

DSE assessments and working from home

The UK Government is asking all who can to work from home. Setting up your workstation properly is key to this. However, it is recognised that not everyone will have the space or resources to set up an ideal home office. Here we provide information regarding how best to set up your home workstation and, in these exceptional times, pragmatic steps you can take to try to work safely if your situation is less than ideal.

Workstation set up

1. Try to find a separate space to work in. Ideally, this would be a separate room, but if you don't have the space or cannot separate yourself from the rest of your household, try to make sure that it is against a wall or in a corner of a room where trailing cables can be tucked out of the way and kept from being a trip hazard.
2. Your workstation should be on a flat surface and at a comfortable height for work. Ideally this would be large enough to place everything you need in arms reach, for example allowing you to position your mouse so that you do not have to work with your arm outstretched. If that is not possible, or in circumstances where it is not possible to set up a permanent workstation, for example, you are working at the family dining table and still need to use it to eat, try to set up only essential, easily portable equipment
3. Ideally, the top of your display screen should be at eye level, if your screen does not allow this you can use a box or large books to increase its height, just make sure that the screen is stable and not in danger of toppling over. If needed, you can increase the height of your sitting position with cushions. If using a laptop adjust the screen angle and, if possible, height, to reduce stretching your neck. If you have one, plug a separate keyboard into your laptop so that you can raise the screen on a box, etc. If your laptop gets hot, make sure there is a barrier between it and any flammable material you are standing it on. Try to avoid any glare on your screen.
4. It is important that you align your computer centrally with your body – don't twist round to use it. Find a posture in which you can keep your wrists straight (neutral, in line with your forearms), your shoulders relaxed and your back supported, and in which you feel comfortable. Ideally you will have a fully adjustable chair with full back support to allow you to do this. If this is not the case and you are working off a dining chair, for example, try and keep your knees below your hips and an open 100 degree hip angle. You can adjust your position by sitting on a cushion or pillow folded in half. A cushion or a rolled-up towel against your lower back can provide lumbar support. These measures will help to take the strain and load off your spine but only use them if they feel comfortable. Make sure that your feet are planted on the floor. If you can't do this use a biscuit tin, Tupperware container or similar as a footrest. Change your position regularly to keep your muscles relaxed.
5. Regardless of your set up, the best way to look after your musculoskeletal health is to take regular breaks and to move around as much as possible. The more 'makeshift' your set-up, the more important it is for you to move. If you have a good home office set-up, take a break for 5-10 minutes every hour. For other set-ups take a break every 15-20 minutes. In short, you should not continue where it is uncomfortable to do so.
6. If your home environment is hectic, consider working outside of normal office hours so long as you are not too tired or stressed.

7. If it is impossible to set up a safe workstation, it may be that it simply is not possible for you to work at home. If so, you will need to discuss this with your line manager.