



SUBJECT	UBC Hybrid Work
SUBMITTED TO	Employee Relations Committee
MEETING DATE	November 18, 2022
SESSION CLASSIFICATION	OPEN
LEAD EXECUTIVE	Marcia Buchholz, Vice President, Human Resources
SUPPORTED BY	Adam Charania, Associate Vice President, Human Resources Cam Gray, Executive Director, HR Operational Excellence Carolyn Kirkwood – Consultant

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The global COVID-19 crisis has in fundamental ways changed the nature of the university as a place of work. In the successful pivot to remote work with the onset of the pandemic, we have collectively recognized the advantages of this strategic opportunity to regularize aspects of remote work on a more permanent basis and enhance the employment proposition.

Remote work at UBC has been led by Human Resources (HR) and overseen since December 2020 by a Steering Committee¹, which remains in place to track progress. In June 2021, the university announced the initiation of a remote work program through a one-year pilot. By creating a more flexible workplace environment, the program aims to support a range of UBC's institutional goals, notably the attraction and retention of faculty and staff, as well as the promotion of wellbeing, inclusion, and cross-campus collaboration and the advancement of sustainability through reduced levels of commuting and strain on campus facilities. At the centre of the plan is the need to preserve the student experience, support research excellence and impact, and maintain the high quality of our teaching and learning.

UBC Community Experience

While the uptake of remote work under the auspices of the pilot reached a plateau² in late fall, it was only with our return to campus in early February that we started to gain a more complete understanding of the impact of remote work on our endeavours, our people, and our campuses. A community survey and focus groups, together with meetings with Deans, Heads and Directors, and various stakeholders during May and June have informed the **recommendations of the Committee to proceed in formalizing remote work as the UBC Hybrid Work Program.**

The results of the recent Remote Work Survey indicate strong support for hybrid work, with respondents generally perceiving a positive impact in most areas, including engagement, mental health, productivity, and UBC's reputation as an Employer of Choice. Community consultations reinforce these findings. One of our academic leaders commented that remote work has been a "lifesaver for so many staff", especially given the cost and challenges of living and working in the Lower Mainland. Moreover, women, racialized people, and persons with disabilities, appear to be more positively inclined to remote work.

It is important to emphasize that the community also recognizes the need for a balanced approach, with the survey confirming general interest in in-person interactions, at least some of the time.

¹ Marcia Buchholz, Gage Averill, Rae Ann Aldridge, Jennifer Burns, Rob Einarson, Jennifer Kain, Yale Loh, John Metras, Rehan Sadiq, Dave Shorthouse, Bryce Traister, Adam Charania, Cam Grey

² Approximately 40% of staff on both campuses with formal remote work arrangements in place

Peer Experience

Most universities in Canada are exploring remote or hybrid work arrangements for staff, motivated by similar factors. More broadly, a scan of BC employers affirms that most have established remote work programs, with private sector employers more progressive in terms of flexibility (i.e., eligibility, permissibility of 100% remote work) and support (i.e., additional resources, space redesign) than those in the public sector. UBC's approach is broadly consistent with that of its post-secondary and regional public peers.

Key Elements of the UBC Hybrid Work Program

In line with its general operating model, UBC is seeking to adopt a consistent approach across the institution, with leaders making decisions that respect local autonomy and reflect local contexts. The foundational work undertaken at the planning stages of the pilot means that few adjustments are now required to the guidelines and principles underpinning the program.

Key guidelines, which have **not** changed, include that:

- Employment at UBC is campus-based, with any hybrid workplace agreement a temporary arrangement that does not supersede the employment agreement.
- Deans, Vice-Presidents, and Associate Vice-Presidents are responsible for decisions made in respect of hybrid work for staff within their respective faculties and units, including those in respect of the extent of remote work.
- Determined by the demands of the role, hybrid work does not apply to every position at the university.
- 100% remote work will not be considered at this time.
- Hybrid work will continue to be permitted only within the province of British Columbia, except as required by the position.
- Decisions need to be defensible using criteria arising from labour law and consistent with collective agreements: reasonable, operationally justified, not arbitrary, and not discriminatory.

What **has** changed is that the program going forward will apply only to staff. While the pilot was institution-wide, in part to signal to staff an extension of the flexibility that has always been afforded to faculty, the reality is that the program has little bearing on faculty. Moreover, its application to faculty may in fact complicate the return to in-person teaching. Faculty decisions in respect of their work will continue to be based on collegial discussions with their respective heads, directors, and Deans, and we ask academic leaders to consider the guidelines of the Hybrid Work Program when considering faculty arrangements.

Ongoing Focus and Recommendations

Variability in implementation is a natural consequence of the operating model of the university, and was raised by some stakeholders as an area of focus. Academic and administrative leaders have expressed some interest in exploring common approaches in certain job categories, where appropriate, to reduce internal competition between units. Any such coordination would reinforce the principles of both local autonomy and institutional consistency while also upholding the Hybrid Work Guidelines.

Stakeholder discussions also highlighted the importance of intellectual culture, campus vibrancy, and community connection – and of the associated efforts to protect these foundational assets of UBC. Moreover, the incremental demands on managers are not trivial, as anticipated last June, and support for their role in hybrid work is a key element in the ongoing strengthening of leadership competences across UBC. The value of sustained communication was highlighted, to reinforce the principles and guidelines of the program, along with hybrid work norms and available tools to support leaders and teams.

To help assure continuing success in hybrid work, the Committee recommends the following:

- Extension of the Hybrid Work Guidelines to reflect developing understanding of best practice, including the critical importance of intentional on-campus time, intact teams on campus, and on-campus time for supervisors of staff who cannot work remotely.

- Enhancement of HR support for managers in a hybrid work environment, including in respect of onboarding of new and more junior employees.
- Concerted community communications to reinforce the principles, guidelines, and available supports for hybrid work.
- Further consideration of the university's space requirements as the Hybrid Work Program matures.
- Clarification of the relationship between the Hybrid Work Program and other HR programs.
- Continued tracking of key dimensions of employee experience and potential operational impacts.

The university's work to establish more systematic processes around performance management will provide valuable reinforcement, as these will facilitate an outcomes-based approach and the development of supervisory competencies, both important in the success of hybrid work.

Moving Forward

While the data worldwide suggest that hybrid work is here to stay, there is still considerable uncertainty surrounding the evolution of the workplace. Like any program of this nature, the UBC Hybrid Work Program will be subject to regular review. In addition to continuing support from HR, the Steering Committee will remain in place to monitor operationalization of the UBC Hybrid Work Program, to recommend refinements as and when warranted, and to consider, as appropriate, longer-term questions around the "future of work" at UBC.

PRESENTATIONS

1. UBC Hybrid Work Program presentation

UBC HYBRID WORK



**Discussion with the Board Employee Relations Committee
Marcia Buchholz, Vice President Human Resources
November 2022**

RECENT CONSULTATIONS TO DEVELOP RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Remote Work Survey:** May 2-10, 2022;
 - N = 6,516 (35% response); c.4,500 staff working remotely / c.1,000 staff working on-campus / c. 1,000 faculty
- **Focus groups** May 16-25th
- **Student Survey** Results from VPS Office
- Initial discussions with the UBC **Executive**
- Discussions with **Deans** across both campuses
- Discussions with **Heads and Directors** at both campuses
- Engagement with **equity groups**
- Multiple meetings and discussions with the **Remote Work Steering Committee**



KEY GUIDELINES THAT HAVE NOT CHANGED

- Employment at UBC is **campus-based**, with any hybrid workplace agreement being a **temporary work arrangement** that does not supersede the employment agreement.
- **Deans, Vice-Presidents, and Associate Vice-Presidents** are responsible for decisions made in respect of hybrid work for staff within their respective faculties and units, including those in respect of the extent of remote work.
- Participation is determined by the **demands of the role**, hybrid work does not apply to every position at the university. Arrangements are also subject to employee agreement.
- 100% remote work will **not** be considered at this time.
- Hybrid work will continue to be permitted **only within the province of British Columbia**.
- Decisions need to be **defensible using criteria** arising from labour law and consistent with collective agreements: reasonable, operationally justified, not arbitrary, and not discriminatory.



WHAT HAS CHANGED

- The program going forward will apply **only to staff**.
- Faculty decisions in respect of their work will continue to be based on collegial **discussions with their respective Heads, Directors, and Deans**.
- However, where a hybrid or remote work arrangement is being considered, it is important for faculty members and academic leaders to mirror the principles and guidelines of the Hybrid Work Program in their decisions, notably those that support wellbeing and equity, diversity, and inclusion.



HYBRID WORK CONSIDERATIONS GOING FORWARD

- **Variability in implementation** that is a natural consequence of the operating model of the university. Some interest from leaders in exploring common approaches in certain job categories, in alignment with the principles of both local autonomy and institutional consistency (and other Hybrid Work parameters)
- **Intellectual culture and campus vibrancy**
- Incremental **demands on managers** and associated university support for their role in hybrid work operationalization
- Ongoing **communication**, to reinforce the principles and guidelines of the program, along with hybrid work norms and best practices to support leaders and teams
- Continued **regular review** of the program through the Remote (now Hybrid) Work Steering Committee, including six-monthly reassessment of institutional risk, in partnership with the ERA Team



HYBRID WORK RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Extension of the Hybrid Work Guidelines to reflect developing understanding of best practice, including the critical importance of intentional on-campus time, intact teams on campus, and on-campus time for supervisors of staff who cannot work remotely.
2. Enhancement of HR support for managers in a hybrid work environment, including in respect of onboarding of new and more junior employees.
3. Sustained attention to initiatives designed to “make our campuses great places to be”: from transit pass programs to community reconnection events to workplace experience improvement to academic infrastructure planning to affordable staff housing.
4. Clarification of the relationship between the Hybrid Work Program and other HR programs.
5. Concerted community communications to reinforce the principles, guidelines, and available supports for hybrid work.
6. Continued tracking of key dimensions of employee experience, including the satisfaction of staff working on campus, who are generally less positive in respect of remote work.

