

Higher quality and choice : the charter for higher education / Department for Education.

Contributors

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*h*igher quality and choice

THE CHARTER
FOR
HIGHER
EDUCATION



JA THE STANDARD

DFE

DEPARTMENT FOR
EDUCATION



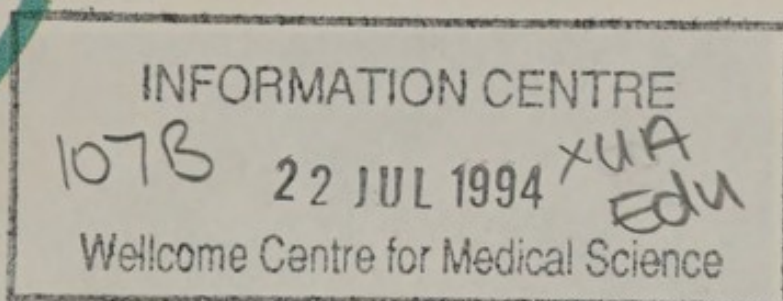
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“ ...everyone has the right to expect good service from higher education. Better information and improved choice will help everyone make the most of what universities and colleges offer. ”

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Universities and colleges offer full-time or part-time courses (or other programmes of study) of higher education, at a level beyond GCE A-level and its vocational equivalents, for students from about 18 onwards. They also provide research and consultancy services for employers and others, and services for the local community.

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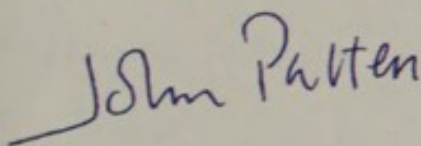


Secretary of State

This Charter sets out what is being done to ensure high standards of service in higher education. Those standards are mainly the responsibility of universities and colleges themselves. But some other bodies also provide services (such as student grants and loans and the national admissions system).

The Charter tells you how all these bodies respond to the needs of the customers of higher education. Those customers vary a great deal: students of all ages, full-time and part-time; a wide range of employers looking for recruits, for continuing education for their employees and for other services; and those who live or work around universities and colleges. All have different needs and priorities. The Charter explains how these bodies are making everyone more aware of what is provided for the large amount of public money that goes into higher education. It also points out the steps that are being taken to secure better value for money, for example in the way that quality will affect funding for courses.

Universities and colleges are more and more aware of the need to deliver high-quality services, responding to the needs and demands of customers. This Charter shows you how much has been achieved for you and how much more work is in hand to do even better in the future.



JOHN PATTEN

What this Charter

This Charter explains the standards of service that students, employers and the general public can expect from universities and colleges and other bodies involved in higher education in England. This includes those bodies which provide financial help for students.¹ The Government expects each university and college to set down and publicise the standards of service it provides.

At the back of the Charter you will find names and addresses to help you.

Customers of universities and colleges also have responsibilities and the Charter reminds you of some of them. But the focus is on the meeting of **your** legitimate needs. If you are not satisfied with the service you receive, the Charter explains what you can do to get it put right.

All publicly-funded universities and colleges can apply for a Charter Mark which is awarded for excellence in delivering public services. (Details of the Charter Mark Scheme are available from the Citizen's Charter Unit. Contact them on 071-270 6343).

What this Charter promises you

If you are considering becoming a student, you should receive clear and accurate information about:

- universities and colleges and the courses they offer;
- the usual entry requirements;
- the quality of what they provide;
- the residential accommodation available; and
- any facilities for people with disabilities or learning difficulties.

When you apply for a place, your application should be handled fairly and efficiently.

If you apply for financial help, you should receive full and accurate information about what is available. Once you become a

student, you should get prompt payment of grants, loans and any available 'access funds' if you are eligible.

Your university or college should explain the aims and structure of your course. You should be able to register your views about your course. You should receive a high standard of teaching, guidance and counselling. There should be proper arrangements for student security and safety.

The Government has also announced proposals to reform student unions, replacing automatic involvement with an opt-in system; all students will still have access to a range of core student union services. The Government will seek Parliament's approval for these reforms. The Government's plans will also give you the right of appeal to an outside authority if you think your student union has acted unfairly.

At all times you are entitled to equal treatment regardless of your sex or ethnic background.

If you are an employer, you should receive information about what graduates and holders of diplomas have been taught and

can do; and clear explanations about the purpose of work placements and the arrangements for supervising students. Names of the people to contact should be available and you should receive prompt responses to any queries. You are also entitled to ask for contracts for any research or consultancy work you ask the university or college to do.

If you live near to a university or college, you should know what facilities are open to the public and at what charge.

If the standard of service you receive is poor, there are steps you can take to get it put right.

(1) Separate Charters cover Scotland and Wales.



*S*tudents

This Part of the Charter applies to potential and current students of universities and colleges of higher education in England, including those from elsewhere in the UK and those ordinarily resident overseas.

If you are considering becoming a student:

You should receive clear and accurate information about universities and colleges and the courses they offer including the normal entry requirements. The following are available in many schools, colleges, universities, public libraries and careers offices:

- a prospectus for each university and college;
- two books published by the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS)¹: a handbook listing all courses and a fuller book called ‘University and College Entrance’ with more information including the usual entry requirements. Other commercial guides are available. (Many universities and colleges now take into account previous experience and non-traditional qualifications when accepting students. This will be made clear in their prospectuses);
- the Graduate Teacher Training Registry (GTTR) (same address as UCAS) ‘Guide for Applicants’ covering postgraduate teacher training courses; and
- a computer database called ECCTIS which provides up-to-date information on courses and vacancies. The address for further information is on page 22.

You should know how well different universities and colleges are performing.

The Higher Education Quality Council² will regularly audit the quality assurance systems of each university and college. Reports will be available from the Quality Council, and universities and colleges can be expected to include in their prospectuses information on when an audit last took place and on the



availability of recent or forthcoming audit reports. The Quality Council will look to universities and colleges to deal with any serious problems identified in the reports.

The Higher Education Funding Council for England ² will also publish regular reports on the quality of education which, over time, will build up to a wealth of information. The Funding Council will aim to make sure that any serious problems identified in the reports are put right by the universities or colleges involved. Lists of reports will be available from schools, colleges, public libraries and careers offices. Reports will be available from universities and colleges. You can also get copies from the Funding Council.

For the future, the Funding Council will arrange for the publication of information about the performance of universities and colleges, including degree results and the number of graduates who gain employment.

(1) UCAS combines the former UCCA and PCAS admissions systems. The address is on page 20.

(2) The Higher Education Quality Council checks that institutions have satisfactory quality assurance systems for controlling the quality of their educational provision. The Higher Education Funding Council will assess the actual quality of education provided. Both Councils publish their findings in reports. Addresses are on page 20.

*S*tudents



You should know what residential accommodation is available in and around a university or college.

Universities and colleges should set out in prospectuses or other booklets what accommodation they themselves provide, including that reserved for first-year students. They may also give information on what private accommodation is generally available and the price range.

All universities and colleges have student accommodation offices. These provide information on the availability of accommodation owned or managed by the university or college and may be able to help in finding accommodation in the private sector.

You should know what facilities are provided for students with disabilities. You may be able to get special financial help.

Universities and colleges should explain their policies for providing access to students with disabilities or learning difficulties. They should tell you about any extra support that is

available, such as extra staff or equipment, and any arrangements to cater for people with physical disabilities, including access to buildings.¹

If you are entitled to a 'mandatory award',² you may qualify for one or more disabled students' allowances and to help with travel expenses. Your Local Education Authority (LEA) may also make a payment if you are eligible for a 'discretionary award'. If you take a loan, you may qualify for special repayment terms. You may also be able to get help from social services funds. Contact your LEA and social services department (see page 20).

When you apply for a place

Your application for a place should be handled efficiently and fairly.

If you want to apply for a part-time course you should do so direct to universities and colleges. This procedure also applies to most postgraduate courses. Universities and colleges will develop and publicise their own targets for handling applications.

There are central admissions arrangements for undergraduate full-time and sandwich courses (and **some** postgraduate courses) in all universities and colleges. For most courses, you should make your applications to UCAS.³ The Art and Design Admissions Registry (ADAR) handles applications for many art and design courses.⁴ UCAS manages the GTTR which handles applications for postgraduate teacher training courses. These central arrangements are designed to make sure that those people who are suitably qualified are matched as fairly as possible with the available places on courses.

(1) You can also get advice from SKILL on the facilities provided for students with disabilities. The address is on page 22.

(2) For an explanation of these terms, and further information including whether you can claim for help, see 'Student Grants and Loans'. It is a free Government booklet with details of the grants, fees and loans schemes and other main types of financial help. Page 20 tells you how to get a copy.

(3) UCAS combines the former UCCA and PCAS admissions systems. The address is on page 20.

(4) Address on page 20.

Students

The standard arrangements allow those applying to choose a number of universities and colleges throughout the United Kingdom. The price charged for applications will be reviewed regularly. UCAS and ADAR are developing performance indicators for their operations, which will be published.

UCAS will make special arrangements from September 1994 (for courses beginning in or after September 1995) for those who wish to make a single application, through UCAS, to one university or college. The price charged will be less than for the standard arrangements.

Many universities and colleges give you the opportunity to visit and discuss your requirements before you need to reach a final decision on accepting a place.

If you apply for financial help

If you live in England or Wales, are on a qualifying full-time higher education course (most first degrees and diplomas and some equivalent courses) and you are personally eligible,¹ you are entitled to the following:

- ◆ A 'mandatory award' from your LEA. This includes tuition fees (usually paid in full), a means-tested grant towards living costs (which depends on the income of you and your parents or spouse) and extra allowances where they apply, such as for any dependants you have. The awards section of your LEA will tell you how to apply for a 'mandatory award'.
- ◆ A Government-funded student loan (see page 11, address on page 20).

Even if you are not entitled to a mandatory award or student loan, you may still be considered for the following:

- ◆ A 'discretionary award' from your LEA. These may be available for certain courses at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The awards section of your LEA will explain the rules for these. These rules may differ from LEA to LEA.
- ◆ A competitive postgraduate award. Your university or college will tell you whether your course is in a postgraduate award scheme and how to apply.

- ◆ Other sources of finance such as university scholarships or grants which may be available from charitable trusts. Your university or college may be able to tell you about these.

If you are in severe financial difficulty while on a full-time or sandwich course, you can be considered for help from your university or college through a hardship grant from their 'access fund'. Your college or university will tell you about the rules for 'access funds' and how to apply.



Part-time students, students with disabilities, or students who are lone parents may be entitled to certain social security benefits.

Contact your local social security benefit office for details or Freephone 0800 666 555.

You may apply for a Career Development Loan if you are on a qualifying vocational training course and are personally eligible.

Freephone 0800 585 505 for details.

(1) For an explanation of these terms including the UK or EC residence requirements, and for further information including whether you can claim for help, see 'Student Grants and Loans'. Students who normally live in Scotland should see 'Student Grants in Scotland'. Page 20 tells you how to get copies.

*S*tudents

You have a right to expect prompt and efficient service.

If you are a new student applying for a **mandatory** award, you should do so by your LEA's published deadline (check this deadline with your LEA – it is often 30 June for courses starting in the autumn, but it can be in May or even earlier). If you do so, and give any extra information they ask for on time, then in return you have a right to expect your LEA:

- to tell you quickly (normally within 3 weeks but it can take longer if your case is not straightforward) if you are clearly not entitled to an award, giving the reasons and explaining where you can appeal;
- if you are entitled, to offer you an award that will depend on your place at university or college being confirmed and taken up;
- to explain how much you will get, and to send your first instalment of any grant at the start of your first term and payments at the start of each term after that;
- to pay the tuition fees on time, direct to the university or college (either by the date set in the Regulations or within one month of receiving a valid fee invoice, whichever is later);
- to deal with any queries quickly (normally within 10 working days unless they are complicated or it is a peak period); and
- to re-assess your grant quickly if your circumstances change, for example if your parents' income falls significantly. (This can take up to 3 weeks but may take longer if the LEA needs further details from you or your parents).

If there is a delay, for example because you applied late or there is a problem, you can expect the LEA:

- to warn you about the difficulty; and
- if you are clearly eligible for a grant, to make a provisional payment where necessary at the start of the term and pay any amount still owed as soon as possible after sorting out the problem.

You have a right to expect a similar standard of service in later years of your course if:

- you apply to renew your award before the LEA's published deadline; and
- your university or college confirms that you have attended satisfactorily.

If you are applying for a **discretionary** award, some of the arrangements may be different – check with your LEA.

If you want a **student loan**, ask your university or college for an



application form and 'eligibility certificate'. This certificate confirms that you meet the conditions for a loan. In most cases, you can expect the certificate to be ready within 14 calendar days of your asking for it. Send the application form to the Student Loans Company who should pay you within 21 calendar days of receiving the completed application form. They will also help you if you have any queries.

Students

If you apply for **access fund** help before the deadline set by your university or college, you should receive a decision within a reasonable time and be paid quickly. Universities and colleges have different procedures for this and some allocate funds only once a term. But in most cases you can expect a decision within 4 weeks.

You can expect similar standards of service from other organisations that help students with public funds (e.g. Department of Health bursaries).

Your university or college

You should know in advance how your course will be taught and assessed. You should receive a high standard of teaching and research supervision. This includes effective management of your learning by teaching and other staff. You should also be given the opportunity to register your views. Universities and colleges should do the following:

- ◆ Explain the structure of each course they provide (including details of any requirements or opportunities for work or other placements), its aims, the qualification you will receive and any opportunities to proceed to further study.
- ◆ Offer opportunities for students to take part in making decisions about academic matters. The views of students will be taken into account by the Funding Council and will be included in reports (see page 20 for address).
- ◆ Explain the academic regulations and disciplinary procedures.
- ◆ Explain for overseas students any particular facilities and requirements that may be relevant to them.
- ◆ Explain the range of study patterns available. In some universities and colleges that operate 'credit accumulation and transfer' (CAT), students may have a greater choice over what they study. They may be able to transfer between courses and between universities and colleges without repeating work or levels of study.



- ◆ Explain the teaching and learning facilities available, including libraries, information technology and other resources.

Universities and colleges have arrangements for assessing the performance of staff in their duties. More and more universities and colleges are encouraging high quality by including a performance-related part in staff pay. The Funding Council will also take the quality of education into account in their funding allocations.

To get the most out of teaching and learning, students themselves have certain responsibilities.

For example, they should take part in seminars, attend lectures and practicals on time and hand work in promptly. Some universities and colleges are setting out responsibilities of institutions and students in 'learner agreements'.

*S*tudents



You should receive well-informed guidance from your tutors and careers staff and appropriate access to counsellors.

In your first few days, your university or college should make you familiar with the services available on site. These should include proper counselling for personal problems, medical help, arrangements for student security and safety and careers advice. It should also explain what facilities there are for catering and recreation, including sport.

The Government has proposed new rights for you in connection with your student union.

At present, most students have no choice over their collective involvement in their campus student union. The Government plans to change the law to give students greater freedom of choice. Under these proposals, all students will continue to have access to core student services, such as welfare, catering, sport and representation within the university or college. For student union activities outside the core, students will be able to choose

what collective involvements they want, joining in by subscribing voluntarily. All student unions at campus level will be governed by codes of practice which will protect students from any unfair practices or political bias by their campus union.

Equal opportunities

You are entitled to equal treatment, regardless of your sex or ethnic background.

The law protects all people from sexual or racial discrimination; and your marital status should not affect the way you are treated.

Universities and colleges should also set out their policies on equal opportunities. This includes the steps they are taking to encourage under-represented groups, for example women in areas such as science, engineering and technology.



*I*f you are an **employer** you may recruit graduates or holders of diplomas. You may also buy continuing education, training or research from a university or college. As well as the information and services set out in the first Part of the Charter, you should receive extra services as set out below:

If you recruit graduates and holders of diplomas, you should know what they have learned and what they can do.

Each university and college should set up channels of communication with employers to keep them fully informed about its approach to teaching and learning, particularly the way students are taught transferable skills like problem-solving and effective communication.



cal community

If you want to buy services, you should receive a fast response to your queries.

Universities and colleges should list the people to contact for enquiries and make sure that detailed matters are handled quickly. If you write a letter, you should receive a reply or an acknowledgement that your enquiry is being considered within 10 working days.

If you are buying education or training for your employees, you should know how much it will cost, the time it will take, any qualification to be awarded and the possibilities for further qualifications through more study or training.

If you are buying research or other consultancy work, you are entitled to ask for a contract that sets out how much it will cost, your responsibilities and the responsibilities of the university or college for using the results.

If you offer work placements, you should receive a clear statement that sets out your responsibilities and the responsibilities of the university or college for supervising the placement.

Whatever your involvement with higher education, you can make your views known.

If you have comments on a service provided by a university or college, or if you feel they should be providing extra services, contact the institution. Your letter should be answered within 10 working days. If you prefer, you can phone.

The local community

If you live in or near a university or college, you should know what facilities are available to you.

Universities and colleges should publicise the facilities that are open to the public, any charges they make and the times of opening.

This Charter sets out the standards you can expect from universities and colleges and other bodies involved in higher education. **If you are not satisfied with a service you have received, you can take action.**

First, contact the university, college or other body responsible for delivering the service. Explain the problem. You can expect a reply within 10 working days.

If you are not satisfied with the outcome, there are further steps you can take.

Complaints about your LEA (for example about grants)

If you think your LEA has treated you unfairly – for example, if it has been extremely slow in processing your grant application or has made serious administrative errors – you can complain to your council officials or your local councillor.



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You can also write to the Commissioner for Local Administration in England ('Local Government Ombudsman' – see addresses on page 22). The Commissioner for your area can investigate complaints and seek redress for any injustice, for example by recommending that your LEA pays you compensation.

Complaints about student loans

If you are not satisfied with the performance of the Student Loans Company, you can ask the company's independent assessor to investigate. You can contact the assessor through the company (address on page 20).

Complaints about universities and colleges

If your complaint is about a service provided by a university or college (including information it has provided or its performance in processing your student loan) and you are a student there, you can complain through its internal complaints system. Details are provided to new students and are available from the university or college.

For serious disputes which cannot be resolved through the internal complaints procedure, some universities or colleges provide for someone outside the institution, normally a senior judge, to review the case. You can get details from the university or college.

If your complaint is specifically about misleading information in a prospectus, and you are not satisfied with the outcome of the internal complaints system, you can contact the Higher Education Quality Council (address on page 20).

Complaints about student unions

If you feel you have been unfairly treated by a campus student union then, under the Government's proposed reforms, you will be able to appeal to an outside authority.

*N*ames and addresses

HOW TO MAKE CONTACT

Universities and colleges are listed in telephone directories. If you want information on admissions, contact the Admissions Officer.

Local Education Authorities are the local authorities which deal with education. These are county councils except in Greater London, Greater Manchester, Merseyside, the West Midlands, Tyne & Wear, South Yorkshire and West Yorkshire where they are the district or borough councils. Addresses and telephone numbers are in telephone directories. If you are not sure, ask at your local library.

Social Services Departments are listed under the appropriate local authority in telephone directories.

The **Department for Education** can be contacted at Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BT. Tel: 071 925 5000

The **Higher Education Quality Council** can be contacted at 344-354 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1X 8BP. Tel: 071 837 2223

The **Higher Education Funding Council for England** can be contacted at Northavon House, Coldharbour Lane, Bristol BS16 1QD. Tel: 0272 317317

Information on **student grants and loans, fees and other main types of funding** can be found in 'Student Grants and Loans', a free Government booklet. It is available in schools, colleges, public libraries or direct from the Department for Education, Publications Centre, PO Box 2193, London E15 2EU. Tel: 081 533 2000

'Student Grants in Scotland' is available from the Scottish Office Education Department Awards Branch, Gyleview House, 3 Redheughs Rig, South Gyle, Edinburgh EH12 9HH. Tel: 031 244 5823

'The Student Loans Scheme' is a free leaflet with further details on loan terms. Copies available from your college or university or the Student Loans Company Ltd., 100 Bothwell Street, Glasgow G2 7JD. Tel: 0345 300900

You can get information on the national admissions system from The **Universities and Colleges Admissions Service** at Fulton House, Jessop Avenue, Cheltenham, Glos GL50 3SH. Tel: 0242 222444

The **Art and Design Admissions Registry** can be contacted at Penn House, 9 Broad Street, Hereford HR4 9AP. Tel: 0432 266653

*N*ames and addresses

Information on support for post graduate studies can be obtained from the appropriate Research Council for science-based subjects and from The British Academy for the humanities. The addresses are listed below.

Agricultural and Food Research Council (AFRC)

Polaris House
North Star Avenue
Swindon SN2 1UH.
Tel: 0793 413200

Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)

Polaris House
North Star Avenue
Swindon SN2 1UJ.
Tel: 0793 413000

Medical Research Council (MRC)

20 Park Crescent
London W1N 4AL.
Tel: 071 636 5422

Natural Environment Research Council (NERC)

Polaris House
North Star Avenue
Swindon SN2 1EU.
Tel: 0793 411500

Science and Engineering Research Council (SERC)

Polaris House
North Star Avenue
Swindon SN2 1ET.
Tel: 0793 411000

The British Academy

20-21 Cornwall Terrace
London NW1 4QP.
Tel: 071 487 5966

Overseas students may obtain information about study in the United Kingdom from The British Council through its worldwide network of offices. British embassies and consulates can provide details. Overseas students in the UK may contact:

The British Council

Information Centre
Medlock Street
Manchester M15 4PR.
Tel: 061 957 7000

UK Council for Overseas Student Affairs (UKCOSA)

9-17 St Albans Place
London N1 0NX.
Tel: 071 226 3762

*N*ames and addresses

Commission for Local Administration in England ('Local Government Ombudsman'). Local Commissioners are responsible for particular areas of the country:

Greater London, Kent, Surrey,
East and West Sussex

Dr D C M Yardley
21 Queen Anne's Gate
London SW1H 9BU.
Tel: 071 222 5622

The South West, the West,
the South, East Anglia and most
of Central England

F G Laws
The Oaks
Westwood Way
Westwood Business Park
Coventry CV4 8JB.
Tel: 0203 695999

The East Midlands and
the North of England

Mrs P A Thomas
Beverley House
17 Shipton Road
York YO3 6FZ.
Tel: 0904 630151

There are also Local Commissioners for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Contact your local council for details.

The National Bureau for Students with Disabilities (SKILL) can be contacted at 336 Brixton Road, London SW9 7AA.
Tel: 071 274 0565

ECCTIS can be contacted at Fulton House, Jessop Avenue, Cheltenham, Glos. GL50 3SH.



For further copies of this Charter or the
Charter for Further Education call FREE on
0800 24 23 24 (until 31 March 1994).
Or, at any time, write to

Charters, FREEPOST EDO 3138,
London E15 2BR.
(No stamp required)

The Charters are also available in the
following languages:- Urdu, Bengali,
Gujerati, Hindi, Punjabi, Chinese, Turkish,
Vietnamese and Greek.

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of managed forests where for every tree cut down at least one more tree is planted so
replenishing the Earth's resources.*



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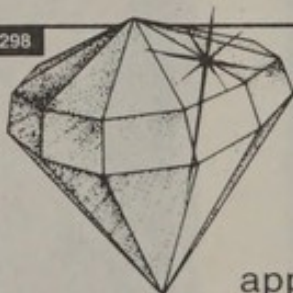
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**Crystal
Mark**

Clarity
approved by
Plain English Campaign