

Council Meeting*For information***Part-time undergraduate fee-waiver scheme 2015/16**Agenda: 15
HEFCW/17/75

Disclosable

21/09/2017**1 Issue**

- 1.1 This paper reports the outcomes of HEFCW's Part-Time Undergraduate Fee Waiver Scheme in 2015/16.

2 Corporate Planning Implications / Rationale for paper

- 2.1 Social justice is a key Welsh Government priority and widening access to higher-level learning and skills has an important contribution to make to this aim. The part-time fee waiver scheme is intended to contribute towards equality of opportunity, improving access and increasing rates of retention and achievement.

3 Recommendations

- 3.1 The Council is invited to:
- i. note the contents of this paper.

4 Timing of decisions

- 4.1 There are no decisions arising from this Council paper.

5 Council members' interests

- 5.1 No conflicts of interest have been declared in advance of the meeting.

6 Further information

- 6.1 Steve Williams (029 20859 744; steven.williams@hefcw.ac.uk)

7 Details of the scheme

- 7.1 The fee waiver scheme provides grants to institutions that waive fees for part-time students that are in receipt of Department for Work and Pensions benefits. The students must also be assessed by their institution to confirm that they meet the course and personal requirements set out most recently in our most recent guidance circular.¹
- 7.2 Submissions for fee waivers were requested from institutions in November 2016. This included information setting out the actual fees waived for 2015/16 and estimated fee waivers for 2016/17. Estimated expenditure is compared with actual expenditure at the end of the academic year and any difference between the two values is recognised by making appropriate adjustments to the payment of grant for fee waiver for the following year.
- 7.3 The fee-waiver scheme was amended in 2014 to take account of the introduction of part-time loans.² The amendments focused on the intensity of study in the eligibility criteria of the scheme. Grants would only be available for fee-waivers for students studying less than 25% of a full-time equivalent. This was in response to the eligibility for part-time loans being available for students studying at an intensity of 25% or more of a full-time equivalent (ie 30 or more credits).

8 Outcomes of the scheme

- 8.1 It appears that the amendments to the scheme in relation to the intensity of study under the eligibility criteria have significantly reduced the number of students eligible for the scheme. Given that students studying 30 credits and above are now eligible for loans and that fewer students are eligible for part-time fee waivers, it is no surprise that the overall number of fee waivers went down significantly. However, this does not seem to have been considered in the institutional estimates for the past two years and as such, there have been significant variances between the actual and estimated fee waiver figures for some institutions. In addition to this, HEFCW analysis of HESA data revealed that of the 302 fee waivers made, 34 were deemed to be ineligible. Estimates for fee waivers in 2016/17 seem more realistic, albeit slightly higher than actual figures for the past two years.
- 8.2 **Annex A** gives details of the estimated fee waivers for 2015/16, received in Autumn 2015, and the actual figures for 2015/16, received in Autumn 2016. Eleven institutions claimed between a total of £191,980 for estimated fee waivers. Actual spend was lower at £81,765. Some 514 fee waiver awards were predicted to be made from the scheme; the actual number awarded was 268.
- 8.3 **Annex B** compares 2013/14, 2014/15 & 2015/16 data. The numbers of student awards made in 2015/16 (268) decreased from the previous year (359). The actual spend (£81,765) was lower than the previous year (£93,326).

9 Financial implications

- 9.1 The payments to institutions were adjusted to take account of the difference between the fee estimated for 2016/17 and actual amount of fees waived in 2015/16. Due to the variances between these two amounts, only £11,371 was actually paid to institutions.

¹ HEFCW, [W15/19HE: The HEFCW part-time undergraduate fee waiver scheme](#)

² HEFCW, [W14/28HE: The HEFCW part-time undergraduate fee waiver scheme](#)

10 Communications implications

- 10.1 There are no direct communication implications arising from this paper. In response to the Welsh Government's consultation on its response to the Diamond Review recommendations, HEFCW identified fee waivers, along with low tuition fees as factors which could encourage study with an intensity of lower than 25%.³

11 Diversity and Equal Opportunities implications

- 11.1 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 study higher-level qualifications.

12 Risk Assessment

Risk	Action to address risk
If the scheme is not monitored and maintained there is a risk that opportunity for part-time students in a position to benefit from its provision may be lost.	Scheme is maintained and monitored as detailed in this paper.

³ HEFCW Response to Welsh Government consultation: *Student support funding for students ordinarily resident in Wales*