

# **Flysheet: Resolution for phasing out of the Graduate Application Fee**

The University is committed to increasing access to graduate study. The abolition of the Graduate Application Fee would have significant implications for many parts of the University, and potentially jeopardise graduate access initiatives.

## **Introduction and review of the Graduate Application Fee**

The Application Fee (currently £75) was introduced on the recommendation of Education Committee's Graduate Admissions Committee in 2007 due to increasing numbers of applicants, and the pressure this placed on the University. Since then it has been considered in multiple committees, with academic representation from departments and colleges – including divisional committees, Graduate Admissions Committee, Education Committee and PRAC. They have consistently supported the fee policy, after weighing up the broader financial and access context.

## **Increasing access to graduate study**

Graduate access is an important priority for the University. A Graduate Access Working Group has been formed to develop strategy in this area, made up of passionate and knowledgeable academics and student services leads. A small part of the fee income currently supports some of its activities (see breakdown below). A key focus of the Group has been the launch of graduate access programmes including UNIQ+ and Wellcome Biomedical Vacation Scholarships. Around 100 placements have been offered by departments in 2020.

Recognising that the application fee could act as a barrier for some applicants, the University has also introduced fee waivers. At present Oxford waives fees from World Bank-defined Low-Income Countries, which include many African and some Asian countries. There is also a waiver for applicants who attended the UNIQ+ summer school. From the 20/21 application cycle, it has also been agreed that we will waive the fee for UK applicants who were in receipt of the maximum means-tested financial support as undergraduates. This would include our own Crankstart scholars, for instance.

The view of the Graduate Access Working Group is that the most important access issues are encouraging applications from candidates who would not normally consider Oxford, giving candidates help and support to make a competitive application, and having funded studentships available. These are the University's current priorities. **The Graduate Access Working Group does not support abolition of the fee.**

## **Use of application fee funding**

Since the Graduate Application Fee was introduced, the number of applications has increased from 12,000 per year to more than 30,000, equating to £2.1M (after waivers) in the last admissions cycle. Funding is used to cover the costs of administering the application process in the central university, with a small surplus used to support wider student services. The breakdown is as follows:

- £1.1M (53%) directly supports the Graduate Admissions and Recruitment team. It handles over 30,000 applications per year; fields 35,000 queries from applicants and staff; manages college intake number planning and the college placement process; supports graduate access and recruitment work, and advises on international qualifications
- £783k (37%) is used to fund services for applicants and offer-holders in the wider central services, including:
  - IT systems maintenance and upgrades, and support for applicants (£140k)
  - visas and immigration (including subscriptions to regulatory bodies UKCISA and UKBA) (£144k)
  - fees and funding, including administering complex graduate scholarship and loans processes, and advice, including support for applicants with disabilities (£499k).

These costs in direct support of the application process amount to 90% of the fee income, or £68 per applicant. The remaining 10% is channelled to wider student support, including access and outreach work, in the Academic Administration Division (which has received cash-flat University funding for the past three years, absorbing inflation and increased payroll costs). We believe the University should commit not to raise the fee until such time as it can demonstrate that its direct costs exceed the income, and in the meantime should reinvest the surplus into more generous waiver schemes, or into expanding graduate access initiatives such as UNIQ+.

### Sector comparisons

Many other Russell Group universities charge application fees for graduate courses, as do comparable US and international universities. Examples (using current exchange rates) include:

UK universities	US universities	International universities
<b>Oxford: £75</b> Cambridge: £65 LSE: £75 UCL: £80 (or £105 for paper applications), for taught courses only Warwick: £60, for taught courses only	Harvard: \$105 (£82) Yale: \$105 (£82) MIT: \$75 (£58) Stanford: \$125 (£97) University of California system (Berkeley, UCLA etc): \$120 (£93) (US citizens), \$140 (£109) (rest of world)	ETH Zurich £117 Australian National University £51 McGill £68 Toronto £70

### Consequences of abolition

Abolishing the fee would result in the loss of £2.1M per annum of recurrent funding to the University. This is equivalent to the cost of about 60 graduate scholarships per year. It is the annual income from an endowment of about £52M – larger than the endowment of several Oxford colleges.

Removing this funding entirely would result in either:

- Substantial cuts to graduate admissions and access activities and wider student services;
- Or, more realistically, services departments would need to levy charges on academic departments to cover the shortfall

Given the potentially significant impact of these options across the collegiate university, the current University policy is to maintain the application fee, but offer appropriately targeted fee waivers and additional measures to improve access to graduate study.

We recognise the good intentions behind the call to abolish the application fee, but colleagues who work most closely on graduate access have concluded that the most important actions we can take are outreach efforts such as UNIQ+, support for applicants and greater provision of scholarships, and not abolition of the fee.

**For these reasons, we ask you to vote against the resolution to abolish the graduate application fee.**

Martin Williams – PVC Education/New College  
 Kate Blackmon – Said Business School/Merton  
 Michael Burden – Music/New College  
 Rob Gilbert – Medicine/Magdalen  
 Sam Howison – Maths/Christ Church  
 Paul Martin – Politics/Wadham

Victoria Nash – Oxford Internet Institute  
 Saira Shaikh – Academic Registrar  
 Benjamin Thompson – History/Somerville  
 David Vaux – Pathology/Lincoln  
 Mark Wormald – Biochemistry/Corpus Christi



