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## Student fees may reach £20,000, argues vice-chancellor

**By Judith Burns**

BBC News education reporter

**Some universities may eventually charge students from England up to £20,000 a year, a vice-chancellor has told the Times Higher Education magazine.**

Tuition fees paid by home students at English institutions are capped at £9,000, overseas students pay more.

The sector may start to see both groups the same way, says Prof Nick Petford, of Northampton University

His comments come as a report argues that universities will need more money to cope as demand for places rises.

The report, published on Thursday by the umbrella group Universities UK (UUK), says that higher fees charged by universities since last year have merely replaced cuts to government funding.

### **Rising demand**

Some forecasts predict that the number of university places needed will grow from 368,000 to 460,000 within the next 20 years.

The report says this means institutions will need extra money to invest in buildings and facilities if they are to compete with universities in other countries.

Many universities are already relying on sources of income other than fees or government money to pay for new building projects, it says.

Prof Petford is the third university vice-chancellor to argue that the cap on annual fees, currently set at a maximum of £9,000, will need to rise.

Last week UUK president and Surrey University vice-chancellor Sir Christopher Snowden urged the government to allow fees to keep pace with inflation.

In September the vice-chancellor of Oxford University, Prof Andrew Hamilton, said fees should be related to the true cost of a degree - or £16,000 in the case of Oxford.

Both said that some universities and departments were losing money, particularly on expensive courses such as science, technology or engineering.

Prof Petford argues that some universities "with high brand value will be able to charge £17,000, £18,000 or £20,000 in the future - I am sure of that".

### **'Unregulated market'**

"If you look at international students that's been a pretty much unregulated market since we've been recruiting overseas students," he said.

"Universities have always been used to this sort of behaviour.

"The big step change now is thinking about home students in this way."

He agrees that universities could increasingly find themselves short of cash if the government maintains the £9,000 cap on fees.

"It is quite easy to do a financial forecast which shows that if the cap remains at £9,000 in the next decade, a number of universities, including ours, could potentially be in financial difficulty."

Prof Petford acknowledges it would not be easy for any political party to adopt a tuition fee rise as policy in the run-up to the next election.

He said: "As a vote winner, it's just not going to work is it?"

Any change in tuition fees would have to be agreed by Parliament.

The Department for Business Innovation and Skills maintains that the current £9,000 maximum fee allows universities to deliver high-quality teaching and to invest in improved teaching facilities, while ensuring that going to university remains affordable for students.

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