



Danes Hill School

Homeworking/ Laptop Policy and Good Practice Guide

All staff, including those who work from home and who use a laptop are regarded as designated users for whom Danes Hill School has a duty of care and a responsibility to assess and analyse the risks under the Display Screen Equipment Regulations (as amended), 2002, etc.

All staff who work at home and use a laptop computer are required to comply with this Policy and are expected to complete a questionnaire in order to co-operate with Danes Hill School Management in enabling them to carry out their duty under the Health and Safety at Work, etc Act, 1972 and the Display Screen Equipment Regulations (as amended), 2002 and to follow the safe system of work prescribed below and any outcome which arises from the Workstation Assessment.

Danes Hill School does not expect staff to use laptops, if a PC is available, as they do not comply with the minimum requirements as described under The Schedule of the Regulations. Where this is not an option (i.e. when working at home as opposed to being based in the office) it is expected that the laptop screen will normally be used in conjunction with a keyboard and/ or mouse and a laptop stand. In some specific instances, after risk assessment, a different configuration of equipment or the use of a docking station*, may be considered more appropriate.

The Risks

The laptop can present particular risks due to the lack of flexibility/ separate adjustability of screen and keyboard and inbuilt mouse. It is generally designed with portability in mind - not for user safety. A monitor that does not move independently from the keyboard can mean a choice between an aching neck and aching wrists.

When considering the use of a laptop and its risks, it must be borne in mind that

- (i) a laptop presents greater risks than a PC
 - (ii) it can take years – and you might be working at a computer for upwards of 2 hours a day (this might be regarded as the starting point for "significant" risk) for up to 40 years – for the serious, deleterious effects of the PC and laptop, if not safely and comfortably arranged to suit you and your individual needs, to manifest themselves
 - (iii) musculo-skeletal and vision problems are often the outcomes, not to mention stress which may cause an increase in their use.
1. Normally, with a PC, the top of the monitor should be about eye level and the keyboard about the same level as the elbows. Normally, with a laptop, the keyboard and the monitor are attached and very close together, so their position cannot be adjusted independently. The result is that comfort can be compromised. **Possibly resulting in musculo-skeletal and vision problems.**
 2. Placing the laptop too low (on the coffee table, for example) for comfortable arm position means that the neck is straining forward and down to view the screen. **Possibly resulting in musculo-skeletal and vision problems.**
 3. Raising the screen to an acceptable level means that the hands would be reaching up and the arms stretching. **Possibly resulting in musculo-skeletal problems.**

4. The keys of many laptops are smaller than those found on PC keyboards so fingers have to work on a more confined area, so are more tensed. **Possibly resulting in musculo-skeletal problems.**
5. Use of an integral mouse requires finger control without adequate wrist/ arm support. **Possibly resulting in musculo-skeletal problems.**

*A docking station allows the user the comfort of using a full size monitor, keyboard and mouse whilst maintaining the laptop's portability. The laptop is simply plugged into and out of the docking station which is already connected to the PC. It serves as an interface between the components and essentially creates a PC.

6. The standard laptop screen is 15" – 17", so although users have to view the same amount of information presented in a smaller space than on the standard PC screen (17" - 19") the risk of vision problems is more in line with those of using a PC screen. **Possibly resulting in vision problems (but not significantly increased).**
7. Laptops are often used in cramped spaces or otherwise unsuitable places. This can lead to poor posture. **Possibly resulting in musculo-skeletal problems.**
8. Since the screen is attached to the keyboard it is less flexible to adjust satisfactorily for glare, reflection and direct sunlight. The screen can only be adjusted slightly to eliminate these as this also re-positions the keyboard. **Possibly resulting in vision problems.**
9. **Any resulting aches, pains and ill-health can themselves cause stress.**

Controlling the risks

The assumption here is that the first requirement of any risk assessment – elimination or avoidance of risk – is not possible or practicable. The laptop can be a very useful, powerful tool in achieving work targets and can be used safely enough and positively. To do so the risks have to be adequately and consistently controlled. The following **Control Measures** to reduce the risks have to be implemented – although you may have specific, personal strategies which you find work for you and will want to implement.

1. Do not use the laptop when you can use a PC
2. Use it on an adjustable laptop stand with a separate keyboard and/ or mouse
3. If you use the keyboard for more than 1hour per day a separate keyboard has to be used
4. If you use the keyboard for less than 1hour per day only a mouse is required (the laptop keyboard can then be used in the "usual" way)
5. If the laptop keyboard is used in the usual way, daily sessions of continued use should not exceed 30minutes without a 30minute break – a minimum of 2 keying sessions per day at this rate (could be 3 x 20minute sessions, etc) and the more sessions the shorter the breaks can be between them (break = length of session, approximately). A break, in this context, means *not using the laptop keyboard* and not stopping work
6. The equipment has to be used on a desk or table sitting on a comfortable chair which provides adequate and good support during working hours
7. Stools, floors, beds and settees do not make the best workstations and should not be used

In normal circumstances, you are not required to carry your laptop in public. However, the following advice should be followed if you have to:

A laptop can be fairly heavy to carry about for some people and there is a risk of injury from doing so. If there is a need for it to be carried for a significant amount of time, bearing in mind the previous advice, you should

- a) change the carrying arm/ shoulder frequently enough to avoid aches and pain – and musculo-skeletal problems
- b) take rests or relieve yourself of the load whenever possible
- c) use a trolley (bearing in mind the security arrangements mentioned above)
- d) consider using a backpack for carrying
- e) carry as little else as possible along with it

Other matters

Report any related problems and any ill-health effects that arise out of the use of the PC/Laptop at home to your health and safety officer or IT Manager

If you have an existing health condition, it should be mentioned, if it affects you on account of your work with the computer. This should be recorded

If you have an existing health condition which might be triggered or exacerbated by work with the computer - it should be recorded and monitored

If a health condition develops from your use of the computer, it should be reported to the Health and Safety Manager

The Home Assessment will be reviewed after 2 years.

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TJC