

Display Screen Equipment– Health and Safety Arrangements for Staff

- 1) The Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992 set down safety standards for the use of computers, word processors, alphanumeric or graphic display screens (including video or television displays), along with any accessories, furniture, and the immediate work environment. All of these have a monitor or a Visual Display Unit (VDU).
- 2) The main part of these regulations applies in detail only to those employees who habitually use display screen equipment (DSE) for a significant part of their normal work. The reasons for this definition stem from the likely risks associated with prolonged display screen use, *e.g.* musculoskeletal aches and pains, visual fatigue, and stress.
- 3) The majority of University employees will be DSE USERS who work at personal computers (PCs) for two hours or more per day (for periods of an hour or more at a time) on average, or for a few weeks of intensive and prolonged work (there may be other work patterns which also qualify). Temporary staff from employment agencies and self-employed contractors will also be covered by risk assessment and control provisions.
- 4) All DSE workstations must be assessed to reduce the risks from using them. This will be done initially by staff self-assessment using a questionnaire available from the Health and Safety section of the Personnel web pages. Problems identified should then be discussed with the line manager and the Health and Safety Coordinator.
- 5) Heads of Department and managers must ensure that formal risk assessment records are made for DSE USERS under their control, and that any additional items required for staff to use workstations safely are supplied within a reasonable time.
- 6) All managers and staff must ensure that DSE work is planned to break up spells of keyboard/screen work with frequent breaks to carry out other tasks thus preventing fatigue. The recommended minimum is at least five minutes in every hour, and the frequency of short breaks (to get up and move about) should be increased during periods of intensive work or whenever discomfort is experienced.
- 7) USERS are entitled to a free eye and eyesight testing and a contribution towards spectacles for DSE work (or towards the cost of spectacles which include a basic VDU prescription). Details available from the Health & Safety Coordinator.
- 8) All workstation equipment provided for prolonged use is required to comply with the details in the Schedule to the regulations. However, anyone suffering discomfort from using their workstation must have their problem remedied as soon as is reasonably practicable, if necessary by purchasing additional items. Staff suffering from musculoskeletal aches and pains should contact their line manager in the first instance and may be referred to the Health and Safety Coordinator or Occupational Health Service for an assessment of their problems and recommendations for improvements.
- 9) Fully adjustable chairs should be supplied for all USERS by their department. Anyone with a faulty chair should report it immediately to their department administrator as a health and safety item for repair or replacement. Staff with ill-health conditions that cannot be safely accommodated by standard furniture, should supply medical evidence of their needs to in order for specialist furniture to be recommended for departments to purchase

- 10) Information and guidance on VDU safety and how to deal with workstation problems is available from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) web site at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg36.pdf> (which is a downloadable leaflet) and <http://www.hse.gov.uk/msd/dse/> which explains about musculoskeletal disorders especially as caused by DSE use.

Ways of reducing the risk

The following notes will take you through the checklist point by point and will offer advice on how you might minimise the risk and overcome any issues.

1 Display Screens

- Make sure the screen is clean and cleaning materials are made available. Check that text and background colours work well together.
- Software settings may need adjusting to change text size.
- Try using different screen colours to reduce flicker, eg darker background and lighter text. If problems still exist, get the set-up checked.
- For example, intensive graphic work or work requiring fine attention to small details may require large display screens.
- Separate adjustment controls are not essential, provided you can read the screen easily at all times.
- Swivel and tilt need not be built in; you can add a swivel and tilt mechanism. However, you may need to replace the screen if:
 - swivel/tilt is absent or unsatisfactory;
 - work is intensive;
 - and/or you have problems getting the screen to a comfortable position.
- Use a mirror placed in front of the screen to check where reflections are coming from. You might need to move the screen or even the desk and/or shield the screen from the source of reflections. Screens that use dark characters on a light background are less prone to glare and reflections.
- Check that blinds work. Blinds with vertical slats can be more suitable than horizontal ones. If these measures do not work, consider anti-glare screen filters as a last resort and seek specialist help.

2 Keyboards

- This is a requirement, unless the task makes it impracticable (eg where there is a need to use a portable).
- Tilt need not be built in.
- Try pushing the display screen further back to create more room for the keyboard, hands and wrists. Users of thick, raised keyboards may need a wrist rest.
- can be used to prevent:
 - hands bent up at wrist;
 - hitting the keys too hard;
 - overstretching the fingers.
- Keyboards should be kept clean. If characters still can't be read, the keyboard may need modifying or replacing. Use a keyboard with a matt finish to reduce glare and/or reflection.

3 Mouse, trackball etc.

- If you are having problems, try a different device. The mouse and trackball are general-purpose devices suitable for many tasks, and available in a variety of shapes and sizes. Alternative devices like touch screens may be better for some tasks (but can be worse for others).
- Most devices are best placed as close as possible, eg right beside the keyboard. Training may be needed to:
 - prevent arm overreaching;

- tell you not to keep your hand on the device when it is not being used;
- encourage a relaxed arm and straight wrist.
- Support can be gained from, for example, the desk surface or arm of a chair. If not, a separate supporting device may help. You should be able to find a comfortable working position with the device.
- See if cleaning is required (eg of mouse ball and rollers). Check the work surface is suitable. A mouse mat may be needed.
- If needed, ask for training in how to adjust device settings.

4 Software

- Software should help you carry out the task, minimise stress and be user-friendly. Make sure you have had appropriate training in using the software. Software should respond quickly and clearly to your input, with adequate feedback, such as clear help messages

5 Furniture

- Create more room by moving printers, reference materials etc elsewhere. If necessary, consider asking for new power and telecoms sockets, so equipment can be moved. There should be some scope for flexible rearrangement.
- Rearrange equipment, papers etc to bring frequently used things within easy reach. A document holder may be needed, positioned to minimise uncomfortable head and eye movements.
- Consider mats or blotters to reduce reflections and glare.
- The chair may need repairing or replacing if you are uncomfortable, or you cannot use the adjustment mechanisms.
- You should be able to carry out your work sitting comfortably. Consider asking for training in how to adopt suitable postures while working. The arms of chairs can stop you getting close enough to use the equipment comfortably. Move any obstructions from under the desk.
- You should have a straight back, supported by the chair, with relaxed shoulders.
- Adjust the chair height to get your arms in the right position, then adjust the VDU height, if necessary.
- If not, a foot rest may be needed.

6 Environment

- Space is needed to move, stretch and fidget. Consider reorganising the office layout and check for obstructions. Cables should be tidy and not a trip or snag hazard.
- You should be able to control light levels, eg by adjusting window blinds or light switches. Consider shading or repositioning light sources or providing local lighting, eg desk lamps (but make sure lights don't cause glare by reflecting off walls or other surfaces).
- VDUs and other equipment may dry the air. Circulate fresh air if possible. Plants may help. Consider a humidifier if discomfort is severe.
- Can heating be better controlled? More ventilation may be required if there is a lot of electronic equipment in the room. Or, can you move away from the heat source?