

Education, Children and Young People, Committee of Scottish Parliament

30 May 2025

Dear Mr Douglas Ross MSP, convenor, and members of the above-mentioned Committee,

Re: University of Edinburgh Joint Unions, composed of recognized staff unions, University and College Union (UCU), Unison and Unite, request for scrutiny of University of Edinburgh (UoE) Principal and senior management by the Scottish Parliament Education, Children and Young People Committee

We are following up on our letter to you of 26 March 2025, to request your Committee's scrutiny of the situation at University of Edinburgh. This letter is also attached.

Adding to the information provided in our previous correspondence, we would like to note the following updated information:

1. On 20 May 2025, our University Senate voted no confidence in UoE management's financial proposals, due to their negative impact on the core academic mission of the University. This no confidence motion passed by a large majority. At its 26 March meeting, Senate expressed deep concern about the impact of the proposed cut of £140 million over 18 months on the University's teaching and research, and the no confidence vote was taken as the Senate's concerns had not been addressed by the University executive. Papers outlining these concerns are available [here](#).
2. On 21 May, the outcome of UCU Edinburgh's ballot of members for industrial action was released. Over 60% of members voted in this ballot, with 84% willing to strike, and 92% willing to take action short of strike. Our demand is that management commit to no compulsory redundancies until July 2026. So far, management has refused to negotiate to resolve this dispute.
3. Campus trade unions still have not received a copy of the budget and other financial information that we have requested. The law requires that employers should provide trade unions with all information relating to its business without which union representatives would be impeded in carrying out collective bargaining. In a situation where there is risk of redundancies at such a scale, unions need to look into their employer's finances to assess the claims that redundancies are warranted. Although the proposal for a specific cut and timetable for achieving these budget savings has been announced in February, our employer has failed to comply fully with this legal requirement.

While proceeding with cuts that may necessitate as many as 1800 redundancies, our employer has not shown any willingness to consider alternative proposals that would be in the spirit of its legal responsibility to avoid redundancies. This figure is our estimate based on the executive's proposal that of the £140 million in cuts, £90 million should come from

reduction in the budget for staff. This figure is disproportionate to the percentage currently spent on staff.

4. We are concerned that similar patterns of mismanagement to those exposed at the University of Dundee are clearly in evidence at the University of Edinburgh. These include irresponsible and unsustainable levels of capital spending, which continue to be proposed, despite management's claims they are scaling back. Cost-overruns on capital projects, including IT projects, have also contributed to this overspending. Two key committees in charge of overseeing the University's capital spending have not published minutes of their meetings for the last five years.

The university's capital plans have been severely mismanaged. Despite the financial difficulties, we understand that capital expenditure this year remains at or near a record high. Depreciation, which was about £60m in 2020 has increased by about 50% to just over £90m in 2024 and, we have recently been told, is expected to nearly double again to £170m in 2028. This is causing enormous damage to the organisation.

Another area of mismanagement is poor planning, which relates to the point above. Management has banked on endless growth in student recruitment.

5. We are concerned that the University Court has not been able to exercise due diligence related to the above, as, just as in Dundee, it has not been able to scrutinize the executive's workings or assumptions underlying the financial proposals. As far as we are aware, the Court has not requested that the executive present alternatives to the budget proposals for the scale and pace of cuts proposed.

6. We have repeatedly raised the concern that cuts at this pace and scale seriously risk depressing the University's key income stream, from tuition fees. This is not only to do with the reputational risk, but also that cuts to staff, programmes and courses are very likely to further reduce student recruitment. We have not been convinced by the executive's arguments that fewer courses and programmes, inevitably taught by fewer staff with less opportunity to teach to their specialisms, will maintain the previous levels of fee income.

We are happy to provide more information to substantiate these points, and others above, should you require it.

As previously requested, we call on the Committee to use its investigatory powers, including related to accessing critical internal information, summoning witnesses, and creating recommendations, to interrogate the basis for and necessity of these severe cuts by a body receiving millions in public and Scottish Funding Council (SFC) funding. The Scottish Government has a duty towards the students and staff of UoE, and this is especially vital considering the devastating potential professional, economic, and personal impacts of the proposed cuts. Committee action, and the need for proper planning on the University's part, is of critical importance before permanent damage is done to

the largest university in Scotland, to the local and national economy, and to our international reputation.

We would also like to request that the Education Committee take up a broader proposal to address the financial difficulties faced by universities in Scotland. In Wales, [the Welsh government called on universities](#) there to use their reserves to save jobs in the sector. This would be eminently possible at UoE, and may be an option elsewhere. The core mission of universities, and the depth and breadth of their teaching and research, should not be sacrificed for a short-term downturn in finances.

As noted earlier, the Joint Unions Finance Working Group, composed of academics and professional staff, with a range of expertise, has analyzed the University's publicly available financial information, and raised a great many questions about all these matters, which have largely gone unanswered. Since we last wrote to you, we have two additional posts.

Given that the UoE Principal has stated that the proposed changes will begin immediately, we urge you to hold a hearing to question him and other members of the senior leadership team as soon as possible. We would appreciate a response at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely

June Maguire, Branch Secretary, Unison

Mark Patrizio, Branch Chair, Unite, Convenor of UoE Joint Unions Liaison Committee

Sophia Woodman, Branch President, UCU Edinburgh

Joint Unions Finance Working Group analysis:

1. [Dire financial straits at UoE? No!](#) 26 November 2024
2. [Is the University of Edinburgh's management financially prudent? No!](#) 13 December 2024
3. [Misleading and partial data in management's 'crisis' narrative](#) 19 December 2024
4. No compulsory redundancies at the University of Edinburgh! [Management is manufacturing a 'financial crisis' to impose staff cuts](#) 14 February 2025
5. [Cuts could kill our university](#) 28 February 2025
6. [Cutting revenue is not the way to solve financial pressures](#) 14 March 2025
7. [Reckless downsizing: the 'logics' of management's cuts](#) 21 March 2025
8. [More money than ever for buildings, while threatening compulsory redundancies](#) 25 April 2025
9. [A repurposed UoE: what might management's dream university look like?](#) 12 May 2025