

Where should university students' money go?

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Recent strikes across all tiers of education have caused many to question why educators are not happy. If the average yearly fee is approximately £9,250 for 3 years, and £11,000 for accelerated per student (although this varies according to institution and area), where does that money go? Fees are even higher for foreign students on a postgraduate masters course. This short opinion piece from two academics ponders on where the university fees really go, and where they may be better spent.



Anecdotally, we have noticed a shift post-COVID19 where more students seem to be continuing to live at home with their families and choosing a local Higher Education (HE) provider. So what are students expecting from 'getting a degree'? Is it just about earning a certificate at the end of the period of study, or should tuition fees offer something bigger and longer lasting? As we see a societal shift to greater understanding and awareness of mental health and wellbeing, the authors of this piece have also seen running parallel to this, a demand from students for more appointments to discuss anxiety and motivation, as opposed to the academic content of their course. Does this imply that students expect mental support as well as just their classroom learning, and if so, are tuition fees supporting this shift to greater pastoral care?

How are fees spent?

Research by the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) revealed exactly where students' tuition fees get spent, revealing that less than half of the money actually goes into the cost of teaching (Skoulding, 2022). In 2018, around 45% of the funds generated from each student's £9,250 annual fees in England were spent on the cost of teaching, the remaining funds were spent on other necessary expenses. This includes things like buildings, technology and libraries, university administration, welfare support such as mental health services, and spending on the students' union (Skoulding, 2022). According to the 2018 HEPI report, around 20% of tuition fees were spent on management staff, recruitment of students, advertising, and community work. The remaining money collected was spent on a range of other services, including administration and infrastructure costs.

Fees in a Marketisation of Higher Education

McGettigan (2013) analyses the current situation by placing modern university funding, including tuition fees, as a true market. Whether the marketplace is right for a democratic education place or not is one discussion, or indeed whether it is a true market for the fee-paying consumer, one aspect of marketisation is that the student should feel that the fees paid represent value for money. Students see the purchase of a degree, i.e. a transaction, but is there other consumer care that is required? This question is at the heart of the article.

The future of fees?

In our post-pandemic world, behaviours and expectations of education are changing. The surge of Artificial Intelligence in our classrooms is impacting how we create content, and how students interact with their learning. More and more courses are being offered as distance learning courses, and the future of HE is somewhat uncertain. The bigger societal picture here in the UK is one of the cost of living crisis and the brink of a recession. Should fees be lowered to make university more accessible to all? University chiefs argue that lowering fees would in fact be detrimental to those who are suffering financially, as reduced fees would probably equal reduced support in terms of bursaries and other financial help (Skoulding, 2022).

References

McGettigan, A. (2013) *The great university gamble*. London: Pluto Press.

Skoulding, L. (2022) This is what your tuition fees actually get spent on – Save the Student. [Online] Available at [This is what your tuition fees actually get spent on – Save the Student](#)

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