

UCU Extraordinary General Meeting: Stopping Forced Rezoning

13th January 2026

12:00-1:00pm

MINUTES

Chair: Duncan Lowther

Present: Around 139 UCU members

1. Welcome and Introductions

Duncan Lowther welcomed members to the meeting. Apologies were given for slight delays to the start of the meeting due to technical issues.

2. Professorial Zoning Review – Member update (Maha Rafi Atal)

Zones – Salary bands for professors, which professors must apply to be promoted into. About half of the Russell Group universities run a system like this, with higher salaries for higher zones.

University action (announced November 2025) – The University is requiring professors who were assigned to their current zone six or more years ago, and have not applied for zone movement since, to have their “zone profile” (how their performance lines up to the four zones) reviewed. 20% of the professoriate in scope, with some exemptions.

University’s proposed timeline:

- **By end March:** Targeted professors to fill in zone profile form.
- **June or July:** Professors receive outcome of panel assessment.
- **August 2026 – August 2028:**
 - Colleagues assessed *above* their zone promoted
 - Colleagues assessed *below* their current zone undergo individualized performance management managed by POD and their line manager.
- **August 2028:** targeted professors must demonstrate progress towards meeting zone criteria (but not necessarily meet it).
- Some unspecified change to job role would be imposed for those not demonstrating progress.

No consultation with UCU

16 July 2025: University alerted UCUG that there were 26 professors who had *never* been zoned (due to administrative error) and would be zoned this year. UCUG asked for a meeting with Gillian Shaw, Head of Performance and Reward, to confirm that this exercise would *only* be applied to these 26.

UCU were informed verbally by People & Organisational Development (POD) that the University had no immediate plans to do any other zone review, but POD would not reiterate this in writing, and the requested meeting was not granted.

2 October 2025: University told UCUG about a wider review of promotion and zoning criteria being considered for future promotion rounds after the review completes. No mention of a rezoning exercise this year was made. UCUG reiterated the request to meet with Gillian Shaw and to be formally consulted on any new criteria, but the meeting was not scheduled.

20 November 2025: Meeting with Gillian Shaw was finally held. At this meeting, UCUG was informed verbally for the first time of the mandatory rezoning planned for 20% of professors. No written proposal was shared with UCUG nor was this policy taken to the formal negotiating body for terms and conditions where UCUG sits with the other TUs.

Notification of the rezoning exercise went out to in-scope colleagues the next day.

12 December: Following vote at 27 November branch meeting, UCUG wrote to Principal to convey our strong opposition, noting that the forced rezoning alters terms and conditions of employment, and therefore requires formal consultation under our recognition agreement that has not been followed.

The Principal replied on 16 December, restating University position to move ahead with the review but offering a meeting for UCUG with Christine Barr (Head of POD) and Frank Coton (Senior Vice-Principal - Academic). This meeting was held yesterday.

12 January Meeting – key points:

- The University is not willing to withdraw the forced rezoning exercise.
- The University acknowledged that they cannot downgrade any staff member’s salary without their agreement. UCU were told that therefore salaries for those staff who after two years have not “made progress” towards meeting their zone will not be unilaterally reduced. We were not told, however, what the University *will* do to those colleagues, though it was implied that they might be encouraged to move into another job or to retire.
- The University acknowledged that zone movement letters – when people are successful in getting promoted to a zone – do not give any indication that the promotion is conditional on meeting the same criteria at any future date. They provided no justification for why it would be fair to hold staff to an unstated condition.
- The University disputes UCUG’s timeline of events, maintaining that verbal mention of a future review of promotion criteria was sufficient notice of this exercise. We dispute this.
- University maintains that because UCU does not directly negotiate professors’ pay, and zones are pay bands, this rezoning exercise does not require formal negotiation with UCUG. We dispute this as the exercise itself alters conditions of employment, which we do negotiate.

Purpose of Extraordinary General Meeting

Per motion passed in November, UCU will hold a vote on whether to launch a formal dispute with the University to stop forced rezoning.

3. Floor opened for questions and comments

Comments/discussion points

- The possibility of launching a formal dispute was considered as early as November; the principal did not reconsider the University's approach. The University maintains that the union is not recognised for negotiations on GP 10, claiming that promotion and zoning are distinct from the pay scale. It was noted that the Remuneration Committee should conduct annual reviews, yet the University has been accused of disregarding its own procedures and misinterpreting its policies.

Scottish Government policy, as reflected in last year's signed Fair Work First policy for funding agreement, stipulates that trade unions must be consulted regarding any changes to terms and conditions. This consultation is also a requirement for the University to secure Scottish Government funding. The requirement for consultation with trade unions on changes to terms and conditions, as per the Fair Work First policy for funding, was reiterated. This is essential for maintaining Scottish Government funding.

- There is widespread concern that the current actions represent a significant threat to terms and conditions, potentially signalling the start of further detrimental changes affecting *all* staff. Reference was made to similar actions at Lancaster. A coordinated strategy, potentially including industrial action and marking boycotts, is being advocated.
- This is not merely the beginning of threats to staff terms and conditions, as the University is already targeting fixed-term staff as evidenced by the widespread redundancies in the School of Education last year. There is a need for a unified campaign to defend all roles and proposed moving towards a comprehensive strategic response – defending all jobs at all levels.
- Colleagues who have been through the ECDP recently will probably recognise how unclear it is about what happens if you don't move up to higher grades or zones. The uncertainty around future job terms, which used to be more of a theoretical worry for many, now seems to affect those at Grade 10 too. As all staff are dealing with these kinds of conditions, there's a real reason for people across different pay grades to support each other. Plus, with funders like Leverhulme now using lotteries to award grants, it really doesn't make sense to judge performance just by whether someone gets a grant.
- The sector is experiencing a shock and awe austerity without the old school fanfare. In Edinburgh, there's a freeze on Grade 10 promotions and the introduction of an Academic Performance Framework, designed to evaluate staff locally and identify individuals who may be considered for voluntary severance or redundancy.
- Even if there are no changes to salaries, any modifications to roles or responsibilities constitute changes to terms and conditions and therefore require union consultation. Concerns were raised about the use of coercive tactics, such as pressure and potential harassment, to push staff into new roles, with the added issue that many zoning criteria involve unique responsibilities that cannot be replicated throughout a career.
- Concerns were raised about requiring the change in a timescale that doesn't allow adjustments in work priorities. Staff are often asked to cover for colleagues, do extra jobs, or take a hit on something one year to be recompensed the next. Why would anyone agree

to any of that with a constant 6-year deadline hanging over you? This policy will affect collegiality.

- Obtaining legal advice is both costly and time-consuming. While one member is pursuing independent legal counsel at their own expense and there is hope of sharing the findings, it was noted that the most significant leverage may lie in advocating for a review of the zoning procedures as they stand (rather than the proposed detrimental changes) and highlighting the University's failure to comply with Scottish Government guidelines.
- Scope for collective refusal to comply with new processes could be part of action short of strike.
- Scope for requesting a stress risk assessment that has not yet been undertaken by the University before implementing these changes. The University of Birmingham have been officially criticised by the HSE for workplace stress due to concerns raised by their branch.

Questions

- *Is it possible for staff to be moved to a new role without any impact on their salary?*

The response from Maha Rafi Atal clarified that the terms being proposed are intentionally vague. Legally, the University cannot reduce staff salaries without their consent. However, there is concern that significant pressure may be placed on staff to accept terms and conditions at a lower level, although unilateral salary reductions are not permitted.

- *Who is responsible for conducting the ongoing management process and deciding which roles are being removed?*

The panels responsible for making decisions regarding the outcomes of the assessment process consist of the Senior Management Group along with the management groups of each college.

- *Has the branch sought legal advice from UCU Glasgow regarding the current situation?*

Replying on behalf of the branch, Duncan Lowther noted that due to compressed timelines, formal legal advice has not been sought. However, members shared that legal advice arranged by the Scotland branch for staff already affected by this process indicated that there is little that can be done legally unless and until salaries are actually cut.

Maha Rafi Atal advised that members can decide to direct officers to “explore legal challenge.”, either alongside or instead of a formal industrial dispute.

- *Have the criteria within the professorial zones changed (and if so, did UoG consult on that)?*

Maha Rafi Atal advised that no, a review to change the criteria is for future promotions is underway separately and UCU knew about that. This process is separate and one of the points UCU raised to the University is that it makes no sense to do this if the criteria are all going to change in a year anyway.

4. Vote

Motion

Should this branch enter formal dispute with the University over the mandatory rezoning scheme? Yes/No

YES: 117

NO: 0