



Tertiary Education Union (TEU) Te Hautū Kahurangi o Aotearoa (University of Waikato Branch) on the Proposed Changes to the School of Science at the University of Waikato

10/03/2021

TO:

**Professor Geoff Holmes, Pro Vice-Chancellor
Margaret Barbour, Dean of Science
Clare Bateson, HRM Consultant, University of Waikato**

Introduction

1. The New Zealand Tertiary Education Union (TEU) Te Hautū Kahurangi o Aotearoa is the largest tertiary sector union in this country, representing approximately 10,000 members, covering all types of TEOs in the sector, of which approximately 430 are members of the University of Waikato Branch. As such, we trust this submission carries the appropriate corresponding weight when considerations are made prior to any decisions regarding the proposed new structure. We make every effort in this submission to genuinely reflect the views of our members, and it is intended to support and complement the many individual and group submissions also made.
2. This submission responds to the proposed changes to the School of Science released on Friday 12th of February 2021.
3. TEU has consulted widely with its membership within the School of Science on both an individual and team basis.

4. TEU's submission does not address all the specifics of the roles affected; but is very concerned with the overall impact of the proposed changes on the School of Science staff, its students and the teaching and research capacity of the School.
5. TEU supports the submissions staff are making, both individually and in group submissions on the Proposal.

Process

6. TEU has serious concerns that there has been no engagement with TEU and the majority of staff prior to the current release of the change proposal of the School of Science on the 12th of February 2021. The change proposal, if implemented will have significant impacts on staff, students and the future teaching and research capacity of the SoSc, so not engaging with all parties is a real opportunity lost. The change proposal has been largely justified on the basis of the precarious financial position of the School and the fact that the School is predicting a budget deficit in 2021 of \$1.93 million. We note that the School of Science has got good faith obligations to its staff under both the Individual and Collective Agreements that cover them as well as good faith obligations under the Employment Relations Act. Such obligations require the School of Science to consult widely and to provide clear and concise financial and academic rationale for the change proposals that inform, justify and explain both the reason for the changes being proposed and the potential consequences of those changes. We don't believe that the University has met these obligations in this case. They have not supplied TEU or staff with any detailed financial analysis of their budget situation. Nor have they provided any detailed explanation or plan on how they intend to maintain the teaching and research capacity of the School, if the proposed changes are implemented. There is also sparse detail on how teaching programmes will be maintained and delivered, and how the associated workloads will be allocated to remaining staff
7. The proposal disestablishes 16 positions. This is on top of 8 positions that were lost as a result of enhanced retirements and voluntary redundancies at the end of 2020. The combined loss of staff equates to nearly a twenty percent reduction in staff FTE across the School. Many of these staff are Senior Academics and senior experienced technicians. This loss of intellectual capacity will have a dramatic impact on the School and its teaching and research capability moving forward, and this will have serious consequences on both its current students, its teaching and research programs and its ability to attract students and research contracts into the future.
8. There is an assumption by the School that some of the staff whose positions have been disestablished, will seek redeployment into new positions established in the proposal and that this will mitigate the overall loss of capacity. This may happen but it should not be assumed in this process. It should also be noted that considering the size of the proposed disinvestment in the staff of the School and because of the uncertainty of how teaching and research responsibilities will be reallocated within the School, it is likely that many staff not directly affected by the current proposal will be reconsidering their future at the University of Waikato.

Any further loss of staff in the near future would seriously escalate the drop in capacity and therefore impact on the reputation of School of Science and the University.

9. We draw to your attention Section H.5.3 of The University of Waikato General Staff CEA which states:

*'The employer will consult and explore options with the employee affected and his/her representative. Options to be explored include redeployment and retraining. Where reasonable efforts to resolve the surplus staffing situation through these options prove unsuccessful, **redundancy provisions may be invoked as a last resort**. Alternatively, the employee(s) affected may apply for redundancy without exploration of these options.*

The University of Waikato Academic Staff CEA has similar provisions. Why we draw this to your attention is that when TEU engaged with Dean Barbour and HR during the consultation period to explore possible redeployment options we were told that such options would not be considered until after a final decision on the proposals was made. To be frank, at that point it is too late because the impact of those decisions has already been set in concrete. Failure to explore redeployment and other options through the consultation period implies a predetermination in the consultation exercise and seriously limits the options available to the individual, the unit and the School of Science moving forward.

Finances

10. The School of Science has largely justified the proposals before us on the basis of the budget deficit the School is facing. We note that in 2020 the School of Science brought in \$13,763,500 in external research resulting in a \$4,000,000 increase between 2015 and 2020. However, the School of Sciences share of this research funding that contribution to the Schools balance sheet was only \$390k (less than 10% of the global increase). We question the justification and fairness of how external research funding is being allocated to the SoSc by the University. The reality is that downsizing the staff and capacity of the SoSc will have a significant impact on its ability to maintain and grow its external research funding into the future. This will have a negative flow-on impact across the whole of the University, because the University has taken a short sighted and self interested focus on how external research funding should be allocated.
11. We also note that the SoSc has argued that they need to improve its academic to student FTE ratio to one to twenty for undergraduate EFTS. This is a totally unrealistic aspiration and no SoSc in the country comes even close to achieving this. Reducing the numbers of academic staff (particularly senior academics) to try and achieve such ratios will not only have adverse impacts on the workload and stress faced by the staff but it will also compromise the quality of the teaching provided to students and therefore undermine the learning experience of those students. This is in direct conflict with one of the SoSc strategic aims which is to improve the

learning experiences of the students. Additionally teaching workload expectations on staff will also have a negative impact on both the quantity and quality of the research outputs of those same academic staff.

Specialised Services

12. The proposal is recommending that The Waikato Stable Isotope Unit (WSIU) be closed down by April 2021. It also proposes winding up by the end of 2022, the Liquid Scintillation measurement technique. We support the analysis and recommendations of the submission made by Professor [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] and reinforce the view expressed in their submission. We agree, that we should not make short term decisions because of the current financial crisis that undermine the capacity of the SoSc to respond to future opportunities for research and external income generation. We note that the SoSc's own investigation late last year into these units highlighted the lack of financial oversight and the need to increase charges particularly for internal clients and students. We believe a rigorous analysis and resetting of charges would secure the financial liability of these units. It should also be noted that we maybe penny wise and pound foolish by closing down the units because funding of alternative options/providers to meet the needs of internal users would be significantly more expensive. The WSIU has international accreditations and a high National and International reputation which impacts on the University of Waikato's QS rankings which is another reason why the long term viability of these Units is critical.

13. The SoSc has highlighted significant expenditure will be required in 2021 and beyond to address maintenance and repair costs to the specialist units in question. The decision by the University of Waikato to defer all non urgent maintenance and refurbishment across the University in mid-2020 so that they could guarantee the financial viability of the Pa proposal should not be used to justify these costs being reallocated back to the SoSc to negatively impact on its/in its balance sheet. The cost of such capital expenditure should be allocated over the life of the buildings and equipment and used to ensure its efficient and effective operation and usage.

Diversity

14. TEU notes the number of female and non pakeha staff that are having their positions under the proposal disestablished (and the very recent resignation of research fellow Dr [REDACTED]) when the SoSc's own 2021-26 strategic plan highlights the need to increase the enrolment and success of Maori students and increase the extremely low number of Maori staff appointments. The SoSc claims that one of the goals of the proposal is to free up resources to support improving the diversity of its staffing compliment. The SoSc therefore might want to reflect how this proposal is going to achieve that. Further, considering the recent claims and acceptance by the University of Waikato that institutional racism is prevalent across the University, the SoSc might like to reflect and reconsider the justification and criteria used to determine which individuals are having their positions disestablished.

15. The SoSc highlights in its strategic plan the need to connect with Maori science networks for both research and teaching and to attract more Maori students, however there is no plan or strategy on how and who would do this. The SoSc also wants to attract more female students to the School yet again there is no plan or strategy to do so. Reducing in percentage and real terms the number of female academic and technical staff and therefore the ability to role model gender diversity in the Science discipline for female students is counterproductive.

Pro Vice-Chancellor (HECS)

16. Many staff have questioned TEU over the role the PVC, Professor Geoff Holmes, has played in requiring the SoSc need to downsize and meet his financial expectations. Staff have highlighted that he has not taken any part in the preparation of the proposal or engaged with staff over the academic or financial consequences that will impact on the SoSc. Staff have asked why there has not been in depth analysis of the overhead contributions made by both the SoSc and the HECS division to the University of Waikato's global financial situation. Staff have also questioned why there has not been stronger advocacy, acknowledgment and fairer allocation of the external research funding that the SoSc generates.
17. Staff have also questioned the rationale for the current proposed significant disinvestment in the SoSc and its staff which generates 600 student EFTS and \$13.7 million in external research revenue while at the same time the Division is investing significant funding in staff and capital resources to establish a School of Nursing that hasn't generated any research income and which is capped at 60 student EFTS for the next 3 years. Effectively the SoSc (and other Schools within HECS) are being expected to cross subsidise the establishment of the School of Nursing at a time where supposedly the Division and the University are under financial pressure. We would like to see the academic and financial justification for this cross subsidisation and the business case that supports it.

Recommendations

18. TEU recommends that an immediate case is made by the SoSc and supported by the HECS Division for the University to reconsider the rationale and criteria used for the allocation of external research funding between the University centrally and the Schools and the Divisions that generate it. At the moment there are perverse incentives that are undermining the allocation of resources and staffing to the SoSc. These need to be addressed to ensure that the SoSc's research and teaching outputs are appropriately recognized, valued and financially acknowledged so we can ensure a viable future for the SoSc, its staff, its students, teaching and research futures.

19. That last years proposed strategic reviews of the Waikato Stable Isotope Unit (WSIU) and the Waikato Radiocarbon Dating Laboratory (WRDL) progress as planned. That business cases for both units be developed and resourced to secure their long-term financial viability. Accordingly, that the positions being disestablished within these units be withdrawn.

20. That the positions being disestablished within the academic teams be put on hold until a detailed analysis of the teaching and research programmes is carried out. Such an analysis needs to take into account the impact that reducing staff would have on the scope and quality of the teaching and research programmes that each academic unit delivers. It would also need to consider the impacts on student learning, how workload would be redistributed across the unit and across the SoSc as a whole.

Conclusion

For Aotearoa our guiding principal is;

He tangata, he tangata, he tangata

It is the people, it is the people, it is the people

For Te Aka Mātuatua – School of Science we suggest our guiding principle should be;

Ko nga tauira, ko nga kaimahi, ko nga tangata katoa o Aotearoa

It is the students, it is the staff, it is all the people of Aotearoa.

Shane Vugler
TEU Branch Organiser

Annie Barker
Co Branch President

Vicky Young
Co Branch President