



To:

Higher Education Institutions in Wales providing designated Higher Education courses
Further Education Institutions in Wales providing designated Higher Education courses
Private Institutions providing designated Higher Education courses
The Student Loans Company
UCAS
The Open University in Wales
Student Finance Wales Stakeholder Group
NUS Wales
Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
Universities Wales

22 October 2014

Dear Colleague

**HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENT SUPPORT -
CHANGES TO BE INCLUDED IN THE WELSH STUDENT SUPPORT REGULATIONS
FOR ACADEMIC YEAR 2015/16**

The Education (Student Support) (Wales) Regulations 2013 which govern higher education student support for students ordinarily resident in Wales in relation to academic year ("AY") 2014/15 are currently being re-drafted. A new set of Welsh student support regulations for AY 2015/16 are expected to come into force early in 2015.

A small number of policy changes and technical amendments to the existing legislation have been proposed for AY 2015/16. The proposed limited technical changes are detailed in the annex below. Attached to this letter is a response proforma for stakeholders to complete if so required.

ENQUIRIES

If you have any queries about the regulations or this Information Notice, please contact, in the first instance, the Higher Education Division, Welsh Government - email HEDConsultationsMailbox@Wales.GSI.Gov.UK



Student Finance Wales Information Notice (SFWIN 03/2014)

Overview	This engagement exercise seeks views on the proposed policy changes and minor technical changes to the existing student support legislation to be contained in the forthcoming Education (Student Support) (Wales) Regulations 2014.
Audience	Higher Education Institutions; Further Education Institutions; National Union of Students; Student Loans Company; the Open University in Wales; other interested parties.
How to respond	Any comments which stakeholders might have on the proposals should be sent to the Welsh Government by 3 December 2014. Comments can be made in writing on the response sheet that accompanies this letter and should be e-mailed to the address below: HEDConsultationsMailbox@Wales.GSI.Gov.UK.
Further information and related documents	Large print, Braille and alternate language versions of this document are available on request. A copy of this SFWIN can also be found on the following website: www.studentfinancewales.co.uk
Contact Details	Further information about this limited engagement exercise can be obtained by e-mailing HEDConsultationsMailbox@Wales.GSI.Gov.UK . or by writing to: Higher Education Division, Welsh Government, Cathays Park, Cardiff, CF10 3NQ
Data Protection	How the views and information you give us will be used: Any response you send us will be seen in full by Welsh Government staff dealing with the issues which this engagement exercise is about. It may also be seen by other Welsh Government staff to help them plan future engagement exercises. The Welsh Government intends to publish a summary of the responses to this document. We may also publish responses in full. Normally, the name and address (or part of the address) of the person or organisation who sent the response are published with the response. This helps to show that the engagement exercise was carried out properly. If you do not want your name or address published, please tell us this in writing when you send

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your response. We will then blank them out.

Names or addresses we blank out might still get published later, though this is unlikely to happen often. The Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 allow the public to ask to see information held by many public bodies, including the Welsh Government. This includes information which has not been published. However, the law also allows us to withhold information in some circumstances. If anyone asks to see information we have withheld, we will have to decide whether to release it or not. If someone has asked for their name and address not to be published, that is an important fact we would take into account. However, there might sometimes be important reasons why we would have to reveal someone's name and address, even though they have asked for them not to be published. We would contact the person and ask their views before deciding whether or not to reveal the information.

Summary of changes to student support regulations for AY 2015/16

The next set of student support regulations are expected to issue under the title of the Education (Student Support) (Wales) Regulations 2015.

Level of grants and loans

The package of support available to eligible higher education students in Wales is usually reviewed annually to take account of inflationary pressures on the fee levels and on the associated levels of student support.

1. Fee support

What we are proposing:

For full-time students who commenced their studies on or after 1 September 2012 and are studying during the academic year 2015/16:

- the maximum tuition fee that institutions in Wales are able to charge will remain at £9,000;
- there will be an inflationary increase in the maximum tuition fee loan (from £3,685) to £3,810 for students studying on or after 2012. The amount of tuition fee grant will reduce by an equivalent amount to £5,190;
- for continuing students studying in Wales, England and Scotland who started their course prior to September 2012, the maximum tuition fee support will be frozen at £3,465;
- the maximum tuition fee loan available to continuing students (those who started their course before September 2012) studying in Northern Ireland will be increased to £3,805 to reflect the increase in the fees charged there.

Intended outcome:

Full-time students will remain eligible for sufficient fee support to avoid upfront fees in line with the Programme for Government commitment:

“No full time undergraduate student ordinarily resident in Wales will pay higher fees in real terms during the lifetime of the next Assembly than if they had been students in 2010/11. This will apply no matter where the student chooses to study, in Wales or elsewhere in the UK”

2. Maintenance support

What we are proposing:

For full-time students who commenced their studies on or after 1 September 2012 and are studying during the academic year 2015/16:

- a means-tested Welsh Government Learning Grant (maintenance grant) of up to £5,161 depending on household income
- an inflationary increase to the means-tested maintenance loan of 3.34% (up to £4,162 if living at parents' home, up to £5,376 if living away from parents' home, and up to £7,532 if studying in London) giving access to a total of up to £6,743 maintenance support for those students with the lowest household incomes living at home; up to £7,957 if living away from parents' home, and up to £10,113 if studying in London; as well as
- partial cancellation of up to £1,500 of maintenance loan once repayment has begun.

3. Definition of a disability

What we are proposing:

This is a technical change which makes explicit the definition of a disability within the regulations, with reference to the Equality Act 2010. From AY15/16, students who fall within the category can then apply for the Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs). The rationale is that by making the definition of a disability explicit within the regulations it becomes a 'finding of fact' as to whether or not a student falls within the category. SFW will require evidence that a student has a long term condition (at least 12 months) which has a substantial (more than minor or trivial) impact on their day to day activity (including education). Guidance regarding how this will be done in practice will be issued in due course.

4. Changes to Childcare Grant (CCG)

Currently students are unable to claim CCG if they or their partner/spouse already claims the Childcare Element of Working Tax or Universal Credit. The intent is that support towards childcare costs should only be claimed from one government source, even where that funding does not cover the full costs of childcare.

The Department of Health have inserted provision within their Regulations which prohibits students who are partners of students claiming under the Student Support system from claiming a childcare grant in respect of the same children under the NHS bursary scheme.

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What we are proposing:

To clarify existing policy and make it explicit within regulations in Wales, from AY15/16 full-time and part-time students will not be entitled to apply to Student Finance Wales for a Childcare Grant (CCG) if they have a partner on an NHS funded course and are claiming support for childcare costs through the NHS bursary scheme.

Intended outcome:

The aim is to prevent double government funding where both students may simultaneously claim support for the same childcare costs from different government departments.

5. Definition of taxable income

The current definition of 'taxable income' in the Regulations, which is used in the financial assessment of means tested maintenance loan, maintenance grants and grants for dependants, is not explicitly linked to 'total income' in the Income Tax Act 2007.

What we are proposing:

It is proposed to change the regulatory definition of 'taxable income' to improve clarity and confirm the correct policy intent. This is a technical change and will have no direct impact on any students.