

Windows laptops & PCs | Easy | 2 min read

'Windows is not activated' message: what to do

A message such as **Windows is not activated**, or a small watermark in the corner of the screen, means Windows cannot confirm that your copy is genuine. It does not usually stop the PC working, but it can limit personalisation and will keep nagging you.

Check the status

Open **Settings**, then **System**, then **Activation** (Windows 10: **Settings**, then **Update & Security**, then **Activation**). It will say **Active** or give an error with a number.

Things to try first

1. Make sure you are connected to the internet, then restart the PC.
2. Check the date and time are right, since a wrong clock can break the check.
3. Click **Troubleshoot** in the Activation page, if it is shown, and follow the prompts.
4. Run **Windows Update**, then try again.

After new hardware or a repair

Windows links its licence to your PC's parts. If the main board was replaced, it may need to be activated again. Sign in with the same Microsoft account you used before, then choose **Troubleshoot**, then **I changed hardware on this device recently**. This is the official way to carry the licence over.

About product keys

- Most modern PCs have a digital licence built in, so no key is needed.
- If you bought Windows, the key is on the box or in the email receipt.
- Beware of very cheap keys on auction sites and marketplaces. They are often invalid, cancelled later or stolen, and some come with software that you should not run.
- Do not download tools that claim to activate Windows. They are a common way to catch malware.

Business PCs

A work PC may be activated through your organisation, and the message can appear if it cannot reach the company network. Ask your IT team first.

When to get more help

Get in touch if the error code remains after the steps above, if the PC is second-hand and was sold to you with Windows already installed, or if you are not sure the copy is genuine. Please send us a photo of the Activation page.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.