1. Introduction

1.1 Display screen equipment (DSE) or visual display units (VDU’s) are widely used throughout Cumbria Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust (the Trust). Their use has led to many benefits, making many tasks quicker and easier to perform. Their unplanned and prolonged use can lead to users having to spend longer periods sitting and working at the display screen. Attention to organising the workstation and work process for the individual is vitally important if we are to avoid users experiencing back, wrist or possibly other health-related problems.
1.2 The Trust has legal duties under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, and more specifically the Display Screen Equipment Regulations 1992 amended in 2002, to ensure a safe place of work.

1.3 This Guidance is designed to support those staff that use DSE in their work and is therefore essential to ensure safe working practices and environment, minimising any risk to the lowest practicable level.

1.4 The risks associated with the use of DSE are generally low and easily avoided provided the workstation is properly set up and the advice given to reduce any risks is followed. Some staff may experience work related health problems in using the equipment, which may result in claims for compensation. These may include:

- Upper limb disorders.
- Visual discomfort e.g. eye strain.
- Fatigue and stress.
- General backache or wrist problems.

1.5 Staff who identify back or other associated problems on commencing employment with the Trust, or experience problems later, may be referred to the Team Prevent our Occupational Health providers for assessment. A specific risk assessment may be required to determine any underlying problems relating to the use of this equipment and special provision may be necessary to support that member of staff.

2 OBJECTIVES

2.1 The Trust is obliged to inform all employees (and the managers of those employees) who use computers and other DSE in their work about:

- Health and safety regulations.
- Safe systems of work.
- Legal duties of the Trust.
- Guidelines for managers implementing the DSE Guidance that must be followed (refer to Section 5).

3 SUMMARY

3.1 The Trust is required to:

- Determine which staff are designated as regular users of DSE. The job description of the user will generally define their duties; however, staff that spend increasing amounts of time at their workstation should be regularly identified and assessed by their line manager.

- All new members of staff will undertake a self-assessment of their workstation by using the Display Screen Equipment Self-Assessment Worksheet Form (Appendix 1). This will help to identify and address any requirements and potential risks to which the user may be exposed to, so far as may be reasonably practicable, at the time of assessment.

- Ensure all workstations meet at least minimum requirements.
• Ensure staff work schedules are frequented by planned breaks and changes of activity
• Provide free eyesight tests biennially and, where appropriate, make available single plane vision corrective spectacles free of charge.

3.2 Cost implications must be considered and following completion of a Display Screen Equipment Self-Assessment Worksheet Form (appendix 1), the manager will be made aware that additional costs will be incurred should the provision of a personal computer and specific equipment be necessary to meet compliance with DSE regulations.

4 AIM

4.1 The Trust aims to achieve full compliance with the Display Screen Equipment Regulations 1992 for all staff designated as regular users.

5 GUIDELINES FOR MANAGER IMPLEMENTING THE DSE GUIDANCE Managers must:

5.1 Identifying a DSE user.

5.1.1 A DSE user is defined as an employee who uses DSE as a significant requirement of their job description or where most of the following criteria apply:

• The employee is dependent upon DSE as a requirement of their role
• The employee has no discretion over the use of DSE
• The employee’s work calls for training in or particular skills in DSE
• The employee uses DSE for continuous spells of an hour or more
• The use of DSE is used in this way more or less on a daily basis
• The fast transfer of information is required
• The critical nature of errors could have serious consequences

5.1.2 DSE is defined as computer equipment such as personal computers (PC’s) and microfiche systems. Calculators and hand held data logging devices do not fall within the scope of this Guidance. Laptop computers only fall within this category if used on a prolonged or habitual basis.

5.2 Ensure a Display Screen Equipment Self-Assessment Form (Appendix 1) is completed for all users within the work environment and for those working from home. This will identify and address any risks to which the user may be exposed.

• Ideally this will be completed as soon as practicably possible following commencement of employment.
• Further guidance for users can be found within the Appendices 3-5.
• If issues cannot be resolved by basic adjustments the manager must complete a Managers Referral Form (Appendix 6). On receiving this the respective Patient Safety Advisor will consider the information and where necessary provide advice and / or undertake a full DSE assessment. The purchase of a specialist chairs or other DSE equipment may be required.
Note: A user experiencing pain or upper body discomfort may be an indication of poor workplace design or organisation of work. These problems should be referred to Team Prevent the Trust’s Occupational Health provider.

5.3 Managers must ensure workstations meet minimum requirements - refer to Appendix 2 for details

5.4 Eye Screening

5.4.1 On request, enable users to have periodic eyesight tests (biennially, or more frequently if specified by an optician) and, where appropriate, make available specific corrective spectacles free of charge.

• Those staff requiring an eyesight test with an optician can apply for a Specsavers eye care voucher from the Patient Safety Department at St Nicholas Hospital. An Eye Test Application form should be completed by their manager before being submitted to the Patient Safety department, See Appendix VII. Following this a voucher will be supplied.

• The voucher entitles the user to a free eye examination and a pair of single vision spectacles free of charge. Any additional upgrade costs will be met by the user.

5.5 Managers should help users to plan their work activity ensuring periodic breaks or changes of activity.

5.6 Provide Health & Safety Training

5.6.1 Managers should ensure that:

• Users complete mandatory manual handling updates that include information about back care and how to avoid problems.

• Users complete mandatory Health, Safety and Welfare training on a three yearly basis.

6. USE OF LAPTOP COMPUTERS/TABLETS

6.1 Where portable computers or machines with small screens are used for prolonged periods of more than an hour at a workstation, full sized keyboards and/or plug in monitors may be required and may include the use of a docking station. The risks should be assessed in every situation and appropriate action taken.

7. RESPONSIBILITIES OF DSE USERS

7.1 DSE users will:

• Where possible, organise their work routines so that their DSE work is regularly interspersed with other duties. The aim will be to limit such work to a maximum of 50 minutes in every hour.

• Participate in any assessments of work station / environment.

• Participate in safe systems of work.
• Talk to their manager or safety representative if they have problems, which they believe may be connected to their DSE work. This may indicate an inadequate workplace design or organisation of work, which should be assessed and may require referral to the Team Prevent our Occupational Health providers or Patient Safety Advisor.

• Not to significantly change or redesign their workstation without consulting their manager or Patient Safety Advisor.

• Attend mandatory manual handling updates, which include information about back care and how to avoid problems.

• A user believing their screen to be faulty, i.e. flickering, should register the fault with the IT Helpdesk in the usual manner. The call will be logged as a priority for action.

8. REPLACEMENT OF EQUIPMENT

8.1 All equipment will be replaced within a rolling programme with oldest equipment replaced first on a necessity basis. All new equipment will conform to British Standards. This responsibility lies with the IT Department.

8.2 The electrical cables from DSE installations should be routed to eliminate trip hazards or risk to staff, service users and visitors. The IT Department should ensure that cables are tidy and secure. Extension leads should be sited so that they are not subject to damage and are portable appliance tested on an annual basis.

8.3 Any defect or fault should be reported to the NTW Solutions Helpline

9. REFERENCES

• Work with Display Screen Equipment Regulations as amended by the Health and Safety (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2002

• Guidance on Regulations ISBN 0 7176 25826.

• Provision and Use of Workplace Equipment Regulations 1992 (PUWER)

• COVID Secure Workplace Risk Assessment Guidance

• Working Safely at Home Guidance
Appendix 1

To access Appendix from CNTW Trusts Internet site, please click HERE
Appendix 2

Minimum Requirements for Workstations

Guidance for Managers

Every workstation should meet the following requirements:

Computer
- Adjustable brightness and contrast controls
- Image quality sharp and not flickering
- Screen clean
- Screen roughly at arm’s length, although it may be slightly closer or further away, depending on the user’s focal range.
- The top of the screen level with or slightly lower than the user’s eyes
- The top of the Screen tilted slightly back from the vertical
- Keyboard directly in front of the user to avoid awkward movements
- There should be sufficient space to rest the hands during pauses in typing
- Hands and wrists in line with the forearm

Chair
A well-designed chair is adjustable from the seated position. It should:
- Be height adjustable
- Have a curved front edge to minimise pressure on the underside of the thighs
- Have a 5 point base on castors
- Have a swivel base
- Have a backrest which can be adjusted in height angle, depth, and back rake
- Have a seat covered in a breathable material
- Have careful consideration given to armrests – they could cause shoulders to hunch

Desk design and adjustment
- A well-designed desk is neutral in colour, matt in finish, has rounded corners, smooth surface and enables users to stretch their legs whilst sitting
- Fixed height desks provide limited flexibility with reliance on adjustable chairs to meet user’s needs, hence height adjustable desks may be considered where different staff use the desk or a range of tasks are performed
- If split height desks are used, ensure there is enough room for the mouse
• For VDU use, the desk top should be just below elbow height
• For reading or writing, the desk height should be just above elbow level to reduce pressure and tension on user’s spine and muscles as they rest weight on the forearms
• There must be sufficient desk space to carry out the required tasks. Most frequently required objects should be within easy range and within your reach

Accessories
• Repeated turning and twisting of the neck may cause problems. This can be avoided using a document holder. Either the screen or document holder may be placed directly in front of the user depending upon which one is looked at most
• If not using a document holder, users should place copy between keyboard and screen
• Glare can be a hazard, which can cause eyestrain. Tilt the screen to prevent reflections from lights and windows. Users may need to use blinds to reduce glare, or use an anti-glare screen or reposition their workstation
• If a user’s feet do not touch the ground when sat correctly at the desk, a foot-rest may be required
Potential Problems when using DSE

Upper Limb Disorder

This term covers a variety of conditions ranging from simple aches and pains in the back or neck, to conditions such as upper limb disorders, also known as repetitive strain injury (RSI). Upper limb disorders can be caused by long periods of rapid, repetitive action or prolonged static positions, particularly in uncomfortable or unnatural positions, for example, position, which twist or stretch muscles. Usually aches and pains do not last but in a few cases they may become persistent or even disabling.

It is important that you report any discomfort in your hands, wrists, neck or shoulders to your supervisor or line manager so that he/she can take appropriate action. Symptoms could include aches, pains or sensory loss (tingling feeling or ‘pins and needles’). A number of factors need to be considered which could contribute to upper limb disorders such as the furniture layout, training, workload and task design.

If symptoms persist after you have finished DSE work, you should seek medical advice.

Staff should bear in mind that upper limb disorders may not be caused by DSE work, although such work may worsen a pre-existing condition. For instance, Carpal Tunnel Syndrome is a wrist condition, which is more prevalent in middle-aged women. Other conditions such as tennis elbow may be associated with hobbies.

Visual Problems

Working with DSE cannot damage eyesight. It can, however, highlight an existing problem and prolonged periods at DSE can lead to symptoms of visual fatigue. Problems can include eye discomfort such as dry, itchy, aching or tired eyes, or difficulties with focusing or perception of the image. It can be helpful to focus on objects at a distance, for example outside the window for a short time as this allows the muscles of the eyes to relax. Postural problems may also result from visual difficulties if the user adopts an unnatural position in order to see the screen more easily.

Visual problems can occur if you stay in the same position and concentrate for a long time, if your workstation is badly position, if lighting conditions are poor, or the image quality is unsatisfactory. The side effects from some medications (e.g. minor tranquillizers) may also mimic the symptoms of visual fatigue.

Visual problems could be due to a defect with your vision. Some people have difficulty focusing at the visual distance of the screen and there are also some rare eye conditions, which may only become apparent when doing DSE work, which tends to be visually demanding. If you are a user, you are entitled to have free eye and eyesight tests. Further details are given on page 11.

Fatigue and Stress

Working with DSE can sometimes be stressful. For instance, pressure to meet deadlines or an increased pace of work can lead to fatigue or a feeling of being ‘snapped under’. Poor job design can lead to boredom or a feeling of isolation; lack of familiarity with the software can result in frustration when things go wrong. Better work planning and organisation can overcome many problems. Training in the use of the software package is important, as is the choice of a software package, which is appropriate both to the task and the hardware. You should contact your manager if you have not received any training relating to the software package you use.
Am I at risk?

Frequently Asked Questions

VDUs have been blamed – often wrongly – for a wide range of health problems. Only a small proportion of people using them suffer health problems as a result, but because there are so many users this can be a significant number. You should remember that in most cases the problems do not arise directly from the VDU’s themselves, but from the way in which they are used. The problems can be avoided altogether by good workplace and job design and by the way you use your equipment and workstation.

Can working at VDU’s damage my eyesight?

There are no indications, from extensive research, that VDUs will cause disease or permanent damage to eyes. But the fatigue of intensive VDU work can cause discomfort, even to healthy eyes. Because it gives your eyes more demanding tasks, it might also make you aware of an eye problem that you did not know about before. It doesn’t help your eyes if the VDU is badly positioned, or if the workplace is poorly lit. Drifting, flickering or jarring images can be very tiring and must be corrected.

I wear vari or bi-focal spectacles – will I be able to use a VDU?

It depends. It is important that you can see the screen comfortably without having to raise or lower your head, so your vari or bi-focal lenses will not be ideal for VDU work and their use has been associated with users experiencing neck problems. You may find you will need a single plane lens spectacle to work comfortably. You should consult your doctor or optician if in doubt. Remember, the Trust does not advocate the use of bi-focals or vari-focals and therefore does not provide financial assistance towards them.

I wear contact lenses. Does this cause any special problems when working at a VDU?

Users of contact lenses find any dry environment uncomfortable and the heat generated by VDUs tends to make the atmosphere drier than in rooms without them. You may find it helps to blink more often, or use tear substitute drops. An alternative might be to wear spectacles instead of your lenses for VDU work.

I sometimes see a coloured ‘after-image’ after working with a VDU. Is this serious?

No. This is common when someone looks at an object for a long time and then looks elsewhere. It does not harm vision in any way.

Are aches and pains caused by using a VDU?

Some VDU users may experience aches and pains in their hands, wrists, arms, neck, shoulders or back (that is to their musculoskeletal system), especially after long periods or uninterrupted VDU work. If this happens you should alert your supervisor or line manager. Usually these aches and pains do not last, but in a few cases they may become more persistent or even disabling. Most problems of this nature can be prevented by good workplace design and good working practices.

Can working with VDU’s be stressful?

Yes, in several ways. Often it is not so much because of the VDU itself, but because of the increased pace or pressure to meet deadlines. Some VDU workers experience less stress because the VDU gives them better access to information, but for others
stress is intensified. This can happen, for instance, when a system does not function well or when training has not been sufficient to properly operate the system. These problems can be overcome by better training and better work planning and organisation. If you feel that you are suffering from stress, it is important you inform your manager and refer to the ‘Stress Management Practice Guidance Note’.

Can VDU’s cause headaches?
Yes, headaches can result from many factors associated with VDU work. For example, stress from the pace of work, anxiety and tension, the need for new spectacles or a change of lenses, poor image quality, glare from the screen, poor posture, or a combination of these.

How long should I work with a VDU?
This depends entirely on the type of work you are doing.

Do VDU’s give out harmful levels of radiation?
No. VDUs give out both visible light (which enables us to see the screen) and other forms of electromagnetic radiation, which can be harmful above certain levels. However the levels emitted from VDUs are well below the safe levels set out in international recommendations. So your employer doesn’t have to check radiation levels from your VDU, and you don’t need special devices such as protective spectacles, screens aprons when using it.

What should I do if I’m pregnant?
You don’t need to stop working with VDUs. There has been some concern about reports of higher levels of miscarriage and birth defects among some groups of VDU workers. Many scientific studies have been carried out which, taken as a whole, do not show any link between miscarriages or birth defects and working with VDUs. If you are anxious about working with VDUs or about work generally during pregnancy, you should consult your doctor and highlight this as part of your ongoing Pregnant Workers Risk Assessment.

Can working with VDU’s cause skin disorders?
A small number of people have experienced irritation, skin rashes or had existing skin problems aggravated by the use of VDUs. The exact cause is not known, but it seems possible that a combination of dry air, the electrostatic charge in the room, and individual susceptibility may be involved. If this is the case, reducing the electrostatic charge in the room and increasing the humidity may help.

Can VDU’s trigger epileptic seizures?
Most people with epilepsy are completely unaffected. A small number of people who suffer from photosensitive epilepsy and are susceptible to flickering lights and striped patterns may be affected in some circumstances, but even they can often work successfully with VDUs without provoking an attack. If concerned, contact Team Prevent, our Occupational Health provider or speak to your GP.

I am taking drugs prescribed by my doctor. Can I still use a VDU?
Yes. There are no drugs, which cannot be safely combined with VDU work. A few tranquillisers, other psychoactive drugs and certain eye drops prescribed for glaucoma can temporarily affect the way your eyes change focus, but this is not harmful.
WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP MYSELF?

Adjusting your workstation to suit you

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. If the regulations apply to you, your employer must cover these things in training. If the regulations don’t apply to you, using these facilities is still important. Here are some specific tips.

- Adjust your chair and VDU to find the most comfortable position for your work. As a rough guide, your arms should be approximately horizontal and your eyes at the same height as the top of the screen.
- Ensure your computer monitor is directly in front of you to avoid unnecessary head turns, which could lead to neck and shoulder problems.
- 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 petite 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 the keyboard, screen and document holder to find the best arrangement for you.
- Make sure you have enough workspace 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 focused and can be read easily. They shouldn’t flicker or move.
- Make sure there are no layers of dirt, grime or fingers marks on the screen.
- Use the brightness control on the screen to suit the lighting conditions in the room.
- If you believe there is a fault with your screen, register it with the IT Helpdesk.
Managers Referral for Staff DSE Workstation Assessment

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<th>Unit, Villa, Department</th>
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<td>Manager Name</td>
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<td>Contact person</td>
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Could I please request that a workstation assessment be conducted for the staff members detailed below? I realise that funding may have to be available for the purchase of any equipment or aids identified in the assessment which are necessary to assist staff with their duties.

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<td>Job Designation</td>
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Principal Functions of Job and any Health related problems

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Principal Functions of Job

Please email to safetyteam@cntw.nhs.uk
To access Appendix from CNTW Trusts Internet site, please click HERE

Appendix 7 (737kB)
Application for an Eye Test and or Special Corrective Lenses