



Briefing Note: Variable Tuition Fees

1 In July 2008, Universities UK published *Variable tuition fees in England: assessing their impact on students and higher education institutions*. This is the third in a series of annual reports on the effects of variable tuition fees for UK and EU full-time undergraduates attending higher education institutions in England.

2 The report concludes:

Overall there is nothing in the available data that indicates that the introduction of variable fees in England has yet had any lasting impact on the level or pattern of demand for full-time undergraduate education. Nor is there yet any indication of changes in demand for part-time undergraduate education despite the decision by many institutions substantially to increase part-time undergraduate fees from 2005/06. However, because part-time students take significantly longer on average to obtain the qualification they are studying for than full-time undergraduates, it may take longer for significant changes to emerge.

3 Notable trends include:

- (a) There was a year-on-year increase in applicants through UCAS for full-time undergraduate study in 2008 of 9% for the UK (of which 2.2% is attributable to the incorporation of nursery and midwifery diploma courses).
- (b) There was a 4.3% reduction in UK-domiciled first-year full-time undergraduate enrolments between 2005/06 and 2006/07. However, UCAS application data for 2007 and 2008 entry suggests this is likely to be a temporary blip and that year-on-year growth in first year full-time undergraduate enrolments is likely to be restored at least until the projected decline in the number of 18-20 year olds starts from 2010.
- (c) Three subject areas – subjects allied to medicine, computer science, and historical and philosophical studies – experienced an above average decline in first year enrolments between 2005/06 and 2006/07.
- (d) There has been an increase of 6% in applicants from the EU and 11% in applicants from outside the EU. Within the UK, differing funding regimes appear to have an impact on applicant behaviour. There was a significant increase in the number of Welsh-domiciled students choosing to study in Wales between 2005/06 and 2006/07, coinciding

with the introduction of a fee remission grant of £1,835. The already very high proportion of Scottish-domiciled students choosing to study in Scotland has increased slightly. UCAS figures for 2008 show a slight decline in applicants from Northern Ireland, which may reflect the abolition of tuition fees in the Irish Republic.

- (e) There has been no significant change in the ethnic, social class, or age profile of accepted applicants between 2004/05 and 2006/07.
- (f) The vast majority of institutions have decided to charge the maximum statutory fee of £3,145 in 2008/09 and broadly to maintain their current bursary arrangements. Expenditure on financial support for low-income families has been lower than institutions had forecast.
- (g) There has been a 6.8% increase in part-time undergraduate enrolments between 2003/04 and 2006/07. Part-time undergraduate fees continue to rise year-on-year in real terms.

4 The full report is available online at:

<http://bookshop.universitiesuk.ac.uk/latest/>

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