

Briefing for the Petitions Committee

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 13 November 2018

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Research Briefing:

Petition number: **P-05-848**

Petition title: **Let Welsh Students have the opportunity to choose the best study option for them**

We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to ensure that the same funding arrangements are available to students wherever they choose to study and that the funding options are also available to students who have already commenced their studies.

Students currently have the option to study within the UK and Ireland with some study in Europe but why can they not study for a recognised degree throughout the world if the chosen programme best suits their overall career objectives.

In 2017 Georgia Ellis was accepted to the Doctorate of Physiotherapy course at Quinnipiac University in the USA. The bachelor's degree is a liberal arts degree which encompasses a variety of subjects as standard including Public Speaking and as part of gaining her undergraduate degree she will minor in another elective, in her case Business Studies.

Although these are fabulous benefits Georgia chose this study option as her ambition is to become a physiotherapist for a sporting team and because of the exposure to sports teams she would gain in the university's purpose-built training health centre.

Why can't students be able to utilise the same funding arrangements they would have here in the UK towards funding alternative study options. Georgia's story is just one example of the fine calibre of UK students but there are many more.

1. Current student support in Wales

1.1 Introduction

The student support system in Wales is being reformed as a result of the recommendations of Professor Diamond's [Review of higher education funding and student finance arrangements](#) in Wales (the Diamond Review), which was published in September 2016. However, what has

remained unchanged is that **students must be studying at a publicly funded higher education institution or college located in the UK**, or on a specifically approved course in a private institution.

1.2 Overview of the reforms

Amongst other matters, the Diamond Review recommended changing the focus of the support system from tuition fee grants to increased support for living costs. However the reforms have not changed the basic eligibility criteria, **so potential students still have to be studying in a UK based institution**, on a course specifically approved by Welsh Government.

The Welsh Government accepted the Diamond Review recommendations and as a result, from September 2018, eligible students from Wales will be able to receive:

- A tuition fee loan of £9,000 per year if studying in Wales, £9,250 if studying in England, Northern Ireland or Scotland or £6,165 if studying at a private university or college in the UK on a course designated by the Welsh Government; and
- A maximum of £7,650 if living at home, £9,000 if studying away from home outside of London or £11,250 if studying in London, in repayable loans and/or non-repayable grants to cover living costs. The level of support in the form of a loan or grant depends on the household income of the applicant, with those from the poorest households (an annual income of £18,370 or less) will receive most of the support as a grant; and
- A non-means tested, non-repayable grant of £1000.

The Welsh Government describes this new system as the 'most generous student support package in the UK'. The Research Service has produced a guide which provides more [information on the new student support system](#).

In general, to be eligible for this support students must:

- be a UK national or have 'settled status' (no restrictions on how long you can stay in the UK); and
- normally live in Wales; and
- have been living in the UK for 3 years before starting the course.

Broadly speaking eligibility is also dependent on all of the following criteria:

- the course must lead to a recognised qualification (it doesn't have to be a traditional First Degree such as a BA or BSc. Criteria include HNDs, HNCs, Foundation Degrees and others);
- **the higher education institution or college must be publicly funded and located in the UK**; or if studying in a private institution the course has to have been specifically approved by the Welsh Government;
- To receive the Maintenance Loan, the applicant has to be under 60 when at the start of the course, but no limit applies for the Tuition Fee Loan or the Grants.

2. The Welsh Government's view

The Welsh Government highlights that its 'current financial arrangement' with the UK Government means that it is 'unable to offer any tuition fee or maintenance loans to students who chose to study outside the UK'.

However, the Diamond Review recommended that, subject to the necessary regulation:

The Welsh Government explore the possibility of running a pilot scheme to establish whether it is possible or desirable to extend the student support package beyond the UK and EU – for Welsh domiciled students that choose to study further afield for the whole of their degree programme. (The proposed pilot would be study at not-for-profit organisations with a recognised track record of quality provision).

The Welsh Government's paper notes that it is 'supportive of the principle' of supporting Welsh students to undertake international study. It has commissioned research into the possibility of such a scheme: [Overseas Study Pilot: Scoping study](#), which was published in July 2018. The Welsh Government reports that this research found:

[...] low levels of latent demand, difficulty in establishing demand for full portability and limited stakeholder support for providing a maintenance grant/loan to study a full degree abroad.

The Welsh Government has 'considered the report's findings' and will 'confirm the position in a statement to the Senedd later in the year'. But it notes that any future pilots will:

[...] not be able to support students to study a full degree at an overseas university and will instead focus on shorter periods of study in order to allow the greatest number of students to take up this opportunity.