

Management of Student Tuition Fees Debt due to Political, Social and/or Economic Turmoil in Home Countries

1. Introduction

This policy relates to the management of student tuition fees debt due to political, social and/or economic turmoil in home countries. In this context, student debt relates to both self-fee paying and sponsored (contracted and non-contracted) students. It covers UG and PG UK/EU and International students.

2. Background

- 2.1 This policy is based on the premise that all students have a sound financial plan in place when embarking on their studies. Additionally, where applicable, the grant by the UK Visas and Immigration of any Student Visa is on condition that the applicant proved at the time of issue that he or she could support themselves and any dependants and live in the UK without obtaining employment or needing any help from public funds.
- 2.2 The University provides financial support via the Hardship Fund to students who are faced with unexpected financial difficulties during their studies. However, this fund is not available to pay Tuition Fees or ongoing financial problems with living costs as this would exceed the limited resources available.
- 2.3 It is recognised that if a student has a significant (i.e. in excess of £3000) overdue debt with the University and with little realistic prospect of being able to pay, it is not in the student's best interest to amass further debt without addressing the problem.
- 2.4 This policy does not include the scenario whereby the cause of debt is a consequence of environmental problems e.g. natural disasters¹.

3. Scope

- 3.1 To explain the institutional response in an open and transparent way in how the University will manage Tuition Fees debt caused by political, social or economic turmoil in home countries.²
- 3.2 Debt in this policy relates to Tuition Fees only; other debt is managed under existing policies.
- 3.3 To apply a policy that is consistent in its approach and has the flexibility to recognise and respond to financial problems at the earliest opportunity.

4. Procedure

- 4.1 Due date(s) for payment and extensions may be considered at the University's discretion where the cause of the debt is more likely to be delay than non-payment.
- 4.2 The Head of Faculty Finance (HoFF), working with Fees, will proactively monitor debt and lead on the management of individual students' circumstances. The HoFF should contact the Country Development Manager within the International Office for contextual information.
- 4.3 The Financial Information & Assistance Team (FIA) in Student Services will be notified by the HoFF of those students who are facing financial difficulty and kept up to date with any changes in their circumstances.
- 4.4 Associate Deans (Education) will be informed of students who accrue a debt of over £3000 before the end of each semester.

¹ This is managed via a separate University process.

² This scenario may also include civil unrest and armed conflict.

- 4.5 A Faculty meeting led by the Associate Dean (Education), or their delegate, will review each case prior to the student's re-enrolment and the outcome communicated to the student (see *Guidance*, Appendix 1). FIA should be consulted during the decision making process to gain a more informed view of the student's overall financial position.
- 4.6 The Associate Dean (Education) should inform the Vice President (Education) if necessary.
- 4.7 The Associate Dean (Education) or their delegate should inform the student's sponsor, where appropriate, to provide the sponsor the opportunity to respond³.
- 4.8 The financial consequence of any Tuition Fees waiver agreement is met from the faculty budget.
- 4.9 Students that have not been in discussion with The Advice Centre (SUSU) prior to approaching either their Faculty or Professional Service, are to be directed to them by the service involved.
- 4.10 Students may appeal the procedure if they feel that it has not been correctly followed. All complaints and appeals should be submitted following the existing process.

APPENDIX 1

Guidance

1. Continue with study with/without graduation⁴
 - Under normal circumstances, the University believes that a waiver of Tuition Fees could be considered unfair to students who do pay, in full, within the University's established payment terms. Both further extension of payment terms and waivers adversely compromise the University's ability to deliver the services required by the student body.
 - However, in extremely limited and exceptional circumstances, and at its own discretion, the University may waive its right to Tuition Fees and related charges or fines. Factors that may be considered include objective measures such as year of study, attendance, attainment, contributions to University activities e.g. other roles and responsibilities, voluntary work, etc., and more subjective measures such as the value of the research (e.g. contribution to worldwide learning or 'changing the world for the better').
 - Any decision taken by the Faculty on a Tuition Fees waiver should not be disconnected from the student's overall financial position; the limited resources available from Hardship should be reinforced. For example, financial support would only be available for one academic year.
 - If the student is allowed to continue their studies *but not allowed to graduate* on completion, he or she should be informed of this outcome. However, graduation would be allowed on clearance of debt.
2. Suspend
 - This limits the debt incurred to the point of suspension and may allow the student time to clear their debt without detriment to their studies. It also allows students to ensure they have sufficient funding in place for the re-commencement of their studies. However, any suspension should only be considered after a realistic assessment of any potential improvement in circumstances that are either within or outside the student's control. Any related issues with Student Visas should be considered as appropriate. Faculty Academic Registrars should be consulted prior to this action. Where applicable, sponsors and the International Office should be informed of the suspension.

³ Many sponsors specify in their financial guarantee that the University must communicate any changes to their student's studies.

⁴ "No person shall be awarded a degree, diploma or certificate unless he or she has paid the academic fees prescribed and due to the University (Ordinance 7.4.4)" University Calendar (Section III: Charter, Statutes and Ordinances).

3. Terminate

- If a Fees waiver is not agreed, the Associate Dean (Education) will inform the Director of Finance and Academic Registrar. The students concerned will be liable to termination of programme. The effective termination date will be determined by the amount of Academic Fees paid on a pro rata basis. Students may also be refused any examination in accordance with Ordinance 7.3.6.⁵ Faculty Academic Registrars should be consulted prior to this action. Where applicable, sponsors and the International Office should be informed of the termination.

4. Future decision-making on higher risk applications

- All applications should be considered normally under Section IV: General Regulations, Regulations for Admission to Degree Programmes. However, when an existing issue exists over non-payment, especially relating to sponsoring organisations, new applications should be considered within the prevalent political, social or economic context. To enable a more informed decision to be taken, the International Office should be contacted to provide contextual information regarding the situation - especially in relation to sponsored students where there is often contact with funding bodies. Sponsors should be informed of future implications for non-payment for current students where applicable.
- Students who have not made full payment of Academic or other fees for a programme at the University of Southampton will not be permitted to enrol for another programme at the University until cleared funds have been received by the University, and the student may be requested to provide advance payment in full for Academic Fees for the subsequent programme.⁶

*Approved by the Education and Student Experience Executive Group in February 2016
Reviewed – May 2019: minor changes*

⁵ University Calendar (Section IV : General Regulations, Fees, Charges and Expenses)

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