University of Oxford Medical Sciences Division
Sir William Dunn School of Pathology

USE OF DISPLAY SCREEN EQUIPMENT

Introduction

Display Screen Equipment is the generic term given for all types of visual display units (VDUs), covering computer terminals, laptops, microscopes, liquid crystal displays & plasma screens.

It is the policy of the University and hence the Department to identify all **Users** of such equipment and to complete necessary Risk Assessments. In this context **Users** are defined as employees using DSE for continuous spells of an hour or more at a time and on a regular daily basis, who may have to transfer information quickly to and from the DSE and who may have to apply high levels of attention and concentration. Therefore not everyone requires a full Risk Assessment carried out by a trained person. However everyone, including visitors, who access such equipment even for shorter, less intense periods, must be informed of the basic issues relating to computer use. This document outlines those basic points.

Use of Display Screen Equipment

Make full use of the equipment provided, and adjust it to get the best from it and to avoid potential health problems. Here are some practical tips:

Getting comfortable
- Adjust your chair and VDU to find the most comfortable position for your work. As a broad guide, your forearms should be approximately horizontal and your eyes the same height as the top of the VDU. Use old catalogues/box files to raise the screen if necessary. The chair should provide support to the small of your back.

- Make sure you are sitting square on to the screen. <u>Do not sit so that your neck or torso is twisted</u>. Do not cross your legs while working.

- Make sure you have enough work space to take whatever documents or other equipment you need.

- Try different arrangements of keyboard, screen, mouse and documents to find the best arrangement for you. A document holder may help you avoid awkward neck and eye movements.

- Arrange your desk and VDU to avoid glare, or bright reflections on the screen. This will be easiest if neither you nor the screen is directly facing windows or bright lights. Adjust curtains or blinds to prevent unwanted light.

- Make sure there is space under your desk to move your legs freely. Move any obstacles such as boxes or equipment.

- Avoid excess pressure from the edge of your seat on the backs of your legs and knees. A footrest may be helpful, particularly for shorter users.

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Keying in
- Adjust your keyboard to get a good keying position. A space in front of the keyboard is sometimes helpful for resting the hands and wrists when not keying.

- Try to keep your wrists straight when keying. Keep a soft touch on the keys and don't overstretch your fingers. Good keyboard technique is important.

Using a mouse
- Position the mouse within easy reach, so it can be used with the wrist straight. Sit upright and close to the desk, so that you don't have to work with your mouse arm stretched. Move the keyboard out of the way if it is not being used.

- Support your forearm on the desk, and don't grip the mouse too tightly. Use the mouse mat/wrist rest provided where possible. If you find it uncomfortable turn the mouse mat through 180°.

- Rest your fingers lightly on the buttons and do not press them hard.

Reading the screen
- Adjust the brightness and contrast controls on the screen to suit lighting conditions in the room. The brightness should be sufficient to see clearly but no more.

- Make sure the screen surface is clean.

- When setting up software, choose options giving text that is large enough to read easily on your screen, when you are sitting in a normal, comfortable working position. Select colours that are easy on the eye (avoid red text on a blue background, or vice-versa).

- Individual characters on the screen should be sharply focused and should not flicker or move. If they do, the VDU may need servicing or adjustment.

Posture and breaks
- Don't sit in the same position for long periods. Make sure you change your posture as often as practicable. Some movement is desirable, but avoid repeated stretching to reach things you need (if this happens a lot, rearrange your workstation).

- Most jobs provide opportunities to take a break from the screen, e.g. to do filing or photocopying. Make use of them. If there are no such natural breaks in your job, your employer should plan for you to have rest breaks. Frequent short breaks are better than fewer long ones.

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Possible Health Effects from DSE work

A variety of "work-related upper limb disorders" may be associated with DSE use, although the precise causal pathway is unclear. Some users experience discomfort or aches and pains. If you experience any such discomfort, then this must be brought immediately to the attention of your Group-Leader. A department 'DSE Assessor' must then complete an assessment and where necessary Occupational Health will be contacted for further advice. The current DSE Assessor within the department is:

- Mr. Richard Stillion (Tel: 75531)

Eye & Eyesight Tests

Individuals who do meet the definition of **DSE Users** are entitled to an eyesight test and the University must cover the minimum cost. Individuals requesting such tests should again contact their Group-Leader first and then subsequently a DSE Assessor for confirmation of whether they meet this definition. . Individuals **must** only use one of the University Nominated Opticians (see below) – the cost cannot be reclaimed if alternative opticians are used.

University Nominated Opticians:
- Batemans Opticians, Cornmarket, Oxford.
- P B Conway, George St, Oxford
- Gardiners, Headington, Oxford.

It is worth noting though, that there are no known adverse effects on the eye or eyesight due to DSE work. However, some users experience temporary visual fatigue leading to eye discomfort and may require advice on reducing this effect. Existing eye conditions are not made worse by DSE work, but it is logical to use the appropriate sight correction for such work, as would be expected with any other job needing visual skills.

Remote Working with Display Screen Equipment

Certain employees have the discretion to work away from the University, often at home, using computing equipment. If you feel that this is you, then you must consider what equipment you use & how it is set up & maintained. You must discuss this issue with your Group-Leader who is responsible for instructing you on the University Safety Policy requirements. Notably that you set your workstation up in a similar manner as described above and that any equipment provided to you by the University is maintained in a safe manner. Any health concerns you identify whilst using such equipment must also be communictaed without delay, to your Group Leader.

Further Information

If you require further advice on setting up your workstation, either see your DSE assessor directly, Departmental Safety Officer(s) or contact Mr Brian Jenkins (Area Safety Officer, Tel: (2)71854). Further reading & explanation can be found at:
- **http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/safety/oxonly/s303.shtml** (**University Safety Policy on DSE**)
- **http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/safety/03a2.pdf** (**Diagram of setting up a Workstation**)
- **http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/safety/oxonly/s703.shtml** (**USP on Remote Working**)
- **http://www.learninglink.ac.uk/keepfit/index.htm** (**Excellent introduction to DSE safety**)
- **http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg36.pdf** (**Health & Safety Executive Advice**)