

## **Briefing for: All staff on our next steps in collection of tuition fees and rental fees 2024/25**

### **Update to briefing issued September 2024**

#### **To be issued: November 2024**

To be sent to: Executive Deans, Divisional Directors, Heads of Faculty Operations for cascade to relevant staff in their areas. Also to be saved on Finance web page and shared via PS Essentials.

### **Staff briefing regarding collection of student tuition fees and rental fees 2024/25**

Following on from my [update in September](#), this briefing sets out what will be happening to collect outstanding termly tuition fee and rental fee (accommodation) instalments which were due on 15 October 2024.

In accordance with the published [Student fee collection cycle 2024/25: information for University staff](#) (now delayed by around 1 week due to systems issues and to allow more time to pay):

- Students who have not settled their termly tuition fee instalment are at risk of suspension of IT and library services on 12 November 2024, and withdrawal from the University after 26 November 2024. Students who are withdrawn will need to leave University accommodation.
- Students who have not settled their termly rental fee (accommodation) instalment are at risk of receiving a notice to terminate their licence after 19 November 2024. This will require them to leave University accommodation within 28 days.

Our approach continues to build on lessons learned from debt recovery during 2023/24. In particular, students have been clearly informed about their financial responsibilities and where to access support and advice, and colleagues across Finance, Housing, Communications, Student Experience, Schools Professional Services, ITS and the Library have collaborated closely to ensure that affected students can be supported effectively.

This briefing is intended to ensure that all staff, and particularly those working directly with students, understand what is happening and why, and are able to support affected students appropriately.

Please note that all timings set out below are subject to a review on 11 November 2024 to ensure that all necessary support services are in place.

### **The tuition and rental fee payment process to date**

Students are made aware of the contractual responsibility for their payments in advance of joining the University and throughout the registration process.

Students who are self-funding their studies are required to pay their fees in full when they register or to sign up to a termly instalment plan.

Students in University housing are similarly required to agree to a termly instalment plan.

Most tuition fee, and all University housing payment instalments, were due on 14 October 2024. Other academic costs (e.g. continuation fees which are charged to postgraduate student to cover the additional costs associated with a deferred dissertation or re-sits) were also due on that date.

Students who were due to pay and did not make their first payment have received two reminders to their University email addresses on 22 October and 31 October 2024.

The letters set out:

- How to pay

- The implications of non-payment
- Where to get help and support.

### **What is happening now**

It is essential for the financial sustainability of the University that our students meet their financial commitments and make payments on time.

Whilst the overwhelming majority of our students do make their payments as agreed, a significant minority do not engage with Finance, or other University services, or pay their fees until sanctions are imminent or actually applied.

The University will be applying sanctions in accordance with our [Debt recovery Policy](#).

As above, the sanctions for non-payment of tuition fees are the suspension of IT and library access, and ultimately, withdrawal from the University. Students are required to leave University accommodation if they do not pay their rental fees, or if they are withdrawn from the University.

We recognise that it is not always appropriate to apply sanctions and want to ensure that we are identifying such situations. Colleagues from Finance and the Division for the Student Experience are working closely together to try to identify students who still have open applications for Student Finance England (SFE) funding, who are awaiting the outcome of relevant complaints or appeals to the University, or where there are known and significant wellbeing concerns.

PGR students with teaching responsibility this term will also be excluded from the IT sanctions described below to enable them to meet their contracted responsibilities. These students have been separately made aware of this intention.

- **Tuition fee debt**

Where the University has not **received** the full termly tuition fee instalment (and any associated fees, e.g. continuation fee) by the end of Friday 8 November, students will have their access to University IT (including University email accounts, campus WiFi, Sussex Direct and Canvas) and Library services suspended on, or shortly after, Tuesday 12 November. We really do want to make sure that students are given every opportunity to pay, so this date is subject to change if we are still dealing with a high level of unresolved enquiries for students seeking to pay their fees. When IT and Library services are removed, students will receive an email to their personal email address (registered by the student in their Sussex Direct account) advising them what has happened and what to do next.

Students are asked to make payment using a debit or credit card or a UK bank transfer. Owing to delays which can arise in the receipt and matching of payments it may take up to two working days before the student receives confirmation that their IT and Library access will be reinstated, and a further working day before this happens.

Students whose payments are not received by 26 November are at risk of withdrawal from the University, and will also have to leave University accommodation if they are withdrawn.

- **Rental fee (accommodation) debt**

In accordance with University policy, if we have not **received** the rental fee instalment by 19 November, students will receive a notice to terminate their licence and will need to leave University accommodation in 28 days. IT and Library access is not suspended where students have paid their tuition fees but have rental fee debt, and students who only have rental fee debt are not at risk of withdrawal from the University.

## Supporting our students

We know that everyone in our community will wish to support students who are affected by the fee collection processes.

Staff can familiarise themselves with advice to students using the student FAQs [here](#). The FAQs will be updated regularly to reflect student enquiries or to address emerging issues.

The best and kindest way to support our students is by helping them to reach the appropriate University services and being honest about the University's approach to debt. Staff in direct contact with students might help them to understand that by registering with Sussex they are under a contractual obligation to pay their tuition and (where applicable) accommodation rental fees. This is in line with messages that we have shared with students in recent letters letting them know that tuition fees enable us to pay tutors, provide Sussex learning opportunities and spaces, staff and run the Library service – and provide essential support to students in need through our wellbeing and student support services.

Based on past experience we expect that the ongoing debt recovery processes will identify:

Students with the means to pay their fees but who have chosen not to act until now, or to make a part payment only:

- These students should simply be encouraged to pay their full fee instalment(s). If they do not know how much to pay, or how to pay, or have queries regarding tuition or related fees or housing charges, they should be signposted to the relevant services below and as set out in the [FAQs for students](#) to get the information they need.

Students who can **demonstrate that they have funds, or a reliable expectation of funds**, but who are unable to meet their contracted payment dates due to **exceptional** circumstances (e.g. delays with SFE applications, international banking restrictions):

- These students should be signposted to Finance, using the contact details below and as set out in the [FAQs for students](#). Students can be reassured that if they can evidence their ability to meet their financial responsibilities (reliable third party evidence of funds, or anticipated funds, e.g. bank statements, successful loan applications will be required) and the exceptional circumstances they are experiencing, we will work with them to agree some flexibility around payment dates, as long as they continue to demonstrate commitment to what has been agreed. Students will be made aware that flexibility of payment dates will never extend beyond an academic year or the end of a course of study.

Students who are unable to afford their study and associated living costs, or are uncertain about this:

- There is no provision within the University finances to waive or discount fees. All staff are asked to help students to understand this, and the importance of making an informed and realistic assessment of their circumstances as soon as possible, before further liabilities arise. Students should be signposted to money advice and support through the [Student Centre](#) using the contact details below and as set out in the [FAQs for students](#). Students experiencing immediate hardship or who are in need of wellbeing-related services should also be signposted to the Student Centre. Advice for overseas students regarding visas is also available through the Student Centre.

## Offering direct support

Please encourage students to:

- Access our [student FAQs](#) to understand the action they need to take and how to get help and support
- Check their emails from Finance, and if necessary take the time to make sure they have understood what is being asked for, including the need to use our required secure payment route to ensure that payments are received by the University and matched to the student account as soon as possible
- Act immediately to settle their debt or contact the appropriate service for advice
- Set up their next fee instalments for January and May to ensure payments are received on time.

## University services

Our [student FAQs](#) explain where and how students can get the help they need. In summary:

- There will be access to specialist Finance staff in the Student Centre and by email at [creditcontrol@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:creditcontrol@sussex.ac.uk)
- Student Centre services can be accessed in person or by email at [studentcentre@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:studentcentre@sussex.ac.uk), or by telephone on 01273 075700. Topics covered might include:
  - Students requiring guidance to understand the personal or academic impact of a decision. For example, if they are unable to pay fees and are therefore considering taking a period of temporary withdrawal, they should be referred to specialist advisors for individualised advice. Students are also encouraged to discuss their situation with their academic advisor.
  - International students who need support to understand the impact of non-payment sanctions on their student visa should be referred to student visa information.
  - Students who are in hardship or have other challenges affecting their ability to act should be referred into the existing support services for students in line with existing referral protocols.

In addition:

- Students with queries regarding housing charges should contact [housing@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:housing@sussex.ac.uk)
- Students with queries regarding tuition fee status should follow guidance on the [University's Fee Status webpage](#)
- Students with queries regarding continuation fees should email [studentprogress@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:studentprogress@sussex.ac.uk)
- Students who do not know how much to pay, or how to pay, should contact Finance by email at [creditcontrol@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:creditcontrol@sussex.ac.uk) or in person at the Student Centre
- Students who are experiencing exceptional circumstances that are preventing them from accessing their funds should contact Finance by email at [creditcontrol@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:creditcontrol@sussex.ac.uk) or in person at the Student Centre.

Note that Finance does not directly consider requests for payment flexibility due to hardship, students should be signposted to resources as above. Finance cannot share personal information about a student with a member of staff.

If you have further questions or comments regarding the process to collect student fees please contact [Sian Thomas](#) (Deputy Director of Finance) or [Jacinda Humphry](#) (Chief Financial Officer).

If you have further questions or comments regarding the ongoing student engagement please contact [internal.communications@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:internal.communications@sussex.ac.uk).