

# Financial Support Evaluation Recommendations for Action

Financial support and undergraduate outcomes  
in the University of Cambridge

2019

## Context

The University of Cambridge has undertaken an evaluation of financial support provision and their relationship with undergraduate outcomes, with a particular focus on the Cambridge Bursary Scheme (CBS), the flagship financial support mechanism.

Alongside other sources of financial support, the CBS is the main mechanism of financial support for undergraduate students at Cambridge. The purpose of the Bursary is to compensate for the financial disadvantage experienced by some students and to afford them the opportunity to participate fully in the student experience at Cambridge, addressing any otherwise-existing gap in their academic outcomes. The University and the Colleges jointly contribute financially to the CBS. The Bursary is a non-repayable and means-tested award. It is provided on a sliding scale to eligible Home and EU undergraduates automatically on the reporting of qualifying household income to the Student Loans Company. Students are not required to take out a tuition fee or maintenance loan to qualify for the Bursary, with receipt of either type of loan unrelated to the amount of Bursary students are eligible for.

To assess the role of both the CBS and broader financial support, three components of work have been undertaken using the Office for Students' (OfS) financial support evaluation toolkit. The first is a survey of students in receipt of the CBS in the 2017/18 academic year, investigating perceptions of the usefulness of financial support, uses thereof, and knowledge of financial support availability prior to application. The second component adds depth to the survey findings through an interview study with students in receipt of the CBS in the 2017/18 academic year. The interview study explores students' experiences in relation to financial support and its impact on their academic and social lives. The third and final component is represented by the statistical analysis of linked records from local sources and the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). This analysis explored the relationship between receipt of the CBS and receipt of other forms of financial support, with a series of key undergraduate outcomes.

A full account of the research and its conclusions is available in the Research Report:

[\[www.cao.cam.ac.uk/financial-support-and-undergraduate-outcomes-2019\]](http://www.cao.cam.ac.uk/financial-support-and-undergraduate-outcomes-2019)

A series of recommendations have emerged from the conclusions of the Research Report, as follows.

## Recommendations for Action

Action 1: The report to be provided to the Undergraduate Admissions Committee and Senior Tutors Committee to inform a review of the Cambridge Bursary Scheme and wider financial support arrangements, due to take place during 2019-20

Action 2: Concerns regarding the clarity and availability of information regarding financial support to be considered by the Undergraduate Admissions Committee and Senior Tutors Committee with a view to enhance guidance provided. This will need to take into account the output of the review in Action 1, aiming at all times for increased clarity in the messaging around financial support provided through the Cambridge Bursary Scheme

Action 3: The Bursaries Research Working Group to be tasked with conducting further research regarding the relationship between financial support and undergraduate student outcomes. Additional academic research already underway at Cambridge is exploring in more detail this relationship. Analysis comprising this research will generate evidence on how different amounts of financial assistance relate to a wider range of student outcomes; and will also employ a variety of other statistical approaches that can create better comparison groups in the available data.

Action 4: The Bursaries Research Working Group to be tasked with undertaking further research regarding the measures of disadvantage and targeting approaches behind the Cambridge Bursary Scheme and contribute evidence to the review of the Scheme.

Action 5: This piece of work to be repeated biennially to monitor any changes in attitudes and impact of financial support, and to capture any changes resulting from the implementation of any recommendations forthcoming from the review in Actions 1 and 2.

Alongside the Research Report, the results of the research and review outlined in the action points above will provide the evidence base to guide institutional policy and practice around financial support.