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Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

**Faculty of Veterinary Medicine and
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Annexe to: Dean's decision of 28 May 2019

The VH Faculty's policy for availability, email and meeting etiquette

Purpose and target group

The purpose of this document is to present the faculty management team's thoughts on staff availability and email etiquette, as well as a basis for personal reflection. A healthy attitude to today's technological work tools reduces stress among employees and improves the working environment.

Managers have a particular responsibility and must set a good example.

Summary

New technology does not mean that staff members are expected to be constantly available but allows for greater flexibility and higher expectations as to when colleagues are available. Increased flexibility makes it easier to reconcile work and private life, but increased availability using new technology can also lead to an increased workload. During certain periods, a higher workload can be acceptable, but the situation must not become permanent. Flexibility also makes it even more important to inform our colleagues about when we are available and when we are not.

If someone chooses, in consultation with their manager, to occasionally work evenings and weekends, this does not mean that colleagues can be expected to be available as well. New communication tools make instant communication possible, but can also prevent recovery and cause considerable stress. Emailing colleagues late at night, for example, also sends other signals than what is communicated in the message.

It is therefore important that the employer:

- makes it clear that employees are not expected to be available at all times – you should switch off your email/phone when you are on sick leave, on holiday or just want to be offline;
- clarifies that teachers are not expected to be available to students outside normal working hours;
- clarifies that students are not expected to be available to teachers outside normal working hours;
- encourages a climate of mutual respect when we use email and phones to communicate;
- creates awareness among staff of how we can use new technology in an optimal way.

When you are on leave or working from home

If you are not at the office but working anyway (on a business trip or working from home) you must do the following:

- write where you are and when you will be back at the office on the whiteboard by the door (or another available option);
- be available via email or phone, if possible.

If you want to work from home, your manager must approve this and you must follow current agreement/rules. By working from home, you make yourself less available to colleagues. At the same time, your home environment becomes your work environment, and your closest manager is de facto responsible for the latter.

If you are on sick leave, taking care of a sick child (VAB, vård av barn) or on any other kind of leave, you must do the following:

- register your leave in Primula;
- inform your immediate manager and ask them to write a note on your whiteboard (or another available option) and, if necessary, program an “absent” message on your fixed work phone;
- activate an out-of-office message in your email program.

You are not expected to answer the phone or emails when on leave. Therefore, you should activate automatic replies in your email program and on your work phone. You should also refrain from contacting absent employees on their private mobile phones.

Normally, we do not contact colleagues with work-related questions during leave (illness/VAB/holiday/leave of absence). An exception is managerial responsibility during illness, etc.

Phone, email and meeting etiquette

In 2016, the vice-chancellor approved new phone guidelines at SLU (only available in Swedish). Among other things, they state that all SLU employees should have a good “phone culture”, which means that all employees must do the following:

- represent SLU in a satisfactory way when talking to external parties and the general public;
- be available via a personal or shared telephone extension;
- return missed calls and voicemails.

Read the full document here (in Swedish): [Riktlinjer för användande av telefon vid SLU](#) (SLU ID:SLU.ua.2016.1.1.1-81)

You are expected to primarily send emails and make calls during normal office hours. In the case of urgent matters outside normal office hours, you may text or phone a colleague. Explain that it is an urgent matter if you expect an immediate response. If it is not urgent, colleagues are not expected to reply outside normal working hours or on the same day.

Tips for better email communication:

- State the subject clearly.
- Do not use the function “Reply all” if you do not want your email to go to everyone.
- The recipient does not have access to your thoughts, only to your text. Therefore, you should write clearly.
- Clearly state if and when you want a reply at the latest.
- Recipients who have been cc'd in an informative email are not expected to reply to the sender.
- Remember to take data protection into consideration when sending or forwarding emails.
- When scheduling meetings in Outlook, keep in mind that only the meeting creator can make any changes.

As far as possible, meetings should be scheduled between 9am and 4pm.

If possible, also avoid scheduling a meeting directly before or after another meeting. Preferably, there should be a 15-minute break between meetings.

Prepare meetings well to make sure they are effective, and send meeting invitations and supporting documents well ahead of time.