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Alternative format, support and information

If you need this document in an alternative format, please [Contact Us](#) (visit www.open.ac.uk/contact), call us on +44 (0)300 303 5303, or get in touch with our student support teams via [StudentHome](#) if you are a current Open University student.

Contact us:

If you need support and guidance regarding this document, please contact northernireland@open.ac.uk or call us on +44 (0)29 9024 5025.

Previous versions: For changes made to this document please refer to the [change log](#) and for previous versions see the Fee Rules (Postgraduate Taught Study) on the [Fee Rules landing page](#).

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This document outlines the rules about fees, fee liabilities and fee refunds for postgraduate students eligible for the Northern Ireland fee. Eligibility requirements refer to the specific criteria that determine which fee you qualify for. For further information please refer to the [Fee Status Policy](#).
- 1.2. Fees may vary based on study level, modules, and when you start studying. This document also covers payment rules and policies if your circumstances change. You should read this document alongside the [Conditions of Registration](#), which you agree to upon registration. The Conditions detail your fee obligations and consequences of non-payment. For personal guidance, contact our [student support teams](#).
- 1.3. Throughout this document The Open University will be referred to as “**We**”, “**Us**” or “**Our**” and students will be referred to as “**You**” or “**Your**”.

2. Scope

What this policy covers

2.1 These Fee Rules apply to all students eligible for the Northern Ireland fee who are registered for a taught postgraduate module (either standalone or as part of a qualification) for the 2026/27 academic year. Future modules will follow the Fee Rules in effect at that time. Updates to this policy may be made to correct errors, enhance clarity, or comply with legal changes.

What this policy does not cover

2.2 These rules do not apply to the following:

- Postgraduate students who are not eligible for the Northern Ireland fee. See the [Fee Rules Policy](#) page for other related policies and the [Fee Status Policy](#) for details on the fee you will pay.
- Undergraduate or Integrated Masters qualifications. For the relevant Fee Rules for your nation, please see the [Fee Rules Policy](#) page.
- Modules that fall within any academic year other than 2026/27.
- Please see the [Fee Rules](#) in place during that academic year.
- For Fee Rules prior to the 2025/26 academic year, note that all nations were contained in a single document.
- Postgraduate Research Degrees. Please see the [Fee Rules Policy page](#) for the relevant policies.
- Apprenticeship programmes. Please contact the [Apprentice Enrolment and Support Team \(AEST\)](#).
- Non-credit bearing Short Courses. Please see [Conditions of Registration \(Short courses\)](#).
- Open University Microcredentials. Please see the [Conditions of Registration \(Microcredentials\)](#).

3. Setting and changing our fees

- 3.1 We allow students to study at varying intensities and over extended periods. As a result, fee structures, rules, and policies may change during your studies. For detailed information on fee setting, please refer to the [Fee Status Policy](#).
- 3.2 Fees for the relevant academic year are published on each module description in the [online prospectus](#) in the spring of the previous year (e.g., fees for the 2026/27 academic year will be published in Spring 2026).
- 3.3 Fee changes reflect the costs of delivering courses and services. This includes staffing and operational costs, changes in government funding or the national funding body for Higher Education in Northern Ireland ([Student Finance Northern Ireland](#)), inflation indices like the Consumer Price Index (CPI), Retail Price Index (RPI), changes in taxation and wage inflation.
- 3.4 Other fee changes may include the introduction, modification, or withdrawal of offers, discounts, and schemes to support study completion or further enrolment.
- 3.5 We will provide reasonable notice of any significant fee changes and when these changes will come into effect.

4. Understanding your fees and funding

Which fees apply to me?

- 4.1 **Registration:** You will be informed about your module fees, available payment methods, and enrolment deadlines before registration. Fees are in pounds sterling.
- 4.2 **Seasonal Academic Year (SAY):** When you start studying with us you are allocated a Seasonal Academic Year (SAY) of Autumn, Winter, Spring or Summer. Your SAY is determined by the start date of the first module you study with us towards your qualification. Your SAY may change if you take a break in your studies or if you change to a new qualification:

- **Autumn SAY:** If your first module starts between 1 August and 31 December, the first day of the Seasonal Academic Year is 1 September.
 - **Winter SAY:** If your first module starts between 1 January and 31 March, the first day of the Seasonal Academic Year is 1 January.
 - **Spring SAY:** If your first module starts between 1 April and 30 June, the first day of the Seasonal Academic Year is 1 April.
 - **Summer SAY:** If your first module starts between 1 July and 31 July, the first day of the Seasonal Academic Year is 1 July.
- 4.3 **Home address:** Your fee is based on your home address on the first day of the SAY in which your first module begins. Your home address is where you are ordinarily and lawfully resident and must not be temporary or work-related. For further details, please see the [Fee Status Policy](#).
- 4.4 **Residency criteria:** If your residency changes during your studies, your fee liability may be affected. Residency criteria are used to determine if you are eligible for the Northern Ireland fee. For more details, please refer to the [Fee Status Policy](#).
- 4.5 **Qualification status:** Your fee status will stay the same for the duration of your qualification if you remain resident in the UK and maintain your status as a continuing student. However, if you relocate outside of the UK or become a returning student, your fee liability will be reassessed. This will not affect the fees you are charged for the module(s) you are currently studying but will take effect for any future modules. For more details on the continuing and returning student criteria, and how any changes in your circumstances might affect your fees, please see the [Fee Status Policy](#).
- 4.6 **Standalone modules:** If you are not studying towards a qualification, your fee will be reassessed each time you register for a module.

Postgraduate tuition fee loan

- 4.7 **Eligibility criteria:** To find out the eligibility criteria please see the [Student Finance Northern Ireland \(SFNI\) website](#).
- 4.8 **Administration of the loan:** Loans are paid directly to us. If the loan does not cover your fees, you must pay the shortfall at registration.
- 4.9 We must confirm with SFNI that you are engaged with your studies. Upon this confirmation, SFNI will release your funding to us. Details on how your engagement is monitored and used are in the [Attendance and Participation Policy](#) and [Student Privacy Notice](#).

Funding for the Skill Up Scheme

- 4.10 If you are aged 18 or over and eligible to work in Northern Ireland, you can access a range of free accredited courses through the Skill Up scheme. These courses are fully funded by the Department for the Economy, allowing you to re-train and up-skill without any cost.
- 4.11 Please visit our [Skill Up information page](#) for more detailed information on eligibility, available courses, and how to apply.

5. Paying your fees

- 5.12 Your obligation to pay fees and the consequences of non-payment are detailed in the [Conditions of Registration](#).
- 5.13 Our acceptance of third-party funding (e.g., loans) depends on you meeting the funding body's eligibility requirements. Confirmation of eligibility is usually required before registration. If you are allowed to register before eligibility is confirmed, we may cancel your registration if we do not subsequently receive confirmation. You will be notified in advance if this is the case.

- 5.14 For sponsorships, a signed sponsorship agreement must be submitted as a promise to pay. We accept this agreement as confirmation of payment. If the sponsorship agreement is not honoured, we may cancel your registration and recover any fees due.
- 5.15 **OUSBA:** You may be able to pay your fees using a loan from The Open University Student Budget Account Ltd (OUSBA). If you choose to pay this way, OUSBA pays your fees to The Open University on your behalf, and you repay OUSBA either in a single sum or in monthly instalments. For more details, visit the [OUSBA website](#).
- 5.16 If payment or an agreed payment method is withdrawn or insufficient, we may cancel your registration and recover fees as detailed in the [Student Debt Policy](#).
- 5.17 If you owe us tuition fees, you may be prevented from registering for future study unless you can pay in advance or secure an accepted payment method.
- 5.18 If you need to repeat a module, you must register again and pay the full fee. You will pay the fee in place at the time you repeat the module.

6. Cancelling, deferring or withdrawing

Cancelling

- 6.1 **Right to cancel:** You have the right to cancel your registration for a module or qualification within 14 calendar days of the date of the email or letter confirming our acceptance of your registration.
- 6.2 **Cancellation before the module starts:** If you wish to cancel your registration after the 14-day period without incurring a fee liability, you must cancel before the module start date.
- 6.3 **Refund:** If either **paragraph 6.1 or 6.2** apply you will receive a full refund of fees paid or a waiver of any remaining fees.

- 6.4 Please follow the cancellation procedures set out in the [Changing Your Study Plans Policy](#).
- 6.5 If you cancel your registration in line with **paragraphs 6.1 and 6.2**, we will not request payment of any tuition fee loan from [SFNI](#). Any OUSBA loan agreement will be cancelled.

Deferrals and withdrawals

- 6.6 **Monitoring engagement:** We monitor your engagement in line with the [Attendance and Participation Policy](#). If you stop studying without following the deferral process outlined in the [Changing Your Study Plans Policy](#), your registration may be cancelled.
- 6.7 **Effective date for deferrals and withdrawals:** The date you defer or withdraw is crucial as it determines your eligibility for fee refunds or waivers and affects your academic record. Withdrawal will take effect from the date you contact us to withdraw, or from the date on which you last actively participated in your studies, whichever is earliest. **Paragraph 6.17** outlines the dates used to calculate your fee liability and any fee refunds or waivers.
- 6.8 **Notification:** You must inform us of your intention to defer or withdraw using the procedure in the [Changing Your Study Plans Policy](#). Failure to notify us makes you ineligible for fee refunds.
- 6.9 **Fee payment:** You must pay the agreed fees even if you subsequently defer or withdraw from your studies, unless you are entitled to a refund.
- 6.10 **Tuition fee loans:** If you pay with a tuition fee loan and then defer or withdraw, you will not be liable for fees due after the deferral or withdrawal date, and your loan liability will be adjusted accordingly.

- 6.11 **Refunds:** If you defer or withdraw after the module starts and more than 14 days after registration:
- Refunds or fee waivers are only available under certain conditions, which depend on your funding method and when you defer or withdraw from your qualification or module. See **paragraph 6.17** for more details.
 - You are not eligible for a refund of any grant funding received from [SFNI](#), other government agency, or The Open University.
- 6.12 **Final deferral date:** The final deferral date is the last date you can defer your studies. This is the last working day before you sit the exam or submit the end-of-module assessment (EMA) or, for modules that do not have an exam or EMA, the last working day before the submission deadline for the final piece of assessed work. Refer to [StudentHome](#) or your module website for specific deadlines.
- 6.13 **OUSBA loan deferral:** If you have paid your fees using an OUSBA loan, you must formally notify us of your intention to defer. Simply stopping your studies or payments without notification will leave you liable for the full fees and any payments due under your credit agreement. Any OUSBA Limited loan agreement will be adjusted so that it matches your module fee liability. OUSBA will contact you directly if there are any changes to your loan balance or payment schedule due to deferral.
- 6.14 **Withdrawal by us:** In rare cases where we need to withdraw a module, qualification, or programme of study, reasonable steps will be taken to ensure you can continue your studies as outlined in the [Student Protection Plan](#) and [Conditions of Registration](#). If continuation is not possible, the [Refund and Compensation Policy](#) outlines the criteria for refunds or compensation.

Fees paid by you, a third party, or a sponsor

- 6.15 If you or a third party or sponsor paid your fees (in whole or in part), you/they may be eligible for a refund as outlined in this **section 6**.

Changing modules

6.16 If you wish to change module, you must follow the process set out in the Changing Your Study Plans Policy. You must pay the difference if the new module costs more. If it costs less, you will receive a refund of the difference.

Fee liabilities

6.17 This section outlines your fee liability based on when you start your module and when you choose to withdraw or defer. The information is split into modules of less than 52 weeks in duration and modules of 52 weeks or more in duration. You only need to look at the section that applies to you.

Your fee liability for modules of less than 52 weeks duration

Autumn (Modules starting between 1 August and 31 December)

- **0% Fee liability:** Before your module starts or before the 14th day of your module.
- **25% Fee liability:** From the 14th day of your module to 31 December.
- **50% Fee liability:** From 1 January to 31 March (or final deferral date, whichever is earlier).
- **100% Fee liability:** From 1 April to the final deferral date. This means you will not be entitled to a refund.

Winter (Modules starting between 1 January and 31 March)

- **0% Fee liability:** Before your module starts or before the 14th day of your module.
- **25% Fee liability:** From the 14th day of your module to 31 March.
- **50% Fee liability:** From 1 April to 31 July (or final deferral date, whichever is earlier).
- **100% Fee liability:** From 1 August to the final deferral date. This means you will not be entitled to a refund.

Spring (Modules starting between 1 April and 30 June)

- **0% Fee liability:** Before your module starts or before the 14th day of your module.
- **25% Fee liability:** From the 14th day of your module to 31 July.
- **50% Fee liability:** From 1 August to 31 December (or final deferral date, whichever is earlier).
- **100% Fee liability:** From 1 January to the final deferral date. This means you will not be entitled to a refund.

Summer (Modules starting between 1 July to 31 July)

- **0% Fee liability:** Before your module starts or before the 14th day of your module.
- **25% Fee liability:** From the 14th day of your module to 31 December.
- **50% Fee liability:** From 1 January to 31 March (or final deferral date, whichever is earlier).
- **100% Fee liability:** From 1 April to the final deferral date. This means you will not be entitled to a refund.

Your fee liability for modules of 52 weeks or more duration

September – December (Module starting 1 September – 31 December)

- **0% Fee liability:** Before your module starts or before the 14th day of your module.
- **25% Fee liability:** From the 14th day of your module to 31 January
- **50% Fee liability:** From 1 February to 31 May (or final deferral date, whichever is earlier).
- **100% Fee liability:** From 1 June to the final deferral date. This means you will not be entitled to a refund.

January – March (Module starting 1 January – 31 March)

- **0% Fee liability:** Before your module starts or before the 14th day of your module.
- **25% Fee liability:** From the 14th day of your module to 30 April
- **50% Fee liability:** From 1 May to 31 August (or final deferral date, whichever is earlier).
- **100% Fee liability:** From 1 September to the final deferral date. This means you will not be entitled to a refund.

7. Discretionary Fee Credits and Refunds

Discretionary Fee Credits

- 7.1 **Discretionary Fee Credit:** A Discretionary Fee Credit is a discount awarded following you deferring or failing a module due to exceptional circumstances. The discount is applied to the fee of a future module presentation. It can only be used towards future study, and no cash alternative is available.
- 7.2 **Eligibility for a Discretionary Fee Credit:** You may be eligible for a Discretionary Fee Credit if you defer or fail a module due to unforeseen circumstances and can provide evidence of this where applicable. Examples of the supporting evidence we may require from you can be found on the Help Centre: [Applying for Discretionary Fee Credit or Refund](#). Unforeseen circumstances that can be considered are:
- death of a close family member, partner or dependent
 - prolonged incapacity of yourself or a close family member due to serious illness, accident or medical condition
 - disability
 - prolonged incapacity of yourself due to pregnancy, maternity/paternity, or surrogacy

- prolonged incapacity of yourself due to adoption
- prolonged incapacity of yourself due to gender reassignment
- a change in employment circumstances which means you cannot continue to study due to the extreme nature of the work
- maladministration by us
- a change in caring responsibilities
- other serious exceptional circumstances beyond your control

7.3 **Amount:** A Discretionary Fee Credit may be awarded for up to 100% of the fee liability incurred for the module you have deferred from or failed. If the Discretionary Fee Credit does not cover the full cost of your module when you return to study, you must pay any additional module fees due.

7.4 **Time limit:** Discretionary Fee Credits can be used towards any module starting within 13 months of your deferred or failed module's start date. If you want to study the deferred or failed module again and the next available start date is beyond this period, the Discretionary Fee Credit can still be used. Unused Discretionary Fee Credits expire after this period with no refund given. Discretionary Fee Credits cannot be used for Microcredentials or Apprenticeship Programmes.

7.5 In exceptional circumstances, permission can be given for a Discretionary Fee Credit to be used up to 25 months after the start date of the module you deferred from. Contact our [student support teams](#) for more details.

7.6 **Usage:** A Discretionary Fee Credit can only be used once. If you use a Discretionary Fee Credit in full or part payment and then defer or withdraw, you will not normally be eligible for another Discretionary Fee Credit for that module.

7.7 **Third-party payments:** If a third party paid your fees, the Discretionary Fee Credit will be credited to you.

- 7.8 **Failing on module T802:** If you are registered on module T802 and fail the first Tutor Marked Assignment (TMA01), you may be eligible to defer this module and receive a Discretionary Fee Credit of 25%. This credit is only available if you have incurred fee liability of at least 50%. If you have incurred a fee liability of 25% or below, no credit will be available. You must inform us of your decision to defer within 28 calendar days of us contacting you about your marked TMA01.
- 7.9 **Failing a module:** If you fail a required module but have already started a dissertation module and incurred at least 50% fee liability for this module, you will be eligible for a Discretionary Fee Credit of 25%. This applies to resit, resubmissions, and postponements. Deferral requests must be submitted within 28 calendar days of the fail result being published.
- 7.10 **Applying for a Discretionary Fee Credit:** If you believe you are eligible for a Discretionary Fee Credit, visit the Help Centre: [Applying for Discretionary Fee Credit or Refund](#) or contact our [student support teams](#) to apply. You will receive a written outcome from us within 10 working days.
- 7.11 **Application deadline:** You must submit your application for a Discretionary Fee Credit within 13 months of the start date of the module you have deferred from or failed.

Discretionary Fee Refunds

- 7.12 **Discretionary Fee Refund:** A Discretionary Fee Refund is the refund of fees already incurred for a module. It is only given when exceptional circumstances mean you are unable to return to study at all.

7.13 **Eligibility for a Discretionary Fee Refund:** A Discretionary Fee Refund can only be considered under these conditions:

- Death of a registered or enrolled student.
- Unforeseen prolonged and serious illness of you or a close family member, preventing you from returning to study within 25 months of the module start date for the module you deferred from.
- Serious maladministration by us which has led to you wanting to stop studying and this has been jointly agreed with us.

7.14 **Amount:** A Discretionary Fee Refund may be awarded for up to 100% of the fee liability incurred for the module you have deferred from or failed.

7.15 Any Discretionary Fee Refund approved will be returned to the original method of payment. Where a third party has paid your fees, for example sponsorship, the fees will be returned to them.

7.16 **Applying for a Discretionary Fee Refund:** If you believe you are eligible for a Discretionary Fee Refund, visit the Help Centre: [Applying for Discretionary Fee Credit or Refund](#) or contact our [student support teams](#) to apply. You will receive a written outcome from us within 10 working days.

7.17 **Application deadline:** You must submit your application for a Discretionary Fee Refund within 13 months of the start date of the module you have deferred from or failed.

7.18 **Exceptional awards:** The Vice-Chancellor's Delegate may approve exceptional awards for Discretionary Fee Credit or Refund cases outside the normal criteria.

8. Additional costs

8.1 You may incur extra costs when studying, such as for a computer, internet access, travel to tutorials and set books. This list is not exhaustive. Financial help may be available for low-income students. Contact our [student support teams](#) or see the [Study costs funding](#) page for more information.

- 8.2 If you register for a module with a residential school, you are responsible for any additional expenses you may incur to attend. This includes the cost of travel to the residential school, accommodation and meals provided during attendance at the residential school. You will be informed of any extra costs before you register, including when and how these must be paid.
- 8.3 Students studying modules with a residential school may be required to contact an external provider directly to book their place and make payment. Further information is available on the module description on the [online prospectus](#).
- 8.4 You do not need to pay a fee for your resit examinations, postponed resit examinations, or for resubmitting your End-of-Module Assessments.

Related policies and legislation

- [Assessment Banking Rules](#)
- [Attendance and Participation Policy](#)
- [Changing Your Study Plans Policy](#)
- [Conditions of Registration](#)
- [Fee Status Policy](#)
- [Equality and Diversity Statement](#)
- [Refund and Compensation Policy](#)
- [Safonau'r Gymraeg \(Welsh Language Standards\)](#)
- [Student Charter](#)
- [Student Complaints and Appeals Procedure](#)
- [Student Debt Policy](#)
- [Student Protection Plan](#)

Feedback

If you have any feedback on this policy please email student-policy-compliance@open.ac.uk.

Charity statement

The Open University is incorporated by Royal Charter (RC 000391), an exempt charity in England and Wales and a charity registered in Scotland (SC 038302). The Open University is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority in relation to its secondary activity of credit broking.

About this Document

Summary of Significant Changes since last version

Below are the significant changes from the previous version of this document:

- Section 7 updated to improve clarity and readability. It has been reorganised into two subsections separating discretionary fee credits and fee refunds. No change to content.
- Paragraph 8.2 updated to confirm you will be informed of any additional residential school costs before you register.

Document information

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