

Cylchlythyr | Circular

HEFCW part-time undergraduate fee waiver scheme 2023/24

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To: Heads of funded higher education providers in Wales
Principals of directly-funded further education colleges in Wales
Response by: 14 December 2023 to hestats@hefcw.ac.uk (2022/23 IRIS outputs)
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This circular provides information on HEFCW's part-time undergraduate fee waiver scheme for 2023/24, including the allocation of £200k funding to institutions, and sets out the criteria students will need to meet in order to be eligible for a fee waiver under the scheme.

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Introduction

1. This circular provides information on HEFCW's part-time undergraduate fee waiver scheme for 2023/24, including the allocation of £200k funding to institutions, and sets out the criteria students will need to meet in order to be eligible for a fee waiver under the scheme.
2. Funding is available in 2023/24 to be administered by HEFCW-funded institutions to students who meet the criteria of the scheme, as outlined in this circular. Funding is provided to encourage growth in part-time student numbers.
3. Institutions are encouraged to widely advertise the funding available in order to maximise the number of students who are able to benefit and subsequently enrol on a part-time course which meets the scheme course criteria.
4. The scheme was revised in 2021 as part of our review of teaching funding. More information is available via circular [W22/10HE](#).

Details of the scheme in 2023/24

5. We have made no changes to the way the scheme will operate in 2023/24 compared to 2022/23.
6. The individual institutional allocations are provided in **Annex A**. We have included a floor of £2.5k to ensure all funded institutions are able to benefit from the scheme.
7. The allocations have been calculated on a pro rata basis to the number of students considered to be from groups under-represented in HE, using data extracted from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) student record. The following criteria have been used as a proxy for assessing whether a student is considered to be from a group which is under-represented in HE: students in the bottom two quintiles of the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019; students from UK low participation in HE areas; carers, care leavers or care experienced students; students with disabilities; students whose parents do not have a higher education qualification; students from ethnic minority backgrounds. The eligibility criteria are outlined in paragraphs 11-13.
8. Intensity of study will normally be measured in credit values. A fee waiver should not be provided for any student who studies 30 credits or more in one academic year. In the situation where a student initially undertakes fewer than 30 credits but subsequently adds to this during the academic year, any fee waiver given would not be regarded to be part of the HEFCW scheme. However, we would encourage providers to continue to provide that fee waiver from other sources, 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.

Commission for Tertiary Education and Research

9. On 8 September 2022, the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Bill became an Act. The Act outlines arrangements to establish the new Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CTER), which will replace HEFCW, and will be responsible for regulating and funding most post-16 provision in Wales currently within the Welsh Government. It is anticipated that CTER will be operational, and HEFCW will be dissolved, by April 2024. We have confirmed to the Welsh Government that we are proceeding with aspects of our work which we consider to be critical for a smooth and effective transition to CTER.
10. We intend to make the payments to institutions in September 2023. Should we have to amend this profile, we will inform institutions as soon as practically possible. We anticipate that financial commitments made by HEFCW will be honoured by the new Commission, which will include arrangements for monitoring and reclaim of funds where there is an underspend.

Student 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 Higher Education Students Early Statistics (HESES) survey
 - (ii) be Welsh domiciled (provision of a Welsh address by the student would usually be considered sufficient evidence of Welsh domicile).

and meet one or more of the following conditions:

 - a) the student or the student's family¹ is in receipt of:
 - [Universal Credit](#) or its predecessors²
 - [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 benefits³
 - c) the student is from a group which is considered to be under-represented in higher education, such as:
 - students of all ages from areas in the bottom two quintiles of the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019
 - students of all ages from UK low participation in HE areas as measured by the proportion of working age adults with HE qualifications from the 2011 census (bottom two quintiles)

¹ 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.

² Housing benefit, Income support, Income-based Jobseekers Allowance, Income-related Employment and Support Allowance, Child Tax Credit, Working Tax Credit, where these still apply.

³ Information on the benefits which are listed above and the definitions of terms used in these benefits are available on the [DWP website](#).

- care leavers or care experienced students
 - students with disabilities
 - students from ethnic minority backgrounds
 - LGBTQ+ students
 - refugees and asylum seekers
 - students with caring responsibilities
 - those studying through the medium of Welsh
12. It is for institutions to assess the eligibility of students applying for fee waivers, and to devise a fair and equitable process for administering funds under the scheme. It is our general intention that institutions should allocate funds to students who meet the criteria above and who would most benefit from undertaking part-time higher education. Information on identifying under-represented groups in higher education can be found in HEFCW's [Fee and Access Plan guidance](#).

Course eligibility criteria

13. To satisfy the eligible course requirement, a student must:
- (i) be studying part-time at an intensity less than 25% of a full-time equivalent student. The definition of part-time study is that used by HEFCW in its [2022/23 HESES survey](#). 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 from other sources.

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 academic year for HE providers, ie 1 August to 31 July.

- (ii) be registered, as a new entrant in 2023/24 or a continuing student, on a programme with the aim of obtaining a recognised undergraduate higher education qualification⁴; or on a course, module or unit (including micro-credential provision) which enables credit to be obtained which could be counted 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.

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

⁴ See Annex B of circular [W22/40HE](#)

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 five credit values or more as defined by the [Credit and Qualifications Framework](#) (CQFW).

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.

Administration of the scheme

14. In order for an institution to issue funds to students via the fee waiver scheme, 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.
15. Institutions should record the eligibility criteria prior to fees being waived. If documentation was required to prove eligibility for a fee waiver (e.g. receipt of benefits) the provider should retain evidence of that documentation for audit purposes. HEFCW may wish to audit the eligibility criteria used and evidence gathered at a later date, in addition to monitoring using HESA data at the end of the academic year.
16. 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.
17. 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.
18. HEFCW-funded institutions 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, support arrangements as identified in fee and access plans.
19. Some cases will fall on the margins of the eligibility criteria set out 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.
20. Funding can only be provided 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, and within the total funding available. Fees may be waived to the full cost of the course's tuition fees, or as a partial waiver. All grants paid must be used for the purposes for which they are provided.

Changes in circumstances

21. A material change in circumstances may result in a student becoming, or ceasing to be, 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. Providers should require students to notify them if such a material change in their circumstances arises.
22. 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 institutions are encouraged to continue providing that fee waiver without the HEFCW grant in order not to deter students from undertaking additional study.
23. 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.

Monitoring and reclaim of funds

24. Institutions are required to return the data relating to part-time fee waivers to HESA, as described in paragraphs 26-33 below. Where institutions have not spent their fee waiver allocation in 2023/24 the funding will be reclaimed by the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research.

Promoting the scheme

25. 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.

Allocation and monitoring

2022/23 monitoring

26. We are yet to monitor the fee waivers given under the previous scheme for 2022/23 and so are including details of how we will do that using HESA data here. In order to monitor 2022/23 part-time fee waivers, we will extract data returned by providers on the HESA student record and compare the actual value of fee waivers with the allocation provided for 2022/23. Where the actual value of fee waivers is less than the allocation provided, there will be a reclaim of funds.
27. The data are extracted as part of providers' submissions of the HESA student record to Jisc Providers receive output generated by HEFCW through the Information Reporting Interface Service (IRIS). This includes a downloadable part-

time fee waiver monitoring table for verification. We require providers to sign off the data in that table with an electronic signature.

28. Providers should indicate on the table and in their covering email any changes to their signed off data to account for data errors and return the table to HEFCW, together with an explanation for the change, as part of the wider return of signed IRIS outputs. Amendments to the table should be made in red. The downloadable table being signed off must be taken from the final IRIS output generated from the final (signed-off) submission of HESA data to JISC.
 29. The downloadable table displays information about the amount of fee waived (HESA field StudentFinancialSupport.FINSUPAMOUNT) where the award of a fee waiver has been identified in HESA field StudentFinancialSupport.FINSUPTYPE. Further information can be found on the HESA website in the student record coding manual. 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. 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 are collected annually from providers in the autumn.
 30. 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.
 31. Further details are available in the interim Data Requirements circular 2023/24 circular [W23/07HE](#), and in an update to the circular to be published in summer 2023.
 32. The signed IRIS table should be returned to HEFCW by **14 December 2023**.
- 2023/24 monitoring
33. Fee waivers awarded for 2023/24 will also be monitored using HESA student record data extracted through the IRIS process, in the same way as for fee waivers awarded for 2022/23.

Timelines

Date	Action
December 2023	Providers download the part-time fee waiver monitoring table from the final IRIS output for 2022/23 and provide it to HEFCW with any amendments or explanations required so it shows the actual value of fee waivers for 2022/23 students. The table should be electronically signed by the authorised signatory for the part-time fee

	waiver data, and emailed to hestats@hefcw.ac.uk by 14 December 2023. The data expected to be used in allocations for 2024/25 will also be available for sign off as part of the IRIS outputs.
From February 2024	HEFCW makes adjustments to 2022/23 allocations following monitoring. Allocations for 2024/25, if appropriate, will be calculated using IRIS output data.

Assessing the impact of our policies

34. 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 keep this impact assessment under review. 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.
35. 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 for more information about equality impact assessments.

Further information

36. For technical enquiries about IRIS please email hestats@hefcw.ac.uk. For all other enquiries relating to the scheme please contact Nicola Hunt (029 2085 9735; nicola.hunt@hefcw.ac.uk).