

	DSE Home Working Guidance	Document No.	HS-GN-038
		Date	07.07.23
		Pages	1 of 9
		Revision	Rev 1

DSE Home Working Guidance

Introduction

This guidance provides practical advice on steps to take to ensure staff who work from home for short or for extended periods of time, assess any relevant hazards that may be present in their home and help establish reasonable controls, so they can achieve the best possible workstation set up within their limits and look after their musculoskeletal health. Additionally, this guidance will also detail measures that may be taken to mitigate any risk arising from DSE use.

While the University has a duty to take reasonable care of staff health and safety, staff are expected to take primary responsibility for ensuring safe working conditions in their home.

Scope

This guidance covers laptop, desktop PC or paper-based work from an employee's home.

Practical advice for working from home safely

Introduction

University staff work flexibly, including at home and remotely at offsite locations, either carrying out paper-based work on a desktop PC, laptop, tablet or other electronic devices. This is classed as a low-risk activity. There are associated hazards that this type of working pattern can offer, in addition a range of potential benefits. These hazards include and are not limited to:

- working in isolation (wellbeing, personal safety, accidents and feeling of loneliness or stress)
- lack of control over the work environment (DSE, fire safety, electrical safety and other non-work related, external pressures)


Risk assessment

There is a duty to carry out a risk assessment in relation to work activities for all staff, whether working on site at the University or at home. In the University, the work environment and equipment can be more easily assessed and controlled. Working conditions while working at home are possibly not ideal.

This does not mean a visit to the home of staff who carry out some of their work at home to check their working conditions. It is usually sufficient to bring to their attention possible hazards and provide a [checklist](#) to enable staff undertake their own risk assessment.

Irrespective of the work being undertaken, a mental note of any possible risks to the health and safety of yourself and others present whilst working should be considered. If the risk is significant appropriate steps should be taken to minimise the problem(s) and where appropriate advice, assistance or resources from School/Service or the Health and Safety Adviser sought.

It should be noted that the BeOnline Workstation Assessment is not applicable to working at home.

	DSE Home Working Guidance	Document No.	HS-GN-038
		Date	07.07.23
		Pages	2 of 9
		Revision	Rev 1

Roles and responsibilities of line managers and supervisors

- Ensure adequate communication and contact with home workers. The University provides various mediums for online communication including Skype for Business, Teams, mobile phone and email.
- Ensure risks associated with home working are covered by the local safety management system (where applicable), including DSE assessments and ensure home working is covered by local rules.

Workstation set up

To begin, find a place with sufficient space to set up a work zone. Ensure there is sufficient light, ventilation and no trailing cords.

Proper home workstation set up is as important as the office workstation set up, should be the same as the same principles apply. It should include:

- A table / desk
- Chair
- Desktop / PC or laptop or other electronic devices.
- Workstation peripherals


Tips for working on a PC or laptop remotely:

Table: A table and chair should be used rather than the sofa or bed (see attached ‘Workstation set up diagram’).

Chair: Sit back in the chair with the back rest adjusted suitable. If an adjustable chair is not available, can try to get into an ideal sitting position using a cushion or pillow (folded in half) to sit on and a rolled-up towel against the lower back for lumbar support. These measures will help take the strain and load off the spine, but they are only to be used if they feel comfortable. If unsure, contact your Workstation Assessor or Health and Safety Adviser (there is a lot of advice and guidance on the [Posturite website](#)). Ensure feet are planted firmly on the floor or a small foot stool, biscuit tin, Tupperware container or similar can be used as a footrest. If there is a footrest available at work and can be taken home, please do so.

Screen: Ensure the screen is raised so the top of the screen is at eye level. This can be done using an adjustable laptop stand, a box, a rim of paper or some books if necessary.

- A separate keyboard and mouse should be used, as this enables the correct positioning of the laptop screen.
- Pain or discomfort should be reported to your line management as soon as it is noticed. Further advice may be sought through Occupational Health.

	DSE Home Working Guidance	Document No.	HS-GN-038
		Date	07.07.23
		Pages	3 of 9
		Revision	Rev 1

- Chair height should be adjusted where possible, so arms are at right angles, with forearms, lightly supported by the work surface.
- Ensure the lower back is well supported. Lower back support helps encourage good posture. A back-support cushion should be considered, if needed.

Screen Glare: If possible, the laptop/tablet should not be positioned directly underneath bright, artificial light. Try to use as much natural light as possible.

Mouse and Keyboard: If the laptop/tablet is being raised, use an external keyboard and mouse to ensure work is not being carried out with arms too high. If possible, take the keyboard and mouse home, particularly if they are ergonomic ones. Ensure there is enough USB ports to connect these. Elbows should be at a 90-degree angle, tucked closely to the body, and wrists should be in a neutral position. This posture helps prevent rounding shoulders and pulling neck muscles. If an external mouse and keyboard can't be attached, leave the laptop in place on the table rather than raising it up but more breaks must be taken. Try moving every 15 minutes.

Breaks and Exercise

Regardless of the workstation set up, the best care for musculoskeletal health is taking regular breaks and moving around as much as possible. The more 'makeshift' the set-up, the more important movement is.

- Regular, short breaks, movement for five or ten minutes every hour, aiming for frequent, short breaks to be taken for a good home office set-up. Consider taking microbreaks to stretch, move around, change in activity like taking a phone call, reading or getting up for a drink to avoid prolonged static postures.
- More frequent breaks up to every 15-20 minutes should be taken if the DSE setup is not optimal or if discomfort is being experienced.

Tips to help more movement:


- Stand up every time you use the phone
- Try doing more activities away from the screen e.g. reading paperwork
- A reminder could be set up e.g. a timer on your phone. Also, apps such as Break Reminder (contact IT Helpdesk for help with this) could be installed on your computer, that allow you to set reminders.

Some [workstation exercises](#) that can be done in your microbreaks (Can be found in Appendix 3):

Avoid:


- using phones or tablets for a long time,
- sitting on unsupportive seating such as a sofa,
- static postures.

Whilst it may seem easier to simply open the laptop and commence working without making any adjustments, this can lead to poor posture, which can cause pain and discomfort over time. It is well worth taking a couple of minutes to set up your workstation correctly each time you sit down to work.

	DSE Home Working Guidance	Document No.	HS-GN-038
		Date	07.07.23
		Pages	4 of 9
		Revision	Rev 1

Reporting

Accidents, near misses and incidents of ill health should all be reported in the usual way using our [online template](#). This is available on the Health and Safety pages on the intranet. This should be completed for all accidents and incidents whether they occurred at home or at work but are relevant to workplace hazards.

	DSE Home Working Guidance	Document No.	HS-GN-038
		Date	07.07.23
		Pages	5 of 9
		Revision	Rev 1

First Aid

Most homes will have an appropriate level of domestic first aid stock so it would be prudent for those working from home for longer periods to check the contents to ensure they meet their own needs.

Emergency actions and contacts

Ensure you are familiar with the actions required to summon assistance if you require it, specifically when working at home alone. Ensure you have a mobile device/house phone (if installed) available and have emergency numbers programmed into the phone for easy access. These may be for local family members or the emergency services. The university [Lone Working guidance and risk assessment](#) can be accessed via the Health and Safety Pages on the intranet or via the following link.

Additionally, the [Suzy Lamplugh Trust](#) has some excellent resource information

Wellbeing

It is important to take regular breaks and maintain positive wellbeing when working.

- Take a micro-break (2-3 minutes) every 20 minutes.
- Take a break (5-10 minutes) every hour e.g. make a hot drink or walk around the room.
- Do simple exercises (Appendix 3).
- Keep hydrated and drink water.
- Enjoy healthy snacks and avoid sugary or fatty foods.
- Stay connected and maintain social connections with your team, family, friends and community.

It is quite normal to feel anxious or stressed during these situations. Contact your line manager or [Employee Assistance Program](#) for free and confidential help.

The Wellbeing Portal also has useful resources in the '[Wellbeing at home](#)' section

Further Information

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/toolbox/workers/home.htm>

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/research/rrhtm/rr262.htm>

<https://www.iosh.com/media/1507/iosh-home-office-mobile-office-full-report-2014.pdf>

Appendix 1: DSE Home working checklist

Use this checklist whilst undertaking a risk assessment of your homeworking area. Share the findings with your line manager once complete

Employee:	
Home workplace location:	

	✓ or X	Comments
A – Working area		
1. Is the workplace segregated from the rest of your home and away from distractions?		
2. Is there a safe means of access to the working area?		
3. Is there adequate workspace in the room to work safely		
4. Is there sufficient height to stand up in?		
5. Is your home workplace free from tripping hazards?		
6. Are the floor coverings / surfaces in good condition?		
7. Is equipment, bags, paper, files, books etc stored safely off the floor?		
8. Is equipment positioned safely so that no cables are left hanging that could lead to the equipment being pulled over?		

	✓ or X	Comments
B - Environment		
1. Is heating available to maintain an adequate working temperature in the winter (Minimum 16 °C)?		
2. Is there a means of cooling during hot temperatures, i.e. local cooling, adequate ventilation or hot weather fans?		

3. Are blinds/ curtains available to prevent glare on computer screens?		
4. Is there adequate ventilation in the work area?		
5. Is adequate lighting provided which may be a combination of natural lighting, task lighting and general room lighting?		

	✓ or X	Comments
C – Display screen equipment		
1. Have you completed the display screen equipment assessment for your home workstation?		
2. Are you using a docking station for your laptop?		
3. Have you an external mouse and keyboard for your laptop?		
4. Are you taking short but frequent breaks away from your work?		

	✓ or X	Comments
D- Emergency actions		
Have you access to basic first aid provisions?		
Do you know what to do in an emergency? Have you worked out a fire drill so you and anyone else in the house know what to do and where to go in case of a fire?		
Have you a smoke detector/s fitted?		
Are you familiar with the University procedures for accident and incident reporting?		

Are you familiar with the university Lone Working arrangements and supporting information		
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	✓ or X	Comments
E – Electrical safety		
1. Are University owned portable electrical appliances PAT tested and a sticker applied?		
2. Do you carry out frequent visual checks on plugs, wiring and casings of electrical equipment?		

Employee signature		Date:
Line Manager's signature		Date:

Further Information

- <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg226.pdf>
- <https://www.iosh.com/media/1507/iosh-home-office-mobile-office-full-report-2014.pdf>
- <http://www.suzylamplugh.org/>

	DSE Home Working Guidance	Document No.	HS-GN-038
		Date	07.07.23
		Pages	9 of 9
		Revision	Rev 1

Appendix 2: HSE DSE User Guide

Health and Safety Executive Guidelines on Working with VDUs

What can I do to help myself?

Lots! You should make full use of the adjustment facilities for your VDU and work environment to get the best from them and avoid potential health problems. Here are some specific tips.

- Adjust your chair and VDU to find the most comfortable position for your work. As a broad guide, your arms should be approximately horizontal and your eyes at the same height as the top of the VDU casing.
- Make sure there is enough space underneath your desk to move your legs freely. Move any obstacles such as boxes or equipment.
- Avoid excess pressure on the backs of your legs and knees. A footrest, particularly for smaller users, may be helpful.
- 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 repeat stretching movements.
- Adjust your keyboard and screen to get a good keying and viewing position. A space in front of the keyboard is sometimes helpful for resting the hands and wrists while not keying.
- Don't bend your hands up at the wrist when keying. Try to keep a soft touch on the keys and don't overstretch your fingers. Good keyboard technique is important.
- Try different layouts of keyboard, screen and document holder to find the best arrangement for you.
- Make sure you have enough work space to take whatever documents you need. A document holder may help you to avoid awkward neck movements.
- Arrange your desk and screen so that bright lights are not reflected in the screen. You shouldn't be directly facing windows or bright lights. Adjust curtains or blinds to prevent unwanted light.
- Make sure the characters on your screen are sharply focussed and can be read easily. They shouldn't flicker or move.
- Make sure there are no layers of dirt, grime or finger marks on the screen.
- Use the brightness control on the screen to suit the lighting conditions in the room.