GuildHE response to:

ACCELERATED DEGREES: WIDENING STUDENT CHOICE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

FEBRUARY 2018

About GuildHE

GuildHE is an officially recognised representative body for UK Higher Education. Our members include universities, university colleges, further education colleges and specialist institutions from both the traditional and private ("for profit" and "not for profit") sectors. Member institutions include some major providers in professional subject areas including art, design and media, music and the performing arts; agriculture and food; education; maritime; health and sports.

Consultation Questions

Are there any other technical features of accelerated degree courses that we should take into account for the purpose of new fee arrangements?
Yes No

There is not one definition of an accelerated programme, but this consultation offers a definition for the purposes of accessing a higher rate tuition fee:

- The new arrangements will initially apply to two-year degrees only.
- two year accelerated degree will lead to an identical qualification to its standard three-year equivalent in terms of the substance and calibre of learning required for qualification.
- Accelerated degrees will generally maintain the total volume of learning content as a three-year degree, by increasing the number of weeks of study in each year. Study is likely to run over the summer, with shorter academic breaks at other times.
- The pace of learning week-on-week for a student is likely to be broadly the same as a standard degree. There are typically 30 weeks of study annually in a three year degree, or 90 weeks overall. We envisage 45 weeks of annual study for an accelerated course, although we recognise other patterns may emerge.

We have not identified any other technical features of an accelerated programme that need to be taken into account when attributing the new fee cap.

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Do you agree that an annual fee cap set initially at the standard rate plus a 20% uplift is the right amount to incentivise wider provision of accelerated degrees?
Yes No

There is a fine balance between ensuring good value for students, and covering the true cost of offering an extra 50% of the course. We recognise there are savings providers can make when extending the study period across the summer and current accelerated programmes have different delivery models for different times of the year in order to ensure students have access to the appropriate services, resources and staff, ad the right time. We feel a 20% increase in tuition fees is broadly fair for programmes which are predominantly classroom and/or workplace based. But if government wish to extend the types of courses that offer an accelerated pathway, it must consider the significant additional financial cost of providing 'high cost courses' over the summer period. This may be picked up through an additional payment through the high cost subject fund, rather than increasing tuition fees in the first instance.

Do you agree that a 20% reduction overall for students, in tuition fee and maintenance loans, would incentivise wider take-up of accelerated degrees by students?
Yes No

We believe that a 20% reduction in the overall student loan would provide an incentive for students to take up such courses. Where our members already deliver accelerated programmes, students often cite a key benefit is a decrease in their overall student debt. We don't believe that charging the additional 20% fee will be a deterrent to students, as they will be saving time in obtaining their course, something which is precious to lots of non traditional HE entrants. Students recognise that in order to receive high quality provision, there is a cost associated to that, and see there are additional costs to undertaking 150% of a course per year.

What is not clear is the extent to which students are able to afford to study so intensively. With no increase to the maintenance loan available to them (other than a very small additional amount through long course loan), many students will struggle with the additional financial costs associated with studying longer. There is already a looming financial crisis for students and we often hear issues associated with very high living costs, forcing students to work more than 15 hours a week. We think that if government wish to encourage greater take up of these fast track programmes it should create additional financial incentives to students through additional grant income to offset some of these costs.

Do you agree that a 20% increase in loan cap rates per annum is the right value to incentivise wider uptake of accelerated degrees at Approved providers?
Yes No Explain

We believe that everyone who offers a two year accelerated programme should be able to charge an additional 20% regardless of whether they are approved, or approved fee cap. Alternative providers do great work in the sector to widen participation and develop innovative teaching practices. Whilst at present it is true that some alternative providers charge an additional upfront fee to cover the full additional cost, not all providers do so in the spirit of ensuring equal access. To ensure that all students regardless of background are able to access good quality accelerated programmes, it is important that all providers should be able to access the extra 20% tuition fee loan.

Do you agree that accelerated degree fees should be treated in the same way as other higher course fees for the purpose of access funding?
Yes No Explain

The new regulatory framework is in its infancy, but we believe it will provide appropriate measures to ensure good quality education for all students regardless of background, mode of study or type of approved provider. There may however need to be changes made to data capture and analysis to reflect the different approach to delivery.

Should any additional safeguards and controls be in place as a proportionate and effective measure to ensure expanded provision of loans for accelerated degrees provide value for money to the taxpayer?
Yes No Explain

We think that the current approach to regulation and quality will provide an appropriate approach to monitoring this provision. However we do not believe that distance learning courses offer a substantial increased risk if managed effectively. Many distance learning courses now mirror the traditional weekly face to face delivery model, and have appropriate checks in place to ensure students continue to engage and achieve. It would be unfair to block distance learning as a conduit for accelerated programmes in all cases, as for many students who are locked to their location may not have access to the right programmes for them.

Are there any additional practical considerations we should take into account as we develop our final regulations to support accelerated degree course provision?
Yes No Explain

We are concerned that the current regulatory framework has a very strong focus on timescales that align to a traditional 3 year degree model. Expanding accelerated provision will have implications for the reporting of student outcomes, and this could have a knock on effect when taking a snapshot of a provider. HESA and OfS will need to work together to make sure that non standard delivery is not disadvantaged by the new data collection and analysis processes.

We would also like to take this opportunity once again to highlight the cash flow issues of small providers who are heavily reliant on the SLC payment profile. Our members already face cash flow issues under the current system, and these may be further exacerbated when delivering more content in a shorter space of time. We hope that government will look again at when SLC payments are made to ensure they are equally distributed across the academic year to ensure smaller providers are not disadvantaged in delivering innovative programmes. Ultimately we want to see the tuition fee loan system moves to a credit based payment profile rather than based on academic terms. This allows greater flexibility for both students and providers - allowing students to not be financial penalised by moving provider or dropping out, and providers getting paid for what is actually being delivered.

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