# University of Aberdeen staff and students prepare for strike over disputed academic cuts



The University of Aberdeen is facing a turbulent chapter, marked by significant proposed cuts that have raised legal and ethical questions among faculty and union representatives. These concerns have intensified following the recent announcement of plans to reduce staffing significantly within various academic departments, prompting fears of job losses and the end of specific degree programmes.

David Anderson, an anthropology lecturer and the branch secretary of the University and College Union (UCU), expressed frustration regarding the management's approach, characterising it as an arbitrary and underhanded decision-making process. He stated, "It appears that management is picking and choosing disciplines to shut down. A lot of us are very angry." Citing the Scottish Higher Education Act, Anderson emphasised that the authority to determine academic offerings rests with the academic Senate, not the administration. His remarks underscore a growing discontent among staff, who perceive the cuts as a form of 'cynical vandalism' with questionable legality.

The union has called for transparency and collaborative efforts from management, a demand rooted in previous confrontations over similar issues. Just last year, around 200 employees opted for voluntary redundancy and early retirement, largely in response to an ongoing standoff regarding plans for the modern languages department. This history of conflict indicates not only a chronic misalignment between academic staff and university governance but also a pressing need for more meaningful dialogue regarding institutional priorities.

An anonymous academic at the university highlighted the procedural oversight, claiming the Senate has not been consulted on any changes necessitated by the drastic staffing reductions. This lack of consultation contradicts the recommendations from a 'Lessons Learned' review aimed at improving such communications in the future. The current trajectory suggests that rather than adopting a more compassionate approach towards programme cuts, management might be navigating these waters with increased disregard for the academic community's welfare.

The university's rationale for these cuts focuses on financial sustainability. According to a communication from management, approximately 25% of the university's postgraduate courses have five or fewer students enrolled, alongside 16% of undergraduate offerings. This data has been used to justify the initiation of voluntary severance and enhanced retirement schemes across various departments. However, critics argue that these measures are unnecessary, particularly since the UCU's own position paper contends that the university is forecasted to achieve a £2.8 million surplus in the current financial year. This disparity between financial projections and operational decisions only fuels speculation about the true motives behind the cuts.

In addition to internal dissent, the student body has also rallied against the proposed measures. Miles Rothoerl, Vice President for Education of the university's Student Union, voiced concern over the implications of these cuts, stating, “We need a sustainable model that recognises education as a public good, not a financial burden." He maintained that inaction would have dire consequences for students, families, and future employers as the university grapples with financial and educational sustainability. Students previously staged protests against cuts to the modern languages department, further illustrating the depth of concern surrounding academic provision.

As the university's financial landscape is complicated by rising operational costs and diminishing international student enrolments, many Scottish institutions find themselves in similar predicaments. The University of Dundee, for example, is looking to reduce its workforce by 300 staff members amid a £35 million deficit. Concurrently, the University of Edinburgh has already seen 350 employees take voluntary redundancy, showcasing a broader trend of academic institutions grappling with economic pressures.

With mounting opposition from both staff and students, including the recent overwhelming support for industrial action voted by 80% of staff, the University of Aberdeen stands at a crossroads. It must reassess its strategies for budgetary prudence while ensuring that academic integrity and community welfare are upheld. Amidst this turmoil, the call for genuine collaboration and transparent communication becomes even more crucial, as the university navigates the complex interplay of educational value, financial health, and institutional governance.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraph 1: Sources [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25147415.aberdeen-uni-cuts-legally-questionable-critics-say/?ref=rss), [[2]](https://ucuscotland.wordpress.com/2024/04/29/break-the-silence-aberdeen-university-ucu-branch-position-paper-on-cuts/)
2. Paragraph 2: Source [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25147415.aberdeen-uni-cuts-legally-questionable-critics-say/?ref=rss)
3. Paragraph 3: Sources [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25147415.aberdeen-uni-cuts-legally-questionable-critics-say/?ref=rss), [[4]](https://www.ucu.org.uk/article/13454/Aberdeen-University-staff-overwhelmingly-back-industrial-action-in-row-over-modern-languages-cuts-and-job-losses)
4. Paragraph 4: Source [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25147415.aberdeen-uni-cuts-legally-questionable-critics-say/?ref=rss)
5. Paragraph 5: Source [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25147415.aberdeen-uni-cuts-legally-questionable-critics-say/?ref=rss)
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7. Paragraph 7: Sources [[3]](https://www.thenational.scot/news/23983172.ucu-holds-rally-modern-languages-cuts-aberdeen-university/), [[6]](https://thestudentnews.co.uk/2024/02/17/ucu-aberdeen-to-strike-over-widespread-budget-cuts/)
8. Paragraph 8: Sources [[5]](https://www.scotsman.com/education/aberdeen-university-staff-vote-for-strike-action-amid-row-over-cuts-to-modern-languages-staff-and-degrees-4509291), [[6]](https://thestudentnews.co.uk/2024/02/17/ucu-aberdeen-to-strike-over-widespread-budget-cuts/)
9. Paragraph 9: Sources [[2]](https://ucuscotland.wordpress.com/2024/04/29/break-the-silence-aberdeen-university-ucu-branch-position-paper-on-cuts/), [[4]](https://www.ucu.org.uk/article/13454/Aberdeen-University-staff-overwhelmingly-back-industrial-action-in-row-over-modern-languages-cuts-and-job-losses)
10. Paragraph 10: Sources [[2]](https://ucuscotland.wordpress.com/2024/04/29/break-the-silence-aberdeen-university-ucu-branch-position-paper-on-cuts/), [[3]](https://www.thenational.scot/news/23983172.ucu-holds-rally-modern-languages-cuts-aberdeen-university/), [[6]](https://thestudentnews.co.uk/2024/02/17/ucu-aberdeen-to-strike-over-widespread-budget-cuts/)

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## Bibliography

* <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25147415.aberdeen-uni-cuts-legally-questionable-critics-say/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
* <https://ucuscotland.wordpress.com/2024/04/29/break-the-silence-aberdeen-university-ucu-branch-position-paper-on-cuts/> - In February 2024, the University and College Union (UCU) branch at the University of Aberdeen published a position paper titled 'Break the Silence'. The paper critiques the university's proposed cuts, arguing that the institution is on track for a £2.8 million cash surplus in 2024, questioning the necessity of the cuts. The UCU calls for transparency and cooperation from university management, emphasizing the need for alternative solutions to avoid staff redundancies and preserve academic programs.
* <https://www.thenational.scot/news/23983172.ucu-holds-rally-modern-languages-cuts-aberdeen-university/> - In December 2023, staff and students at the University of Aberdeen participated in a rally organized by the UCU and the Aberdeen University Students’ Union to protest cuts to the modern languages department. The rally featured speeches from UCU General Secretary Jo Grady, MSP Maggie Chapman, and AUSU Vice-President for Education Rhiannon Ledwell. The protest was in response to the university's consultation on reducing modern languages provision, including proposals to end certain language degrees.
* <https://www.ucu.org.uk/article/13454/Aberdeen-University-staff-overwhelmingly-back-industrial-action-in-row-over-modern-languages-cuts-and-job-losses> - In February 2024, staff at the University of Aberdeen voted overwhelmingly in favor of industrial action in response to proposed cuts to modern languages degrees and potential redundancies. The ballot, conducted by UCU Scotland, showed 80% support for strike action on a 60% turnout. The dispute centers on plans to end single-honours degrees in French, Gaelic, German, and Spanish, with approximately 30 staff members at risk of redundancy.
* <https://www.scotsman.com/education/aberdeen-university-staff-vote-for-strike-action-amid-row-over-cuts-to-modern-languages-staff-and-degrees-4509291> - In February 2024, staff at the University of Aberdeen voted to strike over proposed cuts to modern languages degrees and staff. The University and College Union (UCU) Scotland reported that 80% of those who voted supported the move, with a 60% turnout. The dispute involves plans to end single-honours degrees in modern languages and put 30 staff members at risk of redundancy, following a decline in student numbers and financial challenges.
* <https://thestudentnews.co.uk/2024/02/17/ucu-aberdeen-to-strike-over-widespread-budget-cuts/> - In February 2024, the Aberdeen University and College Union (UCU) voted to strike in response to widespread budget cuts at the University of Aberdeen. The university announced in November that continuing its modern languages department was 'unsustainable' and proposed eliminating degrees in French, Gaelic, German, and Spanish. The UCU's ballot showed 80% support for strike action on a 60% turnout, highlighting concerns over potential job losses and the impact on language education.
* <https://news.stv.tv/north/university-of-aberdeen-scraps-double-marking-rules-amid-ucu-lecturer-boycott> - In April 2024, the University of Aberdeen announced the removal of double marking rules for assessments amid a lecturer boycott by the University and College Union (UCU). The decision was made to minimize the impact of the ongoing marking boycott, which began on April 20, 2024, due to disputes over pay, pensions, and working conditions. The university stated that the policy change would not affect academic quality or standards.