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Consultation key to workplace democracy

James Dale, Massey University

The recently proposed changes announced by Massey University | Te Kunenga ki Pūrehuroa shine a spot light on bigger issues about how decisions are made at our universities, and who gets a say in decision-making processes.

For the College of Science, the proposed changes were delivered as a discussion document emailed to us on the first day of classes. Massey staff had no idea that such radical proposals were coming, let alone that we would be launched into something that seems like a case study in over-management and poor consultation. But here we are, and now it's our responsibility to make ourselves heard.

Many affected staff and students are still processing the proposed changes, and the lack of consultation in their development. There is a widespread sense from my sciences colleagues, and from other affected colleges, that the past weeks have revealed serious flaws in staff and student involvement in decision-making. Indeed, exactly how Massey decides to proceed could potentially leave a lasting impact on education in New Zealand.

The lack of consultation we have seen at Massey brings the university's mission

statement as an education provider into question. First we had been informed of major policy changes regarding course delivery simply through emails delivered to our inboxes. Soon after we were presented with discussion documents focused on bottom lines and student/staff ratios, while minimising the bigger picture responsibilities of universities as public institutions. Universities provide not only teaching and learning opportunities, but also act as hubs for discovery and advancing knowledge.

The result was a sense by staff of being led by business managers who don't quite understand the 'business'. We do not just pitch some product designed to get as many bums on seats as possible. We are academics that educate and discover. Our university's research-led mission is to provide top tier education that is enhanced by active staff involvement in advancing our collective knowledge.



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We all understand that universities need to be financially sustainable. But our call here is for greater and more meaningful involvement in the development of colleges and institutions as places of research and learning. The process so far has not addressed the latter point nearly enough.

The discussion documents came with no prior consultation, and with no alternatives. We know consultation around policy and decision-making can and should be done differently. I believe our voices are now being heard by management, and I'm confident there will be more constructive conversations moving forward, with greater engagement and genuine representation. But if there is a lesson that can be gained from this, it's

strategies that 1) look to ensure financial sustainability and viability while 2) maintaining the integrity of our

that staff, students, and all stakeholders need to be represented and heard at every step along the way.

Ensuring strong workplace democracy where everyone is represented in decisions that affect us all, and ensuring we are free as academics to be involved in key decisions and to question the wisdom of these decisions can only serve to strengthen our institutions and the sector as a whole.

See Professor Dale's presentation on keeping Sciences at Massey University's Albany Campus [here](#).

Professor James Dale, TEU member and head of wildlife biology at Massey University | Te Kunenga ki Pūrehuroa Albany campus' School of Natural and Computational Sciences discusses the need for greater workplace democracy and academic freedom in the context of two discussion documents recently released at Massey.

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