



City SU Tuition Fee Instalment Research

Summary paper

Number of City
students
deregistered*

2020/21

25
students

2021/22

10
students

*on the instruction of Finance Office. This figure was acquired from the Income Team who process withdrawals based on existing tuition fee arrears.

Introduction

The risks of missing tuition fee payments are high for students including for their continuation of studies and access to City University services. As a final action of missed tuition fee payments, students can face being deregistered as a City student and consequently withdrawn from their course.

For many students they have a lot to lose if they fall into or come close to this situation and its impact can be detrimental; mentally, financially, academically, and professionally.

The SU has undertaken research in the form of case study submissions on the experiences of students who have struggled to pay their tuition fee on schedule while studying at City.

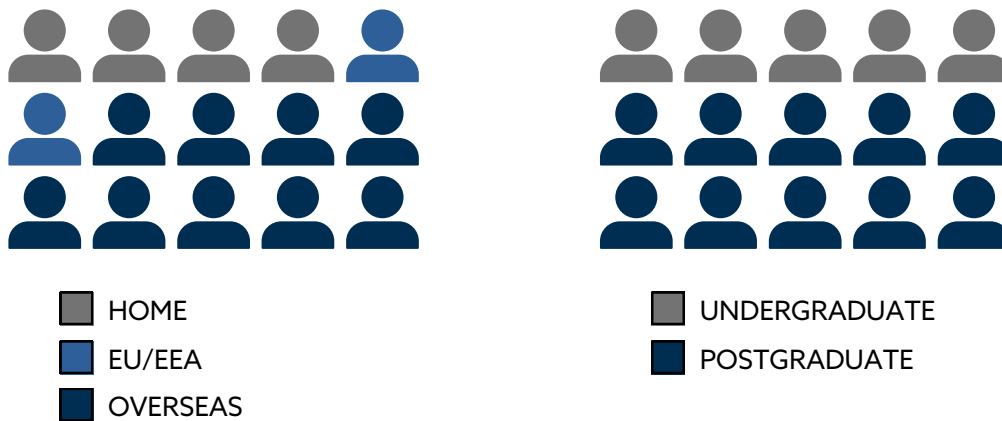
We recognise that there is a significantly small cross section of the student population who self-fund their studies and have been deregistered as a final action in failure of paying their tuition fee on time. Nonetheless, there is a large proportion of City students who self-fund their studies, who may encounter challenges in making upcoming payments, thus increasing their risk of becoming deregistered.

Methodology

15
anonymously
written case
studies
submitted

City SU opened case study submissions for students who have experienced or are currently experiencing financial hardship in paying their pay tuition fee while studying at City. In total, we collected in-depth online case studies from 15 students across a 3-week period during Term 2 of the academic year 2022/23. We recognise that we were unable to collect the experiences of current deregistered students as a result of missed tuition fee payments due to not having access to their student information.

Our sample instead focused on students who were at risk of being deregistered, having experienced financial hardship in paying their tuition fee. Students were invited to participate in the research via email and outreach from Student Union Officers to anonymously feedback their experiences for this incentivised research. Most of the case studies were submitted by postgraduate taught students and overseas international students. Further demographic breakdowns are shown in the infographic below.



Students represented four out of six schools including 6 from BBS, 5 from CLS, 1 from SCC and 2 from SHPS.

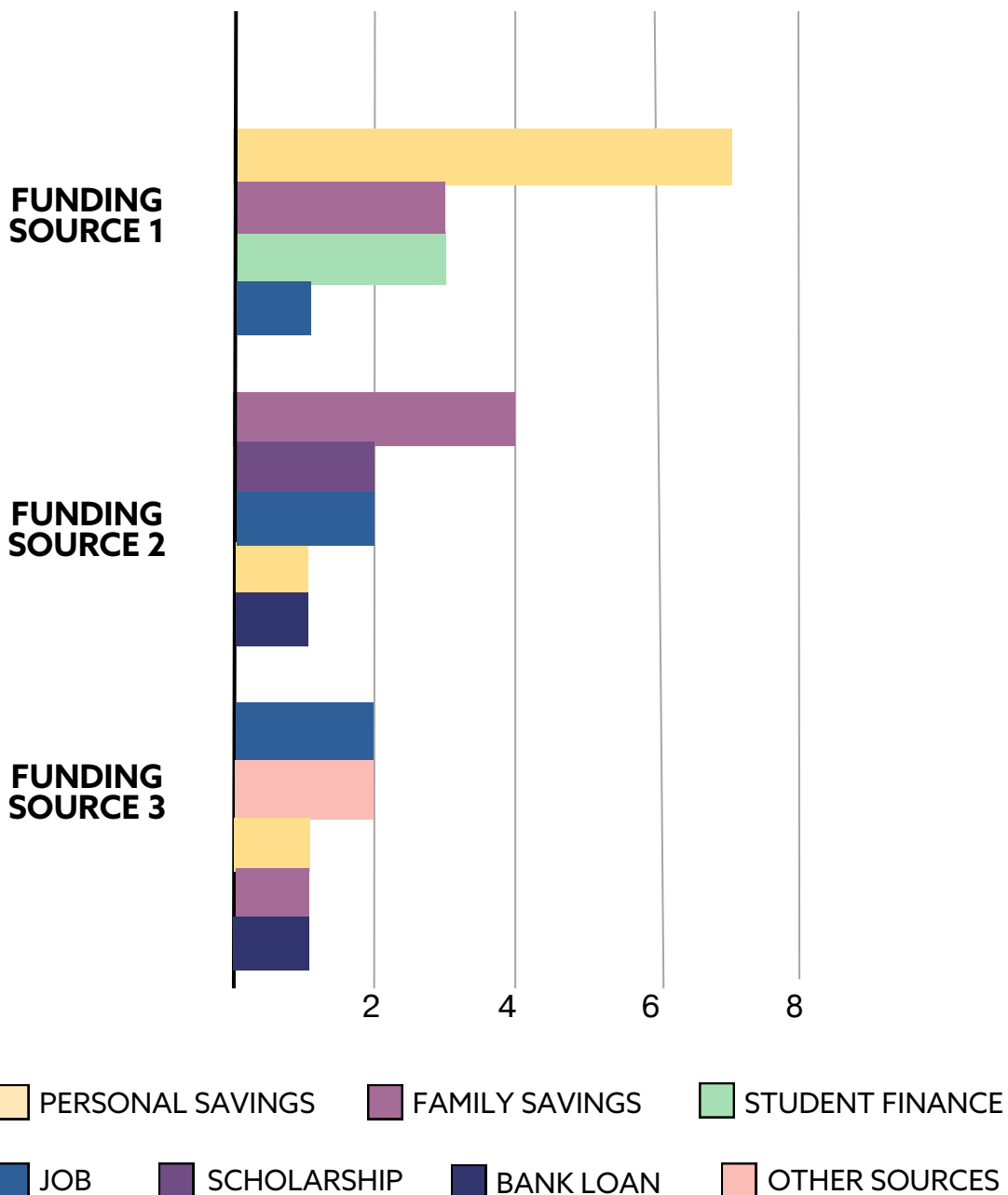
This research has produced rich qualitative data in the form of case study submissions where students were asked up to 8 open-ended questions to record their experiences.

Findings

Funding sources for students

Most students funded their tuition fees from their personal savings with some stating family savings being their main source of funding. Other secondary sources of funding for tuition fees included support from family savings or bank loans. The graph below shows the main sources of funding tuition fees as recorded by 14 out of the 15 students.

Income from jobs tended to be a secondary source of funding tuition fees as well as relying on bank loans.



Factors affecting students' ability to pay tuition fees

The case studies of students who had experienced missing a payment were all case specific to individual situations. We explore some of the common reasons behind student's difficulty in paying their tuition fee on time. Themes are based on 3 or more accounts of similar experiences reported across the 15 case studies.

International conditions

Almost three-quarters of the case studies submitted were by international students (11 students). The case studies reflect additional challenges that international students may face when funding their studies.

- The economic and political conditions of home countries was a recurrent theme that students reported as impacting their ability to pay their fees. Many mentioned the strain on rising exchange rates of home currency against the GBP, causing costs of tuition fees and living expenses to increase that goes over student's planned budgets. One account included the political climate of human and women's rights as creating financial difficulty for raising tuition fee funds e.g. economic sanctions being imposed.
- International students who rely on family support to fund their studies, often means that they have to rely on international bank transfers to access funds. Some case studies mentioned that this process can be unreliable if there are issues with banks, for example closures of banks, political unrest and banned transfers.

Details of any additional separate costs that will be incurred when coming to study in the UK was seen as being essential to the planning of international student's move, including for Visa costs or IHS surcharge.

“ I need to save money and spend less. Other than the essential expenses like rent, food and transport, I reduced entertainment in this year.



Cost of Living and finances

The case study submission highlights that the rising cost of living has had a universal impact on students who fund their studies. In addition to paying tuition fee , managing costs to cover living expenses such as rent, food and travel costs was a worry for students. Students especially felt this when they had explored other sources of financial help and were unsuccessful in securing i.e. bank loans, student loans, bursaries or scholarships.

Some students mentioned the difficulty in securing a job to help keep them afloat and also balancing time between studying and working.

Some case studies highlighted that unexpected events can arise which could affect student's ability to pay off tuition fee. For example, financial situations can quickly change in examples like having to extend unexpected financial support to family members or quitting paid work to take on sudden caring responsibilities or due to their own poor health, therefore making students have to reprioritise their finances.

Access to Financial Support

Access to financial support from City in the form of scholarships or hardship funds made a significant difference to student's ability to manage financially and pay their tuition fee in order to continue their studies.

Some students noted their ineligibility of financial help to bursaries or scholarships to support their tuition fee payments as limiting the financial help they could receive.

“ I supported myself with that fund - paid debts, brought a new laptop as the old one was so slow and difficult to use, used for transportation.”



Student Support

Our case studies reveal that the following teams are reached out to when students were unable to pay for their tuition fee.

- Course Office
- Student Centre - Visa/International Team and Funding Team
- Finance Team
- Income Team
- Welfare Officer
- Students' Union

Generally communication across various university departments was positive with timely responses and relevant signposting where required.

Most students recorded that the Income team were the key department in deciding changes to payment plans and were often signposted to by other departments or found via City's website.

Tuition Fee hardship outcomes

There was a mix of different experiences and course of action when requesting for more flexible tuition fee payment plans from City's Finance and Income team. When students face financial difficulties, as explored how in the section above, it was widely felt that split payments over a longer period would give more time for students to pull together funds and complete payment. Some outcomes shared in the case studies are described below. We note that depending on the case, there may have been restrictions to what could be offered which may not have been fully disclosed in the case studies.

- In circumstances where students relying on international bank transfers had faced unexpected complications such as closing of banks or banned transfers, students had contacted the university and successfully received an extension to delay the payment.
- It was possible for some students to split their payments over a period of time, where a payment plan was set up for students with more than two instalments. This option, when offered, was helpful for students. The situation of students who were offered payment plans included students who had undertaken sudden care responsibilities and who were receiving scholarship grants.

However, some students found smaller instalments would be more manageable to pay. Some returned back to their original dilemma as a result of struggling to pay large chunks of instalments at once and therefore risking deregistration from their course. This left students wanting options for more solutions to the financial challenges they may experience.

- The case studies recorded one student's experience of being deregistered multiple times as a result of missing a payment and another time by administrative error. This meant that access to resources like the library and student IT accounts were temporarily blocked until payment was made each time, causing the student to miss classes and important course updates, as well as affecting their assessment completion and wellbeing.

How can City support students struggling to pay their tuition fee?

Our research shows that students don't choose to miss their tuition fee payments, but in fact challenges can arise that are outside of their control and interests, and student's financial situations can quickly change. The support to students therefore must adjust to these needs.

Students highlighted that their wellbeing should be central to the process of paying tuition fees and that the university should make available more options to support struggling students so they may continue their studies. In many of the case studies, there was a recurring theme that students in this situation were constantly worried about their financial state that affected their ability to focus on their studies and declined their general wellbeing.

“Sometimes it is the last £2000-£3000 pounds that poses the problem at the due date.”

100% of students agreed that a more student friendly fee payment scheme should be available to students paying for their tuition fees such as spreading out up to 10 payments in the year.

- The option of a more flexible and individualised payment plan for students funding their studies should be offered to all students. This can allow for more smaller interval payments agreed with the University and student, making payments more manageable for students to raise funds in the allocated time and reducing the burden of paying a larger sum at once.
- The research reveals that extenuating circumstances can arise that may affect student's financial ability to complete their tuition fee payments. Students highlighted that contingency payment plans should accommodate for such events that are out of student's control and as a result offer extensions or a grace period to complete their payment.

International students would like to see more tailored information when it comes to expenses involved for moving abroad and studying at City.

- International students stated a breakdown of estimated costs and expenses should be provided in their budget planning including Visa costs and IHS surcharge.
- On top of their high paying fees, international students would like to see the removal of additional university bank charges when transferring fees.

Students want better signposting to know what to do and where they can go for help if they fall into a situation that impacts their ability to pay their tuition fee.

- A signposting guide for students who self-fund their studies should be widely available including which team is best to contact if they may encounter issues in the payment process and what options are available if students find themselves in this situation.
- Financial advice in times of crisis should also be advertised widely, especially for mature and international students.
- Students highlighted that educational resources and information on financial planning, debt management and budgeting costs on essential and living expenses would be helpful for managing their finances.
- Increased access to internal and external financial support including widening eligibility to scholarships and bursaries as well as access to zero and low-interest loans was seen as a highly interested option to financially help students cover their costs. In particular the zero interest options available to students reflected on some students' religious belief while self-funding their tuition fees. The availability of these financial assistance options available to international students were limited depending on factors like their length of stay.

University flexible payment plans

So many universities have long moved on to adopting more student friendly fee schemes to boost their students' retention rate. City major dream is to continuously move people who at the lower wrung of the economic strata into becoming members of the top echelon of the society. For instance, the model used by the following universities is worth considering.

- Glasgow Caledonian University allows students to pay 75% of their fee in term one and 25% in term two in addition to a fee plan designed for students who may be financially distressed.
- The University of Birkbeck allow students to pay on monthly basis till graduation with the last instalment being in June.
- The University of Manchester allows students to pay one third of their fee at the first instance and the remaining through instalments by direct debit.
- The University of South Wales allows the payment of 50% at first and then setting up equal consecutive instalments thereafter on monthly basis.
- The University of Lincoln permits the payment of 50% at first and nine equal instalments later.
- The University of Teesside allow requires students to make an initial payment of £5000 and then seven equal instalments
- The University of Dundee allows students to make an initial payment of £3000 followed by seven equal instalments later by direct debit with charges up to £400 be made as penalty for default.
- The University of West England allows students to make payment in 3 to 6 instalments.
- The University of West Scotland allows students to make payment in seven instalments on monthly basis.