



To:

Higher education institutions in Wales providing designated higher education courses  
Further education institutions in Wales providing designated higher education courses  
Other providers 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  
Colleges Wales  
and other interested parties

23 September 2016

Dear Colleague

## HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENT SUPPORT

### CHANGES TO BE INCLUDED IN THE WELSH STUDENT SUPPORT REGULATIONS FOR ACADEMIC YEAR 2017/18

The Education (Student Support) (Wales) Regulations 2017 are currently being drafted and, if made, will provide support for students ordinarily resident in Wales taking a course of higher education. The regulations will apply to the provision of support to students in relation to an academic year which begins on or after 1 September 2017 ('AY 2017/18').

A small number of policy changes and technical amendments to the existing legislation have been proposed for AY 2017/18 and are detailed in the annex below.

## ENQUIRIES

If you have any queries about the regulations or wish to comment on this Information Notice, please contact the Higher Education Division in writing at the address below or by email ([studentfinancedivision@wales.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:studentfinancedivision@wales.gsi.gov.uk)).

## Summary of changes to student support regulations for AY 2017/18

The next set of student support regulations are expected to be referred to as The Education (Student Support) (Wales) Regulations 2017.

### Level of grants and loans

The package of support available to eligible higher education students in Wales has been reviewed to take account of inflationary and other pressures. Students will continue to be eligible for sufficient support to avoid upfront fees.

#### **1. Fee support**

For full-time students who commenced their studies on or after 1 September 2012 and are studying in Wales during the academic year 2017/18:

- the maximum tuition fee that institutions in Wales are able to charge will remain at £9,000;
- there will be an increase (3.7%) in the maximum tuition fee loan (from £3,900) to £4,046 for students who commenced their studies on or after September 2012. The amount of tuition fee grant will reduce by an equivalent amount to £4,954;

For full-time students who commenced their studies on or after 1 September 2012 and are studying in the rest of the UK (RUK) during the academic year 2017/18:

- Maximum fees for full-time courses, sandwich courses and full-time distance learning courses will be increased by forecast inflation (2.8%) to £9,250 where publicly funded providers with an OFFA access agreement have also achieved a Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) rating of Meets Expectations in Year One (2016/17).
- Maximum fees for full-time courses, sandwich courses and full-time distance learning courses will be maintained at 2016/17 levels in 2017/18 (£9,000) where publicly funded providers with an OFFA access agreement have not achieved Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) rating of Meets Expectations in Year One (2016/17).
- There will be an additional fee loan made available to students ordinarily resident in Wales whose fees increase as a result of changes elsewhere in the RUK, e.g. a full-time course costing £9,250 will be supported by a Tuition Fee Grant of £4,954, and a Tuition Fee Loan of up to £4,296.

## **Student Finance Wales Information Notice (SFWIN 04/2016)**

For full-time students who commenced their studies prior to 1 September 2012 and are:

- studying in Wales, England and Scotland, the maximum tuition fee support will continue to be frozen at £3,465;
- the maximum tuition fee loan available to those studying in Northern Ireland will be increased to £4,030 to reflect the expected increase in the fees charged there.

### ***2. Maintenance support***

For full-time students who commenced their studies on or after 1 September 2012 and are studying during the academic year 2017/18:

- a means-tested Welsh Government Learning Grant (maintenance grant) of up to £5,161 depending on household income
- an inflationary increase to the overall maintenance support of approximately 10%, (up to £5,358 if living at parents' home, up to £6,922 if living away from parents' home, and up to £9,697 if studying in London) giving access to a total of up to £7,939 maintenance support for those students with the lowest household incomes living at home; up to £9,503 if living away from parents' home, and up to £12,278 if studying in London; as well as
- partial cancellation of up to £1,500 of maintenance loan once repayment has begun.

### ***3. Erasmus***

Historically this scheme used to attract a fee waiver throughout the UK, meaning that the sending HEI didn't charge the student a fee for the time they were abroad, but were still compensated for receiving the student from overseas through the fee waiver supplied by their respective funding councils. Since 2012 these arrangements have changed in England and Wales, but not in Scotland or Northern Ireland who have maintained the fee waiver until now.

The Scottish Government will now be removing the fee waiver they pay (through their funding council), meaning that students ordinarily resident in Wales but participating in this programme of study through a Scottish university will be subject to a fee for any ERASMUS years that commence on or after 1 August 2017. Students ordinarily resident in Wales undertaking an ERASMUS year as part of their course through a Scottish HEI will have access to a non means tested tuition fee grant and loan of up to a maximum of £1,385, (£675 grant and £710 loan).

Arrangements in Northern Ireland are not expected to change in AY2017/18.

#### **4. Course Designation**

From Academic Year 2017/18 the current distinction between public and private providers as they relate to course designation will no longer apply. A provider of higher education in Wales which is a charity will be able to submit a fee and access plan to the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), which if approved, will allow them to be automatically designated and be permitted to charge fees up to the maximum fee level. They will be known as a 'recognised educational institution'. Providers who do not have a fee and access plan approved may apply for specific designation.

#### **5. Part-time Equivalent Level Qualification (ELQ) Exception**

Generally, students who hold a UK Honours degree, or equivalent, are not eligible for student support. There are some particular courses which have been made exceptions to this rule. These exceptions currently include certain postgraduate courses such as a Postgraduate Certificate of Education, (PGCE) and some more specific undergraduate courses for which an Honours degree is a requirement of entry, for example: graduate entry medical and dental courses. Limited support has been available for these courses in certain circumstances for some time. In academic year 2015/16 England extended the list of subjects excepted from the ELQ rule when studied on a part-time basis.

The Welsh Government consulted on the possibility of extending support for students on a range of courses earlier in 2016:

[\[https://consultations.gov.wales/consultations/support-postgraduate-study-and-part-time-engineering-technology-or-computer-science\]](https://consultations.gov.wales/consultations/support-postgraduate-study-and-part-time-engineering-technology-or-computer-science). Following the responses received, from academic year 2017/18 a package of part-time support will be offered by the Welsh Government to eligible students pursuing part-time Honours degree level courses in:

- Engineering, technology and computer science
- Subjects allied to medicine
- Biological sciences
- Veterinary sciences, Agriculture and related subjects
- Physical sciences
- Mathematical sciences and
- Welsh

Details of the part-time package available to eligible students, ordinarily resident in Wales include fee loans, and depending on the level of intensity of their course, a range of targeted grants. A full explanation of the current part-time support package can be found in a range of information, advice and guidance which is updated annually by Student Finance Wales. <http://www.studentfinancewales.co.uk/>

***6. Postgraduate Loan Scheme***

In May 2016 the Welsh Government consulted on proposals to implement a postgraduate loan scheme for students ordinarily resident in Wales. The intention is that postgraduate support should be available for those students for AY2017/18. This is subject to appropriate regulations being brought forward.