

Post-Pandemic Workforce Recommendations for Staff – Return-to-Campus

Proposed Overarching Guiding Principles

- Ensure the health, safety and well-being of everyone in our community.
- Honor our missions to educate, teach, discover, heal and serve as the University of, for and with Kentucky.
- Provide a first-class residential experience for UK students, which includes creating a vibrant campus community with the continuity of presence on campus (offices, laboratories, studios, common areas, libraries and clinics).
- We are an enterprise built on relationships.
- Improve the experience for our students and employees through even greater authenticity, customization and responsiveness – unbounded by time and place.
- Be an employer of choice to attract and retain the best and most diverse talent at UK.
- As a people-driven industry, we must prioritize taking care of our people.
- Assess opportunities for additional growth through space reconfiguration and reallocation.
- Support academic and business continuity in the case of disruptions caused by weather, natural disasters, construction and/or a public health emergency.
- Promote the university's sustainability goals.

Proposed Fundamental Operating Principles

- We will continue to look to the CDC, Governor's Office and UK START team for precautions, guidelines and recommendations to protect community health.
- We will remain compliant with federal, state and local employment laws and tax withholdings.
- Unless noted, college staff employees who directly support faculty will be required to work in person as will student-facing staff positions.
- We will be future-oriented in our workforce strategy, irrespective of what has been done in the past.
- All administrative offices are open and need to be staffed during regular business hours (per HR Policy and Procedure #70: Attendance/Hours of Work: The department head shall establish each employee's work schedule as operational needs demand. The normal work week of 37.5 or 40 hours distributed over five consecutive work days, usually Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. until 4:30 or 5:00 p.m. is applicable to most staff positions.)
- We expect flexible work and technology will enable units to offer expanded hours and optimized services to improve our student and employee experience.
- Remote work locations, as designated by the needs of the position, are limited to the United States.
- Any additional costs incurred because of remote and flexible work environments are the responsibility of the department (e.g., purchasing laptops, ergonomic assessments and equipment, state laws requiring paid leave, etc.) Note: Base package for remote workers

(desk chair, computer, monitor, keyboard and mouse) will be determined and the costs will be borne by the unit.

- HR will offer training and resources for supervisors about leading and managing remote and hybrid teams. Training and resources will also be provided to employees to support success in a remote and hybrid environment.
- We will utilize FY22 as a transition year to strengthen and realign workforce strategies for employees.
- Leaders will re-evaluate all arrangements at the end of spring 2022 semester before decisions are made for FY23.
- UK HealthCare has developed separate guidelines and an approval process for UKHC (area 1500) employees.
- Please note these guidelines are for staff employees. The class schedule for Fall 2021 is materially similar to Fall 2019 with greater than 90% of the classes being offered in person. Faculty and graduate and teaching students will work with deans, department chairs and other college leadership to support their teaching and other in-person activities.

After conversations with university leaders, including representatives from University and Staff Senates, and a review of practices at benchmark and SEC institutions, the post-pandemic workforce strategy group recommends the following:

- Recommend a staff transition to commence on Thursday, July 1 through to Monday, August 2.
 - Allow departments/units to flex the transition before or after July 1 depending on work needs, with expectation that all staff who are working in person or an approved hybrid schedule will be back on site as of the week of Monday, August 2.
- Communicate **draft** return-to-campus dates on Friday, May 14 (graduation).
 - Launch a website on Friday, May 14, and make it available for campus comment, with all comments due on Monday, May 24.
 - Ask every direct report to the President to develop a feedback plan, in addition to the University call for responses.
 - Include the most up-to-date health and safety guidelines for a safe return.
 - Work toward a Tuesday, June 1, final copy to be published.
- Working Return-to-Campus Plan to include:
 - The university's standard operations include in-person services and an on-site presence. Flexible work and technology should be utilized for enhancing and expanding the student experience.
 - Set an expectation that work location and flexible work options are determined by the responsibilities of the position.
 - All return to campus workforce plans will be approved at the direct report to the President' level. Plans for dual report positions (e.g., philanthropy officers, academic advising units, HR business partners, etc.) will be jointly created and endorsed by both reporting line supervisors.
 - A centralized hybrid and remote work request form will be provided on the Coronavirus and HR website. Details of the process will be forthcoming.

- Limit remote work locations for all employees to the United States, but allow employees to work in other states.
 - Communicate to all employees working in another state the need to change their tax withholdings.
- Share resources – FAQs, talking points, etc. -- with campus leaders (direct reports to the President, Deans, etc.) to support decision making for their areas as part of the return-to-campus communication.
- Utilize FY22 as a transition year to strengthen and realign workforce strategies for employees; no long-term commitments on work location should be made until after FY22.
- An implementation team will commence effective immediately to include members of the existing workgroup, along with two staff members, two faculty members and two students. Recommendations for the staff members will be solicited from Staff Senate, faculty members from University Senate Council, and student members from SGA. The university recognizes these guidelines apply only to staff, and the work of this committee will be over the summer, which may limit the ability of faculty and students to participate; however, the offer of participation is being made in the spirit of shared governance.
- A communication strategy is being developed by Public Relations/Marketing and HR.

Summary of Return-to-Campus Discussions (to date)

Erika Chambers, Director, Employee Engagement and Work-Life, began working on Return to Campus options in January 2021. She met with and gathered insights from department and division leaders to better understand what the university may need to consider and implement to operationally support hybrid and remote work beyond the pandemic. The following departments and divisions were consulted on an ongoing basis: Faculty Advancement, Human Resources, International Center, ITS, Legal, Office of the Provost, Risk Management, Transportation, and University Financial Services.

The work was expanded in early March 2021 to include additional representatives from the following offices: Rob Turner, Emergency Operations Center; David Hibbard, Environmental Health & Safety; Mary Vosevich, Facilities Management; Kim Wilson and Erika Chambers, Human Resources; Sally Woodson, Public Relations; George Ward, Real Estate; and Grace Hahn, Student Success; and Andrew Smith, Auxiliary Services. This group was tasked with developing a comprehensive Return-to-Campus plan based on the safety and security of UK's faculty, staff, and students and focused on our residential mission and the operational needs of a complex research land-grant university. The group developed guiding and operational principles and sought feedback from the President's Cabinet on April 14, 2021; the President requested additional campus feedback.

Kim Wilson, VP and CHRO, and Erika Chambers conducted meetings between April 19 and 28, 2021, with deans, administrators and university leaders about the university's post-pandemic workforce strategy. They met with 54 leaders, including VPs, all deans, and representatives from University and Staff Senates.

The purpose of these meetings was to gather feedback on the university's proposed guiding and fundamental operating principles for a post-pandemic workforce strategy, listen to their current and anticipated challenges with returning to campus, and understand what support they are requesting.

Key Themes that Emerged from Conversations (includes what we heard and responses from the workgroup)

1. **Health and Safety**

A key theme that arose during the conversations was concerns regarding health and safety. As the university's priority is the health and safety of our students, staff, faculty and community, leaders think it is important for the university to reiterate what safety measures the university has taken and will continue to implement this fall. Several leaders also recommended going "back to basics" with communication about health and safety guidelines – when employees should wear a mask, cleaning protocols for desks and shared spaces, and guidance for in-person meetings and events.

Three topics within the health and safety category were mentioned most frequently: vaccination concerns, CDC requirements and the impacts of those requirements on space planning along with ADA accommodations.

a. Vaccination Concerns

The dialog surrounding vaccinations involved a wide scope of concerns. Leaders are hearing a desire from some employees for a policy or mandate requiring students to be vaccinated before returning to campus to help individuals feel safe conducting in person job responsibilities. A major concern articulated was the possibility of an adverse reaction toward an individual if it was discovered they have chosen not to be vaccinated. Questions also surfaced about the university's plan to distribute booster shots in the future to combat new strains of the virus, if required. Lastly, the issue was brought up of what options an individual may have not to return to campus if they choose not to be vaccinated.

- i. **Workgroup Response:** University plans to continue to offer vaccinations to the campus and surrounding community including boosters, if necessary and available. The university continues to monitor the pandemic with compulsory vaccination requirements for students, faculty and/or staff as one of many ideas continually under consideration as the world grapples with an ever-changing virus.

b. CDC Requirements for Physical Distancing and Impact on In-Person Staffing Plans

The U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary, Xavier Becerra, has extended the public health emergency (PHE) declaration for the COVID-19 pandemic through July 20, 2021. With the uncertainty of what the requirements from the CDC might be in the fall, leaders strongly expressed the difficulty in planning a fall return to campus that looks like fall of 2019. If physical distancing requirements continue, space constraints will become an issue for some classrooms, office space and common areas. Leaders mentioned potential solutions for space constraints as hybrid schedules, hoteling space and staggered shifts, although this strategy may conflict with ideal staffing plans for in-person services.

- i. **Workgroup Response:** Based on current state public health projections, the university is planning for normal distancing in the fall. Should distancing requirements continue to be in place, the university will work with the START team to adjust.

c. ADA Accommodations

It was noted throughout the conversations that leaders anticipate an increase in ADA accommodation requests in response to employees being expected to return to in-person services. Leaders suggested providing information for the process of ADA accommodation requests will be useful for supervisors to accurately guide individuals through the process. The ADA office should also be properly prepared to review the anticipated increase in requests.

- i. **Workgroup Response:** The university has three offices that continue to collaborate on ADA Accommodations: Institutional Equity and Equal Opportunity, HR, and Disability Resources Center. These offices are prepared for additional requests. The ADA accommodation request form as well as other important information is available at the following website: <https://www.uky.edu/eoo/ada-compliance>

2. **Clear Guidance and Communication**

In every conversation, we heard the need for the university (i.e., President Capilouto) to provide clear guidance and communication about a return to campus. Specifically, leaders said it will be helpful to give their employees a date certain to return or begin a phased return.

a. Date Certain: July 1

Most leaders agreed July 1 is a good target date to give employees, with the ability for leaders to flex the date sooner or later than July 1 based on their college or division's in-person work responsibilities. The majority of leaders agreed about giving employees as much notice as possible, preferably a month, before they need to return to campus. A few leaders noted they already communicated a May or June return date to their employees because of end-of-year reporting deadlines or preparing for new-student orientation. One leader mentioned an August 1 return date as a balance between employees' caregiving responsibilities this summer and ensuring the college is prepared for students to return to campus.

a. An Adjustment Period and Mental-Health Awareness

Some leaders suggested a phased approach during July and August, when possible, for returning employees to campus. A few leaders shared observations about the adjustment period they've experienced or heard from colleagues when returning to in-person work. They spoke about the positive benefits of seeing their students and colleagues face to face. However, they also experienced fatigue in the first couple of days and weeks as they got back into the habit of their everyday work routine (e.g. dropping off kids at school, finding parking, walking across campus).

Leaders also anticipate they will see an increased number of mental health concerns from employees when preparing for a return to campus and after they return as employees adjust to on-campus work. One leader mentioned a concern with "unbounded by time and place" and the pressure this puts on employees to be available 24/7. There are existing concerns about faculty and staff burnout.

- i. [Workgroup Response: The university has adjusted the recommendations to accommodate a phased-in return to campus during the month of July. Original plan was to return on July 1.](#)

b. Limited Child Care Options

Several leaders said they are hearing concerns from employees about limited child care options this summer. They expect some of their employees with school-age children will not want to return to on-site work until K-12 schools are in person again mid-August. The leaders acknowledged the challenge and potential issues with offering flexibility to some employees and not others based on personal situations.

- i. [Workgroup Response: The university will highlight existing HR website with resources for parents, including child care and summer camp options. The Y Academy at UK will provide on-site, full-day](#)

summer programming for children ages 5-12; they currently have 50-60 spaces available for children of UK employees. There are local camp options at this time but they appear to be more limited in terms of enrollment or fewer weeks while others have delayed enrollment and announcements due to anticipated changes in restrictions. The university will continue to monitor.

b. Defined Terms

Leaders also said it will be helpful for the university to provide guidance and definitions for terms mentioned in the guiding and operating principles (e.g., employees who support faculty, student facing roles, university's regular business hours).

- i. **Workgroup Response:** HR is available to advise direct reports to the President and other leaders on implementing these principles in their college or division. University HR Policy and Procedure #70: Attendance/Hours of Work states the department head shall establish each employee's work schedule as operational needs demand. The normal work week of 37.5 or 40 hours distributed over five consecutive work days, usually Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. until 4:30 or 5:00 p.m. is applicable to most staff positions.

c. Centralized HR Remote/Hybrid Repository and Process

All the leaders acknowledged it will be helpful to have a central repository to accurately support our leaders with understanding employment law, workers' compensation and taxation needs.

- i. **Workgroup Response:** Human Resources will offer an online form and workflow for employees to document approved remote and hybrid work schedules. Employees who do not have access to a computer can get in-person assistance at Scovell Hall.

d. Position-Driven Decisions

There was strong agreement for the university communicating that all decisions about remote or hybrid work will be evaluated based on the position responsibilities and not individual preferences, except for ADA accommodations. Most leaders thought position-driven decisions support a more equitable process within units and alleviate some concerns with consistency across colleges for similar job titles (e.g. business officers).

- i. **Workgroup Response:** Decisions will be position-driven.

3. Flexibility during FY22

Although leaders would like a firm date and other clear guidance, some leaders shared a desire for additional flexibility in decisions about the following position:

a. Student-Facing Employees and Academic Advisors

Leaders recognize the dual-reporting relationship academic advisors have to the college and Student Success. Some deans asked about the operating principle

stating “student-facing roles will be in person” as it relates to staff in their college or unit.

- i. Some shared that advising productivity, specifically, has increased since moving appointments to Zoom, with one leader noting a 30% increase and others noting they have hard data to support virtual advising sessions, because students are keeping their appointments. Others suggested that there is data indicating the increase in attendance in individual advising sessions during the pandemic is due to students wanting to connect with university personnel. Regardless, there is widespread agreement about student services and advising offering students the opportunity to choose a virtual or in-person sessions, and that in doing so, the staff can offer either modality (virtual or in person) while being on campus.
- ii. Some deans as well as several student services leaders advocated for expanding advising and student services hours to include early evenings and weekends, which has benefited both students and employees, and not reverting to solely providing services in a fall 2019 way (i.e. in person conversation, 8 a.m. - 5 p.m.)
- iii. By many, there is concern that during the pandemic much of our student interactions have been more transactional (e.g. lifting holds, processing forms) rather than relational (e.g., checking on the holistic student experience), given the virtual nature of the pandemic. The transactional parts, such as helping a student select classes, could be handled virtually, and a virtual option could create an expanded or enhanced experience for some students (e.g. students who live off campus.) That said, a critical and important part of a student-facing staff member is relational, particularly in academic advising, career advising, counseling, academic coaching, and the like – noticing a student’s body language, watching for behaviors that may signal a concern, helping a student develop and grow so they are prepared for interviews and life after graduation. Leaders have heard from students that the students are “hungry for connection.”
 1. [Workgroup Response: The university will work with leaders with these impacted positions to achieve the principles described above.](#)