# UHI Perth considers scrapping degrees amid financial crisis



Managers at the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) Perth are considering the potential scrapping of degree programmes, just 14 years after the institution gained university status, in an effort to address severe financial pressures. This development was revealed in papers obtained by The Courier (Dundee), which detail discussions among board members about exploring "options around stopping higher education delivery."

In a board meeting held in March, former chairperson Graham Watson, who resigned earlier in June, emphasised the need to assess "the implications and benefits of this" proposed move. He also criticised other cost-cutting initiatives, suggesting they "appear to merely tinker around the edges," highlighting the urgency and seriousness of the institution's financial predicament.

The proposed plan involves shifting the focus of UHI Perth away from degree education towards further education. This would involve concentrating on college-level courses and vocational training instead of undergraduate degree offerings. Perth College, which gained university status as part of the Highlands and Islands group in 2011, allowing it to award degrees, has since struggled with ongoing financial difficulties.

Perthshire SNP MP Pete Wishart condemned the proposals, describing them as an "absolute disgrace" and a "step backward two decades." Speaking to The Courier, Wishart highlighted the importance of UHI Perth to the city, explaining, "Perth quite literally brands itself as a university city – it’s the first sign you read when you drive in, and is an integral part of the city’s identity." He further expressed concerns about leadership effectiveness at the institution, noting, "To break from this current downward trajectory requires effective leadership. However, after these string of events, I am concerned as to whether those at the very top of the current senior management team are up to the task."

Financial struggles at UHI Perth have intensified in recent years. Earlier this month, an associated aviation firm with a near-century history of training pilots and aircraft engineers entered administration. The university's leadership faced criticism for failing to act despite warnings about the firm's instability seven months prior. The institution also shuttered its nursery last year, citing financial unsustainability.

The college set ambitious savings targets of £3.2 million last year. Its deficit stood at £3.3 million in July 2024 but has been reduced by £1.3 million since then. However, organisational instability remains, with reports that UHI Perth was "unable to prepare budgets" last summer due to ongoing staff restructuring. The minutes from board meetings reveal that 50 staff members accepted voluntary redundancy at a cost of £964,000. It remains unclear how many jobs would be affected should the university courses be completely discontinued.

The proposed changes could significantly impact students, especially those who begin their studies in further education and proceed to complete degrees at the institution. An education union spokesperson from the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS) expressed concern over the discussions: "We were concerned to learn about these discussions. There has no communication with staff about this proposal from senior leadership."

A spokesperson for UHI Perth noted: "The minutes of our board of management meetings reflect a wide range of ideas and ongoing discussions. These conversations are part of a broader process and do not necessarily represent final proposals." They added that the institution is "carefully exploring all available options to address financial challenges, with a firm commitment to securing the long-term sustainability of UHI Perth while keeping any impact on our students and staff to a minimum."

Similarly, a representative from the University of Highlands and Islands stated, "We are aware of the financial challenges facing UHI Perth and the wider education sector. Our commitment to providing accessible, high-quality higher education remains unwavering."

The situation at UHI Perth signals a critical juncture for the institution as it navigates financial instability and considers fundamental changes to its educational offerings. The outcome of these discussions will likely have significant implications for staff, students, and the broader Perth community.

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

## Bibliography

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2. <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/24069797.university-highlands-islands-review-lead-cuts/> - This piece discusses the financial reviews at UHI Perth, Moray, and Shetland, highlighting potential redundancies and course cuts, supporting the information about the institution's financial challenges and the consideration of fundamental changes to its educational offerings.
3. <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/24296582.uhi-perth-fire-huge-cuts-including-library-nursery/> - This article details UHI Perth's proposed cuts, including the closure of the nursery and library, as part of a £3 million savings plan, aligning with the claim about the institution's financial difficulties and the potential impact on students and staff.
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6. <https://www.pressandjournal.co.uk/fp/education/higher-education/2251478/government-asked-to-help-as-college-seeks-800000-savings/> - This piece reports on the Highland and Islands Students Association urging the Scottish Government to intervene as UHI seeks £800,000 in savings, highlighting the financial difficulties faced by the institution and the potential impact on staff and students.
7. <https://www.thecourier.co.uk/fp/politics/5231956/uhi-perth-university-degrees/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data