

Dear Cabinet Secretary for Education and Committee Chairs,

I'm writing as a mum from Pembrokeshire. My daughter, [REDACTED], has trained since she was a little girl to audition for a specialist musical theatre and/or dance degree at a leading college in England. We have discovered that, because she is Welsh-domiciled, she may be unable to access Student Finance Wales for these courses even if she earns a place through a competitive audition.

Over recent weeks I have tried to understand the position. I have contacted multiple specialist colleges and Student Finance Wales. I am attaching our email thread with SFW (16 Sept 2025, 24 Sept 2025, 7 Oct 2025, 8 Oct 2025) for your information. In summary, I was advised that some providers do not meet the current designation conditions for Welsh students; that automatic designation in franchise arrangements requires both the lead university and the partner provider to be OfS-registered; and that where specific designation hasn't been sought, SFW applications will be declined. Colleges have begun posting notices to that effect, leaving Welsh families with no viable funding route for a musical theatre and/or dance degree.

I understand that, on paper, the routes of automatic and specific designation still exist. But in practice, the way the arrangements are now operating has shut Welsh students out of specialist training unless providers choose to apply for specific designation (which only enables a reduced tuition fee loan, leaving families to bridge several thousand pounds per year). For ordinary families, that shortfall is impossible and it turns an audition success into a closed door.

It is also impractical and unfair to expect families to chase eight or more separate colleges for answers and hope that each one understands and navigates Welsh designation in time. Parents cannot and should not be responsible for fixing a systemic issue college by college. Some specialist colleges have indicated they will not go down the specific designation route at all. That leaves Welsh applicants with no pathway, regardless of talent or effort. This is compounded by the fact that most of the long established, industry-recognised conservatoires and specialist colleges for musical theatre and dance are in England. If Welsh students cannot access support for those courses, they are effectively shut out of the main professional training pipeline.

The timing is now critical. [REDACTED] is aiming to start in September 2027, which means auditions begin from September 2026 and decisions will move quickly. Without clear funding arrangements, Welsh students will have to withdraw or decline offers purely because of where they live.

This isn't about special treatment; it's about fair access. [REDACTED] knows places are won through audition, and we aren't assuming an outcome. We simply need to know that funding rules won't be the reason she has to say no whether it's for a musical theatre degree or a dance degree.

I am asking for urgent, higher-level scrutiny and a practical route forward:

1. A clear public statement (in plain language) on what Welsh-domiciled students can expect for 2026 audition season and 2027 entry to specialist musical theatre and/or dance degrees in England, without sending families back to each individual provider.
2. A workable pathway that does not place the burden on families, for example, a time-limited, streamlined process (with Medr and providers) to secure specific designation where appropriate, or an interim arrangement that restores fair access while the system is reviewed.
3. Recognition of the impact of the reduced tuition fee loan under specific designation and consideration of transitional support so successful Welsh applicants to musical theatre and/or dance degree programmes are not excluded purely because of funding.

An audition year is not just a date, auditions are seasonal, momentum matters, and opportunities don't always return. This is about the future of Welsh talent in dance and musical theatre, and about making sure our young people are not disadvantaged because of where they live.

Thank you for your time and for anything you can do to provide clarity and a fair route forward. I would welcome the opportunity to give evidence or supply further details.

With thanks,

Jenny [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

From: Jennifer [REDACTED]
Date: 9 October 2025 at 10:54:29 BST
To: Jenny [REDACTED]
Subject: Fwd: Student Finance Wales Support for Specialist Dance & Musical Theatre Honours Degrees in England

Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

From: studentfinancedivision@gov.wales
Date: 9 October 2025 at 10:24:47 BST
To: [REDACTED]
Cc: studentfinancedivision@gov.wales
Subject: RE: Student Finance Wales Support for Specialist Dance & Musical Theatre Honours Degrees in England

Dear Jenny

Thank you for your further email.

I appreciate the position for your daughter; however, I must correct your understanding of the situation and our student support regulations.

English institutions and their partner providers, who deliver the courses, must both be registered with the OfS to meet the conditions for automatic course designation in Wales. In recent months, we have written to a small number of English institutions, who work with partner providers, and not just those delivering performing arts courses, who have enrolled Welsh students onto their courses but have not complied with our student support regulations.

This is the error of the course provider, and unfortunately, as highlighted by the email I have sent to you and despite our letter to them explaining the situation, they have provided you with incorrect information. There has been no change in policy; I hope

you will appreciate where we have identified non-compliance that financially impacts current students, we have a duty to balance the harm between the providers error and protecting public funds.

The process of applying for specific designation has also not changed under Medr and is the same process that was previously completed by the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW). If providers do not satisfy automatic course designation they must apply for specific course designation. It has always been the provider's choice whether they apply for specific designation or not.

We keep our student support regulations under review, and Welsh Government consulted early this year on the [Regulation of higher education providers and designation for student support | GOV.WALES](#). This will inform future policy, and we will publish further information when details are available.

Finally, higher education institutions are autonomous bodies with responsibility for their own academic affairs, including the provision they choose to offer. They are also responsible for compliance with our student support regulations.

Kind regards



Yr Is-adran Ariannu a Strategaeth / Strategy and Funding Division

Y Grŵp Addysg, Diwylliant a'r Gymraeg / Education, Culture & Welsh Language Group

Llywodraeth Cymru / Welsh Government

isadrancyllidmyfyrwyr@llyw.cymru

studentfinancedivision@gov.wales

From: Jennifer [REDACTED]

Sent: 08 October 2025 11:46

To: Student Finance Division – Is-adran Cyllid Myfyrwyr
<studentfinancedivision@gov.wales>

Subject: Re: Student Finance Wales Support for Specialist Dance & Musical Theatre Honours Degrees in England

Dear [REDACTED],

Thank you for your response. I appreciate the clarification, but I must respectfully disagree with the assertion that this situation is not the result of a policy change.

While the technical framework for course designation may have existed previously, the practical implementation of the new regulatory structure under Medr and the requirement for specific designation for courses not automatically qualifying has materially changed access to funding for Welsh students.

These changes are now disadvantaging Welsh students who wish to pursue specialist performing arts degrees in England. Previously accessible courses are now out of reach unless providers go through a designation process. This creates a postcode lottery where English students can access funding for these courses, but Welsh students cannot.

While I understand that the reduced tuition fee loan under specific designation is technically available, the reality is that students would be left to self-fund the significant shortfall which would be several thousand pounds per year. This makes these courses effectively inaccessible for many Welsh students, even if designation is granted.

My understanding is that prior to these changes, partner institutions delivering courses on behalf of OfS-registered universities in England could be automatically designated for Welsh student finance, provided the lead university was OfS-registered and the arrangement met certain criteria. If this understanding is correct, it represents a significant shift in practice.

Even if [REDACTED] were to go through the process of becoming specifically designated, there is no guarantee my daughter would be offered a place due to the competitive audition process. This issue affects multiple specialist colleges, and the cumulative effect is a significant reduction in opportunities for Welsh students not just at one institution, but across the entire sector.

I would like to request that this situation be urgently reviewed. It cannot be acceptable that my daughter, who has dreamed of becoming a professional dancer since childhood, is now unable to study at any of the UK's leading dance colleges simply because she lives in Wales.

Thanks

Jenny

On 8 Oct 2025, at 09:50, Jennifer [REDACTED] wrote:

Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

From: studentfinancedivision@gov.wales

Date: 8 October 2025 at 09:23:36 BST

To: [REDACTED]

Cc: studentfinancedivision@gov.wales

Subject: RE: Student Finance Wales Support for Specialist Dance & Musical Theatre Honours Degrees in England

Dear Jenny

Thank you for your follow up email.

The matter is complex and I must stress the position for English providers offering such courses is not as a result of a change in Welsh Government policy.

If providers are offering performing arts courses which satisfy the course designation conditions in the Welsh student support regulations, the courses will attract student support from Student Finance Wales. As covered in my previous email, there are currently two routes to course designation, and it is the responsibility of English providers to check if their courses meet the Welsh designation conditions and to use the appropriate route to attract student support.

A course can either be:

1. Automatically designated which attracts the higher rate fee loan up to £9,535. This means both the lead provider and partner provider who work under a franchise arrangement must both be registered with the Regulator in England, the Office for Students (OfS). We understand that [REDACTED] (as the partner provider) delivers courses under a franchise arrangement with English universities (as the lead provider); whilst the English universities are registered with the OfS, [REDACTED] is not registered and so the courses are not automatically designated.

or

2. Specifically designated which attracts the reduced rate fee loan up to £6,355. This route applies if a course does not satisfy being automatically designated. If a partner provider is not registered with the OfS in England, the lead provider (or partner provider) must apply to the Regulator in Wales, Medr to have its courses specifically designated..

If a provider's course is not automatically designated it is each provider's responsibility and decision to whether they wish to apply of Medr to have their course specifically designated for Welsh students. [REDACTED] has not applied to have its courses specifically designated. Welsh Government cannot intervene.

I appreciate [REDACTED] has made its position clear for 2027; however, we are unable to confirm what the Welsh regulations will be for a future academic year.

Currently, if it remains that [REDACTED] is not registered with the OfS or chooses not to apply to Medr to have its courses specifically designated, their courses will not attract student support from Student Finance Wales.

The rules for course designation are different across the UK and course providers in England should not assume they are the same. I encourage you to reach out to each of the providers you have listed to check if their courses currently attract student support for Welsh students.

I hope the above has provided further clarification.

Kind regards

[REDACTED]

Yr Is-adran Ariannu a Strategaeth / Strategy and Funding Division

Y Grŵp Addysg, Diwylliant a'r Gymraeg / Education, Culture & Welsh Language Group

Llywodraeth Cymru / Welsh Government

isadrancyllidmyfyrwyr@llyw.cymru

studentfinancedivision@gov.wales

From: Jennifer [REDACTED]

Sent: 07 October 2025 15:32

To: Student Finance Division – Is-adran Cyllid Myfyrwyr

[<studentfinancedivision@gov.wales>](mailto:studentfinancedivision@gov.wales)

Subject: Re: Student Finance Wales Support for Specialist Dance & Musical Theatre Honours Degrees in England

Hello

Unfortunately your response is not very clear for how I can take things forward. You advise that ' The providers you have listed do not have any courses specifically designated for Welsh students' Do you mean that any dance degrees at those colleges would not provide my daughter with any access to funding? The degrees are through affiliated universities so would you need that detail to check?

I have received the below response from a college, can you explain what has happened here, has there been a change in policy? Who can I speak to about taking this further as this is a major disadvantage to any Welsh students wanting to study dance or musical theatre?

Thanks

Jenny

<image001.png>

Sent from my iPhone

On 24 Sep 2025, at 09:36, studentfinancedivision@gov.wales wrote:

Dear Jenny

Thank you for your email to the Welsh Government.

Regarding your daughter's eligibility to statutory student support from September 2027 (i.e. academic year 2027/28), as you will appreciate, I am unable to provide you with the confirmation you seek at this time as the matter relates to a future academic year. However, if there are no changes to our statutory student support regulations, the current provisions set out in our regulations will continue to apply.

Details about our statutory student support arrangements and regulations for academic year 2027/28 will be confirmed towards the end of next year. You may consider visiting the [Student Finance Wales](#) website for updates.

In response to your specific questions:

1. Which of these specialist Honours degree programmes are currently designated for Student Finance Wales support

It is each provider's responsibility to confirm to students if their courses are designated for Welsh student support.

The Student Loans Company (SLC), who provide the Student Finance Wales (SFW), does not publish a list of courses which are automatically designated for student support. Providers across the UK upload around 300,000 courses annually to SLC's system.

SLC does publish a list of courses which have been specifically designated by the Welsh Ministers. The current list can be found via this weblink: [Designated courses in Wales, information for student finance practitioners | Student Finance Wales](#). The providers you have listed do not have any courses specifically designated for Welsh students.

2. Whether there are plans for further colleges/courses to be designated

There are currently two routes to course designation, and it is the responsibility of providers to check if their courses meet the designation conditions and use the appropriate route to attract student support.

A course can either be automatically designated (attracts the higher rate fee loan up to £9,535) or specifically designated (attracts the reduced rate fee loan up to £6,355), for the purposes of our student support regulations.

Higher education courses will be automatically designated if they satisfy the designation criteria set out in our statutory student support regulations: [The Education \(Student Support\) \(Wales\) Regulations 2018](#).

If a course does not meet the automatic course designation criteria, the provider can apply for specific designation via the Regulator Medr; the application process can take up to 3 months.

3.What process a college must follow to secure designation so that Welsh students can access tuition fee and maintenance loans

As per 2. above. If a course is specifically designated the student can apply for the reduced rate tuition fee loan (currently set at £6,355) and full maintenance support. If the provider charges fees above the loan amount the difference between the loan and fees charged will need to be self-funded.

I trust the above has answered your questions and I would encourage you and your daughter to speak to her prospective provider(s) to check if their courses are designated, and if not, whether they will be seeking specific designation for them.

Kind regards



Yr Is-adran Ariannu a Strategaeth / Strategy and Funding Division

Y Grŵp Addysg, Diwylliant a'r Gymraeg / Education, Culture & Welsh Language Group

Llywodraeth Cymru / Welsh Government

isadrancyllidmyfyrwyr@llyw.cymru

studentfinancedivision@gov.wales

From: Jennifer [REDACTED]

Sent: 16 September 2025 13:53

To: Student Finance Division – Is-adran Cyllid Myfyrwyr

<studentfinancedivision@gov.wales>

Subject: Student Finance Wales Support for Specialist Dance & Musical Theatre Honours Degrees in England

Hello

I am writing on behalf of my daughter, [REDACTED] who hopes to apply to specialist dance and musical theatre Honours degree programmes beginning in 2027 (applications opening next academic year). Dance has been her passion from a very young age, and attending one of these colleges would be a dream come true for her. We are starting to plan ahead and would like to understand the position for Welsh students.

Many of the leading conservatoires and performing arts colleges she is considering are based in England. While these institutions may be funded for English-domiciled students through Student Finance England, it appears that several do not currently offer funding for Welsh students. This creates a significant disadvantage for talented young people in Wales wishing to pursue specialist training at degree level in dance and musical theatre.

The colleges we are particularly interested in are:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Could you please advise:

1. Which of these specialist Honours degree programmes are currently designated for Student Finance Wales support,
2. Whether there are plans for further colleges/courses to be designated, and
3. What process a college must follow to secure designation so that Welsh students can access tuition fee and maintenance loans.

This information is essential for planning my daughter's future, as without access to Student Finance Wales, she would unfortunately be unable to take up a place at these colleges, despite her talent and dedication.

Any help or guidance would be much appreciated as it will make a real difference in helping us plan for her future.

Kind regards

Jenny 