

Ten Good Reasons Why University Tuition Fees Are A Bad Idea

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Tuition fees at public universities in England are now, on average, the highest in the world. The reform has already been judged by monitoring authorities to be a bankrupt idea. It is without question a rushed and ill-considered experiment, out of line with the policies of other Western democratic nations. The arguments against this high fees regime are many and various. This blog looks at the new system from different angles in order to show the impact it will have on individuals and on society as a whole, on universities and on the national economy, offering ten good reasons why university tuition fees are a bad idea.

Reason 10: Out of Line with All Other Developed Countries

Nothing on the scale of the high fee regime in England has ever been attempted before. The shift in costs from the state to students is unprecedented and the consequences are incalculable. From a global perspective, there is nothing fair about this radical reform.

English students now pay on average the highest fees in the world. Even in the USA the national average is lower. Fees in England are nearly four times higher than in Ireland and seven times higher than the next most expensive country in the European Union, the Netherlands (at £1,200 per annum). In other EU countries students pay less than £1000 a year, or nothing at all. The world's other expensive public universities systems – Australia, Canada, Chile, Japan, Korea, and New Zealand – all charge fees lower than £2,200.

English graduates are now the most heavily indebted in the world, with over three times more student debt than the average American student. Meanwhile, the proportion of public spending on higher education in the United Kingdom, one of the wealthiest nations in the world, remains small compared to that of other social democracies with market economies: 1.2% compared to OECD average of 1.6%.

In Germany tuition fees were tried, then rejected. The conservative government in Lower Saxony scrapped fees for university in October 2014, making the entire country again fee-free. Change was brought about by continuous pressure from the Alliance Against Tuition Fees founded in 1999 – students unions, trade unions and opposition parties – which organised protest when eight German states introduced fees. A similar experiment was implemented then dropped in Scandinavia.

Under international law, higher education is recognised as a public good and states are expected to provide free higher education if their means allow. The UK is isolated and unique in disregarding this principle, and attempting to redefine advanced education solely as an individual benefit. As Diana Reay has observed, the UK 'combines the lowest spending on higher education of any comparable OECD country with the highest tuition fees for study at a public university.'

Sources

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