Safe use of the display screen equipment

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Policy Commitments

1. The overarching commitments set out in the University's general Health and Safety Policy apply. The general policy can be found here: URL: https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/media/environmental-health-and-safety-services/H&S-Policy-2017.pdf
2. For the purposes of this policy, the University recognises the importance of maintaining the safety and welfare of staff and students who use Display Screen Equipment (DSE). It is committed to fulfilling its responsibilities under the Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992 as amended by the Health and Safety (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2002. This includes the completion of risk assessments for all workstations and offices equipped with DSE, the provision and maintenance of suitable equipment for users, and the provision of appropriate training in the safe use of DSE.

Arrangements

1. Roles and Responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities set out in the University's general Health and Safety Policy apply.

For the purposes of this policy:

a) Each School or Unit will implement the Regulations in their area of remit. The Head of School or Unit has overall responsibility for this.
b) The Safety Co-ordinator in each School or Unit will normally assist in identifying users and monitoring compliance with the online training programme.
c) Environmental, Health and Safety Services (EHSS) will provide group or individual training as required in support of the online programme and in DSE risk assessment.
d) Users are responsible for completing the online training as soon as possible after arriving at the University, and thereafter at intervals of no more than four years. Staff are also responsible for alerting the safety co-ordinator or EHSS at an early stage if they believe using the DSE has affected their health.

Guidance

1. Definitions

Display Screen Equipment (DSE): computers with any kind of display screen, including desktops, towers, laptops, netbooks, tablets, electronic books and PDAs.

DSE Workstation: computers, monitors, printers, disk drives, telephones, document holders, work chairs, work desks or surfaces, lamps, accessories and peripheral items, *and* the surrounding environment (lighting, heating, ventilation, noise, humidity etc).

User: anyone who habitually uses DSE as part of their normal work. In most cases, it will be obvious that someone is a user, but if DSE use is infrequent, or in frequent short bursts, it will generally be appropriate to classify someone as a user if:

a) DSE is used continuously for one hour or more at a time on most days, or
b) The individual depends on the use of DSE in their work and alternative means are not readily available, or
c) The individual has no discretion as to the use or non-use of DSE, or
d) The individual needs significant training and/or skills in the use of DSE, or
e) The equipment must be used at high speed, or
f) The system requires high levels of concentration from the individual.

The vast majority of University staff use computers for everyday activities, and should be considered to be 'users'.

2. The importance of DSE safety

An increasing number of health problems have been identified among people who work with DSE for prolonged periods. Symptoms include headaches, backache, migraines, blurred vision, and Work Related Upper Limb Disorders and Repetitive Strain Injury, causing pain in shoulders, neck, arms, wrists and hands. These are all common problems, and in rarer instances the damage can become extremely painful and even permanent. As so many University staff make extensive use of DSE, the risk of injury is high unless the Regulations are followed by users and managers alike. *Note that there is no evidence of risks to a foetus during pregnancy.*

3. Training

The School or Unit Safety Co-ordinator should ensure that users are aware of the Cardinus training programme accessible at URL: https://secure.cardinus.com/launch.asp?id=ustan22439 and monitor its use to ensure that users refresh their training at least once every four years. Any problems in accessing or using the programme should be referred to EHSS, who will assist you. Records of the training will be stored by the Cardinus programme and will be available to Safety Co-ordinators and to the Director of EHSS for monitoring and auditing purposes. Strict confidentiality will be maintained in accordance with Data Protection Standards. Face-to-face group or individual training can be requested from EHSS.

4. Reporting

If a user experiences health problems while using DSE, (s)he, or the line manager, should contact Occupational Health (occhealth@st-andrews.ac.uk) at an early stage. The Occupational Health Adviser will advise, and may request a member of EHSS staff to carry out an individual workstation assessment and make recommendations for adjustments.
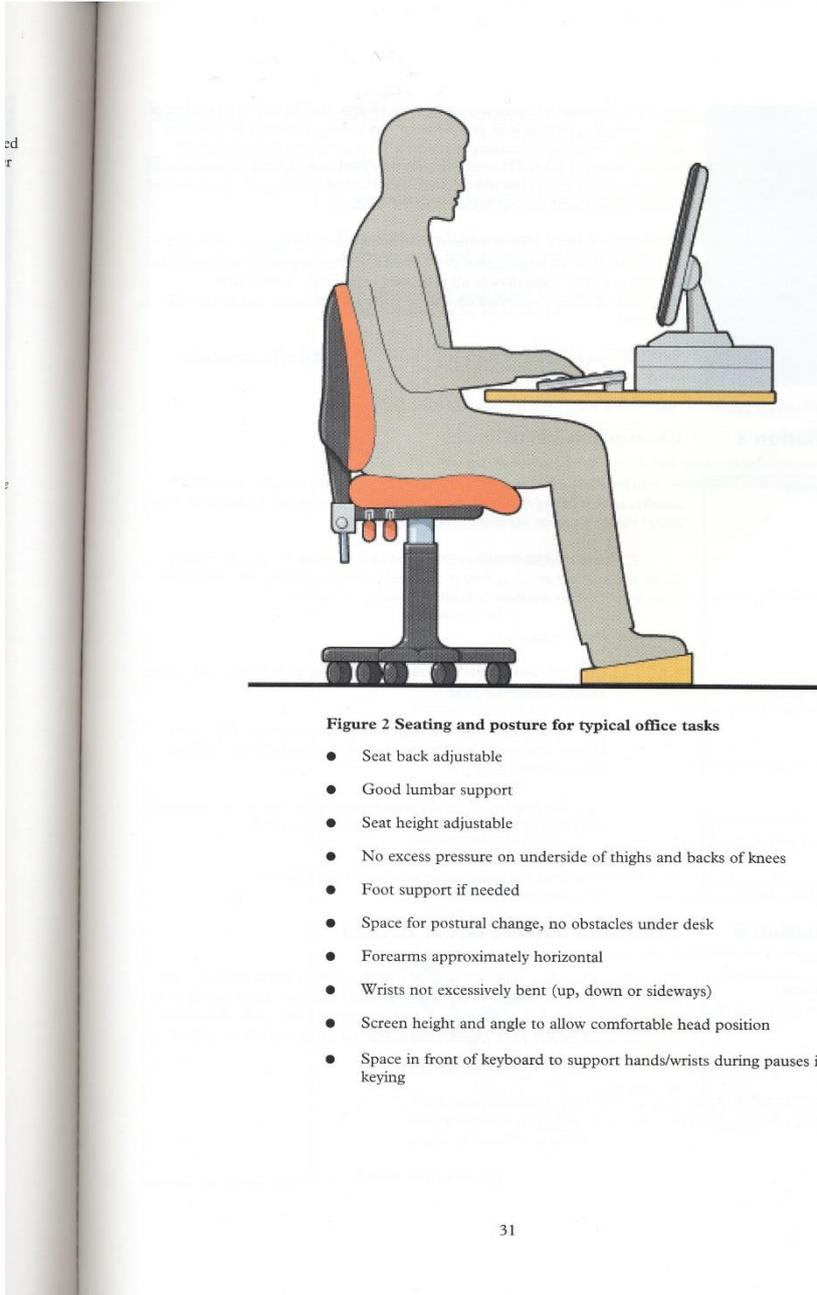
5. Setting up a DSE workstation

For most users, the workstation layout and seated position shown below will be the most comfortable:

Figure 1 Subjects dealt with in the Schedule

- Adequate lighting

- Adequate contrast, no glare or distracting reflections

- Distracting noise minimised

- Leg room and clearances to allow postural changes

- Window covering if needed to minimise glare

- Software: appropriate to task, adapted to user, providing feedback on system status, no undisclosed monitoring

- Screen: stable image, adjustable, readable, glare/reflection-free

- Keyboard: usable, adjustable, detachable, legible

- Work surface: with space for flexible arrangement of equipment and documents; glare-free

- Chair: stable and adjustable

- Footrest if user needs one

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Figure 2 Seating and posture for typical office tasks

- Seat back adjustable
- Good lumbar support
- Seat height adjustable
- No excess pressure on underside of thighs and backs of knees
- Foot support if needed
- Space for postural change, no obstacles under desk
- Forearms approximately horizontal
- Wrists not excessively bent (up, down or sideways)
- Screen height and angle to allow comfortable head position
- Space in front of keyboard to support hands/wrists during pauses in keying

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Note in particular:

a) Chairs: in accordance with Health and Safety Executive guidance, these should have five castors, a seat that raises and lowers, and a back that raises, lowers and tilts. The back should ideally lock into position.

b) Desks: should be kept free of clutter.

c) Monitors: should be at the correct height (eyes level with the top third of the screen).

d) Mouse: should be comfortable to use. It should be within easy reach, so that the user's arm does not have to reach far across the desk. Constant reaching for the mouse can cause severe shoulder, arm and wrist pain.

e) Keyboards: should tilt and should be positioned close to the user so that the user's arms can remain at his/her sides. Try to avoid working with papers on the desk between you and the keyboard – this leads to shoulder and arm strain as you try to type while reaching over the papers. If possible, keep papers in a document holder next to the monitor.

f) Laptops: should not be used at your workstation for prolonged periods. If your usual computer is a laptop, it should have a docking station with separate screen and keyboard to allow you to maintain a healthy sitting position.

g) Arms: should be comfortably at your sides, with forearms horizontal with the workstation and wrists supported on the desk.

h) The user's back: should be vertical and supported by the back of the chair. If you are not in contact with the back of your chair, it is doing nothing for you.

i) Feet: should rest flat on the floor or, if necessary, on a footrest.

Note that everyone is different! While standard office equipment can be configured to suit nearly everyone, users with existing injuries or special circumstances (e.g. being exceptionally tall) might require alternative provision. Please refer to Occupational Health for guidance. Before asking for alternatives, please experiment with the equipment you have, as your problem might have a simple solution – e.g. your chair height needs adjusting or your monitor needs to be closer to you. You can ask Occupation Health or EHSS for help with this if you wish.

6. Breaks

Taking regular breaks to change position is very important in preventing DSE-related injury, but also one of the hardest things for users to do, as they become absorbed in their work. Setting a reminder on your computer might be helpful. The Regulations require employers to organise tasks to ensure that breaks from DSE can be taken regularly. The associated guidance suggests a 5-10 minute break every 50-60 minutes.

7. Spectacles

Eyesight defects are a common cause of DSE problems, resulting in a tendency to lean forward/down or twist the neck in order to see the screen clearly. Users often do not realise that their spectacles are inadequate for DSE purposes or that they are sitting awkwardly. Eyesight tests in Scotland are free, and it is important that you visit your optician regularly. Tell your optician that you need to focus on a screen while at work, as your regular prescription might not cover this. If you need separate spectacles, specifically for use with display screen equipment, the University will reimburse the cost of basic lenses and frames. For details of this scheme, contact occhealth@st-andrews.ac.uk

8. Further guidance

The Appendices to the Regulations expand on the above points. The Regulations can be downloaded in full here: http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/l26.htm

A useful summary prepared by the Health and Safety Executive is available here: http://www.hse.gov.uk/msd/dse/guidance.htm

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