

To: Professor Henrietta O'Connor (PVC Head of CSSAH), Professor Richard Thomas (Dean of Research CSSAH), Professor Phil Baker (PVC Research), Professor Jim Devlin (Dean of ULSB) and Professor Dan Ladley (Deputy Dean of ULSB)

Dear Review Group members,

We the undersigned members of academic and professional services staff and PGRs at the School of Business express our grave concern at the strategic direction outlined in the Case for Change. This currently includes the threat to the jobs of thirteen friends and valued members of our research community.

We are all affected by this situation. We are concerned for the wellbeing of those colleagues at risk and about the future implications for every person in the School.

The Case for Change Process

Information has been incomplete and disseminated inconsistently. Most staff have not seen the full Case for Change, and there has been no publication of the new School strategy. Presentations and written summaries offered by the Dean have been too brief to facilitate sufficient consultation or reassurance, and the Dean has excluded the Senior Management team from the process. Legitimate questions asked via formal bodies such as the School Research Committee and Learning and Teaching Committee remain unanswered.

The process has been disturbing and distressing, especially for colleagues at risk. There remains no presentation of the evidence that has been used to determine the proposed Case for Change and to support the disinvestment in some research areas and the investment in others. Despite this, thirteen of our colleagues continue to be in scope for redundancy based on the subjective decisions of two non-subject experts, who determined they undertook research which was deemed to fit a specific definition of critical management studies or political economy.

The School-wide Impacts

Through the redundancy consultations, it has become apparent that the scope of the process has broadened to include 'other areas not aligned with the proposed future strategic direction' of the school. For example, strategy, sustainability, international business, business environment, logistics, MIS, innovation, and entrepreneurship are only accepted from a 'mainstream' perspective. 'Mainstream' remains undefined. Perhaps most worryingly, there is also a suggestion that sociological perspectives, and critical approaches more generally, are not valued. Additionally, publication in specific journals and citations which are now deemed 'unaligned' have been used to support individual redundancy decisions.

As such, the Case for Change and associated redundancy process severely threatens research autonomy and academic freedom within the School. Statements to the contrary in the recent FAQ document circulated by the Dean are undermined by his comment that 'over time it is hoped that staff will reflect on their personal research agenda and how they might best contribute to the strategic priorities of the School'.

Furthermore, it raises concerns of the way that all research will be evaluated in the future. The prospect that whole research 'areas' could be divested by a top-down process, or that particular kinds of research could be arbitrarily determined as aligned or non-aligned with strategic priorities is a concern for everybody in the School, including those who might consider themselves to be researching in mainstream areas and from mainstream perspectives.

The Case for Change is primarily about research, but no part of the School is unaffected. In the short-term, there are the workload implications associated with the fourteen modules that are currently convened or co-convened by at-risk staff. This will have significant impacts on the delivery of the BA Business and Management, BA HRM and BA Marketing from September 2021, as well as the MSc Management and MSc International Management from August 2021. There is also insufficient supervisory capacity to cover the numerous PhD students currently supervised by at-risk staff, and these PhD students will no longer be able to draw upon the subject expertise that is central to the successful and timely completion of their research.

In a School that claims to deliver research-led teaching, the medium-term impacts are more fundamental; if areas of research are disinvested from and certain research perspectives, methodologies and journals deemed unacceptable, then our autonomy over what and how we teach is also threatened. This will also require substantial reworking of current module content, and module and programme specifications. Furthermore, our ability to attract high quality PhD students will be severely affected by the reputational damage. There are numerous other impacts, concerns and queries raised in the Consultation Response documents of the Research Committee (9th February) and WEMO L&T Committee (25th February).

As a result of the current Case for Change process, the morale in the School is at an all-time low. There is a lack of trust in School leadership and governance, and there is a strong sense that voices are being silenced and divisions being created between staff. Many external voices have also raised deep unease; external examiners have resigned, protest letters have been signed by thousands and statements of opposition have been issued by prominent journal editorial boards and professional associations. The reputational damage to the School and University caused by this exercise has been immense.

We call on the Dean to:

1. Reverse the policy of compulsory redundancies within the School associated with the Case for Change;
2. Provide prompt and satisfactory responses to the genuine concerns related to the Case for Change raised in this Open Letter, but also those detailed in the Research Committee Consultation Response and the WEMO L&T Consultation Response; and
3. Engage in meaningful consultation with academic and professional staff within the School in order to establish the future direction of the School.

Signed

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- 2 Paul Brook, Work and Employment Division
- 3 Charlie Smith (Management and Organisation)
- 4 Dr Joseph Choonara (Work & Employment)
- 5 Warren Smith, M+O Division
- 6 Marta Gasparin, MISO
- 7 Sally Exon (PGR, Work and Employment Division)
- 8 Dan Hamilton, Professional Services
- 9 Salma Baz (Work and Employment Division ULSB)
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55 Wissawa Jenjob, PhD student
56 Cristina Galalae, MISO
57 Paul Conville, Work and Employment
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- 59 Anthony O'Tierney, M&O
- 60 Cristina Fona, MISO
- 61 Deborah Price W&E
- 62 Mandi Jamalian, MISO
- 63 Will Lewis (MISO; Cranfield)
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- 65 Emeritus Professor Ian Parker, Management
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- 67 Sara Lemos, EFA
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- 69 Geoff Lightfoot, M&O
- 70 Amanze Ejiogu, EFA
- 71 Sam Dallyn, M&O
- 72 Chris Grocott, M&O
- 73 Chandrima Roy, W&E
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- 79 Sujata Telang
- 80 Roy Clinton, PhD Student
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112 Louisa Horne, PhD student
113 Ruoying Zhou, MISO
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117 Polina Khrennikova, EFA
118 Francisco Martinez Mora (EFA)
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127 Carlos Diaz Vela (EFA)
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130 Federica Salvatori (EFA)
131 Efthymia Ioli Argyraki (EFA)
132 Maha Baz Radwan, PhD student
133 Professor Stephen Pollock (House of Lords)
134 Maha Baz Radwan, (PhD student)
135 Jingyi Mao (EFA)
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