Decision regarding the start of the 2021 autumn semester as a result of COVID-19

Background

COVID-19 is currently spreading in society. A national vaccination is under way and the conditions can rapidly change. The University follows the Government’s, the Public Health Agency of Sweden’s and Region Västerbotten’s directives, guidelines and recommendations regarding COVID-19. Additionally, the Vice-Chancellor reaches the decisions deemed necessary. The university’s objective is that teaching and assessment can be carried out with maintained high quality. At the same time, the university is also working to reduce the spread of disease. The university follows the development and revises its decisions if new or updated national or regional guidelines are issued, or if the situation allows or requires. This decision has been made based on the university’s regular consultation with the Department of Communicable Disease Control and Prevention at Region Västerbotten.

On 17 December 2020, the Vice-Chancellor decided on the measures and adaptations for spring semester 2021 (FS 1.1-2617-20), valid until 7 June 2021. Furthermore, on 27 April 2021, the Vice-Chancellor decided on the equivalent decision for summer 2021 (FS 3.1.1-548-21) valid from 8 June until 29 August 2021.

To give staff and students at Umeå University better ability to plan their work and studies, this decision is valid for the initial part of autumn semester 2021, from 30 August until 29 September 2021, which equals the first of four 7.5 credit periods. By starting carefully, the university hopes to gradually be able to return to on-campus activities during the autumn semester. A new decision regarding the period after 29 September will be made and announced in August.

Decision

This decision is valid from 30 August until 29 September 2021.

The Vice-Chancellor has reached the following decision:

General communicable disease control measures

- Avoid visiting university premises if it is not necessary during this initial period.
- Those who visit university premises must be careful to follow the Public Health Agency of Sweden’s guidelines and general advice to reduce the spread of disease and maintain a safe distance to others. This also applies to public spaces such as study areas, canteens and cafés.
- Those who experience symptoms – even mild ones – must stay at home according to the Public Health Agency of Sweden’s and regional guidelines.
- People who share work or study places, and who have to be present at times, for instance in certain offices or labs, should discuss the possibility of alternating their presence in the facilities, i.e. some form of shift work.
All public spaces, lecture rooms, group study rooms and study spaces must be adapted for physical distancing to the extent possible.

Teaching
This section covers education on all levels – university entrance qualification level, Bachelor’s and Master’s levels, and doctoral education.

- Teaching is made possible with physical attendance for entrant students (beginner students) on study programmes provided that the teaching can be conducted in a disease-preventative and safe manner.

- Teaching for other students should take place online or through other adapted formats that do not involve physical attendance under the condition that reasonable demands on quality can be satisfied.

- In cases where education is conducted with physical attendance, the Public Health Agency of Sweden’s and regional guidelines and general advice must be adhered to. When teaching requires physical attendance, necessary distance between individuals must be ensured.

- Students who work in groups outside of their teacher-led education should maintain the same group throughout this period, and the group size should be as small as possible. The effect is best if the group does not exceed seven (7), according to the county medical officer. This applies to group work and similar exercises.

- Teaching can be scheduled to evenings if required to prevent the risk of spreading disease, but only with consideration for the ability of students and teaching staff to participate.

- Students who are to carry out a placement, thesis project, clinical training, teaching placement or similar must follow the guidelines and recommendations issued by the host organisation.

- If a student, who takes an on-campus course (as opposed to a distance learning course), cannot participate in a compulsory course component due to regional recommendations or equivalent, the department should investigate if adaptations can be made to enable the student to participate. If no such adjustments can be made, the student must be offered participation at the next available opportunity.

- If a student, who takes a distance learning course, cannot participate in a compulsory course component at the study location due to regional recommendations or equivalent, adaptations should be made to the extent possible to enable the student to participate. This could, for instance, be by using virtual tools for a compulsory course component. If no such adjustments can be made, the student must be offered participation at the next available opportunity.

Examination
This section covers education on all levels – university entrance qualification level, Bachelor’s and Master’s levels, and doctoral education.

- Examination should take place online or through other adapted formats that do not involve physical attendance under the condition that legal certainty can be maintained and that reasonable demands on quality can be satisfied.
In cases where education is conducted with physical attendance, the Public Health Agency of Sweden’s and regional guidelines and general advice must be adhered to. When examination requires physical attendance, necessary distance between individuals must be ensured.

If an examiner, due to circumstances caused by COVID-19, does not have the opportunity to notify students of their examination results within fifteen (15) working days of the examination date, notification of examination results can be made later. In that case, students must be informed of when their results will be communicated.

Examinations can be scheduled to evenings if required to prevent the risk of spreading disease, but only with consideration for the ability of students and teaching staff to participate.

The Examination Services at the Campus Services Office is instructed to schedule examinations to more days of the week than usual if deemed necessary to enable all examinations that cannot be adapted to other formats to be carried out.

When necessary, in order to schedule examinations, the Examination Services can demand that the duration of a written hall examination is limited to a maximum of four (4) hours. In cases when it is not possible to limit a written hall examination to a maximum of four (4) hours with regards to legal certainty and reasonable quality, the already scheduled examination may be moved to another time. If a written hall examination is to be rescheduled, the decision must be documented according to the instructions provided in the template (for rescheduling course, course module or examination) and students are to be notified as soon as possible.

Each dean has the authority to decide on the formats for and implementations of public defences of doctoral theses.

Deviations from syllabi and rescheduling of course or examination

Deviations from a course syllabus regarding forms for teaching and assessment may be made to the extent necessary to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Only the person who normally makes decisions on course syllabi and examinations is allowed to make decisions on necessary deviations and must ensure that the decision is well-documented and archived. In those cases where an examination requires access to a computer or internet connection, students must be offered such aids that allow them to participate from a technical perspective.

Decisions can be made to reschedule a course, course module or examination, or make a deviation from a programme syllabus to reduce the risk of infection if no other solution is possible. Such a rescheduling can take place within the 2021 autumn semester or to another semester, primarily to the 2022 spring semester. Such decisions can be made in a revised order to the one described in the Vice-Chancellor’s delegation of authority. Prior to making a decision to reschedule a course, course module or examination, a student representative must be consulted if possible. The Vice-Chancellor is hereby delegating to deans and the director of the Umeå School of Education to reach such decisions. This delegation of authority may be further delegated. Such further delegation of authority must be documented, archived and notified to the relevant student union and the students.
Travels, meetings and events

- Extensive restrictiveness must be taken regarding business travel, and online options must be the primary solution.

- Internal and external meetings, conferences, seminars, visits and similar must be implemented using online tools, alternatively be postponed or cancelled.

- No events for students or staff may take place in university premises. Serving alcohol is prohibited.

- All public events organised or co-hosted by Umeå University are cancelled or replaced by alternative formats. The concept “public events” does not include research and education on any level.

- Student unions are urged to observe applicable national and regional recommendations and guidelines, follow the development of the spread of COVID-19 and adapt current guidelines when implementing student onboarding and information campaigns about union activities.

- Student unions are urged to not organise events in external premises. This particularly concerns events in which alcohol is served or sold.

Staff and employment

- Staff who work with teaching entrant students (beginner students) at study programmes are given the opportunity to work at the workplace to the extent necessary to conduct on-campus education.

- All other members of staff must work from home to the extent possible and in consultation with their manager.

- Umeå University must continue to follow the Swedish Agency for Government Employers’ interpretation stating that employers can voluntarily remove the requirement for staff to produce a doctor’s certificate for day eight until fourteen of illness if there are ‘specific reasons’.

Other university organisations

- The Umeå University Library, including its study spaces and group rooms, will be open. The library director makes decisions on the library opening hours. Necessary precautions to reduce the risk of spreading disease must be taken.
A decision regarding Bildmuseet and Curiosum will be reached separately.

The Swedish Scholastic Aptitude Test may be implemented in university premises in accordance with special agreements set up with the Swedish Council for Higher Education (UHR) and based upon the requirements for special measures stated therein.

Delegation

The validity of the decision reached on 28 April 2020, including later revisions, has been extended – Delegation of authority due to COVID-19 (FS 1.1-973-20). This means that the appointments, delegations and adjustments regarding limitations and prohibitions of further delegations of authority noted in the original decision are still valid without alterations.

The validity of the decision reached on 19 May 2020 has been extended – Delegation of authority due to COVID-19 – Umeå School of Business, Economics and Statistics (FS 1.1-973-20). This means that the adjustments regarding limitations and prohibitions of further delegations of authority noted in the original decision are still valid without alterations.

This decision was reached by Vice-Chancellor Hans Adolfsson after presentation by Academy Clerk Daniel Andersson and Analyst Carl Larsson.