

15 July 2010

Dear Colleague

Admissions briefing for schools and colleges – 2010 applications cycle

Given the increased pressure on this year's admissions round it is important that schools and colleges are kept informed of the current situation regarding admissions to higher education. We are also aware that there has been media interest in the high levels of demand across the UK, the capacity of the sector to respond to that demand, and the possibility of an increase in tuition fees in England and Northern Ireland in the future. The purpose of this briefing is to clarify the situation, and to this end we would be grateful if you could forward this briefing to all schools and colleges.

As schools and colleges will know, universities and other higher education institutions are experiencing a considerable increase in demand for their places this summer. Applications across the UK have risen significantly compared to previous years.

In response to this increased demand, in England the Coalition Government has made funding available for an additional 10,000 new students wishing to study in 2010 (8,000 full-time and 2,000 part-time places). However, this additional funding comes at a time of significant cuts in public spending, including cuts to the university sector and to the amount of

funding available for student support. This has resulted in strict controls on the numbers of new students an institution can recruit this summer. If this number is exceeded a penalty of £3,700 per student will be imposed on the institution.

Similar pressures are also evident in other parts of the UK. In Wales, applications have risen though the number of places funded by the Welsh Assembly remain roughly the same; universities have therefore also been asked not to recruit excessively this summer. In Scotland, applications have also increased and the Scottish Government has introduced stricter controls on the number of full-time under-graduate students that universities can recruit without facing financial penalties. In Northern Ireland, universities also face a penalty if they recruit beyond their Government agreed targets.

These factors have resulted in higher education institutions needing to take a number of actions:

- To stay within its Government-set targets, an institution may have reluctantly had to raise the level of offers compared with its previously published grades or tariff points requirement. It is of course important to remember that grading information is only intended as an indicator of the offer that may be given in any one year. In essence it is an estimate, denoting the threshold required for students to cope with the content of the course and it may increase or decrease in line with the volume of demand for the course.
- Many institutions also use a holistic form of assessment which results in a degree of flexibility in their offers with varied grades/tariff offers. This use of academic judgement is not new and has been standard practice in admissions. Institutions seek to ensure that basic entry criteria are normally set well in advance of the application cycle to meet prospectus and UCAS publication deadlines and this indicative information is designed to help student match their capability to choice of programmes. The initial subject and grade requirements for many programmes would have been determined within a very different context to the situation we are in today.

Bearing in mind that some entry requirements data may have become out of date, universities and colleges will be taking positive and proactive steps for 2011 entry to reassure applicants that entry requirements published at the beginning of the main admission cycle (September) are as accurate as possible. Schools and colleges are urged to recommend to applicants that they check HEI websites before finalising their application in *Apply*.

We also realise that schools, colleges and parents have been asking about the position regarding tuition fees if an institution makes an offer this summer for a deferred entry place in 2011. This is a complex area and no decisions have yet been made as the Browne Review which is looking at university funding including tuition fees is not due to report until later this year. In view of this it is highly unlikely that there would be any change to tuition fees in England for 2011. In England, the level of the tuition fee cap for full-time courses for the academic year 2011-12 is yet to be confirmed (by Government). But as a guide, the maximum fees for this year (2010-11) are £3,290 per year and any change for 2011-12 will be based simply on annual inflationary increases.

On a separate point, it would be helpful if you could kindly encourage all students applying to a higher education institution in 2010 to apply for their student loans as soon as possible. This can be done via UCAS Track or online at www.direct.gov.uk/studentfinance.

We hope that this briefing helps explain the current position regarding higher education admissions. We would like to emphasise that higher education institutions are of course taking every care to remain as fair to their applicants as they possibly can.

Yours sincerely

 

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