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Circular

The HEFCW Part-Time Undergraduate Fee Waiver Scheme

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To: Heads of higher education institutions in Wales
Principals of directly-funded further education colleges in
Wales
Response by: 6 November 2009
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This document describes HEFCW's part-time undergraduate fee waiver scheme for 2009/10 and sets out the criteria students will need to meet in order to be eligible for fee waiver under the scheme.

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 2280 or email info@hefcw.ac.uk.

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The HEFCW Part-Time Undergraduate Fee Waiver Scheme

1. This document describes the Council's part-time undergraduate fee waiver scheme for 2009/10 and sets out the criteria students will need to meet in order to be eligible for fee waiver under the scheme.

Nature and objective of the scheme

2. The part-time undergraduate fee waiver scheme offers fee remission for students who are unemployed and actively seeking work or who are in receipt of Department for Work and Pensions benefits. It is designed to serve as an instrument for helping to combat social exclusion and to assist more people to obtain vocational qualifications. As such the scheme is intended to contribute towards widening participation for disadvantaged groups, such as care leavers, improving access and increasing rates of retention and achievement.
3. The scheme is part of a package of measures aimed at widening access to Higher Education. It will be ongoing and independent of any existing schemes offered by institutions or other bodies to support students, for example, schemes funded from institutions' general resources or hardship funds.
4. The Council will provide grants to institutions to enable them to offer direct assistance to eligible students. Individual students will apply directly to institutions for fee waivers and the Council will provide fee waiver grants to those institutions on the basis of returns they supply. It is not envisaged that there will be any direct contact between individual students and the Council.

Criteria for eligibility

5. In order to qualify for fee waiver a student must satisfy eligibility criteria under two headings:
 - course
 - personal

Course

6. A student must:
 - (i) be studying part-time.

The definition of part-time study will be that used by the Council in its request for End of Year Monitoring data (Circular W09/17HE, Annex E).

The Council recognises that part-time students do not necessarily follow a course of study on a traditional academic year basis; however, for administrative simplicity the grant scheme will be based on the financial year for institutions, 1 August to 31 July. Circular W09/17HE, Annex A provides information on how to deal with students following a programme of study which does not coincide with the academic year.

- (ii) be registered, either as a new entrant or as a continuing student, on programme with the aim of obtaining a recognised undergraduate higher education qualification; or on a course, module or unit which enables credit to be obtained towards a recognised undergraduate higher education qualification.

The following qualifications are recognised for the purpose of the scheme:

- *First degree, including Foundation Degree*
- *HNC*
- *HND*
- *Other undergraduate credit-bearing higher education award which is funded by HEFCW.*

Non credit-bearing courses and postgraduate courses do not qualify for the scheme.

Students who already have any of the above qualifications will not be eligible for a fee waiver unless they intend to top-up their higher national qualification to a full degree.

- (iii) be studying on a course, module or unit which corresponds to ten credit values or more as defined by the CQFW credit framework.

Where an institution has not formally attributed CFQW credit values to elements of its programmes, notional credit values will have been determined on the basis of the CQFW standard of 120 credit values equalling one academic year of higher education experience for undergraduates.

Personal

7. A student enrolled on an eligible course must:

- (i) be classed as eligible for funding according to guidance provided for End of Year Monitoring purposes (Annex W09/17HE, Annex C)
- (ii) meet **at least one** of the conditions set out under (a) to (d) below:

(a) the student's family is in receipt of:

income support, **or**
Jobseekers allowance, **or**
Housing benefit, **or**
Council Tax benefit

(b) the student is a registered job seeker, and has been so for a continuous period of no less than six weeks prior to the date of application for fee waiver.

(c) The sole income to the student's family is Department for Work and Pensions benefits

(d) The student's family is in receipt of Working Tax Credit. You should note that, from April 2003, Working Families Tax Credit was replaced by Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit. Only those students in receipt of Working Tax Credit are eligible for a fee waiver. There are no restrictions on this eligibility. Those in receipt of Child Tax Credit only are not eligible for a fee waiver.

For the purpose of the criterion (a) the definition of 'family' is as follows:

- *mature single student, **or***
- *married or unmarried couple, **or***
- *married or unmarried couple with dependent children, **or***
- *loan parent with dependent children*

Evidence

8. To be eligible under the criteria in paragraph 7(ii) students must provide the institution with official documentary evidence of their entitlement. This may be in the form of, for example, a letter from the Benefits Agency, Local Council or Jobcentre confirming entitlement or a copy of the cover and first page of the student family member's benefit book confirming the claimant's name and address and the type(s) of benefit received.
9. Evidence under paragraph 8 should be obtained prior to fees being waived. The institution should retain evidence of the documentation, for example, by recording the evidence obtained on a form, or taking a photocopy of relevant documents. The Council may wish to scrutinise this evidence at a later date.

Changes in circumstance

10. A material change in circumstances may result in a student becoming, or ceasing to become, eligible for fee waiver during a period of study. Where such a case arises, the institution should seek to waive, rebate or claim fees, as appropriate, to an amount reflecting, in broad terms, the remainder of the year's period of study. Institutions must require students to notify them if such a material change in their circumstances arises.
11. A student may decide to change from a full-time to a part-time mode of study. If this change in status results in the student meeting the eligibility criteria then, where it is practical, the student should be able to benefit from the scheme. Such a case should be dealt with in the same way as any other significant change in circumstance.

General points relating to assessment of eligibility

12. Student status should normally be assessed at the beginning of a programme of study. It should then be reassessed at least once every twelve months thereafter, for the duration of the period of study. Once confirmed as eligible for the scheme, and subject to there being no significant change in circumstances, a student should normally expect to receive a fee waiver for each of his or her remaining years on the programme of study.
13. There are no age restrictions relating to eligibility for the scheme.
14. Only tuition fees are eligible for fee waiver. The cost of any assessment or examination fees is not eligible under this scheme.
15. Some cases will fall on the margins of the eligibility criteria set out in paragraphs 6 and 7 above. In such cases, where the award of a fee waiver would, in the view of the institution, clearly be meeting the overall purpose of the scheme, institutions may apply reasonable discretion when testing student eligibility. It is important that the reason for applying discretion is recorded by the institution as this may be scrutinised by the Council at a later date. In the event that such cases represent a sizeable proportion of eligible students, that is **the higher of 20%**, or more than 10 cases, the Council should be informed without delay.

Basis of HEFCW grant payments to institutions

16. Institutions offering fee waivers under the scheme will be supported through Council grant subject to available funds. Each year institutions will be invited to claim a grant in support of tuition fees waived by submitting a return to the Council which sets out an *estimate* of the value of the tuition

fees to be waived under this scheme, and an *estimate* of the number of students expected to benefit, together with the corresponding overall number of credit values. **The estimate claims pro-forma for 2009/10 is attached to this circular at Annex A and should be returned to the Council by 6 November 2009.**

- 17 With the introduction of variable fees for full-time students, HEFCW recognise that the level of fees for part-time courses may also increase. In the case of Part-Time Fee Waiver, assuming the maximum FTE fee of £3,225, the credit fee value in 2009/10 will be set at a maximum of £26.88. In line with the fact that the fee levels for part-time courses will vary, the Council expects that institutions will claim the actual credit value specific to courses when they submit the 'Estimate Costs' pro-forma in November. Please note, where various courses have the same fee per credit value institutions may input a combined number of students on to one line of the pro-forma.
- 18 The estimates of the value of fee waivers provided in the returns from institutions will be used as the basis of an *initial* payment from the Council to support institutions for these fees. These payments will be made in December of each year. Under normal circumstances, institutions will receive one payment of a grant for fee waivers each year. However, if an institution finds that its likely outturn is significantly different from the initial estimate for the year, it should contact the Council without delay to discuss whether an initial additional payment, or clawback, of a grant is necessary.
- 19 Each institution benefiting from the grant in support of the fee waiver scheme will be required to submit an annual return setting out the *actual* value of fees waived under the scheme. The Council will write to institutions towards the end of the academic year seeking this information. Final confirmation of the value of *actual* fee waivers should be returned by the end of August. The Council will compare the early *estimate* received the previous November with the *actual* value of fee waivers reported in August. Any difference between the two will be recognised in the payment of grant for the following year made in December.

Reporting requirements

- 20 As part of the August return, the Council will also request a number of items of information relating to the actual students benefiting from the scheme. These items are set out in paragraph 20 below. The information requested may be revised from time to time; however, in such circumstances the Council will endeavour to provide institutions with prior warning. In determining the data requested, the Council has sought to minimise the burden on institutions of administering the scheme by relying as far as possible on information already collected.

- 21 The data required for each individual student who has benefited from the scheme in the academic year in question are as follows:
- (i) HESA Data:
- student identifier
 - date of birth
 - gender
 - postcode (full)
 - the overall credit value of the course, module or unit being studied for the year in question
 - title of programme of study
 - highest qualification on entry
- and, where applicable,
- reason for leaving institution/completing programme.
- (ii) Institutional data:
- actual fee waived
 - indicator of qualifying criterion in terms of low income, unemployment or discretion applied.

Conditions of grant

- 22 Institutions may claim grant only in support of tuition fees waived for those students who are deemed eligible for the scheme, as set out in paragraphs 6 to 7 above.
- 23 All grants paid must be used for the purposes for which they are provided. Separate grants are being offered to contribute to the administration of the scheme and to publicise it (see paragraph 28 below).
- 24 Each institution must submit an annual return setting out the total value of fee waivers actually awarded and providing additional details relating to the students benefiting from the fee waiver scheme, as set out in paragraph 21 above.
- 25 The Council may adjust the amount of grant paid to an institution in support of student tuition fees waived where the amount that an institution has actually waived is different from its initial estimate for a year.
- 26 The operation of the scheme will be reviewed in subsequent years and institutions will be invited to provide comments to contribute to review.

Administration and promotion of the scheme

- 27 A separate sum is being made available to contribute to the costs of administering the scheme. This will amount to 4% of the overall grant paid, up to a maximum of £5000, to each institution in support of fee waivers.
- 28 Institutions are asked to promote the scheme in order to attract students from the target groups and the Council will make a maximum of £4,000 available to each institution for this purpose. Relevant expenditure includes the preparation of leaflets and posters and the costs of advertising the scheme. Payments will be made on the basis of claims supported by invoices together with a statement of the purpose of the expenditure. The supporting invoices must demonstrate expenditure on promoting this scheme specifically.

Contact person

- 29 The Council hopes that any queries or problems that arise out of this scheme can be resolved quickly. For this purpose each institution has nominated one person as the formal contact between the institution and the Council. The individual nominated should hold all documentation relating to the scheme so that communication between the Council and the institution will be smooth. The institution should notify the Council if there is a change to the nominated contact person.