

# Home working guidance



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## Practical advice for working from home safely

### 1. Scope

This guidance covers laptop, desktop PC or paper-based work from an employee's home. The same principles apply if using a laptop in any remote/offsite location, e.g.:

- whilst travelling
- at another organisation's workplace
- from home (either as part of a formal arrangement or occasionally)
- from other non-university locations.

Please also see:

Safety and Health Services [guidance on offsite working](#), applicable to any offsite work carried out by staff or students for the purposes of teaching, research or other activities on behalf of the University.

## 2. Introduction

Many staff work flexibly, including remotely at offsite locations and at home. Working at home, either on a laptop, desktop PC or carrying out paper-based work is a low risk activity. This type of working pattern can offer a range of potential benefits, but there are also associated hazards. These include:

- Working in isolation (wellbeing, stress or personal safety and accidents).
- Aspects of the work environment like display screen equipment (DSE), fire safety and electrical safety.

This guidance provides practical advice on steps to take to ensure work at home is carried out in a healthy and safe way. There is also a checklist at the end which can be used by staff to consider the safety of their home working environment.

## 3. Roles and responsibilities of line managers and supervisors

- Ensure there is adequate contact and communication with home workers.
- Ensure risks associated with home working are covered by the local safety management system. This might include DSE assessments and making sure home working is covered by the local rules.

There is generally no need to visit a homeworker at their home unless a specific concern has been raised.

## 4. Display Screen Equipment (DSE)

Setting up your workstation correctly at home is equally as important as when you are in the office, and the same principles apply. Your workstation includes your desk or table, chair, and PC or laptop. Safety and Health Services has a range of online information about DSE, including:

- [DSE e-learning module](#) with advice on setting up your workstation correctly wherever you work. This should be completed every 12 months.
- [Flow chart overview of the DSE assessment process](#): gives an overview of the DSE process and the steps you need to take to work comfortably in any location
- [Visual checklist](#) for setting up your workstation correctly. To be used each time you work at a new workstation.
- [DSE self-assessment](#): only complete this if you are still experiencing difficulties after completing the [DSE e-learning module](#) and using the visual checklist. Forms should be submitted to your local DSE assessor.
- [Safety and Health Services' DSE guidance](#).

If you are experiencing pain or discomfort after completing the actions outlined in the home working guidance and checklist, or have an underlying health condition which is affecting your work, complete a more detailed [DSE self-assessment](#) and submit this to your local DSE assessor and line manager.

Whilst it may seem easier to simply open the laptop and start working without making any adjustments, this can lead to poor posture, which can cause pain and discomfort over time. It is well worth taking a couple of minutes to set up your workstation correctly each time you sit down to work.

### Tips for working on a PC or laptop at home:

- **Raise your screen:**  
Make sure your screen is raised so that the top of the screen is at eye level. This can be done using an adjustable laptop stand, a box or some books if necessary.
- **Use a separate keyboard and mouse**  
This allows the laptop screen to be positioned correctly.
- **Report pain or discomfort**  
If you feel discomfort, report it to your line manager as soon as you notice it. In some circumstances, an opinion from or [referral to the Occupational Health Service](#) may be appropriate.
- **Adjust your chair height**  
Your arms should be at right angles, with forearms horizontal and lightly supported by the work surface. You may need a footrest if your feet are not firmly on the floor.
- **Make sure the lower back is well supported**  
Support for your lower back will help encourage good posture. You can use a folded towel to give you more support or consider a back-support cushion if needed.
- **Take regular, short breaks:**  
Move around for five or ten minutes every hour, aiming for frequent, short breaks.

Consider taking microbreaks to stretch, move around, change activity by taking a phone call, do some reading or get a drink to avoid prolonged static postures.

Take more frequent breaks if your DSE setup is not optimal or if you are experiencing discomfort.

### Try to avoid:

- using phones or tablets for a long time,

- sitting on unsupportive seating such as a sofa,
- static postures.

## 5. Safe working environment

### Fire and electrical safety

- Make sure you have [smoke alarms](#) fitted and check these regularly.
- Do not overload sockets adaptors. Avon Fire and Rescue has a [useful online tool](#) to help you decide if you are overloading a socket.
- Carry out regular visual checks on plugs, cables and electrical equipment. Do not use items which have damaged casing, cables, plugs, scorch marks or other signs of damage. [Further information](#) is available from the Health and Safety Executive.
- Ensure University-owned electrical equipment has been PAT tested (it should have a sticker confirming this).

### Emergencies (including first aid)

- Make sure you have access to [basic first aid provisions](#).
- Have an [emergency plan](#) including what to do if there is a fire.
- [Report work related accidents](#) and incidents to Safety and health Services (please log in with VPN to access this).

### General working environment

- Give yourself enough space to work comfortably and move around.
- Ensure your work area is free from trip hazards like trailing cables, bags or other items etc.
- Make sure there is adequate lighting, temperature, and ventilation.

N.B. Please use the home working checklist at the end of this guidance to assess your home working environment.

## 6. Wellbeing

The University has a range of [guidance and support for staff on wellbeing](#). Additional information can also be found on the University's [PositiveWorking@Bristol web page](#).

- School and services should have a team/departmental preventative work-related stress risk assessment taking remote and lone working into consideration.
- Concerns relating to wellbeing at work should be discussed with your line manager.
- Refer to the [work-related stress guidance](#) to complete a risk assessment.

## 7. Insurance

Insurance arrangements for the University of Bristol will extend to home workers, subject to the conditions of the policy. Details of the University's insurance arrangements can be found on the [insurance office website](#).

Please note that your home insurance may be affected by having to work from home for a prolonged period. Staff should check this with their home insurance provider.

Some staff may have particular conditions in mortgage or tenancy agreements prohibiting them from using their home for business purposes without prior permission. Staff should check the terms of any agreement and inform where appropriate.

Check with your home insurer to ensure that home working does not invalidate your own policy

## 8. Reporting

Accidents, near misses and incidents of ill health should all be reported in the usual way using our [online incident reporting system](#).

To use the reporting system from home, enable the University's IT network on your laptop, just like you would in order to access any other on-campus services, either by using the [Student Remote Desktop](#) and [Staff Remote Desktop](#) services or setting up the [UoB Virtual Private Network \(VPN\)](#).

## 9. Useful information

1. Health and Safety Executive [information on home working](#)
2. Chartered Institute of Ergonomics and Human Factors infographics on [homeworking and staying healthy](#)
3. [DSE e-learning module](#)
4. University [lone working guidance](#)
5. University [DSE guidance](#)
6. [University's Insurance Office website](#)
7. [HR flexible working](#)
8. [General risk assessment guidance](#)
9. [University information on work-related stress](#)
10. [IOSH remote working guidance](#)
11. [PositiveWorking@Bristol](#)
12. Setting up [IT services](#) for working at home

## 10. Home working checklist

Use this checklist to identify any possible hazards in your home working area. Once completed, this checklist can be used in discussion with your line manager to confirm working arrangements and help you complete a risk assessment.

<b>Employee:</b>	
<b>Home workplace location:</b>	

	✓ or X	Comments
<b>A: Working environment</b>		
1. Is there adequate space in the area you are working in to work safely?		
2. Is your working area free from tripping hazards (eg, trailing cables)?		
3. Are objects like equipment, bags, paper, files and books stored safely?		
4. Is there an adequate working temperature (Minimum 16 °C)?		
5. Is there adequate lighting?		
<b>B: Display screen equipment</b>		
Used the visual checklist		
1. Have you completed the e-learning module for DSE?		
2. Have you completed the DSE self-assessment form for your home workstation (if applicable)?		
<b>C: Emergency actions</b>		
1. Do you have access to basic first aid provisions?		
2. Do you know what to do in an emergency, and have you worked out a fire drill so you and anyone else in the house knows what to do and where to go in case of a fire?		
3. Are smoke detector/s fitted?		
4. Are you familiar with the University procedures for accident and incident reporting?		
<b>D: Electrical safety</b>		

1. Are University-owned portable electrical appliances PAT tested with a sticker applied?		
2. Do you carry out frequent visual checks on plugs, wiring and casings of electrical equipment?		

<b>Employee signature</b>		<b>Date:</b>
<b>Line Manger / Supervisor's signature</b>		<b>Date:</b>