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Circular

## The HEFCW Part-Time Undergraduate Fee Waiver Scheme

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Principals of directly-funded further education colleges in  
Wales  
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This document describes the Council's part-time undergraduate fee waiver scheme for 2010/11 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](mailto:info@hefcw.ac.uk).

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## **The HEFCW Part-Time Undergraduate Fee Waiver Scheme**

1. This document describes HEFCW's part-time undergraduate fee waiver scheme and sets out the criteria students will need to meet in order to be eligible for fee waiver under the scheme. This scheme will continue into Academic Year 2010/11 with a budget of £800,000.
2. HEFCW remains strongly committed to supporting part-time higher education, particularly in the context of the significance which attaches to it in *For our Future*. In that context, this scheme forms one of a range of policy interventions in support of part-time higher education. In the light of the broader economic context, however, we are having to manage carefully the allocation of resources across our policy areas, particularly in respect of "on demand" budgets. Accordingly, we have made some adjustments to the way in which this scheme will operate in future which are outlined in this circular.

### **Nature and objective of the scheme**

3. 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 as an instrument to help promote social justice and to assist more people to obtain higher qualifications. As such the scheme is intended to contribute towards widening access for disadvantaged groups and increasing rates of retention and achievement.
4. HEFCW will provide grants to institutions to enable them to offer direct assistance to eligible students. Students will apply directly to institutions for fee waivers and HEFCW 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 students and HEFCW.

### **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 HEFCW in its request for End of Year Monitoring data (Circular W10/20HE, Annex E)

HEFCW 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 W10/20HE, 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 a 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.*

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

Eligible students can claim up to a maximum of 360 credits from the fund during their studies, which may be spread across several academic years. Students are not eligible for funding to repeat a course under any circumstances.

- (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 CQFW 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 W10/20HE, Annex C)
  - (ii) be Welsh domiciled (provision of a Welsh address by the student would usually be considered sufficient evidence of Welsh domicile). Information on other UK fee support schemes can be accessed at <http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/index.htm>.
  - (iii) 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;
      - Income based jobseekers allowance;
      - Housing benefit;
      - Pension credit;
      - Council Tax benefit;
      - Working Tax Credits
    - (b) the student is in receipt of:
      - Severe Disablement Allowance;
      - Disability Living Allowance;
      - Attendance Allowance;
      - Incapacity Benefit;
      - Carer's Allowance

*Information on the benefits which are listed above and the definitions of terms used in these benefits are available on the DWP website ([www.dwp.gov.uk](http://www.dwp.gov.uk)).*
    - (c) Be a registered job seeker, and have been so for a continuous period of no less than six weeks prior to the date of application for fee waiver.
    - (d) The sole income to the student's family is Department for Work and Pensions benefits

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

- *mature single student, **or***
- *married or unmarried couple, **or***
- *a couple in a civil partnership, **or***

- *married or unmarried couple or couple in a civil partnership with dependent children, or*
- *lone parent with dependent children*

### **Evidence**

8. To be eligible under the criteria in paragraph 7(iii) students must provide their institution with official documentary evidence of their entitlement. This, for example, may be in the form of a letter from Jobcentre Plus confirming the claimant's name, address and benefit entitlement.
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. HEFCW may wish to audit 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.
13. Situations may arise where fees are waived at the start of a year of study and then a student's status changes materially so that he or she no longer meets the qualifying criteria. In such cases the institution should seek, where appropriate, to adjust the fee waiver to represent that part of the year during which the student qualified for the scheme. Institutions must require students to undertake to notify them if such a significant change in their circumstances arises.

14. Only tuition fees are eligible for fee waiver. The cost of any assessment or examination fees is not eligible under this scheme.
15. Where the cost of tuition is paid for by an external/private source, the cost of tuition fees is assumed to be included in this full-cost. Such courses are not eligible for HEFCW funding. Therefore, courses that are run on a full-cost recovery basis cannot be included in applications for fee waiver.
16. HE providers offering fee waivers under this scheme will be supported through this HEFCW grant. Institutions may, in addition operate other schemes to support part-time students using, for example, their general resources, or other HEFCW grants provided in support of part-time study.
17. 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 audited by HEFCW 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, HEFCW should be informed without delay.

#### **Basis of HEFCW grant payments to institutions**

18. Institutions offering fee waivers under the scheme will be supported through the HEFCW fee waiver grant subject to available funds. **In a change to previous years the Council has agreed to set the maximum level of funding that can be claimed for any student in an academic year at either the full cost of the course, or £1200, whichever is lower.**
19. Each year institutions will be invited to claim a grant in support of tuition fees waived by submitting a return to HEFCW 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 2010/11 is attached to this circular at Annex A and should be returned to the Council by 5 November 2010.**
20. The estimates of the value of fee waivers provided in the returns from institutions will be used as the basis of a payment from HEFCW to support institutions for these fees. These payments will be made in December of each year.
21. 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. We 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. We 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, subject to the constraints of the overall fee waiver budget.

22. In light of the broader economic context referred to in paragraph 2 above, HEFCW will no longer be providing allocations in support of administration and marketing for the scheme. The Council considered that as the scheme has been available for ten years in Wales it should be sufficiently embedded within institutional structures of student support that such additional funding is no longer required.

### **Reporting requirements**

23. As part of the August return, HEFCW 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 24 below. In determining the data requested, HEFCW has sought to minimise the burden on institutions of administering the scheme by relying as far as possible on information already collected.
24. 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

25. The following conditions of grant will apply to any payment made under the HEFCW HE Fee Waiver Scheme:
- institutions may claim grant only in support of waived tuition fees for those students who are deemed eligible for the HEFCW HE fee waiver scheme, as set out in paragraphs 6 to 7 above. Fees may be waived to the full cost of the course, or a maximum of £1200 per student, whichever is the lower amount.
  - eligible students can claim up to a maximum of 360 credits from the fund during their studies, which may be spread across several academic years.
  - all grants paid must be used for the purposes for which they are provided.
  - 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 24 above.
  - HEFCW 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. Additional payments required where institutions have underestimated the level of funding required will be subject to the constraints of the overall HEFCW fee waiver budget.
  - under the fee waiver scheme institutions may not waive the tuition fee for a student where the same course fees for the same academic year are being supported by a Welsh Assembly Government Part-Time Fee Grant.
  - the operation of the scheme will be subject to review by the Council.