

Kirsty Williams AC/AM  
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg  
Cabinet Secretary for Education



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

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David John Rowlands AM  
Chair - Petitions committee.  
National Assembly for Wales  
Cardiff Bay  
Cardiff Bay  
CF99 1NA

[overnment.Committee.Business@gov.wales](mailto:overnment.Committee.Business@gov.wales)

8 October 2018

Dear David

Thank you for your letter of 25 September regarding a petition submitted by Mrs Sharon Ellis asking the Welsh Government to provide student support to Welsh students who wish to study overseas, similar to Mrs Ellis' daughter.

I have received several pieces of correspondence from Mrs Ellis since January 2017 via her Member of Parliament and Assembly Member on this subject. My responses have made clear how the current student support system works.

The current student support system in Wales is designed to provide support to eligible students who are primarily undertaking a designated higher education course at publicly funded institutions or specifically designated courses at private institutions based in the UK. There is also support for periods of study spent in European institutions (for example, Erasmus funding) and for students who undertake a module of study overseas as part of their UK course (such as medical students who may choose to study 'tropical medicine'). There are also reciprocal arrangements with other EU member states regarding tuition fee support. Similar criteria are applied by the other UK administrations.

Following the comprehensive independent review of higher education funding and student finance arrangements in Wales (the Diamond Review), I introduced a new package of support for students starting their course from academic year (AY) 2018/19 onwards. Eligible Welsh students will be entitled to the most generous student support package in the UK. Most students will receive maintenance support equivalent to the National living wage and will be able to access support to cover the cost of tuition fees.

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay  
Caerdydd • Cardiff  
CF99 1NA

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:  
0300 0604400

[Gohebiaeth.Kirsty.Williams@llyw.cymru](mailto:Gohebiaeth.Kirsty.Williams@llyw.cymru)  
[Correspondence.Kirsty.Williams@gov.wales](mailto:Correspondence.Kirsty.Williams@gov.wales)

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.

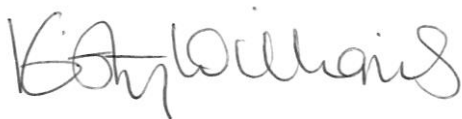
Currently, if a student decides to complete a degree at a university outside the UK, they are not eligible to apply for student support. The Diamond Review recommended that the Welsh Government should explore the possibility of running a pilot scheme to establish whether it is possible to extend the student support package for Welsh domiciled students that choose to study outside the UK for the whole of their degree programme.

I am supportive of the principle that talented Welsh students should have the opportunity and funding to study abroad. In January 2018, the Welsh Government appointed OB3 Research, in conjunction with the Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods (WISERD), to undertake a scoping study with the key aim of providing evidence to support the development of an overseas study pilot. The final report was published in July 2018 and is available here: <https://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/overseas-study-pilot/?lang=en>.

The OB3 report points to 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.

I have considered the report's findings and options for developing an overseas pilot and I expect to be able to confirm the position in a statement to the Senedd later in the year. However, I can confirm that under the current financial agreement with HMT, I would be unable to offer any tuition fee or maintenance loans to students who chose to study outside the UK. It is therefore important to note that the pilot 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.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kirsty Williams'.

**Kirsty Williams AC/AM**

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