

Ecoscience as a workplace – values and visions

8 September 2021

This document was prepared by the management of Ecoscience and presented to the local liaison committee on 21 June 2021 and again on 8 September and to the departmental forum on 16 August 2021. Comments from the meetings have been incorporated into this version.

How should the department be organised as a workplace in the future?

Restrictions and lockdown as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020 and 2021 have led to major changes in the way that we do our job. It has been problematic and difficult, but many employees have also experienced that some tasks and routines have worked satisfactorily and perhaps even better during the lockdown. It is therefore not given (or necessarily desirable) that we automatically return to all 'pre-corona' routines when the restrictions are lifted. The management therefore wishes – in dialogue with the employees – to formulate common principles for the future workplace based on the experiences that we have made with working from home, digital meetings and other forms of work.

We do not want to have inflexible and fixed rules, but with this memo we will formulate principles and a set of values that can contribute to creating the best possible work environment for all employees and thus the optimal conditions for the department's activities.

The coming strategy (Ecoscience 2021) states:

The department is, and wishes to continue to be, an active, dynamic and inspiring workplace with exciting challenges, enthusiastic colleagues and academic opportunities for development. The department wishes to support employees in creating a good balance between their work and home lives and to maintain and attract a talented and committed staff, where freedom, creativity and respect for the long-term perspective are core values.

Working together – or individually? Generally, the department's physical workplace (offices, laboratories, workshops, meeting rooms and lunchrooms) is the location where people gather to work. *The management wishes to promote a collaborative culture and experience exchange in the department, and we still believe that the best way to do so is by sharing the experience of an active, common and inspiring physical workplace.* However, the department's employees work with very different tasks, where some require presence in offices and laboratories, while others can also be solved remotely. We are different as individuals and are at different stages of our lives, and what works well for some, is not always the best solution for others. The management acknowledges that people have private and different attitudes to what is a meaningful work life, and we aim for inclusiveness, flexibility and respect for individual needs.

The department will therefore increase the possibility for employees to be able to carry out their job where it is most appropriate and meaningful – both for the individual employee but also for the group that the employee is part of and for the department as a whole. In other words, it is a question of finding the right balance between personal, academic, collegial and managerial wishes and objectives.

What should the management do?

- Our shared workplace must be a dynamic and exciting place to be to ensure that as many employees as possible are physically present at the workplace. The management must therefore work to create the necessary physical environment with good offices that meet the employees' need for space and tranquility, well-appointed laboratories and inspiring meeting rooms, workshops and coffee rooms.
- The management must do even more to ensure that the employees have a balanced work life (neither too many nor too few hours on the work programme – and by exploiting vacant hours strategically, for example to create new academic connections across the department).
- The 'immediate supervisor' must make an extra effort to ensure that everyone in the group thrives both academically, socially and personally. In periods of prolonged remote work, this will particularly require outreach and frequent communication.
- In collaboration with the staff associations, the management must support social initiatives that can take place during or after normal working hours (e.g. cinema/wine/running/lecture clubs, celebrating anniversaries or major events, introductory events for new employees and guests, academic excursions, Christmas parties etc.).

What should you do as an employee?

- The overall framework for the work is agreed upon individually with the immediate supervisor; this includes the possibility and extent of working from home, the need for presence at the workplace, special academic and social responsibility for colleagues etc. Such an agreement will not be permanent but will be regularly reassessed and adapted to the needs of the employee, the group and the department and could, for example, be part of the annual staff development dialogue.
- Within the agreed framework, the employee will plan his or her daily routine in such a way that it gives the greatest possible personal satisfaction and work value but also in respect of close colleagues, the community and the department's overall goals.
- If you work at home, you must ensure that you do not isolate yourself but make yourself accessible and contactable for colleagues and management and preferably also make an active effort to help and reach out and be academically curious.
- We all have a responsibility for the well-being of our colleagues, and this must be taken into account when organising your presence at the department. There may be colleagues, guests or students who need sparring or support and help with their work. Nor should it be underestimated that physical presence also means that there is life and activity in corridors and offices, which in itself contributes to creating a more inspiring work environment and a good workplace.
- If you for some reason do not thrive with your work situation (or if you become aware that a colleague does not), you should contact your immediate supervisor (or the safety committee, union representative or key person) and get help to solve the problem. This is particularly important when more people work from home.

Other specific proposals

- Large, regular meetings should, to the widest extent possible, be conducted digitally so that all employees can participate regardless of location (department, workplace and section meetings).

- You must always assess the need for (online) meetings as the easy access to book people for online meetings may limit (some) people's possibility for working coherently without disruption.
- We have been given new tools that make remote collaboration and knowledge sharing easier (especially Teams), but together we must work to make better use of them. In particular, we must ensure that the tools streamline our routines and minimise wasted time so that we also liberate resources to meet for academic discussions and development of ideas or to strengthen our work relationship.