# University of the West of Scotland principal’s £37,000 travel expenses spark uproar amid £14.4m deficit



In recent revelations that have drawn sharp criticism, Professor James Miller, the Principal and Vice-Chancellor of the University of the West of Scotland (UWS), has been reported to have claimed £37,429 in travel expenses over the past two years, a considerable sum amid the university's ongoing financial turmoil. The expenses include a luxury trip to Barbados costing £5,970, along with visits to other exotic destinations such as Dubai, Kuala Lumpur, and South Africa. This controversy forms part of a larger narrative surrounding UWS, which is grappling with a staggering £14.4 million deficit for the current financial year.

These lavish expenses come at a time when the university is facing severe budget constraints, prompting lecturers and other staff to consider strike action over potential job losses. UWS is not alone in this struggle; institutions across Scotland are experiencing financial challenges, exacerbated by the diminishing student enrolments and increased operational costs. The university's headcount dropped from 22,088 in the previous year to 20,514. This decline alone has resulted in a £1.8 million shortfall in tuition fee income.

Further complicating the situation, UWS has been affected by a cyberattack in July 2023, attributed to the Rhysida cyber gang, which compromised over one million personal documents and resulted in substantial recovery costs. The ongoing impact of this cyber incident has been cited as a major factor contributing to the university’s financial deficit, with recovery efforts inflating expenditures by £18.3 million compared to the previous financial year.

Critically, while some senior staff accumulated over £163,000 in expenses between April 2023 and September 2024, Professor Miller's claims have raised eyebrows, especially considering his annual salary, which totals £288,000 including pension contributions. The claim for a £5,631.09 trip to attend the COP28 Partnership Meetings in Dubai and other high-cost engagements only serve to intensify scrutiny. Political figures from the Scottish Conservative and Labour parties have expressed concerns, arguing that such spending is inappropriate given the financial strain on the institution.

A spokesperson for UWS defended these trips, asserting that international engagement—though costly—is essential for securing income through overseas student recruitment. They maintained that the financial benefits far outweighed the expenditures, a claim that requires careful examination in light of the current fiscal state of the university.

In parallel, the broader context of the Scottish higher education sector reveals that several universities are echoing similar financial woes. Concerns are mounting that unless urgent discussions regarding a new funding model are initiated, institutions may continue struggling under increasing financial pressures, including inflationary rises, increased pension contributions, and a funding framework that many perceive to be inadequate.

In response to these challenges and the university's shifts in strategy, UWS has initiated voluntary redundancy schemes aimed at reducing costs, projecting a savings of approximately £10 million. The first phase targets around 170 roles, primarily within support services. The move reflects a growing consensus that to navigate this financial crisis effectively, universities must prioritise fiscal sustainability while ensuring that core educational services remain robust.

These developments emphasise the turbulent state of the higher education sector in Scotland, as institutions struggle to balance the need for financial prudence with the imperative of providing high-quality education and support to students. As UWS grapples with its ongoing challenges, questions remain about governance, accountability, and the broader implications for the future of higher education in the region.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
2. Paragraphs 2, 6
3. Paragraphs 6, 7
4. Paragraphs 6, 7
5. Paragraphs 4, 6
6. Paragraphs 7
7. Paragraph 6

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/scottish-news/head-cash-strapped-scots-university-35204641> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.scotsman.com/education/scottish-university-posts-ps144m-deficit-after-cyber-attack-and-fall-in-student-numbers-4926237> - The University of the West of Scotland (UWS) reported a £14.4 million deficit for the 2023/24 financial year, a significant downturn from a £2.5 million surplus in 2022/23. This financial decline was attributed to a cyberattack in July 2023, which led to increased recovery costs, and a decrease in student enrollment from 22,088 to 20,514, resulting in a £1.8 million shortfall in tuition fee income. The university acknowledged the need for a 'multi-year concerted effort' to restore student numbers and manage costs effectively.
3. <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/hat-trick-seven-figure-deficits-he-finance-crisis-spreads> - The University of the West of Scotland (UWS) reported an underlying deficit of £15.3 million for the 2023/24 financial year, marking a significant financial challenge. This deficit was attributed to increased expenditure outpacing income, a decline in international student recruitment, and additional costs associated with recovering from a cyberattack in July 2023. The university's financial difficulties reflect broader challenges within the UK higher education sector, with several institutions reporting similar deficits.
4. <https://www.scotsman.com/education/snp-under-pressure-to-open-urgent-talks-on-new-university-funding-model-with-7-institutions-in-the-red-5019391> - The University of the West of Scotland (UWS) reported an underlying operating deficit of £15.3 million for the 2023/24 financial year, a significant increase from a £909,000 surplus in 2022/23. This financial downturn was attributed to increased expenditure, a decline in international student recruitment, and additional costs related to recovering from a cyberattack in July 2023. The Scottish National Party (SNP) is under pressure to initiate urgent discussions on a new university funding model to address these financial challenges.
5. <https://b2bdaily.com/it/university-of-the-west-of-scotland-faces-cyberattack-and-financial-crisis/> - In July 2023, the University of the West of Scotland (UWS) experienced a significant cyberattack by the Rhysida cyber gang, compromising over one million personal documents. This breach led to substantial financial strains, with the university's expenditure increasing by £18.3 million compared to the previous year due to recovery efforts. Additionally, a decline in student enrollment resulted in a £1.8 million shortfall in tuition fee income, contributing to a projected £14.4 million deficit for the financial year ending April 2023.
6. <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/17520221.university-west-scotland-cuts-jobs-amidst-funding-crisis/> - Facing financial pressures, the University of the West of Scotland (UWS) initiated a voluntary redundancy scheme to reduce costs by an estimated £10 million. The first phase targeted up to 170 positions among academic-related support staff, including librarians, senior administrators, and IT staff. The university cited inflation, wage increases, a real terms decrease in grant funding, and increased pension contributions as factors necessitating these cost-cutting measures.
7. <https://www.uws.ac.uk/about-uws/compliance/financial-statements-regulations/> - The University of the West of Scotland (UWS) provides access to its annual financial statements and financial regulations on its official website. These documents offer detailed insights into the university's financial performance, strategic planning, and compliance measures. The most recent financial statements available are for the year 2023, with archived statements dating back to 2003. The university emphasizes transparency and accountability in its financial reporting.