



## St Peter's College

### **DISPLAY SCREEN EQUIPMENT**

#### Introduction

1. The use of the term display screen equipment (DSE), previously known as visual display units (VDUs) covers cathode ray screens and liquid crystal displays, plasma screens and includes the use of laptops. Since the introduction of the regulations in 1992, computer use in the University has risen as have the number of cases of arm, neck or back pain caused or exacerbated by computer use. Referrals of individuals with musculoskeletal problems to the University Occupational Physician have almost doubled since 1998 and most of these referrals relate to upper limb disorders associated with DSE use. Most of the occupational health workplace follow-up visits also relate to DSE use.

2. These cases can progress to disabling work-related illness, but they are preventable. This policy describes good practice in workstation set up and use which will help prevent such problems. However, if a person does develop symptoms associated with their DSE use, it is important that they report this to the College or the University's Occupational Health Service. Early referral as soon as symptoms develop will assist in identification of workplace problems and speedier recovery.

#### Aim

3. The aim of this policy is to put in place measures that are intended to minimise the incidence of work related upper limb disorders (WRULD) arising from use of DSE.

#### Scope

4. This policy is concerned with all aspects of usage, including posture and furniture, visual factors, breaks, environment and training. The legislation applies only to employees but the College has a duty of care towards undergraduate and post-graduate students<sup>1</sup> who should be advised on induction as to best practice.

5. An employee will be classed as a user if they:

- normally use DSE for continuous or near-continuous spells of an hour or more at a time and
- use DSE in this way more or less daily and
- have to transfer information quickly to or from the DSE and
- need to apply high levels of attention and concentration; or are highly dependent on DSE; or have little choice about using it; or need special training or skills to use the DSE.

Whilst employee users have a responsibility for their own health in this regard, line managers should also be aware of who, in their area of responsibility, falls into the above criteria and may need to undertake a DSE user survey (see below).

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<sup>1</sup> Post-graduate students who may be heavy users of a variety of DSE and working in departments will be subject to a similar duty of care.

## Assessment

6. Whereas larger colleges and University departments may be able to afford to employ an assessor (internally or out-sourced), the College relies on individuals to carry out a self-assessment using the questionnaire at Appendix 1. The completed assessment should be discussed with their line manager who should then determine whether the outcome(s) should be referred to the Bursar for further action. Assessments should be collated to form part of a line manager's report to the College's Safety Working Group.
7. The assessment should be carried out annually: or on such occasion as the DSE user relocates or makes/has made for them, significant modifications to their workstation or work area.

## DSE Best Practice

8. The following criteria, whilst not necessarily exhaustive, should be taken into account under the terms of this policy:
  - a. Where any individual has been provided with University equipment, it should comply with the requirements of this policy and should be maintained in a safe condition. "Safe condition" means that the screen must not flicker and the equipment, including the flexes and plugs, must be physically intact (and see also requirements for portable electrical appliances).
  - b. All individuals who use computing equipment, which may be their own, must arrange their equipment such that risk from trips over cabling or flexes is minimised.
  - c. If usage is to the extent that the individuals become "users" for the purpose of their employment in locations away from their normal workstation, they must have the risks of using the equipment and the risk control measures explained to them. However, it is not intended that DSE assessors should make visits to remote locations.
  - d. Users will be personally responsible for:
    - (1) Arranging their equipment and workstations in accordance with the diagram in Appendix 2 and taking regular short breaks<sup>2</sup>.
    - (2) Arranging a timely repair if their computer screen flickers or their equipment, including the flexes and plugs, becomes physically damaged.
    - (3) Reporting, without delay, to their line manager any personal discomfort, e.g. tingling sensations or pains in their hands (or forearms or necks) thought to be associated with the use of the workstation.
  - e. If ill health symptoms are identified, the line manager must refer the individual, without delay, to the Occupational Health Service through the HR Officer. Such action is to be reported both to the Bursar and to the next meeting of the College's Safety Working Group.
9. Requirements for Work Stations. These are to be found at Appendix 3<sup>3</sup> to this policy.

## Health Issues

10. Where users experience any DSE related health effects, including those outlined below, then departments must act to minimise the risk of long-term discomfort. Departments should arrange, through the Bursar's office, for a reassessment of the work area to be carried out; and the employee should be referred to the University Occupational Health Service for advice without delay.
11. Likely adverse health effects include the following:

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<sup>2</sup> "Short breaks" can mean 5-10minutes every hour doing something else, looking at the horizon thinking great thoughts etc.

<sup>3</sup> Taken directly from HSE's Guidance to the Regulations.

a. Musculoskeletal disorders: A variety of "work-related upper limb disorders" (WRULDS) may be associated with DSE use, although the precise causal pathway is unclear. Some users experience discomfort or aches and pains, where others may develop chronic soft tissue disorders. It is important that where such damage is suspected that the person is referred to the Occupational Health Service so an accurate diagnosis can be made in order to help identify the possible causes. The term 'repetitive strain injury(ies)' (RSI), sometimes attributed to these disorders, should be avoided as it is not a medical diagnosis and can be misleading.

b. Fatigue and stress: Many symptoms described by DSE workers reflect stresses arising from their work. Symptoms may be linked to upper limb or visual problems but there is evidence that stress often contributes as well. Both supervisors and users, for further information, should consult the College's policy on the prevention and management of work-related stress.

c. Eye effects: 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.

12. Eye and eyesight testing. When users believe they require eye and eyesight testing as a result of being a heavy user of DSE, this must be referred through their line manager to the Bursar's office. If there is a supportable case, the College will meet the cost of the test and reasonable costs of any corrective spectacles recommended by the optometrist for DSE use.

When eye/eyesight tests are carried out, the frequency of necessary re-testing will normally be two years unless otherwise specified by the optometrist.

CJ Scotcher

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Appendices:

1. DSE Assessment Questionnaire.
2. Equipment and Work Station Arrangement.
3. Requirements for Work Stations.

14/08/2013