

# Tuition Fees

Report Debate Tuition Fees 11/12



STUDENTENRAAD  
KU LEUVEN

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<b>Document for</b>	Broad communication	
<b>Author</b>	Stijn Carpentier	
<b>Board member</b>	Sander Vanmaercke	
<b>Conclusion</b>	Discussion will be held on faculty level, deciding upon the possibility and the practicalities of a university-wide poll. To be decided upon in the Stura GA at the start of the second semester.	
<b>Further developments</b>	<b>Where?</b>	<b>Timing</b>
	General Assembly	22/02, 18h
	Council(s) for International Policy	tba
<b>Communication</b>	Website, Facebook-event, mail	
<b>Contact</b>	<a href="mailto:Stijn.Carpentier@Stura.be">Stijn.Carpentier@Stura.be</a> ; <a href="mailto:Astrid.maerevoet@stura.be">Astrid.maerevoet@stura.be</a> ; <a href="mailto:International@stura.be">International@stura.be</a>	
<b>Joined documents</b>	none	

## Short Summary of the session

The session started off with a short introduction of the student council (Stura) and, concerning this topic, how the student council handles policy matters within its representation. Secondly, a general session on the matter of the increased fees was given, followed by a Q&A on the matter. For the remainder of the debate the participants were asked to split up in groups according to faculty and to start the discussion between them.

As the central council for the KU Leuven by decree, Stura represents all students at the KU Leuven. Since the structure on the university relies heavily on the different faculties, we do as well and hence use a bottom-up model of representation. As such, the different faculty boards gather every two weeks to discuss issues and plans so Stura can process this information to participate in existing discussions -or start new ones- on the level of central, overarching policy.

Our representation in the specific case of the discussion regarding the tuition fees is driven by the same system: the initial debate will have to be held by students within the different faculties and this information will be synthesized and made ready for use in our General Assembly (GA). While all students are welcome in our GA, the most relevant place for them to let their voices be heard, are the meetings of their faculty boards. All information can be found [here](#) -we're working on an English version of the site!

This discussion goes back to a change of legislation within Flanders in 2014, when the tuition fees for all students were raised. Next to this raise -and neglected at the time- the Flemish government stipulated that the fees for non-European students could be increased by the individual universities. Only in the last few years the KU Leuven has been acting upon this possibility, with 11 out of 16 faculties now sporting at least one programme with increased fees for non-European students.

The KU Leuven momentarily has a broad frame for these increases: the faculties can decide autonomously between three levels of increases -1750, 3500 and 6000-, given they can defend the decision and will use the surplus of money to better support the international students within their faculties. Student services, psycho-social wellbeing, study support and the different international offices and the like could use the extra funding. It is however important to note that this is hard to control: the faculties have their own financial plans and judging upon the need or use of the surplus money is borderline impossible.

In order to make up the actual balance of the fees that exist at this moment, a first glance was given upon who actually paid the increased fee the last few years and who was excluded from the measure. First of all, students with a refugee-status do not pay an

increased fee and neither do students with close EU-family members. Students who have been living in Belgium two years prior to their studies with a non-work residence visa - mostly the children of expats and diplomats- do also not pay the increased fee.

Furthermore, students in a certain programme at the KU Leuven can not be asked to pay the increased fee should the faculty decide to raise during their studies. This gentleman's agreement goes without exception within BA or MA; the faculty chooses if they want to extend it to the overarching level of the programme; e.g. all who started in the BA, will not pay increased fees for their MA in the same programme.

A last means of exception is a waiver system, ran by the faculty. Here again, the faculty chooses how much they are willing to invest and which parameters -social-economic status, excellency, ... - they wish to use. Current examples are the faculty of Engineering, waving based on excellency and proven academic competence, and the faculty of bio-engineering, waiving based on the DAC-list.

At this moment there are about 5000 non-EU students, of which 1200 students are paying the increased fees. About three quarters of the non-EU students at the KU Leuven pay the normal fee at this moment, being excluded (ca. 1000) or waived (ca. 200). It is however fair to mention that this balance will change as time goes on, since less students will be excluded because they were in the programme before the changes came into effect.

As a side effect, this means that the statistical data needed to conduct a debate of this measure is momentarily scarcely or not at all available. The small amount of students paying the heightened fee make for incomplete and anecdotal data, unable to foresee the impact these measures will have on the demographic of incoming students on a longer timescale.

The debate is gaining momentum in 2018-2019 because of several reasons. First, more and more new and existing programmes are installing increased fees (which can be found [here](#)). Note that this debate only concerns BA and initial MA programmes; MaNaMa's and EM programmes are a separate category of funding. Second, the new central policy board and the vice-rector for international policy want a more centralized approach towards the fees. Lastly, students as well as their representatives have been questioning the very need for increased fees in general. As Stura, we're involved in the working group that is doing the preliminary work and we'll be involved in the decision making process in the monthly council for international policy.

Although we are glad this enormous interest in the matter is existent, we judge it necessary to conduct the debate with the information we have at this time. As such, we can state

that right now this is not an effort nor an experiment to raise the fees for all students: this would have to happen on the Flemish level and cannot be decided by the KU Leuven individually. According to the discourse of the vice-rector, this policy still aims for more international degree-seeking students in our institution, not less, seeing as clarity and a more extended waiver system should attract more students. Moreover, this debate is completely independent from the discussion regarding the mandatory non-binding pré-tests, meant to offer support to students from the very beginning. That being said, we're nevertheless still careful and will follow up on new developments.

## Q&A

*Please note that this is not an exact transcription, but rather a synthesized account of the broader Q&A. Repeated notions have been restructured and personal questions have been reduced to their general contributing notions. Participants who would like for something to be reformulated can mail us without hesitation at [international@stura.be](mailto:international@stura.be)*

**Currently three quarters of the students are excluded from the increased fees. What percentage has been included because they're already enrolled in a programme?**

Except for the broader numbers (1000 by decree, 200 waivers) we have little knowledge of how many students are being excepted by what rule or measure. It is however certainly fair to expect less students will be exempt from the heightened fees in the future should the current system stay in place, because less students will be enrolled in the programmes at the time they change.

**As a criticism, I'm surprised Stura takes over the narrative that this isn't an experiment or antecedent for heightened fees for everyone. Student numbers increase, but funding is lagging behind and everything seems to get more expensive. (Another participant) Other universities are also changing their policy towards tuitions fees and the very discourse of the rectorates is troubling in this regard; naïve trustfulness is not in its place.**

We're aware that various aspects of being a student are getting more costly and that this can be seen as a bigger evolution within Europe and higher education in general. While extremely cautious, we won't however be able to bring this into the debate at policy level, because there is no tangible evidence to link these two issues directly to each other. Implementing this fear into our discourse at this moment would to our understanding lead to less constructive debate and harder participation for the student council.

It's however not up to us to decide upon which path we'll take in this debate, but up to the students voicing their opinion at the various faculty boards. Certain faculties, such as Theology, have for example opposed the increases and will most probably vehemently continue to do so. It is important to note that the faculties still have a lot of autonomy as well and that opposition is to be expected.

If the majority of students feel these concerns should be implemented, we will most certainly do so.

**The DAC list, or any waiver system judging only by the country a student is from, is fallible.**

This is a fair point, also increasingly being raised on faculty and central level. One of the possibilities being looked at is a centralized waiver-system for socio-economic backgrounds. While this would allow the existing specialization to be used to the fullest, it must be admitted that for some countries it is virtually impossible to get credible data on an individual's financial and socio-economic background. This practical roadblock must and will be addressed in the coming policy boards and working groups. As students we can start this debate about how we would like the waiver system to be formed.

*The notion was brought up that we should not invest time in this and should instead focus on stopping the increase as a whole. If the majority of the student population judges so, we will focus solely on preventing the raises. Together with the faculties we're looking at the most apt way to reach out and collect opinions from as many students as possible. In the meantime, however, we have to be able to anticipate all possible approaches and we can not act on individual opinions.*

*Another student mentioned that the Flemish education system does not systematically recognizes degrees from some of the DAC-countries. This must also be taken into account.*

**At the moment there is a lack of control on the actual use of the surplus of money, although the intention was there in the initial approach?**

The monitoring of how the money is being invested has indeed proved to be unrealistic. Faculties can spend money directly on their international services or for example invest in new staff members. What staff members do and how they contribute is up to the faculty and its autonomy. The flow of money is more or less untraceable. It is as such fair to assume that the money is (indirectly) being used for other purposes as well.

**One could argue that paying more money to enter the university is in itself negative for the psycho-social wellbeing of students: they have lesser means to go out, travel, engage in social activities, ...**

While this is undeniably true, two counter-nuances can also be mentioned. Firstly, a broad study conducted in 2016 shows that the group of international students at the KU Leuven show a relative higher demand for psychological assistance or help. As second remark, regardless of the tuition fees, it has to be noted that the living cost in Leuven is relatively high compared to other cities in Belgium and Europe and that this is also a very big factor for the financial situation of students.

It is nevertheless important to guard the balance between the two: from a high-end university we must be able to expect good medical and psychological help, coming at a fair (indirect) rate. Some of the support being introduced is found to be lacking and hence must be improved.

Students also have troubles finding a suitable (student)job in Leuven, because of a lack of jobs accepting English-speaking students. The KU Leuven is trying to mend this situation, but it has proven to be difficult.

**There apparently is a big data problem. How many data does the university make available and how much of the policy is based upon tangible research?**

Both the availability of data and the amount of communication about the existing data is scarce. The low amounts of students paying the higher fees produce but anecdotal evidence, while the different offices at KU Leuven are careful in communicating unnuanced and fragmented numbers. Once the debate gains momentum in the actual policy boards, we and other parties will push more intensely for more data and data-based policy on faculty and central level.

**It was mentioned in previous debates that a faculty-based poll would be conducted to gather the opinions of the student population. Is it possible to make this an university-wide survey? Can we take it to the streets?**

There are two dimensions to this question; being the practicalities of a poll as the first dimension and the representation and it's possibilities and limits as the second dimension.

If the majority of students communicates, through their respective faculty boards, that they would like to see an university wide poll, we'll organize one without a doubt. We operate based on what is discussed in the faculty boards and brought to the GA. Without picking sides, it is useful to mention that some faculties would at this moment prefer a faculty-specific poll because of the internal stances that already exist, because of unique waiving-systems, ....

The same dynamic applies when Stura would want to make a statement about the tuition fees. The support of the majority of students voicing their opinions is needed and we cannot decide the contents without consulting them.

Concerning a more pro-active approach: at this moment Stura definitely opts for full participation in the official policy boards, meaning we work conform the existing rules and within the framework of the existing board-structure. This does mean we would have to present a strong case, just as other parties would, in the council for international policy.

Taking to the streets would impede this method and would hurt our credibility and legitimacy in representation at the KU Leuven as such. Should the institution however not take our voice into account, we can start to think about other measures, as we did last year. At this moment, we are however pleased by the open discussions and debates concerning the matter.

**International students are concentrated within certain faculties. How will these faculties be able to tip the scales in favour of a poll or other measures?**

While it is certainly true that some faculties have more international students than others, the issue is relevant in almost every one of them. European and Belgian students are furthermore also voicing opinions about the matter and we see a slow but steady growth in interest.

The voting within Stura is organized according to size of the student population in the various faculties, not making the distinction between international or non-international students. Every faculty has at least one vote and can as such weigh upon the final decision. No one faculty is big enough to decide the vote by themselves.

*The further actions Stura will undertake, are to be discussed on an extra GA in the second semester, 22th of February. Contact your faculty board to participate in the discussion!*