



## **Guideline on extra contributions in addition to tuition fees**

laid down by the Executive Board on 5 July 2016 and amended on 15 March 2022.

### **a. Starting points of UU**

Following his or her registration, a student is entitled to certain provisions such as participation in a course of study, sitting examinations and the use of student facilities and study supervision. In addition, students must finance a number of things themselves, such as books and course materials. With regard to the students' own contributions in addition to tuition fees, Utrecht University adopts the following starting points:

1. A student's own contribution should not form a barrier to following a course of study;
2. Courses should make clear what provisions form part of the course and are provided free of charge, and what provisions students are required to finance themselves;
3. UU offers a range of options in the courses it provides. It is reasonable to expect students to contribute towards the costs of extra-curricular activities they have chosen themselves;
4. The course information must be transparent about the level of the contribution that students will have to make themselves;
5. One of the cornerstones of the UU educational model is commitment: UU expects students to participate actively in their course of study, demonstrate sufficient commitment to the courses and fulfil their obligations of effort. This also means that students must ensure that they have available to them the study materials they need for active participation in the educational activities.

When charging extra costs, the following three questions must be asked concerning the course:

1. May extra costs be charged, and/or is it reasonable to do so?  
A clarification is given under c. concerning the rules that apply for the various cost types.
2. Is the amount of the student's contribution reasonable, and is it sufficiently justified: is the contribution asked for in proportion to the provision delivered and the associated costs?  
This question is important if the university itself charges costs for items such as readers. If the student himself/herself chooses where to buy a laptop, for example, this is not so important. However, question 3 must then be taken into account, namely:
3. Is the total of the extra contributions for the course still affordable for a student relying on student finance?  
Student finance includes a component for books and course materials (most recently around 700 euros a year). The standard amount that Nibud uses for course books is between 700 and 1,000 euros a year. The total of extra contributions should therefore preferably not exceed 1,000 euros a year.

### **b. Statutory framework**

To be enrolled, students must pay tuition fees. Section 7.50 (1) of the Higher Education and Research Act (WHW) and the ministerial regulation based on it "Other contributions of students in higher education" state which other contributions besides tuition fees may be charged to the student. It states that students' own contributions may be requested for:

1. Costs related to enrolment (or rather admission to the degree programme), namely for:
  - the administrative work related to valuing a foreign diploma of the prospective student: maximum 100 euros;
  - testing the language level to assess whether the prospective student with a foreign diploma meets the minimum required language level; maximum cost covering;
  - conducting the admission examination in the context of a colloquium doctum and sufficiency and deficiency tests, if the prospective student does not meet the prior education requirements or does not hold a diploma entitling him to admission: maximum cost-covering.
2. costs resulting from the special nature of the degree programme in terms of participation in practicals, educational excursions within the study programme and workshops within the study programme. The own contribution may at most cover the costs. Furthermore, the institutional board must offer a free alternative, unless no free alternative is possible as a substitute.
3. costs related to registering for an examination after the regular registration period for this examination: maximum 20 euros.
4. costs directly related to the provision of a replacement certificate or a replacement statement in case of change of name or gender: maximum the cost covering costs

The legal rules deal with in which cases charges may be levied for the university's primary tasks. In addition, students are supposed to bear the cost of some educational supplies and facilities themselves. There are no regulations on that in the legal rules. However, various Ministers of Education, Culture and Science have listed in answers to parliamentary questions and in letters which costs are to be borne by the student<sup>1</sup>. The Ministers did not, however, give any exhaustive list of what contributions are or are not permitted. It is for the institutions to provide greater clarity on this point.

This guideline is designed to do just this: it offers the faculties a point of reference for the question as to when students may be asked to pay a contribution and specifies which starting points Utrecht University takes in this respect. Deviations from this are possible in highly specific situations, following permission by the Executive Board, in so far as this is permitted by law.

### **Financial provision for students unable to pay costs**

Article 7.50 WHW contains the instruction to institutions to make financial provision for non-EU/EEA students (those who do not belong to one of the groups of persons referred to in article 2.2 of the Wet studiefinanciering 2000 (Student Finance Act 2000) or do not have the Surinamese nationality) for whom the costs related to admission to the study programme or the costs arising from the special nature of the study programme with respect to participation in practicals, educational excursions and workshops within the study programme (see above under 1 and 2) form an insurmountable obstacle.

At the same time, the WHW prohibits making financial provision for Dutch or EU/EEA students who are unable to pay the costs: section 2.9(1) of the HRA prohibits institutions from using the state contribution for this purpose<sup>2</sup>. If the institution nevertheless does so, it is an 'inefficient use' of the state contribution, which will result in financial penalties for the institution.

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<sup>1</sup> Letter of the Minister of OCW an 26 July 1989 on student own contributions  
 Letter from the Minister of OCW of 25 August 1994 on own contributions students  
 Letter from the Minister of OCW dated 28 April 2015 (reference 645693) on own contribution students.  
 Letter from the Minister of OCW dated 11 July 2018 (reference 1356865) on the motion costs for selection procedures.

<sup>2</sup> That article states: "*the government contribution is not being used efficiently in any case insofar as amounts are used for (...) compensating students or external students in any way for (...) the contribution referred to in external students for (...) the contribution referred to in Article 7.50, Paragraph 2, (...) unless there is financial support as referred to in Article 7.50, Paragraph 3, (...).*"

The legal mandate to make provision for non-EU/EEA students for whom the contribution is an insurmountable obstacle and the legal prohibition to do the same for EU/EEA students is curious. Seen from Utrecht University's inclusivity policy, it is also unfair. There should be a safety net arrangement for both groups if there is an exceptional situation that makes the own contribution an insurmountable obstacle to participation in education. Primarily, this must be provided by the part of the university that collects the contribution: there, via a hardship clause, the collection of the contribution can be waived. In case this does not provide a solution, the student can appeal to the university's emergency fund or the university fund via the student counsellors. These funds are a safety net for very exceptional situations. Indeed, the starting point in government policy is that students are expected to bear the cost of certain educational facilities themselves. Student grants therefore take into account various cost items in the standard budget, such as living expenses, books and learning materials, tuition fees and travel. Since 2007, the various cost items are no longer visible as such in the allocation of student grants: the standard amounts for living expenses and books and learning materials have been merged into one standard amount for living expenses. It is not the government's intention for the university itself to compensate students for co-payments. In fact, government regulation goes so far as to prohibit institutions from using government funding for this purpose. This means that the university will have to be cautious and the funds in the emergency fund for Dutch and EU/EEA students will have to come from the third money flow or support will be through external funds such as the university fund.

### **c. For what provisions may the student be asked to pay a contribution?**

Utrecht University adheres to the following principles when deciding if the student may be asked for a contribution towards certain provisions:

1. Contribution permitted for extra-curricular activities

Costs may be charged for extra-curricular activities (that do not form part of the course): the starting point being that participation in these activities and payment for them is on a voluntary basis. See also ad 3 for the exception to this for honours.

2. Costs for practicals, educational excursions and workshops where participation is a condition for passing the course

Students may be charged a personal contribution (to a maximum extent covering costs) for costs arising from the special nature of the programme relating to

- participation in practicals
- participation in educational excursions
- participation in workshops.

This concerns practicals, educational excursions and workshops that are part of the curriculum in the sense that participation in those activities is compulsory within the course (without participation, the course cannot be successfully completed). Optional components within the course that can be participated in on a voluntary and non-compulsory basis, where participation is not relevant for successful completion of the course, are to be considered extra-curricular components. No free alternative needs to be offered, as the student is free to decide whether or not to participate.

The ministerial regulation stipulates that a free alternative must be offered for compulsory practicals, educational excursions and workshops, unless no free alternative is possible as a substitute. An example of the latter is: excursions that are so intertwined with or essential to the learning objectives set for the programme that the absence of an excursion would be too detrimental to one of those objectives.

Question is who has the authority to decide on a free alternative as a replacement:

- o Executive Board?

The ministerial regulation stipulates that the institutional board (that is: the Executive

Board) must offer a free alternative to compulsory participation in practicals, educational excursions and workshops, unless no free alternative is possible as a substitute.

o Board of Examiners?

Practicals, educational excursions and workshops qualify as 'practical exercises' as mentioned in section 7.13, second paragraph under t, WHW. The WHW itself does not define what is meant by practical exercises, but it follows from the explanation that they should be understood to include:

- making theses;
- making working papers or trial designs;
- carrying out research assignments;
- taking part in fieldwork
- participating in field trips;
- completing internships;
- participating in practicals;
- completing internships;
- participating in other educational activities deemed necessary, aimed at achieving the intended skills

Compulsory practicals, teaching excursions and workshops can therefore be classified as 'practical exercises' as referred to in the WHW. The WHW contains three regulations on practical exercises :

1. the Education and Examination Regulations (EER) must describe the set-up of the practical exercise;
2. the Education and Examination Regulations must describe whether participation in the practical exercise is compulsory in order to pass the course, i.e. whether there is an assessment of the participation that qualifies as the test (or one of the tests) of that course;
3. the Board of Examiners is authorised to grant exemption from the obligation to participate in practical exercises with or without the imposition of substitute requirements.

*Ad 1: dean can lay down an alternative in advance in EER*

The organisation of the practical exercise must be described in the EER. The education committee has the right of consent on this part, the faculty council does not.

If it can be determined and recorded beforehand that a course is offered in two ways, viz:

- one where participation in practicals, teaching excursions or workshops is mandatory within the course;
- one in which a free alternative is described for those practicals, educational excursions or workshops;

the dean may lay this down in the Education and Examination Regulations. On that part (the design of the practical), the programme committee has the right of consent. From the point of view of teacher load, it is conceivable that this is not organised and laid down by default, but only at the request of students. The extent to which there is a need for such an alternative will also have to be considered when deciding whether or not to offer one by default.

*Ad 2: The dean should indicate in the EER whether participation in practical exercises is compulsory*

The EER must state whether participation in practicals, educational excursions and workshops is compulsory or optional. If it is not compulsory, a free alternative is not necessary.

*Re 3: not the CvB, but the Board of Examiners decides on the request for an alternative*

If an alternative is not offered by default in the EER, but only at the student's request, the Board of Examiners is competent: it must then examine whether the compulsory participation in the practical exercise is replaceable by a free alternative that also realises the learning objectives of the course.

The ministerial regulation assumes that it is the responsibility of the institutional board (=

Executive Board) to determine, in consultation with the employee and student participation body, whether the practical exercise can be replaced by a free alternative or not. However, this is incorrect as in the WHW itself, the power to examine an alternative (substitute requirements) for a compulsorily prescribed practical exercise is not assigned (attributed) to the Executive Board but to the Board of Examiners. Since formal law takes precedence over a ministerial regulation, this means that it is up to the Board of Examiners, when imposing the substitute requirements, to examine whether the practical exercise is replaceable by a free alternative.

It is therefore allowed to charge for practicals, teaching excursions and workshops that are part of the curriculum and where participation in those activities is mandatory within the course. If no free alternative is possible, students will have to pay an own contribution. The fees to be charged shall at most cover costs.

Charging a fee should not hinder the student's accessibility to education. This point should be resolved by means of a 'hardship clause': a financial safety net provision for the student for whom the contribution is an insurmountable obstacle. It is forbidden to use the state contribution to compensate Dutch and EU/EEA students in 'any way for the own contribution' (art. 2.9. first paragraph, WHW). Deployment of specific external student funds is allowed.

Note This section is not about passing on costs related to teaching materials. These may be passed on to students on a voluntary basis: see ad 7.

3. Honours: UU does not charge a student contribution

For an honours programme within a degree programme, it is not legally allowed to charge a personal contribution; for an extracurricular honours programme or component it is. According to the new UU vision on honours education (2021-2025), honour programmes have an extra-curricular character and are meant to offer ambitious and curious students an extra challenge. Because of the extra-curricular character, a personal contribution is allowed under the legislation. However, a contribution could create a financial barrier that might prevent some students from applying for such a programme. Because of the importance of inclusiveness, Utrecht University therefore chooses not to levy a personal contribution for honour programmes or modules of those programmes.

However, there may be costs associated with excursions within an honours course. In that case, the organisation will make every effort to provide a safety net facility for the student for whom the contribution is an insurmountable obstacle.

4. Required educational resources (books and course materials): on a voluntary basis

Students themselves must bear the costs of a number of educational materials, such as books, readers etc. In secondary education, textbooks and teaching materials are free: the government provides the funds for this to schools. In higher education, the situation is different: universities do not receive (additional) funds for providing books and teaching materials free of charge. Students in higher education will have to pay for this themselves. These costs for books and course materials may only be charged to students on a voluntary basis. It may be that the course itself provides the materials, such as with readers. In that case the cost price may be charged. This also includes charging for copyright. Students must not be obliged to buy course and study materials; it is permitted to recommend or expect students to buy them. Students who do not buy these materials may not be excluded from the course or the examinations.

This statutory rule is at odds with a cornerstone of the UU educational model: commitment. UU expects students to take an active part in their education, demonstrate sufficient commitment to the courses and fulfil their obligations of effort.

This also means that students should ensure that they have the study materials they need for active participation in educational activities.

In these cases it is recommended that students be informed that they are not required to buy the study materials, but that they are required to have them available to them if this

is necessary. The University Course Catalogue must also describe what is expected of students in this respect. If a student does not participate adequately in a course, both quantitatively and qualitatively, the course coordinator may exclude the student from further participation in all or part of the course. This is laid down in the Education and Examinations Regulations.

5. Own contribution for post-registration examinations: not applicable at UU  
According to legal regulations, costs related to registering for an examination after the regular registration period of this examination may be charged to the student. The own contribution in this respect is a maximum of 20 euros. Utrecht University does not apply such a contribution and (post)registration for examinations. When registering for the course, the student automatically takes part in the examination.
  
6. Online learning and testing: free access to summative tests  
Various courses make use of online study materials from commercial publishers. Students must bear the costs of these materials themselves.  
The costs of using an online access code or other online tool for taking summative tests may not be charged to students: Access to the tests may not be made dependent on payment of financial contributions in addition to tuition fees. This applies to the summative tests and not for the formative tests: if online exercises form part of the online study materials, students must buy these themselves. If they do not do so, they may not be denied access to the course of study and the examinations.
  
7. Lesson materials and resources / costs relating to practicals: on a voluntary basis  
On the question whether the costs of lesson materials and resources for practicals such as breakage money and microscopes may be charged to students, the Minister of Education, Culture and Science takes the view that it cannot be made unequivocally clear whether costs in connection with educational provisions can be charged. The Minister states that the nature of the course determines whether costs arise direct from a statutory task of an institution or come under costs that can be charged. An institution cannot request payment if government funding is given for the provision concerned. The problem with this explanation is that it is not specified for which educational provisions this funding applies. There is a general system of three levels of educational funding: low, high and top, roughly equivalent to arts/humanities/social and behavioural sciences, sciences and medical. In a letter of 25 August 1994 the Minister of Education, Culture and Science stated that the costs of microscopes, protective clothing and breakage money may be charged to the students, but only on a voluntary basis. Students should not be required to buy these materials or obtain (hire/buy) them through the university; recommending or expecting students to do so is permitted. The same applies as that set out under point 4: students must ensure that they have lesson/practical materials available to them if these are necessary to take an active part in educational activities.
  
8. Protective equipment for practicals: free of charge  
If a student carries out procedures in a practical training room or laboratory that are comparable with work in professional practice and personal protective equipment is required for such procedures, such as lab coats, safety goggles or protective clothing, Utrecht University adopts the principle that this protective equipment will be provided to students free of charge. No hire, cleaning or other costs will be charged.
  
9. Laptop ('bring your own device'): on a voluntary basis  
The Minister of Education, Culture and Science states that students may not be required to buy a laptop with the correct software or a tablet; recommending or expecting students to buy these is permitted.

At Utrecht University, in more and more courses 'bring your own device' is being introduced in the educational concept. The university expects students to buy a laptop with the associated software. If the course information states that a laptop is 'required', it must also state that the student will not be excluded from the course of study or the examinations if he or she does not have a laptop:

- the student who comes to a lecture or practical without a laptop will not be excluded; in that case, the student may watch alongside a fellow student, for example;
- the student who wishes to take a test and does not have a laptop with him/her will not be excluded from the test: a replacement device will be provided (must also be available as backup if the laptop does not work, crashes, etc.).

10. Library: free of charge

Students may make use of the university library free of charge.

11. Student counselling: free of charge

Students are entitled to receive student counselling from lecturers, tutors and Study Advisers free of charge.

12. Student facilities

A number of student facilities are offered free of charge, such as the services of a Student Counsellor. Other facilities may incur costs. These costs are not directly related to the course of study. The student is free to decide whether or not to make use of these services.

13. Selection procedure: no contribution

Utrecht University does not charge a fee for participation in the selection procedure for a bachelor's or master's degree programme. It is also not allowed by law to charge a fee for this to prospective students.

14. Application fee for students with foreign educational qualifications

It is allowed to charge a co-payment for costs for administrative work related to the valuation of a foreign diploma of the prospective student: maximum 100 euros.

Utrecht University does this in the form of an application fee of EUR 100 for bachelor's and master's degree programmes.

15. Matching: free of charge

Utrecht University does not charge for matching (course selection activity) for a bachelor's degree programme. This is also not permitted by law.

16. Language testing costs

It is allowed to charge an own contribution (no more than cost-recovery) for costs of language testing to assess whether the prospective student with a foreign diploma meets the minimum required language level. This means that the cost of an IELTS, TOEFL or Cambridge EFL will be borne by the prospective student.

No co-payment may be requested from prospective students with a Dutch prior education.

17. Colloquium doctum, sufficiency and deficiency tests for Bachelor's admission

Students may be charged a personal contribution (up to a maximum covering costs) for costs related to

- administering the entrance examination for a Bachelor's degree programme as part of a colloquium doctum
- sufficiency and deficiency tests, if the prospective student does not meet the prior education requirements or does not hold a diploma entitling him to admission to a Bachelor's degree programme.

18. Replacement certificate

Costs directly related to the provision of a substitute certificate or a substitute declaration in case of name change or gender change may legally be charged to students. Utrecht University does not do so: the Regulations on Enrolment and Tuition Fees stipulate that no costs are charged for this.