

> Writing Task Two

Title: The myth of free tuition and social mobility - and where Europe should head

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The cost of university education constitutes one of the most fiercely debated issues in the field of education and has been polarising Austrian society for years. Whilst it is often argued that free tuition is the key to social mobility, I am convinced that this goal can be achieved in a much faster way using an innovative system to finance universities that includes obliging students to pay for their education.

The current situation in Austria, however, is entirely different. At public universities students are only required to pay a small fee covering at around 20€ per semester, mostly for administrative purposes. And even though private institutions are more expensive, tuition fees do not usually surpass 5000€ a year.

The most common arguments stated in favour of free university education are that free unis are said to foster social mobility, increase students' financial independence from their parents and allow students from poorer backgrounds to enrol at the institution of their choice. Whilst those are undoubtedly vital goals when talking about this issue, requiring students at all colleges to pay tuition fees could

significantly increase the universities' financial means, improving the overall quality of teaching and leading to more funds being dedicated to research. In order not to hinder social mobility, fees should be calculated based on the parents' income and interest-free loans should be made available to everyone pursuing their tertiary education.

On the long run, free universities could therefore be a burden on government finances, ^{and} decrease the quality of teaching and research. Moreover, highly ranked universities could slip in university rankings if all EU students were entitled to free university education, putting Europe's good reputation in education at serious risk.

Due to the variety of issues alluded to in this essay, from the huge amounts of money needed to finance universities to the possibility of introducing a fair tuition fee system enabling everyone to enjoy the best education possible it appears clear to me that our current system is ineffective, outdated and in urgent need of reform. The reputation of Europe's highly performing colleges and universities, especially those in the United Kingdom, should not be put at risk due to our politicians' inability to grasp that there are much better ways to reach the goals mentioned than free tuition.

(383 words)