

## UNIVERSITY LIFE

VIDEO COMPREHENSION: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BtB6ZIsEwtE>

Watch the first 5 minutes of 'Off the Hook' episode 1, part 1, and answer questions i-xii.

- i) Who took Dan to the university campus?
- ii) What did she give him before she left?
- iii) Where did Becky spend her gap year?
- iv) Where did Danny spend last summer?
- v) How does Danny know Shane?
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- ix) Why do you think Danny wants to go to university?
- x) Why do you think the boy in the queue wants to go to university?
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VOCABULARY: 'Off the hook'      'Chill out'      'Full on'      'granddad'      wormfood  
A gap year      An inhaler      To make up a bed      Uni      school trips

DISCUSSION: Why did you go to university? Why do other people do it? What is university for?

LISTENING: What does Alain de Botton think universities should do?

DISCUSSION: What do you think universities should do?

READING COMREHENSION: British university fees

VIDEO DISCUSSION:

- i) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o-ghh5dqj2c>

Should university students pay for their tuition? If so, how much?

- ii) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UVJhvW0M8HA>

How much will English undergraduates have to pay for their tuition in the near future?

Why do British universities want more foreign students?

## DISCUSSION LANGUAGE

### 1) Sequencing Words:

*Firstly, secondly, thirdly, lastly.  
To begin with, moreover, furthermore*

### 2) Sentence Adverbs:

*Naturally, of course, actually, anyway, in fact, fortunately, unfortunately, in any case.*

### 3) Logical Connectives:

|                      |                          |                    |                |                     |
|----------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| <b>And</b>           | <b>Or</b>                | <b>But</b>         | <b>Because</b> | <b>As a result</b>  |
| <i>Plus</i>          | <i>alternatively</i>     | <i>however</i>     | <i>as</i>      | <i>therefore</i>    |
| <i>In addition</i>   | <i>on the one hand</i>   | <i>although</i>    | <i>since</i>   | <i>thus</i>         |
| <i>Not only that</i> | <i>on the other hand</i> | <i>by contrast</i> |                | <i>consequently</i> |
| <i>Also</i>          |                          | <i>whereas</i>     |                | <i>so</i>           |

### 4) Agreeing and Disagreeing:

- +     Definitely, Certainly, Of course, That's a good point, Yes, I agree with you, I suppose so.
- + / — I'm not sure, It depends, I don't know, Maybe, Perhaps.
- I don't think so, I'm not convinced, I don't agree, Of course not, You must be joking.

SUGGESTIONS: Shall we...? Why don't we...? What about...? How about...? Let's...

EXPLAINING: You see... In my opinion... If you ask me... I would say...

INVITING AN OPINION: What do you think? Do you agree? How does that sound?

SPECULATING: Maybe... Perhaps...

### 5) Don't forget to use Modal Verbs to express:

POSSIBILITY: could, may, might, can't.

OBLIGATION: should, ought to, must, mustn't, needn't.

SPECULATION: would.

PREDICTIONS: will / won't / should / shouldn't

# England's Poorest Students Will Finish University £57,000 in Debt

*British Prime Minister, Theresa May, in February 2018: "We now have one of the most expensive systems of university tuition in the world. The level of fees charged does not relate to the cost or quality of the course."*

*Recent graduate, Tara Paxman, in March 2018: "In April 2016 I owed the Student Loans Company £41,981.77. In my first year working I paid off £104 but gained £564 of interest. So, from April 2017 I owed £42,441.91. At my current salary, I will literally never pay it off."*



In September 2017, tuition fees in England rose to £9,250 per year. This means that students from the poorest 40% of families entering university for the first time will graduate with an average debt of around £57,000, according to a leading economic research institute, the Institute of Fiscal Studies (IFS). The abolition of the last maintenance grants will disproportionately affect the poorest students, while those from the richest 30% of households will need to borrow about £43,000.

So, how did we get from free university education (1962-1997) to the idea of a reasonable contribution to the cost of university tuition – the principle of Tony Blair's reform in 1998 – to today's Frankenstein's monster of £50,000-plus debts for graduates on modest salaries who can't remotely afford to pay back these sums, buy a house or start a family? And why did we give university Vice-Chancellors the power to undertake grandiose infrastructure projects and pay themselves hundreds of thousands of pounds, plus lavish expenses, in a decade when austerity has dominated every other public service?

40 years ago, seriously underfunded universities were trying to devise a survival strategy in response to Margaret Thatcher's savage cuts in public sector spending. In an act of semi-privatization, the Thatcher government removed controls on fees for international students. There were campus demonstrations, but this sensible deregulation soon established a vibrant market for students from overseas, giving higher education a vital source of non-state income. It also converted the Vice-Chancellors to the cause of fees for home students.

In 1997, Prime Minister Tony Blair arrived, with his mantra “education, education, education”. Vice-Chancellors responded by agitating for fees higher than the modest £1,000 per year which he introduced in 1998. Tony Blair’s head of policy persuaded him that he should create a new settlement for university funding – copying the Australian scheme of part-payment by students on a scale reflecting cost and benefit, with repayments made only after graduation through the tax system, with no interest. That way, concerns about access for poorer students could be met, while providing a vital new source of income for the universities.

In 2004, a new cap was set at £3,000, but the intention was that fees would vary between £1,000 and £3,000, depending on the cost and benefit of the individual course. So, those using expensive specialist equipment and facilities, such as Medicine and Engineering students would pay more, while those at Philosophy and Sociology would pay less. The government expected that this would enhance student choice while making students more demanding and universities more responsive.

Virtually none of this happened. The Vice-Chancellors formed a cartel and charged £3,000 for almost every course. Students continued to choose universities mostly based on where they could get in with their A-level grades. The quality of university teaching remained inconsistent, and often got worse as lecturers focused on their research ratings (upon which research funding was based) while neglecting their students, who had no choice but to pay. Nowadays, many students never see a professor from one month to the next, and produce even less work than they did at school.

When David Cameron’s government was elected in 2010, the Vice-Chancellors persuaded him that they needed even higher fees. Despite intense student opposition, Parliament voted to treble tuition fees as their first major act of legislation. There were protests and deep resentment as the Vice-Chancellors maintained their cartel and immediately increased fees from £3,000 to £9,000 for virtually every course. Congratulating themselves on their supposed entrepreneurial success, Vice-Chancellors increased their own pay and benefits as fast as they increased tuition fees, and are now earning salaries between £266,000 and £444,000. Newly-appointed lecturers, meanwhile, are paid by the hour from October to May and are not considered members of staff.

In 2017, the government made fees even more egregious by charging interest at 3% above the rate of inflation on student debt. In 2022, the government intervened to limit the surcharge to 6.3%. Even so, debt levels for new graduates are so high that the Institute for Fiscal Studies estimates that three-quarters of graduates will never be able to pay it all back. In 2023, Rishi Sunak’s Conservative government ruled that any student loan plus interest remaining 40 years after the graduate was due to start making repayments would be cancelled. In 2025, English tuition fees rose again to £9,275 per year.

#### READING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS: ARTICLE 1

- 1) How much did English students pay for university tuition in 1969 ?
- 2) How much did English students pay for university tuition in 1999 ?
- 3) How much did English students pay for university tuition in 2009 ?
- 4) How much did English students pay for university tuition in 2012 ?
- 5) How much did English students pay for university tuition in 2018 ?
- 6) How much will the poorest English students owe when they graduate next year ?
- 7) How much will the richest English students owe when they graduate next year ?
- 8) How much do British Vice-Chancellors earn ?
- 9) How do British universities spend the increased revenue they receive from higher tuition fees ?
  
- 10) Have higher university fees improved the employment prospects for university lecturers ?

#### READING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS: ARTICLE 2

- 1) What is the best title for this article ? (a) English University Fees (b) The Poor Pay More (c) Should University Education be Free ? (d) How Much Does a UK University Really Cost ?
  
- 2) How much do English university students pay for their tuition ?
  
- 3) How much do Welsh university students pay for their tuition ?
  
- 4) How much do Northern Irish university students pay for their tuition ?
  
- 5) How much do Scottish university students pay for their tuition ?
  
- 6) How does the British government help university students living in London ?
  
- 7) How does the British government help Irish university students from poorer families ?
  
- 8) When do English and Welsh university students have to start repaying their student loans ?
  
- 9) When do Irish and Scottish university students have to start repaying their student loans ?
  
- 10) How much interest do university students now have to pay on their loans ?

Now, read articles 1 and 2 again and underline the most important information in each paragraph.

## University Tuition Fees for English Undergraduates

Universities in England, Northern Ireland and Scotland can charge up to £9,275 a year for undergraduate tuition. The maximum Welsh universities can charge is £9,000 a year.

## Tuition Fee Loans

If you are planning to attend a UK university, you apply online to Student Finance England for a loan of up to £9,275. This will cover your tuition fees but you have to start repaying once you start earning over £21,000 a year. All students will repay 9% of their income when they are earning above this threshold, plus interest at 3% above the official inflation rate. If your income is below or drops below these amounts, you will not have to make repayments.

## Funding Your Living Costs

You can apply online to Student Finance England for a means-tested maintenance loan, to help with living costs. There are different amounts of maintenance loan available. This depends on household income, and where you will live during term-time.

| If you:  | You can receive: |
|--|------------------|
| Live at home   | Up to £7,097     |
| Live away from home and study in London  | Up to £11,000    |
| Live away from home and study outside of London (including Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales) | Up to £8,430     |
| Live and study abroad for at least one term as part of your course (including Ireland)           | Up to £9,654     |

The loan is paid into your bank account at the start of each term, once you've registered on your course.

## Welsh Students

Welsh students will also be required to pay £9,275 per year in tuition fees but they can apply for a **fee grant**, which will pay the remaining balance of your annual fees up to £5,000. Welsh students are not required to repay the **fee grant** following graduation.

Welsh students must start repaying their tuition fee loans once they start earning over £21,000 a year. All students will repay 9% of their income when they are earning above this threshold, plus interest at 3% above the official inflation rate. If your income is below or drops below these amounts, you will not have to make repayments.

## **Northern Irish Students**

Students from Northern Ireland studying in Northern Ireland have to pay £4,030 a year for tuition. Students from Northern Ireland studying in Wales pay £9,000 for tuition and students from Northern Ireland studying in England or Scotland must pay £9,275 for tuition.

### **Extra Funding**

Northern Irish students may be eligible to receive one of two grants, both up to £3,500. They do not have to repay them.

They are the:

- **Maintenance Grant** – You can receive this if your household income is £40,000 or less. It will decrease the amount of maintenance loan you receive.
- **Special Support Grant** – This is based on other criteria, such as being a single parent. It will not affect your maintenance loan.

If you receive either of these you may be entitled to receive a bursary. Contact your university to find out more. Bursaries and scholarships do not have to be paid back.

### **Repaying Your Loans**

Northern Irish students must start repaying their tuition fee loans once they start earning over £17,500 a year. All students will repay 9% of their income when they are earning above this threshold, plus interest at 3% above inflation. If your income is below or drops below these amounts, you will not have to make repayments.

## **Scottish Students**

**Scottish students going to university in Scotland** are charged up to £1,820 per year for tuition. The Student Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS) will pay this in full if you are eligible. You must reapply to SAAS every year of your course.

**Scottish students going to university in England, Northern Ireland or Wales** will be charged up to £9,250 per year for tuition at English and Northern Irish universities. At Welsh universities, they will be charged up to £9,000. Scottish students need to reapply online to SAAS every year for a loan to help with their fees.

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All British students' outstanding debts will be automatically cancelled after 40 years.

## WRITING TASK

Read through Articles 1 and 2 again, plus the attached graphs, and underline the most important information on each page. Now use this information plus your own opinions to write an article of your own entitled,

‘The Short-Term and Long-Term Effects of Raising University Fees in England in the 1990’s and 2020’s’

Don’t simply copy phrases from the two articles, use your own words. You can do this by,

- (i) using synonyms e.g. ‘unemployed’ instead of ‘jobless’, ‘grew rapidly’ instead of ‘rose sharply’;
- (ii) using negative expressions instead of positive ones or vice versa e.g. ‘more young mothers decided to go back to work’ becomes ‘increasingly, women with small children chose not to stay at home’;
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