Health & Safety Directorate

Obtaining Correct Office Equipment Guidance

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Workstation/Desk
The workstation/desk:
• should provide adequate length and width to accommodate a screen, keyboard, documents and other relevant equipment that can be arranged appropriately.
• should be non-reflective to prevent glare.
• should provide sufficient legroom to allow for postural changes.
• should be stable and positioned so that it’s comfortable and easy to use where an employee uses a document holder.

Standing Desk
Although sitting for long periods is not good for our health, there is no evidence to suggest that standing desks will counteract this. Standing desks can be helpful in relieving body aches for those with lower back or neck pain, but ultimately this will depend on the posture adopted and by ensuring that the workstation is set up correctly.

• If using a standing desk, you are advised to:
• Alternate between sitting and standing 1:1 or 2:1.
• Adjust your desk and screen so that your desk is approximately at elbow height and your screen is approximately at arm’s length.
• Maintain the correct posture and engage your core.
• Take regular breaks from your workstation.

Chair

Office chairs should have five basic features. The chair should:

• be stable.
• have (at least 5) castors and gliders.
• have a swivel mechanism.
• have an adjustable height mechanism.
• have an adjustable back height and tilt mechanism.

Furthermore:

• Seat width should be wider than the hip width of the person using it.
• The backrest should provide support for the back in all sitting positions, particularly the lumbar region.

Chair Armrest

• The armrests must not interfere with movement, e.g. by stopping the user getting the chair under the work surface.
• The armrests should be adjustable in height. If the armrests are too high you might have to shrug your shoulders in order to use them, which could fatigue your shoulders and back. Conversely if they are too low, then you might end up leaning on one armrest.
• The armrests should be rounded on the edges. Sharp corners, even when they are made of padding, increase the pressure on the arms. A rounded edge distributes the pressure over a larger area.
Footrest

- A footrest may be needed if the user cannot place their feet on the floor. The preferred solution is to add a shorter cylinder to the chair.
- A footrest should be height adjustable.
- Optional: some footrests have a rocking feature that allows the user to rock the footrest. This increases circulation and helps avoid static postures.

Exercise Balls as Office Chairs

Exercise balls (also known as FitBalls, Swiss Balls, Physio Balls) have increased in popularity and one of the latest office trends has been to replace the office chair with an exercise ball. While there are advantages in promoting core strength training in routine exercises, there are significant disadvantages to using a ball in your everyday work environment.

The ball promotes trunk stability and the use of the lower back and core abdominal muscles to support the body, whilst maintaining a neutral spine posture. Although this can strengthen muscles, over an eight-hour period, the muscles will tire rapidly causing the body to compensate and assume non-neutral postures. This is called slumping, which will ultimately place pressure on the spinal discs, which may cause pain and discomfort.

The ball can have a tendency to become unstable and roll, even when placed in a ring, thereby introducing a safety hazard in the office.

The balls are not height adjustable, which may lead to workers assuming non-neutral arm and leg postures whilst seated at a desk. Working with shrugged shoulders or dangled arms for the duration of the day may create pain and discomfort.

To get the most support, stability, and adjustability from your office seating, it is recommended you use standard ergonomic office chairs.
**Computer Screen**

Computer screens should:
- tilt and swivel to suit the needs of the user.
- show clear characters with enough spacing.
- show a stable image with no flickering.
- have easily adjustable brightness and contrast controls.
- have a screen size suitable for its intended use (15” monitors are the minimum recommended size).
- be positioned so that the top of the screen is at eye level.

**Screen Raiser**

- Screen raisers / monitor stands are useful for taller users to bring the top of the screen to eye level.
- The stand should be stable and able to support the monitor intended for its use.
- Optional: the stand should be height adjustable.

![](image)

**Glare Screen**

- Glare screens should be used only when the monitor cannot be moved away from the light source.
- Look for a polarised glare screen to reduce glare where possible. This technique is used on some sunglasses to reduce bright lights while maximizing the visibility of other objects.

**Document Holder**

- **Clip to the Side Document Holders**: useful for single, infrequently changed sheets of paper such as phone lists.
- **Beside Monitor Document Holders**: useful for writing notes on documents and for holding several documents.
- **Under-Monitor Document Holders**: useful for note taking and where space on the workstation/desk is limited.
Keyboard

- Keyboards should be tilt-adjustable and separate from the screen to allow the user to work comfortably.
- Keyboards should be legible and have a matt surface to minimise glare.

Wrist Rest

- Wrist rests should be gel or soft foam.
- Wrist rests should be removable.
- Wrist rests should be no higher than the front edge of the keyboard.

Computer Mouse

- **Standard Mouse**: Common mice are manufactured in different “standard” sizes depending on the manufacturer. A good mouse should partially “fill” the hand while gripping it. If you find yourself gripping the mouse with your fingertips or squeezing it between thumb and pinkie or thumb and ring finger, the mouse is likely to be too small.

- **Trackball**: Trackballs are stationary devices, so they require less room to use than the standard mouse. They are normally larger than a mouse and may support the hand better. Look for trackballs with the ball located in the centre of the device. Avoid trackballs where the ball is manipulated using the thumb as this may place undue stress on the thumb.
• **“Ergonomic” Mouse:** Often these mice are curved along their length or raised on the thumb side to support the hand in a handshake posture. Be sure the mouse fills and supports the hand without requiring pinching with the fingertips.

• **Roller Mouse:** these mice encourage the use of both hands and reduce strain on shoulders where arms may be overextended.

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**Laptop**

Laptops should:

- be as light as possible (3 kilograms or under).
- be fitted with a large and clear screen - preferably detachable or height-adjustable.
- come with a lightweight carrying case with handle and shoulder straps.
- have a sufficient battery life and have extra charging cables so that the user has a set in each main location where the equipment is used.
- have a tilt-adjustable keyboard.
- have friction pads underneath to prevent it from sliding across work surfaces.
- have enough memory and speed for the software used.

If a laptop is your main workstation, it should be used in conjunction with a laptop raiser, along with a separate mouse and keyboard.
Environment

- **Noise levels** - office equipment should not be so noisy that it distracts the user. If quieter equipment cannot be used, consideration should be given to soundproofing or moving the equipment.
- **Lighting** - surrounding windows must have curtains or blinds, which users can adjust to prevent reflected glare. If needed, provide users with lighting appropriate to their tasks and particular workstation. Users should have control over their lighting to prevent reflected glare.
- **Temperature** - the equipment should not give out so much heat that the user becomes uncomfortable.

Software

Voice recognition software is useful for anyone who struggles to use a mouse or keyboard due to difficulty in using their hands or harms. The risks of conditions such as repetitive strain injury can be reduced and mobile or remote working can become more productive. The process for installation of voice recognition software will also include 1:1 user training. To request the installation of voice recognition software contact IT Services (helpdesk@qmul.ac.uk).