

Jeremy Miles AS/MS
Gweinidog y Gymraeg ac Addysg
Minister for Education and Welsh Language



Eich cyf/Your ref P-06-1403 240130
Ein cyf/Our ref JMEWL/00235/24

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Jack Sargeant MS
Chair – Petitions Committee

petitions@senedd.wales

16 February 2024

Dear Jack,

Thank you for your letter of 30 January 2024 regarding '*Petition P-06-1403 Reconsider cuts to Postgraduate funding and increase Doctoral Loans to match UKRI Stipend*'.

As the Minister for Finance and Local Government noted in her foreword to the *Welsh Government Draft Budget 2024-25*, our funding settlement is not sufficient to respond to the extraordinary pressures Wales faces. As such, difficult decisions must be taken.

The Welsh Government's principal policy aim in supporting students is to ensure that all those who can benefit from a higher education are not precluded from doing so by cost. The Welsh Government continues to prioritise support for those undertaking their first degree to ensure wide participation in higher education. Support for first degree study has been protected in the budget. Maintenance support was increased by 9.4% in the 2023/24 academic year, will increase by 3.7% in the 2024/25 academic year, and has grown by 39% since 2018. The Committee may wish to note that this support remains available to a large number of students studying for a postgraduate qualification, including those on teacher training courses and courses connected to certain other professions.

Statutory support for postgraduate Master's study has been consistently more generous than that available to students resident in England since the recommendations of the Diamond review were implemented in the 2019/20 academic year. While grants will now be removed for new students, subject to regulations being made, loans will replace those grants, ensuring that students who are considering a further investment in their higher education have access to a significant amount of financial support from the Welsh Government during their studies.

There may be a disincentive effect in removing these grants. I expect this to be small. The total amount of support available greatly exceeds that available to students resident in England. Repayment of postgraduate loans remains income contingent – borrowers repay 6% of their income above the £21,000 threshold and any debt remaining after 30 years is written off. Despite budget pressures, this is a generous and attractive package of support for those considering advanced study.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

I have also taken the decision to reprioritise £3.2m funding for postgraduate incentive bursaries made available by the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales to protect schools funding. These bursaries were available to some students in addition to statutory support.

Support for postgraduate doctoral and Master's study is a contribution to the costs of studying, as was made clear in the Explanatory Memoranda and Regulatory Impact Assessments associated with the Welsh Government's regulations. These assessments can be found at:

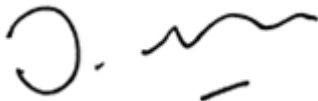
The Education (Postgraduate Doctoral Degree Loans) (Wales) Regulations 2018: https://business.senedd.wales/documents/s76085/EM_SL5225 – The Education Postgraduate Doctoral Degree Loans Wales Regulations 2018.pdf.

The Education (Student Support) (Postgraduate Master's Degrees) (Wales) Regulations 2019: https://business.senedd.wales/documents/s87506/EM_SL5411 – The Education Student Support Postgraduate Masters Degrees Wales Regulations.pdf.

The contribution to costs loan is not intended to meet the full costs of undertaking postgraduate doctoral study and the Welsh Government has no plans to change this. The principal route for support for doctoral study is with the Research Councils who operate a sophisticated and robust UK-wide planning and funding system.

The Welsh Government is content that it has struck an appropriate balance between ensuring that first degree study remains affordable, while providing generous up front support for those planning on pursuing advanced study, given the very difficult financial backdrop.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J. Miles', with a stylized flourish.

Jeremy Miles AS/MS

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