

Briefing to staff re outstanding tuition fee and University accommodation debt collection, June 2024

This briefing sets out the approach we are taking to collecting outstanding 2023/24 tuition fee and University accommodation debt from students, and explains how staff can support affected students through this process. It follows on from the [briefing to staff](#) issued on 3 April 2024.

As reported in April 2024, teams across the University have been working together to develop proposals for managing student debt collection, with input from USSU. 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.

We are now at the end of the assessment period and entering the final phase of our debt recovery cycle for 2023/24. Student debt remains exceptionally high.

Our approach

We have designed

Students were asked to settle all debt by 31 May 2024 (an extension beyond the contractual payment date of 23 April, for most debt). Students were given a clear due date to encourage as many who were able to, to settle their debt so that we can understand our financial position and identify students who may be struggling and require further contact and support.

Students who still have outstanding debt are now receiving emails during the course of this (week commencing 3 June 2024). For the purposes of communication, we have categorised students as those who expect to graduate in July 2024, those who expect to graduate in January 2025 and those who expect to return to their studies in September. Please see below for the different messages going to each group.

Some students will receive two emails as we are writing to



If the student has not paid their tuition fees and does not graduate this will mean it is not possible to obtain a Graduate Route Visa. More information on the Graduate Route Visa can be found at [Visas and immigration : University of Sussex](#).

All students with debt will receive a confirmation email in week commencing 8

- the University will withhold the award of the degree, diploma or certificate and any relevant official certified transcript or other formal confirmation of academic achievement until the debt has been paid
 - the student will not be permitted to attend a graduation ceremony
 - the student will be entitled to receive a notification of their marks, for their personal information but this is not an official transcript.
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- the student will not be allowed to attend a graduation ceremony, their degree will be awarded in absentia, and their degree certificate will be sent out by post.
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- if we are unable to reach agreement on the payment of debt after the student has left the University, the University may have to use the services of a debt referral agency to recover the debt owing
 - whenever debt is settled by the student in the future then the student may attend a graduation ceremony and, where relevant, will receive their degree certificate and official certified transcript.^x

All students with debt will receive a confirmation email in week commencing 2 December setting out the next steps if they wish to attend a future graduation ceremony and, where relevant, receive their degree certificate and official certified transcript, depending on whether the debt relates to tuition fees or accommodation rental fees.

If the student has not paid their tuition fees and does not graduate this will mean it is not possible to obtain a Graduate Route Visa.

More information on the Graduate Route Visa can be found at [Visas and immigration : University of Sussex](#)

Support from Finance, the Student Centre and in Schools

In Finance we have increased our resources and improved management of our enquiry system to make things simpler and faster for students who need to speak to us.

Designated School and Student Centre staff were briefed in April and will be briefed again in June 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 we can support them. We have seen £

- 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*).
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