

Deakin  
Professional  
Staff  
Network



Stacey Walton  
Chief People and Culture Officer  
Deakin University

Tom Slack  
Director, People Partnering and Solutions  
Deakin University

16 March 2023

Dear Stacey and Tom

This letter is a follow-up to a letter we sent in October of last year. In that letter we expressed our concern with professional staff members being forced to return to the office in unsafe ways and for unsatisfactory reasons.

The response from Gemma Doyle on 31 Oct 2022 stated:

We are continuing to adapt to a blended working environment where staff may work a combination of on campus and at home arrangements (where their roles allow). There may be a need for employees to work at other Deakin campus locations at times and this will be determined by role requirements. Zoom/remote working remains to be an effective form of connection and communication, but it has not replaced the need for on campus attendance. It is reasonable that staff are asked to attend in person for specific days/events as required by their role however this is a further example where team members and supervisors need to have discussions where there are concerns.

We are still receiving reports of professional staff being forced onto campus in circumstances that don't require a physical location. For instance, we have been told by our members of instances in which professional staff are being told to come into the office to support academics who are working from home. These aren't student-facing roles, and working from the office shouldn't be a requirement for them. In addition, it seems some supervisors still think Deakin has a firm policy of a 40:60 ratio (work-from-home to on-campus).

As you'd be aware from our EB negotiations, management have not agreed to any legal, clear and enforceable work-from-home rights, resulting in this patchwork of inconsistent practices, confused communication from the university, and unfair treatment of professional staff. I remind you that poor organisational justice is an incredibly serious psychosocial hazard and a key contributor to poor mental health in the workplace.

**The present lack of clarity from Deakin on the issue could be readily and simply resolved by adopting our proposals for work from home arrangements presented in the current bargaining process.**

Of course, these psychosocial hazards are further compounded by concerns about a safe working environment. While we're now in "COVID normal", the virus is still out there and some people are rightly concerned. Supervisors forcing concerned people onto campus, and/or offering compact/dangerous seating arrangements, should not be allowed.

We are concerned about this widespread misinformation, unsafe practices by managers and the impact this is having on staff wellbeing.

**We request you immediately:**

- **reinforce, from the top down, what the current rules are, and specifically mention that it's not appropriate to force professional staff back to work for inadequate/no reason.**
- **recognise this issue results in psychosocial as well as physical risks and harms to staff.**
- **engage in good faith with our WFH proposals in current bargaining.**

Health and Safety Representatives across the university will be looking closely at this issue, monitoring incident reports and seeking to control the resulting psychosocial hazards over the coming months to address the problem through those formal channels.



Piper Rodd  
President  
Deakin Branch NTEU



Andrew Stapleton  
DPSN Leader

*The Deakin Professional Staff Network (DPSN) is endorsed by the Deakin Branch Committee of the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU).*