenue investigations, mandatory deductions from your salary or your pension, and even attachment orders, you felt the need to pay what you believe was an honest and fair estimation. Did the fear of selling your home in the future feature in your decision to pay your LPT?

If now selling your property or considering selling your property, you may be seeking a price that is in excess of the valuation for LPT that you gave your property on 1st May 2013. You may wonder if you are liable to pay the outstanding LPT if you sell for the asking price or more. When you are selling your house, your solicitor can use the LPT online system to get clearance from Revenue to prove that there are no outstanding LPT issues with your property. This is known

as general clearance. However, if the expected or agreed sales price is greater than the valuation band or valuation declared on the 2013 return, you may need to get written clearance from Revenue in addition to general clearance. There are, however, a number of situations when you will be exempt from getting written clearance:

1. The first of these conditions includes the sale of any property where the purchase price does not exceed €300,000. The chargeable value that was declared for the property is not taken into account. This is a new condition that was inserted into the guidance note in November 2015. If a property that was valued in the €100,001 to €150,000 band sells for €290,000, the general clearance applies. If the property sells for €310,000, written clearance is required.

2. The second condition gives allowable valuation margins, meaning that there is an allowable margin by which the sales price of a property may exceed the valuation band/chargeable value that was declared for the property on the 1st May 2013 valuation date. Different allowable margins apply in relation to properties situated in Dublin city and county and those in the rest of the country. The condition states that the sales price must not exceed the upper limit of the valuation band/chargeable value or that, when it does, any such excess must be within the allowable margin. The allowable margins are where the sales price is not more than 25% higher than the upper limit of the band declared in cases up to €1 million, and, in the case of properties with declared chargeable value exceeding €1 million, where the sales price is not more than 25% higher than the chargeable value. In the case of properties situated in Dublin city and county, the 25% allowable margin is increased to a 50% allowable margin.



For example, if a property situated in Cork that was valued in the €250,001 to €300,000 band sells for up to €375,000, general clearance is sufficient. However, if the property sells for €380,000, written clearance is required. Similarly, if a property situated in Donegal that was valued in the €350,001 to €400,000 band sells for up to €500,000, then general clearance is sufficient - whereas if the property sells for €508,000, written clearance is required. If a property situated in Wicklow that was valued at €1,200,000 sells for up to €1,500,000, then general clearance applies - but if the property sells for €1,550,000, written clearance is needed.

This allowable margin was increased from 15% to 25% in October 2014 and from 25% to 50% in November 2015 for properties in Dublin - so if a property situated in Dublin that was valued in the €250,001 to €300,000 band sells for up to €450,000, then general clearance applies but if the property sells for €455,000, written clearance is required. And if property situated in Dublin that was valued at €1,200,000 sells for up to €1,800,000, then general clearance applies, but written clearance is needed if the property

sells for €1,820,000.

3. General clearance given under the third condition involves expenditure on enhancements to a property. The condition relates to whether or not a vendor has enhanced the value of his or her property since the 1st May 2013 valuation date by carrying out construction/refurbishment work. Where the sales price exceeds the valuation band/chargeable value declared, any such excess must be within the specified margins set out in condition 2, adjusted by the amount of any verifiable expenditure on refurbishment or improvement incurred since 1st May 2013, i.e. the amount by which the sales price exceeds the valuation band/chargeable value must be less than the aggregate of the specified margin and the enhancement expenditure. The specified margin set out in condition 2 is 50% in the case of properties with a chargeable value exceeding €300,000 situated in Dublin city and county and 25% for all other properties. For the condition to apply, the vendor must be in a position to make available (if requested by Revenue) receipts verifying the type of work undertaken and the cost of the work done.

Take for example, a property that was valued in the €350,001 to €400,000 band and that sells

for €560,000: general clearance condition 2 allows for a sales price of up to 25% more than €400,000 (i.e. €500,000). However, after the valuation date the vendor incurred (verifiable) refurbishment expenditure of €120,000. As a result, general clearance applies because the gap between the upper limit of €500,000 and the sales price does not exceed the refurbishment expenditure. However, if the property sells for €650,000, general clearance would not apply.

4. Finally, you can argue that you based the original valuation on sales of comparable properties. You must be able to show that you based the declared chargeable value on the valuation date on known and verifiable sale prices of comparable properties in the area.

You will need to get written clearance from Revenue if none of the above conditions are met and your declared valuation was made in good faith and in line with Revenue guidelines. You apply for written clearance by completing Form LPT5 and including relevant supporting documentation. Revenue will review the basis for your declared valuation and determine whether clearance should issue. Also, you will note that if any of the above applies to you and you deliberately

undervalued your property for the purposes of paying a smaller LPT, you could say you have gotten off scot free. If, for example, you valued your house at the lowest valuation available and you have now sold that property for under €300,000, there is no consequence or penalty. This is a matter that will no doubt be a frustration for those of us who did give an honest and fair valuation in 2013 and paid LPT on that basis since.



## Tax benefits to marriage

Is a marriage proposal on the cards for 2016? It could make financial sense. It may even be the encouragement you or your significant other needs to know that marriage allows for greater flexibility, letting you choose how you are taxed and allowing you to maximise savings. You and your spouse can be jointly assessed, meaning that you will be taxed as one unit and allowing some tax concessions unused by one spouse to be utilised by the other. Separate assessment means that both spouses have their combined available allowances split evenly. Of course, you can also decide to be

treated as single individuals for tax purposes if, for example, a couple separated. Outside of income tax and credits, numerous concessions are afforded to married couples such as gifts and inheritances between spouses, which pass without being subject to capital acquisitions tax. Any assets transferred between spouses are also exempt from capital gains tax and capital losses made by one spouse can be used by the other to reduce a capital gains bill. Such tax incentives may just be enough for you to pop the question!







# Product/Tech News

## CES 2016

The big players in the world of consumer electronics and technology always start the year with a major event that gathers together innovations and inventions from all over the world. This year's Consumer Electronics Show (CES) was held 6th-9th January in Las Vegas where thousands of consumer technology companies showcased their newest offerings, ranging from the inspired and impressive to the downright weird and wacky.

In recent years, CES has seen fewer launches of mobile phones and tablets as some major manufacturers prefer to launch their latest innovations outside the January event. However, car manufacturers are increasingly taking up the floor space left vacant as they seek to show off their advances in autonomous technology and electric and hydrogen drive systems. Among this year's auto-related highlights was the introduction of the Chevy Bolt EV, a relatively affordable long-range electric car that reportedly delivers 200 miles on a single charge. Extending its gesture control capability, German car manufacturer BMW showcased its AirTouch 3D, which uses dashboard sensors to recognise hand movements that will activate the tablet-like dash display for controlling in-car entertainment, making a phone call and more. Similarly, Ford's Sync 3 is a new dashboard interface that uses enhanced speech recognition technology to allow drivers to ask for directions, browse phone contacts or select a radio station simply by talking out loud. Carmakers are battling it out with technology companies to see who will be first to produce a fully robotic, self-driving car and integration of smart-car and smart-home technology was also a running theme.

Often the most interesting products on the convention floor are clever new gadgets aimed at streamlining life for consumers and adding to the growing trend towards the Internet of Things, whereby all kinds of appliances and objects are endowed with smart capabilities. Here are some examples of products that caught our eye...



CES 2016 took place 6th-9th January in Las Vegas



Samsung's Family Hub Refrigerator

## Cool and clever device

Generating a good deal of buzz at CES 2016 was Samsung's Family Hub Refrigerator, so called because, according to the manufacturer, this appliance "reconnects families". One door of the fridge boasts a 21.5-inch full HD touchscreen that can be used to post notes, share calendar reminders, display art or photos - much as you would use a normal fridge door but without the yellowing paper curling at the edges. This screen is equipped with sound, enabling music streaming, and you can also stream television using screen mirroring with a Samsung Smart TV - so you can watch a cookery show as you prepare dinner for step-by-step guidance.

Cooler again is the ability to take a look inside your fridge when you are roaming supermarket aisles. Three cameras positioned on the inside of the fridge door capture an image every time the door is shut and the built-in wi-fi connectivity means that you can take a peek using a smartphone app from wherever you are to help finalise your shopping list.

Another very clever feature is that the touch display can be used to record when items enter the fridge and keep track of how long they have been lurking at the back of the shelf so you know when to chuck them out. The appliance on the show floor was a four-door fridge and freezer, though those who do not need the freezer capacity have the option of using Samsung's FlexZone feature to switch between freezing and refrigeration according to their needs. Unsurprisingly, this will not be an inexpensive item to buy, with projections that it will cost \$5,000 (€4,600 approx.) when it becomes available in the spring.

**The products featured on these pages have not been tested by the Consumers' Association of Ireland and their inclusion here is not, in any way, an endorsement of them.**



Product News by *Clodagh O'Donoghue*

# Remote control

If the Samsung Family Hub Refrigerator is aimed at reconnecting your family, the manufacturer's latest high-end TVs will allow you to control your smart home from your sofa. Samsung's line-up of high-end 'superior 4K UHD' (SUHD) TVs for 2016 will come with Internet of Things hub technology from SmartThings – a company that recently extended its reach beyond the US to the UK and Ireland. This hub technology allows users to remotely control a wide range of compatible smart devices, including lights, locks, thermostats, and music speakers. And thanks to the new collaboration between Samsung and SmartThings, you will now be able to do it all using a TV remote control – so you could dim the lights, turn up the heating, lower the volume of the music and even open the front door to visitors without ever leaving the couch. And for those panicked moments when the TV remote goes missing, a mobile app is available for smartphones.

## Vigilant cleaning

Another example of a manufacturer creating a device that moves beyond its primary function is LG with its Hom-Bot Turbo+, which is a robot vacuum cleaner that not only cleans floors but also uses its camera capabilities to improve home security. A robot vacuum cleaner needs to be able to navigate around obstacles like table and chair legs, and the Hom-Bot Turbo+ is aided in this by a triple camera setup that allows it to record the surrounding area, keeping track of where it has been and where it has yet to clean. Those cameras also come in handy by providing a home security feature that automatically sends still images to users' smartphones if movement is detected when they are not at home. And using augmented reality, the Home-Joy feature means that owners can use their smartphone camera to indicate areas of a room that need particular attention – a simple tap on a location in the room will send the robot scurrying off to get started on its cleaning.



LG Hom-Bot Turbo+



Laundroid

## Healthy innovation

New consumer-focused, technological developments in the area of health care are a common fixture at CES and this year saw new applications for 'virtual check-ups'. For example, a French-based company introduced its Bewell Connect health management suite that includes a smartphone app that communicates with its connected blood pressure and glucose monitor, thermometer and blood oxygen sensor. For those that experience symptoms such as shortness of breath or chest pain, the app will pose questions and offer potential diagnoses, and a simple button will connect you to a doctor. US-based company MedWand has created a handheld connected device that enables consumers to measure temperature, heart rate and oxygen levels and includes a camera to examine the throat and inner ear, allowing doctors to carry out a more thorough examination online. MedWand is working with existing telemedicine doctors and hopes to sell the \$250 (€230) device in the US and worldwide from June.

Simplifying life for parents of very young children or those who are unwilling to hold a thermometer under their tongue or clamped under their arm for the required time, the Thermo from Withings is a wi-fi connected, smart thermometer that can take accurate body temperature readings by simply tapping the device to the side of the patient's head. Certainly a convenient and hygienic option, the Thermo gauges temperature through the head's temporal artery, taking 4,000 measurements in two seconds and correcting for biases like ambient temperature and skin heat loss to deliver its reading, which can be shared and tracked through a smartphone app. The thermometer is priced at €100 and is planned to go on sale in the next few months.

## Neat trick

And as always at CES, the 2016 event had its share of devices to solve problems that may not really be problems at all or to do tasks that are not overly arduous in the first place – one we feel falls into this category is a robot to fold your laundry. Called the Laundroid, this appliance is about the size of a tall fridge with a bottom pull-out drawer where you can toss in your clothes and these will then be moved up to shelves neatly folded. The Japanese manufacturers have been working on this device for ten years and it is not quite there yet – though there is a deal with Panasonic to potentially start including it with washers and dryers in 2018 and to begin building it into Japanese homes by 2020.

# Minister of Health should ban perfluorochemicals (PFCs) in takeaway food packaging

CAI members may have read the recent report in the *Irish Mirror* (January 11th) entitled "Popular munch box takeaway could kill you because of chemicals contained in the packaging".

The article highlighted that the US Food & Drug Administration (FDA) has banned perfluorochemicals (PFCs) used in takeaway food packaging as they are carcinogenic and thereby harmful to human health.

PFCs are widely used in food contact materials, particularly as an additive in paper coatings to provide oil and moisture resistance to paper. This means that in the US food cannot now be sold which has been in contact with packaging such as paper boxes that have been treated with PFCs.

The US FDA, which introduced the PFC ban at the end of December 2015, has already been working with manufacturers to cease the use of these chemicals in paper packaging. The Framework EU Regulation 1935/2004 on materials and articles intended to come into contact with food requires such materials not to:

- Release their constituents into food at levels harmful to human health, or
- Change food composition, taste and odour in an unacceptable way

In addition, there are specific EU rules on certain food contact materials e.g. ceramic materials, regenerated cellulose

film, plastics (including recycled plastic), and active and intelligent materials (which extend the shelf-life by maintaining or improving the condition of packaged food) **BUT** there are no specific EU rules on paper such as takeaway food packaging. Such packaging must simply be in line with the two requirements mentioned in EU Regulation 1935/2004. Member States may establish their own rules on paper packaging but there are no such rules in Ireland.

The Food Safety Authority of Ireland in response to the *Irish Mirror* article stated that *"The European Commission advised by the European Food Safety Authority is developing further legislation to set specific rules for particular materials including paper and cardboard"*.

The Consumers' Association of Ireland (CAI) is surprised by this statement since at a Luxembourg Presidency conference on Food Contact Materials last October, Michael Flüh, of the Commission's health and food safety directorate, said that the Commission plans in 2016 to focus on improving mutual recognition of national packaging rules rather than introducing new European rules on food contact materials. This is in line with the Juncker Commission's philosophy to introduce limited new EU laws.

This Commission response comes after inquiries by the European Parliament's Environment Public Health and Food Safety Committee and the Danish Consumer Council has questioned the lack

of harmonised EU laws covering chemicals in food contact materials such as paper and cardboard. Indeed, the testing of packaging by the Danish Consumer Council highlighted in particular health concerns about the use of PFCs in takeaway food packaging.

The CAI is concerned that the Food Safety Authority of Ireland is waiting for EU legislation on PFCs in paper packaging before doing anything on this issue. Such EU legislation seems very unlikely to emerge in the near future. During this time, Irish consumers will be exposed to carcinogenic PFCs in takeaway food packaging.

The CAI therefore calls upon the Food Safety Authority of Ireland to immediately complete an inventory of takeaway food packaging used in Irish food businesses, to ascertain the presence and levels of PFCs used in such packaging.

At the same time, the CAI calls upon the Minister of Health, Leo Varadkar, to prepare legislation (Statutory Instrument) in line with the US FDA decision at the end of December 2015 to ban the use of PFCs in takeaway food packaging in Ireland due to their carcinogenic properties. This simple move will immediately protect the health of Irish consumers, rather than waiting for the EU Commission to draft specific rules for such packaging which may take two-to-three years to be adopted.

The CAI has a simple message - protect the health of Irish consumers first.

## Council Opinion

## Choice Comment

Lest it be misunderstood, let us be clear, the CAI is concerned that a food packaging issue, already legislated to be harmful by the US Food & Drug Administration (FDA), is receiving delayed attention at the EU Commission level and, as a result, entirely none at our national Food Safety Authority of Ireland level.

Packaging presents problems and, by way of example, we can also cite the Stiftung Warentest test results in December 2014 and earlier in November 2012 where most chocolates in 24 tested advent calendars in Germany contained mineral oil hydrocarbon residues. Recycled cardboard packaging was mentioned as the source of those residues. The organisation gave recommendations on solutions to manufacturers.

When chemicals with carcinogenic contents were found in takeaway food packaging products in the US, the FDA took clear action and banned them. This has not been the case across the EU where we can now see how such action is far into the distance – regardless of the precautionary principle, which, we believe, should have generated immediate action to protect consuming citizens.

In these circumstances, the CAI urges the Minister for Health to prepare the necessary legislation, by way of a Statutory Instrument, banning the sale and use in Ireland of all packaging using PFCs and with immediate effect.





# A Change In Your Change

Following the nationwide application of the rounding initiative just over three months ago, *Consumer Choice* re-examines the scheme, highlighting what consumers need to know when receiving their change.



REPORT by Sarah Breathnach

You may have been expecting change from a purchase you made recently that you did not receive, but did you ask why? As of 28th October 2015, most retailers began rounding change in cash to the nearest five cent. With the symmetrical rounding policy, a transaction of €9.98 or €9.99, for instance, will be rounded up to €10.00, while a transaction of €9.96 or €9.97 will be rounded down to €9.95. This follows a decision by the Central Bank to reduce the number of one cent and two cent coins in circulation.

## Background to the rounding rollout

According to the Central Bank, consumers do not use one cent and two cent coins regularly for transactional purposes, causing these coins to be kept out of circulation. This has resulted in the Central Bank issuing approximately three times the number of one cent and two cent coins compared to other countries, ultimately at the expense of the taxpayer. These coins are expensive to mint, with the production cost of the one cent coin at 1.65 cent, exceeding its face value.

Prior to the national implementation of the scheme, the National Payments Plan conducted a nine-week pilot in Wexford town to assess consumer and retailer responses to the introduction of a rounding convention in Ireland. The trial found strong support for the initiative among both consumers and retailers. When 'don't knows' were excluded, 85% of consumers and 100% of retailers felt that rounding should be applied nationally. The practical issues with small denomination coins coupled with evidence of a favourable response towards the scheme has given rise to the nationwide implementation of the initiative.

## Other European approaches

Ireland joins six other EU member states – including the Netherlands, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Hungary and Belgium – in its adoption of the rounding system. Sweden has been coin rounding with the krona since the early 1970s; however, it was Finland that pioneered the rounding initiative within the eurozone when the country made the switch

from the Finnish markka to the euro in January 2002. It was decided from the outset that one cent and two cent coins would not be introduced into general circulation and instead prices would be rounded to the nearest five cent. Shortly after this in 2004, following a successful pilot, the Netherlands opted to withdraw one cent and two cent coins from general circulation. However, small coin denominations of one cent and two cent still remain legal tender in these countries.

## Inflation concerns

Despite general positivity towards the adoption of the initiative, fears of inflation remain a worry for some consumers. During the aforementioned Wexford trial, participants were asked whether they felt that rounding may exacerbate price inflation. Over half (55%) of consumers agreed that price inflation would not be increased by the introduction of rounding while another quarter were unsure. According to the Central Bank, evidence from other countries that have adopted a symmetrical rounding policy indicates that the rounding of the total bill, as opposed to the price of each individual item on the bill, limits any inflationary effects.

## So what do consumers need to know?

The Central Bank's guidelines state that consumers and retailers are not obliged to participate in rounding as it is conducted on a voluntary basis. It is, however, important

to keep in mind that if retailers are participating in rounding, they are not required to ask whether or not the consumer agrees to participate. The onus therefore rests with the consumer to state that they do not want rounding applied. It should be noted that rounding may occur on self-service check-outs automatically; however, as a consumer, you are by law entitled to your exact change, provided you request it. In the event that retailers do not have the necessary small coins, they are obligated to round the cost down at their own expense. Retailers are provided with signage by the Central Bank and should be displaying this in-store if they are participating.

Rounding only applies to cash transactions and only occurs on the total bill, meaning that the individual pricing of items will remain unchanged. Although the evidence from other countries suggests that symmetrical rounding does not significantly increase price inflation, it has been noted that items are most commonly priced at €0.49, €0.99 or €1.99 and so on – meaning that unless customers actively request their change, these items will be rounded up when making single purchases. Issues relating to loyalty card points have also arisen; it seems that some consumers may not be receiving their full points entitlement on purchases that have been rounded. For instance, for loyalty cards that offer one point per euro, a purchase of €14.99 that has been rounded up to €15.00 apparently may still only yield 14 points as opposed to 15 points.



## Choice Comment

We would have concerns at the reality that there has been insufficient advice issued to consumers regarding rounding and, specifically, their right to opt out when making cash transactions. The simple fact is that our common pricing practice in terms of selling at €0.49, €0.99, €1.99 and so on – clearly – places the consumer at a distinct disadvantage when purchasing individual items in cash. Alternatively, we are seeing a direct inflationary action that is creating a significant accumulation of profit for the retail sector. This is the issue that appears to have been disregarded in what was a ridiculously short term and poorly centred 'trial'. Prices will be reflected as unchanged through the Central Statistics Office review of goods and services while a uniquely quiet and hidden opportunity has been created for non-disclosed profit-taking. We have no doubt but that this will be strenuously denied and so we call for a policy of full disclosure in auditing to clearly account for what the Central Bank has assured us would be a nil effect from rounding – not on pricing – but in specific terms of cost to and loss to the paying consumer.

# Working Out Your Gym Membership



REPORT by Sarah Breathnach

## At a glance

- Survey findings
- Tips for joining
- Low-cost and free alternatives

**In the wake of New Year ‘get fit’ resolutions designed to assuage our guilt following the excess of Christmas, we give you the skinny on gym membership fees, providing consumers with top tips before joining.**

The Irish population spends a staggering total of €435 million on gym membership per annum, according to figures released in the 2014 Philip Lee Sports Report. Last year, the Central Statistics Office’s National Household Survey reported that aside from walking, gym-based activities (to include aerobics and keep fit) were found to be the most popular form of physical activity for adults, followed by swimming, with nearly 57% of the population members of a sports or fitness club. In spite of the popularity of gyms and leisure centres, many members discontinue their membership, with the most commonly cited reason in 2014 being “affordability”. The proliferation

of low-cost gyms in recent years has made it easier for some to become members – nevertheless, leisure centres and gym facilities can be relatively costly depending on the type of membership package opted for.

Alarming statistics related to the levels of inactivity across the country and indeed the worrying health effects of a sedentary lifestyle coupled with the government’s recent launch of the National Physical Activity Plan – a programme designed to get an extra 50,000 people exercising regularly every year for the next ten years – will undoubtedly see the nation investigating possible ways to meet fitness guidelines.

In light of this, and given the popularity of this form of activity, we conducted a survey to examine leisure centre and gym membership fees nationwide.

## Survey findings

### About our survey

In our analysis, 20 randomly selected leisure centres (pool and gym facilities) from across the country were surveyed, with a number of the larger chains having multiple locations, ensuring that each of the 26 counties in the Republic of Ireland is represented among our findings. An additional five gym-only facilities in Dublin, Cork, Galway, Limerick, and Donegal



were also surveyed for comparison. All averages were based on standard non-promotional rates and were correct at the time of analysis (12th January 2016).

### **Annual fees**

The average annual cost for membership to a leisure centre with access to both gym and pool facilities was €437. This is similar to the patterns found in our previous gym membership survey from 2010. Within our 2010 sample, the cheapest annual membership reported was €200. In the current sample, the most inexpensive annual membership for a gym-only facility was priced at €175 and €254 for gym and pool membership, while the most expensive membership fee was €599 per annum. The distinction between gym-only facilities and gym and pool facilities is an important one, quite often significantly influencing price points. We found that the average cost of membership to a gym-only facility was €282 per annum making it around €150 less expensive than membership to a gym and pool leisure centre. Opting for a gym-only membership within a leisure club facility (with a pool) also tended to be on average more expensive than choosing to join a gym-only facility.



### **Upfront versus direct debit payment options**

According to our findings, different payment plans can have a considerable influence on the total price a consumer pays. In our sample, monthly fees, generally paid via direct debit, ranged between €29 and €60. Opting to pay on a monthly basis can be on average 30% more

costly than paying a once-off, upfront annual membership fee. Alongside this, a number of the leisure centres we spoke to noted that a joining fee (ranging from €10 to €25) was only applicable on direct debit memberships.

It seems, therefore, that for those who make regular use of the facilities all year round it is often a vastly better investment to pay upfront. Having said that, if you are not a seasoned gym-goer you may be better advised to start with a monthly, three-month or six-month membership in order to adequately assess your fortitude before getting tied into a contract and committing to a large annual payment.

### **Commitment issues**

For those who worry about getting tied into a contract, the good news is that half of the gyms and leisure centres we surveyed offered 'pay-as-you-go' rates, with prices ranging from €3.50 to €12 euro per visit. Additionally, the majority of the remaining clubs we spoke to allow members to bring guests for a daily rate. Paying as you go appears to be a good alternative for infrequent swimmers or gym-users, but with repeated use quickly (sometimes within as little as three visits) becomes the most expensive option. Recently, some of the lower-cost gyms have introduced a more flexible membership model allowing members to take a break - for instance, during holidays, exams or illness - by 'pausing' their membership.

### **The off-peak advantage**

Some leisure clubs offer off-peak rates, which give members full access to the facilities during specified hours. Our survey indicated that on-peak annual membership was almost 30% more expensive than the off-peak alternative. The hours vary from club to club, but if the time periods prove convenient, it is well worth considering an off-peak package.

### **Discounts**

A staggering 90% of leisure centres we surveyed offer discounted rates to older age groups, often referred to as 'golden packages', and to students with a valid student ID card. Within our sample, the average cost of an all-inclusive membership (gym and pool) was €363 for students and €350 for the older age groups. Some of the leisure centres we spoke to also offered off-peak student or older age group rates that were even less expensive. Corporate rates may also be available upon request. Although gym-



only rates were found to be less expensive on average, the majority of gym-only facilities within our sample did not offer discounted rates for older age groups and students.

### **Promotions**

While this survey only included standard non-promotional rates in its analysis it should be noted that there are a number of excellent deals available for those who do their research. We also found that there is often room for negotiation, particularly if more than one individual is joining.

### **Location**

It remains the case that consumers in the larger cities will have more choice when it comes to selecting a gym or leisure centre. As was noted in our 2010 survey, there has been a move towards lower-cost gym-only facilities with none of the frills, particularly in larger cities. It seems that, in smaller counties, joining a leisure centre - albeit often more expensive - may be the only option available.

### **Tips for joining**

#### **Try before you buy**

Many leisure facilities offer a free trial to prospective members. We recommend all consumers to avail of this opportunity in order to ensure that the centre being considered is an environment that suits and appeals to you. If a free trial is not offered, consider buying a day-pass or asking a friend who is a member to bring you along as a guest.

#### **Room for manoeuvre**

If possible, visit all prospective leisure centres and gyms to inspect the facilities and discuss your options with the



membership team. Don't be afraid to negotiate. There is very often flexibility with the price, especially if a number of people are joining at once. Today, there is a discount available for almost everyone - many clubs offer student, older age group and corporate rates - so take time to shop around.

### **Mind your Ts and Cs**

Examine the terms and conditions carefully. It appears that, in general, direct debit monthly payments can be cancelled once the minimum terms of the contract are fulfilled (i.e. with a three-month direct debit package, you may cancel after the three months) but notice is required sometimes no less than 30 days in advance. With direct debit payments, many gyms have an automatic renewal policy, meaning consumers are obliged to cancel their direct debit with both their bank and the gym if they do not wish to continue their membership. With annual upfront payments, in certain leisure centres and gyms,

long-term memberships can be 'paused' or cancelled in the event of illness, injury or a medical condition with appropriate written proof. It is, however, important to check this with each gym as terms and conditions can vary greatly.

### **Before jumping in at the deep end...**

Overall, our survey suggests that leisure centre and gym memberships remain relatively expensive. That said, with increased competition in the market, there are undoubtedly deals and discounts to be availed of. It is, therefore, our advice that consumers do their research and shop around. The price versus the quality of services and facilities offered is a crucial consideration, particularly when comparing centres with varying price-tags. Finally, and possibly most importantly, get a sense of the personal value of your investment, by taking time to adequately evaluate how often the membership will be used in realistic terms. If upon reflection gym membership is not the route for you or, indeed, is not in this

year's budget, fear not. With the government's current focus on achieving a healthier Ireland, there is now more than ever an abundance of low-cost and free alternatives to help you warm up to the idea of exercise in 2016.

## **Virtual motivation**

With the advent of mobile and online fitness apps, gym-goers no longer have to keep track of their workouts and progress on paper. Smartphone fitness apps such as GymGoal, GymHero and GymFrame allow users to log their workouts, measurements and routines; compare their results to other users; and track their progress while sharing it on social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Such apps may help users to achieve the arduous task of building and maintaining a gym routine, enabling them to meet fitness goals. There are also a number of top-rated fitness apps such as Hot5 Fitness, Lose It! and Couch to 5K, which provide dietary information, fitness plans and workout routines - all of which can be done in the comfort of your home or the local park.

## **Stretching the funds**

There are a number of low-cost and free alternatives on offer and they are well worth investigating.

### **Local leisure centres**

For many, the cost of private membership is a precluding factor - if this is the case, it may be worth investigating your nearby local authority leisure centre. These centres, which are often subsidised, can be the least expensive option for gym and pool access. For more information contact your local county council or citizens information centre.

### **Out-door gyms**

Although it is a relatively new concept within Ireland, a number of outdoor gyms or 'green gyms' have been installed in parks and open spaces around the country. The equipment - which includes walkers, steppers, bikes, cross-trainers and various resistance machines similar to what is found in a traditional gym - is free to use and suitable for all age-groups.

### **Parkrun**

Parkrun is a worldwide organisation that holds free weekly 5km timed runs for people of all ages and levels of fitness. Each participant is provided with information on their performance, allowing participants to track their progress and compare their finishing times to those of their peers and the current world-record holders. Due to Parkrun's rapidly growing popularity in Ireland, the Minister for Health has included it as a feature of the government's recently launched National Physical Activity Plan. Parkrun Ireland holds events on Saturday mornings at 9.30am in parks and forests across the country.

For more information on ways and places to get active in your locality, visit [www.getirelandactive.ie](http://www.getirelandactive.ie).



# Supporting Your Local Lotto



**Consumer Choice** investigates the use of local lotteries as a fundraising mechanism for clubs and societies. Who regulates and how are consumers protected?

At a glance

- Local lotteries
- Regulation
- Call for controls



**REPORT** by *Róisín Moloney Weekes*

Many of us like to support our local club and many of us feel obliged to. It cannot, however, be denied that the value of local sporting clubs and societies in many communities cannot be quantified, offering avenues for networking, friendship building, building community spirit and fostering a collective identity for players, coaches, spectators, organisers and more. It is, therefore, understandable that so many of us opt to support such clubs and societies through their fundraising lotteries. Do we purchase without asking questions about who administers, regulates and watches out for our investment? This investment may be €2 per week or less; it may be €5 for three tickets per week; and some wish to show their support by committing to even greater amounts of €10 and €20 per week. Over the course of a year, your support can amount to a significant sum. While it may be more difficult to question your neighbour than a stranger about the rules and regulations of the 'lotto', it may just be worth it.

## Lottery legislation

What we do know is that, in the majority of cases, sports clubs and charities must

apply for a lottery licence in their local District Court. In order to obtain such a licence, the lotto must be for some charitable purpose. Governed by the Gaming and Lotteries Acts 1956-1986, legislation dictates that a lottery permit or a licence must be obtained if a lottery is promoted. A lottery licence granted by the District Court authorises the holding of a series of lotteries and draws, the total value of the prizes of which cannot exceed €20,000 on any occasion. Can consumers feel safe in the knowledge that their local lotto has been granted such a licence and does it flow from such a licence that consumers are treated fairly and their interests represented fairly? The licence will prescribe that the lotto must be for a charitable purpose; the licensee should derive no personal profit from it; the value of each draw must be stated on the ticket or coupon; and, importantly, no more than 40% of the gross proceeds can be used for the expenses of promotion, which is to include commission - and any free entry for the lottery will be deemed to be a payment of commission to the extent of its value. But how much protection does this offer to consumers in real terms?

I hand over my cash and pick my numbers in the local shop or pub or when a selling agent calls to my home. What happens next? How do I know my ticket was entered into the draw? How do I know the draw took place? Who carried out the draw? Who supervised the draw? What procedure is used and what safeguards are in place to avoid fraud? Some consumers may have the answers to these questions but the difficulty arises in the lack consistency across clubs and societies.

## Court rulings

One vigilant consumer and supporter of his local soccer club in Limerick successfully sued Glin Rovers over a disputed lottery jackpot that he claimed he had won. During the case at Limerick Circuit Court in December 2015, the consumer explained how he purchased three tickets for the local lotto at his local pub three days before the draw. The court was told that while the consumer had picked the correct numbers, his ticket had not been included in the draw as the club had not ensured that all of the tickets were collected before the draw was due to take place. On this basis,

it was argued that the club had been negligent in not paying out as a contract existed between the club and the consumer. The defence claimed that this consumer had purchased just one ticket, which did not have the winning numbers. The defence further argued that the club had collected the tickets before the draw from the local pub. While finding in favour of the consumer, the judge commented that the decision was likely to divide the community and friendships. The judge further criticised aspects of the lottery and how it was being run - and he noted that the lottery tickets submitted in evidence did not bear key pieces of information that are required in law. He commented that some of the legal requirements (pertaining to the lottery) had been "casually observed". The soccer club has said that it intends to appeal the ruling.

A further example is demonstrated in a legal action taken in 2012 by a Meath woman who was awarded a GAA club lottery prize at the direction of the Circuit Court judge who heard her case. This woman sued the ticket seller and the GAA after she was told by the club chairman that her ticket stub was not found in the draw. The consumer claimed that she had purchased three tickets in a local pub on behalf of herself and her family. When she saw her numbers posted on a pub notice board as the winning numbers in the Rathoath GAA weekly lotto draw she made enquiries and was told that there had been no ticket with her numbers entered into the draw. The consumer had retained the ticket stub, which displayed the serial number, but, following a search, her ticket had not been found in the draw drum. The consumer was awarded €7,600 severally and jointly against the ticket seller and the GAA. The Circuit Court judge commented that there was an element of looseness in the club's records of sale for the draw.

## Lack of regulation

So where do we turn? It is imaginable that opting out of your local lotto may in some circumstances be difficult and suing your local club may be significantly worse. Depending on the community in which you live, there may be an element of pressure when it comes to supporting the community clubs. The above examples beg the question: who regulates this sector?

The Charities Regulatory Authority (CRA) is Ireland's national statutory regulatory agency for charitable

organisations. The CRA was established in October 2014 under the terms of the Charities Act 2009. It is an independent agency of the Department of Justice and Equality. We contacted the CRA and were told that it does not have responsibility for regulating lotteries run by sporting organisations as sporting bodies are not considered charitable organisations under the Taxes Consolidation Acts and so local lottos run by a sporting association will not fall within the CRA's remit.

We enquired with the Department of Justice and Equality if any further controls have been put in place in this area, such as guidelines or recommendations for sporting clubs that carry out local lotteries as a mechanism of fundraising for their clubs, and we received the following response:

*"Part IV of the Gaming and Lotteries Act 1956 (as amended) sets out the legislative requirements regarding the holding of lotteries.*

*The prize fund limits are currently €5,000 (permit granted by Garda Superintendent) and €30,000 (licence granted by District Court).*

*There is no central regulator with responsibility for oversight of such lotteries and, accordingly, there are no rules (except those set out in the Act) governing the operation of these activities."*

We further asked the Department of Justice and Equality whether there were any plans to regulate this area given the potential for abuse and the lack of controls that are evident in some clubs together with the lack of consistency from one club to another. We are currently awaiting their response.

## Call for controls

As with all consumer issues, we as consumers must be vigilant when it comes to matters of money. While regulation and consumer protection are very much lacking in this area we must do what we can to protect our interests. Although the very local nature of many of these lotteries can make opting out difficult, no consumer should feel that they do not have the right to ask some questions around the controls on any given fundraising. If we are part of our local clubs, perhaps we could look to the sporting governing bodies for some guidance in this area.

A lack of regulation in such fundraising is a disservice to both clubs and consumers and the Consumers' Association of Ireland calls upon the Department of Justice and Equality to deal with this problem area, which appears to be wide open for abuse.



## Choice Comment

For as long as most of us will remember, raffles have been a part of our lives. We have bought and/or sold tickets in efforts to raise funds for our schools, sports clubs, youth and social centres, hospitals and even to support actions by people and for people we have never met. It is a part of the fabric of life in Ireland and a reflection of the good-natured generosity of all who live here.

Central to it all is trust. Our research here indicates how, naturally, mistakes will happen. Sadly, though, we also see how there is potential for wrongdoing and the unfortunate fallout from such an event.

But we have been here before. Trust has been broken on many occasions and is why we have the requirement for committees, applications, licences and accountability. More to the point, it is why we have regulations, regulators and enforcers.

This author does not recall the need for such oversight and services when I was younger. But then, Latin was never my strongest subject back then. It has improved since - Caveat Emptor! D.J.







# Pushchairs

**A pushchair should deliver maximum comfort and safety for its tiny passenger, but parents are entitled to think about themselves a little too. Our independent labs have pushed and prodded 18 models to see which ones are the easiest to manoeuvre and use on a daily basis.**

 **REPORT by Clodagh O'Donoghue**

## At a glance

- **Choosing a pushchair**
- **Test drive checklist**
- **Four Choice Buys**

For new and prospective parents, choosing a pushchair can be a voyage into the unknown but it is an important decision to get right. As well as finding a pushchair that delivers the maximum level of comfort and safety to its small passenger, given the significant investment involved it is also worthwhile taking some time to consider how the pushchair will adapt to your growing child. And from the parents' perspective, it is also ideal if the pushchair is simple to manoeuvre, can be folded and unfolded effortlessly - preferably with one hand - and, once folded, can be stored neatly or fitted into a car boot easily. Those who favour public transport over driving might need a pushchair that is compact enough to use on a bus or train, whereas others might be looking for a pushchair that is not too heavy or cumbersome to haul up and down stairs. City dwellers may only have to consider how well a pushchair glides over pavements and up and down kerbs, but those who like to

get out and about in the great outdoors might need a buggy that can handle uneven and off-road surfaces and still deliver a smooth ride. So there is a lot to factor into the purchasing decision and, to help, our independent labs have tested 18 pushchairs - all of which are travel systems - for all these criteria and more.

## Choosing a pushchair

Babies grow quickly, with their needs changing as swiftly, so many parents will look to buy a pushchair that can adapt to these changes and can be used over a number of years and in a variety of ways. For many, travel systems can be the way to go, particularly for those who also use their car a lot. Travel systems come supplied with a seat unit, which is often reversible - enabling parents to position the child facing either towards them or towards the big, wide world - but, in addition, a travel system can be used with a Group 0 or Group 0+ car seat that can be fitted onto the pushchair chassis,

either on top of the existing seat unit or replacing the seat unit altogether. This means that parents can transfer their baby from pushchair to car and vice versa without removing them from the car seat – especially useful if their little one is asleep. However, it is important to keep in mind that babies should not be left in their child car seat for long periods of time.

Some travel systems also come with the option of fitting a carrycot onto the pushchair frame, allowing smaller babies to lie flat as they are being pushed around. In addition, some travel systems allow a second seat unit to be attached, turning them into a double buggy and potentially making them attractive to those who hope to extend their family further in the future. Thus, travel systems are a versatile option, though they can be expensive and tend to be large and cumbersome, even when folded. All the pushchairs in our current batch are travel systems.

### Test drive checklist

The first priority when choosing a pushchair should of course be the all-important comfort and safety of your child. However, once these elements are ensured, parents should also take their own needs in using the pushchair on a daily basis into consideration. Given

that a pushchair may be a significant investment, be sure to try out various models before you buy to get a real feel for how they handle. You should make sure to find a pushchair that is easy to manoeuvre and that suits your size and shape. Those buying a pushchair for the first time or who have little or no experience of wheeling a buggy around should make an effort to befriend practised parents, ask how they rate their own pushchairs and see if they will let you 'test-drive' their buggies. There are also a number of things you can test out for yourself in store before making a purchase.

- Consider if the handle height suits you or can be adjusted to a comfortable level and if you can walk normally without bumping against the brake bar, foot pedals and so on.
- Take some time to test the pushchair's manoeuvrability and stability as well as how easy it is to use the brake pedals and how effective they are.
- Find out if the pushchair can be folded swiftly and if one-handed folding would be possible, given some practice.
- Check to see if the pushchair, when folded, is a manageable weight to haul in

and out of car boots.

- Look at the amount of storage provided underneath and if this is accessible when the buggy is in a reclined position.
- If you are buying a travel system, make sure that you don't need a university degree in engineering to work out how to swap between the normal pushchair seat, car seat and carrycot and mount each of them on the pushchair frame. Also, find out which elements are included in the price, as the car seat and/or carrycot may have to be purchased separately.



## When the going gets tough...

For parents who enjoy walking in the countryside or on the beach, a pushchair that can handle bumpy and uneven surfaces is the ideal choice. A number of pushchairs in our test cope well with a range of surface types, including off-road and bumpier terrains, and the all-terrain Stokke Trailz is touted by the manufacturer as being "built for adventure", offering extra-large air-filled tyres to deliver a smooth ride whatever the surface. In addition, two Choice Buy all-terrain models from our June 2014 test remain available in shops – the Bugaboo Buffalo (€1,079) and the Mountain Buggy Urban Jungle (€649) – both of which can handle all kinds of rough ground with ease. The Bugaboo Buffalo offers great manoeuvrability despite its large size. The Mountain Buggy Urban Jungle provides large pneumatic wheels and effective suspension, so your baby should not experience too much jolting on bumpy ground, and, again, is easy to manoeuvre and comfortable to push. However, as with most all-terrain models, both of these options are bulky to store and fairly heavy to lift. For a full review of these products, see our June 2014 issue of *Consumer Choice*.





### 1. Nuna Ivvi €888

Leading our current batch of pushchairs, the **Choice Buy** Nuna Ivvi is a pricey model that is a great all-rounder, with good suspension and plenty of padding delivering a smooth and comfortable ride across a range of terrains and surfaces. This travel system can be used from birth with an almost completely flat recline and can be configured in four modes – using a car seat, carrycot or forward- or rear-facing seat unit. It is very simple to use, with one-handed operation for the recline and easy folding and unfolding. This pushchair can also stand upright when folded and provides a sizeable and readily accessible storage basket underneath. The handlebar is height-adjustable and this pushchair offers great manoeuvrability, though with its wide back wheels, getting through some doorways can be a bit of a squeeze and testers found that the model's width and long length meant it is not ideal for use on public transport. It is also the heaviest model on test at 15.9kg.

### 2. UPPAbaby Cruz 2015 €599

The **Choice Buy** UPPAbaby Cruz 2015 is particularly suited to city living, handling very well on pavements and providing good manoeuvrability in tight spaces – though it fares less well on off-road surfaces. The manufacturer's patent-pending Air-Go tyres do a good job of absorbing shock, making for a smooth and comfortable ride. This travel system is suitable for a new-born baby if you use the UPPAbaby Vista carrycot – priced at around €230 – and babies from six months of age can use the seat unit, which is reversible. This pushchair comes supplied with car seat adaptors, which may be used to attach a compatible BeSafe or Maxi-Cosi car seat. The Cruz 2015 scores highly for ease of use, especially when it comes to getting a child seated and buckled in, adjusting the harness and folding the pushchair. At 10kg, it is also lightweight for lifting in and out of car boots and testers found that it would be suitable for use on public transport.



### 3. Joolz Geo €999

The **Choice Buy** Joolz Geo scores top marks for manoeuvrability, with an ability to navigate around obstacles easily. This pushchair copes well with a range of surface types and effective suspension ensures a smooth ride for the baby or child it is carrying. The bucket-shaped, reversible seat unit can only be used for babies from six months of age, but a compatible carrycot may be attached to allow newer babies to lie flat. The Joolz Geo folds easily and neatly, and testers liked the extra-large storage basket, which is removable. However, our testers found it a little awkward to take off and reattach seat covers for cleaning purposes, and this pushchair is quite heavy to lift, though a handle lets you pull it along when folded. One key feature of the Joolz Geo is that it can easily be converted and extended into a double buggy, using either a side-by-side or tandem configuration, making it a very versatile option for those thinking ahead to possible future new arrivals.

### 4. Mamas and Papas Armadillo XT €390

The **Choice Buy** Mamas and Papas Armadillo XT provides superb manoeuvrability with its narrow frame and testers considered that it would be fairly well-suited to public transport despite being around a metre in length. With sizeable, chunky wheels, this pushchair delivers a smooth ride on a variety of surfaces, allowing for a seamless switch from pavement to park, though rugged off-road terrains may feel a bit bumpy. The Armadillo XT does not have the option of adding a carrycot, though you can add a compatible car seat and the supplied seat unit reclines far enough to allow a small baby to lie flat. This seat unit is only forward-facing and cannot be reversed, but it is particularly roomy and a handy viewing window in the large-sized hood lets parents keep an eye on their little one. Folding and unfolding this pushchair is very easy, with one-handed operation possible, and it can stand upright when folded for neat storage. In addition, the handlebar is adjustable, offering a good range of heights.



MODEL		SPECIFICATIONS				TEST PERFORMANCE								SCORE
		Price (€)	Weight (pushchair) (kg)	Number of wheel sets	Maximum recommended weight (child) (kg)	Daily use (75%)						Ergonomics (15%)	Storage (10%)	% 
						Manoeuvrability	Child set-up	Using the push-chair	Travel system	Transporting	Cleaning			
Travel Systems														
1	Nuna Ivvi	888	15.9	4	15kg	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	80
2	UPPAbaby Cruz 2015	599	10	4	15kg seat / 9kg cot	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	77
3	Joolz Geo	999	14.1	4	15kg seat/9kg cot	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	76
4	Mamas and Papas Armadillo XT	390	10.3	4	15kg	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	76
5	Britax Smile	630	12.2	4	17kg	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	74
6	Stokke Scoot V2	569	12.9	4	15kg	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	74
7	Stokke Trailz	1,049	14.3	4	15kg	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★	★★★★★	★★★★★	73
8	Britax B-Agile	300	9	4	15kg	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★	69
9	Bugaboo Cameleon 3	554	10.8	4	9kg	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★	69
10	Cybex Priam	1,035	12.3	4	17kg	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	68
11	Mothercare Roam	310	10.6	4	15kg	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★	★★★★	★★★	67
12	Joolz Day	949	13	4	15kg seat / 9kg cot	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★	67
13	Cosatto To & Fro	370	10.7	4	15kg	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★	66
14	Cosatto Woop	515	10.5	3	15kg	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★	★★	★★★	64
15	Mamas and Papas Armadillo Flip XT	630	11.1	4	15kg	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★★	★★★★	64
16	UPPAbaby Vista 2015	979	13.2	4	15kg seat / 9kg cot	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	61
17	Stokke Xplory	949	12.9	4	15kg	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★	59
18	Greentom Upp	280	7.3	4	15kg	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★	59

USING THE TABLE

Star ratings are out of five.

SPECIFICATIONS

**Price:** Typical retailer’s price if you shop around.  
**Weight (pushchair):** The weight of the pushchair excluding any accessories.  
**Maximum recommended weight (child):** As stated on the pushchair or in the instruction manual.

TEST PERFORMANCE

**Manoeuvrability:** How easy it is to manoeuvre the pushchair around obstacles, in tight spaces and on different surfaces, including pavements, kerbs, uneven surfaces and off-road surfaces.  
**Child set-up:** How easy it is to get a child settled into the pushchair - taking into account space, accessibility, buckles and size - as well as the ease of adjusting the harness, foot or leg rest and recline.  
**Using the pushchair:** Includes ratings for the ease of folding and unfolding the pushchair, detaching and attaching the seat unit, using the brakes and adjusting the hood and handlebars.  
**Travel system:** How well the pushchair works as a travel system, including the availability of a car seat or carrycot, the ease of attaching and detaching these items, the clarity of the labelling of the adaptors, and the manoeuvrability of the pushchair with a car seat or carrycot attached.  
**Transporting:** Includes ratings for how easy the pushchair is to lift and move when folded, to carry up and down stairs, to fit into a car boot and to use on public transport.  
**Cleaning:** A rating for the ease of removing and replacing covers and whether covers are washable.  
**Ergonomics:** Includes ratings for the comfort of the child in the seat unit and expert ergonomic assessments on suitability for children of up to six months, one year, two years and three years of age.  
**Storage:** The size, shape and accessibility of the storage basket area and the storage capacity as verified with everyday items.

Useful contacts

**Joolz**  
[www.my-joolz.co.uk](http://www.my-joolz.co.uk)

**Mamas & Papas**  
[www.mamasandpapas.ie](http://www.mamasandpapas.ie)

**Nuna**  
[www.nuna.eu](http://www.nuna.eu)

**UPPAbaby**  
[www.uppababy.co.uk](http://www.uppababy.co.uk)

# Tablet PCs

**With tablet pcs becoming a regular fixture in households, our labs have been keeping tabs on the latest devices.**



**REPORT by Clodagh O'Donoghue**

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#### At a glance

- **What to consider**
  - **Four Choice Buys**
- 

Since the tablet category was kickstarted with the arrival of the iPad in 2010, numerous devices have come onto the market, presenting consumers with plenty of choice as products range from the cheap, cheerful and somewhat basic to sleek, high-performance, feature-laden models that will put quite a dent in your wallet. Though not as ubiquitous as smartphones, tablets are a common fixture in many homes, where often most members of the household have their own device. Consumers - both young and not-so-young - use tablets for quick and easy access to the internet, playing games, watching films and TV shows, firing off the odd email, posting on social media and more. The larger screens make many of these tasks more comfortable compared with using a smartphone. However, as we have noted in the past, the growth in size of smartphones may erode consumer appetite for smaller tablets, which may only be slightly bigger than the largest smartphones - and such 'phablets' can do everything that tablets can do plus

make phone calls.

In addition, those who already own a good tablet may not find any compelling reason to upgrade. The newest tablets may be lighter and faster than their predecessors and some may be better at multitasking - but these may be only incremental improvements over an already fairly speedy, not-too-heavy, and quite versatile device. Our current Choice Buys are outstanding devices but they do not come cheap. Those who are not too fussy about stunning screen quality and lightning speed - or who are buying tablets for youngsters who only need a basic entertainment device - may like to look further down our table for potentially less impressive, but often less expensive, models.

#### **What to consider**

Those who are coming new to tablets should consider a number of factors before making their purchase - and if they get the decision right first time, they may find they are happy to stick with

their device without feeling the need to upgrade too soon.

#### **Operating system:**

For some, their choice of tablet will be largely determined by the operating system they prefer - Apple's iOS, Google's Android or Microsoft's Windows. Each operating system offers its own software environment and online store with a range of apps, music, movies, and so on. Those who also own a smartphone are likely to find that keeping to the same operating system across all their devices will mean a less steep learning curve and easier transition between devices.

#### **Size:**

Our table separates our current batch of devices into 7-to-8.5-inch tablets and those that are larger than 8.5 inches, stretching to 12.9 inches. As well as being smaller, 7-to-8.5-inch tablets are generally a little less pricey than their bigger counterparts, are more lightweight and comfortable to hold for long periods,

and are easier to slip into small bags and even large pockets for added portability. Conversely, larger tablets are typically more expensive and also heavier for holding for lengthy periods – though the bigger screen makes for a more comfortable viewing experience and those looking to get a bit of work done or type emails using the onscreen keyboard will appreciate the extra space. In the past, larger versions of the same tablet tended to have faster, more powerful processors and longer-lasting batteries than their more compact siblings, but this is no longer necessarily the case. In addition, those looking to use their tablet as a laptop substitute may be able to get a detachable or bluetooth wireless keyboard to avoid having to negotiate an onscreen keyboard and potentially extend the usefulness and productivity of even small tablets.

### Storage:

How much storage you will need on your tablet depends on how you intend using it. If you plan to use your tablet for mainly surfing the web or streaming media, a

lower level of built-in memory may be adequate for your needs. However, if you want your tablet to house large amounts of photos, videos and demanding apps, you will need to take your significant storage requirements into account. Tablets in our current batch offer from 8GB to 64GB of onboard storage and some tablets even have 128GB versions – though upping the levels of built-in storage will significantly hike up the initial purchase price. It might not be necessary, however, to fork out for more built-in storage as, apart from the Apple tablet, all the tested devices on our table have memory card slots that allow you to greatly expand memory capacity. Cloud storage, where you store your data online, is also becoming increasingly popular, particularly with iPad owners. It should also be noted that not all the storage capacity claimed by the manufacturer will be available to users, as a certain amount is taken up by the operating system and any apps that come preloaded onto the device. See our table for the amount of space you will actually be able to use on each of our tested models.

### Wi-fi-only or 3G/4G:

Another decision facing those in the market for a tablet is whether to opt for a wi-fi-only device or to go for a tablet that also offers 3G/4G to let you access the internet when wi-fi is not available. The 3G/4G capability will push up the purchase price and requires that you pay for a data plan – similar to your phone plan – further adding to the cost. However, many may find that it is not worth paying extra for 3G/4G connectivity given the numerous locations now where wi-fi is readily and often freely available. And users who also have a smartphone have the option of simply tethering the phone to the tablet for online access when needed.

Beyond these basic considerations, potential tablet purchasers might like to think about their expectations in terms of screen quality, battery life, and ease of use. Our labs have put 19 new tablets through rigorous tests to provide independent and objective ratings for each model.



## 1. Samsung Galaxy Tab S2 9.7 €520

The **Choice Buy** Samsung Galaxy Tab S2 9.7 is the highest-scoring tablet we have ever tested by some margin, with significantly more impressive performance than its excellent predecessor, the Galaxy Tab S, which topped our tables last year. Exceptionally light at just 385g and super-slim at just 5.6mm thick, this tablet is extremely comfortable to hold in one hand for long periods and it is a pleasure to use with its highly responsive touchscreen and ultra-speedy processor that can handle the most demanding apps with ease. The 9.7-inch screen is outstanding, with 2048 x 1536 resolution displaying brilliantly crisp, bright and detailed images, making viewing photos and videos a joy. Running Android 5.0.2, this tablet is very intuitive to operate and offers useful features like multiple user accounts and side-by-side multitasking. Battery life is very good, yielding almost 13.5 hours of viewing time when watching videos, though you will get less than half that time when surfing the web. The Samsung Galaxy Tab S2 9.7 is a stunning tablet and those in the market for something a little smaller might like to check out its 8-inch sibling.

## 2. Apple iPad Pro €909

With the **Choice Buy** Apple iPad Pro, Apple has taken a big leap in terms of size, offering a very substantial 12.9-inch screen and aimed at those looking for a larger device that can double as a laptop replacement. The 2732 x 2048 resolution display is stunningly sharp and offers plenty of room for the new multitasking, split view feature enabled by the highly effective operating system – iOS 9.0 – running on this device. Though incredibly slim at just 7mm thick, the larger screen size on the iPad Pro inevitably means a heftier weight – and indeed this is the heaviest tablet in our current batch, so users may not find it comfortable to hold for extended periods. With a super-fast processor, this tablet is incredibly speedy even when handling HD video or demanding apps and battery life is decent, with 11 hours of video playback on a full charge, though just under eight hours of web browsing. As there is no memory card slot, the tested 32GB device may not afford enough storage for those using it as a laptop replacement – and the 128GB version is an even more eye-wateringly expensive €1,119.





## 11. Samsung Galaxy Tab S2 8 €420

For those impressed by the sound of the previous Samsung Choice Buy but looking for something more compact and a little less pricey, the **Choice Buy** Samsung Galaxy Tab S2 offers an 8-inch version that squeezes all the same eye-catching specifications and superb performance into a condensed package that costs around €100 less than the larger-sized offering. Once again, the 2048 x 1536 resolution screen offers stunning detail and the super-fast processor keeps everything zipping along at lightning speed. Again sporting an exceptionally slimline design, the 5.6mm thick tablet is even thinner than its main rival, the iPad mini 4, and 40g lighter – making it extremely portable and comfortable for one-handed use. Of the 32GB storage, 24GB is available to users and – unlike the iPad mini 4 – there is the option to expand this to 128GB via the micro-SD card slot. Battery life is great if you like to watch videos on your tablet, with 14.5 hours of viewing time delivered in our tests, and when it comes to web browsing, a reasonable seven hours was measured. This is a super small tablet filled with fantastic features but that is nonetheless easy to use.



## 12. Apple iPad mini 4 €409

The **Choice Buy** Apple iPad mini 4 is another outstanding tablet from Apple with familiar features like the stunning Retina display screen and effective fingerprint scanner that still have the power to impress, and it all comes in a faster and lighter package than the iPad mini 3. Measuring 7.9 inches diagonally, the 2048 x 1536 resolution screen is superb with reduced glare and better viewing angles, and the processor moves everything along very swiftly indeed. Running iOS 9.0, the iPad can now offer a SplitView feature that allows two apps to be open on the screen at once for mobile multitasking – though the small screen size may limit how often you use this. The tested version of this tablet offered 16GB of internal storage, of which 11GB was available to users, and with no memory card slot, there is no option to expand memory. Although 64GB and 128GB versions are available, the greater storage capabilities significantly increase the price – to €509 and €609, respectively. A terrific tablet, the iPad mini 4 did not quite match the performance of the Samsung Galaxy Tab S2 8 but will not disappoint Apple lovers.

## The rest on test

As well as the stand-out Samsung Galaxy Tab S2 models in both the 9.7- and 8-inch versions, Samsung has a less pricey and still very good mid-range tablet in our current batch. The Samsung Galaxy Tab A is touted by the manufacturer as having the ideal 4:3 aspect ratio screen for reading books and magazines, but this tablet can do much else besides. The 1024 x 768 resolution display does not dazzle like the higher-end models and processing is not quite as swift – but screen quality and processing speed are all more than satisfactory and this tablet has the added bonus of yielding impressive battery life of over 12 hours both when viewing videos and web browsing.

Sony has two tablet models on test, the Sony Xperia Z4 and the Sony Xperia Z3 Compact – both of which scored very well, though they did not quite achieve Choice Buy status. The Sony Xperia Z4 comes with a bluetooth keyboard, which, according to the manufacturer, turns the tablet into a laptop and lets you work away. The 1600 x 2560 resolution, 10-inch screen is exceptionally crisp and this slimline tablet is the lightest full-sized device on test, making it very comfortable for prolonged one-handed use. However, battery life was significantly less impressive than the 17 hours claimed by the manufacturer – with less than eight hours of video playback measured in tests. For those seeking a smaller tablet, the Sony Xperia Z3 Compact offers a very lightweight design and an 8.1-inch screen that is crisp and clear. It performs well across the board, with a responsive touchscreen, fast processor and decent camera capabilities. In addition, the battery life on this device shouldn't disappoint, as it managed over 11 hours of video watching and just under 12 hours of web browsing in tests.

Like the Apple iPad Pro, the Microsoft Surface 3 is a tablet that is focused on doubling as a laptop and it turned in a very creditable performance in our labs. This Windows tablet has a very crisp 11.1-inch display, a powerful processor to keep everything zipping along nicely and the option to add a keyboard (for around €150) to boost its ability to get some work done. Significantly heavier than most other tablets on test – though lighter than the Surface Pro 3 tested last year – users may not want to hold it in their hands for long periods, but the adjustable built-in kickstand is handy for propping it up. In tests, battery life failed to impress with around seven and a half hours of video playback and less than nine hours of web browsing.

A mention must be made of the lowest-priced model in our current batch. At €70, Amazon's latest Fire 7-inch tablet is half the price of the next cheapest device on test and less than a sixth of the price of our Choice Buys. You don't get a premium feel or a lot of high-end specifications for your money but it is not too heavy to hold for long periods, the 7-inch screen is decent and operation is smooth enough, if not particularly speedy. In terms of battery life, this tablet managed only six hours of web browsing and just under eight hours of video playback and testers judged the sound quality and camera capabilities to be poor. Nonetheless, for a spot of web surfing on the couch, this device would more than suffice – and the modest price tag is hard to ignore. As with the other Amazon tablets on test, the operating system is the Amazon version of Android and users will be directed to the Amazon store – so these tablets are very much for fans of Amazon content.

MODEL		SPECIFICATIONS								TEST PERFORMANCE								SCORE
		Price (€)	Stated memory storage (GB)	Available memory storage (GB)	Other memory storage options (GB)	3G/4G option	Screen size (inches)	Weight (kg)	Screen resolution	Operating system	General performance (10%)	Screen quality (20%)	Ease of use (20%)	Specific tasks (25%)	Battery life (15%)	Device overview (10%)	Back-up security (0%)	%
Larger than 8.5-inch tablets																		
1	Samsung Galaxy Tab S2 9.7	520	32	24.03		✓	9.7	0.385	2048x1536	Android 5.0.2	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	84
2	Apple iPad Pro	909	32	25	128	✓	12.9	0.738	2732x2048	iOS 9.1	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	76
3	Sony Xperia Z4	615 online	32	18.89		✓	10	0.384	1600x2560	Android 5.0.2	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	71
4	Samsung Galaxy Tab A	280	16	9.58		✓	9.7	0.448	1024x768	Android 5.0.2	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	70
5	Microsoft Surface 3	609	64	34	128	✓	11.1	0.617	1280x1920	Windows 8.1	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	70
6	Amazon Fire HD 10	250	16	11.72	32		10.1	0.430	1280x800	Fire OS 5.0.1	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	68
7	Samsung Galaxy Tab E	220	8	4.19		✓	9.6	0.482	1200x800	Android 4.4.4	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	67
8	Asus Transformer Book Chi	950	64	26.5			10.1	0.57	1200x1920	Windows 10	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	64
9	Asus ZenPad 10	210	16	9.54			10.1	0.516	800x1280	Android 5.0.2	★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	61
10	Acer Iconia Tab 10 A3-A20	210	16	11.1			10.1	0.508	800x1280	Android 4.4.2	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	55
7-to-8.5-inch tablets																		
11	Samsung Galaxy Tab S2 8	420	32	24.05		✓	8	0.268	2048x1536	Android 5.0.2	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	84
12	Apple iPad mini 4	409	16	11	64, 128	✓	7.9	0.308	2048x1536	iOS 9.0	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	78
13	Sony Xperia Z3 Compact	380	16	10.28	32	✓	8.1	0.266	1920x1200	Android 4.4.4	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	71
14	Amazon Fire HD 8	180	16	11.72	8		8	0.304	1280x800	Fire OS 5.0.1	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	68
15	Asus ZenPad 8.0	170	16	8.47			8	0.349	1280x800	Android 5.0.2	★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	68
16	Asus ZenPad C7.0	120	16	9.35			7	0.263	1024x600	Android 5.0.2	★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	64
17	Amazon Fire	70	8	4.63			7	0.313	1024x600	Fire OS 5.0.1	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	60
18	Acer Iconia One 8 B1-810	170	16	9.5			8	0.328	1280x800	Android 4.4.4	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	43
19	Acer Iconia Tab 8 W	170	32	13			7.9	0.401	1280x800	Windows 8.1	★★★★	★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	37

USING THE TABLE

Star ratings are out of five.

SPECIFICATIONS

**Price:** Typical retailer’s price if you shop around. Prices are provided for the lowest specification model - generally the lowest memory option and wi-fi only version. Prices found online only are indicated.

**Stated memory storage:** The memory size in GB of the tablet version tested.

**Available memory storage:** The measured amount of internal storage available to users taking into account the space used by the operating system and preinstalled apps.

**Screen size:** Measured diagonally in inches.

**Weight:** The weight of the device in grams without including any detachable keyboards.

**Operating system:** The operating system that comes on the tested device. This can often be upgraded to a newer version as it becomes available.

**TEST PERFORMANCE**

**General performance:** Includes the results of benchmark tests to gauge how quickly data is moved around the system as well as ratings for the start-up time, the speed of switching between apps and the tablet’s performance when copying files.

**Screen quality:** The screen’s resolution and viewing angle, colour purity and absence of reflection in various lighting conditions and the speed and accuracy of the touchscreen.

**Ease of use:** Includes ratings for the ease of setting up and using the function buttons, connecting to wi-fi or a 3G/4G network and transferring files, as well as the convenience of the physical and virtual keyboards and the quality of the automatic screen rotation.

**Specific tasks:** Includes ratings for the video call function, watching videos, listening to music, taking still photos, making videos, the email function, surfing the web and ebook capabilities.

**Battery life:** Includes ratings for the length of time a fully charged battery lasts when playing video or web browsing using wi-fi or 3G/4G connections and the battery life gained after charging the device for just 30 minutes.

**Device overview:** Includes ratings for the construction quality of the tablet, the connections available, the measured size of internal storage and the portability of the device.

**Backup - security:** Includes ratings for the ease of making a backup and resetting the tablet, the quality and range of security features, and the convenience of creating multiple user accounts.

Useful contacts

Apple Ireland Ltd  
1800 92 38 98  
www.apple.com/ie

Samsung  
tel 0818 717100  
www.samsung.com/ie



*Visit our website  
[www.thecai.ie](http://www.thecai.ie)*

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