

Items submitted for discussion at the February 2026 meeting of JCNG

1. Protection under the terms of the Public Interest Disclosure Act

It has come to the attention of UCU that it would appear a number of colleagues, who have raised concerns regarding the alleged violation of professional and academic standards, have had their concerns dismissed and been made subject to various detriments, including threats to their security of employment.

The law, in particular the Public Interest Disclosure Act, makes it very clear that the detrimental treatment of “whistleblowers” is a very serious offence, which can invite unlimited awards of damages against both the institution and named individuals who attempt to impose detriments.

ACTION: UCU and ARU to agree and distribute a joint statement, reminding colleagues of the duty to report wrong-doing and the protections which exist in law and our procedures for “whistleblowers”.

2. Use of mobile phones in the teaching environment

UCU has been made aware that a number of academic colleagues are facing challenges in seminars, tutorials and lectures where a great number of students seem to be distracted from their studies by frequently inspecting and using mobile phones. In the current climate, where the university urges all colleagues to focus on the needs and demands of students, maintaining credible and productive spaces for learning is undermined as academics live in fear of provoking the chagrin of “the customer”. There are obvious equalities issues at stake, not least the fact that the capacity to enforce discipline is unevenly distributed amongst staff, while the pressure to succumb to the exercise of lifestyle choices in order to maximise the recording of student satisfaction may well have a distorting effect upon survey results. In addition, we must acknowledge the deadening effects upon freedom of expression for staff and students, consequent upon the anxiety of being recorded surreptitiously and then having words broadcast to the world, with possible disciplinary consequences. When we extend our understanding to the facility to capture images, we face the possible horror of teaching spaces being used to capture images that can then be modified and distributed in the service of pornographic harassment. To overcome these problems, a university-wide ban on the use of mobile phones in class would appear to be appropriate.

ACTION: ARU management and UCU to investigate the extent and effects of the problem and to devise suitable policies to remedy the situation.

3. Academic Workload Agreement: safeguarding health and safety, well-being and academic and professional standards.

The collective agreement reached between UCU and ARU in May 2022 (see: [signed-agreement-may-2022.pdf](#)) guides workload planning for academics across the institution. It was designed to safeguard health and safety, well-being and academic and professional standards. The agreement has been implemented successfully, albeit unevenly. Where local managers have shown resistance or even feigned incompetence, to affect the over exploitation of academics through the extraction of unpaid labour and to the detriment of students, UCU has been successful in drawing attention to injustices and worked with university leaders to enforce the implementation of the agreement.

In particular, in 2024 and 2025 colleagues involved in social work education in Peterborough threatened an all-out indefinite strike to enforce the collective agreement (see: [ARU-Peterborough and the crisis in social work education – ARU UCU](#)). After protracted negotiations, the VC signed an agreement with UCU to settle the dispute, with the promise to uphold the collective agreement of May 2022. Inspired by this success, in September 2025 colleagues in Criminology signalled to the leadership of the faculty of AHSS that they would not tolerate the prolongation of overwork and the violation of the workload agreement. Again, UCU made the commitment to provide colleagues with full financial compensation in the event of strike action (see: [criminology-declaration-of-dispute-september-2025.pdf](#)). We are pleased to say that industrial action proved to be unnecessary and that all outstanding complaints about overwork have since been resolved.

At the end of 2025, further to concerns raised about the implementation of the workload agreement in the School of Psychology, Sport and Sensory Science (see: [Open Letter to Professor Laurie Butler, the Dean of FSE – ARU UCU](#)), UCU officers met with the Head of School and the Dean of Faculty. We are pleased to say, it would appear that problems identified are to be resolved imminently and that we are working with faculty management to produce a joint statement to remind all concerned of the obligations and duties contained in the workload agreement.

ACTION: While changes to the extant agreement are permissible through established collective bargaining arrangements, no variations should be imposed or agreed at a local level (faculty or School), until any such modifications of the collective terms and conditions are explicitly agreed, through a branch wide ballot of affected UCU members. ARU and UCU should produce a joint statement to that effect, to be distributed to all academic staff.

4. RIDO Review and Restructuring

UCU have been approached by several members within RIDO regarding concerns over how the recent review and restructuring is being handled by some HR and management colleagues.

At-risk staff (at Assistant Director level) had interviews just before the Christmas break and at least one person was informed they were unsuccessful and could expect to be made redundant at the end of March. They received this news on December 22nd, just days before Christmas and before a holiday when they would have no support from university services or colleagues. UCU requests an explanation as to why delivering this devastating news at this time was deemed acceptable, given that this negatively impacted the mental health and wellbeing of affected staff. The timeline of the whole process – including interviews – should have been planned so that interviews were not right before Christmas, to avoid outcomes being communicated days before the holiday.

Since the start of January, members have informed us that the scheduling of meetings to discuss possible redeployment opportunities has been slow and required chasing. This has caused significant anxiety. Furthermore, some staff have been told – prematurely - that they can expect to be made redundant before these conversations have even taken place.

ACTION: UCU have requested (by email to HR colleagues) to have sight of the full timeline for phase 2, including details of when job descriptions and information about ringfencing of posts will be shared *before the February JCNG meeting*.

5. The mismanagement of university accounts: the case of the missing £3.5million

At meeting of JCNG, on Tuesday May 13th, UCU asked for an explanation as to how and why there had been a £3.5 million downward adjustment in our income as recorded in the university accounts, consequent upon the discovery of an error in the calculation of fee income from students in FBL. UCU expressed concern that such a significant error should occur, especially in the light of recent actions and demands upon staff to embrace "efficiency" savings. As the Vice Chancellor acknowledged at the meeting, we need to be confident that the senior leadership of the university are responsible custodians of our finances. Subsequently, UCU has received an account of how the error occurred, but no mention of who is to be held responsible and the disciplinary action taken. UCU delegates received written assurance that *"This matter has been discussed at both University Executive Group and our Board of Governors. I trust this gives you the assurance that we have actively engaged in firstly an investigation into the circumstances as well as looking at solutions to a new issue emerging."*

ACTION: UCU wants to know who is to be held responsible and if disciplinary action has or will be taken. In addition, UCU requires sight of the minutes of both the University Executive Group and our Board of Governors, where we are told this matter was discussed. We are particularly concerned that the Board of Governors be given ample opportunity to exercise its duty of due diligence and proper oversight of the management of our finances by the university leadership. Finally, UCU requires a clear statement as to how the university will ensure that this or a similar mismanagement of accounts will be prevented from reoccurring.

6. The mismanagement of university accounts (part II): The Creative Quarter and the case of £4.36 million wasted

In November 2023, UCU declared an official dispute regarding management plans to force colleagues out of their offices and into open plan work spaces, all in the name of making way for the development of a new building project on Cambridge campus, referred to as the Creative Quarter. UCU warned senior management that no contracts should be signed until the dispute was resolved. While the VC apologised for the failure of his senior colleagues to consult in a timely fashion on the proposal to move colleagues out of dedicated staff offices, agreement could not be reached. In September 2024 the dispute came to an end with the announcement that the university had decided to suspend work on the Creative Quarter. UCU remains concerned that the bearers of poor decision making have inflicted significant financial losses upon our community, costs which are translated into resource shortages and additional pressure on staff, most notably the spectre of redundancy and staffing shortages. In order to derive an appreciation of the full extent of the costs of failure, UCU requested a breakdown of the monies already committed to this failed and failing project. Below is the sketch provided by the Chief Operating Officer:

Creative Quarter - Cost to date		
Sum of Sum (Amount)	Description	Total
ACCOUNT		
2710	RIBA AV Design	14,400.00
2710 Total		14,400.00
1310	Design and Planning Fees	1,956,029.67
1310 Total		1,956,029.67
Q111	RIBA Stage 1 - 3 Support	2,357,613.93
Q111 Total		2,357,613.93
Q110	Legal Fees	25,623.76
Q110 Total		25,623.76
Q143	Quantity Surveying	2,304.00
Q143 Total		2,304.00
9990	Other Costs	3,218.84
9990 Total		3,218.84
Grand Total		6,363,185.90

ACTION: UCU demands to know, who is going to be held accountable for the evident waste of our resources? Our officers have been told that the Board of Governors is content. UCU is surprised with this assertion and request a written explanation from the Chair of the Board of Governors, to explain how this could possibly be the case.

7. Back to Campus

UCU notes the university's recent demand that colleagues spend more time on campus. The advice of the union is that colleagues discuss practicalities with their line managers. As has been pointed out, UCU is somewhat disappointed that the intention of seeking greater on-campus working was not discussed with us prior to announcement.

We have, however, been invited to participate in a Task and Finish Group where implementation will be discussed. The whole rationale for the Task & Finish Group appears to be based on a number of assertions that have no factual basis or evidence to support them. For example, upon what is the statement *'Increased on campus presence is key to improving our students' experience while studying with us'* based? How does the University arrive at the conclusion that increased presence on campus will improve the students' experience? Or *'Face-to-face working fosters collaboration, creativity and a sense of belonging'* - Does it? On what evidence does the University reach this conclusion? Or, *'which we all know is crucial to the*

experience and success of both students and staff - Do we know this? And who is 'we'? And is it true?

UCU also notes that the aim of greater on-campus presence is undermined by the actions of university management. Since the introduction of hot-desking and open plan office spaces in some parts of the university, the idea that academics will be able to conduct meaningful and productive work in spaces devoid of privacy and quiet, while all the while having to operate out of lockers and clear desks at the end of a shift, denotes complete ignorance of what it takes to be a functioning scholar and represents yet another attack on professional autonomy. This is perhaps unsurprising when decisions are made by those who have little or no experience of university life.

In addition, UCU has become concerned by the increase in reported instances of managers seeking to enforce greater on-campus presence by the imposition of additional, unplanned, teaching delivery allocations on academic colleagues, in subjects outwith the field of expertise of the colleague involved. These allocations not only impose demands on colleagues' workloads over and above agreed AWBM allocations, but also undermine and devalue the standard of education the University should be upholding. Such actions can only have a negative effect on the educational experience of students.

The sense of resentment towards senior leaders is compounded with the recent announcements regarding a rise in car parking fees on Chelmsford campus, as well as the mean-spirited departure from, what has been popular in some quarters, discounted "meal deals". When combined with the above inflation rise in travel costs and yet another real terms pay cut, it is no wonder that many colleagues are deeply resentful of the imposition of additional costs by the university.

ACTION: UCU suggests that the university leadership reflects upon the failure to consult and the very real deleterious consequences for staff morale and upon the cohesion of our community, which will inevitably follow. The university should issue an apology to both academics and UCU, as well as placing a pause on the implementation of the decision, to allow enough time for a sensible, consensus-based approach to be adopted.

8. Academic Management Review

UCU has been made aware of plans to review academic management, with possible plans to amalgamate, depending on student numbers attached to each course of study, several courses under the tutelage of each Director, so as to capture approximately 100 students per directorate. In addition, we have been informed that Course Directors will not have line management responsibility, even though they will have a role in informing the appraisal process. There are no plans to elevate grades and reward attached to Course Leadership. In addition, it is proposed that there will be a redistribution of line management to Professors and Associate Professors.

While the Deputy VC has given solemn assurances that no Course Director should face disciplinary action, as a result of poor student feedback for instance, UCU is aware of at least one case at least where the obverse is true. So, with the disciplinary gaze firmly fixed on Course Directors, it is not entirely clear why any rational individual would choose to take on such a role.

We have already heard reports from the Faculty of Science and Engineering that Deputy Heads of School will no longer be needed and that once they have completed their tenure they will be returning to their previous roles. What we have here is the prospect of salary cuts and the removal of opportunities for promotion to Grade 7 positions, along with an imposition of managerial responsibility on colleagues (Professors and Associate Professors) who may well have better things to do (research and teaching) and who may have no desire to take such a path, or possess the necessary skills or experience to undertake such a role. What is more, the proliferation of unrewarded and in all probability unrewarding managerial functions, all on the back of unspecified promises of training from an HR department which is already struggling to cope with the demands placed upon it, looks like a recipe for chaos, conflict and the waste of our collective resources.

ACTION: UCU suggests that the University pauses in order to reflect upon the suggestions for change and take time to consult Professors, Associate Professors and Course Leaders.

9. Course Closures and Suspensions:

Several courses were suspended without prior discussions with the course teams and without any guidance on how this suspension can be lifted. Colleagues are distressed as they are concerned for their jobs and their future at ARU.

In informal communication management indicated that the suspended courses had several years of student numbers. If this is the case, why has management not supported the courses through intensive marketing and course development.

The decision of suspending courses has been made even so courses had a healthy number of applications for open days in October and November 2025.

In one case (BA Photography) was denied the opportunity to revalidate the course together with the suite of other CSA courses, which now makes the course an outlier, that can not share modules with other courses when it is reinstated in 27/28.

ACTION: Courses that are suspended should have dedicated teams that shares market intelligence with the team and should give clear guidance on how courses can be reactivated. Management also needs to reassure staff that the courses will be reinstated for 2027/28 and that colleagues will not be made redundant.

10. Disciplinary Grievance Policies and Procedures

It has come to the attention of UCU that the implementation of our disciplinary and grievance procedures and policies is in need of urgent inspection and renewal. In particular, we are concerned about the questionable independence of some investigators and members of disciplinary panels. Recent and ongoing cases have called into question the ability of investigators and panel members to act in an objective and independent manner. Examples include: Investigators persistently refusing to provide any detail on allegations beyond generalised assertions of 'wrongdoing'; Investigators being appointed who are also material witnesses to the alleged events leading to the grievance/complaint; investigators 're-drafting' the original grievance or complaint (often with the obvious assistance of AI) so that it no longer reflects the true nature or seriousness of the original; investigators making decisions based on information that is manifestly and obviously inaccurate; disciplinary panels made up of individuals who have a direct material interest in avoiding scrutiny of the service or processes for which they are responsible; and disciplinary panels acting outside the scope of their powers by making decisions on cases other than those alleged in the allegations put to the employee, found by the investigating officer, or presented to them at the hearing. This will not do.

ACTION: Investigations and disciplinary panels need to be conducted fairly and seen to operate thus. UCU would like to open discussions with the university, to explore ways in which independent investigators are trained and drawn from outside the direct managerial authority structures within which the subjects of discipline and grievance are located. Likewise, we need to establish rules of impartiality for the staffing and conduct of panels.

11. Cambridge School of Art: New Head of School

Colleagues in the Cambridge School of Art are dismayed about the conduct and outcome of the recent interview process for an interim 18-months HOS position and the resulting lack of leadership in the art school.

In October 2025, in open meeting the Dean of AHES announced that the CSA HOS was stepping down. She expressed dismay that CSA found itself in this position yet again. Professor Lee encouraged CSA colleagues to help find a replacement we could work with. She made it clear that she needed to find someone who was 'the right fit for CSA'.

CSA colleagues, worried about the situation CSA finds itself in a volatile time for the arts in HE, identified a colleague, who had previous experience as DHOS and was very well regarded within the school. He had stepped in as an emergency appointment previously and within half a year had brought the school back on track. The overwhelming majority of colleagues asked UCU to communicate our support for this colleague to the Dean and the DVC, who were overseeing the internal recruitment process. When UCU conveyed this endorsement to the Dean and the

DVC, the intervention was derided as 'unusual' and unwelcome. Nevertheless, the DVC recognises that a colleague with arts background was the best the faculty could hope for. It was suggested that the UCU representative withdraw from the stakeholder meeting merely for conveying the message from colleagues. On the day, only two internal candidates were interviewed. One with no prior knowledge of working within an art school and the colleague who had previous experience as DHOS in CSA. After going through the whole interview process, none of the candidates was appointed.

The stakeholder meeting was made up of three senior colleagues from CSA, one DHOS and the line manager of one of the candidates. She made disparaging remarks ("be careful what we wish for") about the colleague she managed. UCU would like to question the fraught decision-making process by the Dean and DVC, and why the voice of the CSA community was ignored, especially after they had been invited back in October to support the search for 'the right fit'. Not only were colleagues from CSA challenged when expressing support for an experienced colleague, they were also reprimanded for being passionate and highly engaged in the process.

ACTION: This active engagement of a school should be celebrated, commended and encouraged, especially in a time when the message from the VC is, that he wants more engagement and more visibility of colleagues.

ARU UCU Branch Executive