# University of the West of Scotland faces vote of no confidence amid £37,000 travel expense scandal



The financial mismanagement of universities in Scotland has come under intense scrutiny amid revelations of extravagant spending by senior administrators. In particular, the Principal and Vice-Chancellor of the University of the West of Scotland (UWS) is facing a vote of no confidence following disclosures of his extensive travel expenses totalling over £37,000 within just two years. This situation is compounded by UWS's staggering deficit of £14.4 million for the 2023/24 academic year, prompting discussions around compulsory redundancies.

The details surrounding these travel expenses raise serious questions. For instance, a recent trip to Barbados cost £5,970 for flights and accommodation — all during a time when university staff were preparing for industrial action due to impending job cuts. Trips to high-profile destinations like Dubai, Kuala Lumpur, and New York seem to prioritise needless international engagement over urgent financial responsibilities at home. Critics, including union representatives, have voiced their outrage at this appalling mismanagement, especially in light of the university's severe financial constraints affecting both staff jobs and critical student services.

John Mooney, a regional organiser for UNISON, starkly remarked, “This kind of spending on executives' international travel, while the deficit soars and jobs and student services are being slashed, reflects an astounding level of negligence.” Such sentiments underscore a growing discontent among university staff, evidenced by a recent indicative ballot where 85% of EIS members expressed their support for industrial action against compulsory redundancies. David Belsey, an Assistant General Secretary, reiterated the clear message from members opposing these cuts.

This troubling association of lavish spending with broader financial difficulties is not isolated to UWS. A 2016 report by the University and College Union highlighted that several Scottish university leaders were among the highest claimants for expenses in the UK, revealing a concerning trend of opacity in financial dealings. The vice-chancellor of Strathclyde University alone incurred over £41,000 in flight expenses in a single year, while the principal of Glasgow Caledonian University claimed nearly £40,000. Such patterns have raised serious questions about accountability, particularly as many institutions struggle under mounting financial pressure.

Recent examples at other universities, such as the University of Dundee, where its principal defended a £7,000 trip to Hong Kong, illustrate a disturbing narrative in which university administrators justify extravagant travel as essential for income generation and global partnerships. However, critics argue that such justifications become increasingly difficult to accept amidst growing debts and the urgent need to improve services for students and staff alike.

As UWS prepares for a potential vote of no confidence and calls for strike action continue to escalate, this episode highlights a pivotal moment in the governance of higher education institutions. The challenge for university leaders is not merely one of financial management but also of restoring trust and morale among staff and students, who are questioning how luxury spending can coexist with the pressing necessity for sustainable operations.

The unfolding situation at UWS casts a glaring spotlight on the urgent need for accountability and strategic financial management in higher education. The overwhelming backlash serves as a potent reminder that transparency and genuine consideration for the university community must take precedence over self-indulgent expenditures.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/scottish-news/boss-cash-strapped-scots-uni-35243795> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.uws.ac.uk/about-uws/governance/court/members-of-court/professor-james-miller> - Professor James A. Miller was appointed as Principal and Vice-Chancellor of the University of the West of Scotland (UWS) in November 2022. He began his career as a clinical nurse in Edinburgh and is the first nurse to hold such a position in Scotland. Prior to UWS, he served as Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Glasgow Caledonian University and held roles including Director of the Open University in Scotland and Chief Executive of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow. He holds an MBA from Edinburgh Napier University, a PhD from the University of Edinburgh, and is an alumnus of Harvard University’s Institute of Education Management. In 2023, he was elected as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. ([uws.ac.uk](https://www.uws.ac.uk/about-uws/governance/court/members-of-court/professor-james-miller?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://www.uws.ac.uk/about-uws/vice-chancellors-executive> - Professor James A. Miller FRSE serves as the Principal and Vice-Chancellor of the University of the West of Scotland (UWS). Appointed in November 2022, he is the first nurse to hold such a position in Scotland. His previous roles include Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Glasgow Caledonian University, Director of the Open University in Scotland, and Chief Executive of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow. He holds an MBA from Edinburgh Napier University, a PhD from the University of Edinburgh, and is an alumnus of Harvard University’s Institute of Education Management. In 2023, he was elected as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. ([uws.ac.uk](https://www.uws.ac.uk/about-uws/vice-chancellors-executive?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.ucu.org.uk/article/8103/Report-reveals-university-heads-perks-and-lack-of-transparency-at-Scottish-universities> - A 2016 report by the University and College Union (UCU) revealed that university leaders in Scotland were among the top claimers in the UK for expenses, including air travel and exclusive hotel accommodation. The report highlighted a lack of transparency, with some universities refusing to disclose information or redacting details. For instance, Strathclyde University's Professor Sir Jim McDonald spent £41,891 on flights in 2014/15, and Glasgow Caledonian University's Professor Pamela Gillies spent £39,509 on air travel. The report also noted that some universities spent significant amounts on management consultancy fees. ([ucu.org.uk](https://www.ucu.org.uk/article/8103/Report-reveals-university-heads-perks-and-lack-of-transparency-at-Scottish-universities?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/clyrdz9n0ejo> - In November 2024, the University of Dundee defended a £7,000 trip to Hong Kong by its principal, Professor Iain Gillespie. The university stated that the trip generated more than ten times that amount in revenue. Despite facing a potential deficit of £30 million in the next financial year, the university emphasized the importance of global partnerships and the income they bring. The trip included business class flights and accommodation, which some staff members criticized as 'irresponsible' given the university's financial challenges. ([bbc.com](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/clyrdz9n0ejo?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.scotsman.com/education/revealed-scottish-university-principals-eye-watering-bill-for-chauffeur-driven-cars-and-5-star-hotels-4698092> - An investigation by The Scotsman in July 2024 revealed that Scottish university principals have been spending significant amounts on chauffeur-driven cars, five-star hotels, and overseas travel. For example, Andrea Nolan, principal of Edinburgh’s Napier University, spent close to £4,000 on chauffeur-driven transport in one year. Other principals, such as Sir Peter Mathieson of Edinburgh University and Richard A Williams of Heriot-Watt University, also faced criticism for their lavish spending, including stays in five-star hotels and extensive international travel. ([scotsman.com](https://www.scotsman.com/education/revealed-scottish-university-principals-eye-watering-bill-for-chauffeur-driven-cars-and-5-star-hotels-4698092?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://www.scotsman.com/education/the-ps131000-travel-bill-racked-up-by-a-cost-cutting-scottish-university-principal-4887887> - In November 2024, it was reported that Professor Iain Gillespie, principal of Dundee University, accumulated a £131,000 bill for travel and accommodation over three years. This included a £7,154 trip to Hong Kong in November 2023. The university faced criticism for this spending amid a potential deficit of up to £30 million. The university defended the expenses, stating that the global activity brings in millions of pounds annually through student recruitment and in-country education and collaboration. ([scotsman.com](https://www.scotsman.com/education/the-ps131000-travel-bill-racked-up-by-a-cost-cutting-scottish-university-principal-4887887?utm_source=openai))