



British International School Riyadh

Student debt nears £60,000 for 2012 University freshers

Students who begin their courses at universities in England next year are likely to graduate with nearly £60,000 in debt. Photograph: Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

Students starting university in England next year, after the introduction of higher tuition fees, should expect to finish their degree with debts approaching £60,000, according to a survey published today.

The independent student guide Push asked 2,808 students at 115 UK universities how much they owed banks and their parents, and the amount they had borrowed in student loans. Projections of future debt levels were made by taking into account increased tuition fees this year and next.



Students now at university are racking up an average debt of £5,681 a year, the survey found. In England the average debt is £5,876; in Wales £6,231; Northern Ireland £4,319 and Scotland £2,025.

Those who started studying in 2008 will have graduated with £22,000 of debt. That figure will rise to £24,100 for those who those who started courses last year and will shoot up to £26,100 for those enrolling this autumn, the poll found.

But freshers beginning their degrees next year face the steepest increase in debt, to an average of £53,400.

Those studying in England, where fees are estimated to average £8,630 next year, should expect to finish university with debts of almost £59,100.

On average about a quarter of students' debts are owed to sources other than the Student Loans Company, with 13% owed to parents and family and just under 7% borrowed from banks or on credit cards.

For students in England, yearly average debt has risen by 11% over the last 12 months, the survey shows. It increased by 42% between 2004 and 2011.

Students at Birkbeck College, University of London owe most each year – £15,458 – while those at the University of Strathclyde owe least – £726.

Johnny Rich, editor of Push, said the government had failed to explain how students should manage debts of more than £50,000.

"For students this year and in the future it has never been more important to understand the differences between universities," he said. "It's not just the debts that vary widely, – the whole experience students have at different institutions and what they stand to gain from them vary too."

Liam Burns, the president of the National Union of Students, said ministers seemed to "think it is OK to hang an amount of debt equivalent to a small mortgage over someone's head while they study.

"Leaving young people reliant on commercial credit just to stay in education is scandalous. The case for full reversal of the government's fee regime remains.

"Ministers must stop student support going to insubstantial fee waivers and instead invest in putting money back in the poorest students' pockets."

Sally Hunt, the general secretary of the University and College Union, which represents lecturers, said average student debt was "already staggeringly high and is now set to get much worse", adding: "The government's [university funding](#) plans are a recipe for disaster and will lead to people making important life choices on the basis of their ability to pay rather than their ability to learn."

At eight institutions the average projected debt on graduation for those studying now is more than £30,000, while at 18 universities it is less than £10,000.

- This article was amended on 12 August 2011. Based on survey findings issued by Push, a student guide that commissioned the debt survey, the original said that the students who owed most were those at University College London. Push later corrected its announcement of the results.