

Display Screen Equipment

Introduction

The Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations (NI) 1992 came into effect in January 1993. Display screen equipment (DSE) includes visual display units or terminals and portable systems such as laptops that are in prolonged use.

These regulations require employers to carry out an assessment of the workplace where staff are employed in the use of DSE's in order to reduce the risk of associated ill-health.

Definition of a user

Not everyone who use DSE is covered by the regulations. The regulations cover only those staff who are most at risk and would include employees:

- Who use DSE more or less continuously on most days;
- Who use DSE for spells of one hour or more at a time.

Suggested areas where assessments may be required

Area	Person
General office	Secretary/clerical staff
Library	Librarian
IT Room	Technician/teacher
Other rooms where DSEs are in use	Technician/teacher

At this stage it is not expected that workstations used by pupils will be subjected to the requirements of these regulations. However, where possible, best practice in relation to workstation design should be followed.

What does the assessment entail?

The assessment should involve an examination of the workstation and its environment. Consideration should be given to including the current working practices and health of the user.

The main elements of the assessment are:

The desk

This should have ample space to carry out the work and be of sufficient height to allow for postural changes.

The chair

The chair should have height and back adjustment and also have lumbar support.

The computer

The screen should be adjustable and the characters should be easily read.

General environment

The equipment should not be located in an area where glare from windows or lights are likely. Window blinds or curtains are considered to be essential in offices where display screen equipment is used.

Additional items

Additional items, which may be of benefit to users are:

- A document holder;
- A foot rest;
- A wrist rest; and
- A mouse rest.

Who carries out the assessment?

In most cases the assessment will be straightforward and involve only a few minutes observation of the display screen activity. A common sense approach will generally be enough. In difficult or unusual cases assistance may be sought from the Employer's Health and Safety Adviser.

Setting up workstations

The photograph below shows how a workstation should be set up to minimise risks to the user.



1. Adequate lighting.

2. Adequate contrast with no glare or distracting reflections.

3. Window covering.

4. Software, which is appropriate to the task.

5. Screen has a stable image, is adjustable, readable and glare/reflection free (screen height and angle should allow a comfortable head position).

6. Keyboard is useable, adjustable, detachable and legible.

7. Work surface allows flexible arrangements and is spacious and glare free (space in front of keyboard to support hands/wrists during pauses in keying).

8. Work chair is adjustable (seat back and seat height are adjustable with good lumbar support).

9. Leg room and clearances to allow for changes in posture.

10. Create a work pattern that

allows you to spend no more than 45 minutes in an hour at the DSE without taking natural breaks to move about, perhaps to file documents or to use the telephone.

11. Try to keep a soft touch on the keys and don't overstretch your fingers.

12. If you have any problems, which you think may be connected to using DSE, contact your supervisor and/or the Human Resources Section.

Eye Tests

The regulations make provision for eye tests for employees who are designated as users of display screen equipment. Schools should contact the Board's Human Resource Section or Health and Safety Adviser who will arrange tests with an optician designated by the Board. Teachers in Catholic Maintained Schools should similarly contact CCMS's Human Resources & Corporate Services Section in Hollywood, telephone number 028 9042 6972.

DSE spectacles

If following an eye test, it is determined by the optician that the user needs special glasses for DSE work, then the Employer will meet the cost of basic glasses. The current Board allowance for glasses is £55.00.

If an employee decides to go for a higher specification of frames or lenses, then the employee must make up the difference in cost, as the Employer is only liable for the cost of basic glasses.

Further advice on eye testing and the issue of glasses is available from the Employers' Human Resources Section.

Working with a laptop

Sitting

■ Avoid slouching.

- Don't sit forward in a hunched-up position.
- Don't place the laptop too close to the edge of the desk. This will cause you to look down too much and puts your head and neck in a stressful posture.
- You may find it easier to push the laptop backwards a little. This can be more comfortable for your head and neck. Your arms can rest on the desktop and you will find it easier to keep your wrists in a relaxed or neutral position.

■ Make sure your chair supports your back.

- Sit right back in your chair so that your backrest can support you.
- Use a pillow or suitable alternative to support your back if the chair doesn't provide this support.
- Make sure its curve fits snugly into your lower back.

■ Avoid leaning to one side.

- Avoid leaning or bending to one side to read your screen or hardcopies.
- Remove any obstructions that prevent you sitting directly in front of your display, such as a pedestal unit.
- If you are reading from a hardcopy, try to keep it as close to the laptop as possible. Use a copystand whenever possible.

Arms and shoulders

■ Avoid bent wrists.

- Avoid sitting at too high, or too low, a level in relation to your laptop to minimise the risk of strain injuries, particularly to your wrists.
- Always try to work on height adjustable chairs. Avoid meeting room chairs that often do not have this adjustment facility.
- Ensure that your forearms are roughly horizontal when your hands are on the keyboard. This will allow you to work with your wrists in a straightened position when typing.
- Watch out for pins and needles, a loss of sensation and dull aches. Minimise the risks. Short breaks as you work are helpful.

Using the mouse

- Use the trackball or glide pad so that your hand is flat and keep your fingers relaxed.

Reading the screen

■ **Avoid glare on your display screen**

- Glare or reflected light is often a problem for laptop users. The screen should be roughly perpendicular to your line of sight. If you see glare, adjust your screen away from the light source to find a position where the reflections are not visible. You may have to slightly adjust your sitting position after doing this.
- If a window is causing a problem, try to move so that you do not have your back to it. If you are positioned sideways on to a window, try to move as far away from it as possible.

■ **Make sure your display remains legible.**

- Regularly clean your screen with approved cleaning materials.
- Adjust the screen brightness to suit the ambient light level.

General tips

■ **Batteries**

- Get the most out of your batteries by checking and following the recharging regime. This will help to avoid carrying extra batteries.
- Utilise any power conservation settings that help prolong the life of your batteries.

■ **Carrying**

- Try to reduce the amount of weight you have to carry (see batteries above).
- Try to avoid taking hard copies of documents that may already be on your laptop.
- Where appropriate, use luggage that has wheels.
- When carrying your laptop, try to use a carrying case with a padded shoulder strap.