

# **Policy Proposal: Lobby UCL to remove the application processing fee for postgraduate taught courses**

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To be discussed at: Education Zone

## **What would you like the Union to do?**

I would like the Union to lobby UCL to remove the application fee for postgraduate taught courses.

## **Why would you like to do this?**

UCL currently charges £80 as a standard application fee for most postgraduate taught courses. Some courses (Finance MSc, Business Analytics (with Management Science) MSc, Management MSc, Project and Enterprise Management MSc, all Eastman Dental Institute programmes) have significantly higher application fees.

These fees are non-refundable and are only waived in very exceptional circumstances, on a case-by-case basis, primarily for applicants "living in conflict zones, or affected by displacement". UCL makes no provision for students from low-income backgrounds or who might for any other reason have difficulty affording this fee.

The UCL application processing fee is the highest of any Russell Group university - the only Russell Group universities with comparable requirements are LSE (£75), the University of Oxford (£75), and the University of Warwick (£60). Of the 24 Russell Group universities, nine charge no application fee for postgraduate taught courses, and a further nine only charge an application fee for a very limited number of programmes (usually just for a handful of courses in their respective Business Schools). Most have a more generous exemption policy, for instance the University of Cambridge has a standard application fee of £65 but waives it for students from low-income countries and for UK students from low-income households.

UCL's application fee policy disproportionately discourages applicants from low-income backgrounds, thereby fostering an elitist culture of exclusion that is unfortunately endemic in Higher Education. Removing this fee would remove an unnecessary barrier to postgraduate education from students who cannot afford £80 out of pocket.

One of the reasons often stated for having an application fee and having it be extortionately high is that it discourages speculative applications. I would argue that the fee simply discourages poorer students from making applications, both speculative and otherwise, while richer students who can afford to spend £80 without much thought are unaffected and continue to make speculative applications.

Another reason given for having such a high application fee is to cover the administrative cost of processing PGT application fees. While I appreciate that applications create a significant amount of work for administrative staff, I would point out that Cardiff University, the University of Exeter, the University of Leeds, the University of Liverpool, QMUL, Queen's University, the University of Sheffield, the University of Southampton, and the University of York all manage to carry out this process without charging additional fees. Perhaps there could be an examination of their administrative structures to gain some ideas for best practice?

## **How will this affect students?**

This will affect students and potential students by removing barriers to education for those who cannot afford extortionate fees. Removing the postgraduate application processing fee will not only have a financial impact on applicants, but a wider impact on the accessibility of education at UCL.

When institutions are made accessible and inclusive, everybody benefits. Postgraduate education should never be the exclusive preserve of the rich and this Union has a duty to remind UCL of that.