



## Safety Services Guidance



### Guidance for DSE users

**Key word(s) :** Display Screen Equipment, DSE, DSE assessment, Occupational Health screening for DSE users, visual display units (VDUs)

**Target audience :** All staff and students using Display Screen Equipment, Heads of Schools, line managers, School Safety Advisors, DSE assessors

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## Display screen equipment (“DSE”) / workstation set up

1. Setting up your workstation correctly will reduce most of the causes of pain and discomfort from sitting at a computer. The correct setup might not feel right straight away, however adopting correct posture, layout of equipment etc. will minimise possible risks to your health and wellbeing.
2. Your local Display Screen Assessor (“**DSA**”) or safety advisor will facilitate your DSE assessment. The initial self-assessment takes the form of a questionnaire (on-line or hard copy). The questionnaire includes much of the information within this guide for ease of reference when completing it. You may find it useful to ask a colleague to assist as it is easier to judge relative positions from a non-seated position at the side of the DSE user. It is also common to make one adjustment only to find that you need to re-assess another adjustable factor. Thus the process may need to be repeated.

### Seating

3. First, adjust your chair height so that when you put your fingers on the middle row of the keyboard your forearms and hands are horizontal, with your elbows vertically under your shoulders and no angle at the wrist.
4. With your chair correctly adjusted check if your feet are flat on the floor. If your feet are not comfortably on the floor then you will benefit from a footrest. The footrest doesn't need to be angled unless you wear heels or have it a long way away.
5. Adjust the angle of the backrest, and/or the length of the base cushion, so that your back is supported in your usual work position, ensuring your back is comfortably in contact with as much of the seat back as possible.
  - If you can't sit fully back and upright without the back of your knees touching the front of the seat, you need a different chair with a shorter base cushion. If the seat base is adjustable (forward and backward), it should be brought as far forward as it will go, retaining your back on the back rest, leaving a gap of “3 fingers in width” between the seat edge and the back of the knee.
  - Adjust the backrest height so that it supports the lower back (at belt level). Many people set the back support too low. To ensure that the back support is in the right place, sit up straight. If the shape of the backrest does not fit fully into the lower part of your back, you would probably benefit from adding a



back support or inflating the lumbar cushion within the chair back (if available) to a comfortable position.

6. Move your chair so that when typing your elbows are vertically under your shoulders. If you cannot get close to the desk because the chair armrests hit the edge of the desk, either change the chair or remove the armrests. If necessary ask for help from your school safety advisor or DSE assessor.
7. Fixed-height armrests are generally too low, encouraging you to slump down to them. Adjustable-height armrests are usually shorter and will let you get close enough to your desk.

### Monitor (screen) position

8. Adjust the height of the monitor so that you are looking horizontally, not down at it. Generally this means having the top of the visible area at eye height, when you are sitting upright:

- many people have their monitor too low; and
- you can raise the monitor on anything suitable that you have to hand; it doesn't need to be an adjustable monitor arm.



9. Check the distance of the monitor. For most people to view the screen comfortably it should be about 22-26" (55 - 65 cm) away, so that the muscles that focus your eyes do not have to work too hard:
  - if you are sitting much closer than this, consider whether there is a problem with your eyesight, the screen quality or settings, or the desk depth. If you have an older cathode ray tube (CRT) monitor, try increasing the usable desk depth by pulling the desk away from the wall and allowing the monitor to overhang at the back.
10. Check the position of the monitor - it should be directly in front of you:
  - don't put the monitor in the corner - it will either be hard to get close enough to the keyboard, or you will be twisted and you may develop back and neck problems.

## Keyboard, mouse and accessories

11. Sit close to the desk and don't put things between you and the keyboard except a wrist rest (if required) - your elbows need to be vertically under your shoulders. Don't automatically use the keyboard's rear feet - you only need them if your elbows are below desk height. If you rest your wrists on the table when you type, try using a wrist rest to reduce pressure on your wrists.



12. Position and use the mouse as close to you as you can. Aim to have your elbow vertically under your shoulder, and right by your side or on the armrest:

- if you develop any sensation in your mouse-side shoulder, you may need to consider a different type of keyboard. A variety of ergonomic mice and keyboard input devices are available which may be used on the advice of a health professional.

13. If you often refer to documents whilst typing, use a document holder, one which can be placed between the monitor and keyboard may be preferred. If an easel style document holder is being used, it should be positioned at the same height and distance as your monitor. If you look at the documents more than the screen put the document holder directly in front of you and the monitor to the side.

14. Eliminate any glare or reflections on your monitor. Try closing blinds and changing the position of the workstation so that the monitor is at right-angles to the window. If possible, don't position the screen facing a window as the contrast in daylight and screen light can strain your eyes.

- turn off overhead lights unless you really need them. You can reduce reflections from overhead lights by raising your monitor then tilting it down to make the screen vertical.

15. Position any additional equipment e.g. phones, paper trays, reference material in accessible places. Try to avoid reaching and twisting. Ensure good cable management and keep your workstation and surroundings free from clutter. Investigate storage facilities and desk accessories to help you organize your workstation better.



## The working environment and work routine

16. The working environment: lighting, temperature, air flow, and humidity should be comfortable. If ambient noise levels disturb concentration, headphones can be worn, but must still enable the user to hear warnings such as fire alarms.

17. A 5 – 10 minute break after 50 – 60 minutes continuous screen and/or keyboard work is likely to be better than a 15 – 20 minute break every 2 hours. If breaks include taking phone calls or having conversations whilst at the same workstations, DSE users should look into the distance to change the focus of the eye, and blink often, stretch and change position.

## Outcome of assessment

18. If you conclude that some aspect(s) of your workstation need to be changed, discuss this with your line manager, or School/area Display Screen Assessor (see Chapter 34).

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