Extract From HSE Guidance On The Use Of Screens

It is not appropriate to lay down requirements for breaks which apply to all types of work; it is the nature and mix of demands made by the job which determine the length of break necessary to prevent fatigue. But some general guidance can be given:

- breaks should be taken before the onset of fatigue, not in order to recuperate and when performance is at a maximum, before productivity reduces. The timing of the break is more important than its length;
- breaks or changes of activity should be included in working time. They should reduce the workload at the screen, i.e. should not result in a higher pace or intensity of work on account of their introduction;
- short, frequent breaks are more satisfactory than occasional, longer breaks: e.g., a 5-10 minute break after 50-60 minutes continuous screen and/or keyboard work is likely to be better than a 15 minute break every 2 hours;
- if possible, breaks should be taken away from the screen;
- Informal breaks, that is time spent not viewing the screen (e.g. on other tasks), appear from study evidence to be more effective in relieving visual fatigue than formal rest breaks;
- wherever practicable, users should be allowed some discretion as to how they carry out tasks; individual control over the nature and pace of work allows optimal distribution of effort over the working day.