

ORAL CONCOURS 2013 ANGLAIS - LVI

Most universities 'to raise student tuition fees in 2013'

More than half of universities are preparing to impose tuition fee rises next year amid fresh concerns over levels of student debt, the Telegraph has learned.

Figures show that 64 out of 122 institutions plan to raise average costs for undergraduate degree courses starting in the autumn. Data published by the Government's Office for Fair Access shows that universities in England are preparing to push up charges by as much as £900 per student.

Experts claimed that some institutions had been forced to raise fees on popular courses to balance the books because of an overall slump in student demand nationally.

It is only the second year that universities have been given powers to impose charges up to £9,000 for degree courses. In all, 94 universities are planning to charge the maximum amount for at least one course, compared with 82 a year earlier. Others imposing the largest average increases include Bournemouth, Chester, Derby, Greenwich, Kingston, Salford, Westminster and the University of West London. Data also shows that some 43 universities are freezing their fees at 2012 levels and 15 are imposing cuts in prices.

Most top universities, including members of the Russell Group, already charge an average of almost £9,000 and charges will largely remain unchanged in 2013. The disclosure comes just days before the January 15 deadline to apply to degree courses through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS).

It is feared that students are already being put off higher education by rising fees. Data shows that demand was down by 18,000 – 6.3 per cent – in mid-December compared with the same point a year earlier. University leaders insisted that it was too early in the academic year to draw conclusions from the data and insisted that poorer students could rely on generous support packages to soften the blow of higher fees.

But Sally Hunt, general secretary of the University and College Union, which represents lecturers, said it was clear that fees were having a major impact.

"As student applications stagnate, universities are charging students higher fees to balance the books," she said.

"However, students and their parents will be expecting more bang for their increased buck – raising the pressure on already overworked and underpaid staff.

"It is difficult not to conclude that some universities are milking the students they know will apply to popular courses to make up for shortfalls elsewhere."

But Universities UK, which represents vice-chancellors, insisted that many fee rises were in line with inflation, adding that the organisation would be publishing an analysis into the impact of fees on poor students later in the year.

Nicola Dandridge, chief executive, added: "It is worth remembering that a significant proportion of fee income is spent on financial support, outreach and retention."

Universities are required to publish tuition fee levels in documents submitted to OFFA last summer.

Figures show that average fees will rise from £8,385 for students starting in 2012 to just over £8,500 for those taking up places in 2013. The average drops when fee waivers and other financial support for poor students is factored in. Average fees for Bournemouth University will increase from £7,889 to £8,417, Greenwich will rise from £7,917 to £8,432, Westminster fees increase from £8,019 to £8,628 West London will see average fees increase from £7,614 to £8,156.

A spokesman for the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills said: "It is for universities to decide what they charge for the courses and facilities they provide.

"The Government's reforms have made the university system fairer and more progressive. Most students will not pay upfront to study; there are more loans, grants and bursaries for those from poorer families and loans are only repaid once graduates have jobs and are earning over £21,000."

The Telegraph, 13 January 2013