

ULSTER UNIVERSITY

Minutes of the UCU JNC Meeting held on 15 October 2025 at 2.00pm (via Microsoft Teams)

Present:

Damian McAlister
Mark Latuske
Paul Davidson
Fiona Wills
Joanne Doherty
Linda Moore (UCU)
Paddy Mackel (UCU)
Norman Hagan (UCU)

In Attendance:

Paul Seawright
Helen Elliott
Sarah Walker
Gillian Hinds

Apologies:

Mary Hannon-Fletcher
Aisling O'Beirn (UCU)
Ricky Mitchell (UCU)
Mark Bailey (UCU)

25.23 Welcome and Apologies

The Chief People Officer welcomed those in attendance and noted apologies.

25.24 Minutes of the meeting held on 2 June 2025

Amendments to the draft minutes proposed by UCU prior to the meeting were agreed by the Committee and no further changes were requested.

25.25 Matters arising from minutes of 2 June 2025

Minute 25.18: The Deputy Vice Chancellor informed the Committee that the Director of Student Administration had recently issued a staff update on SEAtS which received positive feedback.

The Director of Student Administration advised the Committee that the team had been working with the Dean of Learning Enhancement and the Head of the Office for Digital Learning to source feedback from colleagues to help identify any changes that could be

made to improve the current system. She added that this feedback would inform a reflective report to identify further improvements.

The Director of Student Administration informed the Committee that statistics reflecting the usage of SEAtS have been looking positive and show a considerable increase in usage compared with the same time last year.

UCU expressed their solidarity and support for the team working on SEAtS, noting the additional workload for timetabling staff caused by the difficulties.

The Director of Student Administration thanked UCU for their acknowledgement of the team who are working very hard.

UCU reported that first year students are experiencing high levels of stress and this is also stressful and time-consuming for staff supporting these students. First year students in particular are worried that if SEAtS fails to register their attendance, they may suffer a detriment. UCU suggested that a communication should be made by senior leaders acknowledging the stress caused by SEAtS to both staff and students.

The CPO explained that most issues with SEAtS arise from amendment requests to timetables, resulting in the first few weeks of term being a difficult period. He added that the system was introduced to assist staff and not to cause any unnecessary stress.

The DVC stated that he did understand how the introduction of any new system could be stressful and he was keen to understand the specific issues that were causing stress during this academic year. He informed the Committee that he had made a video and written to staff about SEAtS during the previous academic year when SEAtS was first introduced and he would be happy to issue a further staff communication this year.

UCU requested a review of the Academic Timetabling and Space Usage Policy due to concerns that the campus buildings in Belfast and Magee do not offer sufficient teaching accommodation to meet the principles set out in the Policy.

The DVC, the CPO, and Director of Student Administration agreed to discuss the issues that have been reported as causing stress this academic year and if necessary they will issue a communication to staff.

25.26 School Leadership Structure

Following the circulation of a paper to UCU which set out a new school leadership structure, UCU raised concerns that this new structure would generate an increase in workload for both heads of school/department and for staff. UCU complained that there had not been consultation on the creation of the new roles despite the implications for its members.

UCU also questioned the duties set out in relation to the new Director of Teaching and Learning role and suggested that this new role would add a layer of micromanagement onto Module Coordinators and Course Directors.

The CPO stated that micromanagement is not in keeping with the culture of the organisation, which supports collaboration rather than the creation of structures which increase staff workload. The new structure was designed to redistribute and alleviate workload and address fundamental and critically important people management issues such as ensuring that Heads of School have time to engage in DAR meetings and in meaningful conversations with their staff. The new structure has been created to give Schools the bandwidth necessary to manage staff and meaningfully engage with them on an individual basis.

UCU asked how the teaching gap caused by the new structure would be filled.

The DVC responded that Heads of School will be able to make requests for backfill. The benefits of the new structure should begin to become apparent in the second semester.

UCU explained that members are concerned that the new structure has created additional duties and will increase workload.

The DVC explained that the list of duties under the new structure captures a summary of expectations that are already in place. He explained that the role has been created to support staff to deliver what is expected of them.

The DVC stated that the role was created to support and assist staff. The DVC advised that he will review the Job Description for the Director of Learning and Teaching posts.

The CPO made clear that the new structure would be kept under review to make sure that the outcome was as intended.

25.27 AOB

UCU asked to discuss mid-semester module surveys. UCU requested that the surveys were discontinued or made non-compulsory. UCU cited recent research which shows that module evaluations can cause academic staff stress and mental unwellness. They also noted that evaluations tend to discriminate against women, minority ethnic staff and those with English as a second language. They noted that concerns include additional workload at the busy mid-semester point and the lack of privacy given the number of people who can now access the survey results.

The DVC offered to follow up on this query and said that he would ask the relevant manager if the mid-term survey can be turned off. A meeting would be set up with the PVC (AQSE) to further discuss this matter and would also discuss the possibility of removing some of the Director of Teaching and Learning duties with her.

Meeting ended 16:01