

Important Information About Our Return to Campus

By Jordan Morelli
President, QUFA

Mandatory Vaccination Policy

The QUFA Executive endorses Queen's University's recently announced policy mandating vaccinations¹ in order for students, staff, and faculty to access campus starting 7 September 2021. We look forward to working with the university administration as they make the necessary plans to implement this policy with a view to ensuring, among other things, that our Members' privacy is appropriately protected, that individuals requiring accommodations for medical or other protected grounds are treated in a fair and timely manner, and that QUFA retains our right to object on a case-by-case basis.

Accommodations: Vaccines

In anticipation of the requirements to produce evidence of vaccination status, to be vaccinated, and to wear a mask on campus, any Member who has not been vaccinated or cannot wear a mask for health or religious reasons should consider making a request for accommodation now. Please contact QUFA Grievance Officer Peggy Smith (smithpe@queensu.ca), who will assist you through the process.

Accommodations: Teaching

Queen's University and QUFA agreed to be bound by public-health directions, and this agreement is embodied in the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) on Course Delivery in 2021-2022.² According to Section 1e of this MOA, a QUFA Member "who is unable to teach in the mode assigned to them, because of a need based on a protected ground of discrimination under the Ontario Human Rights Code, shall identify their need for accommodation as soon as possible," but it may be difficult to predict the need for accommodation at this time. Protected grounds include family status. Depending on your vaccination status, the provincial and local public-health guidelines for how to respond to an outbreak in either a daycare-, school-, or university-related setting may require you to quarantine for a period of time.

You may also find yourself in need of unanticipated short-term accommodation if you have young children who are ineligible to be vaccinated because of their age, or if you are caring for a vulnerable family member. If you have questions or require assistance in getting an accommodation in place, please contact QUFA's Grievance Officer Peggy Smith (smithpe@queensu.ca) to discuss how to proceed.

Masks and Classroom Management

It is well established that "COVID-19 vaccines are important tools to help us stop this pandemic. Right now, we still need to follow public-health measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and save lives."³ These public health measures include minimizing interactions, avoiding closed and crowded places, improving ventilation, wearing a non-medical mask, and practising hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette.⁴ Regarding mandatory mask wearing, the university has signalled that everyone on campus will be required to wear masks while indoors, including in classrooms, labs, clinical teaching spaces, and libraries.

What has not yet been communicated is how this mask mandate will be enforced, or what steps are available to students, staff, and faculty who are unable to wear a mask owing to medical reasons or for other protected grounds. QUFA has been raising these questions, and others, since early this summer, but the university has not yet provided clear guidance or information. Despite repeated and ongoing requests from QUFA for the university to provide guidance and information, the university's Safe Return Web site⁵ still contains no information about protocols for how it will respond in the event of an outbreak within the university community, such as within a specific class, or general protocols for the day-to-day management of classes, including, for example, guidance about rights and responsibilities to enforce the wearing of masks.

Ventilation

As was indicated in the 6 August 2021 QUFA message about return to campus,⁶ at Queen's we have received assurances from the university since the spring that ventilation was being

improved and would meet or exceed standards. However, the university has not made public any information about ventilation measurements in campus classrooms. To date, neither the Joint Health and Safety Committees nor QUFA have been provided with specifics about which classrooms and buildings have been inspected, what standards are being applied, or the results of tests and measurements. It remains QUFA's position that the university has failed to comply with their obligations under both the Collective Agreement (Section 22.2) and the Occupational Health and Safety Act (Section 9.18). As a result, QUFA is filing a grievance.

Questions and Concerns About Your Return to Campus

Any QUFA Members with questions or concerns about the return to campus plans, including the vaccine and mask mandates, are encouraged to raise them with their unit head or dean. Specific health and safety concerns in your work area should be raised with the Joint Health and Safety Committee (JHSC) for that area.⁷ Of course, QUFA remains ready to assist in the event that the response from the university is inadequate or inappropriate. If you would like QUFA to be aware of any questions or concerns that you raise with the administration or the JHSCs, please copy them to QUFA Executive member Ayca Tomac (ayca.tomac@queensu.ca), who has volunteered to compile return-to-campus questions for us.

QUFA Updates

QUFA intends to continue to provide regular updates over the coming weeks as we prepare to return to class. We encourage the university to commit to doing the same.

Notes

- ¹<https://www.queensu.ca/gazette/stories/queen-s-require-covid-19-vaccinations>
- ²<https://www.qufa.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/2021-05-03-QUFA-and-Queens-Course-Delivery-in-2021-MOA.-SIGNED-003.pdf>
- ³<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/awareness-resources/know-vaccine.html>
- ⁴<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/prevention-risks.html#p>
- ⁵<https://www.queensu.ca/safereturn/>
- ⁶<https://www.qufa.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/QUFA-Message-re-Return-To-Campus.pdf>
- ⁷<https://safety.queensu.ca/general-safety/joint-health-and-safety-committees>

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