University and College Union

Alternatives to Redundancies at the University of Nottingham

Submitted by the University and College Union (UCU)

Executive Summary

This counterproposal responds to Phase One of the University of Nottingham's redundancy programme under the *Future Nottingham* initiative. It sets out a clear and credible set of financial and strategic alternatives to compulsory job losses, grounded in robust evidence, sector norms, the University's own financial data, and insights from staff working within affected units. The overarching argument is simple: this is not an inevitable crisis — it is the outcome of a series of strategic choices that can and must be reconsidered.

The opening section situates the University's current financial challenges within the broader context of UK higher education. While national pressures such as inflation and the long-term tuition fee freeze have created genuine headwinds, the severity of Nottingham's situation stems from local decisions. Over the past decade, the University has pursued an aggressive expansion strategy, investing heavily in capital projects while relying on internally generated surpluses to fund them. This approach — uncommon in the sector — has diverted resources away from academic delivery and research, leaving the institution vulnerable when projected income did not materialise.

These strategic missteps are analysed in the section *Understanding the Crisis*, which traces the impact of the University's infrastructure-first agenda. Major initiatives such as Castle Meadow Campus, Project Transform, and Campus Solutions absorbed substantial funding with little measurable benefit to academic functions. At the same time, core maintenance has been deferred and Senate's concerns marginalised, eroding confidence in governance.

The section *Flaws in the Consultation Process* documents how the redundancy consultation has fallen short of basic standards of transparency and engagement. Key information was delayed, incomplete, or withheld, and affected staff were often informed too late to respond meaningfully. These procedural failures significantly reduced the chances for the unions to engage in meaningful consultation, casting serious doubt on whether a lawful or effective process has taken place.

Against this background, the counterproposal outlines a constructive and evidence-based alternative. Its core principle is that financial sustainability should be achieved through long-term planning, fair burden-sharing, and a renewed focus on the University's academic mission — not through job losses. Any loss of a post, even if voluntary, can have a significant impact not only on the individuals who are left to absorb the additional workload, but also on the quality of teaching, research, and service — which will inevitably suffer.

The section *Unit-Level Responses* presents detailed critiques and alternatives specific to affected departments. They highlight severe shortcomings in planning, justification, and risk management across multiple areas. Many business units have developed their proposals in isolation, relying on unclear or unsupported data, and ignoring interdependencies with other functions. This approach risks severely undermining essential services — such as counselling, visa compliance, research support, and core administrative functions — in ways that threaten legal obligations, institutional reputation, and the University's long-term strategic goals. Reductions in areas like Research and Knowledge Exchange, Digital and Technology Services, and Libraries compromise critical academic and research infrastructure, undermining the University's ability to secure funding, maintain compliance, and deliver a high-quality student experience.

Across these units, there is a striking lack of risk-based assessment, genuine stakeholder consultation, and evidence-driven planning. Instead, decisions appear driven by arbitrary targets and an overreliance on speculative efficiencies, such as unfunded automation or centralisation without capacity. The cumulative effect is a profound erosion of institutional resilience, loss of specialist expertise, and increased workload pressures on remaining staff — outcomes directly at odds with the University's aspirations for excellence and global standing. By addressing these structural weaknesses and prioritising data-led, collaborative, and transparent approaches, the University can avoid irreversible damage and instead achieve sustainable change without widespread job losses.

The strategy culminates in *Towards Financial Sustainability*, which introduces AFS 2.1 — a revised Alternative Financial Strategy developed by UCU. Building on proposals from 2021 and 2025, AFS 2.1 presents a more balanced financial model: one that moderates surplus targets, reintroduces borrowing and fundraising for capital projects, and ensures that infrastructure investment is aligned with academic priorities.

The section *Avoiding Redundancy: Financial and Strategic Alternatives* expands on this by offering practical solutions across seven key areas:

- A recalibration of surplus targets to a more sustainable 3-4%;
- Improved income forecasting that accounts for substitution trends in UG and PGT;
- De prioritisation of speculative capital projects in favour of essential maintenance;
- An immediate audit and moratorium on consultancy contracts;
- Expansion of voluntary hours reduction schemes and use of natural attrition;
- Smarter use of University assets and commercial income;
- Transparent and evidence-based criteria for programme closures.

These proposals demonstrate that redundancies are not inevitable — they are a choice. While staff are being asked to bear the brunt of financial pressures, other high-cost or poorly justified areas remain shielded from scrutiny.

This is made especially clear in *Programme Closures*, where flawed internal accounting is used to justify the shutdown of income-generating or cost-neutral activities. The Language Centre's evening provision is a prime example: it is being closed not due to actual losses, but because of misallocated central costs that distort the financial picture. Such decisions appear to prioritise accounting convenience over educational value, running counter to the University's foundational object, as stated in Section 4 of its Charter: *"to advance education."*

The section *Better Financial Governance* addresses the structural weaknesses that allowed these patterns to persist. It calls for Senate to be formally involved in reviewing business cases with academic implications, the creation of a joint oversight body to assess the outcomes of major financial decisions, and embedded staff consultation in all future strategic planning. Crucially, it also recognises that academic provision depends on effective support across all key functions — including APM and other professional services — which are put at risk if staffing is cut to the bone or poor decisions are made.

Finally, the section on *Outsourcing and IT* shows how over-reliance on external consultancy — particularly in digital infrastructure — has produced spiralling costs and persistent failures. A pivot toward rebuilding in-house expertise offers a route to regain strategic control, reduce dependency, and avoid repeating the same mistakes with future projects like UniCore.

While this counterproposal provides detailed analysis and a range of forward-looking options, five key structural failings must be addressed to resolve the current crisis and restore institutional integrity:

1. Strategic Failures and the 5% Surplus Target

The University's Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) sets a 5% surplus target — significantly above historical norms and not required or recommended by external regulators. This target appears closely tied to overambitious capital spending plans, particularly the proposed new medical school. There is now a clear and direct link between these spending ambitions, the elevated surplus requirement, and the scale of proposed job cuts. Placeholder borrowing and capital allocations built into the financial model are placing undue pressure on core budgets. By adopting a more moderate surplus target and securing external funding for capital projects, the University could ease financial pressures and substantially reduce the need for redundancies.

2. Consultancy Expenditure and the Hollowing Out of Internal Capability

According to the *Future Nottingham* business case, the University has spent over £18 million on consultancy, particularly in IT and digital transformation. These contracts have often delivered poor value, weakened internal capability, and contributed to technical failures such as Campus Solutions. Rebalancing toward in-house staffing would cut costs and restore control over critical infrastructure—for instance, as detailed in *Outsourcing and IT*, the University has paid around £5,000 per report for work once routinely produced by in-house staff, underscoring how outsourcing has inflated costs and eroded institutional expertise

3. Misleading Use of Central Cost Allocations to Justify Course Closures

The closure of programmes like the Language Centre's evening classes is being justified using internal cost models that assign fixed central charges to local units. This creates the illusion of financial loss even when programmes are cost-neutral or income-generating. Without reform, this logic could trigger a destructive cycle of closures.

4. Historical Mismanagement and the Capital Spending Crisis

Flagship capital projects have been pursued without sufficient scrutiny or academic rationale. The Castle Meadow Campus acquisition exemplifies this pattern. Such projects have drained core resources and now risk being repeated, with £150 million already earmarked for the new medical school and further undisclosed costs expected. UCU does not oppose investment in a medical school, but it questions the scale and timing of the expenditure—particularly if it is to be funded through excessive surplus targets and corresponding job cuts elsewhere in the University.

5. A Crisis of Governance and the Marginalisation of Senate

The University's governance structures lack accountability and transparency. Senate has been sidelined in key decisions, and there are no mechanisms to review the long-term outcomes of major financial commitments. Strengthening oversight and routinely involving the staff who deliver the work is essential, as their insight into risks and practical solutions is often key to avoiding the kinds of strategic failures seen in recent years.

The University of Nottingham now stands at a crossroads: either double down on a failing model or pursue a more balanced, inclusive, and sustainable path. This counterproposal demonstrates that alternatives to mass redundancies exist. What is needed is not more cuts, but the courage to change direction.

Understanding the Crisis: Strategic and Governance Failures

The University of Nottingham's financial crisis reflects a wider failure in the UK's higher education funding model. The freeze in tuition fees from 2017 to 2024, combined with sustained inflation, has eroded real-terms income across the sector. But while national pressures have created a challenging environment, local strategic decisions have made the University particularly vulnerable.

Over the past decade, Nottingham—like many institutions—has become increasingly reliant on international student recruitment to fill the gap left by declining domestic income. This market-based strategy is inherently unstable, subject to shifts in global demand, immigration policy, and institutional reputation. The University has attributed its current financial problems in part to a fall in international enrolments. While this is true, the scale of the problem at Nottingham relative to its competitors is somewhat exaggerated. The sector-wide decline in overseas student numbers between 2023/24 and 2024/25 was approximately 6%. At Nottingham, it was just 0.6%.

The roots of the crisis lie in how Nottingham has responded to these pressures. Since the Higher Education and Research Act 2017, universities have been incentivised to operate more like private firms—competing for market share, pursuing growth, and investing in infrastructure. This logic has been embraced at Nottingham, where institutional strategy has prioritised rapid expansion and capital development over long-term sustainability. Crucially, the University has financed this expansion not through external borrowing—even during a period of historically low interest rates that would have allowed for long-term repayment in manageable instalments—but instead by diverting internally generated surpluses. This is in contrast to standard practice across the sector. As a result, resources that could have supported teaching, research, and essential maintenance have instead been channelled into major building projects, often justified by overly optimistic forecasts.

The consequences are now clear. A series of high-cost, low-impact initiatives have absorbed large amounts of funding while delivering little demonstrable benefit. Project Transform overshot its £50 million budget by more than 60%. The Beacons of Excellence have struggled to achieve visible academic outcomes. The Campus Solutions IT platform continues to underperform, costing £16.4 million a year to maintain. The £35 million rollout of the Unicore finance and HR system created widespread operational disruption. Most strikingly, the £91.5 million Castle Meadow Campus was acquired without a clear academic rationale, initially presented as a Business School site before that justification was quietly dropped. Compounding this was an apparent failure of due diligence — the building's Grade II listing and unsuitability for university use should have been recognised at the outset.

Despite this track record, the University plans to commit a further £150 million (£50 million from surplus and £100 million from borrowing) to start building a new medical school in 2026/27. The total cost is expected to exceed this figure but has not yet been disclosed.

These decisions have not only strained the University's finances but also eroded trust in its governance. Many senior figures involved in past strategic choices remain in post and have done little to acknowledge the escalating costs and financial pressures those decisions have created. While it is, sadly, not unusual for leadership to sideline trade unions, this situation has gone further: Senate members have repeatedly raised concerns about governance and financial risk, only to be ignored or marginalised.

The appointment of an interim Chief Financial Officer offered a potential reset. However, some public remarks—for instance, suggesting that "80% of students are on 25% of courses"—indicate that the core financial approach remains rooted in volume-based metrics. While student numbers and programme distribution are valid considerations in any planning exercise, this perspective risks reducing a complex academic ecosystem to a set of transactional efficiencies. In many areas—particularly STEM and healthcare—course provision involves fixed costs and professional responsibilities that do not scale with enrolments. Their value lies not in immediate financial return, but in research, training, and wider societal impact.

This is marketisation in action: surplus targets pursued at the expense of long-term sustainability. Strategic foresight gives way to reactive budgeting, steadily compromising the University's core mission of teaching and research. Nottingham's current position stems not from external necessity, but from avoidable decisions—prioritising capital expansion over resilience, and spectacle over substance. This represents a clear shift away from the University's founding purpose to advance education, learning and research, as laid out in its Charter. That change, if intentional, should be formally acknowledged—since it would matter deeply to staff, students, donors and public bodies such as the OfS.

Flaws in the Consultation Process

The University has stated that formal consultation on proposed redundancies began on 8 April 2025. However, the necessary information for meaningful engagement was not provided at that point. While a Section 188 notice and a brief business case were shared shortly after the initial meeting, these documents lacked essential details: they did not clearly define the financial case, outline specific roles at risk, or provide a rationale for proposed changes at the level of business units. UCU and other unions therefore did not accept that a lawful or substantive consultation had begun.

From that point onward, key documents were released gradually over a period of nearly two months. Unions submitted repeated information requests on 10 April, 1 May, 6 May, 7 May, and 8 May. The responses, where they came, were often incomplete or significantly delayed. A revised consultation document was issued on 11 April, but stress risk assessments for affected business units were not shared until early June. Organisational charts and pooling data were provided only on 28 May, and in many cases were found to be inaccurate, incomplete, or missing critical information such as job grades and reporting structures. These charts were still being corrected into June.

The pattern of delayed and partial information severely undermined the consultation process. Several meetings were held where managers discussed documents not shared in advance with union representatives. On 23 April, for example, rationale documents and CR lists were shared with unions, but HR refused to release the CR lists to affected staff on the grounds of confidentiality—making it difficult for unions to advise members or respond to proposals in detail. As late as the week beginning 2 June, unions were still being shown new rationale documents and explanatory slide decks for the first time, which were then promised for wider circulation by 6 June.

Communication was also inconsistent and, at times, poorly timed. Important updates—such as revised pooling information—were sent late in the day, including a key document on Thursday 29 May at 19:13. This left unions with little time to review or respond ahead of deadlines. In some instances, staff were informed that their roles were at risk with less than 72 hours before the close of the voluntary redundancy application window. Several were placed in incorrect pools, and others were told they might be moved in or out of a pool after the fact. These practices created confusion and distress for many affected colleagues. In some cases, difficult messages were delivered late on Fridays, compounding the pressure and anxiety over the weekend.

The limitations of the process were compounded by issues of access and transparency. In several cases, union representatives learned of new information from members rather than through formal channels. Some Business Unit leaders attempted to assist by sharing revised organisational charts and rationale documents directly with unions, but HR was not always prompt in officially distributing this material. The assumption of some staff appeared to be that unions had access to a fuller picture than was actually the case.

On 10 June, University management acknowledged in a consultation meeting that the original 20 June deadline for union counter proposals was unrealistic and agreed to extend the period to 4 July.

While welcome, this extension does not remedy the preceding disruption.

Between April and early June, the conditions for lawful and *meaningful* consultation were not met. For consultation to be meaningful, staff and unions must receive sufficient information to understand what is proposed, what it aims to achieve, and how it will affect people—*before* any final decisions are made. This enables genuine dialogue and the chance to propose alternatives. Instead, key information was delayed, withheld, or inaccurate, and often arrived too late for informed engagement. Staff were left unsupported, and unions hampered by the piecemeal and inconsistent release of documentation.

UCU maintains that consultation, in any legal or practical sense, did not begin on 8 April.

The process has been fragmented, poorly managed, and in many respects incompatible with the requirements for meaningful collective consultation. We urge the University to acknowledge these shortcomings and work with campus unions to restore trust, improve communication, and ensure compliance with best practice and legal standards.

Unit-Level Response to Phase One Cuts

In this section, we outline our unit-level response to the cuts proposed in Phase One of *Future Nottingham*. We set out the main areas of concern identified across Business Units, highlighting fundamental issues with the planning, justification, and communication of the proposed changes.

The different Business Units each have individual plans being developed by their respective leaders. However, the challenges with these plans are threefold:

1. Planning in a vacuum
There is clearly a great deal of planning being done in isolation. Many changes proposed by one Business Unit (BU) depend on other units remaining static. In reality, other units are also undergoing changes, which together risk eliminating entire functions. Although BU leaders now claim to be communicating more, this has not led to serious revisions of their plans or greater clarity for the unions. Instead, there is a reluctance to amend the compulsory redundancy list even as problems are identified. Leaders describe fundamentally problematic changes as “opportunities for better working,” yet it is unclear how these opportunities can materialise when there will be no staff left to deliver the work.

2. Lack of clear justification for each redundancy
There is no clear, individual justification for each compulsory redundancy. HR has so far only provided broad, vague explanations, forcing the unions to infer much of the rationale themselves. In some units, this is further complicated by complete restructurings, making it almost impossible to get a clear, coherent picture to respond to. The lack of data-driven decision-making — and frequent references to incorrect, contradictory, or entirely absent data — is deeply concerning.

3. Reliance on an unclear Target Operating Model
The vague Target Operating Model (TOM) is consistently cited as the main rationale for these changes. Despite repeated questions in meetings, the TOM remains poorly defined, with references to centralisation, decentralisation, KPIs, and performance management all remaining unacceptably vague. Consequently, the business cases are built on an unclear foundation, making it difficult to respond meaningfully.

Risks? What Risks?

Despite the scale of proposed changes, there is a striking lack of risk-based planning. BU leaders have openly stated that services will simply deteriorate — with longer wait times, reduced services, and work being left undone. When pressed for details, these explanations remain vague (e.g., “students may have to wait three days instead of one for a response”) or are brushed aside with statements like “management accepts this loss of service,” without any clear specification of what those losses entail.

These risks should have been detailed explicitly in the business case, allowing staff and unions to properly understand and discuss the proposals in context. Instead, the business case misleadingly suggests that most service reductions are “risk free”, which is clearly not supported by discussions with BU leaders.

Is this Phase One or Phase Two — or both?

There is also significant confusion about whether certain changes belong to Phase One or Phase Two. For example, the closure of Libraries and ongoing, as-yet-unfinalised TOM work are referenced within the Phase One business case. This blurs the boundaries of the proposed changes and the intended scope of the redundancies.

Moreover, there are implied further job losses in units that currently appear to face relatively small reductions. By splitting these changes into phases, the number of redundancies in Phase One appears artificially low. As a result, our response is necessarily incomplete: we are being asked to comment on a partial plan and can therefore only provide a partial response.

In the following sections, we examine each Business Unit individually, outlining our specific responses and detailed objections to the proposed cuts.

Academic Registry

The Academic Registry and associated teams - including Counselling, Registry and Academic Affairs (RAA), and Student and Campus Life - represent the core of the University's academic operations and student-facing support. The proposed redundancies within these functions are extensive, strategically incoherent, and operationally hazardous.

They threaten the quality of both staff and student support services at a time of increased institutional and sector-wide pressure.

Staff Counselling

The proposal to entirely remove the internal staff counselling function is a dangerous step that shows insufficient regard for staff wellbeing, legal and clinical obligations, and institutional resilience during a period of organisational upheaval.

- **Clinical Supervision and Accreditation Undermined:** Senior counsellors provide essential clinical supervision and development work necessary for full accreditation and professional standards of other counsellors. Their removal severely compromises this function with much more falling on smaller numbers of senior counsellors.
- **Eroded Capacity Following MARS and Staff Losses:** Student-side counselling services are already under pressure due to previous MARS exits. The removal of the staff senior counsellors threaten this service as well by association.
- **Redeployment Opportunities Ignored:** Before the formal division between staff and student counselling, senior counsellors had experience across both areas. There is clear precedent - and operational logic - for redeploying staff counsellors to support the student-facing service if the staff one was deemed to be fully disbanded. This option has not been explored.
- **Ill-Timed and Poorly Justified:** The removal of internal staff counselling during a period of mass consultation, increased workload, and deep institutional uncertainty is reckless. No clear risk assessment has been shared to justify the removal of this essential and highly oversubscribed function, which is well utilised by staff.

Recommendations

1. **Retain Internal Staff Counselling Capacity:** Suspend plans to cut staff counselling and instead explore strategic redeployment into overstretched student-facing services.
2. **Protect Clinical Supervision Roles:** Ensure the retention of senior counsellors whose expertise is vital to maintaining safe and accredited provision of counselling.
3. **Conduct a Formal Risk Assessment:** Require a documented, evidence-based evaluation of the consequences of removing staff counselling before any decision is made.
4. **Engage with Unions and Staff:** Any changes to internal counselling must be co-designed with those affected and the recognised trade unions, with well being placed

at the centre of decision-making. The impacts seem to have not been discussed with the Students Union nor students or staff in general.

Registry and Academic Affairs, Student and Campus Life

Widespread staffing cuts across Registry and Academic Affairs (RAA) and Student and Campus Life are being implemented with insufficient regard for student experience, long-term capacity, and institutional growth. The process lacks clarity, equity, and evidence.

- **Service Slowdowns and Reputational Risk:** Cuts are expected to be absorbed by relaxing service level agreements (SLAs) and increasing wait times for students noted as being from a 1 day wait to 3 days estimated (note no evidence for this estimated increase has been provided thus is likely a best case scenario). This will have a direct negative impact on the National Student Survey (NSS) and broader student satisfaction.
- **Skills and Role Knowledge Not Properly Considered:** The process assumes that all staff with the same job title possess identical skills, which is demonstrably false. Specialisms developed over many years are being lost due to arbitrary headcount targets, with staff describing the process as a "luck of the draw." While training and cross-skilling can occur, it is time-consuming and will leave gaps in student services for longer than necessary.
- Future Growth Ignored: Student numbers are rising, yet the modelling behind staffing cuts does not account for increased demand. Cuts now will severely undermine the institution's ability to cope with anticipated growth and Phase Two organisational changes. Management has provided no reassurances that this will be resolved, merely accepting that services are likely to worsen.
- **Risks to Compliance and Global Engagement:** The reduction of roles supporting student visas, registration, and status checks threatens the University's sponsor licence and global engagement strategy. This is further complicated by the disbanding/restructuring of related teams in External Relations, as outlined later in that section.
- **Undermining Faculty Support and Academic Operations:** Cuts to student-facing services and academic support roles risk collapsing the delicate balance of administrative support provided to academic colleagues. As work shifts from central services, academic staff will bear the brunt - exacerbating workload issues already at crisis levels.
- **Ignored Strategic Commitments:** The Global Engagement Review, completed and signed off under the previous DVC Jane Norman, has been effectively discarded without successor planning. If related responsibilities are to be passed to RAA, the team lacks the capacity to absorb them.

Recommendations

1. **Halt the Restructure and Reassess Needs Based on Growth:** Pause redundancies until student growth projections and associated service demand are modelled transparently.

2. **Reconfigure Pooling Based on Skills, Not Titles:** Revise the pooling process to reflect actual responsibilities and specialisms, rather than relying on job title equivalence.
3. **Retain Core Compliance and Visa Support Staff:** Ensure no reduction in roles linked to immigration compliance, registration, and global engagement support, all of which are legal and reputational priorities.
4. **Maintain Faculty Support Levels:** Protect student-facing and academic-facing administrative capacity. Do not offload administrative tasks onto academic staff without proper planning or support.
5. **Acknowledge and Build on Past Strategic Reviews:** Re-engage with the findings of the Global Engagement Review and ensure that institutional memory and strategic continuity are respected.

The cuts proposed across Academic Registry and its associated services are poorly timed, inadequately justified, and deeply risky to both staff wellbeing and the student experience. By reassessing redeployment opportunities, prioritising operational continuity, and grounding decisions in future-facing planning, the University can avoid irreversible damage and unnecessary job losses.

Campaign and Alumni Relations Office

The proposed restructure and redundancies within the Campaign and Alumni Relations Office (CARO) demonstrate a lack of financial foresight, strategic coherence, and engagement with operational expertise. One of the key recommendations in the section on *Capital and Commercial Income* is to launch a dedicated fundraising campaign to support capital projects, which would relieve pressure on the primary surplus. Weakening CARO at this time risks undermining the University's ability to engage key stakeholders, sustain philanthropic income, and protect its external reputation.

Scale of Changes

The proposed restructure represents a significant and far-reaching set of changes, raising a number of serious concerns outlined below:

- **Reversal of Sector-Leading Position:** CARO is currently sector-leading in its structure. While some targeted revisions may be appropriate, the proposed wholesale changes risk regressing the University's position, undermining future development, limiting career opportunities, and reducing income generation. There is also a risk of increased inefficiencies and higher costs.
- **Unnecessary Disruption to Existing Functions:** The business case largely describes tasks and ways of working that already exist. Proposed changes could be implemented without such extensive restructuring of roles across the entire office. The restructure is likely to cause significant disruption and lead to a loss of expertise as staff are reassigned to different jobs and tasks.
- **Loss of Critical Internal Networks:** Existing staff have built strong networks across the University to deliver key projects, including graduation communications and events. Widespread changes to roles and responsibilities — and the potential loss of staff through pooling — jeopardise these networks and threaten successful project delivery.
- **Unpreparedness for Campaign Launch:** The business plan and new structure focus on swiftly launching a campaign; however, CARO is not currently prepared for this. A successful campaign requires feasibility scoping and a pipeline of suitable gifts, as well as logistical support from across the university. This exploration work could be undertaken with CARO's current structure, and appropriate resource committed once it is clear the best approach to take.
- **Role Titles Misaligned with Sector Standards:** The proposed structure includes significant changes to role titles, creating a risk that future recruitment will be challenging, as the new titles do not align with sector standards in the UK. Several roles also combine disparate areas of expertise, making them less attractive and potentially confusing to the recruitment market.
- **Disproportionate Impact on Junior Roles:** Nearly all proposed role reductions affect APM levels 2–4, resulting in a more top-heavy structure. This could indirectly discriminate against younger colleagues and leave the office poorly equipped to handle essential junior-level tasks.

- **Threat to Principal Gift Income:** The proposed structure risks reducing the ability to secure principal gifts due to excessive line management responsibilities placed on the Principal Gift Fundraiser, likely resulting in decreased income.
- **Lack of Financial Transparency and Costing:** There is concern that the new structure has not been fully costed. It is unclear how the proposed costs compare to the current budget, as the “current structure” referenced in documentation does not match the actual roles in budget. Additionally, new roles have been added to the structure without clear rationale, contradicting the stated aim of reducing roles.
- **Misplaced Focus on Regular Giving:** Increased investment in Regular Giving roles will not result in increased income. Regular giving is foundational but not a major income generator; campaigns rely on principal gifts, which are put at risk by the proposed structure.
- **Leadership Gap and Transition Risk:** The resignation of the Director, effective at the end of July, increases the risk of a chaotic and disruptive transition. This leadership gap threatens donations, volunteering, and critical ongoing activities.

Recommendations

1. **Limit the scale of restructure:** Restrict the scale of the restructure to the minimum necessary to meet the immediate financial need. Implement any further changes on a much longer timescale, with more consultation and collaboration with staff and stakeholders.
2. **Pause implementation for financial modelling:** Pause implementation until detailed financial modelling is completed, including analysis of projected impacts on philanthropic income and stakeholder engagement.
3. **Reassess roles with expert input:** Reassess role changes with full involvement of subject matter experts, ensuring that operational realities and professional standards shape the final design.
4. **Address leadership gaps first:** Address leadership gaps (such as the vacancy following the Director’s resignation) before proceeding, to ensure stable oversight and minimise disruption during the transition.
5. **Preserve functional interdependence:** Reintroduce or maintain functional interdependence by preserving integrated teams rather than fragmenting essential services, supporting coherent and coordinated delivery.

Cuts to Communication Roles

The proposed cuts to communications roles within CARO raise several significant risks and operational concerns, summarised below:

- **Undermined Fundraising Accountability:** The new departmental focus aims to grow income and reduce reliance on large, one-off gifts by shifting towards cause-led campaigns (eg: the Medical School) However, centralising three communications roles and removing the rest from the Campaign and Alumni Relations Office undermines accountability in fundraising when communications are no longer under direct control. Without oversight or fundraising KPIs, there is a risk of misalignment, inefficiencies, and reduced income — directly contradicting the objectives of *Future Nottingham*.

- **Reduced Responsiveness and Agility:** Without an in-house communications team, the Campaign and Alumni Relations Office will be slower to respond to opportunities, emerging trends, and urgent supporter needs, reducing overall efficiency and impact.
- **Fragmented Alumni Messaging:** Responsibility for alumni communications would be spread across multiple departments (Campaign and Alumni Relations, External Relations, and possibly Careers via Graduate Outcomes). This fragmentation risks delivering overlapping or contradictory messages to the same audiences, diminishing trust and loyalty, and increasing the likelihood that alumni will unsubscribe from communications.
- **Increased Operational Complexity:** Without a dedicated in-house team, CARO staff will need training in numerous technical and automated software systems currently managed by communications colleagues. This added complexity will reduce the volume and quality of work, as liaising with an external team that neither prioritises CARO's needs nor fully understands its audiences will create delays and inefficiencies.
- **Weakened Long-Term Donor Cultivation:** Cause-led campaigns often prioritise short-term targets; however, feedback indicates that supporters feel constantly solicited and are more motivated to give when a cause resonates personally. With hundreds of potential causes and no unified stewardship from the Campaign and Alumni Relations Office, long-term cultivation of major and legacy donors is likely to weaken, ultimately reducing future income and supporter lifetime value.
- **Reduced Data Integration and Compliance Risks:** Separating communications from the Campaign and Alumni Relations Office reduces data integration and diminishes the likelihood that valuable engagement data will be effectively fed back into the data team. This undermines campaign evaluation, increases compliance risks, and weakens data-driven decision-making.

Recommendation

Retain the Campaign and Alumni Relations Office Supporter Communications roles and keep alumni communications resources within Campaigns and Alumni Relations

Cuts to Data Roles

The proposed cuts to data roles create significant operational risks, summarised below:

- **Critical Timing and Workload Risks:** The office is currently in the midst of a major database migration project, with an increased data workload expected over the next year. This includes developing dozens of new data integrations and processes, as well as providing training and support for the new system across the office. Cutting data roles at this critical stage jeopardises the success of the rollout.

- **Loss of Essential Operational Capacity:** The two roles proposed for elimination handle essential manual tasks, including processing all online and postal data updates and preparing data for mass emails. These activities are fundamental to a large number of operations, require significant time, and depend on familiarity with the database, knowledge of data regulations, and expertise with related software.
- **Lack of Clarity on Role Reallocation:** No new role profiles have been provided, making it unclear who would absorb these responsibilities in the new structure. If these tasks are assigned to APM4 data managers, this would represent an inefficient use of resources and likely require advanced work to be deprioritised or dropped altogether.
- **Heightened Compliance and Error Risks:** Shifting these tasks outside of the data team would require other staff to acquire substantial new skills and knowledge. This approach would increase the risk of critical errors, such as emailing individuals who have opted out, breaching data protection regulations, and potentially incurring significant fines.

Recommendations

1. **Retain data roles:** Retain the data roles and preserve this capability and capacity within the data team.
2. **Conduct a workload and skills audit first:** Carry out a full workload and skills audit before considering any restructuring, to clarify essential operational tasks and avoid service interruptions or compliance breaches.
3. **Maintain strong internal data governance:** Keep operational data handling within an integrated team to maintain robust internal data governance, minimising risks of errors, breaches, and loss of specialist knowledge.

Commercial

The Commercial business area is unique in that it does not have a dedicated section in the *Future Nottingham* Phase One business case document. This omission has made it extremely difficult to understand the proposed changes to these functions.

From the limited information gathered through conversations rather than formal documentation, two key areas of concern have emerged:

- **Nottingham Online** If Nottingham Online is not being completely discontinued, its functions are being severely reduced, with significant staff losses and an eventual transfer into DTS structures.
- **Commercial Contracts Oversight** There are serious concerns about the Commercial function's ability to effectively control costs associated with the University's large third-party contracts, which currently involve spending millions of pounds each year on substandard products and services.

Recommendations

1. **Nottingham Online Review:** If Nottingham online is no longer considered worthwhile, staff should be redeployed to other areas of the University where their expertise can add value, rather than being lost entirely. If the project is considered worthwhile, the cuts to roles in that team need to be reversed; otherwise, it will never succeed in a climate of reductions, especially when it has no significant income to support it.
2. **Proactive Contract Management Reviews:** The Commercial function needs to take a much more proactive role in inefficient costly contracts. If there are not enough staff to manage the dozens of third-party contracts effectively, then additional resources are needed - not further reductions. Strengthening this team is essential to properly challenge high contract costs and recover millions in excessive spending on poor services. This point is outlined further in our section on *Consultancy Spending.*

Digital and Technology Services

The proposed 20% staff reduction in Digital and Technology Services (DTS) represents a short-sighted and high-risk move that jeopardises critical digital infrastructure, undermines operational resilience, and threatens the long-term success of the University's digital transformation agenda. These cuts target teams that are essential to both day-to-day academic delivery and future strategic priorities, with no clear plan for maintaining services or fulfilling project commitments.

The large number of roles being lost makes it clear that the proposed complex changes — and the roles selected for removal — need to be reassessed from the ground up, with full involvement from staff. This is essential to ensure workloads do not increase to unsustainable levels and that critical work is not abruptly abandoned. There are areas we have been unable to cover fully in this response, given the far-reaching nature of the proposals. In these cases, we recommend rethinking the planned role reductions, as they would further reduce capacity in already overstretched teams.

Key concerns include:

- **Loss of Critical Digital Capability:** The cuts affect highly specialised roles in automation, Office365 administration, user experience (UI/UX), SharePoint, and low-code platforms. These are not peripheral functions - they are core to the University's ability to streamline operations, modernise service delivery, and enable staff and students to work effectively. Several areas of staffing overlap their functions with front facing operational teams, even if their role title doesn't suggest it directly. The alternative to some of these losses are apparently "watching training videos" for staff support - for complex areas of the business this seems like a very poor replacement of service.
- **Disruption of In-Progress Efficiency Projects:** Teams responsible for major cost-saving initiatives — such as digital storage reforms projected to save £1.2 million per year — are being dismantled mid-project, removing the staff essential to delivering these long-term efficiencies. This is a false economy that will ultimately cost more than it saves.
- **Absorption of Strategic Functions Without Capacity:** The disbanding of DTS's Project Management Office (PMO) a Global Top 100 CDO team with collectively 50 years of PMO experience is predicated on its functions being absorbed by Planning, Performance and Strategic Change (PPSC) - itself facing parallel cuts and deep structural change. This creates a double jeopardy scenario where neither department retains the capacity to manage strategic delivery or oversight of digital projects.
- **Increased usage of External Companies:** Outsourcing by the backdoor is continuing, with CGI engaged in extremely expensive projects. If this approach continues without proper oversight or reform, the University risks paying significantly more than necessary for essential services that underpin core functions, such as the network. Moreover, the perception of key DTS management attending social events with CGI leadership — for example, sporting events — is damaging to staff morale and undermines trust. Funds

spent on these activities would be better directed toward reducing our already high contract costs and delivering better value for the University.

- **No Published Roadmap for Post-Cut Service Coverage:** There is no visible roadmap or risk assessment outlining how DTS will maintain services following the proposed staffing reductions. Even the new organisation charts reveal clear management gaps, particularly in IT Operations. This lack of planning leaves staff in the dark and exposes the University to service failures, reputational damage, and project delays. Simply rejecting most incoming work is not a sustainable strategy, and relying on external contracts to fill the gaps will ultimately cost more than retaining experienced staff.
- **Non-Replaceable Roles Being Eliminated:** Teams such as UI/UX and Low Code are delivering bespoke, user-centred solutions that are essential to internal digital transformation. These services cannot be outsourced effectively without high costs and loss of institutional knowledge, and their removal undermines the innovation the University aims to accelerate.
- **Cuts in Service Management:** Service Management has been shown to deliver cost savings by effectively overseeing several high-profile, high-expenditure areas within DTS, including Unicore, Campus Solutions, and CGI. Reducing Service Management staff at a time of significant change and budget pressure means fewer checks on the areas that represent the highest costs to the University — particularly external contracts.
- **Cuts in Operational Staff:** The commitment to protecting front-facing services is not being upheld, as several roles in operational units are being removed. These staff provide essential front-line and second-line support that is critical to the University's day-to-day functioning. Their loss poses significant risks to key infrastructure, including SolarWinds, DHCP, DNS, and networking services.
- **Loss of Staff Confidence and Strategic Direction:** Widespread disillusionment has been reported across DTS. Staff say they have received no clear answers from management, no evidence of scenario planning, and no reassurance about future priorities. This has led to a breakdown in morale and confidence that threatens retention beyond the immediate redundancy pool.
- **Reputational and Operational Risks to Academic Services:** DTS underpins the entire academic digital ecosystem - from learning platforms and data security to collaboration tools and research systems. Weakening this function compromises the delivery of teaching, research, and professional services, and directly threatens the student and staff digital experience.

Recommendations

To protect the digital future of the University and avoid unnecessary redundancies, the following actions are recommended:

1. **Pause the Redundancy Process Pending Full Risk and Impact Assessment:** Halt implementation until a comprehensive digital capability audit and risk analysis is conducted and published, including how in-progress projects and essential services will be maintained post-restructure.

2. **Retain Critical Delivery Teams:** Reinstate or protect staff in automation, low-code development, UI/UX, and Office365 administration. These functions are central to ongoing and future digital transformation efforts and cannot be cost-effectively outsourced or absorbed. They have already orchestrated savings of hundreds of thousands of pounds compared to going with external companies for key systems the University uses.
3. **Review Ongoing Costly Projects:** Nottingham Online, CGI-based projects, Unicore, and Campus Solutions have all delivered poor outcomes at high cost and require an in-depth review to achieve savings.
4. **Review Contracted Services:** We have heard reports of paying £12,000 per month for Dynamics reporting services — equivalent to the cost of three full-time staff members — yet receiving only about 1.5 FTE worth of effort from contractors. This is an unsustainable expense that comes at the cost of losing more flexible, permanent staff who could be trained to deliver this work effectively and at significantly lower cost.
5. **Enterprise Integration Layer Review:** This project urgently requires a thorough review and reflection due to its wasteful costs. The current contract requires DTS to design the solution up front, pay the vendor during development, and yet prohibits DTS from accessing or reviewing the code or final solution. Although the project was initially intended to simplify IT infrastructure, entrenched resistance at middle management levels has prevented open discussion about its effectiveness. As a result, significant time and resources continue to be wasted without accountability or meaningful evaluation.
6. **Review Efficiency Projects Before Cutting Delivery Capacity:** Protect teams currently driving cost-saving initiatives (e.g. storage reform). Where roles are actively delivering future savings, those savings should be prioritised over headcount cuts.
7. **Reinstate the PMO and Project Managers or Redeploy to PPSC:** If the DTS Project Management Office is to be disbanded and a significant number of project managers are to be cut, it is essential to clearly define and protect a properly resourced and skilled successor function — whether within DTS, PPSC, or elsewhere. Rather than losing experienced staff, they should be redeployed to this new function to effectively manage the extensive programme of change required by the University. Specialist DTS expertise will be crucial for overseeing future system changes and coordinating large-scale projects successfully.
8. **Retain Service Management staff:** The loss of these staff roles would result in reduced oversight of external companies on which the University spends millions, and would leave an already overstretched DTS function overwhelmed with day-to-day service management work. The University already faces challenges in raising and resolving service issues, and further cuts to this area — following previous reductions due to MARS and VR — would only exacerbate these difficulties.
9. **Retain IT Operations staff:** The loss of key staff performing critical operational work must be carefully reviewed, as their departure places an increased burden on remaining team members and risks undermining essential services in areas such as SolarWinds and DHCP/DNS.

10. **Engage Staff in Future Service Design:** Launch a structured consultation with DTS staff to co-create a realistic roadmap for service delivery, digital capability, and future innovation. This should include contingency planning and institutional priorities.
11. **Recognise DTS as a Strategic Enabler, Not a Cost Centre:** Reframe digital services as enablers of efficiency, quality, and competitiveness. Treating DTS as expendable risks long-term damage to institutional agility, reputation, and resilience.

The success of the University's academic, research, and operational ambitions depends on a digitally capable, confident, and future-focused DTS. Several areas of DTS are linked to NSS scores and these may well suffer with the current compulsory redundancies. The current proposals undermine that vision and must be urgently reconsidered in favour of a sustainable, strategic alternative with a co-created planned service design.

Estates and Facilities

There is a need for a fundamental, ground-up rethink of how the University finances large-scale capital projects, particularly Estates projects involving new or refurbished buildings or the purchase of land and properties. This issue is discussed in more detail in the section *Towards Financial Sustainability*.

Against this wider financial backdrop, the Estates & Facilities business case stands out as the most comprehensive, including several changes described in detail. We welcome the fact that University of Nottingham management have already amended the compulsory redundancy list in response to staff feedback, and we had hoped to see the full details of these changes before submitting this consultation response.

Nevertheless, significant concerns remain, along with additional issues raised by staff regarding current Estates practices.

Approach to Outsourcing of Services

There is an agreed need to remove Castle Meadow Campus from University ownership. However, this decision has also resulted in the outsourcing of Security and Facilities services at the site. Rather than redeploying staff or transferring them under TUPE arrangements, security staff are being made redundant, and facilities staff are left in limbo with an uncertain future.

Additionally, maintenance of the BSU (Animal Facilities) has been outsourced to CBRE at a significantly higher cost than if it were kept in-house.

Recommendations

UCU does not view this direction of travel as sustainable and believes it should be carefully reconsidered. The contracts for these outsourced services should be fully re-evaluated, and staff currently at risk should be considered for redeployment to areas facing staffing shortages.

Sale of Student Accomodation

The sale of student accommodation has been suggested as a way to generate quick income for the University. However, UCU has several serious concerns:

- **One-off cash injection:** It provides only a one-off cash injection and does not address the underlying issues of financial sustainability.
- **Loss of long-term income:** The University would lose a source of sustainable, long-term income from the balance sheet. If the current income is not as high as desired, it could be improved through active management rather than disposal.
- **Reduced maintenance control:** Loss of control over maintenance is likely to lead to a decline in the quality of the accommodation over time.

- **Reputational risk:** The University may still be blamed for any decline in accommodation standards, as these facilities are located on campus and remain closely associated with the University's estate.

Recommendations

1. **Retain student accommodation:** Retain the student accommodation and prioritise improving operational efficiency and occupancy rates to increase long-term income rather than pursuing a one-off sale.
2. **Undertake a full financial impact assessment:** Undertake a full financial impact assessment, including long-term revenue projections, maintenance cost scenarios, and reputational risks, before considering any divestment.
3. **Explore alternative value models:** Explore alternative models to unlock value from accommodation assets (e.g., partnership models, targeted reinvestment strategies) without relinquishing ownership and control.

Loss of Programme Management and Project Management Functions

There are major changes proposed through compulsory redundancies in programme and project management roles within Estates. These changes risk undermining future project delivery and eroding critical expertise. Key concerns include:

- **Loss of specialist skills:** The proposal includes the loss of three Capital Projects Managers, who are professionally qualified architects and building surveyors. These are key, specialist skills not covered by the central project management functions, which are themselves being significantly reduced in PPSC.
- **Short-sighted removal of key roles:** The proposed loss of the Space Resource and Programme Manager appears particularly short-sighted, given the crucial importance of this expertise to Estates operations.
- **Impact on future project phases:** The loss of these roles is likely to undermine the planning and delivery of Phase Two and, importantly, Phase Three of *Future Nottingham*, placing long-term strategic projects at risk.
- **Reliance on temporary contracts:** The growing reliance on temporary and fixed-term contracts to fill these gaps creates an inconsistent staffing base and leads to a continual loss of institutional knowledge, precisely when stability and expertise are most needed.

Recommendations

1. **Retain specialist roles and skills:** These roles should be retained, along with their specialist skills, while large-scale capital projects continue. If restructuring is necessary, the University should redeploy these key personnel to ensure that valuable institutional knowledge is not lost.
2. **Suspend redundancies pending full audit:** Suspend all redundancies in programme and project management roles until a full audit of ongoing and planned capital projects (including Phases 2 and 3) is completed and resource needs are clearly identified.

3. **Develop a succession and skills retention strategy:** Develop a succession and skills retention strategy to ensure continuity in critical Estates expertise, avoiding reliance on short-term or temporary contracts that fragment institutional knowledge.

External Relations

The redundancy proposals within the External Relations (ER) portfolio represent a disjointed and high-risk approach that fails to align with the University's stated strategic goals in internationalisation, civic engagement, and access. The restructure has been executed simultaneously with the redundancy process, creating operational confusion and compromising continuity in areas of legal obligation and public reputation.

General concerns include:

- **Simultaneous Restructure and Redundancy Undermine Continuity:** The decision to roll out a restructure and implement redundancies at the same time has created serious confusion over who is responsible for ongoing functions. This approach threatens business continuity and creates risks in areas with legal and compliance obligations.
- **Visa Compliance and Admissions Support at Risk:** Staff responsible for critical elements of student visa compliance—such as status checks, visa interviews, and international admissions—have been identified as redundant. This creates an immediate risk to the University's student sponsor licence and international recruitment pipeline, with potentially severe consequences for income and reputation.
- **Undermining of Civic and Outreach Functions:** Communications and outreach roles are being cut just as the University progresses with its *Future Nottingham* initiative and civic rebranding. These cuts directly contradict the stated strategic priorities of both the Vice-Chancellor and Deputy Vice-Chancellor and jeopardise the delivery of civic engagement commitments.
- **Threat to Access and Participation Plan (APP) Delivery:** Outreach and widening participation roles essential to APP delivery are being cut, despite the APP being a statutory requirement and a central commitment in public funding agreements. This exposes the University to regulatory non-compliance and reputational damage.
- **Unfunded Automation Assumptions:** Management has cited automation as a justification for cutting roles, yet no implementation plan, budget, or technical development resource has been presented. The reliance on hypothetical future technology to justify present job losses is speculative and irresponsible.
- **Increased Burden on Academic Staff:** With reduced ER capacity, key administrative and compliance tasks are being offloaded onto academic staff - despite the sector-wide workload crisis and the University's own commitments to address it. This undermines both staff wellbeing and academic productivity.
- **Legal Responsibilities Treated as Redundant:** Roles with ongoing legal obligations - such as visa status checks and sponsor compliance - are being eliminated without any clear plan for reassignment. This not only increases institutional legal risk but may constitute procedural impropriety.

Recommendations

To avoid reputational, legal, and operational harm—and to support strategic objectives without unnecessary redundancies - the following alternative approach is recommended:

1. **Pause Implementation Pending Legal and Functional Risk Review:** Immediately suspend redundancies and restructure activity until a full review of visa compliance, APP delivery, and civic commitments can be conducted. These functions must not be compromised by staffing cuts.
2. **Protect Roles Linked to Statutory or Regulatory Compliance:** Reinstate visa, admissions, and outreach roles that carry legal obligations or contribute directly to sponsor licence conditions, APP targets, or public commitments.
3. **Clarify Operational Responsibilities Before Restructure:** Separate the timeline of restructuring and redundancy processes to avoid confusion and maintain service continuity. Clear delineation of responsibilities must be made before further change is introduced. The staff have no clear idea what roles they may end up in or how their work may be distributed.
4. **Reject Automation as a Justification Without Proof of Delivery:** Do not cite automation as a mitigation for job loss unless a fully costed, implemented system is in place with demonstrated functional equivalence. Until then, retain human capacity to ensure compliance and delivery.
5. **Safeguard Outreach and Civic Functions in Line with Strategy:** Reverse cuts to communications, outreach, and regional engagement roles that directly support *Future Nottingham*, civic rebranding, and the APP.
6. **Reallocate Workload Responsibly:** Where restructuring shifts work toward academic units, ensure this is accompanied by workload modelling, appropriate support, and academic consultation. Administrative offloading cannot be a hidden redundancy strategy.

The ER restructure, as currently proposed, endangers core functions that the University has publicly committed to strengthening. A legally sound, strategically coherent, and operationally sustainable alternative must be urgently pursued.

Global Partnerships Office

In 2024, a thorough review of Global Engagement (GE) was undertaken This review involved interviews and workshops with over 180 academic and professional services staff with expertise in GE, representing all functions and Faculties. External consultants, also experts in GE, were engaged to contribute to this process. The outputs of the review were presented as a series of recommendations in June 2024. These recommendations were approved by UEB in June 2024, and reaffirmed in January 2025 in light of the financial context.

However, the proposed new structure for GE under *Future Nottingham* appears to disregard these recommendations. The new structure does not sufficiently reflect effective international models or build on UoN's historic strengths. Instead, it risks continuing to operate with fragmented functions, compounding the issues which have been detrimental to UoN's success in global engagement since the abolition of the Office for Global Engagement in 2019 and losing critical talent and expertise. Key concerns include:

- **Fragmenting an integrated model:** Traditional global engagement models in leading universities successfully integrate key functions, including:
    - Study abroad — the foundation for building enduring global partnerships.
    - Teaching and research partnerships — ranging from single-dimension, revenue-generating collaborations to multi-dimensional, strategic research alliances.
    - Strategic partnership and network management.
    - International student recruitment — part of the traditional full-service International Office model, which was previously pioneered by UoN

  Any attempt to separate these functions from an integrated operating model risks undermining overall effectiveness. The proposed new structure involves study abroad partnerships and partnerships, administration and monitoring moving to the new Global Partnerships Office in ER. However, the expertise for those areas currently exists and will continue to exist in the Global Opportunities team in Registry and Academic Affairs (Global Opportunities Team)

- **Misaligned pooling of roles:**It is proposed that APM7, APM6, and APM5 roles at risk across the University could be pooled into equivalent roles in the new structure, with additional upskilling required. There is a failure to prioritise senior and capable individuals at APM4, 5, and 6 who already possess the skills, experience, and deep institutional knowledge necessary to ensure success in more senior role.
- **Loss of key talent:** Current APM5 and APM6 colleagues already have the skills and expertise needed for the proposed APM6 and APM7 roles. Instead of drawing on this existing talent and moving colleagues with the right skills, experience, and institutional understanding into these positions, the restructure risks losing skilled staff to competitor institutions due to a lack of progression and redeployment opportunities. This approach could ultimately result in these roles being filled by individuals who do not have the necessary expertise or experience. At APM5, 6, and 7 levels, we would expect a high level of specialist experience if advertising these roles externally, and the same standard should be maintained under *Future Nottingham*.
- **Lack of focus on talent retention and development:** The restructure does not prioritise retaining or developing existing talent, undermining institutional knowledge, and risking long-term capability.
- **Lack of implementation transparency:** Concerns repeatedly raised by colleagues during ongoing discussions reflect points already highlighted in the GE Review approved by UEB in January. There has been no clear timeline or explanation for why these issues have not been addressed, or how the decision was made — and by whom — to override the recommendations of more than 180 internal and external stakeholders with extensive experience in global engagement. This approach effectively dismisses the collective expertise of academics, professional services staff, and external consultants with significant experience at all levels.

Recommendations

1. **Integrate and align study abroad and partnership functions:** Ensure that study abroad partnerships, along with partnership administration, governance, and monitoring, are fully integrated within the new Global Engagement structure.
2. **Retention of critical skills and institutional knowledge:** Proactively redeploy and promote experienced staff into proposed new roles to retain critical skills and institutional knowledge, rather than relying on generalist staff from unrelated areas who would require a significant amount of onboarding.
3. **Clarify and communicate implementation plans:** Provide a clear timeline and rationale for changes (or lack thereof), ensuring transparency and meaningful engagement with affected staff.

Lakeside Arts Team

Every permanent member of the Lakeside Arts team was offered the opportunity to collectively review and discuss the draft *Future Nottingham* Phase One business case for External Relations and the proposed departmental structure for Lakeside Arts. Most took up this offer, and this response represents their combined feedback.

The team does not believe the proposed structure is fit for the future, builds the skills needed to lead within the sector, or breaks down silos to enable greater collaboration. In many areas, the proposals risk achieving the opposite. The key concerns are outlined below:

- **Visitor Experience Manager Role** The proposed Visitor Experience Manager role is a major area of concern. This role would deprive Lakeside of 36.25 FTE hours per week in critical areas of operational delivery, where capacity is already stretched. It does not account for the fact that the two roles it would replace are currently required to cover customer-facing shifts, creating inevitable capacity gaps and a reduction in service and events. Consolidating these responsibilities introduces a single point of failure in customer-facing operations; even short absences could result in key tasks being left unfulfilled and operational breakdowns across the Front of House and Box Office teams. The proposal also disregards the specialist expertise required for the Front of House Manager and Box Office Manager roles, the latter of which demands in-depth knowledge of Spektrix, Lakeside's ticketing and CRM system, and leadership in developing and maintaining this essential income-generating platform. Additionally, key responsibilities would be pushed onto APM Level 2 Duty Managers, requiring them to perform work beyond the appropriate scope of their roles. Combined with reduced time for team training and support, this change would significantly lower operational standards, compromise visitor experience, and increase the risk of health and safety failures.
- **Imbalanced Leadership Structure** The simplified leadership structure concentrates too much responsibility within the Head of Operations and Finance role and creates three distinct silos across Lakeside Arts. Under this model, the Head of Audience Development & Marketing has just one line report and a team of only two, while the Head of Programmes and Creative Partnerships oversees four line reports and a team of five. In contrast, the Head of Operations and Finance has four line reports, a team of 13 full- and part-time staff, and approximately 40 casual roles, resulting in a total team size

exceeding 50 people. This imbalance risks an uneven division of labour within the leadership team, leaving the Head of Audience Development & Marketing potentially underutilised and the Head of Operations and Finance overstretched across too many operational areas. Such a structure is likely to reduce productivity, particularly in key operational functions, and hinder the Head of Operations and Finance from adequately fulfilling core responsibilities. Additionally, the creation of three separate silos—marketing, operations, and artistic—discourages lateral thinking and disconnects the natural pairing of sales and marketing, which is essential in any commercially focused organisation.

- **Concerns Over Senior Role Grading** There is also significant concern regarding the pay grade gap between the CEO role and the rest of the team. An APM Level 7 managing three APM Level 5s is not standard practice within External Relations and appears particularly problematic given the overall reduction in APM levels across the team. It has been questioned whether the CEO role would be more appropriately set at APM Level 6, especially as key responsibilities—including finance, partnerships, and public programme development—appear to have been transferred to APM Level 5 roles. This grading misalignment risks undermining team coherence and raises further doubts about the sustainability and fairness of the proposed leadership structure.
- **Repeating Past Mistakes** In 2023, as part of the CEO recruitment process and following an extensive HR-led review, it was determined that Lakeside's former Director role carried too many responsibilities and was ultimately unsustainable. A major issue was that the Director was responsible for both leading the overall artistic vision and directly programming all theatre, outdoor, and festival events. This often resulted in a lack of cohesive leadership for the overall programme and insufficient time to adequately develop the theatre, outdoor, and festival offerings. The lack of neutrality in this arrangement also created conflicts of interest and led to organisational bias toward the Director's own programming areas. To address these problems, a CEO role and a separate Creative Programmer role (focused on theatre, dance, and children and families) were established. Although the new Head of Programmes and Creative Partnerships role does not encompass the same breadth of responsibilities as the former Director, it risks repeating past mistakes by merging overall artistic leadership with responsibility for programming a specific genre. Experience indicates that it will not be possible for this role to effectively build and shape Lakeside's public programme and creative partnerships while simultaneously developing and delivering a high-quality genre-specific programme. Furthermore, it is unclear why responsibility for shaping the overall artistic programme and developing creative partnerships—both key strategic components for Lakeside Arts—has been removed from the CEO role.
- **Insufficient Strategic Capacity**
  It has been stated that the three key areas of focus for External Relations going forward are student recruitment (especially international), reputation building to support global rankings and civic engagement, and internal communication and engagement, particularly around *Future Nottingham* and the student experience. Additionally, the *Future Nottingham* Phase One business case highlights that Lakeside is expected to enhance engagement with Research and Knowledge Exchange (RKE), Education and

Student Experience (ESE), and Advancement activities. However, these strategic priorities are not reflected in Lakeside's new organisational structure. Without access to a detailed business plan outlining specific areas of work and expected outputs, it is difficult to assess the capacity needed to deliver on these objectives. Experience indicates that without a dedicated strategic and operational lead focused on developing Lakeside's work beyond public programming, these important areas risk falling between roles and lacking meaningful impact. To effectively enhance engagement with RKE and ESE, these must be embedded as core responsibilities within a leadership role, as both require senior-level collaboration and strong cross-functional partnerships.

Recommendations

1. **Reconsider the Visitor Experience Manager role:** Re-evaluate this role to prevent operational gaps, protect specialist expertise, and ensure critical visitor-facing and income-generating functions are sustainably supported.
2. **Balance leadership responsibilities:** Redesign the leadership structure to ensure equitable distribution of responsibilities, avoid silos, and strengthen collaboration between marketing, operations, and artistic programming.
3. **Separate strategic and programming leadership:** Maintain clear separation between the leadership of the overall artistic vision and genre-specific programming to avoid conflicts of interest and ensure a coherent public programme.
4. **Integrate strategic focus areas into the structure:** Incorporate dedicated leadership capacity for Lakeside's contributions to student recruitment, global reputation, civic engagement, RKE, ESE, and Advancement, aligning operational delivery with University-wide priorities.

Finance

The redundancy proposals affecting the Finance Department - particularly the Procurement team - appear poorly evidenced, inconsistently applied, and operationally hazardous. The reductions target a critical function that underpins the University's financial compliance, value-for-money obligations, and research expenditure management. The proposals threaten not only service delivery but also institutional credibility and legal integrity.

Concerns have also been raised that, during pooling, APM2 administrators in non-Finance roles were combined with Finance-specific administrators. Despite similar job titles, the assumption that they possess identical training and expertise is flawed and undermines the credibility of the final CR pool decisions.

Key concerns include:

- **Arbitrary Targeting of Procurement:** The Procurement team has been singled out for redundancies while other finance functions remain untouched. No clear rationale or comparative functional analysis has been provided, and staff have reported being told that "it's your turn" - suggesting decisions based on perceived fairness rather than strategic need or capacity assessment.
- **Unsustainable Workloads and Operational Risk:** Procurement workloads are inherently cyclical and deadline-driven, particularly around financial year-end and major tendering exercises. Staff reductions will make it impossible to meet these obligations without failure or delay, risking reputational and financial damage.
- **Risks to Research Grant Compliance:** University spending on time-limited, externally funded research projects often requires procurement support to meet funder rules and deadlines. Cuts to procurement capacity may lead to underspent grants or noncompliant procurement processes, with knock-on impacts on future research funding and audit risk.
- **Unprofessional and Dangerous SLA Relaxations:** Senior management has suggested relaxing service level agreements (SLAs) as a way to absorb the loss of staff. This is an admission that the University cannot meet its own internal control standards and raises serious questions about procurement governance, audit readiness, and probity.
- **Increased Scrutiny, Fewer Staff:** While oversight of dispensations (above £1K) and tenders (above £25K) is being tightened in line with improved governance requirements, staffing is simultaneously being reduced. This is a recipe for delays, errors, or breaches of financial regulations.
- **Ethical Concerns Over Budget Handling:** Procurement staff have reportedly been asked to help "spend down" salary underspends while colleagues face redundancy. This raises serious ethical concerns about how financial management priorities are being set and communicated.

Recommendations

To ensure a financially competent and ethically sound future for the Finance Department, the following actions are recommended:

1. **Suspend Redundancies in Procurement Pending Strategic Review:** Halt all proposed reductions in the Procurement team until a full functional assessment is conducted, evaluating risk, workload, and interdependencies with other services such as research support and compliance.
2. **Conduct Evidence-Based Functional Analysis:** Justify all proposed changes based on strategic and operational needs—not on vague notions of team rotation or legacy decisions. Staff capacity should be aligned with actual workload and institutional risk profile.
3. **Reject SLA Relaxations as a Management Strategy:** Do not lower standards of service delivery or compliance to justify cost-cutting. Instead, protect the expertise needed to uphold the University's financial regulations and ensure audit readiness.
4. **Link Procurement Strategy to Research and Planning:** A modern procurement function is essential to delivering institutional strategy—from sustainability goals to research impact. Any staffing decisions must reflect this, not undermine it. The cost-saving efforts of the Procurement team will be significantly undermined by the loss of staff.
5. **Safeguard Ethical Budget Management:** End the practice of encouraging staff to spend budget underspends for discretionary purposes while redundancies are underway. Instead, these savings should be redeployed to retain critical staff where possible.

The University's financial probity and research competitiveness depend on a well-resourced, professional Procurement team. The current proposals place that foundation at risk. A transparent, evidence-based, and ethically responsible approach is needed to ensure both sound financial management and job security for dedicated staff.

Governance and Assurance

The proposed restructuring of Governance and Assurance services at the University of Nottingham poses serious risks to institutional integrity, regulatory compliance, and legal accountability. The scale of reductions appears driven by vague or speculative justifications and has not been matched by a clear plan to ensure the continuation of core statutory functions.

Key concerns include:

- **Inadequate Justification for Reductions:** The rationale offered for the proposed cuts — such as the introduction of "AI note-taking" — fails to provide a credible basis for reductions affecting statutory governance and compliance functions. These justifications reflect a fundamental misunderstanding of the complex, high-stakes nature of governance work, which depends on human judgment, institutional knowledge, and legal expertise. As a result, committees risk receiving incomplete or inaccurate notes and may require more virtual meetings, further reducing valuable face-to-face interaction.
- **Unsustainable Cuts to a Small, Capacity-Limited Team:** The Governance and Assurance function is already lean, operating close to capacity. Any further reductions will severely compromise the University's ability to maintain essential governance processes, manage regulatory relationships, and uphold the standards expected of a public institution.
- **No Consultation on Work Redistribution:** Remaining team members have not been meaningfully consulted on how displaced responsibilities will be redistributed or supported. This undermines both process legitimacy and operational feasibility, as it presumes capacity where none exists and makes no provision for upskilling, transition, or mitigation of risk.
- **High Risk of Regulatory Failure or Legal Breach:** The absence of a robust transition plan or functional reassignment framework introduces a significant risk of failure to meet legal and regulatory duties. This could result in reputational harm, financial penalties, and increased scrutiny from external regulators such as the OfS.

Recommendations

To protect the University's governance capacity and ensure it meets its legal and regulatory obligations, the following actions are recommended:

1. **Suspend Proposed Reductions to Governance and Assurance:** Halt all redundancies within the Governance and Assurance function pending a full risk and capacity review. Any changes must be informed by a robust mapping of statutory duties and regulatory requirements.
2. **Develop a Statutory Functions Risk Register:** Identify and document all compliance-related duties currently performed by at-risk roles. Establish who will take on these responsibilities if roles are removed, and assess whether those individuals are legally and operationally equipped to do so.

3. **Withdraw Inadequate Justifications:** References to tools such as “AI note-taking” should not be used to justify structural changes without independent review, piloting evidence, and demonstrated functional equivalence. If the number of committees is under review, clear decisions on reductions should be made before implementing redundancies, not after.
4. **Undertake Proper Workload and Capacity Modelling:** Engage directly with remaining staff to assess the viability of absorbing work from removed or reworked posts. If work cannot be safely or lawfully reassigned, roles should not be made redundant.
5. **Commit to Safe and Sustainable Governance Capacity:** Reaffirm the University’s commitment to regulatory integrity and good governance by protecting the personnel and expertise necessary to support the institution’s statutory obligations.
6. **Ensure Trade Union Involvement in Future Planning:** Governance is a shared institutional responsibility. Any reorganisation of governance structures or staffing should be developed transparently in partnership with trade unions and key professional staff.

Weakening the Governance and Assurance function for marginal or speculative savings is an unacceptably high-risk strategy. The University’s compliance, credibility, and long-term sustainability depend on robust governance - this must be protected, not compromised at a time of high change.

Human Resources

The current restructuring proposals affecting the University of Nottingham's Human Resources (HR) department demonstrate a serious misalignment between organisational ambition and operational capacity. The proposed changes not only threaten to degrade the University's internal staff support structures, but also risk legal and reputational consequences through the removal or dilution of specialist functions.

Key concerns include:

- **Elimination of In-House Staff Counselling Service:** The complete removal of the staff counselling function, replaced by an external "6-session" model, seriously undermines institutional mental health provision at a time of widespread staff stress and uncertainty. The proposed alternative lacks clinical clarity, continuity, and integration with internal support mechanisms. Staff now have fewer ways to access support, and the use of these services has become more opaque.
- **Increased Risk of Non-Compliance with Equality Duties:** The absorption of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) roles into general HR functions - with no dedicated leadership, governance structure, or strategic oversight - creates a clear risk of not covering EDI requirements for staff - and also students. The loss of a specialised EDI function threatens the University's ability to deliver its legal and moral commitments to inclusion, disability, and equality.
- **Inconsistent and Unclear Handling of Fixed-Term Contracts:** HR's own management of the redundancy consultation process has raised serious concerns, particularly in relation to fixed-term staff. Individuals on fixed-term contracts have reported unclear communications and uncertainty about whether they are included in redundancy pools or can apply for VR. This lack of clarity contributes to distress and creates the risk of procedural unfairness.
- **Operational Overload and Strategic Drift:**HR staff have reported being overwhelmed by the scale of the change programme, as evidenced by staff feedback on repeated delays in communication, which ultimately led to an extension of the voluntary redundancy application window.
- **Successive Rounds of Cuts and Absorptions Without Resourcing:** This latest restructuring follows multiple previous rounds in which specialist functions (such as Occupational Health, Organisational Development, and EDI) have been "absorbed" into generalist teams with no accompanying resource uplift. The result is a chronically overstretched service, undermining both operational effectiveness and staff wellbeing.

Recommendations

To safeguard HR as a credible and functional institutional service, and to avoid further unnecessary redundancies, the following alternative approach is proposed:

1. **Immediately Halt the Removal of the In-House Counselling Service:** Conduct a full review of current mental health provision in consultation with affected staff and clinical

professionals. Retain internal capacity where needed to ensure continuity of care, clinical oversight, and integration with University policies and staff networks. The costs of increasing external contracted provision on this when the current staff counsellors are at full capacity means more outsourcing and higher cost to the University overall. As mentioned in the Academic Registrars section if the staff counselling function must be lost those counsellors could be redeployed to student facing counselling instead.

2. **Reinstate a Dedicated EDI Function with Proper Governance:** Reverse the absorption of EDI roles into generalist HR functions. Create a standalone EDI team with named leadership, appropriate resourcing, and formal governance structures to ensure compliance with equality legislation and institutional commitments.
3. **Ensure Transparent and Fair Handling of Fixed-Term Contracts:** Going forward HR must provide clear guidance on how fixed-term staff are treated in redundancy pooling, and commit to consistent and equitable treatment in all cases, in line with legal obligations and University policy. Working with the unions on this before such plans are finalised would be worthwhile.
4. **Stabilise the HR Function and Conduct a Capacity Review:** Recognise the compounded impact of successive restructurings. Initiate a capacity and workload assessment in partnership with staff and trade unions to determine the true resourcing needs of a fit-for-purpose HR function since there are still Phases 2 and 3 to work through.
5. **Rebuild Trust Through Meaningful Staff Consultation:** Actively engage HR staff in shaping the future of their service, recognising their expertise and operational insight. Consultation must move beyond compliance and demonstrate a commitment to co-creation, not top-down imposition.

A university cannot function without a strong, trusted, and properly resourced HR service. By preserving essential wellbeing and EDI functions, restoring clarity and capacity, and engaging staff as partners in reform, the University can improve its posture relating to large staff changes.

Libraries

The University of Nottingham's proposals for restructuring Libraries present a strategically incoherent and operationally harmful approach to an essential academic service. The impact on research, teaching, compliance, and institutional reputation has not been fully assessed, and the consultation materials reveal fundamental flaws in both rationale and methodology.

Key concerns include:

- **Phase Two Cuts Hidden from View:** Although Phase One redundancies are currently under consultation, staff have been informed that a second phase—likely involving library closures—is anticipated but not yet declared. Much of the work of libraries is driven by the demands of teaching and research, so will be impacted by any changes to the academic structure in Phase Two. This undermines the credibility of Phase One justifications, which appear driven by undisclosed long-term intentions, not current operational need.
- **Lack of information about plans for King's Meadow Campus:** The business case for Phase One refers to the disposal of King's Meadow Campus, with no clear plans for what will happen to the library staff working there or the collections held in the building. This includes the Manuscripts and Special Collections department. Any movement of these materials will be financially and logistically challenging, causing a significant increase in workload for library staff and likely proving a false economy. Moreover, a change of location of workplace at an undetermined point in time is an additional source of stress for staff.
- **Weak and Misaligned Benchmarking:** The benchmarking data used to justify cuts—drawing comparisons with institutions such as Sussex and Anglia Ruskin —fails to reflect the University's strategic ambition to become a QS Top 100 institution and the current high standards of service which are essential to the student experience. The University of Nottingham typically uses the Russell Group as the comparator for the achievement of key performance indicators such as scores in the National Student Survey. A world-class university requires a world-class library service; aligning with smaller or less research-intensive institutions is not a sound basis for strategic planning.
- **Undermining of Digital Scholarship and Open Access Functions:** Increases in workload to digital scholarship, repository, and open access roles risk non-compliance with UKRI and other funder mandates. These roles are essential for supporting REF submissions, grant eligibility, and broader research visibility. Weakening this provision is both strategically short-sighted and financially counterproductive.
- **Contradictory Restructuring of Learning Technology Support:** The Learning Technology team is simultaneously being moved out of Libraries and reduced in number. This contradictory restructuring creates confusion, breaks lines of expertise, and erodes the University's capacity to support blended and digital learning at a time when these modes are increasingly central to both student experience and pedagogical innovation.
- **Excessive Workload and Staff Stress:** Staff already report unsustainable workloads and significant stress. Proposed cuts, both within libraries and to related departments, will exacerbate these pressures, further reducing capacity and increasing the risk of

service degradation. Previous REF cycles have caused an increase in activity for library staff at the point of submission, and the same will be the case for REF 2029, especially with reduction in staff in other areas of the university. The expectation that existing staff can absorb additional duties is unrealistic and risks a downward spiral in service quality and staff wellbeing. A Business Unit Stress Risk Assessment for libraries has not been shared with UCU, despite this being required by university policy. UCU has seen no evidence of appropriate mitigation measures for stress put in place.

- **Flawed and Unprofessional Pooling Methodology:** The University has publicly admitted that the pooling process was based on "keyword matching" in role descriptions - rather than professional analysis of job content, responsibilities, and context. This approach is professionally negligent, undermines the integrity of the process, and increases the risk of legal challenge.
- **Threats to Teaching and Research Support:** Staff predict that the proposed changes will severely damage support for both research and teaching. The merging of the Research Support section with Content and Discovery will mean fewer senior library staff able to advocate for the library and build relationships with key stakeholders. Reduced research support librarian capacity, diminished digital and repository support, and weakened learning technology provision all point to a system in retreat—at odds with the University's stated ambitions for excellence.

Recommendations

To prevent long-term damage to the Libraries service and avoid unnecessary redundancies, the following steps are recommended:

1. **Pause the Restructure and Publish Full Strategic Plans:** Halt Phase One implementation until Phase Two intentions are made public and the entire plan for Libraries can be consulted on transparently and in full. Piecemeal decision-making damages trust and strategic coherence.
2. **Reframe Benchmarking in Line with Strategic Ambitions:** Use appropriate comparators aligned with the University's QS Top 100 aspiration and results in the NSS survey. Any restructuring must support—not undermine—international standing, compliance, and research visibility.
3. **Protect Digital Scholarship and Compliance Functions:** Protect roles in repository management, open research, and digital scholarship. These functions are not optional; they are essential to securing research income, ensuring REF eligibility, and meeting funder mandates.
4. **Stabilise Learning Technology Support:** Maintain capacity in the Learning Technology team and clarify its institutional location in DTS with suitable review of what work the function undertakes in its new location, ensuring continuity of service and adequate support for academic staff and students.
5. **Conduct a Workload and Work-related Stress Impact Assessment:** Before implementing any changes, carry out a full workload review in partnership with staff to assess capacity and prevent unsafe or unsustainable working conditions.

6. **Co-design a Sustainable Libraries Strategy:** Engage librarians, academic staff, and students in co-creating a long-term plan that reflects the University's research and teaching needs, ensures compliance, and supports institutional ambitions. This should be achieved before Phase Two is put forwards.

A strong, fully resourced library service is not a luxury—it is a foundation for academic excellence. Cuts on the scale proposed, underpinned by flawed methodology and opaque long-term intentions, will undermine the very activities the University seeks to promote.

Planning, Performance and Strategic Change

The proposed restructure of Planning, Performance and Strategic Change (PPSC) represents a high-risk and under-evidenced overhaul of a critical strategic function at the University. The scale and pace of change—combined with a lack of transparency and consultation with subject matter experts—raise serious concerns about the viability of the proposed model, the coherence of its execution, and the risks of disruption to core business functions.

Key issues include:

- **Lack of Operational Clarity:** The restructure appears to have been developed without a detailed mapping of business-critical functions. There is no clear indication of what work will be stopped, retained, or transitioned. This absence of a functional impact assessment prevents any meaningful evaluation of risk or continuity.
- **Absence of Business Cases and Job Specifications:** New roles and functions are introduced without costed business cases or detailed job descriptions. This undermines the credibility of the financial rationale and risks appointing staff into ill-defined roles, setting them up for failure.
- **Inconsistent and Potentially Unfair Pooling Practices:** Staff have been pooled across inconsistent grades and role types (e.g. Level 5 pooled with Level 4), in breach of principles of fair comparison. This introduces legal and procedural risks and erodes trust in the process.
- **Lack of SME (Subject Matter Expert) Involvement in Role Design:** The writing of new role profiles has reportedly proceeded without input from those who understand the operational detail of existing work. This raises the risk of under-specification and functional gaps in the new structure.
- **Over-reliance on Centralisation Without Delivery Plan:** The new structure relies heavily on centralisation of functions, yet no clear plan has been presented to show how key activities—such as data assurance, planning cycles, strategic governance, and performance monitoring—will be maintained or improved under this model.
- **Unrealistic Assumptions About Absorption of the PMO:** The disbanding of the Project Management Office (PMO), a key unit with deep institutional knowledge of programme delivery, is predicated on absorption of its functions by Employee Relations (ER) and Digital & Technology Services (DTS)—both of which are simultaneously facing reductions. No evidence has been provided to demonstrate that these functions have capacity to absorb and maintain delivery standards.
- **Cuts Driven by Form, Not Function:** The process appears to have been guided by a reductive mindset of "what can be cut" rather than a forward-looking assessment of "what must be done" to support institutional performance and strategy.
- **Dynamic and Unstable Consultation Materials:** Organisational charts and structures have changed mid-consultation, disrupting the ability of staff and their representatives to provide informed feedback. This undermines the integrity of the consultation process.
- **No Costing of Restructure Outcomes:** Despite claims of financial savings, no detailed costing has been shared on the implications of the restructure. The absence of a

cost-benefit analysis raises concerns about whether the changes will genuinely deliver savings or simply displace operational risk.

Recommendations

To avoid damaging outcomes and ensure PPSC is fit for purpose, we recommend the following:

1. **Suspend Implementation Pending Functional Review:** Pause the restructure process and undertake a detailed functional mapping exercise in collaboration with staff and their representatives. Clarify what work must continue, what can be safely retired, and what resourcing is needed for each core function.
2. **Develop Costed Business Cases for Proposed Changes:** Require that all new roles and functions are accompanied by transparent costings and business cases demonstrating how they will support institutional priorities and deliver genuine savings or efficiencies.
3. **Involve SMEs in Role and Process Design:** Ensure that subject matter experts are directly involved in defining new roles, to safeguard delivery and prevent loss of institutional knowledge.
4. **Re-evaluate the Disbanding of the PMO:** Maintain a core PMO function or establish a clear and resourced transition plan if any redistribution of its activities is to occur. The current assumption of absorption into already-reducing teams is unsustainable.
5. **Stabilise Consultation Materials:** Commit to a consistent set of organisational charts and structures throughout the consultation period to allow meaningful engagement.
6. **Deliver Transparent Cost–Benefit Analysis:** Publish the projected costs and savings of the proposed changes—including transition costs, loss of staff time, and risks to strategic delivery—so that the university community can assess the merits of the proposed restructure.

By shifting from a cut-driven process to a strategy-led review, the University can safeguard essential planning and performance capabilities while avoiding unnecessary redundancies and disruption.

Research and Knowledge Exchange

The proposed changes to Research and Knowledge Exchange (RKE) are diverse and raise significant concerns about the department's ability to maintain performance in key areas targeted for compulsory redundancies. These changes will have long-term knock-on effects on the University's ability to secure research grants and provide REF support. Many decisions appear not to be backed by adequate data to understand the risks involved, and there is an explicit admission that some work will be dropped. Unlike some departments where delays or reductions in service level targets might be tolerated, these changes will directly impact research income.

The restructuring is complex and has taken considerable effort to understand. Greater clarity should have been provided from the outset, as it remains unclear which functions are to be covered by other departments.

Researcher Academy

Several roles supporting research staff training are being lost. This function was intentionally built up over many years to address critical issues faced by the University. The planned reductions represent a 50% cut in capacity—a staggeringly large cut. While it was mentioned that training is best embedded within faculties, there is no provision for this in the form of new roles or funding. With *Future Nottingham* Phase Two potentially introducing further cuts, this could lead to a complete loss of this function across the University. It is acknowledged that these losses will directly impact ongoing work. This will have an immediate effect on the Doctoral Training Programme (DTP) and leave remaining staff with workloads that are too heavy to absorb.

Although long-term improvements in research outcomes depend heavily on staff training, these impacts are not well recorded, making it difficult to quantify the effects of these changes—other than knowing they will be significant.

Recommendations:

- **Stop redundancies:** Roles in this area must be properly evaluated, and redundancies halted to enable the training function to be coordinated effectively with faculties, retaining the knowledgeable staff who would otherwise be lost.
- **Perform a fully data-driven review:** Both short- and long-term impacts require thorough investigation. Training budgets are often the first to be cut, despite having the greatest negative effect on the University's capacity to handle complex research grants. Shifting responsibility to faculties without proper training is short-sighted, especially given the lack of supporting data.
- **Involve staff:** The review of training was conducted without staff input, despite the team having been built over many years and holding extensive experience. These teams are capable of adapting their training provision to new strategies, and major strategic changes should require more training, not less.

Communications and Public and Business Engagement

Communications is being radically restructured, with 10 roles removed or moved and many others changed in title and function. It was stated that Business Engagement is to be shifted directly into faculties and innovation centres, but it remains unclear how this will be implemented and what outcomes are expected.

Public Engagement is also being entirely removed, despite the associated risks. Although a small team, they contribute significantly to the KEF return, support the University's HEBCIS return, train hundreds of researchers, won the University a silver NCCPE Engage Watermark award, deliver the Engage Watermark action plan, and provide high-profile opportunities for researchers to enhance their impact. They play an important role in the REF, particularly in the People, Culture, and Environment statement, while also making the University visible in the community and inspiring thousands of children each year.

Public engagement undertaken by faculties does not compare in scale to the central efforts. The University will likely lose direct publicity almost immediately, as faculties will not have the capacity to run large-scale, University-wide events or provide expert advice. Without oversight or monitoring, this decline may not be noticed centrally until it has already caused significant damage.

Academics will struggle to remain competitive in calls requiring public involvement without demonstrable access to specialist support to strengthen bids. Without a central role connecting faculties and Lakeside Arts, the University will fail to fully leverage its assets and drive innovation.

The lack of a risk-based approach is especially concerning, as these changes are being implemented largely in isolation, relying on External Relations and faculties to absorb the work—something they appear unable to do.

Recommendations:

- **Plan in line with External Relations:** Take a step back and reassess core functions using a risk-based approach. Relying on External Relations and faculties, both undergoing major changes, is unrealistic for implementing such significant reforms.
- **Review the data:** Decisions must be informed by data on the impact of these changes, rather than assumptions that the University can function without these roles.
- **Stop redundancies:** Pause redundancies in these areas until Phase Two plans are finalised and the scale of research and innovation activity is confirmed, so that staffing can be appropriately adjusted. If changes are necessary, staff should be redeployed to support communications rather than removed entirely.

Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategy

The RKE Strategy team faces the loss of 11 roles. In addition to changes to communications, the removal of several project managers, development managers, and senior administrators represents a substantial functional shift, despite the unit's objectives remaining high.

There are serious concerns about the workload on remaining staff, even with a change of focus. It is not clear what work will be immediately—and irrevocably—lost, nor are the risks of losing staff in these areas outlined, despite higher targets for graduate outcomes, research income per FTE, and reputation. While the aim was a 10% overall impact, this function appears disproportionately affected.

Recommendations:

- **Stop redundancies:** Allow more time to plan changes clearly and align them with faculty, department, and school requirements, rather than rushing into significant cuts before Phase Two even begins.
- **Engage directly with researchers:** Stakeholder involvement must go far beyond superficial consultation with PVCs. A genuine, university-wide engagement process is needed to develop a strategic approach to research and determine the necessary RKE capacity. High-level cuts without reflection risk undermining strategic capability before the consequences are even realised.
- **Assess service capacity needs:** While work is said to be changing, the overall workload is not decreasing. With 11 roles lost, remaining staff will be overworked and underperforming, particularly if Phase Two demands substantial central support.
- **Implement proper risk planning:** The department appears unaware of the potential risks associated with losing staff beyond concerns about baseline capacity. However, many research bids rely on these teams performing effectively. A reduction in capacity could lead to significant losses in income and jeopardise the success of major bids that, in previous years, would not have been achievable without adequate support.

Knowledge Exchange and Business Development

A few roles in Knowledge Exchange and Business Development (KEBD) are being removed in an effort to restructure the remaining staff into a "faculty innovation hub" model. There are also cuts to training (as noted for the Researcher Academy). The hub model is brand new and conceptually unproven; if it fails, there will be less capacity to revisit the situation and provide the required support for researchers in the University.

The model appears to rely on moving staff without fully understanding the nature of their roles and their interactions with others. Further siloing of staff risks creating a fragile structure, where the departure of a single staff member could have an outsized impact on ongoing work.

Recommendations:

- **Stop redundancies:** There are many assumptions about how faculties will operate, many of which will be under review during Phase Two. Implementing changes to KEBD now, without a detailed understanding of what will happen elsewhere, is risky and may result in the loss of staff who should be retained

- **Review the model with staff:** A comprehensive review involving KEBD staff should be undertaken to assess each role's contributions beyond job titles and profiles. Expertise and collaboration are at risk of being squeezed out of an already well-functioning part of the department.
- **Reduce silos:** The insistence on a per-faculty setup (also being applied to other business units to save money by reducing staff) risks creating a fragile and unbalanced approach to incoming work. Demand is not evenly spread, and silos will create problems if staff leave. Workloads will likely become uneven, with limited flexibility to respond. Reviewing this approach and benchmarking against best-in-class universities would be far more beneficial than experimenting with an untested restructuring.

Towards Financial Sustainability

This section outlines a series of detailed, evidence-based counterproposals to the redundancy programme set out in Phase One of the University of Nottingham's *Future Nottingham* initiative, focusing on high-level financial considerations. These proposals have been developed in response to serious concerns about the transparency, timing, and underlying rationale of the current plans.

We acknowledge that the UK higher education sector is under serious financial pressure. However, the situation at the University of Nottingham has been significantly exacerbated by local decisions—most notably, the purchase of Castle Meadow Campus (CMC). The current response appears disproportionate. Independent financial analysis confirms that the University's current position is not as precarious as management suggests. In June 2025, S&P Global Ratings reaffirmed the University's A+ credit rating, citing its strong reputation and its ability to scale back capital spending—an approach consistent with our recommendations. The report also notes a "moderately high likelihood" of government support in the event of serious distress. Nowhere does it suggest that large-scale or immediate redundancies are necessary, yet the University is pressing ahead with sweeping job cuts without fully considering their negative consequences or exploring all viable alternatives.

This section of the counterproposal is not a complete financial blueprint — such a document would require full access to internal accounts, assumptions, and scenario models which, to date, have not been provided. Instead, we offer here a structured set of alternatives, anchored in available financial data and sector best practice. These options have not been fully explored by the University, despite their potential to mitigate the need for large-scale academic redundancies.

Our approach is grounded in the following principles:

- Compulsory redundancies are the most damaging and dangerous form of organisational change. As a trade union, we do not accept them under any circumstances;
- Long-term financial health depends on investing in core academic capacity, including both academic and professional services staff who support teaching and research;
- Transparency, shared governance, and stakeholder engagement are essential for sustainable decision-making;
- Considering negative experiences with past top-down decision-making and imposed changes, any restructuring should be employee-led and bottom-up;

This section consists of three parts:

1. An updated financial framework (AFS 2.1), building on UCU's earlier 2021 and 2025 submissions;

2. A set of detailed counterproposals addressing key areas of mismanagement, risk and underexplored opportunity;
3. A case study outlining the folly of excessive outsourcing over in-house expertise.

The AFS 2.1: Updated Alternative Financial Strategy

This section sets out the University of Nottingham UCU branch's revised financial vision: an updated and extended version of the Alternative Financial Strategy 2.0 (AFS 2.0), originally presented in early 2025. The first two strategies — AFS 1.0 (2021) and AFS 2.0 (2025) — were developed through extensive internal work by UCU representatives and offered detailed, realistic alternatives to the University's prevailing financial model. AFS 2.1 builds on that foundation in the urgent context of the Phase One redundancy proposals under *Future Nottingham*.

The underlying problem is not new. In both 2020/21 and 2023/24, the University of Nottingham faced self-inflicted financial crises, driven by a reliance on large annual surpluses to fund capital projects — a model that prioritises infrastructure over resilience, and growth over sustainability. UCU proposed viable alternatives at each point: AFS 1.0 called for rebuilding reserves and using long-term borrowing; AFS 2.0 proposed bottom-up budgeting and greater autonomy for Schools. These were ignored.

AFS 2.1 now responds directly to the logic being used to justify mass redundancies, by restating and reframing the core of AFS 2.0 in light of current risks. The argument is simple:

- The present crisis was foreseeable and avoidable;
- The investment strategy that caused it has not been corrected;
- Redundancies are a political choice arising from a flawed financial model — not a financial necessity.

The AFS 2.0 in Retrospect: Predicting the Present

AFS 1.0 and 2.0 identified a recurring pattern of crisis and contraction driven by a distinctive financial approach. Where most institutions fund capital investment via modest borrowing and ring-fenced budgets, the University of Nottingham has:

- Used primary surpluses as its main source of capital funding;
- Maintained low cash reserves, increasing exposure to volatility;
- Overestimated income (especially international tuition) and underestimated operational costs;
- Deferred essential maintenance to inflate short-term surpluses.

UCU's warnings went unheeded - the Chair of Council refused to circulate them amongst council members. In 2020, Covid exposed liquidity risk. In 2023, under-recruitment and inflation exposed the fragility of the capital-first model. In both cases, the response was to protect infrastructure and cut staff. This cycle continues into 2025.

Strategic Missteps and the Cost of Capital Expansion

As documented in *Understanding the Crisis*, the Castle Meadow Campus (CMC) project typifies the dangers of this model: more than £100 million investment made without a clear academic use case, funded from surpluses rather than borrowing, and justified by dropped or shifting rationales. Similar patterns are evident in other major projects, from Project Transform to the new medical school plans.

These decisions are not isolated lapses, but symptoms of a systemic bias toward speculative capital investment at the expense of core academic functions. The cost of these decisions is now being passed onto staff through a surplus target that has doubled in a year — from 2.4–2.8% to 5% of income — to fund a still-unapproved infrastructure pipeline.

Impact on Academic Infrastructure and Operations

Meanwhile, the University's core estate has deteriorated:

- Student accommodation blocks have stalled or closed, with private landlords filling the gap;
- Teaching and lab spaces suffer chronic maintenance failures;
- Animal research facilities face compliance risk due to neglect or fragmentation.

In some cases, the University is now paying commercial providers and transport costs to compensate for its own underinvestment. This undermines academic quality and imposes reputational and financial costs — the very things the current capital programme claims to protect.

Reframing AFS 2.0 as AFS 2.1: Towards a Sustainable Alternative

In light of the current redundancy proposals, we reiterate and expand the following core principles of AFS 2.0:

1. **Abandon unaffordable strategic capital investments.** Large capital projects should proceed only when fully funded through secured external sources such as major fundraising or government grants. The University's own statements to unions in June confirm it is merely "exploring" funding options and that no bailout exists to offset revenue shortfalls. Pressing ahead with unfunded capital schemes while citing unavoidable staff cuts is illogical. Only strategic projects with fully approved business cases should appear in the MTFP. We again call for the release of the full liquidity and unrestricted reserves profile, which remains undisclosed and is essential for informed scrutiny.
2. **Review capital expenditure governance.** Council currently approves major projects, but no mechanism exists to assess long-term outcomes. We call for the creation of a financial oversight body including Senate representation.
3. **Empower academic stakeholders.** Senate must be involved in long-term financial planning, including capital and strategic priorities.
4. **End the over-reliance on primary surpluses.** A mix of careful borrowing and targeted philanthropy should be used to fund infrastructure.

5. **Tie all future capital allocations to demonstrable academic need.** This includes costing projects to the point of academic use, not just structural refurbishment.
6. **Prioritise repair and maintenance over speculative expansion.** Maintaining existing assets delivers better return and value to students and staff. It also supports UoN''s commitment to carbon neutrality and sustainable development, aligns with the Climate Change Act (2008), DfE's Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy (2023), and contributes to broader climate change mitigation efforts.
7. **Reinstate a contribution-based budget model.** Schools must be able to plan long-term, manage their own resources, and retain a share of the value they generate.

Conclusion

AFS 1.0 and AFS 2.0 warned of a crisis that has now come to pass. AFS 2.1 sets out a clear path forward that protects the University's academic capacity, reforms its financial model, and avoids the worst consequences of reactive redundancy planning. The choice before University leadership is not between redundancy or ruin — it is between persisting with a failed model or embracing a viable alternative.

Avoiding Redundancy: Financial and Strategic Alternatives

Surplus Targets

The University's revised Medium-Term Financial Plan now targets an annual surplus of around £40 million—approximately 5% of total income. This is being presented as essential for financial sustainability. Yet the University has acknowledged that this target is not externally mandated: no financial covenants require a surplus of this scale. The Interim Chief Financial Officer has described the figure as "ordinary," citing a Department for Education recommendation that schools and colleges maintain a 5% surplus. This is misleading. The DfE sets 5% as a cap to prevent excessive surpluses, not as a target. It is inappropriate to apply this benchmark to a university—especially to justify large-scale staffing reductions.

A further explanation provided for the ambitious surplus target is the goal of building cash reserves to follow the guidelines of the Charity Commission. UCU has already shown in AFS 1.0 that the University has failed to follow best practice in maintaining adequate reserves. That makes it all the more concerning that Council approved major capital investments while cash reserves were being run down. We therefore invite the Chair of Council to explain how this approach squares up with the guidelines of the Charity Commission since in the recent past cash reserves have only been built with the purpose of financing major capital investment plans.

We note that a key strategic shift appears to have occurred in 2024. In the MTFP presented to UCU in 2023/24, the surplus target was 2.4–2.8%; this has now doubled to 5%, with £40 million described as a minimum. The difference is equivalent to hundreds of jobs. No clear rationale has been given for this change.

The only reasonable conclusion to draw is that the surplus target is a *strategic choice*, not a structural necessity. Yet it is being used to justify sweeping and immediate staffing reductions.

Historical data reinforces the point. Between 2008 and 2024, the University maintained an average surplus of around 4%, which supported growth without extreme cost-cutting. Previous financial challenges were met through targeted savings and increased tuition income—not mass redundancies. The current environment, while difficult, is not unprecedented. What it demands is steady, adaptive management—not an arbitrary surplus target driving irreversible job losses.

We argue that the current 5% surplus target is unnecessarily aggressive and risks doing disproportionate harm to the institution's core academic mission. By reframing the target within a more realistic target of 3%, which would be in line with the MTFP presented to UCU in 23/24 — the University could continue to meet its obligations and maintain stability, while significantly reducing the need for staffing cuts. At a 3% surplus, for example, the required savings would fall by more than £10 million, protecting jobs to preserve institutional knowledge and capacity, while allowing the University to continue to invest in infrastructure projects based on sound business cases, avoiding the pitfalls of agile decision making driven by easily available cash without adequate scrutiny from lenders or donors.

We note the closing statement of the CFO's latest reply on the rationale for the surplus target that 'the 5% target isn't just about financial prudence - it's about ensuring we can fulfil our mission as a world-class, research-intensive university while maintaining the flexibility to adapt and thrive in an increasingly competitive higher education landscape'. We agree that UoN must fulfill this mission and we ask UoN management to rise to the challenge by launching an ambitious fundraising campaign with a target of 40 Million per year for the next 6 years, matching the success of the UoN fundraising campaign, which raised £242m between 2011-2017.

Moreover, how the surplus is achieved is just as important as its size. While we will address several aspects of this in greater detail in the following sections, it is worth highlighting a few key points here. Across the past five years, operational investment costs — though comprising only about 5% of the University's base expenditure — have grown by an average of 38%, placing outsized pressure on financial resources. The *Future Nottingham* business case - which as we understand has made use of external consultancy to identify areas for saving in the non-pay budget - has failed to carry out any in depth analysis of patterns over time of operational cost items identified for savings to properly identify and put in place measures targeting areas that have seen a disproportionate increase. It is also important to note, that while operational investments have grown at exceptional pace, staff cost growth has remained modest at around 5%.

A particularly high-cost area has been digital transformation — notably the development and rollout of the UniCore system and other IT platforms. These projects were intended to streamline operations and improve efficiency. Instead, they have struggled with performance, integration, and user confidence, while consuming substantial financial and staff resources.

To correct the current imbalances resulting from expenditures growing at a faster rate compared to income, it is crucial to regain control of growth in the pay and non-pay dimension of operating costs. Since salaries have historically grown at a rate well below inflation, as long as future hiring is kept under control, the growth rate of the university wage bill is unlikely to constitute a problem. As for adjustments of staffing levels, MARS has already delivered considerable savings. Thus, a modest VR program and natural staff turnover, would be sufficient to gradually deliver savings to stabilize university finances. It is very concerning that the University does not appear to have collected consistent and reliable data over time on staff turnover to evaluate alternative scenarios of gradual cost control relying on natural attrition rather than drastic and disruptive large layoffs plans.

A gradual approach would also address the pitfalls of past aggressive cost-saving plans through large scale redundancies. Previous restructures at Nottingham have followed a familiar and inefficient pattern: as shown in Figure 1, short-term staff cuts are made under financial pressure, only for headcount to grow again and at a faster rate in subsequent years as service gaps and operational failures become untenable.

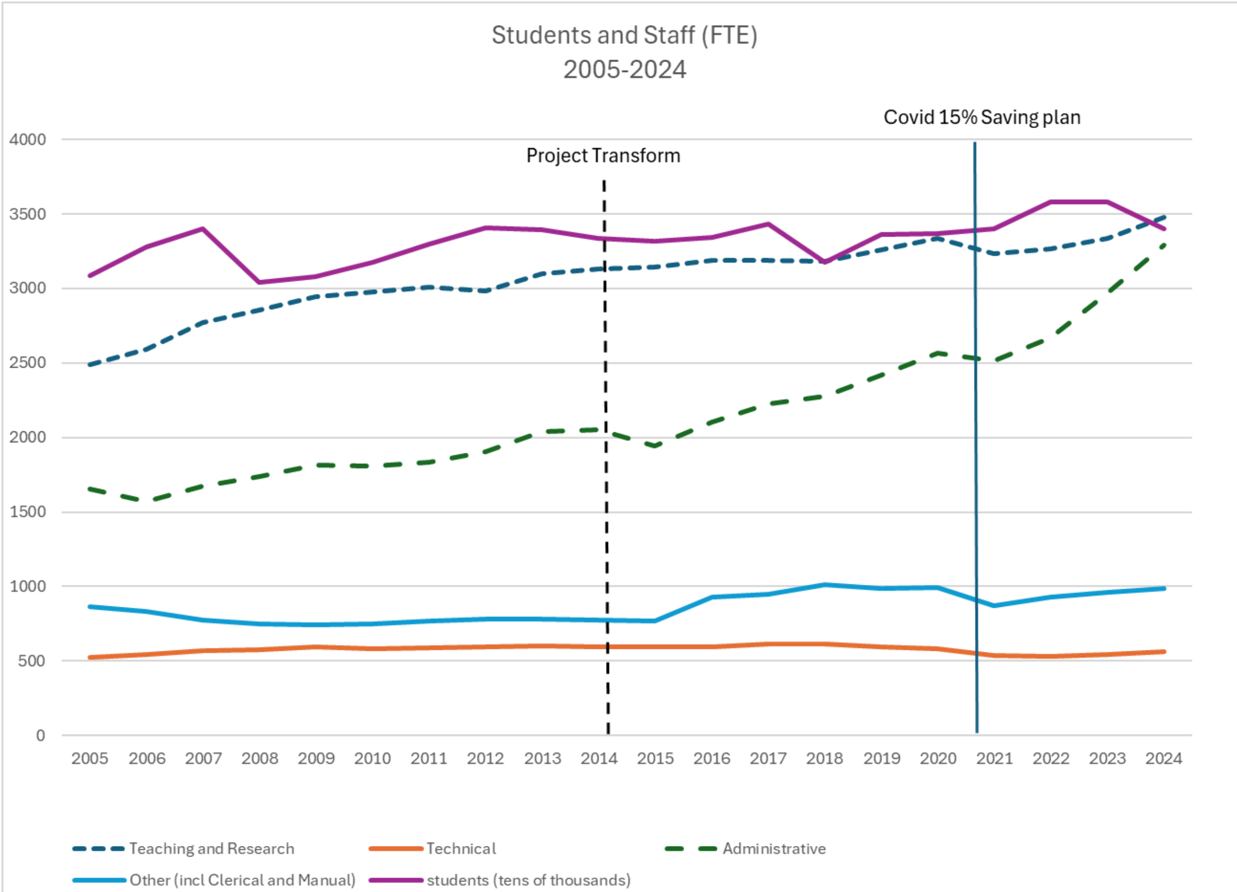

Figure 1 - Source: University of Nottingham, Strategic Review and Financial Statements, 2005-2024.

This cycle of reactive reduction and costly regrowth ultimately undermines both the intended savings and the stability of academic provision. It also erodes morale, damages institutional knowledge, and diminishes trust.

We therefore call on the University to:

- Reframe its financial planning around a realistic annual surplus target of 3-4% , rather than the aspirational and unnecessary 5%.
- Publish alternative financial models showing the staffing and service impacts of different surplus levels, allowing for informed consultation and genuine strategic choices.
- Acknowledge explicitly that the current surplus target is a management preference, not a financial imperative, and open this target to critical governance review.
- Rebalance the burden of cost containment by undertaking a full review of:
    - Operational investment trends
    - Consultancy and digital procurement contracts

The pursuit of financial sustainability must not come at the expense of the institution's core business. A moderate, achievable surplus — built on shared sacrifice and intelligent reprioritisation — offers a viable path forward. It protects the University's long-term health without inflicting irreversible damage on its people, teaching, or research.

Income Forecasting

The CFO's forecast projects a sharp decline in margins, primarily attributed to falling numbers of postgraduate taught (PGT) students, while undergraduate (UG) enrolments are held constant at the targets agreed in January. However, this outlook overlooks recent substitution patterns, where increased UG enrolments have partially offset declining PGT income in 2024/25. Moreover, Appendix B of the document ("PGT Conversion"), shared with UCU in June 2025, indicates recovery in certain postgraduate markets alongside a continued upward trend in UG home intake. Yet, no modelling of potential substitution effects—such as shifts from international to domestic students—is included. This omission raises concerns that projected income growth may be understated, potentially overstating the case for the scale of proposed staff reductions. This represents a noticeable departure from recent years in which such projections were often overly optimistic, as mentioned above.

UCU demands:

- Revision of income forecasts to include substitution effects and live application data;
- Publication of enrolment trends and modelling assumptions;
- A formal response to UCU submitted queries about last year's substitution data and its financial impact.

It is unwise to base irreversible staffing decisions on speculative or inflexible financial assumptions.

Capital Investment Strategy

Despite the University's stated financial constraints, capital investment is projected to rise sharply once again, reaching approximately £121 million in 2026/27 (£28 million in infrastructure expenditure and £93 million in capital projects). This brings spending close to the original levels set out in the Medium-Term Financial Plan, even as frontline staff face the threat of redundancy. Notably, the planned Medical School building remains the dominant capital outlay for that year at a projected cost of £50 million. This signals a strategic decision to maintain large-scale infrastructure ambitions, seemingly at the direct expense of staffing and core academic functions.

While the University has disputed the claim that it is committing to annual capital spending of £88–121 million, citing instead an £80 million "pipeline" for 2025/26 — comprising £30 million in revenue and £50 million in capital — the distinction does little to reassure. Although a £40 million cut to planned capital investment was made in March 2025, the retention of placeholders in the MTFP suggests a continuing intent to prioritise infrastructure growth.

This concern is underscored by the £16.5 million (23% of the estates capital budget) allocated to "clinical skills course accommodation." In the absence of any publicly available return-on-investment analysis, we requested the full business case. Our review revealed a striking lack of financial detail within an otherwise lengthy document, raising serious questions about the level of scrutiny applied by Council and its subcommittees. These gaps undermine confidence in the University's financial priorities and reinforce the impression that capital spending is being protected at the cost of the workforce.

The issue of speculative borrowing compounds these concerns. A £100 million unsecured loan is shown in the 2026/27 planning assumptions to support the proposed Medical School redevelopment. We are concerned that the inclusion of such a speculative figure in financial planning contributes to future surplus targets and rationalises current cost-cutting measures. Why are placeholder borrowings for unapproved capital projects retained in financial modelling, while staff are made redundant under the banner of unavoidable financial pressure?

Furthermore, we have identified approximately £109 million of planned capital and revenue spending across 2024–2027 requiring further scrutiny. Major allocations include £13.1 million for data centres, £10.5 million for Other Digital, a total of £20 million for asset replacement, £16.5 million for clinical skills facilities and £8.6 million for the funding of the project team and preliminary fees relating to the eventual build of a new Medical School building.

We call on the University to:

- Defer non-essential capital projects, especially those lacking short-term return on investment or clear academic benefit,
- Remove large strategic capital spending and speculative borrowing from the MTFP unless a business case has been formally approved and subject to transparent consultation.
- Reassess surplus targets in light of investment placeholders, rather than framing them as fixed necessities that demand staff reductions.
- Publish return-on-investment assessments for all major capital projects, beginning with the Clinical Skills facility, and provide evidence that alternatives such as refurbishment or reallocation were explored.
- Commit to a transparent capital prioritisation framework, ranking all future projects by urgency, legal obligation, health and safety requirements, and income-generating potential.

Although we note that the University has not yet developed a formal five-year capital commitment plan, the presence of capital placeholders, speculative borrowing, and the connection between surplus targets and investment ambitions remains problematic. Our position is clear: we do not oppose long-term investment in the University's future. But we strongly argue that deferring certain projects is a necessary step to protect the institution's present — its workforce — especially at a time of unresolved digital transformation, high consultancy expenditure, and structurally fragile operating margins.

Consultancy Spending

The University's current financial strategy fails to confront a major area of discretionary expenditure: consultancy spending. According to the *Future Nottingham* business case, a total of £18 million has been spent on consultancy, with £11 million categorised as "strategic investment" (primarily within the Digital Programme, including projects like DigiCore and work contracted to firms like CGI) and a further £7 million identified as "non-strategic." Strikingly, only the £7 million non-strategic component appears in the savings review (Figure K), while the larger £11 million figure is excluded on the grounds that these contracts conclude in 2025/26 and therefore "do not represent savings" within the current window of review.

This rationale is flawed. The exclusion of strategic consultancy from scrutiny, simply because it is set to expire, ignores the fact that these costs were incurred during a period of mounting financial risk. No credible explanation has been provided as to how these contracts were evaluated for value, or why such significant sums were committed when core budgets were already under pressure. These sunk costs are not irrelevant — they have directly contributed to the shortfall now used to justify job cuts. Their omission from the savings narrative represents a serious failure of governance.

The remaining £7 million in non-strategic consultancy spending, while nominally part of the review, is itself presented without detail or defence. There is no real transparency regarding the nature of these contracts, what services were procured, whether internal alternatives were considered, or whether they achieved value for money. Meanwhile, research and teaching budgets are under direct threat, and staff travel, development, and departmental resourcing are being pared back. This selective protection of external consultancy expenditure raises fundamental questions about the University's spending priorities.

The University's defence — that all consultancy contracts are subject to approval by the Finance Approval Board (FAB) and only commissioned where "internal expertise isn't available" — does not stand up to scrutiny. Approval by exception does not equate to strategic review, nor does it ensure value-for-money or alignment with long-term institutional priorities. Can the University provide compelling evidence that the Board assesses cumulative spend, evaluates alternatives, or conducts retrospective audits to determine whether contracts delivered their intended outcomes?

Moreover, the claim that internal expertise is lacking is contradicted by the existence of substantial in-house professional services teams in areas such as HR, IT, strategy, and transformation — all of which have grown in headcount in recent years. The institution's track record with consultancy-led systems development (e.g. Project Transform, Campus Solutions, UniCore) has often resulted in additional internal hiring to correct or stabilise outsourced systems, further undermining the case for external procurement. These issues are discussed in greater detail in our section on *The Cost of Outscourcing: A Case for Reform, Control and Efficiency.*

If the University is serious about addressing its financial challenges, it must start by demonstrating that all discretionary spending — including consultancy — is subject to the same rigour it applies to academic operations. This requires not only scrutiny but also the adoption of clear, benchmarked decision-making frameworks. For example, consultancy costs should be routinely compared to alternative uses of equivalent funds: the £7 million annual consultancy budget is nearly 1.2 times the entire academic travel budget for over 3,400 research and teaching staff. The £11 million allocated to strategic consultancy alone could have funded dozens of early-career academic or student support roles. Every £1 million diverted from consultancy could support around 25 or so full time salaries in teaching, research and professional services— a tangible and reputationally significant investment in the core functions of the university.

We note that the document Appendix A: Non-Pay IE Data shared with UCU in June 2025 confirms £11.4m in professional fees across DIgital and DTS, but without itemised outcomes. This reinforces the need for a full audit so that true values of strategic consultancy can be properly assessed. To restore confidence in institutional priorities and ensure that high-cost contracts are not shielded from scrutiny while frontline staff bear the consequences of austerity, we call on the University to adopt the following measures:

- Impose a moratorium on all non-essential new consultancy contracts until a full independent review is completed.
- Conduct a comprehensive audit of all strategic and non-strategic consultancy contracts commissioned since 2021, including:
  - Project objectives and scope
  - Total costs incurred
  - Outcomes delivered
  - Internal alternatives considered
  - Justification for external procurement
- Require that all future consultancy proposals be supported by a published business case, including a clear rationale for not using in-house staff. This should include cost–benefit analysis, performance metrics, and sunset clauses. Departments must now justify advertising all posts—external consultancy should meet the same standard.
- Ensure that all consultancy spending is included in the University's Non-Pay Review process, with clear savings targets attached, and subjected to the same scrutiny as other budget areas before any staffing reductions are implemented.
- Institutionalise a benchmark approach that makes opportunity costs visible: business cases should state explicitly what equivalent investment in staff, student support, or core academic activity would achieve. Where possible, comparative impact assessments should be published alongside any proposal to commission external consultants.

The University's refusal to engage with consultancy spending as a contributing factor to the current financial pressures seriously undermines the credibility of its business case for redundancies. Before seeking further cuts from the academic core, senior management must show that all areas of avoidable expenditure — especially those involving large, externally awarded contracts — have been transparently reviewed, tested for value, and reduced wherever possible.

Discretionary Spending Reforms

The University has confirmed the rollout of wide-ranging reforms to reduce discretionary expenditure — covering travel, procurement, software, furniture, and other non-pay areas. These measures, monitored via UniCore and reinforced through governance mechanisms, include the elimination of business-class travel, centralised purchasing, and tighter authorisation protocols.

While these initiatives are welcome, they highlight a critical inconsistency. The *Future Nottingham* business case does not quantify the expected savings from these reforms or model their cumulative financial impact. This omission is significant: if non-pay savings are being enforced and embedded, their projected value should be visible in the same modelling used to justify redundancies.

The absence of such data contributes to a broader pattern of unmodelled cost-saving measures across the institution. We therefore call on the University to:

- Publish a full savings forecast from current and planned non-pay reforms;
- Integrate these figures into revised financial projections;
- Pause compulsory redundancies for 24 months to evaluate the realised savings and stabilise workforce planning.

In addition, further efficiencies are available. For example, £13.1 million allocated for data centres and £10.5 million for other digital projects between 2025–2027 merit urgent review. Similarly, schemes like Curriculum Nottingham (budgeted at £3.1 million) could be phased out in favour of devolved, school-led curriculum design — more responsive to academic need and less administratively burdensome.

These reforms show that the University is capable of significant savings without resorting to job losses. Until their impact is fully assessed, redundancies are premature.

Staffing and Workforce Planning

Crucially, there has been no transparent attempt to assess whether natural staff turnover could offset the need for compulsory redundancies. Turnover through retirements, resignations, and contract completions offers a gradual and non-disruptive pathway to cost reduction. If paired with internal redeployment and strategic vacancy management, it could significantly reduce the number of roles at risk — without the reputational and human costs of forced redundancies.

Despite this, the University has not published disaggregated turnover data or used it to model alternative staffing scenarios. Without such information, it is impossible for staff, unions, or Council to properly evaluate whether redundancies are truly necessary or simply expedient.

We therefore call on the University to:

- Immediately publish staff turnover data (in FTE) for the years 2018 to 2024, disaggregated by job family (e.g. Research and Teaching, Administration, Technical, Other) and by faculty or major organisational unit;

- Develop and share a scenario-based model of workforce adjustment, quantifying the savings achievable through managed attrition, internal redeployment, and extended vacancy controls;
- Rule out compulsory redundancies for at least two years, allowing time for the above alternatives to be fully explored and tested;

Redundancies should be a last resort — a measure taken only after all other options have been transparently assessed and exhausted. The University has not met that threshold. A staged, evidence-based approach that leverages natural turnover and internal mobility offers a more sustainable, less damaging path forward, preserving both financial stability and academic integrity.

Flexible Working and Voluntary Hours Reduction

Unison has proposed a voluntary scheme allowing staff to temporarily reduce working hours or take career breaks as a cost-saving alternative to redundancies. The University has rejected this idea, incorrectly conflating it with existing flexible working policies.

However, voluntary hours reduction is a strategic tool — not an individual entitlement — that enables shared sacrifice across the workforce. Even modest uptake (e.g. 5–10% of staff reducing hours by 10–20%) could deliver £1–2 million in annual savings, rising further with sustained communication and support.

We call on the University to:

- Pilot a 12-month Voluntary Reduced Working Hours Scheme;
- Include projected savings in the MTFP;
- Promote it explicitly as a job protection mechanism.

This is a low-risk, employee-led alternative that aligns with the broader case for pausing redundancies while evaluating savings from current reforms and workforce attrition.

Capital and Commercial Income

The University's current approach to capital planning and commercial income generation reveals a strategic inconsistency. On the one hand, the administration has routinely dismissed a range of viable income-generating proposals — such as commercial leasing, or alumni fundraising — on the grounds that they would take too long to yield returns within the current financial year. On the other hand, it continues to pursue large-scale capital investments with extended time horizons and deferred benefits, including speculative borrowing.

There is little evidence of a serious strategic effort to expand commercial income from the University's existing assets. Facilities such as hotels, conference centres, and sports venues are not being actively scaled to offset core budget pressures. Vacant or underutilised properties on campus — which could generate interim revenue through short-term leasing — are instead being prepared for sale, even in a depressed property market. Meanwhile, the University's philanthropic potential, including its demonstrated capacity to raise significant funds (such as the £240 million campaign launched in 2011), remains underutilised in the current financial plan.

This asymmetry raises serious questions about the consistency and credibility of the University's financial priorities. If long-term capital investment with deferred returns is deemed acceptable and necessary, then the same principle must apply to revenue-generating strategies with similar timelines — particularly when those strategies offer lower risk, greater flexibility, and fewer reputational consequences than widespread redundancies.

To ensure a more coherent and sustainable financial response, we call on the University to:

- Conduct a university-wide commercial revenue review, with immediate action to identify and lease underutilised properties and to expand income from existing non-core facilities such as conferencing, hotels, and sports venues;
- Launch a targeted capital fundraising campaign, aimed at supporting strategic investments and alleviating pressure on operational budgets without resorting to staff cuts;
- Formally integrate CPD and short-course expansion into the University's revenue model, with realistic income projections and a planning horizon of two to three years;
- Reassess the timing and scale of capital investment plans, particularly where business cases are not yet approved, to ensure they do not preclude more immediate revenue options or force unnecessary redundancies;
- Temporarily suspend or reschedule non-urgent capital projects until credible income generation strategies have been properly developed and assessed.

In short, the University must apply consistent standards of scrutiny and planning to both sides of its financial equation: capital outlay and income growth. Staff redundancies should not proceed while clear revenue opportunities remain unexplored or untested. A balanced, forward-looking approach — grounded in both prudence and creativity — can protect the institution's long-term ambitions while preserving its immediate academic strength.

Energy Efficiency and Maintenance

The University has acknowledged the need to improve energy efficiency and is exploring off-balance-sheet financing for infrastructure upgrades, such as district heating systems. Yet there is no clear evidence that the savings from such measures are being integrated into the broader financial plan that underpins the redundancy case.

This omission is puzzling, given that energy savings represent one of the most reliable sources of recurring operational cost reductions. The University claims to benchmark FM contracts in the "lower quartile," but still plans to cut £1m from specialist maintenance. This suggests further efficiencies may exist, especially in contract renegotiation.

UCU recommends:

- Acceleration of energy efficiency programmes, with clear targets and implementation timelines;
- Full publication of facilities management benchmarking data;
- Integration of projected savings into financial models used to justify staffing decisions.

The refusal to account for medium-term savings while making immediate staffing cuts undermines the credibility of the *Future Nottingham* strategy.

Programme and Service Closures

The current approach to programme closures under *Future Nottingham* has been marked by rushed decision making, opacity, and a troubling lack of financial transparency. Cuts are being justified by vague references to “hidden costs” that are neither itemised nor subjected to proper scrutiny. A striking example is the proposed closure of the Language Centre’s evening classes, based on a notional £200,000 allocation of central costs—yet without identifying which of those costs would actually be saved. This conflation of fixed and variable costs severely undermines the credibility of the savings claim. If the central costs remain largely unchanged regardless of whether the programme runs, then attributing them to a specific income-generating activity creates a misleading financial narrative.

It’s like shutting down a lemonade stand because you've averaged the rent of an entire shopping mall across all shops—even though the stand operates rent-free on the pavement. Closing it eliminates a profitable stream of income without cutting any real costs. Unless central charges are meaningfully reduced, programme closures of this kind simply shrink the income base while preserving structural expenditure. This not only risks reputational damage and weakened community ties—it actively undermines financial sustainability.

There is also a wider structural concern. If central costs are fixed and not reduced, then closing programmes simply redistributes those costs across fewer remaining revenue generating units, making them appear increasingly unviable in turn. This is precisely the kind of downward financial spiral that many in the sector have warned against, where internal cost allocation mechanisms create the illusion of unsustainability and prompt further unjustified cuts.

We therefore insist that:

- No income-generating or cost-neutral programme should be closed without a full, itemised financial breakdown;
- Senate must be centrally involved in evaluating any proposed closures.

Programme closures must not become a proxy for unexamined cuts or a pathway to the so-called death spiral. They require the same evidential standards we advocate throughout this counterproposal: transparency, modelling, and rigorous financial logic.

Better Financial Governance

Key strategic decisions — including the acquisition of Castle Meadow Campus and major capital allocations — have been taken with insufficient post-approval oversight. The University Council has sole authority to approve high-cost items, but no independent mechanism exists to assess the outcome or risk alignment of these investments over time.

Senate, as the elected academic body, is sidelined from major financial decisions despite their direct implications for education and research. This structural disconnection limits accountability and fosters poor decision-making.

We propose:

- That business cases for projects with a substantial academic component, or with significant potential impact on research and teaching, are first assessed by Senate in relation to these aspects, before proceeding to Council for full consideration and approval;
- That a new joint committee of Council and Senate be created to review post hoc the performance of major financial decisions (e.g. capital investments over £10 million)
- That future business cases include staff consultation phases before formal approval.

Shared governance is not simply a procedural ideal — it is a safeguard against strategic error and reputational risk. After years of negative experiences with top-down, imposed restructuring it is high time to adopt an inclusive, employee-led approach to avoid past mistakes.

Leadership at Times of Crisis

To address the ongoing erosion of staff morale caused by years of poor institutional management decisions and a lack of transparency we call on members of the University Executive Board to make a voluntary salary sacrifice to show leadership and solidarity during times of great financial difficulties. This type of initiative is not uncommon in Higher Education and we ask the University of Nottingham senior management to rise to the challenge that their position requires.

The Cost of Outsourcing: A Case for Reform, Control and Cost Efficiency

The University of Nottingham's approach to IT system management—particularly the outsourcing of core digital infrastructure —has led to significant operational inefficiencies, inflated long-term costs, and a persistent loss of institutional control. The ongoing challenges with *Campus Solutions*, and the potential for similar issues with the *Unicore* rollout, suggest that these are not isolated incidents but may reflect a broader weakness in management processes and decision making. A revised strategy centred around in-house capability, strategic use of outsourcing, and robust oversight would not only deliver better service quality but also offer substantial financial savings over the long term. These savings would require retaining in-house expertise though, forgoing redundancies. They would more than pay for this retained staff though, reducing the need for redundancies elsewhere in the University.

Systemic Weaknesses: The Financial and Operational Cost of Overreliance on Outsourcing

Inflated Ongoing Costs and Value Loss

The University has repeatedly struggled with the rollout of new IT systems, notably with Campus Solutions and more recently with Unicore. In the case of Campus Solutions, the University sought to address failures in the system by contracting the private firm Infosys to offer additional support. However, the support offered through this outsourced service has proved both inefficient and financially costly.

For instance, Infosys and similar providers often use underqualified developers, requiring more time and revisions to deliver basic outcomes—resulting in hidden costs through delays and inefficiency. Simple tasks that could be completed internally in a day now take weeks and cost thousands. For example, reports that in-house staff have created routinely were reportedly billed at around £5,000 each.

Aside from increased costs and delays, reliance on outsourcing also means those providing operational support are not part of the university community. They lack local knowledge, or even knowledge of the specific needs of a Higher Education institution operating in the UK and through strong international partnerships. In combination with the reliance on standard software platforms, the result is that the design of IT platforms is driving the design of university procedures and structures. Such broad organisational changes, including significant training of all staff, burdens the university with significant additional costs. It would be preferable to co-evolve IT systems and administrative procedures.

Loss of Institutional Knowledge Increases Cost of Routine Operations

Key internal technical and functional staff were reassigned or lost during Project Transform, which coincided with the rollout of Campus Solutions. This loss of staff created a knowledge gap that has increased reliance on costly external help. This limits the University's ability to respond to issues efficiently, increasing both support costs and downtime-related losses.

Crucially, rebuilding this internal knowledge base would be a one-time investment with recurring savings, compared to the recurring fees of external providers. Yet the risk at present is the loss of more much-needed expertise and local knowledge of how research and teaching work amidst renewed redundancies across all professional services job families. The University must take care to ensure that *Future Nottingham* Phase One, alongside the rollout of Unicore, does not repeat the damaging pattern seen during Project Transform and the launch of Campus Solutions — where reductions in in-house expertise were combined with escalating technical challenges.

Insufficient oversight of external providers by in-house teams increases costs

Related to the above point, a loss of in-house expertise also makes it more challenging for the University to oversee external providers and ensure effective, low-cost service. This is further exacerbated by the types of contractual arrangements entered into, which assume a horizontal relationship between the University and the outsourced provider rather than insisting on exercising managerial oversight, which would then rely on properly resourced in-house expertise.

The University continues to incur substantial costs for system changes and maintenance under the guise of “post-project” support. In reality, it is still locked in a costly dependency loop that is a direct continuation of Project Transform’s structural flaws. This obfuscation hides the true long-term cost of outsourcing, preventing financial scrutiny or strategic correction.

Comparative Evidence: Other Universities Spend Less by Doing More In-House

Peer institutions such as Manchester have demonstrated that building strong internal Oracle support teams leads to lower costs and better service. We understand that Manchester reports lower overall spend on Campus Solutions upgrades—despite running a more ambitious and internally led operation. It would be worthwhile for the University to investigate this point further as it suggests that the University of Nottingham is paying more for le**ss** by continuing with its outsourced model.

Unicore: Risk of Doubling the Mistake and Doubling the Cost

The emerging rollout of Unicore is mirroring the Campus Solutions playbook: externally led, internally under-resourced, and already experiencing delays. Without a centralised, permanent internal team, UoN is setting itself up for a second cycle of long-term outsourcing and spiralling costs.

Given that both Campus Solutions and Unicore are Oracle-based, the University is missing a clear opportunity for cost consolidation. A single, well-resourced internal team could support both systems—leading to economies of scale, greater flexibility, and lower duplication of effort. Failing to leverage this overlap will result in duplicated vendor fees and further delays.

The Case for In-House Investment: Financial and Strategic Benefits

Cost Efficiency

- Internal staff deliver faster, cheaper, and higher quality outcomes. Even on fixed-term contracts, in-house developers have saved the University hundreds of thousands of pounds compared to outsourced alternatives.
- In-house functional staff—those configuring systems and responding to user needs—offer the greatest return on investment, as they are more responsive and better integrated with University operations.

- A modest upfront investment in permanent roles would quickly pay for itself by eliminating inflated change request fees, reducing vendor dependency, and shortening delivery timelines.

Long-Term Savings Over Recurring Fees

- Outsourcing firms operate on long-term support contracts, where even small system tweaks result in ongoing invoices.
- By contrast, an internal team represents a fixed cost with growing productivity over time as expertise deepens.
- Strategic use of external specialists could be retained for genuinely exceptional work—but always managed by in-house experts to maintain cost discipline.

Reduced Risk of Cost Escalation and Conflict of Interest

- External providers, particularly generalist firms like Infosys and Accenture, benefit from creating more billable work, rather than solving problems efficiently.
- A robust in-house team *with oversight authority*—which currently is not built into contracts with providers like Infosys—can hold these vendors accountable, manage timelines, and prevent cost inflation.
- Ensuring internal staff are empowered to act as contract managers—not just collaborators—would protect the University from overbilling, underperformance, and scope creep.

Conclusion: Control, Capability and Cost-Saving Are All Within Reach

The University of Nottingham's IT outsourcing strategy risks entrenching an expensive, inflexible, and underperforming system infrastructure. These are not sunk costs of the past—they are ongoing financial burdens that will only deepen if the same model is applied to Unicore.

Yet, the solution is clear and financially sound:

Retain and invest in in-house expertise and governance to reclaim control, improve service, and drastically reduce recurring costs.

With a modest reinvestment in internal technical and functional staff, and by establishing strong oversight of any necessary external partnerships, the University can:

- Eliminate wasteful vendor spending
- Shorten delivery cycles
- Improve service quality
- And build a future-ready, financially sustainable IT ecosystem.

Other universities are already proving that this model works. Nottingham has the tools—it now needs the will to use them.