**Space Management working group feedback comments June 2023**

**Background**

Initial feedback to space management in the department was sought from the space management working group in June 2023. This group consists of representatives from every group within the department, further details about this group can be found on the [staff intranet](https://www.phc.ox.ac.uk/intranet/better-workplace-groups-committees-open-meetings/space-management-working-group).

The intention of this feedback was to identify support that the department can action now to relieve immediate space constraints, alongside identifying longer term consideration and communications with the wider department of future space management principles. A summary of this feedback has been organised into Stop, Start, Continue points, which is also on the [staff intranet](https://www.phc.ox.ac.uk/intranet/better-workplace-groups-committees-open-meetings/space-management-working-group).

**Please provide up to three suggestions of things that you or your group would see as an improvement to the working space in the office?**

* We only have 5 desks appointed for the team but this does work as not everyone is in at the same time and two are based in Headington often. We are based in the Gibson building and in individual offices which staff seem to like.
* Noise cancelling headphones.
* More docking stations, private pods (ones with sound proofing) for confidential meetings and interviews.
* Having more pods - downstairs in the library, ones with doors to block sound or an easier way of booking offices for meetings
* 1) More dedicated hot desks with docking stations 2) More flexibility on desk sharing from colleagues 3) More structured approach to days in office to facilitate point 2.
* We really need an easy to use and easy to sign into desk booking system that is visual and allows people to know what desk they are booking - perhaps only bookable 7 or 14 days in advance though, as otherwise people will block book and then not necessarily use the space. We have tried desk shares, as it's nice for people to feel like they have a 'home' and a pedestal to share/ put non confidential items in, but most people come in one day a week, so that might need to change to hot desking once there is some decent software to use (hopefully most people can then still book their favourite desk). We've agreed that those coming into the office for 3 days or more can have their own personal space that isn't shared.
* The desks are very small now in our shared space - little, low desk dividers might help to give a sense of privacy, but they would need to be bright to not make the space feel even tinier.
* We need to make sure that all office chairs are decent ones - it's hard to hot desk if you've spent a while adjusting a particular chair for your needs.
* Shared offices are challenging for taking calls - most people like to book an office, so I get a lot of emails to book a PI office, which could be time spent doing other work.
* More small private rooms available for doing teams calls.
* Staff find it very difficult to work at different desks which are not adjusted to their own ergonomics. Chairs with/without arms, with/without footrests, with/without monitor stands etc. In particular, desks which have been fitted with stand-up desks are not suitable for sharing. Also insufficient network points at some desks. Standardising equipment across desks including all desks being able to be used as standing desks (not retro-fitted) would reduce this as a barrier to desk sharing/hot desking.
* Laptops which are not capable of running large data through the department Stata licence without slowing down to the extent that the laptop is unusable. The current solution is to provide a desktop as well as a laptop which enables the user to access the desktop through the VPN independently of their laptop. However, requiring a desktop is another barrier to desk sharing/hot desking. The possible solution to this is to have this running on a separate server, capable of managing all the large data without the need for individual desktops.
* Staff find it very uncomfortable taking calls on teams, even with headsets, in open plan offices which have not been designed for this purpose. This can be highly disruptive to some and results in staff spending more time working from home than they would like. Desks could be fitted more like pods to reduce sound disturbance. Something like this: <https://www.google.com/search?q=corporate+single+pods+for+calls&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj25aaR39n_AhXS7rsIHbZIAWAQ0pQJegQIDhAB&biw=1366&bih=617&dpr=1>

**Please provide up to three suggestions of how we can best manage space between groups/teams, whether that’s desk, office or meeting room space.**

* There seem to be quite a few free desks at Gibson but I never need to book them as my team just use our desks. I am not sure how the booking system works but will find out. The meeting room booking system for the whole dept works well although not many rooms.
* Making desks smaller to accommodate more desk for staff members.
* More smaller meeting rooms.
* Suggested for hot desking between desks on different days.
* Online group booking systems.
* More dedicated hot desk space would be a huge help so that laptops can be properly docked to allow monitors etc. to be used easily.
* A colleague suggested that desks that are not used frequently should all be hot desks and that the middle level library hot desk section be converted into a collaborative space for adhoc meetings and mini meeting rooms using dividers and noise reduction materials. This would give 2-3 extra small meeting spaces or pods for small group work, phone calls, etc. Generally meeting rooms are booked and the pods in the atrium are only useful if there is no community event taking place.
* All hot desk spaces need to be fully set up, possibly with low dividers to give the sense of personal space and also with decent chairs at every space. In our space, 2 members have a sit/stand desk and they use their desks a lot. It might also be useful to have a sit/ stand-up hot desk.
* Available lockers that can be booked for a day, etc, would be useful for those coming in once or twice a week and don't have a permanent desk. It's no longer practical to keep personal, locked pedestals at hot desks, but perhaps the pedestals can all have some stationery in them, etc. Those coming in occasionally definitely still need somewhere to put their belongings when going for lunch, etc, or just to keep a coffee mug in and some snacks. "
* Consistent hot desking desks with two monitors, docking station, keyboard and mouse on each desk so you can go and plug your laptop in.
* More desk space in general.
* Some kind of department desk policy that the DPhils can follow.
* An absolute priority for managing meeting space is a booking system. We currently have a good system (Plan-On) available to all for booking meeting rooms but nothing in place for other office spaces. There are multiple small offices in RPC which are suitable for small meetings which have no system for booking, other than contacting the relevant PA which is an ineffective and unsuitable system and doesn’t cover all suitable office spaces. If all suitable office spaces could be added to the existing booking system, the use of those spaces would be vastly improved. This would rely on the current occupants of those spaces booking/unbooking the space as needed and would require some ‘rules’ around this which allowed them to retain priority for the space. For example, occupants should have the space allocated to them Mon-Fri for the whole year. They would then be required as a minimum, to remove their booking for days that they are regular not in the office (e.g. clinical days) and for holidays and would be expected to update the system if these dates change. It would also be quite reasonable to expect them to forward plan, week by week, to release additional times for which they do not require the space including times when they are in face to face meetings in a meeting room or offsite. At least in the first instance it would be reasonable to only require the space to be released for half/full days rather than hour by hour and only to be actioned weekly rather than daily. Some thought would need to be given to identify the spaces and the capacity of the rooms/equipment available to enable the ‘booker’ to identify whether it is suitable for their needs. Principally, this proposal would mainly extend the availability of meeting spaces for the ‘booker’ or a small group to join online meetings on their own laptop without disturbing others. Some consideration would need to be given to a ‘rule’ which requires the occupant to leave the room in a suitable state for others to use e.g. if the room has a table, then this should be clear, but if it only has a desk then this may need to be more relaxed (and possibly only bookable for 1 person). Rooms which are suitable for a small group, but which do not have a built in PC/Camera/Microphone, would benefit from portable device which allows participants to join from one laptop, whilst using the camera (wide view) and microphone to ensure they don’t have to crowd around a single laptop. Whilst not enabling full usage of the rooms, this would vastly improve availability.
* An absolute priority for managing desk space is a booking system. It is possible that the Plan-On System could also extend for this purpose, but there is also a system which has been trialled a little within the department, which, although intended for booking of ‘equipment’ can be used to book out desks as a piece of equipment. Currently, this has only been used within teams/groups, but it would be worth exploring whether this could be extended to work across teams/groups. There would be no problem extending the physical system across teams/groups, but there are other considerations which would apply here. That is, whilst the same ‘rules’ could be applied for releasing desks as suggested above for meeting spaces, it may not be suitable for the desk to be available for every user. For example, a ‘quiet’ office where most people work independently may not be a suitable space to be booked for a user whose works requires them to be on Teams/Phones or where others frequently approach their desk with questions. Physical resources would need to be logged and wherever possible standardised e.g. one/two screens, footrest, ergo keyboards/mousemats, laptop stand.

**What are the main challenges you and your group experience regarding space management, and what can we do to support you with that?**

* Our team don't have a problem with space but one more desk space allocated to our team would be helpful in the future. Not everyone is in at the same time but that may change at some point. We use the 'library' in RPC if we need an extra space or the pods which work well.
* Increase in new starters, staff members not being flexible with their desks.
* Private spaces for online interviews. More private pods.
* Teams calls in the open plan offices. People could book PI offices but they sit at their desk and take their calls there. It's hard to concentrate especially if they talk loudly. For planned calls they could book a room. This should be standard practice which everyone does unless it is just for a few minutes or for listening to a meeting/taking minutes.
* Group is a mix of those who prefer to come in most days, those who prefer hybrid and those who prefer mainly home working. The main challenge for our group is that we are rapidly growing and will continue to do so over next year at least.
* We need some decent hot desk booking software that is visual and allows the booker to see the desk space and to know exactly what desks are available that day from looking at one screen.
* Lack of small meeting rooms to take calls seems to be the biggest challenge and I think this prevents people from coming into the office on a regular basis.
* There is no consistent department policy. Should the DPhils make their own policy? More clarity about whether DPhils get a desk in their group or not. We dont even know how many people get desks provided or need to use the DPhil room.
* Lack of clarity and standardisation of the expectations for staff to work on site vs offsite. It seems that since lockdown we have some teams who have agreed some principles around the expectations and have worked out rotas to accommodate this and some who are happy for staff to decide for themselves. This still appears to some to be a lack of parity, especially if those working predominantly offsite have the same resources (i.e. an allocated desk) onsite as those who are fully/mostly onsite. Even where efforts have been made to increase individuals’ attendance onsite, we have seen that applicants for posts in the department have an expectation that they can work from home at least part-time and in many cases, full-time. At a time where it has been hard to recruit new people, less expectation to work onsite is being given to new starters than to existing staff, but expectations that desks will be provided have not lessened. Setting expectations along the lines of ‘3 days or more = allocated or shared desk, 2 days or less = hot desk’ would help.
* Lack of clarify and standardisation of the expectations for staff working on site regarding taking meetings/calls at desks etc. Some staff find it extremely inappropriate and disturbing for colleagues to take meetings/calls at their desks. Setting expectations and maybe allocating rooms for quiet working would help.

**Is there any other feedback you would like to share with us at this time?**

* Nice to have a designated space so we don't have to worry about finding a space or leaving for lunch. Some staff also happy to desk share as long as there are useful things like filing cabinets that can be used to share.
* Speaking in a personal capacity rather than for group the most frustrating space issues is, we have 'no space' but on any given day an office is half empty as too many people want a dedicated desk in case they feel like coming in. There needs to be greater co-operation across all groups (ours included!) in regards to desk sharing as most people are happy to work in a hybrid pattern. Those who only come in occasionally should be expected to hot desk and we need better provision for this to make it more acceptable, the library is not fit for this.
* Very happy that the dept. has been so flexible about continuing to work from home, as this really does help a lot of people with their hectic lives and allows those with caring responsibilities to juggle and not feel guilty about not being home when their child comes home from school, etc.