

Cylchlythyr | Circular

Fee Plan Guidance 2013/14

Date: 05 April 2012
Reference: W12/15HE
To: Heads of higher education institutions in Wales
Principals of directly-funded further education colleges in
Wales
Response by: Wednesday 9 May 2012
Contact: Name: Emma Morris
Telephone: 029 2068 2292
Email: emma.morris@hefcw.ac.uk

This circular provides guidance to Welsh institutions who wish to charge above the basic fee rate of £4,000 in 2013/14 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.

If you require this document in an alternative accessible format, please telephone 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 2013/14¹ 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 circular broadly follows the approach set out for the 2012/13 fee plans required in HEFCW circular W11/14HE in March 2011.
2. The Guidance to HEFCW, which is a Welsh Government document, is attached at **Appendix A** and is unchanged from last year. With reference to this Guidance, institutions are required to submit a fee plan by **9 May 2012** using the pro-forma attached at **Appendix B**. Following consideration of the evidence contained in a Fee Plan, we will write to the Vice Chancellor/Principal to agree or reject the Fee Plan proposed by **11 July 2012**. 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. In November 2010 Wales' then Minister for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning, in responding to the Browne Review of Higher Education in England, announced that from 2012/13 Welsh institutions would be allowed to charge fees up to a maximum of £9,000 for full time undergraduate or PGCE courses. In February 2011 the Minister confirmed that the basic rate of fees that can be charged in Wales would be £4,000. Any institution wishing to charge above this basic rate is required to submit an acceptable Fee Plan to HEFCW.
4. The introduction of the Fee Grant for Welsh and EU domiciled students means that, from 2012/13, we will face an increasing demand upon our funding. This new requirement would inevitably affect our capacity to respond to some other key Welsh Government policy priorities. Circular W12/03HE '*Strategic Reallocation of Student Numbers 2013/14*²' set out our process to try and limit the unintended effects of the new fee regime.

¹ For information on the rules for charging higher fees 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>.

² <http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/publications/circulars/circulars.aspx>

The circular stated that all non-priority student numbers would be top sliced from HEIs in 2013/14. Of those, 50% would be reallocated based on those *For our Future* priorities that fee plans do not address, with the remaining 50% made available to higher education providers who reduced their fees for full-time undergraduate and PGCE students to an average of £7,500 or less. The outcomes of this process are published in circular W12/14HE.

Institutions must ensure that their Fee Plan 2013/14 is consistent with any submission made following the reallocation of student numbers exercise.

Arrangements for Higher Part-Time Fees

5. From 2013/14, it is intended to introduce a new student support regime for part-time students. At present the Welsh Government is finalising the legal regulatory framework in respect of the new arrangements. We are therefore not currently in a position to outline our expectations for the part-time fee planning system and will not be able to adopt an integrated approach this year. We expect to be able to provide guidance to the sector later in the year.

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*'³ 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 fee income above the basic level that should be invested in these areas but our expectation is that it would be in the region of 30%. Institutions who wish to consider investing a lower proportion of their fee income than was earmarked in their Fee Plan 2012/13 are invited to discuss this with HEFCW. In future years we may seek to define that proportion more precisely in the light of institutional performance.
7. It remains the case that those institutions with further to travel in terms of widening access will need to provide more investment in support of **equality of opportunity** and clearly respond to the Minister's expectations for that area. The Council has long supported the aims of widening access and institutions should continue to ensure that Fee Plans are consistent with their Widening Access Strategy, Reaching Wider Strategy, Learning and Teaching Strategy and Equality Statements.
8. **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, the forthcoming *Skills and Employability Framework*, and the latest remit letter to HEFCW from the Welsh Government. For example, institutions should

³ Paragraph 21 Appendix A

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, including its profile as represented in the Key Information Sets. We would encourage institutions to consider the inclusion of work they do to enhance the student experience generally, including those which internationalise the curriculum, for example through their support for the Erasmus scheme. Institutions may also wish to consider investment in shared services which benefit students across the whole sector in Wales such as JISC and JANET.

9. 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
- 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 years⁴.

Plan acceptance and appeals process

11. Upon receipt we will consider your Fee Plan 2013/14 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 continue to 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.

⁴ Paragraph 43 Appendix A

12. HEFCW will notify institutions of Fee Plan decisions by **11 July 2012**, after which we will list institutions with accepted plans on our website. Any institution which does not have an acceptable Fee Plan in place by **20 August 2012** 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 process by which an application for review of a provisional HEFCW decision may be made will again be managed by the Welsh Government, and the grounds are 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 us.
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 us 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.

Monitoring and feedback

16. Institutions will be monitored against the targets, benchmarks, and objectives in their agreed Fee Plans via our 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 May, with AMS returns due to be submitted to us in October.
17. Institutions will already be aware that they are required to provide information to the Student Loans Company in order for administrative arrangements to be undertaken.

Equality and sustainability

18. In 2011 we carried out an equality impact assessment screening of circular *W12/14HE Fee Plan Guidance 2012/13* to safeguard against disadvantage and promote equality. The guidance provided in that document was considered to contribute towards widening participation, improving access and increasing rates of retention and achievement for those with protected characteristics. With no substantial changes to the guidance in 2013/14 we have concluded that a repeat EIA screening is not required. We will continue to consider the impact of policies on the Welsh language, and Welsh language provision within the HE sector in Wales.
19. Institutions are responsible for equality impact assessing their Fee Plan 2013/14 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. Following a thorough process of engagement with the student body, finalised Fee Plans will need approval by the governing body after which they should be signed and authorised by the Vice-Chancellor or Principal. We will reject any Fee Plan which does not amply demonstrate that institutions have been through all stages outlined in this process.

22. By **Wednesday 9 May 2012** each institution should:

- submit one signed hard copy version of the Fee Plan to Sheridan Nott at the HEFCW offices in Llanishen;
- email an electronic version of the fee plan to sheridan.nott@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 2012
Submission of completed Fee Plan 2013/14 to HEFCW	9 May 2012
Acceptance/rejection by HEFCW	11 July 2012
Initial referral to appeal	20 August 2012
Publication of Fee Plan online	Within one week following acceptance of Fee Plan by HEFCW
Forecasts, strategic planning, and AMS Circular published	May annually
AMS response due from institution	October annually
Annual Report Produced by HEFCW	March annually