BACKGROUND

Recent media reports of health risks attributed to prolonged sitting have raised interest in the general community regarding office workstations that allow the operator to stand up. Two basic situations can prompt enquiries regarding sit/stand workstations:

- pre-existing medical conditions, and
- general health concerns.

Sit/stand workstations come in two main forms:

- A height-adjustable desktop workstation that is placed onto a standard desk and allows the user to easily swap between the sitting and standing positions:

  ![Height-adjustable desktop workstation – Sitting position](image1)
  ![Height-adjustable desktop workstation – Standing position](image2)

- A full desk with an entire top surface that is adjustable in height.

PRE-EXISTING MEDICAL CONDITIONS

In such cases, the process is generally straightforward and revolves around:

- the duty of the university to make reasonable adjustments for staff’s temporary or permanent disability, and
- specific medical advice relating to the staff member concerned.

The employee is required to approach their supervisor or manager, who is in turn required to contact the Risk, Health and Safety department. The Risk, Health and Safety department will coordinate further action in consultation with the employee and the supervisor/manager.

The cost of obtaining, installing and maintaining sit/stand workstations must be borne by the local School / Section.

Any purchase of a full height-adjustable desk must be organised through Facilities Services.
GENERAL HEALTH CONCERNS WITHOUT PRE-EXISTING MEDICAL CONDITION

The Risk, Health and Safety department neither endorses nor discourages the use of sit/stand office workstations where users have no pre-existing medical condition. However, the proposed provision of a sit/stand workstation in an office is a workplace change that requires a formal assessment process.

Where staff members believe that a sit/stand office workstation would be beneficial to their health, they should discuss it with their supervisor or manager. The manager/supervisor is advised to contact promptly the Risk, Health and Safety department.

The Risk, Health and Safety department will conduct an ergonomic assessment and send the written report to the staff member and their supervisor/manager. The emphasis is usually on adjusting work practices to ensure that tasks are varied, breaks from sitting are regular, and staff have the opportunity to take short walks during work breaks. However, in some cases, the report may include a recommendation for a sit/stand workstation either as a permanent measure or as a trial.

The cost of obtaining, installing and maintaining sit/stand workstations must be borne by the local School / Section. Recommendations to obtain a sit/stand workstation do not override normal purchasing approval processes, and requests to purchase such items for staff members without relevant pre-existing medical conditions may be refused.

Any purchase of a full height-adjustable desk must be organised through Facilities Services.

If the supervisor/manager has approved the purchase of a sit/stand workstation, the employee may need to organise assistance from:

- (for full height-adjustable desks) Facilities Services to install the new desk and to have the original desk placed in storage;
- (for height-adjustable desktop workstations) co-workers to install the platform, as some models are reasonably heavy and unwieldy; and
- Information Technology Services to manage the cables and computer move.

The employee is also required to contact Risk, Health and Safety for adjustments to the new sit/stand workstation. The Risk, Health and Safety department will provide additional follow-up assistance if necessary.

FACTORS TO BE TAKEN INTO CONSIDERATION WHEN PURCHASING AND USING A SIT/STAND DESKTOP WORKSTATION OR FULL DESK

Is the current desk in good repair and is there suitable space to add a height-adjustable desktop workstation?

On which angle could the retrofitted workstation be added? E.g. one side of a desk or in the middle of a corner workstation.

What tasks are performed at the desk? E.g. reading, writing, computer use, phone use, interviewing, meetings, handling heavy books.
What equipment will the user be using? E.g. laptop, single, dual or triple monitors.

If a full height-adjustable desk is to be purchased, it should have an electric lift rather than a manual lift to reduce the risk of injury.

If using a desktop workstation, it needs an assisted height adjustment mechanism to reduce the effort required.

There needs to be a fail-safe mechanism to prevent inadvertent movement and a control locking mechanism to prevent inadvertent operation of the desk/workstation.

User/s need to be trained on how to safely operate their height-adjustable desk/workstation.

A suitable office chair still needs to be provided to allow the user to sit for some tasks and when tired.

There needs to be space to store the chair out of the way when not in use.

Good supportive footwear (and an anti-fatigue floor mat if standing on a hard surface) will reduce fatigue during standing.

A shorter, compact keyboard (without the numeric pad) may be more suitable for a desktop workstation to maximize the workable area. It will also reduce the reach required when using the mouse.

Desk and monitor height as well as correct arm posture for each user are important when using either options.

The site of the hard drive needs to be easily accessible for turning the computer off/on and for utilising computer discs. Cabling needs to be the correct length and tied back to protect it from damage.

Ensure adequate lighting sources to the desk and monitor in both seated and standing positions.

**TREADMILL DESKS**

Treadmill desks are not recommended in the workplace due to the risk of injury.