

UoA TEU Branch Submission

Proposal to establish of a new faculty, combining the faculties of Arts, Education and Social Work, and Creative Arts and Industries, with 2 Options

Due: 23 April 2024

The Employer has failed to meet its obligations under the Employment Relations Act s4(1A)(c) as it has been stated that this proposal will lead to future restructuring, delivering job losses. Failing to provide access to information relevant to the decision is a serious omission on the part of the Employer.

Furthermore, it appears from this proposal that the Employer has already decided that the faculty merger will take place in one form or another which further breaches the requirements of s4(1A)(c)(ii). This section states that an opportunity to comment must be provided, with full access to relevant information prior to any decisions being made.

Summary Overview of Member Feedback

“There is so much about this proposal that distresses me, I am not sure where to begin.”

UoA TEU members are greatly concerned about this proposal. The TEU Branch Committee undertook a survey to gauge member reactions. Respondents to the survey overwhelmingly (nearly 70%) do not see this proposal as having a positive impact on themselves and their colleagues. While many of our members will be submitting individual or group feedback on the proposal, our submission brings together the concerns of our Branch Committee, survey respondents, and individual members who emailed us directly, including after participating in Faculty hui with senior leadership. To ensure the voices of our members are heard, illustrative quotes are included in this collective submission.

Criticisms focus on the content, rationale, risks, timing, and decision-making process for this proposed restructure within the context of senior management failing to provide adequate information, details, and time to ensure sound, fully informed feedback. Members also have asked:

- why a more “bottom-up” approach to merging these three faculties isn’t possible, allowing schools in the three faculties to build and connect in meaningful ways? A change led by the staff and facilitated by the university, rather than a top-down order coming through senior management, would make for a truly robust and resilient new faculty.
- for assurances from senior management that no job losses will occur as a result of this restructure.
- for an extended timeline for implementation, as January 1, 2025 is entirely too soon.

Another member has shared business research findings that the senior management will find useful. In a 2021 study of corporate transformative initiatives, McKinsey & Company said that in fifteen years of global research they concluded that “success remains the exception, not the rule.”

In a more recent report and follow-up discussion, “Driving long-term business transformation” (April 16, 2024), which draws from that study, one of their senior researchers said: “We’re constantly transforming... This can be an uncomfortable idea...however...issues such as changes in costs, profits and efficiencies are not the only issues that matter... Other issues are also important, such as having a culture that sustains you on the journey, and that’s probably the hardest of all.” Another senior executive said that other factors that are critical in getting employees to change include... “the work environment, how they’re recognized, how they’re appreciated, whether the work itself is interesting, whether they feel they are learning; all of these things matter. And you cannot disconnect them from the rest of the transformation.”

“It sounds like the people driving the Arts Faculty transformative change may not understand these key factors for a successful transformative change.”

Content of the Proposal

“Quite frankly it’s embarrassing how poorly prepared this plan is. If a uni student submitted this as an assignment they would fail for incomplete work.”

The proposal overall is profoundly lacking in substantive content, with more information, specificity, and explanation of what the restructure would entail absolutely necessary. The slow drip of information coming from senior management over this consultation period has been inadequate and poorly timed.

“We have been presented with a dumbed-down version that refers only to vague benefits but not all to costs (in terms of workload, job losses).”

While we can acknowledge that this is a “stage 1” consultation document, and that there will be further consultation during the transition phase, the overall effect of releasing such an incomplete document with so little relevant information has simply been to cause widespread a feeling of precarity and uncertainty amongst staff and potentially reputational damage for the university.

“Frankly, a lot more information is required. At this stage the lack of details is concerning and demoralising.”

In cases where there were benefits it is important to know the conditions under which they were produced. The VC’s former University of Western Australia would be a pertinent example. There needs to be a workload audit, an EFTS analysis, enrolment and financial projections, and modelling to estimate potential staff, both professional and academic, reductions.

“With this Trojan Horse of the merger, what other things will then unfold that we will be told that we have agreed to but actually are not clearly set out at this point?”

On many of these vital matters, senior management is failing to fulfill its responsibilities and apparently “kicking the can down the road” and leaving it to the new merged Faculty leadership. As per the FAQs on Uni website: “Strong leadership within the faculty, coupled with a clear vision, will guide the integration process.” That “clear vision,” transparency, and communication needs to come now.

“It is difficult to understand whether the proposal is positive or not given the lack of information about how it will be realised in practice.”

While possibilities for positive outcomes exist for some individual staff members, research collaboration, and protecting and re-energising disciplines and programmes, the proposal fails to spell out how those positive outcomes will be realised.

“It’s a bit difficult to see how some of those would emerge given what details we’ve been given so far.”

Regardless of their own personal position, members remained concerned about the proposal’s major impact and implications, including job losses for colleagues and peers who they have previously worked with given the lack of detail being presented by the proposal.

“The proposal is unlikely to affect me or my immediate colleagues, but I still have extreme reservations about it.”

Rationale for the Proposal

The proposal includes erroneous assumptions about how the different Faculties and programmes operate, their workplace cultures, research needs, and disciplinary identities. For example, mention of science and mathematics in education when the Faculty of Science isn’t part of the proposed merger makes no sense. For another example, it appears the proposal’s authors know little about teacher education in proposing online delivery.

“On what planet is never seeing students a good pedagogical option?”

The rationale for the proposed restructure is seriously vague and inadequate; it is unclear in terms of academics or economics. Moreover, in the VC’s webinar and in Faculty hui, senior management have been unable to answer fundamental questions about the rationale and

justification for the restructure, exacerbating staff concerns about this proposal. To make such a momentous, impactful decision affecting so many staff and students requires reasons for doing so. The proposal needs much more explanation and justification of the change and greater discussion and demonstration of the promised outcomes.

“In answer to a question about what metrics senior management would be using to assess the success of the restructure, they could only offer vagaries.”

A “one-size fits all” rationale for this proposed restructure does not work for the three very different faculties in different circumstances. Student numbers and projections differ across the three faculties. Moreover, factors shaping student enrolments constitute a larger political problem for the government and Aotearoa NZ, which senior management should be addressing with government. It is not appropriate to assume one change can encompass the requirements of very diverse faculties, with very different teaching pedagogies and research practices.

“The positive benefit statements are very broad-brush rhetoric; benefits for each faculty need to be outlined.”

The proposal claims that the restructure will prove greater opportunities for staff to collaborate across disciplinary/faculty boundaries; this claim of greater inter/transdisciplinary collaboration is problematic on two counts. Inter/transdisciplinary collaboration in research and teaching is already happening across the University (as well as nationally and internationally) without “dismantling existing structures.”

The development of new transdisciplinary courses is evidence of this, and students already can take classes from different faculties as they wish. Moreover, no plan for or evidence demonstrating that greater inter/transdisciplinary collaboration will occur in the new merged faculty is offered.

“Greater research collaboration? On what basis can they claim that? Collaboration can’t be forced.”

One obvious rationale is missing—financial—but the proposal doesn’t include this. In the VC’s webinar, she referred to changes in the business model of universities, to the possibility of peak student-age population, and to the vulnerability of some programmes, but no hard data, financial forecasting, or discussion of these matters is presented in the proposal.

We know both Arts and EDSW are Faculties with declining EFTS, but how will merging the two achieve greater “resilience” or “efficiency” without ensuing cuts to programmes and academic and professional staff roles?

“There must be financial advantages of this significant move for the university, otherwise why do it? I wish there had been more honesty about where they plan to make any ‘savings’ by forming an uber-faculty.”

Specific promised benefits cannot be realised through the faculty restructure. For example, the claim that the merged faculty will better serve the Bachelors in Social Justice Studies, Global Studies, and Communication is impossible without reorganising the schools where these degrees are based, which this proposal does not cover. Such errors again raise concerns about the proposal’s flawed justification for the restructure.

“This reads like jargon and spin - without an evidence base for the claims they are making.”

Other proposed benefits are similarly debatable. One of the “positives” of moving Architecture and Planning over to the Faculty of Engineering is to “increase diversity” in Engineering, rather than actually implementing strategies to increase diversity in Engineering.

Another ostensible benefit mentioned is that TAs and GTAs could be “utilized” in new “flexible” ways by the new faculty, but there is no clear indication of what benefits this supposed “exposure” to “a wider range of specialisms” might actually offer TAs and GTAs, nor what kind of training and support would be provided if contracted to teach in an area not related to their study and expertise.

“One of the listed benefits is the potential to explore sharing technical staff. However, technical staff are typically highly specialised regarding their area of expertise, and these specialist skills are not immediately transferable to other technical areas. Technical staff members reported that they do not think there is much potential benefit here.”

“I am thus very concerned that this proposed restructure will open up TAs and GTAs to further unpaid workload creep and to further exploitation as a contingent labour force.”

Risks of the Proposal

“If the end result is cost-cutting, redundancies, and making everyone else work harder, it will be a disaster.”

Risks are completely absent from this proposal. “Risk” is mentioned only once in the proposal, and that is in the context of not merging rather than by merging, and there are many. There is no clear evidence that the many risks identified below are being taken into account or discussion of how they will be mitigated, giving the impression this proposal is being pushed forward recklessly.

“Given our previous experience of change from the centre (the new student hubs, the new admission system) we have very little trust that any change will not create a worse situation in the first instance.”

Job losses are the number one risk in this proposed restructure, with devastating implications for staff, students, and programmes. At the VC’s webinar, senior management could not give any assurance that job losses will not happen. Given the talk of “efficiencies” to come out of a restructure, it appears job cuts are on the table primarily for professional staff but likely academic staff later on. Cuts in staffing not only affect the individual facing job loss, but increase the workload on those who remain. Never acknowledged by senior management is how cuts in professional staff jobs result in the loss of institutional knowledge and transfers additional administrative tasks to both professional and academic colleagues—to everyone’s detriment.

“We are constantly losing colleagues, training new ones, trying to work out who the new point of contact for routine things is, and reinventing the wheel because everyone who used to know how it worked has left.”

Another clear risk is the work and increase in workload entailed in implementing this proposed restructure in the first place. Entirely missing from the proposal is how much work is required to transition to the new structure, at what cost, and who will do it.

We need a “Workload Impact Statement” for the proposed restructure otherwise the work involved remains invisible to senior management. Moreover, staff and student “churn” due to uncertainty has damaging effects on staff morale and workloads and student recruiting and enrolments.

“Such a restructuring requires an enormous input of time and energy from staff, and it is not clear there are advantages from the change that merit such an effort.”

The timeline for the proposed restructure is also a high risk. This proposal, its content and rationale, are rushed and, thus, not fully considered. What is the rush to get this done and how can it possibly get done by January 1st?

The very short timeline for implementation will be incredibly disruptive, chaotic, and confusing. Moreover, this proposed change will happen just after the SSFR, for which fallout and confusion (unacknowledged by senior management) continues, and EDSW staff and student relocation to city campus, and just as elements of the CFT are implemented, including the new required WTR courses. Individual faculties are also engaged in their own change processes at this time; there is the very real possibility these will work at cross purposes.

It must be acknowledged that this proposal and the vague timelines come at a time when the university will be pulling senior management into negotiations for four collective agreements, a time and resource intensive time for any large employer. It is inconceivable that the university have considered the commitments they have to ensure a smooth and productive negotiations and

investing in the futures of its staff when putting into place a large scale and disruptive proposal such as this one.

“It is pretty irresponsible for the University management to rush through this merge so quickly without seriously considering how this merge is going to affect staff's work conditions in view of that many of us are overworked.”

Poor change management and change exhaustion plagues the University of Auckland. This proposal and the VC's claim that the transition will be easy and seamless ignores the clear and demonstrable change exhaustion (fatigue doesn't capture it) affecting staff.

“It's the anxiety of the unknown.”

The way in which senior management rolls out change is detached from the reality of staff and student experience, despite that experience being conveyed with crystal clarity in the last staff survey. Part of the problem is senior management failing to fully explain and justify change and failing to communicate to us as smart, capable colleagues. These failures exacerbate anxiety, stress, and demoralisation among staff.

“I and everyone around me are just so incredibly worn out from change after change after change. It feels like our job description is increasingly just ‘responding to changes that don't make sense’—detracting time, cognitive and emotional energy, and resources from the research, teaching and service we are supposedly paid to do.”

Another certain risk will be the creation of yet another layer of administration, exacerbating the administrative workload and problems for staff and students alike. For example in Arts, the dissolution of departments and introduction of schools required more management and increased the administrative burden.

The workload for many academic service and professional staff positions, especially at the Faculty-level, vastly increases in these larger structures. More systems, processes, sign-offs, meetings, and communication will be needed with this restructure.

“Integrating these administrative functions will be complex and time-consuming.”

The way teaching and administration happens across the current Faculties varies widely; even professional staff roles that have the same job title do not necessarily do the same work. The need to find out which differences exist and what priorities roles would have within the new

faculty, as well as aligning expectations and skill sets among staff cannot realistically be achieved in 6 months.

Concern was expressed from staff in the CAI schools that could go with Engineering about the much higher risks of cultural safety in being with Engineering - with staff having to rebuild 25 years of work in these areas. (This aligns with concerns seen and heard from other staff too, including higher unconscious bias levels in the faculty, for the safety of women at times due to an environment of sexism, and the research and teaching cultures of Engineering not aligning with creative practice and qualitative research). Due to these matters, some staff in the affected CAI schools have said they would rather go with Arts, Education and the other CAI departments.

“Concern that everytime there is a Uni and faculty restructure it hits Māori and Pacific staff the hardest, and much of the room nodded in agreement at that point.”

Process

“This is a restructure which will lead to numerous staff losing their jobs and to call this anything else is a joke and insult to our intelligence.”

The decision-making and consultation process for this proposed restructure has been abysmal. All the problems with this proposal as listed above—lack of full information as to the content, rationale, and risks—mean staff do not have the information needed to participate in this process in a meaningful way, nor does senior management appear to have the information it needs to make a sound decision. In fact, it is only in response to staff questions that senior management has provided more information, posting answers week by week, with more provided just last Friday, 19 April, four days before the submission is due. This drip-feed of information has made it challenging, to say the least, to prepare a submission, particularly in the entirely inadequate timeframe of one month for consultation.

The process also is not giving enough time for student engagement, as that consultation is being left to the faculties, and there’s only been two weeks after mid-semester break to engage with students on this question. We aren’t aware of any student feedback happening.

“The proposal suggests a level of deception (or, the alternative explanation, incompetence) are not reassuring.”

It appears that, in fact, this consultation process is a sham anyway, and that a decision has already been made. The provost’s statement at the Faculty of Arts meeting conveyed as much, when, to paraphrase, she admitted that senior management was saying if there is a restructure, because if they didn’t say if, they wouldn’t be able to say they had consulted us.

Again and again, in TEU members' feedback the lack of an honest and transparent decision-making and consultation process just further undermines employment relations here:

“This merger has not been done in good faith and any allusion to it being an ‘if’ rather than a project that’s already been decided upon is insulting.”

“There are legitimate questions to be asked about the University’s commitment to transparency and whether it has fulfilled due diligence.”

“I am tired of management saying they are transparent when they must have been considering this proposal for some time. It does nothing to build trust.”

Questions have also been raised about future consultation, if this proposal is accepted and the restructure happens. The Employer did not engage in pre-consultation with TEU before this proposal went out, ostensibly because this is an administrative merger not a restructure entailing job losses, but going forward the TEU has rights to pre-consultation. Moreover, consultation on the leadership structure and professional job positions in the new merged faculty needs to happen. Both academic and professional staff (Managers, Team Leaders, GSCs and GSAs) must be fairly represented and involved in the process.

Reference to section 2 of the UoA/TEU Collective Agreement (Academic) is recommended for the Employer to refresh memories as to undertaking to consult with the TEU prior to release of proposals such as this one.

Remaining Unanswered Questions & Recommendations from TEU Members

The various reasons given in the proposal for the restructure require much more specificity and explanation. Evidence to support this proposal is not presented. It is shocking that, as a research-led University, senior management fails to present concrete, convincing evidence to support the proposed restructure. The following vital matters need clarification and elaboration:

- why not have two faculties rather than one?
- what investment will the University make to ensure that the new faculty is as “resilient” as senior management claims it will be?
- given the likelihood of job structuring, what jobs will be targeted, what will be the process and timeline for that, and what assurances—given problems with this current consultation process—do we have that proper consultation with the TEU and staff will happen?
- how will these three very different Faculties work together, with different Staff Student Ratios, teaching models, etc.?

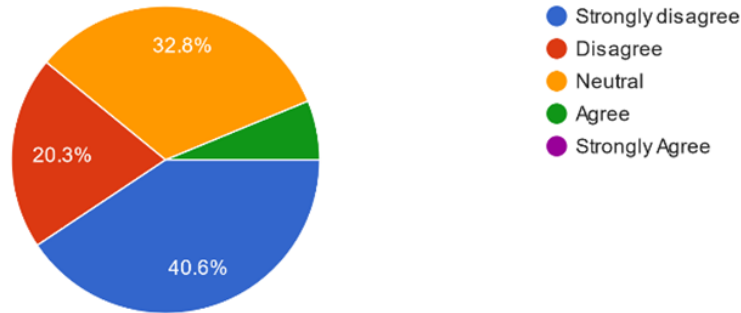
- Option 1 versus Option 2:
 - Why do these make sense, such as merging SoAP into Engineering?
 - What other options were considered and how were these two selected?
 - What criteria will be used for selecting between the two options?
 - What is the process for deciding which option will be chosen?
- how to explain the “fit” of different programmes within the new merged faculty, such as Sport with Arts? Or SoAP with Engineering (as architecture is not only producing buildings but creating spatial experiences and relations too)?
- proper designs for curriculum/pedagogy, leadership structure, and faculty/school organization are needed:
 - will programmes/majors be recombined, delivered only online, or only a postgraduate level?
 - how will this affect Associate and Assistant Dean positions?
 - how will this affect all the processes that happen at Faculty level, such as promotions, RSL decisions, research funding decisions, equity matters, etc.?
- how will this fit with CFT?
- how will the University maintain and acknowledge the distinctive heritage, legacy and reputation of the three faculties?
- where are the comparative studies?
- where has this model of merging of faculties been implemented, and what have been the positive and negative outcomes?
- what was the impact on staff workload, morale, productivity, efficiency?
- is there any evidence that mergers and restructures address the issues and strengthen the academic base of the resulting faculty?
- what are the implications for our international rankings?
- what will be the impact on Staff Student Ratios?
- what risk does this pose to EDSW’s teacher education courses and programmes and ability to provide rich and supported learning in teacher education?
- upon which of the University’s “strategic goals” is this proposal based?
- what does “resilience” look like, for whom, and against what?
- what “efficiencies” will be achieved with “scale” and at what cost for staff workload?
- what “scale” does senior management perceive as big enough to ensure a “sustainable future”?
- how is a “sustainable future” defined and measured?
- how will the promise and rhetoric of “opportunity” be realised?

“What are you going to call this mosaic faculty without making us sound like a laughingstock?”

Appendix for Survey Data

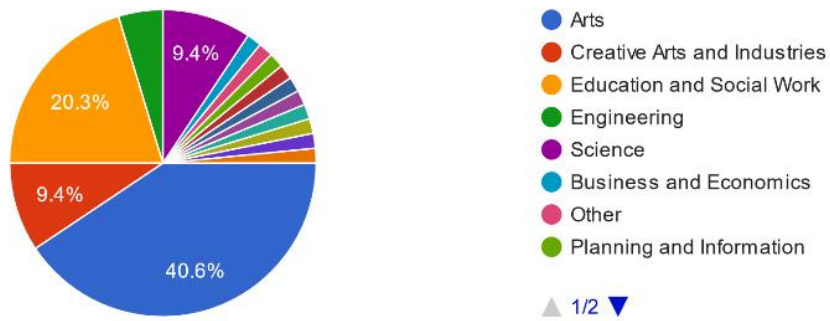
Rate how much you agree with this statement: "the proposal seems positive for me and my colleagues."

64 responses



Which faculty are you from?

64 responses



What is your primary affiliation with the University?

64 responses

