THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

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Desk Sharing Guidelines for Accessible & Ergonomic Workspaces

Desk sharing, sometimes known as "hot desking", is an arrangement whereby employees share desks instead of being assigned to an individual desk. Desk sharing can optimize use of space and create opportunities for collaboration among staff. To work effectively, it requires flexibility, understanding, and planning.

> **Prioritizing ergonomic and inclusive principles can help create a safe, comfortable, and welcoming environment for all.**

The following guidelines can help departments create effective desk sharing spaces. For more information, contact UBC's Ergo and Accessibility Programs at ergonomics.info@ubc.ca.

Step 1: Foster Inclusive Participation

➢ **Participatory approach.** Each office is unique. Managers and teams are encouraged to work together in planning equipment, layout, degree of personalization, booking processes, and expectations for using the space. Managers and staff/faculty should discuss requirements for specialized equipment.

➢ **Effective communication & support.** Managers should facilitate open and transparent communication regarding workspace changes, including helping staff understand the rationale behind these changes. Encourage staff participation in the decision-making process by soliciting their input and addressing their concerns. Let staff know that the design team will strive to make all workstations as inclusive as possible for a wide range of users. Assure staff that if workstations do not meet their accessibility needs, they are encouraged to let their manager know so it can be addressed.

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> **Change can be challenging, especially when people do not feel they have control over the decision. Effective communication can increase trust and minimize misperceptions or discontent.**

Accessibility & Ergonomics Check

- ❑ How have staff been involved in the planning process?
- ❑ Who will be impacted by a change to desk sharing?
- ❑ Is the diversity of our workforce reflected in our planning team?
- ❑ How have we gathered and considered feedback from our teams?
- ❑ How will we respond to questions and concerns that arise through this process?
- ❑ How and when do we plan to communicate with teams that will be impacted by a change to desk sharing?

Step 2: Design for Functionality

- ➤ **Identify the type of work being done.** How do teams spend their workdays? Consider the type of work required of teams using the space. Think about the need for collaboration and meetings, virtual calls, phone calls, and independent work requiring concentration. Most offices are likely to require a combination of these. Keep in mind that some people thrive in busy environments with many opportunities for social interactions while others excel in quiet spaces free of distraction.

- ➤ **Zoning and space planning.** Organize the space into quiet zones and collaborative zones. Zoning will provide people working on high concentration tasks with a quieter space to focus. Work with your team to try to make the space inviting and conducive to the type of work being performed. Provide access to bookable meeting rooms for in-person meetings as well as smaller bookable rooms for virtual meetings.

- ➤ **Booking system.** Determine how and when workstations will be shared. Will staff be assigned a desk partner on alternate days in the office, or will all

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spaces be bookable? If bookable, does your booking system allow workers to filter workstations according to features (i.e., quiet zones, height adjustable desks, keyboard trays, webcam, etc.)? How far in advance can the space be booked? Will there be limits on the number of consecutive days an individual can book the same workstation?

Accessibility & Ergonomics Check

- ❑ How can team members ensure they have the equipment they need to do their work each day in the office?
- ❑ How have we accounted for different types of work happening in the space?
- ❑ How can we provide minimal distraction zones in a desk sharing environment? Have we considered both noise and visual distractions?
- ❑ What challenges do we foresee with our plan (i.e., inadequate booking system, too much noise in quiet zones, etc.)? How can we mitigate these challenges?

Step 3: Select Ergonomic Furniture and Equipment

- ➢ **Excellent adjustability.** Shared workstations should have excellent adjustability so they can fit a wide range of users with different heights and equipment needs.

- ➢ **Training and instructions.** Information should be provided to staff and faculty about the specific equipment and furniture in their work area, including video links on how to adjust their chairs and information on how to request specialized equipment.

- ➢ **Purchasing and standardizing equipment.** Managers may need to work with senior leadership and their facilities teams to determine the specific equipment and furniture for each location.

> **Each workstation should have the following standard equipment available:**

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❑ **Keyboard and mouse.** External keyboard and mouse should be provided as standard equipment. Wireless ergo keyboards and ergo mice are nice to have but are not required as standard equipment.

❑ **Monitor.** External height adjustable monitors (minimum 23+") are available from UBC IT. At least one external monitor should be provided. If using 23" screens, dual monitors are common. If using ≥27" or 32" (4K) screen, one monitor should be sufficient (two 32" screens is too wide of a viewing angle).

❑ **Chair.** Each workstation should have one adjustable ergonomic office chair. See online examples (this list is meant to provide examples; it is not exhaustive).

❑ **Desk depth.** A 30" deep desk with leg clearance should be provided (if re-using existing desks, 24" deep desk is the minimum depth). If purchasing new, a 30" deep desk is recommended as it allows the user to place the monitors at a more comfortable distance for the eyes (large monitors placed too close to the eyes can result in eye discomfort).

❑ **Height adjustable desks.** Height adjustable desks are optimal as they are more versatile (see online examples and required height ranges). Height adjustable desks fit a wider range of individuals, and reduce the need for footrests and keyboard trays (extra expense that could be avoided) as the desk can be lowered and raised as needed. They also reduce the need for medical accommodation and support users in making positional changes throughout the day.

❑ **Keyboard trays or footrests.** If your office does not have height adjustable desks, plan to have a mix of keyboard trays and footrests at a minimum of 50% of the workstations so that all staff of varying heights can work at a comfortable level.

> **Standard office desks are 29" high - the right height for someone that is 6'. Most people need a keyboard tray or a footrest to get their keyboard and mouse below elbow level and feet firmly supported.**

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❑ **Work accessory and file storage**. Access to a place to store files and work accessories (such as ergonomic keyboards or mice) when individuals who use them are out-of-office is an asset.

Tips for standard office ergo accessories

These are some common accessories people may need to work more comfortably:

❑ **Palm rest.** Palm rests promote a more neutral wrist posture when typing and reduce strain on the wrist if used correctly. Some keyboards and keyboards trays have built-in palm rests, in which case, an additional palm rest is not needed. See online palm rest examples.

❑ **Monitor riser**. If the monitor is not height adjustable, a monitor riser

❑ Some monitors are height adjustable so risers may not be needed. Books or stacks of paper can be used as an alternative. Monitor arms can be installed, but it is important to exercise caution with these as the monitor arms can make it more challenging to position monitors where you want them. See online monitor riser examples.

❑ **Headphones.** Over the ear headphones or ear plugs can help those working in an open floor plan office. Overhearing distracting conversations from colleagues can make it difficult to concentrate.

❑ **Task light.** It's optimal for staff to be able to control overhead lighting (e.g. banks of lights on different switches so some can be turned off or on depending on need). There may be situations where individuals have sensitivities to overhead lighting; therefore, it is best to provide the option of floor or desk lamps, see online floor and task lamp examples.

❑ **Webcams**. If staff need to frequently join virtual calls that involve document screen sharing while cameras are on, webcams above the monitor can be helpful.

❑ **Personal storage.** Access to a locker or storage space for personal items such as an umbrella, extra shoes, running shoes, gym clothes, etc. is an

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asset. This is recommended so that staff and faculty do not have to bring all their belongings back and forth each day.

Step 4: Provide training, support & set-up time

➢ **Training.** Provide videos or written instructions for how to adjust the chairs (these should be provided by the vendor/manufacturer). Provide links to UBC's online office ergo resources and workshops.

➢ **Setting up.** Advise staff and faculty to schedule 5 to 10 minutes at the beginning of the day to adjust workstation.

➢ **Support.** Check-in with staff and faculty using the space and provide opportunities for users to provide feedback to managers and space planners. Advise staff and faculty that they can reach out to the Centre for Workplace Accessibility or the Ergonomics Program for accessibility and ergonomic support.