# Tuition cap rises to £9,535 as record living costs push students to work or tighten budgets



Tuition fees in England have risen to £9,535 for the 2025–26 academic year, the first increase since 2017, at exactly the moment students are also facing the highest living costs on record. Official guidance confirms the cap has been lifted in line with a 3.1% uplift linked to forecast inflation, while independent surveys and rental indexes show students spending substantially more on rent, food and travel than in previous years. The squeeze matters: with term‑time living costs often running into the hundreds of pounds a month, the total cost of attending university has grown well beyond tuition alone.

The fee rise is set out in government guidance that also makes clear students eligible for home fee loans will continue to be able to borrow up to the new cap. The Department for Education frames the increase as a necessary adjustment to support provider finances after a prolonged fee freeze, while also tying the higher limit to regulatory conditions such as TEF awards and access and participation plans. The guidance explains how different study patterns and accelerated or part‑time caps are treated under the change and reiterates the availability of tuition‑fee loans to cover the increased ceiling.

Living costs, however, are where many students feel the pinch most acutely. National student surveys place average monthly expenditure well north of the typical maintenance loan: one prominent student charity’s 2024 survey estimated average student spending at around £1,100 a month, with London students nearer £1,260. Independent rental data for 2025 shows the average London room rent at roughly £980 a month; at the other end of the spectrum, cities such as Sheffield, Liverpool and Leeds report average room rents several hundred pounds lower. Those city differences add up: SpareRoom’s index and related calculations show that the gap between the most expensive and cheapest top‑20 university cities outside London can be more than £3,600 a year — roughly £10,900 across a three‑year degree.

That arithmetic has real consequences for budgeting. Official maintenance‑loan tables for 2025–26 show a maximum for full‑time students living away from home and studying outside London of £10,544, while those in London can access up to £13,762. In high‑rent cities the maintenance loan may cover little more than a year’s rent: using the current average rent for Edinburgh as an example, students could be left with only a few hundred pounds a year to cover food, transport and other essentials once rent is paid. The implication is clear — many students will need additional income, parental support or tighter budgets to bridge the gap.

That reality helps explain why financial guidance and student money campaigns are emphasising practical cost‑saving measures. The standard advice is familiar but pertinent: set a weekly budget, prioritise an interest‑bearing or generous interest‑free overdraft rather than short‑term sign‑up bonuses when choosing a student bank account, use discount platforms such as UNiDAYS and Student Beans, and hunt for university bursaries and hardship funds. Consumer guides likewise urge students to compare student bank accounts on the value of their overdraft offers and longer‑term benefits rather than one‑off freebies such as vouchers or short‑term cash bonuses.

Experts speaking to the regional press underline how squeezed many students are. Fiona Peake, Student Money Expert at Ocean Finance, told the South Wales Argus that the combined effect of higher tuition, record rents and rising everyday costs means “many students are finding their maintenance loan doesn’t even cover rent, meaning they need extra income or parental support just to get by.” Tamsin Powell, Consumer Finance Expert at Creditspring, also told the South Wales Argus that starting university this autumn with fees over £9,500 “adds to big financial pressures” and that early financial education is critical if students are to avoid damaging borrowing patterns.

Beyond individual household pressure, the fee uplift was presented by ministers as part of a response to a broader funding crisis in higher education. International reporting has framed the rise as a measure intended to stabilise university finances after years of a fee freeze, falling postgraduate enrolments and mounting cost pressures — but it has also attracted political opposition and concern that higher fees and living costs could deter lower‑income students, prompting calls for more targeted support and clearer planning on access and retention.

For prospective students and their families the practical takeaway is twofold: factor living‑cost differences into any university choice — particularly when comparing offers through clearing — and make use of the many free budgeting tools, charity guides and bank‑account comparisons available before term starts. Policymakers and universities likewise face a renewed test: to marry financial sustainability with measures that ensure the most disadvantaged students do not pay the price of a system under strain.

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## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.southwalesargus.co.uk/news/25392831.8-things-students-must-now-university-fees-hit-9-535/?ref=rss), [[2]](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tuition-fees-and-student-support-2025-to-2026-academic-year/changes-to-tuition-fees-2025-to-2026-academic-year), [[4]](https://www.savethestudent.org/money/surveys/student-money-survey-2024-results.html)
* Paragraph 2 – [[2]](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tuition-fees-and-student-support-2025-to-2026-academic-year/changes-to-tuition-fees-2025-to-2026-academic-year)
* Paragraph 3 – [[4]](https://www.savethestudent.org/money/surveys/student-money-survey-2024-results.html), [[5]](https://www.spareroom.co.uk/content/info-landlords/rentalindex/), [[1]](https://www.southwalesargus.co.uk/news/25392831.8-things-students-must-now-university-fees-hit-9-535/?ref=rss)
* Paragraph 4 – [[6]](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tuition-fees-and-student-support-2025-to-2026-academic-year/support-with-living-costs-2025-to-2026-academic-year), [[1]](https://www.southwalesargus.co.uk/news/25392831.8-things-students-must-now-university-fees-hit-9-535/?ref=rss)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.southwalesargus.co.uk/news/25392831.8-things-students-must-now-university-fees-hit-9-535/?ref=rss), [[7]](https://www.moneysavingexpert.com/students/student-bank-account/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.southwalesargus.co.uk/news/25392831.8-things-students-must-now-university-fees-hit-9-535/?ref=rss)
* Paragraph 7 – [[3]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/english-university-fees-rise-first-time-since-2017-try-fix-funding-crisis-2024-11-04/), [[2]](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tuition-fees-and-student-support-2025-to-2026-academic-year/changes-to-tuition-fees-2025-to-2026-academic-year)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.southwalesargus.co.uk/news/25392831.8-things-students-must-now-university-fees-hit-9-535/?ref=rss), [[4]](https://www.savethestudent.org/money/surveys/student-money-survey-2024-results.html), [[7]](https://www.moneysavingexpert.com/students/student-bank-account/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.southwalesargus.co.uk/news/25392831.8-things-students-must-now-university-fees-hit-9-535/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tuition-fees-and-student-support-2025-to-2026-academic-year/changes-to-tuition-fees-2025-to-2026-academic-year> - Official government guidance sets out the increases to fee limits for the 2025–26 academic year. Maximum standard full‑time tuition fees for approved providers with a TEF award and an access and participation plan will rise to £9,535, with accelerated and part‑time caps also adjusted. The document explains the 3.1% uplift linked to forecast inflation, arrangements for different study patterns, and that eligible students remain able to access tuition fee loans to cover these amounts. It outlines conditions for providers, references TEF and access plans, and stresses the regulatory and financial rationale for increasing fee limits to support sector sustainability improvement.
3. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/english-university-fees-rise-first-time-since-2017-try-fix-funding-crisis-2024-11-04/> - Reuters reports the UK government announced an increase in domestic undergraduate tuition fees for the first time since 2017, raising the cap to £9,535 for the 2025–26 year. The piece explains the move aims to help financially strained universities after years of a fee freeze and falling international postgraduate enrolments. It quotes ministers and sector commentary on the funding crisis and notes public opposition to the rise. The article situates the policy within wider higher‑education funding concerns, highlights risks to access for lower‑income students, and summarises political context and reaction from university bodies and opinion polls across the country widely.
4. <https://www.savethestudent.org/money/surveys/student-money-survey-2024-results.html> - Save the Student’s National Student Money Survey 2024 presents detailed findings on student living costs and financial strain. Based on responses from over a thousand undergraduates, it estimates average monthly student expenditure at £1,104, with London students paying about £1,264 monthly. The report highlights that maintenance loans typically fall short—leaving students needing additional income or support—and documents rising rent as the largest cost pressure. It covers food poverty, mental‑health impacts, use of food banks, and how students manage shortfalls. The survey informs calls for policy change and provides resources to help students budget and access hardship funds and guidance online.
5. <https://www.spareroom.co.uk/content/info-landlords/rentalindex/> - SpareRoom’s Rental Index provides quarterly data on average room rents across the UK, showing London as the most expensive with an average room rent of £980 per month (Q2 2025). The index breaks down rents by region and postcode and lists city comparisons, citing Edinburgh at around £823 and Sheffield near £526 per month among other university cities. SpareRoom analyses year‑on‑year changes and highlights supply‑demand pressures driving rents, plus advice on where students might find cheaper options. The data is widely used by students and press when comparing living‑cost differences between cities and calculating three‑year degree rental totals for planning budgets.
6. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tuition-fees-and-student-support-2025-to-2026-academic-year/support-with-living-costs-2025-to-2026-academic-year> - GOV.UK’s 'Support with living costs' guidance for 2025–26 details maximum and minimum maintenance loan rates for full‑time undergraduates. For students living away from home and studying outside London the maximum loan is listed as £10,544, while those in London can access up to £13,762. The page explains means‑tested bands, maintenance grant entitlements, special support for students on benefits, and how household income affects loan amounts. It includes tables showing loan levels by household income and clarifies eligibility, assessment rules and payment arrangements. The resource is the official reference for students applying for maintenance support in the 2025–26 academic year nationally.
7. <https://www.moneysavingexpert.com/students/student-bank-account/> - MoneySavingExpert’s guide compares the leading student bank accounts for 2025, listing perks such as interest‑free overdrafts, cash sign‑up bonuses, railcard offers and vouchers. It examines Santander’s free four‑year railcard, Nationwide’s cash and food‑voucher deals, NatWest’s overdraft size and Tastecard offer, and other incentives across major banks. The guide emphasises choosing based on the value of the overdraft and long‑term needs rather than short‑term freebies, and provides practical steps for opening accounts, switching and budgeting. It is a regularly updated consumer resource aimed at helping students pick an account that suits their financial habits and term‑time costs over the academic year.