

Vicki Howells MS
Minister for Further and Higher Education
Jack Sargeant MS
Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership
Welsh Government

10 March 2026

Dear Ministers,

Support for specialist creative higher-education courses outside Wales

I am writing following the Committee's meeting on 26 February 2026, during which Members considered correspondence relating to the ability of Welsh-domiciled young people to access Student Finance Wales (SFW) support for specialist creative higher education courses outside Wales. The issues that have been raised with us speak not only to individual hardship, but to wider questions about fairness, opportunity and the future of Wales's creative and cultural talent pipeline.

Concerns for Wales's cultural and creative future

The Committee has received detailed accounts from families and organisations outlining the barriers now being encountered by applicants to conservatoire-style programmes in musical theatre, dance, circus arts and other specialist disciplines. These courses are delivered in only a handful of institutions across the UK, many of them based in England. They play a vital role in training the next generation of performers, technicians, and creative practitioners.

This specialist creative training forms part of a fragile but vital pipeline into Wales's artistic life and culture sector. When even a small number of young people are prevented from accessing training that does not exist within Wales, the impact reverberates across the sector for years to come.

The Committee is therefore concerned that the current designation arrangements may, unintentionally, restrict access to opportunities that have long supported the development of Welsh creative talent – talent that enriches our communities, strengthens our cultural identity, and contributes to Wales's presence on national and international stages.



A recently closed Senedd petition calling for restoration of fair funding routes for Welsh students applying to musical theatre and dance degree in England reached the required threshold of 10,000 signatures for a debate in the Senedd. Although this comes too late in this Senedd cycle for a meaningful debate, the strength of public feeling expressed through that petition underlines the urgency and seriousness of the concerns raised.

Clarification and next steps

The Committee would be grateful for clarity on the following points:

1. What degree of certainty can Welsh-domiciled students expect for the 2026 audition cycle and 2027 entry, particularly in relation to courses validated by UK universities but delivered by specialist partner providers that are not themselves directly registered with the Office for Students?
2. Is the Government considering temporary or transitional arrangements, to avoid the creation of a lost cohort of students while the regulatory landscape is clarified?
3. What engagement is taking place with Medr, SFW, validating universities and specialist providers to explore a more proportionate, streamlined designation pathway for small, high quality institutions offering training not available in Wales?
4. What is the Government's assessment of the likely effect on Wales's cultural and creative sectors, including the sustainability of organisations that rely on a steady supply of specialist graduates?

Given the time sensitive nature of audition cycles and the distress already being experienced by families, early clarity would be valuable.

I look forward to your response on how equitable access to specialist training opportunities for young people across Wales can be protected and maintained.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Petitions Committee and the Children, Young People and Education Committee, who also have an interest in this a matter.

Yours sincerely,



Delyth Jewell MS

Chair

Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.