

## Display Screen Equipment (DSE) Guidance Notes

### HSGN 4a

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### Staff Health & Computers

The Display Screen Equipment (DSE) Regulations (1992) as amended, require employers to minimise the risks involved with habitual use of display screen equipment by ensuring that the workstation and associated activities are well designed and users are properly trained. Employers must evaluate the risk to users by carrying out a risk assessment which includes the workstation (including peripherals), furniture (desk, chair etc), the environment (lighting) and any special needs.

#### Who is a user?

A DSE user is an employee who habitually uses display screen equipment and is reliant upon it in order to carry out his/her work activities. If most, or all, of the following apply the individual should be classified as a user:

- The individual is dependent upon the use of DSE in order to do the job as there are no alternative means readily available.
- The individual has no discretion as to whether or not to use the equipment
- Significant training or particular skills are required
- DSE is normally used continuously for at least one hour every day
- The job requires fast transfer of information between the user and the screen
- The job activity requires high levels of attention and concentration from the user

Examples of DSE users would be:

- Secretarial staff
- Finance staff
- Graphics designers
- Computing software support staff
- Web designers

What types of screen are covered by the regulations?

- Cathode ray tubes
- Liquid crystal display screens
- Microfiche
- Some process control screens

- Screens displaying drawings or graphics
- CCTV security display screens,
- Video editing display screens

Window typewriters, calculators and cash registers are not included.

#### What are the risks?

The health risks associated with the use of Display Screen Equipment are related to static sedentary postures and the extended lengths of time spent using such equipment. The types of health problems that may be experienced by users can be grouped as follows:

##### Upper limb disorders:

Lack of support for the lower back; stooping, reaching or twisting; typing or use of the mouse with bent wrists can lead to anything from temporary fatigue, aches, pains and soreness to chronic soft tissue problems such as tendonitis, bursitis and muscle strain.

##### Eyes and eyesight problems (visual fatigue):

There is no reliable evidence that display screens cause damage to user's eyes and eyesight. However, prolonged use may make users aware of pre-existing defects. Users may, however, suffer symptoms of temporary visual fatigue which can be manifested as temporary impaired vision, red or sore eyes and headaches. This can be caused by focussing at a fixed distance for long periods of time; poor positioning of the display screen; poor legibility of characters on the screen; an unstable display; reflections and glare on the screen.

##### Fatigue/Stress:

Poorly designed or inappropriate software can lead to frustration and stress as can lack of training in the use of required software. Daily work activities with insufficient breaks away from the DSE workstation can cause mental fatigue.

#### What measures are in place to reduce these risks?

All members of staff classed as DSE 'users' should receive training on the risks involved with improper use of DSE equipment, what the university's responsibilities are and what measures users can take to help themselves. This may be done via the DSE risk assessment.

#### DSE Risk Assessment

All users must also have their workstations risk assessed to highlight any potential problems and take remedial action to prevent the onset of any ill-health symptoms. The risk assessment will consider the workstation equipment (chair, desk, screen, keyboard, mouse etc) as well as the environment (lighting, temperature, humidity etc) and provision of information, instruction and training.

The risk assessment must be systematic, appropriate and comprehensive. The DSE assessment is available on the University intranet.

All DSE users must fill this out.

DSE risk assessments must be reviewed if there is any significant change to the software, hardware, furniture or increase in time spent at the screen. The risk assessment must also be reviewed if the user is relocated to another workstation, the lighting is modified or, in particular, if the user develops ill-health symptoms.

#### **What about students?**

Strictly, students are not classed as "users" under the DSE Regulations. However, the University still owes its students a duty of care not to put their health at risk.

Postgraduate students who are required to use DSE as a significant part of their research projects (e.g. computer modelling, computer aided study with specialist software) should be treated as DSE users.

Undergraduate and taught postgraduate students who are required to use DSE as a significant part of their studies should be provided with appropriate information and instruction as part of their course.

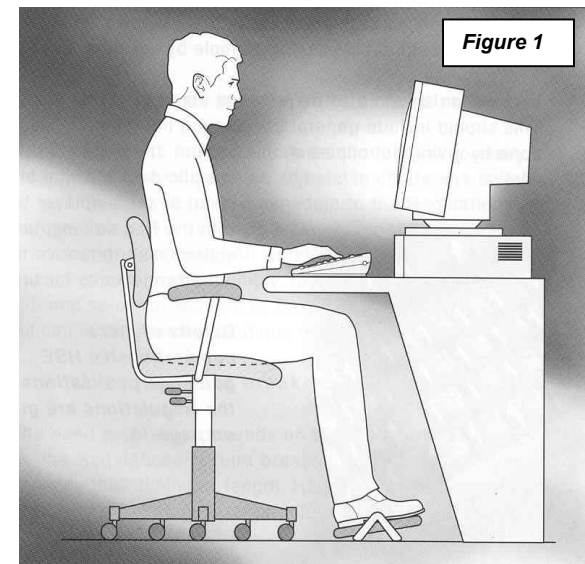
#### **Actions users can take to help themselves**

Posture: ensure that your chair is correctly adjusted so that you are at the right height and the lumbar region of your back is supported. When typing and using the mouse you must keep your wrists straight and avoid resting on the desk. If, once the chair has been adjusted to the correct height your feet do not reach the floor you may require a foot rest. Documents should be located either next to the screen (if you are a touch typist) or next to the keyboard to avoid excessive neck movements (see figure 1).

Eyes: if there is glare or reflection on your screen use blinds or adjust, or reposition, your screen. Ensure that the screen is clean to maintain good contrast and brightness.

Fatigue/Stress: You should receive training on how to use your software. Staff Development run courses every year in co-operation with IT Services on how to use the software most commonly in use around the campus. You can request attendance on these courses via your line manager.

Breaks: alternate your tasks so that you can take breaks away from the screen to rest your eyes, your back and your arms. Short frequent breaks are better than longer less frequent ones. Avoid taking refreshment breaks or lunch breaks whilst sitting at your workstation.



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#### **Eyes and Eyesight Tests**

Research has shown that in general only one in ten DSE "users" will require special corrective appliances for DSE work. However, if you are a user and you believe that you may have vision problems associated with using your DSE workstation you should have an eye test. If you have an eye test then you should keep the receipt and take it to the Human Resources Department for reimbursement of the cost incurred. If your optician believes that you require corrective appliances specifically for work with your DSE workstation the University will contribute towards a pair of "specific" corrective spectacles.

#### **University Policy on contributions to Eye Tests and Glasses for regular users of VDU's and other Display Screen Equipment.**

1. St Mary's University Twickenham recognises its duty to comply with the Health & Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992 amended (2002), which includes provision for eye tests and glasses required specifically for use with Display Screen Equipment (DSE).

2. 'There is no reliable evidence that work with display screen equipment causes any permanent damage to eyes or eyesight, but it may make users with pre-existing vision defects more aware of them. This may give some users some temporary visual fatigue or headaches. Uncorrected vision defects can make work at display screens more tiring or stressful than it should be, and correcting defects can improve comfort, job satisfaction and performance' (Health and Safety Executive, HSE Guidance Notes on DSE Regulations 1992, (Amended 2002).
3. Staff identified as 'users', as defined by the Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment – DSE) Regulations 1992, are entitled to free eye tests annually at their employer's expense. A user is defined in the regulations as "an employee who habitually uses display screen equipment as a significant part of his/her normal work". It is the responsibility of the Head of Faculty / Professional Service to identify users within their Faculty / Professional Service and inform them of this policy.
4. A contribution towards prescription lenses (glasses or contact) will be paid and a contribution towards frames every three years, to those staff defined as 'users' by the Health and Safety (DSE) Regulations and confirmed to use display screen equipment (DSE) as an essential part of their work and for a significant part of their normal working hours by their Head of Faculty / Professional Service
5. Summary of contribution limits:

	Amount	Frequency
Eye Test	Full Cost	2 years
Lenses & Frames	£49.00	2 years
6. Employees will be responsible for the initial payment of their eye test and any costs incurred on lenses or frames.
7. To claim for eye Test, lenses and / or frames, employees are required to complete the eye test and glasses claim form (which can be accessed from the HR page on the E-portal, via email at [hrhelpdesk@smuc.ac.uk](mailto:hrhelpdesk@smuc.ac.uk). Employees should take the eye test and glasses claim form along to their Optician appointment for the Optician to complete and authorise. Any receipts for costs incurred should be retained and attached to the form. The employee will be required to complete and sign the employee section and forward the form to their Head of Faculty / Professional Service for authorisation.
8. The Head of Faculty / Professional Service will be required to confirm whether or not the claimant uses display screen equipment as an essential part of their work and for a significant part of their normal working hours.
9. Once the eye test and glasses claim form is fully completed and signed by the Optician, Employee and Head of Faculty / Professional Service, it should be forwarded to the HR Department along with receipts of all costs incurred relating to the eye test/ frames/ lenses.
10. If the claim is approved and the qualifying criteria relating to frequency of claims has been satisfied, the employee will be reimbursed for eye test and for lenses/frames in accordance with the stipulated contribution limits.
11. Once approved claims have been processed, payment will be issued as per the stated contribution limits along with a receipt detailing a breakdown of the reimbursed claim.
12. If claim(s) for eye test, lenses and / or frames could not be processed, the employee will be notified of the reasons.
13. It is not University policy to reimburse Optician form filling fees.
14. No contribution will be paid in the form of an advance.
15. Where discount is obtained against any individual component, only the discounted value will be considered as an actual expense.
16. This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis in accordance with any legislative changes.

#### What if I have special needs?

Eyesight: If you have more serious vision defects it does not mean that you cannot use display screen equipment. There are various software and hardware solutions that may help you. Further information is also available from the Royal National Institute for the Blind and Action for Blind People Websites ([www.rnib.org.uk](http://www.rnib.org.uk) and [www.afbp.org](http://www.afbp.org)).

Other special needs (e.g. wheelchair users): Wheelchair users are likely to require extra room to manoeuvre into their workstation. Amongst other considerations, the height of the desk may also need to be raised to accommodate the wheelchair. Further information on disability needs is available from Scope ([www.disabilitynow.org.uk](http://www.disabilitynow.org.uk)) and the UK government's disability website ([www.disability.gov.uk](http://www.disability.gov.uk)).

In both cases you can contact your Faculty / Professional Service Health & Safety Coordinator, University Health & Safety Officer, a Human Resources member of staff or your Union representative for further advice.

### What about Laptop Computers?

The main risks involved with laptop computers are those associated with the user's inability to adjust the relative positions of the screen, keyboard and mouse. Avoid using laptop computers for long periods whenever possible. Always sit at a desk or table when using a laptop – do not place the computer directly on your lap. If you intend to use your laptop for significant lengths of time make sure that your laptop allows you to attach an external mouse, keyboard and VDU.

### Finally...

#### What should I do if I have any problems?

If you are a DSE user and think you have health problems connected with your work, it's best to talk to your line manager or safety representative i.e. your Health & Safety Coordinator. If you need further help please contact the University Health & Safety Officer.

A publication entitled 'Working with VDUs' has been published by the Health and Safety Executive and contains a series of questions and answers which will allay many of the rumours of the hazards associated with VDUs.

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This guidance forms part of the St Mary's University  
Health & Safety Policy