

From: [Vice-Chancellor](#)
To: allstaff_titlehol_vis_pgrs@list.adelaide.edu.au
Subject: [Alluniversity] Vaccination Policy and Direction – outcome of consultation
Date: Tuesday, 15 February 2022 9:54:23 AM

Dear Colleagues

As you are aware, consultation for the Pandemic Vaccinations Policy and associated Direction closed earlier this week. I would like to personally thank every one of you who took the time to provide feedback. We received close to 500 responses in total, with valuable contributions from staff, students and volunteers.

Let me say at the outset that I am a fervent believer in the benefit of vaccination and accordingly, I have repeatedly urged staff and students to become fully vaccinated. I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to become triple-vaccinated, and I am proud of our institution, which had a 90% first vaccination rate in October 2021, compared to 77% across the State at the time. Since then, the State as a whole has moved to 92% double-dose vaccination rate, even without a state-wide vaccination mandate. I am confident that the rate amongst our staff and students is even higher. I plead with everyone at our institution to get vaccinated and boosted if you are able to do so.

The objects of our current consultation were two-fold; namely the establishment of a Pandemic Vaccinations Policy and the proposed Direction addressing the COVID-19 situation as it currently stands. I will discuss those in turn.

Pandemic Vaccination Policy

The consultation process provided valuable commentary and did not indicate any strong objection to the existence of the policy and the mechanism that enables it. I remain convinced that the University requires the ability to direct its community to be vaccinated when the risk justifies the impact on the rights of individuals. **I have therefore decided to adopt the Pandemic Vaccination Policy** so the University can protect its community should future circumstances require. The Pandemic Vaccination Policy has been amended based on feedback. The updated version is [available here](#).

Vaccination Direction

I have considered the feedback and also consulted with health experts from across the University and beyond. In weighing up these inputs, I have been conscious that the proposal to adopt the Policy and Direction was prompted by the University's obligation to protect the health and safety of its staff, students and volunteers.

There are several factors I have considered, as follows:

1. Since the State re-opened its borders, the COVID-19 outbreak has rapidly evolved, with Omicron quickly becoming the dominant strain. Omicron has proven to be more contagious than previous variants and is able to infect vaccinated people in large numbers. While the evidence strongly indicates that vaccines provide protection against severe illness and death, it is also clear that current vaccines do not provide sterilising immunity and therefore do not completely stop transmission of the virus;
2. South Australia's vaccination rate has risen to 92% during the consultation period, and based on the vaccination survey undertaken last year, we have confidence that the rate among the University community is even higher;
3. Of the small percentage of our community who are not vaccinated, some will have contracted and recovered from COVID-19 and now have a level of natural immunity; and
4. Government strategies have evolved, and continue to evolve, away from suppression and towards strategies more focused on managing the capacity and stability of the health care system. The numbers of COVID hospitalisations are now declining and we have had no reports thus far of members of the University community requiring hospitalisation.

In summary, it is clear that Omicron has changed the landscape of the pandemic.

The University as an institution values science and is strongly supportive of the importance of vaccination as a means to ensure public safety. However, a decision to mandate vaccination should be proportionate and balance the expected impact on workplace safety against the right of staff, students and others in our community to choose not to be vaccinated at a particular point in time. Equally, it should take into account the conditions and requirements of the society outside work.

The risk posed by COVID-19 is reduced by our already very high vaccination rates, the low age profile of our community, and the existing and new controls the University is implementing. There is no vaccination mandate in the wider community, and we are not aware of any hospitalisation among members of the University community. This, combined with Omicron's ability to transmit to and from vaccinated individuals as well as unvaccinated individuals, makes it unclear that a vaccination mandate will result in a sufficient reduction of risk to justify a mandate.

Accordingly, **I have decided under current circumstances not to apply the Direction** and not to mandate vaccination as a pre-requisite for attending one of the University's campuses. For the avoidance of doubt, this will not preclude me from introducing a vaccination mandate in future should circumstances change using the Pandemic Vaccinations Policy referred to above. Any future Direction would also be the subject of consultation with the University community before it was adopted.

Having determined not to mandate vaccination, a range of other measures are actively being considered to protect our staff, students and the wider University community. These measures include:

- A requirement that masks are worn indoors at all times when on campus until otherwise decided;
- The provision of rapid antigen tests and prescribed masks in certain settings, with the University to provide a limited supply at no cost;
- Continued encouragement for people to stay at home if they are unwell and to undergo COVID-19 testing; and
- Development of protocols around teaching and learning activities and managing the disruption we can expect to occur through staff and students needing to quarantine or isolate away from campus.

The Incident Management Task Group (IMTG) is finalising the details of these measures and we will provide more information to you in the next few days.

For the avoidance of doubt, there will continue to be a mandate for vaccination in higher risk settings prescribed by Government and the University, such as in health care settings.

This has been a very difficult matter for me to wrestle with personally and I know it has been difficult too for sections of the University community. I am, as a person, strongly in favour of vaccination and I continue to urge every member of the University to be vaccinated and access boosters when they are eligible. Nonetheless, on balance, I judge that mandating vaccination currently is not a proportionate mitigation to the risk posed by Omicron with our very high vaccination rates within our University community and with current public health settings, including the absence of a broader societal vaccine mandate. Even so, I believe this was an important matter for the University to have debated and I was heartened by the level of thoughtfulness and respect displayed by everyone as part of the consultation process.

Thank you for your ongoing work to support the University.

Professor Peter Høj AC

Vice-Chancellor and President

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