

**Wilcox, Jackie A.**

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**From:** Hutchison, Norman  
**Sent:** 29 May 2026 11:55  
**To:** Governance & Executive Support Team  
**Cc:** Anderson, Ross  
**Subject:** Response of the Business Committee of General Council to the Draft Resolution on Four-Faculties  
**Attachments:** BusCommGenCo ~Response to Faculty Resolution.docx  
**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

Dear Clerk to the Court,

Please find attached the response from the Business Committee of General Council to the four faculties proposal.

Grateful if you could acknowledge receipt.

With thanks

Norman  
Convener, Business Committee of General Council

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## **Response by the Business Committee of General Council**

**to the**

### **Draft Resolution**

**Submitted by**

**UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN**

**University Court**

#### **1. Introduction**

On Thursday 30 April 2026, General Council was invited to respond to a Draft Resolution seeking to reform the academic structures. The Draft Resolution was discussed at the General Council meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> May, following a presentation by the Principal. Opinion was sought from those present and responses were received both during and after the meeting. The Business Committee of General Council now wish to respond to the Draft Resolution.

#### **2. Reform of Academic structures: Four Faculties Proposal**

It is noted that currently the University has 12 Schools and that four-faculties are proposed. The provisional names of the faculties are:

- Arts and Humanities
- Business, Law and Social Science
- Science and Engineering
- Medicine, Health and Life Sciences

2.1 The Business Committee have received a number of concerns relating to transparency and a lack of detail on the proposals. Some academic members of General Council feel that they have not been properly consulted and do not have sufficient detail to provide an informed opinion. It is understood that the four-faculty model has been discussed at Senate but that the papers were marked confidential, thus not allowing the wider University community to understand the rationale behind the changes.

- **Recommendation – Consultation.** We would recommend wider consultation with the University community and more granular information provided (see below), before any

changes are made, even if this means a delay to the implementation of the new structure which is proposed to take effect on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2026.

2.2 It would appear that the move to four-faculties rests on the assumption that a new leadership layer will streamline rather than complicate decision making.

- However, the success will depend heavily on how the Executive Dean roles are defined and empowered in practice.
- There is a danger that the faculties may be so large that the Executive Dean will not have the same detailed knowledge of disciplines and colleagues that the Head of School currently possesses.
- During the period from 2002 to 2017, the University operated with an academic structure that included three Colleges and 12 Schools. In 2017, the Colleges were abolished as it was felt they added an unnecessary layer of administration and caused delay.
- **Expectation.** It is hoped/expected that senior management have fully examined the reasons for the closure of the Colleges and that the new faculty structure avoids repeating the mistakes so evident in the previous College organisation.

2.3 The proposal situates the structural change firmly within a financial sustainability narrative.

- We understand that the aim is for each faculty to be in surplus.
- However, no financial modelling has been provided showing the financial plan for each faculty.
- As the University is running a deficit, some faculties will start in a deficit position. We have been informed of the high-level ambitions of the new structure, but very little on the assumptions that have been made with respect to teaching and research income and staff costs. This lack of detail is causing anxiety among staff who are concerned about possible job losses. More transparency with financial modelling is requested.

2.4 Related to point 2.3 on financial sustainability, the policy on levels of cross subsidisation among subject areas within each faculty is not clear.

- Not all subject areas can achieve the same financial contribution as others, and cross subsidy has been the norm across the sector.

- **Decision making criteria – consistency.** What criteria will be applied to make decisions on subject areas to be developed or discontinued? Will the criteria be consistent across the four-faculties?

2.5 A number of further questions have been asked about the new structure and these include:

- Replication/duplication.** Will the faculties replicate the committee structure that exists at School level? If so, is there a danger of duplication?
- Cost.** What will be the additional cost of appointing Executive Deans?
- Management structure.** The management structure appears to be an Executive Dean and Executive Group. What is the intended composition of the Executive Group to achieve appropriate representation across all Schools? Will the Executive Group have wide-ranging responsibilities for education, employability, research, innovation, commercialisation, finance, staff management, digital transformation etc.?
- Commonality.** Will all four-faculties have the same internal structure?
- Composition of faculties.** There is a recognised academic rationale for combining Business and Law, but what is the reasoning behind adding Social Science to this faculty? Is the decision based on finance – to seek to balance the faculty books - rather than being based on academic interdisciplinarity?
- Separate campus implications.** Medicine, Health and Life Sciences have a logical commonality, although they are based across separate campuses. Is this locational issue being considered?
- Labelling.** Is better labelling required for the Faculty of Science and Engineering? Does this faculty include chemical, physical and environmental subjects along with engineering?
- Review frequency.** How frequently will the new faculty structure be reviewed and what criteria will be used to evaluate success?

### 3.0 General observations on Adapting for Continued Success (ACS)

**General Council.** The Universities (Scotland) Act 1858 provides that General Council take “into their consideration **all questions affecting the well-being and prosperity of the University**, and to make representations from time to time, on such questions to the University court, who shall consider the same and return to the Council their deliverance thereon” [emphasis added] (Section 6).

**3.1 Staff student ratios.** Under this remit the Business Committee of General Council would like to take this opportunity to express their concern over the proposed raising of staff-student ratios (SSRs) to 20 for STEM and 25 for SHAPE courses.

- While the Business Committee recognises the financial challenges facing the University, the raising of SSRs is likely to cause reputational damage and their use as the primary decision tool on programme closures is considered too simplistic a measure.
- There are a host of reasons why such an approach could lead to poor outcomes. For example:
  - a) **Sharing modules.** A large number of degree programmes share common core modules. While the number on a specific degree programme maybe below the target SSRs, the degree is in effect part of a package of degree offerings which share modules, and the delivery method is very efficient.
  - b) **Beneficial Revenue.** The headline SSR number hides the revenue generated from the student cohort. It is the norm for PGT programmes to charge a premium fee. By simply using SSRs, revenue could be cut, rather than savings made.
  - c) **Student experience & reputation.** Higher SSRs decrease the quality of education, eroding the student experience, which will negatively impact the University’s standing in various league tables, causing reputational damage which will affect student recruitment.
  - d) **Research.** Higher SSRs reduce staff time for research. This may negatively impact not just the performance in REF 2029, but the ability to generate grant income and recruit the best PGR students. We are aware that the University Directors of

Research have already written to Court expressing their deep concern over the proposed raising of SSRs.

- e) **Performance metrics analysis.** A decision matrix on degree programme closures, should also include the impact on research performance of staff involved in that subject area –outputs, grants, and research impact - as well as consider the negative societal impact should a degree programme close.
  
- **Recommendation: consultation.** We would recommend that senior management engage in wider consultation on the use of SSRs in decision making.

**Professor Norman Hutchison (Convener)**

**On behalf of the Business Committee of General Council**

**27<sup>th</sup> May 2026**

[FILE NOTE: Letter received via email 29/05/26]