# University of the West of Scotland staff challenge principal’s £37,000 travel expenses amid £14 million deficit



The University of the West of Scotland (UWS) is facing mounting tensions as staff prepare to vote on a motion of no confidence in Professor James Miller, the institution's principal and vice-chancellor. This unrest follows the revelation that Professor Miller claimed over £37,000 in travel expenses in just two years, with a notable trip to Barbados costing nearly £6,000 for flights and accommodation in November 2023. Such extravagant spending has come under scrutiny against the backdrop of the university’s significant financial woes, including a projected deficit of £14.4 million for the 2023/24 academic year.

In light of the financial challenges, faculty union representatives have increasingly raised concerns regarding the appropriateness of high-level expenses. A spokesperson from UNISON stated, “Our members have had enough… this spending on executive’s international travel… shows an astounding level of mismanagement.” This sentiment is echoed by assistant general secretary David Belsey from the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS), who highlighted a striking 85% of members voting in favour of industrial action over compulsory redundancies, signalling a collective pushback against perceived mismanagement.

Professor Miller's travels extend beyond Barbados, including expensive trips to prominent global venues. For example, a visit to Dubai to attend COP28 incurred costs of over £5,600, and a recent trip to South Africa for the GEC+Africa 2024 Congress led to further substantial expenses. Collectively, these spending habits are provoking increasing frustration among staff and students at a time when the university implements cost-cutting measures, including job losses and reductions in student services.

Similar patterns of high-level travel spending amid financial difficulties have been noted across other Scottish universities. Professor Iain Gillespie of Dundee University accumulated travel expenses exceeding £131,000 over three years, amid their own estimated £30 million deficit and plans for job cuts. Such financial strains have resulted in overwhelming votes for strike action from staff at Dundee, primarily in response to management's financial strategies.

Moreover, a broader trend is emerging across Scottish higher education institutions, where staff dissatisfaction with management performance seems pervasive. A separate survey indicated that 89% of staff at Dundee University expressed no confidence in their management, correlating with ongoing negotiations regarding potential redundancies and pay disputes.

The situation raises critical questions about leadership accountability within higher education during precarious financial times. Concerns have also been voiced about potential nepotism in recruitment practices at UWS, further complicating relations between staff and leadership. The appointment of Gayle McPherson, partner to an Executive Dean, has attracted scrutiny from unions, reflecting deeper issues of governance and management ethos within the institution.

As UWS grapples with internal unrest and financial challenges, the outcome of the impending no confidence vote will likely serve as a pivotal moment. It could set a precedent not just for UWS but also for other institutions navigating similar fiscal pressures and staff discontent. The future of leadership at the university hangs in the balance as the community continues to call for greater transparency and accountability.

### Reference Map

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

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2. <https://www.scotsman.com/education/the-ps131000-travel-bill-racked-up-by-a-cost-cutting-scottish-university-principal-4887887> - An article detailing the £131,000 travel expenses incurred by Professor Iain Gillespie, the principal of Dundee University, over a three-year period. The expenses include international trips to China, South Africa, and Iraq, amid the university's £30 million deficit and plans for job cuts. The article highlights concerns over the appropriateness of such spending during financial difficulties.
3. <https://www.scotsman.com/education/staff-at-major-scottish-university-vote-for-strike-action-over-job-cuts-to-plug-ps30m-deficit-4967843> - A report on Dundee University staff voting overwhelmingly for strike action in response to proposed job cuts aimed at addressing a £30 million deficit. The article discusses the financial challenges faced by the university and the staff's response to the management's plans.
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5. <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/union-accuses-west-of-scotland-of-keeping-appointments-in-the-family/414523.article> - A report on the Education Institute of Scotland's (EIS) concerns over potential nepotism at the University of the West of Scotland, citing the appointment of Gayle McPherson, partner of Executive Dean Malcolm Foley, to a professorial post. The article discusses the union's apprehensions about the university's management structure and appointment processes.
6. <https://www.thecourier.co.uk/fp/news/dundee/3937345/wendy-alexander-expenses-dundee-university/> - An article revealing that Wendy Alexander, Vice Principal for International at Dundee University, claimed over £12,000 in expenses between 2017 and 2022. The claims included small amounts like £3.58 for subsistence and £5 for taxi trips, as well as larger sums for international travel. The piece highlights concerns over the appropriateness of such expenses amid financial challenges at the university.
7. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-bristol-43216843> - A report on the University of the West of England defending its Vice-Chancellor, Professor Steve West, after revelations about his £43,000 expenses over an 18-month period. The expenses included £10,000 on travel to London and £7,000 on trips to Malaysia and Australia. The university stated that the expenses were necessary for international partnerships and that the figures were misinterpreted.