

BBC NEWS**EDUCATION & FAMILY**

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Fee rise 'will not stop demand for university places'

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Increasing tuition fees - even to £10,000 per year - would not significantly reduce applications for university in England, say researchers.

But the University of Leicester study suggests poorer students would be more likely to be put off from applying.

The research involving 730 sixth formers also found new universities would be the most likely to lose applicants as a result of higher fees.

Next month Lord Browne will deliver his report on university funding.

University applications have risen sharply in recent years - and this study provides a detailed analysis of how any increase in fees proposed by the Browne Review might change the appetite for degree courses.

Value of a degree

This in-depth study suggests that the demand for university places is going to remain strong - with 90% of would-be applicants saying they would not be put off by fees of £10,000 per year.

"Despite the prospect of fees more than doubling, most would-be students would still seek to attend university," says the study.

Sir Bob Burgess, vice-chancellor of Leicester University, says it shows that young people

now "appreciate the value of a degree to their subsequent careers".

But he says the challenge now is to "devise a system that means no-one is disadvantaged because of cost".

At present, fees in England's universities are £3,290 per year - and the study from Leicester University suggests that this current charge puts off about 6% of potential applicants.

A slight rise in fees to £4,000 pushes up the number of those deterred to 8%, but beyond that point a suggested rise in fees does not have a major impact on applicants.

If fees were anywhere between £6,000 and £10,000 the surveys says about 10% of students wanting to go to university would be deterred from applying.

Wealth divide

But there are social divisions below the surface of these figures.

Teenagers from poorer families are more likely to be deterred by a fee increase. If universities charged £7,000 per year, 14% of poorer students would not apply, compared with 9% of better-off teenagers.

There were also differences between types of institutions and courses.

The survey shows that while the most prestigious universities would not lose applications from a fee increase, there would be much greater resistance to pay higher fees at new universities.

If fees rose to £7,000, as many as three in five potential applicants would re-consider applying to a new university.

There were also differences in attitudes towards higher fees for different subjects.

Applicants for medicine and law were relatively unlikely to be deterred by fee levels of £7,000 - but there was much more reluctance to paying such fees for arts and humanities courses.

The overall picture suggests that the leading universities and most sought-after subjects will continue to attract large numbers, regardless of fee levels.

But there will be much greater sensitivity towards cost in new universities and in courses which might lead to less lucrative careers.

Poorer students in particular are likely to be influenced by cost - and are more likely not to

apply at all if there is any increase.

'Two-tier system'

Sir Bob said the findings showed that universities needed to be able to set different levels of fees for courses.

"The focus of the fees debate so far has been on how much universities should charge. But for a true fees market to emerge institutions need to be able to set fees at different levels for different courses.

"Under those circumstances newer universities would still be able to charge the maximum for their most popular and highest quality courses, while research-led institutions may need to charge less than the full amount for less popular programmes."

Sir Bob also argues that any fee increase needed to be accompanied by a package of financial support for students from poorer backgrounds to ensure that they are not put off applying.

Lord Browne's review into the funding of higher education is considering how much students should pay.

There has been speculation that he has been considering raising fees - likely to be called a "graduation contribution" - to £7,000 per year.

The funding system will have to support the growing demand for university - with tens of thousands of applicants being turned away this summer because of a lack of places.

The National Union of Students says the survey shows that a big increase in fees will create a two-tier system, with the greatest demand "clustering around a small group of universities".

"Fees have always unfairly impacted those from poorer backgrounds and this study just shows how wide the gap between rich and poor is when it comes to access to higher education," says NUS president, Aaron Porter.

Would increasing fees put you off applying to university? Or is it a case of needing a degree, regardless of the cost?

Having been educated at University in the UK during our free days, yet having to fund a daughter as a single parent in the USA, I know the hardships it causes. I am a teacher and see students making decisions because of cost. I also see Universities in the US take the rich despite their academic ability while the working class have to be at the top of their

game or play football. I am sad to see we want to follow the US for everything. Our education system is far superior to the US.

Kim, Newark

I would be interested to see a poll of parental views on this point. Teenagers can be unaware of the full implications of what, after living costs, could be a debt of £50,000 or more at the start of their working lives. Thus the relatively small % who say they will be deterred by fees of £10,000 or more is likely to be much greater in reality.

Parent, Lincs

I am currently at university and initially I was put off by the level of student debt that I knew I was likely to acquire, I know that having a degree will give me better chances in life and I feel that students who want to go to university will continue to apply regardless of cost.

Amy, Avon

I think the value of the degree is the elephant in the room. I recall during my degree having fewer than 15hrs of lectures and tutorials a week. Over a 30 week year is that really worth £7k or £10k?

Richard, Sheffield

Increasing fees is not about raising monies for universities, it's about making degrees too expensive for the working class so that the supply of degrees is restricted to the middle and upper classes. That way their value is increased for the middle and upper classes. The working class will have to make do with apprenticeships.

Stephen, Chester

The students being asked are of an age where they are not even thinking of the problems of having to pay back much larger student loans. I know first hand as I have one going through the system now and one about to. To them its a "I'll worry about it in a few years" problem.

Roy, Yeovil

I am about to start my 2nd year and regardless if the price goes up I would still continue my studies! I have always had the ambition of being a teacher and in order to do that I need a degree, it is unfair that I have to have this debt in my head specially when I want to do something that will help many young people in the future.

Ruben, London

My daughter is about to start the process of applying for University. My husband earns a decent salary but we would struggle to afford fees of 10,000 pounds a year. It is not just children from poorer backgrounds that would suffer but also middle income families.

Marie Therese, Helensburgh

I'm lucky to have done my degree in the 1990s, before too much damage was done to universities. I would not do a degree now. The ethos of higher education in the UK (particularly so in England and Wales) is being slowly destroyed and replaced by a 'buy a 2:1 and complain if you aren't given what you want' culture, and I want no part of that.

John, London

Much is currently made of the later advantage of a degree to enhance future earnings. Clearly a medical or law degree therefore would attract much higher fees as the rewards for these professions is at least double that of an engineering degree. If we adopt a flat rate fee irrespective of course type then we are going back to the dark ages with respect to engineering in this country.

Mick, Warsash

As a current uni student, if the fees were to be increased then I would like to see a higher quality of teaching being applied then what is currently being offered. Last year (I am a full time student too mind) I had between 12-15hours lecture and practical time a week; which only lead to 5 final exams at the end of each semester - there wasn't even any coursework. This would not be worth £7000 or £10,00. If I'm being made to "buy" a degree - let me get my money's worth. Otherwise just email me a reading list and let me study at home where there are no accommodation fees - because this is what nearly every student in my year was doing.

Lily , Bristol

My daughter is just starting a degree course in Veterinary Medicine and my 15yo son wants to do Medicine. I am a professional, but by no means a wealthy person. I drive a 12yo car and don't take expensive holidays. I can't afford provide much help so my children will finish up with £50k of debt just to cover the fees, let alone living costs. This money will be taken out of the general economy in order to repay the debt. I suggest that those who are voting for this should be asked to retrospectively pay for their University Degrees before they're allowed to vote in favour.

Paul, Wimborne

I find the idea of fee's going up to £10,000 completely ridiculous, especially considering it comes from a generation who largely did not have to pay for university. If a Government involving the Liberal Democrats backs this kind of system then it will be the final nail in the coffin of their party.

Tom, London

I am just about to start my first year of study. I feel that if fees got higher it would certainly be impossible for me to go to uni. I find it hard to believe that fees could get higher when contact time at uni is often as little as 15hrs a week, this seems totally barbaric to me.

Gemma, London

Many undergrads I know have 3-4 hour of contact per week, and it is so unreasonable to expect a fee of £3000 per year, let alone £7000! Another point to mention: Some courses for instance architecture and medicine runs for 5-7 years, and you can imagine the debt accumulated over these years. The gulf between the rich and the poor will no doubt be made worse, as the have-nots will be much less likely to enrol in such courses.

Lip, Sale

I think the problem is that students still expect their degree to translate into higher earnings, which for most people is no longer the case. I can see a future where student loans are so large that graduates are no longer able to repay them in their life time.

Emma, Marsh

I am a graduate currently paying off my student loan. The payments are so small compared to the rest of my monthly costs that I sometimes forget that I am making them. Considering that University was the best three years of my life, I would say that it is a small price to pay.

Richard, Canterbury

I find this quite a shocking conclusion and have to agree that students might not feel quite so relaxed about student loan debt in the future when they have other financial commitments such as rent/ mortgage or children. We all benefit from an educated society and workforce and so we should make a major contribution. It doesn't have to be like this and it isn't fair!

Graham, Sussex

If the would-be applicants are that dumb, not to be put off by fees of £10,000 per year, then the universities ought to put the fees even higher.

Sami, Nottingham

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