

Guidance Note, GN015

OFFICE CHAIR ADJUSTMENTS

Across the University there is a large variation in the types and styles of office chairs available. You should take the time to familiarise yourself with the controls on your chair in order to adjust the chair to your needs. You should be able to freely adjust your chair and this is especially important if you work at different locations during your working week. You could be surprised how much more comfortable you could be by making simple adjustments to suit your needs. You are very unlikely to break the chair in familiarising yourself with the chair controls.

If you do any 'hot-desking', then it is important that you adjust the seat to your own requirements every time you sit at a different desk.

The standard office chair should have the following as a minimum;

- A 5 prong base with castors suitable for the floor surface to give stability and to aid movement
- Adjustable height of the chair seat
- Adjustable height of the seat back
- Adjustable tilt of the seat back

Below is a summary of the key points of each adjustment and the recommended 'settings'.

Seat Height Adjustment

- There will be a lever which will allow you to adjust the height of the seat by using compressed gas. While operating this lever and sitting on the chair, the chair should lower and if you unweight the chair, the chair should rise.
- The optimum seat height allows you to sit at the desk with your shoulders relaxed and elbows approximately at 90 degrees. Your elbows will be very slightly higher than the surface of the desk and your forearms will be horizontal with the desk.
- Once the seat is set at the correct height, if you cannot firmly put your feet on the floor, a foot rest will be required.
- If your knees now touch the underside of the desk, you may need to have a higher desk.

Back Rest Adjustment

- The back rest on most chairs can be moved by either a knurled handle that is loosened / tightened by hand or by a ratchet mechanism. It is recommended that you familiarise yourself with the mechanism.

- The ‘thicker’ part of the lumbar support should fit into the curve of your lower back to maintain the spine in a neutral S-shape. The height of the lumbar support will therefore vary from individual to individual.
- Some chairs may have an inflatable lumbar support to offer greater adjustability.
- The angle of the back rest will most likely be adjusted by a lever, similar to that for the seat height. This should be adjusted to provide support to your back in an upright neutral S-shaped position. Some backs operate on a tension system and will move and support the back as the individual moves.

If any of the above functions do not work, speak to your line manager regarding a replacement chair.

The above basic functions may be supplemented on higher specification chairs, and these may include:

Adjustable Seat Depth

- With your back supported by the back rest, there should be approximately 5cm between the edge of the seat and the back of your leg to fully support your legs.
- If you are particularly tall, you may require a seat with an adjustable seat depth to allow you to fully support your legs.
- If you are particularly short, you may require a seat with a smaller seat depth to prevent the seat edge digging into the backs of your knees.

Adjustable Seat Angle

- It may be possible to tilt the angle of the seat base forward to increase the angle between the seat base and the lumbar support to greater than 90 degrees.
- This can open the pelvis and encourages the spine to more easily form the natural S-position and also relieve tension in the lumbar area.
- However, some individuals may find that feel as though they are being pushed forwards and out of the seat

Arm supports

- Many chairs are supplied with arms, some of these being fixed and some adjustable to varying degrees.
- Some users may find that, especially with fixed arms, these may cause you to sit forward and prevent you from using the lumbar support effectively. Additionally, the arms may prevent you from sitting close enough to the desk.
- If this is the case, it is normally possible to remove the arms using an Allen key.
- Although chair arms can provide you with support for the arms, the edge of the desk is a suitable alternative to the chair arms.