

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
PARTNERSHIP NEGOTIATING AND CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE
MINUTE OF MEETING HELD ON 1 APRIL 2026 (TEAMS)

Present: N Forsyth (Convenor) (NF); D Anderson; O Cox; K Eccles; E Elliot; H Morgan (HM); Jo-Anne Murray (JM); L Robertson; M Williamson; Diane Norris (clerk)

Apologies: L Alford; F Bell; B Paterson; N Edwards; D Cutts.

1. Mike Williamson (UCU Regional representative) was welcomed and introduced to the group. MW confirmed that he was in attendance at the meeting in the role of adviser to UCU colleagues.
2. NF advised that the meeting was a follow on from the previous additional meetings relating to consultation on the proposed SSR model and to receive feedback on the documentation that had been received. He advised that as Jo-Anne Murray couldn't attend the last meeting there were some education questions that could be addressed at this meeting.
3. NF sought clarification on the role of the UCU Regional Officer. UNISON advised that as outlined in their collective agreements, national officials were permitted to be in attendance for such meetings.
4. NF explained that he had sent responses to UCU in relation to recent communications but had not yet received any response. He advised that this communication related to the concerns raised during local dispute resolution.
5. UCU raised concerns about the algorithm that was used to aid the decision to remove particular courses. There are online courses that are recorded which have been developed for the purposes of income generation within the last year, which cannot be argued are consistently underrecruiting as they have not been in place long enough. UCU advised that there is only 2 hours direct teaching and the rest is done through independent learning so there is no cost. UCU said the calculation being used is a blunt measure and doesn't recognise the way courses are delivered. The Schools that have developed online courses, are not being able to see out the benefits of having developed these.
6. JM advised that the discussions regarding the courses at risk are happening with the Heads of School, these include considering market data, potential for the future and current recruitment data. She advised that considering courses is normal business as usual practice within the sector to review the performance of a programme and there are a number of metrics to do that. She advised that in terms of the teaching hours for online this observation is correct, however with online courses a refresh needs to be done every year, which needs to take into account the interaction with online students. JM said that after 20 years in this space there is a good understanding in the institution of the costs of these courses. She advised that there is a baseline cost to keep a programme on the books that needs to be taken into account, these cover marketing, recruiting, staff time and overheads. JM explained that these are the reasons that the University makes these decisions. The University has a portfolio that's not been consolidated, all the information gathered by looking around the sector is that it is challenging for students to

have such a degree of choice, we are unable to do marketing at programme level as there is too much choice. The biggest drive of retention is a sense of belonging and community, which is not there if there are low numbers of students.

7. UCU advised that it has made requests for the sharing of more detailed information about the data used to make those decisions. It is aware that at school level the data and the calculation have been challenged and the response has been that it cannot be changed. UCU advised that without the data it is difficult to have a meaningful consultation and to receive feedback on the proposals.
8. UCU said that the minimum standard SSR being proposed is out of step with the sector and there are concerns about reputation and student experience. There are additional concerns in academics' ability to attract funding and the overall risk to staff jobs.
9. NF explained that the data is always available to Heads of School and this is the same data that generally used within Schools and shared with the School Executive, there is nothing that has been used centrally that the Schools do not have access to. In relation to staff volume and student numbers this is all held at School level.
10. NF explained that in his discussions with colleagues in the sector he understands that the University's approach is the direction of travel for most of the sector, this is not being picked up in historical data as it's a moving picture. The unit of resource is not the same as in the rest of the UK. That the undergraduate population is capped, the vast majority of our students are sitting at SFC Band 6 and 5. He advised that the model we deliver is under the instruction of Court to ensure the safe delivery of the University and there are specific parameters that are specific to the University of Aberdeen. Those funding models dictate the decisions the University needs to make.
11. JM explained where things stand in terms of stopping recruitment to programmes. She explained that there were programmes identified at both undergraduate and postgraduate level and it was agreed that no changes were to be made to the undergraduate courses due to the timescales involved and the impact that would have. She advised that there is work to be done in terms of teaching out. With the PGT it is more straightforward as its 12 months, there are courses that were placed into a red category due to lower numbers, however they considered that data changes over time and had to consider incoming applications and after the initial 39 programmes, conversations took place with every school and considered where the courses were in terms of recruitment for the next academic year, this initial red category was reduced to 21 programmes. She advised that hadn't recruited well in the past but the numbers for sustainability of the courses and considering historical conversion rates were looking better for this financial year, and it was considered more sensible to continue to recruit to those programmes for another year.
12. JM explained in terms of the governance structures to remove programmes, this had to be considered at the programme management committee (PMC) for review. This is normal practice as Schools may want to withdraw programmes for multiple reasons, it is not always the case that PMC is supportive, the committee consider the view of the recruitment figures and

- market potential. The removal of the 21 programme was also considered by QAC which reports to Senate and the QAC also approved the proposal.
13. UCU requested to see the data that the Heads of School have access to see how it has been modelled so it can be understood.
 14. UCU advised that the conversations that they were having with other universities regarding the SSR is live data as of February this year, and the University of Aberdeen proposals are almost double what the sector standard is.
 15. JM advised she had been in all the meetings with the Heads of School and she has seen the same data they have, that this had been checked and they are happy they are accurate. This has been around the PG numbers and fee income. She advised that the Heads of School had access to all of the data to review and determine from their view that it reflects the position in their schools. She advised that there had been double checking of all the data as it comes from different sources to ensure it is correct. She advised that data includes fee income, student numbers and the costs of running a programme.
 16. UCU asked why the calculations on how they arrived at the conclusion of the red, amber, green has not been shared.
 17. UCU advised that there are cases where there are courses that have higher numbers within programmes, such as courses that are run over a number of programmes, some of which have been earmarked for closure. The UCU asked for the trades unions to see all of the data as otherwise they cannot fully consult on the proposals. JM said that there has been some work done in relation to courses, ensuring there is appropriate learning outcomes. She is aware that there are small numbers of PGT programmes that utilise courses that already exist. She advised that they need to look at course level metric, quality and performance.
 18. NF advised that this isn't the final proposal and he wants to receive views. He advised that he understand the need to see the data but explained that he is mindful of providing data that can be safely shared. He advised there has been incidents where data has been falsely reported in the media, and this is tricky to navigate, and consideration needs to be given to the other members of staff in the University who are reading this information.
 19. NF confirmed that trades unions staff have now been invited to the workstreams and will be attending.
 20. UCU said there was a risk of using a uniform calculation across all courses.
 21. UCU said there was feedback on the SUMS workshops that they focussed on a single question rather than open output and participants expressed time wasted in taking part. They explained that ACAS guidance on open consultation is that it is a principle of good management and includes union input on the development of proposals. They expressed concern about proposals already being at a late stage and it is not possible to change the decision that has been made. It was also raised that there had been job descriptions created for Executive Deans and questioned why this was if the proposals are still to be finalised. NF advised that he did not think the workshops should be categorised as a waste of time, he advised that there had been a range of feedback received and on balance it was on the favourable side. However, the plans are not finalised, and there has been repeated workshops and repeated engagements, and they would not be going

- through those steps if this was pre-determined. He advised that a lot of people had attended those sessions which proves that it is not a waste of time.
22. NF explained that there would be job descriptions on file for a range of activity and there need to be consideration of the governance around what needs to be done and plan for what may happen. Court will need to approve what is being done and would require the information before making a decision and can't approve a model unless the frameworks are in place.
 23. UCU said that it resents the implication that UCU are sharing information with the press. NF advised that it was important that we address what is read about in the press and the problems this creates for us all. He advised that he is keen to share information, but it has to be done in a safe way and they need to be satisfied that there is a bilateral trust.
 24. NF advised that the query relating to the Section 75 had been checked and confirmed with Mark White and that this would be an extraordinarily unlikely situation. UNISON advised that they had met with the senior governor and his understand that there is potential for a section 75 debt, across the sector if 60000 staff are not contributing it will mean that the pension scheme will go into deficit and universities will have to underpin the lost contribution. UNISON believes that this should be placed on the strategic risk register.
 25. UNISON noted opportunities in relation to commercial enterprise, for example the cruise ships starting to operate and the potential for tourists looking to purchase a good scotch whiskey in Aberdeen, there are opportunities to generate income. It was also advised that business on the High Street offer deals for the cruise ships and the University should consider what can be offered. NF said that he would like to see the University benefit more from this and consider opportunities for retail on the high street and perhaps items for sale at the airport.
 26. UNISON felt there are opportunities to reduce the impact of the current position if there are fundraising campaigns being considered. NF advised that there has been consideration given to a new campaign and the Principal has been doing work to build relationships in this space. He advised that it is important to conduct research to ensure that the University is being strategic about targeting the right markets, and what the key areas are for us.
 27. UNISON also asked for the status of the EIA and SRA and how these have been considered in relation to the staff and student experience, it noted the importance to consult on this as widely as possible and the University could be in legal jeopardy if this is not done, and could risk the ability to recruit staff in the future. NF confirmed that the University's reputation is at the heart of everything that we do, and everyone would prefer to be in a better place where these decisions are not required but the reality is that there is a need to break even and get back to where the University needs to be and be able to move forward.
 28. HM explained that she has discussion in place across the University regarding these commercial opportunities and also has a place on a local group considering the Aberdeen visitor levy which will give an opportunity to have input into how the money is spent, There is an argument that the University needs investment in this area to improve the visitor experience. HM advised she is keen to hear other ideas and will follow up on the suggestions made in the group through a separate meeting/discussion with UNISON.

29. NF advised that he discuss with colleagues and agree data to be shared, and give reassurance where we can and ensure we get to a place of mutual trust.
30. NF thanked all for attending the meeting.