# Guidance on implementing the outcomes of the DSE Homeworking Assessment – one page summary

1. Where you have staff working from home for all or part of the time who have concerns about their workplace they should complete the DSE Homeworking Self-Assessment Worksheet [[DSE Homeworking Self-Assessment Worksheet](https://occupationalhealth.admin.ox.ac.uk/article/coronavirus-advice-and-updates)] and send the completed checklist to you.

2. Review the Worksheet for each staff member.

a) Does their workplace meet the minimum standard? The minimum standard comprises a stable working surface of suitable height and material, a chair with a backrest, a usable IT device and internet access. See detailed guidance below for details.

b) If their workplace set-up is not suitable, what equipment do they need? See detailed guidance below for details.

c) If their workplace set-up meets the minimum standard but they are struggling to work comfortably or effectively, what do they need to enable effective working? See detailed guidance below for details.

3. If they need equipment:

a) Check if the equipment is available on site and can be collected from there. If so, speak to your departmental administration to ensure safe access and collection. Note: if the staff member is required to be working partly at home and partly on site it may not be practicable to move equipment between home and office, and it may be necessary to purchase additional items.

b) If the equipment is not available or cannot be collected safely, ask your departmental administration to arrange for it to be purchased in line with local approval and University purchasing policies, and delivered to the staff member. See the [Purchasing website](https://finance.admin.ox.ac.uk/working-from-home-supplies) for details. ***Do not*** ask the staff member to purchase items directly as this may give rise to a tax liability and/or by-pass University financial controls or purchasing policies.

4. If there is a delay in obtaining essential equipment, consider temporary solutions such as reducing the staff member’s working hours or exploring whether it might be possible for them to work on site for all or part of the time until the equipment arrives. Consult your local HR contact for advice before implementing any of these options.

5. If it is not possible to achieve a suitable workplace set-up at all, consult your local HR contact for advice.

# Guidance on implementing the outcomes of the DSE Homeworking Self-Assessment Worksheet -- detailed guidance

The objective of this guidance is to provide managers and departments with information about:

1. how the outcomes of the DSE homeworking assessment process might be addressed
2. the minimum items of equipment that should be provided to staff working from home for an extended temporary period
3. other equipment that might be provided to enable an effective homeworking set-up, and
4. how items of equipment should be provided.

This guidance is intended to enable consistency in the **judgements** that managers and departments make on the equipment needed to provide a safe and comfortable working environment for all staff working temporarily from home. Departments may make their own **decisions** on the provision of some items of equipment but they must ensure that the minimum set-up as defined below is in place.

## Scope

The groups of staff to whom this guidance applies are those for whom the expectation is that they will continue to work from home for the foreseeable future, for all or part of their time; this may include:

* Academic and research staff (including grant-funded postholders) who can conduct some or all of their research and teaching remotely, with these forming a significantly greater proportion of staff in Social Sciences, Humanities and Continuing Education;
* Administrative support functions in academic departments and divisions, and in GLAM;
* UAS functions not providing critical onsite student-facing support.

In effect, the guidance applies to all University-employed staff who are working from home as a result of the Covid-19 outbreak and who were subject to the government guidance that where people can carry out their work at home they should do so. The guidance recognises that some staff may work from home part of their time, depending on the specific activities and the implementation of social distancing measures in their University workplace.

The guidance does not cover the situation of staff who are based at home under their contracted terms of employment.

## Principles

In considering the items of equipment that are needed for staff working from home decisions should be guided by the following principles:

* Staff working from home should be supported by the University to achieve their expected levels of work quality and productivity;
* As far as possible all data and processes should be handled electronically to ensure best protection of data and to minimise the use of unsustainable consumables (paper, printer cartridges, printers etc);
* In this phase of temporary working from home staff will generally be supported in one office location. Investment in dual workplaces will be considered as part of longer term planning;
* Whilst meeting the needs of staff working from home departments should control additional costs as far as possible.

Any purchases of equipment to support staff working from home must accord with the University’s Purchasing Policy:

*Good purchasing decisions achieve value for money, are ethical, transparent, take account of sustainability issues and leave a robust audit trail*.

Consideration of how to purchase items must also follow the University’s Expenses principles:

1. Value for money is achieved.
2. Expenses should only be used when it is not possible and/or practical for the University to pay for the good or service directly.
3. Costs incurred are for business purposes only, and the individual does not receive a personal benefit.
4. Only actual and evidenced costs are reclaimed.

## Addressing the scenarios that may arise from the DSE homeworking assessment

Staff working from home as a result of the Covid-19 outbreak who have concerns about their workplace should complete the DSE Homeworking Self-Assessment Worksheet [[DSE Homeworking Self-Assessment Worksheet](https://occupationalhealth.admin.ox.ac.uk/article/coronavirus-advice-and-updates)] as part of an assessment of the suitability of their homeworking set-up and line managers should work with their staff to identify steps that can be taken to make their working situation as safe and comfortable as possible.

**As a minimum, every member of staff who is working from home should have a working set-up sufficient to enable them to undertake their required duties. This will include a stable surface of suitable height and material to work on, a chair with a backrest to sit on, an IT device to work on, and access to the internet. Furniture and equipment should be configured to provide an adequate level of support to the musculoskeletal health of the staff member combined, if necessary, with additional breaks away from the workstation.**

Considering this minimum provision, there are a range of scenarios that could emerge from the DSE self-assessment process. These scenarios fall broadly into three categories which are described below alongside actions managers might take:

1. The workplace does not meet the minimum standard

Action: If the staff member’s workplace set-up does not include the minimum provision described above, the department or division should provide or purchase the required equipment to ensure the minimum standard is met following the guidance below. Where an adequate working set-up cannot be achieved for any reason, the staff member should not be working from home. In this situation guidance from your local HR contact should be sought on available options to consider.

1. The workplace meets the minimum standard but the staff member is struggling to work comfortably or at expected levels of effectiveness

Action: Review the DSE assessment for more information on the issues the staff member is experiencing and for options to improve the environment. In the case of physical discomfort, depending on the situation, it may be possible for the staff member to use available materials to improve their set-up (e.g. redeploying materials to elevate their laptop or create a footstool). **Where additional equipment could improve their situation this should, where possible, be borrowed from the office and loaned to the staff member.** Such items might include a chair, a monitor, and other peripheral equipment. However, if the staff member is expected to spend part of their time working onsite then the department will need to ensure that *both* the home and University workplaces are adequately provisioned (i.e. equipment that is intended to be fixed in a workplace should not be regularly moved between home and University workplaces). Where the provision of further equipment is required, the guidance provided below should be followed. If it is not possible to make changes sufficient to improve the comfort or effectiveness of the staff member, they may be advised to make other adjustments to their working pattern such as taking more frequent breaks or working for shorter periods. A referral to Occupational Health (via your local HR contact) should also be considered, particularly where the staff member has a pre-existing condition requiring specialist consideration.

1. The workplace meets the minimum standard and the staff member is able to work comfortably at expected levels of effectiveness.

Action: No further action is needed other than to continue monitoring through regular contact with the employee.

*In each of these scenarios, all reasonable adjustments should be made for staff with disabilities.* If a staff member requires access to specialist assistive technology which they do not have at home or cannot safely collect or be transported from their usual workplace, their department will be expected to purchase such items for use at home. In some limited circumstances it may be possible for such equipment to be funded by the government’s Access to Work scheme but this can be a prolonged process and there are strict limitations on what can be provided and what the department or division would be expected to provide as part of their duty to all staff. For further information on this or other related issues staff are advised to contact the [Staff Disability Advisor](mailto:staffdisability@admin.ox.ac.uk) based in the Equality and Diversity Unit.

If a manager requires further support or guidance in addressing the outcomes of a DSE homeworking assessment, they should contact their departmental DSE Assessor or Departmental Safety Officer in the first instance.

## Achieving the minimum standard for the home workplace

**The University is not specifying a standard set of equipment for the home workplaces that now exist as a result of the Covid-19 outbreak.** The University recognises that the current situation is considered temporary, even if elongated, and homeworking staff in a variety of roles are undertaking a range of activities. This guidance sets out the factors that managers should consider when assessing whether an employee’s working environment is safe and suitable for the job, and where additional items of equipment or other adjustments may be needed.

#### Computer

Some staff are using personally-owned computers or laptops and some staff are using laptops or other devices provided by the University.

As part of the required minimum set-up, each staff member should be able to make use of a computer that is appropriate for the nature of the work that they are expected to do. This includes access to software applications required for their role. Some roles may require a higher performance computer than would typically be available to the home-user. Where specific software applications are required, or high volumes of data are being processed across the public internet, it may be more appropriate for departments to provide access to a server-based environment from a standard PC.

*Use of a personally-owned computer*: All modern computers are designed to be used regularly and for extended periods, and on mains power there should be little impact on battery life. All University data should be saved on University networks or approved University services (e.g. using Nexus365, within which OneDrive for Business and Teams are particularly suited for data storage and sharing). There should be no significant impact on computer storage as a result of working from home. A separate keyboard and mouse should be provided, both as part of the minimum setup, and to reduce wear and tear on a laptop’s physical components. Overall, using a home computer for work purposes on a daily basis will not significantly reduce its working life or affect its performance. Where a member of staff is working on an older home computer there is a risk that it may reach the end of its useable life simply due to its age. In this case it may be appropriate for the department to issue a laptop or other appropriate IT device to the member of staff for work purposes.

*Provision of further equipment*: Where a line manager assesses that a personally-owned computer is not sufficient for the duties of the role, consideration should be given to providing a University laptop or PC for use by the staff member.

Irrespective of how a computer is provided, all staff, whilst working from home, must comply with the University’s IT Regulations and information security policies, <https://sharepoint.nexus.ox.ac.uk/sites/itservices/investment/SitePages/IT%20Regulations.aspx>.

#### Internet access

All staff working from home should have access to the internet.

The University cannot fund the provision of private broadband services where the employee is the subscriber. The cost of installing or upgrading broadband should be met by the employee.

As an alternative to broadband an individual may be able to use a University-provided phone or other ‘hotspot’ device to provide internet access through a data plan. Use of the device for private use must be insignificant.

#### Working surface

All staff must have access to a hard and stable surface that allows legroom and a chair to be positioned correctly. This could be a household table or a desk. If staff need a desk or table to be purchased by the University the dimensions should be determined by the space available to the individual. The desk or table needs to be used in conjunction with a suitable chair if the minimum viable working environment is to be maintained.

#### Chair

All staff must have a chair that provides adequate support for DSE working, and should be compatible with their workplace table or desk. The chair should enable height adjustment. Cushions may be used for small amounts of height adjustment.

Furniture should be purchased via a University preferred supplier (Purchasing has negotiated a range of options for homeworking equipment, for which home delivery is available). Furniture purchased by the University for homeworking is expected to be returned to the University when no longer required.

## Further details of equipment to enable effective working in the home workplace

#### Computer peripherals

To support the use of computers or laptops in the homeworking environment, departments / divisions are asked to consider the following as recommended for use in the workplace:

* Mouse – a mouse separate from a laptop or tablet is recommended;
* Keyboard – a keyboard separate from a laptop or tablet is recommended;
* Screen – a separate, height adjustable screen should be used with a laptop or tablet. The size of screen will need to be appropriate to the nature of the tasks being performed, for example the level of detail, volume of data etc;
* Second screen – this may be beneficial depending on available space and the nature of the tasks, for example manipulation of data, referring to multiple documents etc;
* Laptop stand – a stand for a laptop is not generally required if a separate monitor is provided. A laptop may also be raised using a box or stable pile of books, for example.
* Webcam & headset – a desktop PC, especially if borrowed from a University workplace, may require a webcam and/or headset to enable full participation in online meetings. Laptops and tablets generally have integrated webcams and speakers.

#### Telephones

The University’s Chorus system provides options for allowing staff to make and receive work calls at no cost through a mobile phone (using an app) or by using a software client on an IT device. Guidance can be found at <https://help.it.ox.ac.uk/chorus/business-continuity>

#### Printer

The security of data is a key consideration where staff are working at home. Internal or confidential documents should be held electronically, and in accordance with the University’s information security policy and guidance.

If it is essential to the task that documents are printed then a privately owned printer may be used. University purchasing policy is to minimise the use of personal printers and therefore the purchase of a personal printer for homeworking should only happen in exceptional circumstances. Any printer so purchased will be expected to be returned to the University when no longer required.

*Storage*

If staff are in receipt of confidential University paperwork it should be stored in a secure place such as a lockable box or cupboard. The purchase of any storage facilities should be done so via a University preferred supplier (Purchasing has negotiated with suppliers a pre-selected list of items for which home delivery is available). Any equipment purchased by the University will be expected to be returned to the University when no longer required.

#### Consumable items

Consumable items (paper, printer cartridges) should be purchased via the department rather than by the member of staff. These items can be ordered from the University’s preferred suppliers for home delivery.

#### General considerations for equipment deployment to the home workplace

Where after consideration of the DSE homeworking assessment a line manager decides that further equipment is required, e.g. to enable more effective working, they should first check whether suitable equipment is available in the employee’s office and whether it can be collected by the employee. If so, the Department should ensure safe access and collection. It may not be appropriate to move equipment from a University workplace to a home workplace if the staff member is expected to spend some proportion of time regularly working in both home and University workplaces, or if that workplace is expected to be used by another employee.

Where it is agreed that an item of equipment should be purchased then the purchase should be arranged by the department in line with local approval and purchasing policies and not by the individual. This will avoid the risk of incurring a tax liability and/or by-passing University financial controls or purchasing policies.

University Purchasing has negotiated a home delivery service with University preferred suppliers for selected IT equipment, consumables and furniture. Guidance on how to raise a catalogue order with each supplier is available on the [Purchasing website](https://finance.admin.ox.ac.uk/working-from-home-supplies).

Where a requirement for an equipment purchase is identified, where possible, equipment types already approved for homeworking should be considered in the first instance. This includes equipment provided in response to DSE risk assessments, where a range of models are recommended for a variety of working scenarios.

All equipment paid for by departments or divisions for use in the homeworking environment will remain the property of the University.

All equipment provided to staff, whether taken from the workplace, bought on their behalf by the department or reimbursed, should in all cases be returned to the department once staff return to their contractual workplace. An asset register should be kept up to date by all departments and, ideally, an audit of the goods bought should be undertaken once staff return to their contractual workplace.