

News story: Government launches consultation on accelerated degrees

Students could be left over £25,000 better off by choosing an accelerated degree instead of a traditional three-year course, according to proposals set out today in a new government consultation.

Accelerated degrees offer the same qualifications and are quality-assured in the same way as a standard degree, but delivered over a shorter, usually two-year timespan. This means when most students are completing their third year of study, an accelerated degree student will be starting work and getting a salary.

The proposals, announced today (10 December), include a £5,500 (20 per cent) saving for students in total tuition costs compared to a standard three-year course. When added to the average salary of £19,000 in the first year after graduating, it means a potential £25,000 benefit overall.

For the taxpayer, it means significantly lower tuition loan outlay, higher rates of repayment and therefore a lower cost to the public purse of higher education. A higher proportion of students on accelerated degrees will also repay their loans in full.

Although the proposals allow institutions to charge up to 20 per cent more each year for accelerated degrees, the overall tuition fee cost of the degree to the student is 20 per cent less than the same degree over three years.

Providers already offering accelerated degrees report on more engaged students, positive employer feedback and the opportunity to attract a wider pool of applicants, including mature students who often want to retrain and enter the workplace more quickly.

New fee arrangements for these degrees are set to be in place by September 2019, subject to parliamentary approval.

Universities Minister Jo Johnson said:

For too long we have been stuck with a system that has increasingly focused on offering only one way of benefiting from higher education, via the classic three year degree programme.

The passage of the Higher Education and Research Act this year has finally enabled us to break the mould of this one-size-fits-all system so students have much more choice over how they learn.

Many will want to stick with the classic three year university experience, but for highly motivated students hungry for a faster pace of learning and a quicker route into or back into work, at lower overall cost, two year degrees will be well worth

considering.

Professor Les Ebdon, Director of Fair Access to Higher Education, said.

Accelerated degrees are an attractive option for mature students who have missed out on the chance to go to university as a young person. Having often battled disadvantage, these students can thrive in higher education and I hope that now many more will be able to take up the life-changing opportunity to get a degree.

There has been historic cross-party support for this policy, from Shirley Williams in the 1960s, to Labour spokesman Lord Stevenson, Roberta Blackman-Woods, Lord Liddle and Lord Watson who all supported it in the passage of the Higher Education and Research Bill.

There are a range of accelerated courses currently on offer – including Law, Accountancy and English – but the ambition is make more courses available across the widest possible range of subjects.

Karl McCormack, who teaches accelerated degrees in Accounting & Finance at Staffordshire University, commented on the increased focus of students on accelerated courses.

I find that the accelerated degree offers so much more to students, including the extra focus, the drive and the immersive experience of constantly learning over the two years.

Accelerated degrees appeal to a broad spectrum of students, including mature students who want to retrain and enter the workplace more quickly, and those who do not take a traditional A-level route into higher education.

Laura Montague, a student in her final year of an accelerated degree at Staffordshire University, said:

The fast-track course is exactly the right option for me. Being able to do the course in a two-year timeframe instead of three really makes you dive into the course knowing that completion is not far off. It also prepares you well in terms of how the working environment will be when you finish.

Providers offering accelerated degrees will need to meet exactly the same quality assurance measures as for the standard three-year equivalent degrees.

The new regulator, the Office for Students, will also support the provision of accelerated degrees when it becomes a legal entity in 2018.

The consultation will run until February 2018.