



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Maggie Chapman MSP
North East Scotland

Douglas Ross MSP, Convener
Education, Children and Young People Committee
Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

17 December 2024

Dear Douglas,

Re: Concerns about governance and management at the University of Dundee

I am writing to you as a North East Region MSP very concerned about governance, financial management and competence at the University of Dundee. I ask that the Education, Children and Young People Committee consider undertaking a session on this issue to interrogate the questions around governance, accountability and financial responsibility that have been raised.

You will, I am sure, be aware of the departure without warning or notice of the Principal and Vice Chancellor, Iain Gillespie, in early December 2024. This followed information relayed to staff in an email in mid-November that the university faced a deficit of £30million.

Staff and students are, understandably, very concerned about this. There was no indication at court meetings prior to that email of any cause for concern. Indeed, the university has recorded modest surpluses in recent years. At a meeting with senior management in November – a Principal’s Question Time event – after the all-staff email about the deficit, the Senior Vice Principal, standing in for the Principal, said he would not be answering any questions. The Director of Finance said she was “mortified” that she could not answer the questions staff were putting to her about the university’s financial situation, and what it meant for jobs, research, teaching, students, or the university’s future.

The three campus trade unions have had virtually no information provided to them about the impact of this, or what is happening now. Recent Local Joint Committee meetings (meetings between unions and management) have been cancelled by management, requests for financial information have gone unanswered, and requests for information about possible voluntary severance schemes and restructuring proposals have also not elicited any substantive response.

It became clear in recent weeks that the university had failed to recruit 300 Scottish students to fill Scottish Funding Council supported places this academic year. It has also been reported in the media that a “recovery plan” is being developed between the university and the Scottish Funding Council. However, no information about any of this has been made available to the unions, or to the university community more generally. Most staff have been made aware of developments, including the Principal’s resignation, via local media, rather than university communications.

The campus unions have been working closely together and organised an all-staff “Townhall” meeting last Thursday, 12 December. Over 1000 staff members attended, in person and online. Those who spoke were all very concerned about the future of the university, about staff morale, the impact on students, and the longer-term consequences of all of this for the university, the city, and beyond. They are very concerned about the governance of the institution, the competence of senior management, and the lack of transparency or accountability displayed by the University Executive Group (UEG). Because of this, they have organised a vote of no confidence in the UEG, which is underway this week.

Public money supports the teaching and research at the university. The university is also required to fulfil certain obligations under both the Higher Education Governance (Scotland) Act 2016 and the Scottish Government’s Fair Work First agenda. Given what has happened, I ask that the Education, Children and Young People Committee consider undertaking some scrutiny of the governance and management of the University of Dundee.

I would be happy to provide further information on any of the points mentioned above if you would find that useful.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Maggie Chapman MSP