

ULSTER UNIVERSITY

Minutes of the UCU JNC Meeting held on 14 January 2026 at 2.00pm (via Microsoft Teams)

Present:

Damian McAlister
Mark Latuske
Paul Davidson
Mary Hannon-Fletcher
Fiona Wills
Joanne Doherty
Linda Moore (UCU)
Aisling O'Beirn (UCU)
Richard Mitchell (UCU)

In Attendance:

Odette Hutchinson
Helen Elliott
Sarah Walker
Gillian Hinds

Apologies:

Paddy Mackel (UCU)
Norman Hagan (UCU)

26.01 Welcome and Apologies

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

26.02 Minutes of the meeting held on 15 October 2025

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

UCU raised the time gap for minutes being received and requested that minutes be received in a timely matter.

26.03 Matters arising from the minutes of 15 October 2025

Minute 25:26: UCU asked when the new leadership structure would be reviewed. The Director of People and Culture responded that rather than conducting a formal review, the commitment that was given was that new leadership structure would be 'kept under review' once implemented by all of the Schools.

26.04 Discussion on academic timetabling

UCU outlined some issues that members have been experiencing in relation to SEAtS. UCU indicated that some members are not confident in using the SEAtS system to record absences. They also reported that academic staff had been asked to return templates detailing planned seminar groups at short notice. UCU stated that this has been challenging for some staff who have experienced difficulties in finding suitable seminar rooms on the Derry~Londonderry and Belfast Campuses.

The Director of Student Administration acknowledged that the template that had been issued to academic staff did not work as expected due to insufficient testing in advance of its release. She advised that, in future, the timetabling process would commence earlier, and improvements would be made to staff communications. She explained that accurate inputs are essential for SEAtS to function effectively.

The Director of Student Administration informed the Committee that her team were running a series of workshops across all three campuses facilitated by People and Culture. To date, feedback had been positive.

UCU stated that they consider that it was inappropriate for staff attending the workshop to be asked to identify the benefits of SEAtS, regardless of whether staff felt there were any benefits. The Director of Student Administration acknowledged that the workshop participants had been asked to identify the benefits of SEAtS when it is working well, along with improvements that could potentially be put in place. She felt the facilitators spoke honestly about the system and acknowledged that there is still a lot of work to be done to improve it.

The team is currently working on an animation to showcase the journey and the many inputs that a module goes through before it appears on SEAtS.

The CPO explained that SEAtS is a market leading system which is used in many institutions across the UK and Ireland, many of whom have encountered various problems along the way. He recognised that Ulster University should have invested more heavily in supporting its implementation. He suggested that the primary focus should be on identifying what can be done to make it work well in the future.

The Director of Student Administration acknowledged that communications have not been timely or clear enough, and that the cascade of communication has not worked as well as expected. Looking ahead, efforts would be made to ensure that engagement takes place with the right people at the right time.

The team are currently working on a ticketing system in which all tickets will be triaged and dealt with so that any problems experienced by academic staff are addressed. In addition, quick reference guides are to be delivered to lecture theatres so that academic staff know who to go to if they have a problem with SEAtS. Content on the portal will be streamlined to make it more user-friendly. Also, 30 fully trained student campus ambassadors will be available at the start of Semester Two on all three campuses to assist in resolving any SEAtS issues.

UCU noted that staff have been dealing with students who are upset that their records are not correct.

UCU queried the use of SEAtS data in relation to academic appeals, student finance, and hardship funding, given that the records may not be accurate.

The CPO responded that students should be directed to the Students Union (UUSU) and Student Wellbeing if they have any such concerns. The PVC AQSE commented that no student should be disadvantaged if complex technicalities with SEAtS are somehow influencing their data. The PVC assured the Committee that staff at Ulster always go above and beyond to support the progression of students. She explained that there is also a robust appeals process in place. The Director of Student Administration added that if it were identified that attendance might be a problem for a student, the team would follow up and provide support where possible.

UCU reported that it can be difficult to find suitable teaching rooms and suggested that consideration should be given to having the option to offer online modules. UCU requested a review of the Academic Timetabling and Space Usage policy as this is overdue.

The CPO responded that a review of the policy would not address the issues raised by UCU and suggested that the monthly meeting to discuss SEAtS should be extended to incorporate discussions on Academic Timetabling. He added that an invitation should be extended to the DVC.

UCU stated that they were concerned that academic staff are no longer able to contact the Timetabling team directly and have been advised that the School Officers are now the main point of contact. UCU noted that this is increased workload for School Officers who are UCU grade.

The Director of Student Administration responded that there must be a misunderstanding as it is not the case that academic staff are not to contact the Timetabling team directly. She suggested that some confusion may have arisen from a new Microsoft Form which was recently introduced.

UCU asked the Director of Student Administration if students have been provided with a date for the release of timetables. The Director of Student Administration responded that students had not been advised of an exact date. The CPO added that due to the volume of requests for timetabling revisions, it would be very difficult to set an accurate date for the release of timetables to students.

It was agreed that monthly meetings on timetabling would be arranged between Student Administration and UCU.

26.05 Learning and Teaching update from AQSE

The PVC Academic Quality & Student Experience (AQSE) reported that the End of Module Survey was due to close on 16 January 2026 and detailed module reports would be shared the following week. Qualitative comments would be scanned by the team

before being released to academic colleagues. The team would be following up on any concerning or inappropriate comments made in the feedback.

The PVC AQSE confirmed that the mid-module survey in Semester Two would take place during the week commencing 23 February 2026. This will be followed by a meeting of the Student/Staff Consultative Committee.

The PVC AQSE announced that a number of student-facing policies are to be presented for trade union consultation and/or information including the Student Domestic Abuse Policy, the Student Anti-Social Behaviour Policy, and the Stalking and Harassment Policy.

The PVC AQSE informed the Committee that the team has also been working on guidance for students on managing communications and interactions appropriately. The PVC noted that advice is being drawn up for staff contact with parents or other third parties.

Richard Mitchell left the meeting at 15:00

UCU welcomed the policies on Student Domestic Abuse and on Stalking and Harassment. and stated that they look forward to consultation on these policies, however, they find some of the 'Blairite' terminology used in relation to the 'Anti-Social Behaviour Policy' to be regrettable and would like to see more positive ways in which such policies could be framed.

UCU stated that the mid-module survey had not been agreed with UCU. UCU reported concerns about the privacy of mid-module survey feedback; potential interruption to teaching caused by the survey at the mid-semester point; and the potential impact of mid-module feedback on new lecturers.

UCU asked to see the updated job description for the Director of Learning and Teaching.

The Director of People and Culture agreed to send this to UCU for information only as the University does not consult on job descriptions.

UCU responded that the duties outlined in the new role will affect other academic staff.

The CPO assured UCU that the role was created to alleviate work pressures and not to create additional work. UCU disagreed that this would be the result.

The PVC AQSE also agreed to send UCU the updated Assessment Code of Practice.

26.06 Update on current academic and academic-related negotiations

The Director of People and Culture provided the Committee with an update on current negotiations.

With respect to ongoing negotiations on the addendum current Workload Distribution Guidance Framework, the Director of People and Culture reported that there are still some areas of disagreement between both parties, however, it is anticipated that negotiations will conclude in the next 4-6 weeks.

A number of negotiation meetings on the review of Disciplinary Procedures have taken place. The negotiations have been conducted in a helpful and collegial manner. Both sides agree that good progress has been made and the negotiations will soon come to a close.

Several negotiation meetings have taken place to date on the Professorial Incremental Salary Progression Scheme with discussions divided into four parts: scheme regulations; criteria related to learning and teaching; criteria related to research; and criteria related to civic and institutional contribution. Negotiations on two parts are almost completed.

Negotiations will commence on a review of the Capability Procedure following the conclusion of negotiations on the Disciplinary Procedures. Negotiations on the review of the Bullying and Harassment Policy and Procedures will follow thereafter.

26.07 AOB

UCU requested an update on an ongoing Employer Led Review. The CPO responded that the management side had previously made its position clear on this matter i.e. it is not appropriate to discuss the individual application of the procedure at a consultative and negotiation committee. UCU asked for its objections to be noted.

Meeting Ended 15:25