# Dundee art students protest job cuts with degree show activism



A fine art student at Dundee's Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design (DJCAD) is leveraging his degree show to voice discontent with the university's recent plans to cut jobs amid a looming £35 million budget deficit. This two-week exhibition, one of the highlights of the academic calendar and expected to draw thousands, is set to feature not only the students' artistic work but also a series of protest posters expressing their dissatisfaction with the management's handling of the financial crisis.

The scope of the upcoming job cuts is staggering, with initial plans suggesting that over 600 staff could be affected, a figure later moderated to approximately 300 full-time equivalent positions as part of an alternative recovery strategy. The students, in collaboration with campus unions, aim to reflect on the gravity of this crisis through their artwork and accompanying narratives, including perceived misrepresentations by the university's senior management. As articulated by Mr Millar, a student involved in the project, “The degree show is an opportunity for our year to make a real lasting impact on this university… to ensure future students get the best quality of education they can and keep this university alive.”

The financial turmoil facing Dundee University has broader implications, reflecting systemic challenges within the UK higher education sector. Chronic underfunding, sharply declining international student enrolments, and spiralling operational costs have combined to push the institution towards insolvency. Independent inquiries have suggested significant governance failures; interim leadership has underscored a lack of financial discipline and questionable investment decisions, exacerbated by increased pressures from staffing needs that do not align with financial realities.

Local political figures have been vocal in the face of this crisis. Maggi Chapman, North East MSP and rector-elect at Dundee University, praised the students for intertwining art with activism, stating, “Art and activism have a longstanding and important relationship... shining a light on injustice.” Chapman urged the university's administration to heed the warnings implicit in the students' exhibition and engage collaboratively with the community.

The University of Dundee's predicament is emblematic of the issues running through Scottish higher education, where the funding model reliant on international fees is becoming increasingly precarious due to tightening immigration laws and fluctuating currency. The financial strain has sparked severe unrest among staff and students alike, with union leaders and opposition politicians denouncing the proposed cuts as “academic and economic vandalism.”

Union representatives have cautioned that substantial job losses would not only devastate the university community but also have far-reaching consequences for the local economy. They have called for urgent intervention from the Scottish Government, which some critics argue has been neglectful in addressing the sector's mounting challenges.

In a notable shift, university management has recently indicated a willingness to pursue an alternative funding strategy, which may mitigate the immediate job losses initially anticipated. This change came after sustained pressure from staff, students, and unions, all rallying against what had been described as “brutal” cost-cutting measures.

The DJCAD Degree Show 2025, commencing on May 24 and running until June 1, is set to not only showcase talent but also serve as a vital platform for advocacy during these contesting times for Dundee University. The students hope the visibility of their cause will galvanize support from both the university community and the general public, highlighting a moment where education, creativity, and civic responsibility coalesce in a critical dialogue about the future of their institution.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.thecourier.co.uk/fp/politics/5252178/dundee-university-degree-show-protest/), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/b095805d-a069-432e-bf31-e4513fb2d2f2)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.thecourier.co.uk/fp/politics/5252178/dundee-university-degree-show-protest/), [[3]](https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/university-dundee-axe-632-jobs-plug-ps35-million-deficit), [[4]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c14lv4y667eo)
* Paragraph 3 – [[5]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/fears-scotland-scottish-government-dundee-snp-b1219993.html), [[6]](https://thetab.com/2025/05/01/university-of-dundee-to-scale-back-job-cuts-after-union-backlash)

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.thecourier.co.uk/fp/politics/5252178/dundee-university-degree-show-protest/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/b095805d-a069-432e-bf31-e4513fb2d2f2> - The University of Dundee is facing a severe financial crisis, risking insolvency by June 2025 without a £22 million bailout from the Scottish government. The university plans to cut 632 jobs, nearly a fifth of its workforce, and reduce academic offerings and research activities to address a projected £63 million budget deficit. The crisis stems from chronic underfunding of UK higher education, exacerbated by dwindling international student numbers, high operational costs, and poor financial decisions. An independent inquiry is investigating potential governance failures, including whether management concealed the severity of the crisis. Interim leadership highlighted poor oversight and mismanagement, while the University and College Union blames excessive spending and flawed projects, like a new admissions system, for the deficit. Staff morale is low, and students face uncertainty about program continuity. Critics are calling for a longer-term, less drastic recovery approach backed by additional government loans. The situation reflects broader challenges in Scotland’s tuition-free higher education model, which relies heavily on international fees and now faces added pressure from stricter immigration laws and currency issues, particularly affecting Nigerian student enrollment. ([ft.com](https://www.ft.com/content/b095805d-a069-432e-bf31-e4513fb2d2f2?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/university-dundee-axe-632-jobs-plug-ps35-million-deficit> - The University of Dundee has announced plans to cut 632 full-time equivalent jobs, while committing to an external investigation into “what went wrong” with the institution’s finances. The cuts are the largest announced yet in the UK higher education sector this year and are equivalent to about one in five posts at the Scottish institution, which said it was unlikely that it could avoid making compulsory redundancies. They come as the institution forecasts a £35 million deficit for 2024-25 – up from the £30 million figure quoted when former principal Iain Gillespie resigned with immediate effect in December. Interim principal Shane O’Neill said that Dundee’s financial crisis had “has challenged us to ask some very fundamental questions about the size, shape, balance and structure of the university”. The university said that staffing reductions would be spread across every school and directorate, with 197 full-time equivalent academic roles set to go, alongside 435 professional services roles. The university said that it would seek to avoid compulsory redundancies, including through a voluntary severance scheme, but “the scale of the required staff reductions means that it is very unlikely that the need for compulsory redundancy will be mitigated entirely, noting the depth of the financial challenge we face”. Dundee is also proposing to restructure its eight academic schools into three faculties, a “review of teaching efficiency” designed to “achieve a 20 per cent reduction in module delivery”, and a “reorganisation” of research into a “small number of focused research institutes” which would “minimise institution-funded research”. As it announced the job cuts, Dundee said that the situation had been “compounded by internal factors” including “a longstanding structural imbalance with the scale and intensity of the university’s research profile being significantly greater than can be sustained from the scale of teaching and commercial activity delivered; inadequate financial discipline and control; poor capital planning and investment decisions; [and] weak compliance in financial control policies and lack of accountability”. Former principal Gillespie had faced criticism of his expenses, including a £7,000 business-class trip to Hong Kong, as the university’s problems mounted. “In setting out our proposals towards a financial recovery and a sustainable future we have adopted an approach of frank realism and honest self-criticism in our assessment of the current situation and the challenges faced,” O’Neill said. “There is an urgency for us to act promptly and we will continue to work intensively with the SFC and other stakeholders to ensure delivery of the sustainable and successful future we need for this great university, which is integral to the economic, social and cultural well-being of the city, our region and beyond.” ([timeshighereducation.com](https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/university-dundee-axe-632-jobs-plug-ps35-million-deficit?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c14lv4y667eo> - Dundee University has told staff that job losses are "inevitable" as it faces a potential deficit of £30m in the next financial year. In an all-staff email, the university's principal, Prof Iain Gillespie, said it was planning for "a significant deficit" in the wake of "an extremely challenging period" for the UK higher education sector. He said despite a recruitment freeze and reducing operational expenditure, the university was still looking at a deficit of between £25m and £30m next year. Academic union Dundee University College Union (DUCU) said it was "outraged" at the news after previously receiving "reassuring verbal updates." The university currently employs more than 3,000 people. Prof Gillespie told staff: "We must take further action now to address our financial stability and long-term future. Given the profile of our costs, it is inevitable this will mean a reduction in our staffing levels. This will be a very difficult period, certainly for this financial year and next." One staff member told BBC Scotland News: "The freeze on staff recruitment and the non-filling of vacancies will over-burden an already demoralised staff, and the threat of redundancy makes things even worse. Staff who are on precarious temporary sessional contracts will be the most affected by this initially. Whilst most staff care about the students and go that extra mile to help, as always, the students will feel the effects of this the most." ([bbc.co.uk](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c14lv4y667eo?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/fears-scotland-scottish-government-dundee-snp-b1219993.html> - Dundee University has been accused of "academic and economic vandalism" after it announced 700 people could lose their jobs due to a financial crisis. Fears have been raised of the institution collapsing after it revealed a £35 million deficit, resulting in plans to cut 632 full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs. In a letter to Holyrood’s Education Committee on Monday, interim principal Professor Shane O’Neill said the job cuts would likely affect around 700 people. A letter was sent to Holyrood’s education committee. Mary Senior, Scotland official for the University and Colleges Union (UCU), said: “Sacking over 700 staff at Dundee University is tantamount to academic and economic vandalism. This level of job cuts would be catastrophic for the city of Dundee and the surrounding area. We cannot let this destruction go ahead, the funding already announced by the Scottish Government and Funding Council is a start to prevent these cuts. We need to do better, to support students, education and jobs in the city.” Scottish Tory education spokesman Miles Briggs said: “The growing number of job losses at Dundee University is an absolute hammer blow for staff who were still reeling from the initial level of cuts announced. Years of mismanagement at the university and brutal cuts from the SNP government are coming to home to roost and the consequences look set to be devastating.” The Scottish Government is “asleep at the wheel”, Mr Briggs added, as he urged it to “act now”. ([standard.co.uk](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/fears-scotland-scottish-government-dundee-snp-b1219993.html?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://thetab.com/2025/05/01/university-of-dundee-to-scale-back-job-cuts-after-union-backlash> - The University of Dundee has announced new plans to cut around 300 jobs, down from the initial prediction of 700. The institution will seek further public funding under the new plans and integrate a new operating model. The development of an "alternative pathway" to funding comes after staff voted in favour of strike action last week. Dundee announced last year it was facing a £35 million deficit and initial predictions made by interim principal Shane O’Neill suggested 700 jobs could be shed to make up the funding gap. He has since announced a number of steps will be taken to avoid this, saying: “We have been continuing to have positive and constructive engagement with the Scottish Funding Council and other stakeholders to develop an alternative pathway towards financial recovery. We have sought to find a financially viable way forward that would mitigate substantially the immediate need for large numbers of job losses.” The University and College Union (UCU) led a number of protests and balloted members on strike action in protest against the cuts. Dundee UCU branch co-president, Melissa D’Ascenzio, told the BBC: “It is a relief that university management has backed away from the brutal plans to cut up to 700 jobs. This backtracking is in no doubt down to the relentless pressure from UCU, from all the campus unions and the support they’ve received from the city of Dundee, local communities and from across the political spectrum.” Professor Shane added: “There are still several challenging steps to be taken in order to clear this pathway to progress. We also need to ensure that the steps we take do succeed in allowing us to access commercial lending, as that will be essential for long term sustainability.” ([thetab.com](https://thetab.com/2025/05/01/university-of-dundee-to-scale-back-job-cuts-after-union-backlash?utm_source=openai))