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Cylchlythyr

Circular

Fee Plan Guidance 2012/13

Date: 05 April 2011
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To: Heads of higher education institutions in Wales
Principals of directly-funded further education colleges in Wales
Response by: Tuesday 31 May 2011
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This circular provides guidance to Welsh institutions who wish to charge above the basic fee rate of £4,000 in 2012/13 for UK and EU full time undergraduate courses and those postgraduate courses, such as PGCEs, that are subject to regulated undergraduate fees. These institutions are required to submit a one year fee plan detailing the additional investment they will make in support of equality of opportunity and the promotion of higher education, and the objectives they will set to secure these outcomes.

This document is available online, in large print, Braille, on CD and on audio CD and cassette. Should you or someone you know require this in an alternative format, please contact us on (029) 2068 2225 or email info@hefcw.ac.uk

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Introduction

1. This circular provides guidance to Welsh institutions who wish to charge above the basic fee rate of £4,000 in 2012/13¹ for UK and EU full time undergraduate courses and those postgraduate courses, such as PGCEs, that are subject to regulated undergraduate fees. These institutions are required to submit a one year fee plan detailing the additional investment they will make in support of equality of opportunity and the promotion of higher education, and the objectives they will set to secure these outcomes
2. The Guidance to HEFCW, which is a Welsh Assembly Government document, is attached at **Appendix A**. With reference to this Guidance, institutions are required to submit a fee plan by **31 May 2011** using the pro-forma attached at **Appendix B**. Following consideration of the evidence contained in a Fee Plan, HEFCW will write to the Vice Chancellor/Principal to agree or reject the Fee Plan proposed by **11 July 2011**. Where we are unable to accept a Fee Plan, the institution concerned will only be able to charge students a fee up to, and including, the £4,000 basic level stipulated in the regulations.

Background

3. Since 2007/08 institutions in Wales have been allowed to charge variable fees capped at a level per student in the region of £3,000 per annum. This level matched that charged in both England and Northern Ireland. In Wales only institutions which submitted an acceptable five year fee plan to HEFCW were permitted to charge this higher fee level.
4. The Browne Review of Higher Education, published in October 2010, advocated an end to capping of fees at this level in England. Subsequently in December 2010 the decision was taken in England to allow institutions to raise fees to a maximum of £9,000 per annum subject to approval by OFFA.
5. In November 2010 Wales' Minister for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning announced that from 2012/13 Welsh institutions will be allowed to charge fees up to a maximum of £9,000. In February 2011 the Minister confirmed that the basic rate of fees that can be charged in Wales will be £4,000. Any institution wishing to charge above this basic rate is required to submit an acceptable Fee Plan to HEFCW.

¹ For information on the rules for charging higher fees to 2012/13 deferred entry students see paragraph 12 of the Guidance; for specified courses such as sandwich or language year out see page 9 of the Guidance (Appendix A).; and for the classification and inclusion of PGCE see The Student Fees (Qualifying Courses and Persons) (Wales) Regulations 2011 <http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-guide-docs-pub/bus-business-documents/bus-business-documents-doc-laid/sub-ld8475-e.pdf?langoption=3&ttl=SUB-LD8475%20-%20The%20Student%20Fees%20%28Qualifying%20Courses%20and%20Persons%29%20%28Wales%29%20Regulations%202011>.

Content of Fee Plans

6. Institutional Fee Plans must be drafted with reference to the Guidance provided at **Appendix A**, which stipulates that a '*reasonable proportion*² of new fee income (i.e. income above the basic rate of £4,000) should be invested in equality of opportunity and promotion of higher education. We are not specifying the proportion of new fee income that should be invested in these areas but our expectation is that it would be in the order of 30% of new income in total. In future years we may seek to define that proportion more precisely in the light of institutional performance.
7. For the purposes of submitting Fee Plans institutions should consider the level of investment from fee income earmarked in their 2011/12 Fee Plan as their 'baseline' level. The Fee Plan must demonstrate that from 2012/13 new fee income is invested into equality of opportunity and promotion of higher education.
8. Those institutions with further to travel in terms of widening access will need to provide more investment in support of **equality of opportunity** and the Guidance clearly set out the Minister's expectations for that area. The Council has long supported the aims of widening access and institutions should ensure that Fee Plans are consistent with their Widening Access Strategy, Reaching Wider Strategy, Learning and Teaching Strategy and Equality Statements.
9. **Promotion of higher education** is a broader investment area and institutions should ensure that the outcomes they propose here are consistent with the aims of '*For our Future: The 21st Century Higher Education Strategy and Plan for Wales*', HEFCW's Corporate Strategy, and the latest remit letter to HEFCW from the Welsh Assembly Government. For example, institutions will wish to include activities, in terms of the student experience, which contribute to the regional agenda for Wales, which support scholarly activity more generally, or which aim to strengthen and sustain the Welsh higher education sector. All the documents referred to above can be found at www.hefcw.ac.uk.

How to measure performance

10. Fee Plans must include detailed and measurable targets, benchmarks, and objectives. These targets must be derived from auditable data sources such as:
 - HESA – Higher Education Statistics Agency
 - LLWR – Lifelong Learning Wales Record
 - HEIDI – Higher Education Information Database for Institutions
 - Internal institutional admissions/completion/retention data

² Paragraph 21 Appendix A

- EYM – End of Year Monitoring
- HESES – Higher Education Students Early Statistics
- HEFCW Corporate Strategy related targets
- SLC – Student Loans Company data
- ECU – Equality Challenge Unit data
- EHRC – Equality and Human Rights Commission data

This is not a definitive list of data sources and others may be more appropriate in some cases. Close attention should be paid to target setting as failure to achieve appropriate levels of progression in year may have serious repercussions for institutions who wish to continue to charge higher fees in future years³.

Plan acceptance and appeals process

11. HEFCW will consider your Fee Plan and discuss any issues arising from it with you. Acceptable Fee Plans will need to specify challenging strategic outcomes and highly ambitious targets in relation to equality of opportunity and promotion of higher education. Fee Plans should demonstrate the depth of engagement with the student body, and the steps in place to ensure that students are aware of new fee charges prior to enrolment, and how fee income will be invested in support of the student experience.
12. HEFCW will notify institutions of Fee Plan decisions by **11 July 2011**, after which we will list institutions with accepted plans on the HEFCW website. Any institution which does not have an acceptable Fee Plan in place by **20 August 2011** will either be constrained to charge, at most, the basic fee rate, or will need to have invoked the appeals process by that date.
13. The initial operating procedure for the appeals process, managed by the Welsh Assembly Government, is set out on page 11 of the Guidance at **Appendix A**.
14. Fee Plans must be published and easily accessible on an institution's website within one week of formal acceptance by HEFCW.
15. Where there are significant changes to your circumstances after the submission of your Fee Plan and you wish to change any of your institution's commitments, you should discuss this with HEFCW at the earliest opportunity. Any changes that reduce your commitments will require our approval. However, you should note that you must honour financial commitments you have made to students.

³ Paragraph 43 Appendix A

Monitoring and feedback

16. Institutions will be monitored against the targets, benchmarks, and objectives in their agreed Fee Plans via HEFCW's Strategic Engagement processes, which includes an annual request for institutions to submit forecast information; strategic planning information; and Annual Monitoring Statements (AMS). The circular requesting this information will be published annually by June, with AMS returns due to be submitted to HEFCW in October.
17. Institutions will be required to provide information to the Student Loans Company in order for administrative arrangements to be undertaken.

Equality and sustainability

18. HEFCW has carried out an equality impact assessment screening of this circular to safeguard against disadvantage and promote equality. We will also consider the impact of policies on the Welsh language, and Welsh language provision within the HE sector in Wales.
19. A similar responsibility rests on institutions to assess the impact of their Fee Plan proposals on students with protected characteristics. When formulating your plan you should take account of its impact on individuals with protected characteristics in relation to age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage/civil partnership, pregnancy/maternity, race, religion and/or belief, sex and sexual orientation, plus the Welsh language.
20. Institutions should describe in their Fee Plan how it underpins their overall approach to sustainable development (economic, social, and environmental) together with any specific contribution to Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship.

Authorisation and Submission

21. Fee Plans will need approval by the governing body after which they should be signed and authorised by the Vice-Chancellor or Principal.
22. By **Tuesday 31 May 2011** each institution should:
 - submit one signed hard copy version of the Fee Plan to Emma Morris at the HEFCW offices in Llanishen;
 - email an electronic version of the fee plan to Emma.Morris@hefcw.ac.uk.

Timetable

Activity	Due Date
Signed response sent to HEFCW if institution does <u>not</u> wish to charge above the basic fee rate of £4,000	15 April 2011
Submission of completed Fee Plan to HEFCW	31 May 2011
Acceptance/rejection by HEFCW	11 July 2011
Initial referral to appeal	20 August 2011
Publication of Fee Plan online	Within one week following acceptance of Fee Plan by HEFCW
Forecasts, strategic planning, and AMS Circular published	June annually
AMS response due from institution	October annually
Annual Report Produced by HEFCW	March annually