

## Cylchlythyr | Circular

# HEFCW part-time undergraduate fee waiver scheme 2021/22

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**Reference:** W21/36HE  
**To:** Heads of funded higher education providers in Wales  
Principals of directly-funded further education colleges in Wales  
**Response by:** 27 November 2021 to [hestats@hefcw.ac.uk](mailto:hestats@hefcw.ac.uk) (IRIS data)  
13 December 2021 to [nicola.hunt@hefcw.ac.uk](mailto:nicola.hunt@hefcw.ac.uk) (Annex A)  
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This circular provides information on HEFCW's part-time undergraduate fee waiver scheme for 2021/22 and sets out the criteria students will need to meet in order to be eligible for a fee waiver under the scheme. The circular also provides information on proposed changes to the scheme for the 2022/23 academic year.

If you require this document in an alternative accessible format, please email [info@hefcw.ac.uk](mailto:info@hefcw.ac.uk).



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## Introduction

1. This circular provides information on HEFCW's part-time undergraduate fee waiver scheme for 2021/22 and sets out the criteria students will need to meet in order to be eligible for a fee waiver under the scheme. The circular also provides information on proposed changes to the scheme for the 2022/23 academic year.

## Background

2. Access to part-time higher education remains a priority for Welsh Government and HEFCW, particularly in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. HEFCW's part-time undergraduate fee waiver scheme currently offers grants to funded providers that waive fees for part-time students who are unemployed and registered jobseekers or are in receipt of Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) benefits, and who meet the eligibility criteria.
3. The part-time undergraduate fee waiver scheme was designed as an instrument to help promote social justice and to assist more people to obtain higher level qualifications. As such the scheme is intended to contribute towards widening access, re-skilling or up-skilling of adults, and increasing rates of retention, progression and success. In the current context, it offers a means of helping to address the ongoing economic challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, including engaging with those who might otherwise be at risk of becoming NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training), or who wish to enhance their existing skills and knowledge.
4. Students apply directly to providers for fee waivers; HEFCW will allocate fee waiver grants to those providers on the basis of returns they supply. This scheme does not involve direct contact between students and HEFCW.
5. In July 2014 Welsh Government introduced part-time tuition fee loans which allowed new part-time entrants from all backgrounds equality of access to higher education, providing they had not already received a qualification at the same or higher level than the qualification they were intending studying for, and were studying at or above 25% full-time equivalent (FTE)<sup>1</sup>. Any new student who wished to study below 25% FTE would be ineligible for the loan scheme.
6. Continuing students who started their course before 1 September 2014 were not eligible for a Welsh Government part-time tuition fee loan and were required to either self-fund or apply to other funding sources. The Welsh Government's means-tested part-time fee grant has remained available to continuing students that started their course before 1 September 2014, but is broadly aimed at those studying at an intensity of at least 50% FTE (courses must be completed in no more than twice the time it would take to complete the full-time equivalent).

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<sup>1</sup> [Student Finance Wales, Part-time students](#)

## HEFCW's part-time undergraduate fee waiver scheme

7. As described above, the introduction of the Welsh Government part-time tuition fee loans in 2014/15 enabled all new eligible part-time students, studying at or above 25% FTE, to have access to financial support for higher education in Wales. HEFCW's part-time fee waiver scheme was amended to support those providers offering financial support for certain groups of students who were not eligible for the Welsh Government's part-time tuition fee loan. There are separate criteria within the HEFCW scheme for students that commenced their studies prior to 1 September 2014 and students that commenced their studies on or after 1 September 2014.
8. Intensity of study will normally be measured in credit values. A fee waiver grant will not be provided for any student who commenced their studies on or after 1 September 2014 and who studies 30 credits or more over an academic year. In the situation where a student initially undertakes fewer than 30 credits but subsequently adds to this during the academic year, providers will be unable to claim a HEFCW fee waiver grant. However, we would encourage providers to continue to provide that fee waiver, where possible, in order not to discourage students who decide they would like to study more credits. In all cases, institutional academic regulations will apply.
9. The maximum funding available to students is as follows:
  - For students who commenced their studies prior to 1 September 2014: £1200 per annum (see para 23)
  - For students who commenced their studies on or after 1 September 2014: £875 per annum (see para 28).
10. The following sections outline the eligibility criteria for the scheme.

### Personal criteria applicable to all eligible students under the scheme

#### Eligibility criteria

11. A student enrolled on an eligible course must:
  - (i) be classed as eligible for funding according to the definition provided in HEFCW's HESES survey.
  - (ii) be Welsh domiciled (provision of a Welsh address by the student would usually be considered sufficient evidence of Welsh domicile).
  - (iii) meet **at least one** of the conditions set out under (a) to (b) below:
    - (a) the student or the student's family is in receipt of:  
[Universal Credit](#) or its predecessors<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Housing benefit, Income support, Income-based Jobseekers Allowance, Income-related Employment and Support Allowance, Child Tax Credit, Working Tax Credit

[Jobseeker's Allowance](#)  
[Employment and Support Allowance](#)

(b) the student is in receipt of:

Carers allowance or carer's credit  
Disability premium or other disability-related financial support  
Bereavement benefits

*Information on the benefits which are listed above and the definitions of terms used in these benefits are available on the [DWP website \(DWP Benefits\)](#).*

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

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

### **Evidence required**

12. To be eligible under the criteria set out above students must provide their provider 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.
13. Providers should obtain evidence relating to the eligibility criteria prior to fees being waived. The provider should retain evidence of the documentation for audit purposes. HEFCW may wish to audit this evidence at a later date.

### **Changes in circumstances**

14. 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 provider 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. Providers should require students to notify them if such a material change in their circumstances arises.
15. A student that initially undertakes fewer than 30 credits but subsequently adds to this during the academic year will be ineligible for the HEFCW part time fee waiver scheme. In this case providers are encouraged to continue providing that fee waiver without the HEFCW grant in order not to deter students from undertaking additional study.
16. 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 must be dealt with in the same way as any other significant change in circumstance.

### **Promoting the scheme**

17. We would expect providers to promote fee waiver opportunities to those students who this policy is intended to support, particularly those from under-represented groups in higher education.
18. HEFCW funding is not indefinite and funding schemes are reviewed on an annual basis. Consequently, funding for this scheme could be withdrawn prior to students achieving a full qualification, and students should be made aware of this.

### **General points relating to assessment of eligibility**

19. 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.
20. Only tuition fees are eligible for fee waiver. The cost of any assessment or examination fees, additional to those included in the tuition fees, is not eligible under this scheme.
21. Higher education providers offering fee waivers under this scheme will be supported through this HEFCW grant. We encourage providers to operate and promote other schemes to recruit and support part-time students using, for example, their general resources, or other funding which can be used in support of part-time study.
22. Some cases will fall on the margins of the eligibility criteria set out in paragraph 11 above. In such cases where the award of a fee waiver in the view of the provider would be clearly meeting the overall purpose of the scheme, providers 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 there are more than ten such cases within an institution, HEFCW should be informed without delay, via the contact details provided in this circular.

### **Continuing students who commenced their studies prior to 1 September 2014**

#### **Criteria for eligibility**

23. Continuing students who commenced their studies prior to 1 September 2014 are excluded from applying for a Welsh Government part-time tuition fee loan, but they might be eligible for a Welsh Government part-time fee grant.

24. Continuing students who commenced their studies prior to 1 September 2014 will fit the criteria that allow a provider to claim a fee waiver grant, where a student meets the personal eligibility criteria in paragraph 11 and the course eligibility criteria set out as follows:
- The student is in receipt of a part-time fee grant, but this is insufficient to cover the full cost of tuition fees that year<sup>3</sup>;
  - The student is studying at below 50% FTE intensity
25. In order for a provider to claim a HEFCW fee waiver grant on behalf of a student, the provider must be satisfied that the eligibility criteria have been met in relation to (i) the student's course, and (ii) the student's personal circumstances.

### Course criteria

26. A student must:

- (i) be studying part-time and have commenced their studies prior to 1 September 2014. The definition of part-time study is that used by HEFCW in its 2021/22 Higher Education Students Early Statistics (HESES) survey.<sup>4</sup>

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 providers, ie 1 August to 31 July.

- (ii) be registered, 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 (including micro-credential provision) which enables credit to be obtained towards a recognised undergraduate higher education qualification. Institutions should contact HEFCW for clarification in the case of doubt as to what is considered to be in scope.

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

- First degree
- Foundation degree
- HNC
- HND
- Other undergraduate credit-bearing higher education award

Students who already have any of the above qualifications and are studying for a qualification that is of the same level or lower will not be eligible for a fee waiver. Non credit-bearing courses and postgraduate

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<sup>3</sup> Students are only eligible for up to £1200 in total combined from both schemes. For example, if their fees are £1300 and they receive the maximum fee grant of £1025, an additional £175 will be available to providers from HEFCW's scheme. Students will need to self-finance any amount above £1200.

<sup>4</sup> Circular [W21/35HE](#), Higher Education Students Early Statistics Survey 2021/22

courses do not qualify for the scheme.

Students are not eligible for funding to repeat a course or any modules or units within a course, except in cases where extenuating circumstances may apply. Providers should contact HEFCW for clarification in these cases.

- (iii) be studying on a course which corresponds to ten credit values or more as defined by the Credit and Qualifications Framework Wales (CQFW) credit framework.

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 full-time undergraduates.

### **Fee waiver grant conditions**

27. The following conditions of grant will apply to any payment made under the HEFCW part-time undergraduate fee waiver scheme:
- Providers may claim grants only in support of waived tuition fees for those students who are deemed eligible for the HEFCW part-time undergraduate fee waiver scheme, as set out in paragraph 26 above. Fees may be waived to the full cost of the course's tuition fees, or a maximum of £1200 per student, whichever is the lower amount.
  - All grants paid must be used for the purposes for which they are provided.
  - Each provider must submit an annual return setting out the total value of fee waivers actually awarded.
  - HEFCW will adjust the amount of grant paid to a provider in support of student tuition fees waived where the amount that a provider has actually waived is different from its initial estimate for a year. Additional payments required where providers have underestimated the level of funding required will be subject to the constraints of the overall HEFCW fee waiver budget.
  - Fee waiver scheme grants will not be available where providers have waived the full tuition fee for a student where the same module(s) fees for the same academic year are being supported by a Welsh Government part-time fee grant. A fee waiver grant might be available where a provider has waived the remainder of a student's tuition fee where a Welsh Government part-time fee grant has been insufficient to cover the full tuition fee.

### **New students and continuing students who commenced their studies on or after 1 September 2014**

#### **Criteria for eligibility**

28. In order for a provider to claim a HEFCW fee waiver grant on behalf of a student, the provider must be satisfied that the eligibility criteria have been met in relation

to (i) the student's course, and (ii) the student's personal circumstances (see para 11). These criteria are set out below.

## Course criteria

29. A student must

- (i) be studying part-time at less than 25% of a full-time equivalent student and have commenced their course on or after 1 September 2014. The definition of part-time study is that used by HEFCW in its 2021/22 Higher Education Students Early Statistics (HESES) survey.

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 HE providers, ie 1 August to 31 July.

- (ii) be registered, as a new entrant in 2021/22 or a continuing student from no earlier than 1 September 2014, on a programme with the aim of obtaining a recognised undergraduate higher education qualification; or on a course, module or unit (including micro-credential provision) which enables credit to be obtained towards a recognised undergraduate higher education qualification. Institutions should contact HEFCW for clarification in the case of doubt as to what is considered to be in scope.

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

- First degree
- Foundation degree
- HNC
- HND
- Other undergraduate credit-bearing higher education award.

Students who already have any of the above qualifications and are studying for a qualification that is of the same level or lower will not be eligible for a fee waiver. Non-credit bearing courses and postgraduate courses do not qualify for the scheme.

Students are not eligible for funding to repeat a course or any modules or units in a course, except in cases where extenuating circumstances may apply. Providers should contact HEFCW for clarification in these cases.

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

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 full-time undergraduates.

- (iv) be studying at less than 25% of a full time equivalent student. This will be measured in credit values relative to an assumed standard 120 credit year for a full-time undergraduate student and so equate to studying for less than 30 credits for the academic year of the fee waiver

In the event that any student studies for 30 or more credits over the academic year they will cease to be eligible for the HEFCW part-time fee waiver scheme but providers are encouraged to continue providing that fee waiver without the HEFCW grant.

### **Fee waiver grant conditions**

30. The following conditions of grant will apply to any payment made under the HEFCW part-time undergraduate fee waiver scheme:
- Providers may claim grants only in support of waived tuition fees for those students who are deemed eligible for the HEFCW part-time undergraduate fee waiver scheme, as set out above. Fees may be waived to the full cost of the course's tuition fees, or the maximum of £875, whichever is the lower amount.
  - 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.
  - HEFCW will 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 providers have underestimated the level of funding required will be subject to the constraints of the overall HEFCW fee waiver budget.

### **General conditions of grant**

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

31. Providers offering fee waivers under the scheme will be supported through the HEFCW fee waiver grant subject to available funds. The maximum level of funding that that can be claimed for any student in an academic year will either be the full cost of the course's tuition fees, or the maximum amount as outlined in paragraph 9, whichever is lower.
32. Each year providers are 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. Providers are encouraged to consider actual values of fees waived under the scheme in previous years in making their estimates.
33. The estimates of the value of fee waivers provided in the returns from providers will be used as the basis of a payment from HEFCW to support providers for

these fees. These payments will be typically made in February of each year, on the basis that the evidence below is submitted, subject to checking the institution's claim. We expect that the majority of students who benefit from this scheme will have commenced their studies on or after 1 September 2014.

34. In order to determine the actual value of fee waivers, we extract data returned by providers on the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) student record and compare the actual value of fee waivers with the early estimate received the previous year to calculate the difference. Any difference between the two would be recognised in the payment of grant for the following year, subject to the constraints of the overall fee waiver budget. In the event that it had been estimated that a student would undertake fewer than 30 credits but actually undertook 30 credits or more, a deduction would be made from the payment of grant the following year.
35. As part of their submission of the student record to HESA, providers receive output generated by HEFCW through the Information Reporting Interface Service (IRIS). This includes a downloadable part-time fee waiver table. We require providers to sign off the data in that table with an electronic signature. An explanation of any anomalies in the data must be provided, for example if a fee waiver is reported to have been paid to a student who is not in an eligible category, or where there are ten or more discretionary cases within a provider.
36. Where the anomalies make a difference to the fee claimed, then this needs to be changed to reflect the actual amount of fee waiver paid out. Providers should indicate on the table and in their covering email any changes to their returns (eg in red text) and the amended table signed off and returned to HEFCW, together with an explanation for the change. The downloadable table must include data from the final IRIS output generated from the final (signed-off) submission to HESA.
37. The downloadable table displays information about the amount of fee waived (HESA field INSTANCE.FEEWAIVEAMT) and the qualifying criterion (HESA field INSTANCE.FEEWAIVETYPE). Further information can be found on the HESA website in the student record coding manual<sup>5</sup>. Members of staff responsible for the part-time fee waiver scheme should liaise with the HESA student record contact(s) for their institution so that they can download and scrutinise the analysis, check for consistency and look for anomalies that may need to be explained, for example, relating to changes in circumstance or discretionary fee waivers. The table also contains checks on the eligibility of the student with regards to mode and level of study, FTE and previous qualifications, and the amount of fee waiver given. As an illustrative example only, a copy of the table produced through IRIS for 2020/21 is provided at **Annex B**. Once providers are content with the data and any required explanations and amendments, providers should electronically sign beneath the table and email the signed copy to us. The table should be signed by the authorised signatory for the part-time fee waiver data. The names of the authorised signatories will be collected from providers in the autumn.

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<sup>5</sup> INSTANCE. [C20051.FEEWAIVEAMT](#), [C20051.FEEWAIVETYPE](#)

38. As a cross check, we will also analyse the HESA data when we receive final signed off HESA student record data for all providers, after the end of November.
39. Providers are required to provide the electronically signed table for **2020/21** downloaded from IRIS, and an estimate claim for fee waiver costs in **2021/22** by completing the pro-forma at **Annex A**. The signed IRIS table should be returned to HEFCW by **Saturday 27 November 2021**. The completed estimates form (Annex A) should be submitted by **Monday 13 December 2021**.

Date	Action
November 2021	Providers download the part-time fee waiver table from the final IRIS output and provide it to HEFCW with any amendments or explanations required so it shows the actual value of fee waivers for 2020/21 students. The table should be electronically signed by the authorised signatory for the part-time fee waiver data, and emailed to <a href="mailto:hestats@hefcw.ac.uk">hestats@hefcw.ac.uk</a> by 27 November 2021.
December 2021 onwards	Providers provide HEFCW by 13 December 2021 with an estimated number and value of fee waivers for 2021/22 students electronically, using the form at <b>Annex A</b> , emailed to <a href="mailto:nicola.hunt@hefcw.ac.uk">nicola.hunt@hefcw.ac.uk</a> . HEFCW compare the actual value of fee waivers for 2020/21 students with the estimated value of fee waivers for 2020/21 students submitted in November 2020 to establish whether there is a variance between the two figures.
February 2022*	HEFCW pays providers based on the estimated value of fee waivers for 2021/22 students, adjusted for any variance calculated between the estimated and actual fee waivers for 2020/21 students.
*This date is subject to checking the provider's claim with the detail on the HESA student record once HEFCW have the full signed off HESA student record.	

### Proposed changes to the scheme in 2022/23

40. In [circular W20/31HE](#) we indicated that we were planning a partial review of our teaching funding methodology, for implementation from AY 2022/23. We published a consultation in August 2021 (via [circular W21/26HE](#)) which included proposals to expand the eligibility criteria for the part-time fee waiver scheme. We also consulted on changes to the way we administer the scheme through a

process of allocating funds to institutions in advance of the academic year, rather than institutions claiming waivers retrospectively.

41. The consultation closed in September 2021 and the outcomes were considered by HEFCW's Council in November 2021. We expect to issue a circular following that discussion to outline the outcomes of the consultation and confirm our approach to the undergraduate part-time fee waiver scheme for AY 2022/23, with full details of the scheme to be published later in the academic year.

### **Assessing the impact of our policies**

42. As part of our original policy development process we undertook an impact assessment to consider the impact of this scheme on individuals with protected characteristics and groups under-represented in higher education. We will continue to consider the impact of our policies in order to help safeguard against discrimination and promote equality and diversity in HE, and to consider the impact on the Welsh language, Welsh language provision and the potential impacts towards the goals and ways of working set out in the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.
43. Providers are responsible for reviewing their own impact assessments in relation to part-time funding, taking into account the impact on individuals with protected characteristics and to help safeguard against discrimination. Contact [equality@hefcw.ac.uk](mailto:equality@hefcw.ac.uk) for more information about equality impact assessments.

### **Further information**

44. For technical enquiries about IRIS please email [hestats@hefcw.ac.uk](mailto:hestats@hefcw.ac.uk). For all other enquiries relating to the scheme please contact Nicola Hunt (telephone: 029 2085 9735, email: [nicola.hunt@hefcw.ac.uk](mailto:nicola.hunt@hefcw.ac.uk)).