

**Briefing for:** all staff dealing with staff or student enquiries on the current student debt situation

**To be issued:** Wednesday 3 April 2024

**To be sent to:** Heads of School, Divisional Directors, Heads of Professional Services for cascade to relevant staff in their areas

**From:** Jacinda Humphry, Chief Financial Officer

## Briefing to staff re outstanding tuition fee debt collection

This briefing sets out the approach we are taking to collect outstanding tuition fees from our students this academic year and explains how staff can support students through this process.

Teams across the University have been working together to develop proposals for managing student debt collection over the remainder of the academic year. We have sought to balance the need to maximise recovery of income with consideration for the wellbeing of our students and supporting them to continue with their academic studies. It is very important to all of us that our students have a positive experience of their time at University and leave us with the academic outcomes they have worked for.

### Context

Tuition fees comprise over 50% of University income and fund our Academic and Professional Services staff, our teaching resources, our library, our infrastructure (including IT infrastructure) and our campus.

You can see here how we apply the home undergraduate (UG) tuition fee: [Where your tuition fee goes : Strategy and funding : About us : University of Sussex](#)

The majority of home UG student tuition fees are funded by student loans, which we receive directly from the Student Loans Company.

Other students commit to pay their fees themselves or demonstrate that they have other arrangements, such as sponsorships, when they register to study with us. These students are asked to arrange for fees to be paid in advance or according to an agreed, structured payment plan allowing payment in instalments over the academic year.

### Engaging with students to ensure tuition fees are paid

Students are asked to regularly check their debt position through their Sussex Direct account. We also contact them by email to notify them if a payment is overdue, to ask them to make their payment or to contact Finance to agree a solution. When a student does not engage or a solution is not agreed we will give notice of a number of sanctions:

- removal of IT and library access (not immediately before or during the summer assessment period)
- inability to re-register in the next academic year
- inability to graduate, receive a degree certificate or an official transcript.

When we are not able to recover debt from the student through our normal processes, collection is ultimately passed to a commercial debt recovery agency.

## Tuition fee collection 2023/24

Some students are already significantly behind in their tuition fee payments and were notified of this in February. IT and library services were temporarily removed from this group but were restored to all students in March and no services have been removed since then.

Our tuition fee collection cycle will begin again in April for all students. It is structured to support students by avoiding any active contact during the May assessment period, with any necessary action taking place after the end of May for students who have not settled their fees.

All students with outstanding tuition fee debt, and those who have debt which falls due in April, will receive emails from Finance on 15 April notifying them that all fees must be paid by 31 May 2024 (the end of the summer term).

The majority of these are UG students whose fees are settled by the Student Loan Company and need take no action.

Students whose debt is not paid in full when it falls due will receive a further reminder letter on 29 April.

We will not contact any student during the assessment period, 13-31 May, unless in response to an enquiry from them.

If full payment, or proof of remittance is not received by 31 May, students will either not be allowed to re-register in the next academic year or will not graduate, receive a degree certificate or an official transcript, depending on their status. The University also reserves the right to remove IT and library services from students who have not resolved their tuition fee debt satisfactorily by 31 May. This will only be carried out following consideration of particular circumstances and with at least two weeks' notice.

The University may also take action to permanently withdraw a student from the University. Where an international student has entered the UK on a Student Visa, the University is required to report any such withdrawal to UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) within 10 days of the notification of withdrawal to the student.

## Support from Finance, the Student Centre and in Schools

In Finance we are increasing our resources and introducing improved management of our enquiry system to make things simpler and faster for students.

Designated School and Student Centre staff are being briefed by Finance colleagues so that they can resolve common questions for students and staff, and make sure students know where to access the information they need. These staff will also be able to provide feedback to Finance colleagues to help them to improve the student experience.

## How all staff can support students

Colleagues should be aware of the common situations we have seen where students' tuition fee debt has built up, and how to respond (*in italics*):

- Some students are aware of their financial situation but leave things to the last minute which can often lead to stress and delays (*Please encourage students to take financial matters seriously, to plan ahead and act as soon as possible*)

- Some students simply don't see emails that require action (*Please encourage students to check their emails from Finance*)
- Some students, particularly overseas students or those who have other support needs, have not fully understood the action we need them to take (*Please either take the time to read through emails with the student or refer them to the designated School resource*)
- Some students need advice to understand the personal or academic impact of a decision, for example if they are unable to pay and therefore considering taking a period of temporary withdrawal (*Please refer them to the [My Sussex portal](#) where they can raise an enquiry with specialist advisors for individualised advice and guidance*)
- International students at risk of withdrawal due to tuition fee debt may need support to understand the impact on their student visa (*Please refer them to [student visa information on the Student Hub](#) and/or encourage them to contact an International Advisor by [raising an enquiry via My Sussex](#) under My international Journey*)
- Some students are in hardship or have other challenges affecting their ability to act which they feel unable to share with Finance (*Please continue to refer these students into the [existing support services](#) for students in line with existing referral protocols*)
- Some students who report that they have paid their debt have only made a part payment without agreeing this with Finance. This not recognised as a payment plan (*Please encourage the student to check their due debt on Sussex Direct and contact Finance if necessary*).

### Accommodation debt

The above information applies to tuition fees only.

A small proportion of students will also be contacted in April to request payment of outstanding University accommodation debt by 31 May. This debt is collected through a separate process but, as for tuition fee debt, students will not be proactively contacted during the assessment period 13-31 May.

Where accommodation debt is not paid, students will still receive their degree certificate and official transcript but may not be allowed to attend a graduation ceremony.

Outstanding accommodation debt may lead to legal action and / or be passed to a commercial debt collection agency.

### Further questions and advice

If you have further questions or comments regarding the process to collect student debt please contact Sian Thomas (Deputy Director of Finance) or Jacinda Humphry (Chief Financial Officer).

Students with queries regarding their outstanding balances should email [creditcontrol@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:creditcontrol@sussex.ac.uk) or telephone 01273 678076 on Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 10am to 1pm and 2pm to 4pm.

The Student Centre offers advice and guidance to students on issues such as managing your money and managing your mental health. All students can take advantage of the financial advice and information provided by the University at [Money advice : University of Sussex](#) on the Student Hub. There is also information about financial support from the University Hardship funds and welfare loans and Blackbullion's free financial education platform.

For information and guidance on student visas, students should be referred to the [Student Hub](#). A student wishing to contact an International Advisor should [log an enquiry through My Sussex](#) under My international journey.