

# EXCEPTIONAL REDUCTION OF STUDENT TUITION FEES 2019/20

**Tuition Fee (and other charges) Waivers for Undergraduate and Postgraduate Students**

<b>Academic Session:</b>	<b>2019/20</b>
<b>Document Reference</b>	<b>09</b>
<b>Period of registration commencing:</b>	Between 01 August 2019 and 31 July 2020
<b>Duration of enforcement:</b>	2019/20 academic session
<b>Teaching Level(s):</b>	Undergraduate Taught Postgraduate Taught Postgraduate Research
<b>Student Groups:</b>	All new and returning students studying at UWE and registering solely as UWE students
<b>Income Group(s):</b>	Home and European Union Offshore International
<b>Related Documents:</b>	<b>TFP1819</b> – Tuition Fee Policy <b>SDP1819</b> – Student Debt Policy <b>01</b> – Deposits, Scholarships, Discounts And Bursaries <b>02</b> – Payment Of Fees <b>03</b> – Student Finance Funded Students <b>03a</b> – Postgraduate Loans <b>03b</b> – Student Finance Funded 'NHS' Students <b>04</b> – International Students <b>05</b> – Studying Away From The University <b>06</b> – Additional Charges <b>07</b> – Additional Modules And Retake Charges <b>08</b> –Withdrawal From The University
<b>Further Information</b>	<a href="http://www.uwe.ac.uk/money">www.uwe.ac.uk/money</a>
<b>Date of Publication:</b>	12/08/2019
<b>Current Version:</b>	V1.0
<b>Previous Version:</b>	V0.0
<b>Last updated:</b>	07/08/2019
<b>Document Owner</b>	Academic Services

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# Introduction

The University of the West of England, Bristol (UWE Bristol) is committed to a fair and transparent policy in respect of charges made to students. The University recognises that occasionally students may be unable to meet their financial obligations to UWE for tuition fees, accommodation or charges for other services. UWE, Bristol recognises that it has an obligation to support its students and to manage the expenditure of its funds. This policy is in place to support students in financial difficulty and sets out the general principles for how and when the University would consider varying, reducing or cancelling a fee charge. All such variations are at the discretion of UWE Bristol. Authority to waive a tuition fee charge is granted to the University Fee Waiver Group in accordance with the provisions of this policy.

*Students wishing to be considered for tuition fee waiver should be able to demonstrate that they have sought other forms of support prior to application.*

The fact that the University may eventually have to 'write off' a student debt should not be considered as grounds for a recommendation to waive fees not least because of the message that this may give to the student body. Financial Services, and not the Student and Academic Services Department, are responsible for pursuing debts to the University.

Tuition fee remission should be considered to be the last resort for a student rather than the first.

## General Eligibility

All applications will be considered on their individual circumstances.

No application will be considered without evidence.

In making an application for a waiver of fees a student is declaring that they have no alternative source of funding available to them.

A student will, other than under the most exceptional circumstances, receive a waiver of their tuition fees in only one academic year and on only one occasion.

A second and exceptional application may normally only be made on the grounds different to those at the first application.

The hardship must not predate registration on the programme or, normally, enrolment on modules at the start of or during an academic year. Students may, however, in good faith register on a programme or enrol on modules, pay the deposit and first instalment and become unexpectedly unable to pay their fees because of an event that occurred some time in the past. For example, the true financial circumstances of a family following the death of a family member may not become apparent until many months after the event.

The shortfall must result from a change of circumstances which could not reasonably be foreseen and be substantial enough to give rise to an inability to pay fees as outlined in point above. Students are responsible for taking all reasonable steps and precautions to ensure that they will be able to pay the fees for which they are liable.

Student should seek advice before re-registration if there is a potential for financial hardship to continue in to a future academic year. Students re-registering where it is subsequently demonstrated that financial hardship was known or expected in advance of the academic year will not be eligible for a fee waiver and should seek university assistance in respect of a tuition fee debt. The exception to this will be where a subsequent serious deterioration of personal circumstances occur post registration that are deemed to be unpredictable regardless of any link to existing circumstances and the student is deemed to otherwise be in good financial standing with the university.

New students have the right to cancel their registration with the University within 14 calendar days of the completion of the contract, defined for these purposes as registration. For 14 calendar days from the day after a student completes registration *or* for 14 calendar days from the day after the start of term, whichever is later, a student can withdraw from the University without incurring financial penalty. The fee waiver policy does not apply to tuition fees during this 'cooling off period' as there exists an automatic right to a fee reduction.

No reduction or variation of fees will be granted by the University where statutory funding is available.

The panel will also consider other options such as suspension from studies as an appropriate alternative.

### **Variation And Waiver Of Fees Recommended By Other Routes**

The University Fee Record Operations Group will consider requests from students whose are subject to exceptional financial circumstances under the terms of this policy.

There are other policies and procedures that exist within UWE that can recommend fee waivers including;

- Maternity Policy
- Fitness to Study Policy
- Stage 1 complaints
- Post Graduate part time fee waiver

Variation to or waiver of fees recommended under these other policies are subject to the rules and conditions applicable to those policies. Decisions will be automatically actioned on a student record by the Fees and Student Finance Team upon notification from the appropriate team or manager responsible for the management and administration of that policy. These variations therefore fall outside of the remit of this policy.

### **Applications On The Grounds Of Disagreement With The Policy**

It is not the purpose of the group to consider applications from students who disagree with the fee charging policy of the University. Students wishing to contest their liability for tuition

fees in respect of the fee charging policy should contact the Student Administration Team or Fees and Student Finance Team under stage 1 of the University complaints policy or complaints and appeals team under stage 2 of the University complaints policy.

## **Applications On The Grounds Of Exceptional Circumstances**

By 'exceptional circumstances' the University means that it must be possible to say that the circumstances in the case in question are 'markedly different from the usual run of cases'. The circumstances must have 'a particular quality of unusualness' that permits them to be described as special or exceptional. The circumstances that will be considered are:

- Significant health condition including; terminal illness, serious or long term injury resulting from accident or other incident, onset of a long term health condition or injury or major psychological or mental health issues.
- Significant life event including; recent bereavement of close family member, victim of serious crime, divorce or family breakdown, loss of home, sudden or unexpected loss of employment.
- Natural disaster (having a direct impact on the student or their source of Funding and/or support).

In all cases, for an application to be considered, it shall be the case that;

- Other statutory support is not available
- The hardship must be such that a student is unable to pay the balance of his or her tuition fees.
- The deterioration in financial circumstances must be unexpected and substantial.
- The event must have occurred AFTER the start of the course
- Could not reasonably have been predicted
- No other option exists – including suspension.

The following shall not be grounds to waive fees;

- An inability to complete the award for which the student originally registered
- The perceived ability or inability of students to fund the remainder of their programme
- The perceived ability or inability of the University to collect the debt from a student

## **Extenuating Circumstances**

Extenuating Circumstances as accepted by an award board and that meet the above criteria will automatically grant the student a full reduction of any fees that might be due for the subsequent retake of the module(s) against which the Extenuating Circumstances apply. Where such Extenuating Circumstances are accepted against a first sit but a student subsequently pass a module at the resit the offer of a reduction in fees ceases to apply.

Exceptionally an award board or extenuating circumstances panel may recommend an individual application is considered for a waiver.

It is not within the remit of the panel to consider applications on the basis of a disagreement with the terms of the University's fee policy.

## Reduction In Fees To Allow Completion Of A Year Of Study Or To Allow Progression

The panel may consider waiving fees for a student where they are repeating a year due to exceptional **personal** circumstances and there is no statutory funding to cover the charge and where supporting the student in this way is to the benefit of the student

Or

Where a student has outstanding tuition fees for the current academic year and is unable to pay due to exceptional **financial** circumstances.

The panel will not consider any applications that have arisen from a complaint by the student until or unless such a complaint has been dealt with through the complaints procedures or the application is referred to the panel by outcome of the complaints procedure or it is determined by the complaints procedure that it is more appropriate to consider the application as a Fee Waiver rather than a complaint.

Request for fee waivers made as part of a complaint will be considered to be part of the complaints procedure first.

Fee waiver application will not normally be considered while other University procedures are ongoing in relation to the module, course or other service against which the application has been made. Including but not limited to:

- Exam boards
- Appeals process
- Complaints
- Disciplinary proceedings

Fee waivers will not be considered by the group once a student account has been passed to the university debt collection agency unless the request is received via the debt collection process.

Before a decision is made to support or not support a student registered with the university as an international student (and meeting the necessary criteria of that status and holding a Tier 4 visa) the panel will seek advice from the International Development Office about the implications for the UWE sponsorship of such students.

## Direct Application

Applications submitted to the panel without evidence from the student or supporting documentation will be rejected pending receipt of required evidence.

Where an application is rejected due to lack of evidence a student may reapply using the same reasons provided supporting evidence or documentation is included with the reapplication

The panel will consider ALL applications meeting the appropriate criteria and all outcomes, either decisions or referrals, will be based on the evidence supplied and according to the terms of this policy.

The panel will make a decision on all applications it considers. Where the panel is unable to reach a decision on an application the application will be referred to the VC or nominee for a decision.

Where the panel is unable to reach a decision on an application the panel will refer the application to Directorate with a summary of the panel discussion and an explanation of the panels inability to reach a decision. Directorate will consider all evidence supplied and decisions will be based on this evidence.

The decision of the panel or Directorate may be subject to appeal on the following grounds;

- Material irregularity in the process and handling of the application.
- Further significant and relevant evidence has become available

All decisions of the panel will be presented to the University Student Funding Group for review at its meetings.

The decision of the waiver and associate appeal process is final and there is no further right of appeal.

## **Self Funding International And Postgraduate Students Liable For Payment Of Their Own Fees.**

Students who can demonstrate that there has been a substantial **and** unforeseen deterioration in their financial circumstances may apply to the panel for consideration if the deterioration has occurred since the start of the current academic year in which the application is made.

Applications made in relation to circumstances that occurred prior to the start of the academic year will not be considered **unless** there are significant additional extenuating circumstances subsequent to the initial event that have further compounded the financial situation and for which there is evidence for the panel to consider.

The student will need to have paid the deposit and at least one Direct Debit or instalment of fees for the academic year for which fees are being considered for waiver unless it can be demonstrated by evidence in support of the application that this is not reasonable.

All applications for a waiver from international students studying on a tier 4 visa will be considered with reference to the requirements of UKBA to ensure any such decision does not breach the terms of a student's visa or the responsibilities of the University's UKBA licence.

## **Students Normally in Receipt of Statutory Funding or Courses Normally Registered to Receive Statutory Support**

Statutory funding includes both undergraduate funding and courses eligible for the postgraduate loan where students also meet personal eligibility criteria.

A waiver of fees will be considered by the panel **only** if the student is ineligible for statutory funding for the fees under consideration by the panel.

In situations where funding has been awarded by Student Finance and then revoked by reassessment students cannot apply for a waiver on the basis of the removal of funding but may apply based on the reason underpinning the reassessment providing there are sufficient reasons as per the terms of this policy to support an application.

Similarly students on an undergraduate degree or PGCE courses are not permitted to apply for a fee waiver solely on the grounds of financial hardship or an unwillingness to access a tuition fee loan.

Applications made by students eligible for statutory funding will be automatically rejected. This is superseded **only** in the first term of the first year of a student finance funded undergraduate degree or PGCE course **and only** if the application for the waiver relates to a withdrawal in the first six weeks of the course (dated from the official course start date) and is for reasons outlined in 1.6 above. In such cases an exceptional waiver of the 25% tuition fee liability may be granted.

Students on postgraduate degree courses are not permitted to apply for a fee waiver solely on the grounds of financial hardship or an unwillingness to access a tuition fee loan unless it can be demonstrated that it is unreasonable to expect a student to access the postgraduate loan. Students ineligible for funding due to academic failure and non progression are also ineligible unless the failure is as a result of significant personal circumstances.

Fee Waivers will only be agreed where no alternative option (e.g. suspension/Time-Out) exists for the student registration. This will take in to account academic progression at the point of application and the potential impact on progression/ability to complete any recommendation or action taken in respect of the application.

Students who cannot complete the award for which they originally registered are usually eligible for an interim award or may use the academic credit they have gained towards an award at some time in the future. There is normally no academic or financial penalty attached to taking a pause in study. It follows that students who fail a module or modules due to unexpected circumstances, and in consequence require extra time to complete their award may need to take a pause in study until their financial circumstances improve.

The panel may request further evidence of the exceptional circumstances if these have not already been submitted. If such evidence is not provided when requested the panel reserves the right to reject the application without further consideration.

Where an application is rejected due to lack of evidence a student may reapply using the same circumstances provided additional supporting evidence is supplied with the reapplication.

## **Students Already in Debt to the University**

Students in debt to the University should refer to the debt policy for details of debt write off. All debt write off must be approved by Financial Services.

## **Procedure For Applications to the Panel**

Automatic referrals/applications made by other routes will be processed without further need for student involvement.

For direct applications it is normally the responsibility of the student to make an application for waiver of fees. Where it is not possible for a student to make an application in person due to incapacity, waiver requests will be accepted on the students' behalf from:

- Parent/Guardian
- Next of Kin
- An individual with legal authority to act on the students' behalf
- Academic member of staff responsible for the course/module on which the student is registered

Any application should be made in a timely fashion however the panel recognises that requests for waivers can be delayed as a result of significant events beyond an applicant's control therefore all applications made as soon as reasonably practicable will be considered.

Students must complete the Waiver application form and submit it with the relevant documentary evidence to the fee waiver panel either via an information point, by post or electronically to [fee.waivers@uwe.ac.uk](mailto:fee.waivers@uwe.ac.uk)

Applications received for reasons other than outlined above will be rejected with guidance or referral to appropriate services such as complaints.

## The Panel

As outlined above the Fee Waiver and Debt panel will review all applications and refer those exceeding the financial criteria to the VC or nominee for consideration. For applications considered by the panel, for a decision where a unanimous verdict cannot be reached, a majority decision will be accepted. Where a majority decision is not achieved the application will be referred to the VC or nominee for consideration.

The panel that considers applications is made up of representatives of professional services and faculties

## Terms Of Reference

To act in accordance with the terms of this policy

To make decisions on fee waivers whether automatically or by panel decision

To enforce the conditions outlined in this policy document to ensure all applications are treated equitably

## Membership

Head of Student Money Service (or nominee)

Student Administration Manager appropriate (or nominee)

Student Finance Manager (or nominee)

Advice Manager (or nominee)

At least 1 other representative (Graduate School, Partnerships)

Finance representative (observer)

### **Quoracy And Passage Of Decisions**

Decisions will be binding if agreed by 50% of the membership and must include agreement by faculty.

Future application may not be made on the same grounds and that a second grant of remission would be made only in the most exceptional circumstances.