

## **APEL's position statement - Consultation of the ETH-Board on the desksharing and multispace concept**

EPFL, Oct 15, 2021,

Dear Colleagues,

An email was sent to all professors and MER with the request for comments. We have received 10 answers (see below). All of them reject, some very strongly, the concept of desksharing for scientific staff (from PhD students to Professors). We would like to mention that this concept has already been discussed at different levels by professors at EPFL. **At the last JSP (Scientific and Educational Days, 7-8 September 2021, Interlaken) the Direction explicitly said that the 0.8 ratio will not apply to scientific staff.** This is mandatory to maintain the efficiency and attractiveness of EPFL.

Finally, we would also like to mention that some of us said that each secretary needs 1 desk in a dedicated office in order to guarantee confidentiality.

Best regards on behalf of APEL

The APEL committee, A. Boghossian, G. Fantner, A. Kis, D. Kressner, M. Picasso

## ----- **Comments received**

Je comprends la volonté de rationaliser l'espace, devenu libre en raison d'une certaine demande en télétravail. voici cependant quelques remarques

-Je ne suis pas favorable au desksharing, car je pense que le desk (=le meuble bureau) doit pouvoir rester personnel.

- Tout n'est pas sur l'ordinateur et la possibilité de personnalisation de l'espace reste importante.
- Le fait de laisser tous les jours place nette prend du temps (au collaborateur comme aux agents d'entretien) et de la charge mentale (quel document papier trouver et où?).
- De plus l'impression d'un espace aseptisé, qui peut plaire aux architectes, n'est sûrement pas propice au travail de certains, qui aiment les espaces plus bigarrés.
- Le fait de pouvoir manger et boire est devenu une nécessité en raison des séances qui ont lieu à toute heure de la journée et de la surfréquentation (et donc d'une immense perte de temps) des restaurants et food-trucks.

- En revanche les bureaux peuvent contenir plus de places de travail, si celles ci ne sont pas toutes occupées en même temps= Perte d'espace, mais gain en personnalisation.

-Le personnel qui reçoit des visiteurs et des étudiants (par exemple le personnel admin des sections) doit pouvoir disposer d'un bureau personnel.

-Faire très attention au traitement trop différencié du personnel scientifique et du personnel administratif. Cela crée des tensions inutiles.

-Attention aussi à ne pas mettre dans la catégorie desk-sharing les collaborateurs scientifiques qui ne font pas d'expériences. L'espace personnel est nécessaire à certains pour exprimer leur créativité. D'autres ont besoin d'espaces partagés.

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A few comments on my side, as I see some dangers for the future (even if the scientists will be probably less impacted, and my group will probably not see a new building before I retire...):

- The document is excessively long and complex and mixes very different topics
- Flexible work/teletravail: yes it is essential for the future and we should give full freedom for it (Is already the case now in my group, even if chronos try to make our life difficult)
- office sharing yes but desk sharing no. Having a small private place for each co-workers (except if less than 20% on campus) is essential. For privacy, efficiency, and now pandemic spreading reasons, large open-space offices should be avoided (offices with 2-3, max 4 people are best).

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this would be really ideal for those of us on other campuses too, so when we come to campus to teach, meetings, etc there could be flex shared space we can use!  
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I attended the meeting yesterday, and found the presentation quite poor (full of management jargon without saying clearly how we or anyone else might be impacted). It was not 100% clear that this does not apply to teaching and research staff (I think this is a wish of EPFL, but not necessarily of the Conseil Federal), and the statement of XXXX (who went down a lot in my esteem) that if someone was doing a PhD in chemistry then they might like to work at home while writing their thesis was not at all reassuring.

My impression was that the RH people have no idea how we (theoretical researchers, teachers, supervisors of PhDs and MScs, ...) work. It would be catastrophic for our attractiveness as an institution to have to say to new professors (imagining that at some point we have a new building large enough to contain XXXX): 'please come, but we have to share our offices. You can come to work only 4 days out of 5, so you don't have your own office and all your books and papers will have to stay at home. Each time you want to meet with someone to do some mathematics or have a phone or video call, you have to book a space to do so, ...'.

We really have to push back very strongly to make the realities of how teachers/professors/assistants work clear to the admin people leading this.

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My comment would be that I'd request exemption from desk sharing for all of the lab except perhaps Secretaries.

Otherwise, IT, HR, Mediacomm, Library, etc. can all deskshare.

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Here are some comments from my Administrative Assistant. I take her opinion seriously as it may reflect the feelings of many others on campus:

"I feel however that the project multispace/desksharing would generally be counterproductive for most admin assistants.

### **Télétravail**

- Globally positive - added flexibility, saving on commute time
- Negative aspects
  - Tendency to work more hours
  - Difficulty to disconnect from work - I currently actually prefer to work on campus as it helps me to clearly define my workday
  - Lack of interaction with colleagues

### **Desksharing/Multispace**

As the lab is an open space, my office is the only place to have a **confidential** discussion with HR ( by phone) or staff members. With open space or desk-sharing this would be lost.

I would also be concerned about noise and disruption if working in an open space environment. Many aspects of what I do require a quiet space without interruptions.

For me the idea of desk-sharing is a loss of "quality of life" at work. It would push me to work more from home."

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my quick comments. This is a complex package and it is a bit obscure what the goals are.

As far as office sharing, creating shared rooms, this is fine. It would increase interaction.

But the idea of reducing physical presence on campus, this is wrong.

A university is where people meet: students, industry, staff, professors. Reducing presence correlates to lowering impact and reducing scientific productivity.

I would be strongly against any plan that requires a reduced presence on campus by students and faculty.

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Hot Desking sounds like an atrocious idea whose only purpose is to save money on building new buildings. People are territorial animals who like to have their own space ;-)

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Je suis contre une telle mesure. Même avec l'importance croissante du télétravail, le corps enseignant a besoin de l'espace de travail au campus, au minimum 1/2 bureau mais de préférence 1 bureau par personne.

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I rather think this is not a good idea. At least, in my lab I want students to have their own place for which they are responsible. In addition, the place gives some privacy, hosts its own tools etc.