



The Educational
Institute of Scotland

Ref: REF SCASUHI
12 December 2025

Richard Leonard MSP
MSP for Central Scotland (Region)

By email only

Dear Richard

We note the Public Audit Committee continues to hear evidence re UHI Perth.

EIS-FELA have a number of questions and concerns regarding the historic situation at UHI Perth and the implications for the ongoing UHI transformation. We have outlined these below.

- The EIS-FELA and UNISON Branch Reps sent a letter on behalf of all staff to the Board of Management (attached) highlighting a range of concerns in relation to the incompetence of the leadership. Many staff (into 100s) signed a petition supporting this letter as there was such concern about the decisions being taken by senior leadership. There was no immediate acknowledgement of the letter and a response had to be chased. When a response was received (attached), it was dismissive and appears no action was taken based on the concerns raised - although the letter covers a range of issues it did query issues around the College finances. The response was sent to the UHI Court Secretary therefore UHI Court/Regional Strategic Body must have been aware of these concerns raised yet, again, they did not to take any visible action. Why was this letter and concerns raised not taken more seriously?
- Conflict on Interest – the Chair of the UHI Perth Board of Management was also Chair of Board for Air Service Training (AST). Why was one person allowed to Chair both? There is no governance apparent for subsidiary companies from UHI, SFC or Scottish Government.
- Inaction of UHI Court/Regional Strategic Body (RSB) – there was an apparent lack of action as the situation at UHI Perth was allowed to continue for so long. As well as the above letter being known to them, the Chair of Court (Alastair MacColl) was observer of UHI Perth Board meetings so would know what was happening therefore why did UHI Court/RSB not do more? It would bring into question the competence of UHI as the RSB - questions need to be

asked of Chair of Court and Principal and Vice Chancellor (Vicki Nairn) as to their role and why the lack of action to intervene. Was the Chair communicating concerns to Court/RSB? What was Court/RSB's response? No visible action was apparent and situation was allowed to continue to escalate which led to a worsening financial situation. Were SFC aware at all?

- The whole purpose/role of the UHI RSB needs looked into given this situation was allowed to escalate as it did. In a climate where finances are very tight, UHI Perth pay a 'topslice' (share) of FE funding to pay for the RSB yet it does not seem to be doing what it should in terms of ensuring effective leadership and governance within the UHI Colleges. If UHI Perth reported directly to SFC (as other Colleges do) and not via UHI RSB would SFC not have intervened earlier? Is there not a conflict of interest in UHI as RSB and a fundable body?
- We are particularly concerned over UHI's apparent lack of governance, scrutiny, oversight given their proposal to merge six UHI colleges into UHI as a 'single tertiary institution' (ie University). How could we be assured these are the right people ensuring appropriate governance?

Yours sincerely

Sarah Collins
National Officer for Further Education
Educational Institute of Scotland

Callum McCormick, EIS-FELA

Sara O'Hagan, EIS-FELA

Jane Edwards, UNISON

Winston Flynn, UNISON

Ben Myles, UNISON

cc Board of Management, UHI Perth
Sheena Stewart, University Secretary, UHI

12 June 2024

Dear EIS-FELA and UNISON representatives,

On behalf of the Board of Management of UHI Perth, I write further to your letter of 17 May 2024 ("Letter") and am grateful to you for your continued interest in the future of UHI Perth.

Having taken appropriate counsel from the Vice Chair and Senior Independent Board Member, I have now had the opportunity to consider more fully the terms of the Letter and note that many of the points you raise/questions you ask relate to operational matters. It is, therefore, appropriate that these points, along with any requests for further information in respect of potential staffing numbers and the proposed business case in respect of possible changes, should be raised as part of ongoing consultation processes.

In the meantime, I can confirm that at the Board's request, Margaret Cook has reported to the Board regularly over the past year regarding the options and proposals for right-sizing the College to respond to the funding challenges faced from flat cash SFC settlements during a period of price inflation and wage claims. The Board also has oversight of the financial position of the College, which is driving the need to consider significant changes in the way the College delivers for its students. Accordingly, the Board is fully aware of the context in which operational decisions regarding staffing numbers are being taken. The Board is satisfied that the correct processes are being followed in respect of the College considering potential reductions in staff numbers and consulting with EIS-FELA, UNISON and College staff regarding this.

Yours sincerely,

Graham Watson
Chair, Board of Management, UHI Perth

Friday 17 May 2024

Dear Chair, Vice Chair and Independent Board Members
(Board of Management UHI Perth)

EIS-FELA and UNISON Representatives send this letter on behalf of our members, the staff at UHI Perth, to inform you of a vote of No Confidence. This vote of No Confidence relates to Dr Margaret Cook (Principal and Chief Executive) regarding serious concerns about her ability to effectively lead UHI Perth. There are a number of reasons why staff felt this vote of no confidence was necessary, some of which are outlined below. Trade Union Representatives would like a meeting with you all (the Chair, Vice Chair, and Independent Members of the Board) as soon as possible to discuss our concerns in greater detail. These concerns relate both to the current consultation around financial sustainability and in general the leadership at UHI Perth. We believe neither the consultation paper nor leadership demonstrate that students are always 'at the heart of all we do'.

The length of time taken by Senior Leadership to begin the current consultation in regard to financial sustainability demonstrates a lack of effective decision making. Over the last year, the College has faced increasing uncertainty and instability. The loss or deterioration of key student services and the departure of many valued colleagues have caused a steep decline in staff morale, damaged the fabric of the college, and harmed its reputation in the community. Despite these difficulties, the staff have continued to provide an outstanding experience to our students, reflected in the recent Education Scotland report and successful student recruitment. Notably it has taken nearly a year for similar, but arguably more damaging, proposals to be put forward for consultation after initially releasing proposals in May 2023. Months passed before the workstreams commenced, when Senior Leadership passed responsibility for the majority of the work to management below them. This shirking of responsibility has led to staff having no confidence in the current Principal at UHI Perth and we ask the Board to intervene.

These latest proposals from our Senior Leadership Team - including the closure of our nursery, the removal of course provision, attacks on the terms and conditions of lecturers, the reduction in our library service and the loss of yet more academic and professional services colleagues – have deepened fears about the future of the institution. Taken as a whole, these proposals reflect a complete absence of strategic leadership at the centre of the College. They contain no clear vision for the future of our College except that of a diminished student experience, fewer courses, overworked and undervalued staff and a shrinking campus. This absence of strategic leadership has led to staff having no confidence in the current leadership at UHI Perth and it is now the responsibility of the Board to intervene.

Trade Union Representatives and staff have grave concerns over the current consultation process. Information that is essential to meaningful consultation has not been provided timeously (we still await sight of EQIAs, risk assessments and other financial information). This has prevented full and frank discussion and exploration of possible alternatives which may be less damaging to the future of UHI Perth's

students and staff taking place. The consistent reiteration of only meeting 'statutory' obligations has added to staff concerns.

The sharing of required information with staff has also been inadequate despite the Principal stating information would be shared with staff at a staff consultation. It is stated in the consultation paper that FAQs will be updated at least once per week but a link to FAQs was communicated to staff over two weeks after consultation commenced. This lack of openness and transparency has led to staff having no confidence in the current leadership at UHI Perth and we ask the Board to intervene.

The lack of clarity around financial figures related to each proposal is very concerning as there is no confidence that the proposals actually equate to the reduction of £3 million stated in the consultation paper. At a staff consultation meeting, the Depute Principal - Operations explained that the £3 million related solely to the proposals in the current consultation paper and that figures related to previous changes were still being worked through. This is highly concerning as staff left on enhanced voluntary severance as long ago as August 2023; staff assume the costs/savings related from all previous changes would be known and available at this point. It leads to questions regarding the accuracy of any calculations related to the expected savings from the current proposals, a full breakdown of these calculations have still not been made available to Trade Union Representations or staff. In addition, the College have had no Head of Finance or permanent Finance Manager in post for a lengthy period of time and, in addition, one of the Business Partners is leaving/has left. The Head of Finance and Finance Manager posts have been advertised but no appointments to these roles have been made. It seems unlikely that with such reduced capacity the Finance Team are able to complete all operational tasks and accurately calculate all figures related to the current proposals. In addition, the team would be required to calculate costs/savings in relation to any alternative proposals in the very tight timelines allowed when working to the statutory 30 day consultation period. The fact consultations continue despite key roles remaining vacant within the Finance Team has led to staff having no confidence in the current leadership at UHI Perth and we ask the Board to intervene.

We recognise the financial challenges that our College and all Colleges in Scotland face. In the face of these challenges, effective leadership and clear direction become even more vital. Guiding the College through these periods requires that students and staff have faith and confidence in the individuals tasked with giving that leadership. Unfortunately, our faith and confidence in our Principal has been harmed beyond repair. As a result, we declare our complete lack of confidence in her ability to continue in her role and ask the Board to intervene.

A lack of consideration to the impact these proposals would have on our students is evident. Students were provided no information about the proposals and no offer was made to meet with students. The only reason details of the proposal are now known to students is down to the persistence of a student(s) who would not stop until their demand to have a copy of the consultation paper was met. In addition, it has taken a petition and very public campaign by students for the Principal and Depute Principal to agree to meet with students and arrange an all-student meeting. Parents of children who attend the nursery, most of whom are students or staff, have also

had to actively request a meeting with the Principal and Depute Principal. As the meeting was about to commence, the Principal and Depute Principal insisted they would only meet with four parents, and it took a parent demanding that all parents in attendance were included in the meeting for this to be allowed. This does not demonstrate that 'students are always at the heart of all we do' and has led to staff having no confidence in the current leadership at UHI Perth and we ask the Board to intervene.

These proposals have a heavy focus on cuts to academic services, having already seen a reduction in both academic staff and management due to previous rounds of Enhanced Voluntary Severance, these further proposed cuts will be very damaging to our students' experience. This heavy focus on academic cuts is clearly demonstrated in the proposed new structure for the Perth Leadership Group. Out of the eight proposed Director roles, only two will oversee academic teams yet the purpose of UHI Perth is to provide academic learning, teaching and research. This also means 25% of the Directors oversee 94% of the activity generating income. At a time when financial sustainability and income generation is vital, staff question this proposed structure, yet it is not part of the consultation. These Director roles will be responsible for leadership of the operations of the College so it would be expected that the majority of these roles should be focused on academic provision and student experience. Comments have also been made in relation to the estate being 40% learning spaces and 60% for other activity and the focus should switch to be 60% learning and 40% other. Agreed, so why does the proposed leadership group not reflect this stance? The current proposals will see good academic managers who provide effective leadership, and have the respect of staff, either leaving the organisations or facing taking on roles which are impossible to undertake. This proposal has led to staff having no confidence in the current leadership at UHI Perth and we ask the Board to intervene.

A number of the proposed cuts in professional services are job roles which provide a service directly related to the student experience, yet some support functions barely see any, or no, changes with certain areas exempt. Why are support functions with little/no direct impact on our students' experience not experiencing further cuts enabling less detrimental cuts to be made to both academic and professional services roles who form an essential part of our students' experience? Once again, these proposals do not demonstrate that 'students are always at the heart of all we do' and has led to staff having no confidence in the current leadership at UHI Perth and we ask the Board to intervene.

Staff stress levels have increased dramatically whilst morale has drastically decreased. The latest staff survey results were due to be released, however this critical survey's findings have still not been published. The lack of transparency in relation to the stress survey results lead to the assumption UHI Perth's Senior Leadership are trying to hide the cause of high stress and low morale - which many staff feel is due to poor leadership from our Principal. Student facing staff continue to work hard to put the student at the heart of everything we do which was demonstrated through excellent student survey results and the recent public support of staff who are facing job loss through these proposals. This high level of service will however not continue to be possible, if the current leadership remain and this has led to staff having no confidence in the current leadership at UHI Perth and we ask the Board to intervene.

We note that the College staff have previously – and on more than one occasion – made their feelings known on this issue. We expect that the Board of Management will, on this occasion, take these concerns seriously. As the Board of Management's Vision is focused on ensuring 'customers and students are always at the heart of all we do' we are confident you as members of the board will want to act to ensure UHI Perth has effective leadership. This means discussing the points above at a meeting of the whole board and providing a response to the staff. Anything else would constitute a dereliction of duty.

We anticipate an early response in order to arrange a meeting with you to further discuss the concerns raised in this letter.

Yours faithfully

EIS-FELA & UNISON Representatives and the Staff of UHI Perth
