

Kirsty Williams AC/AM
Y Gweinidog Addysg
Minister for Education



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-05-884
Ein cyf/Our ref KW/06047/19

Janet Finch-Saunders AM
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14 May 2019

Dear Chair

P-05-884 Amendment to Education (Student Support) (Wales) Regulations 2018 to include UK institutions with operations overseas

Thank you for your letter of 3 May regarding a petition made to the National Assembly for Wales.

I should first make it clear that the Welsh Government has long ensured that support is available for students to study overseas. Students may undertake placements abroad and participate fully in the Erasmus+ scheme. This ensures they are able to experience the language immersion and other activities which are crucial to achieving certain degrees, as well as facilitating positive cultural, intellectual and institutional exchange. Your petitioner may be aware that I announced a new pilot scheme to offer a mix of opportunities for Welsh

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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.

students to participate in activities abroad related to their studies. These include study, volunteering and internships, ranging from two or three weeks to eight weeks.

The statutory student support system in Wales is designed to provide support to eligible students who undertake a designated higher education course in the UK. At least half of the teaching and supervision which comprise the course must be provided in the UK. By implication, up to half can be overseas. To enable this, fee and maintenance support continues to be paid and additional support in the form of travel grants may be available.

This is successful and effective for the overwhelming majority of students. It has ensured that thousands of Welsh students have successfully pursued those degrees where a period of study overseas is either essential or highly desirable for academic success, most notably in modern foreign languages. This continues to be the case. From a purely academic point of view, it is not obvious why a long period of study abroad is necessary. I note that the University of London Institute in Paris is the only UK institution to organise provision in this way.

There are two major constraints to supporting full degree study overseas:

1. As I noted to the Committee in response to petition P-05-848, the package of support available from the 2018/19 academic year is based on recommendations resulting from the Diamond Review of Higher Education and Student Finance in Wales. Various models for support were considered during the review and difficult decisions were necessary regarding priorities. With the limited budget available in a time of continued austerity, our finance supports those most in need. Extending this to those who study the entirety of their degree overseas is not possible.

2. The regulatory framework for higher education has developed over a number of years and is designed to provide protections for, on the one hand, students, and, on the other, the public purse. Exercising the regulatory functions necessary for this framework to be effective when provision moves abroad is likely to be difficult, and increases risk to both groups.

There is also the fact that increasing the amount of fee income remitted overseas would not support our aims for investment in higher education in Wales.

I am supportive of overseas study and the Welsh Government commissioned research in order to determine how best to increase the number of students studying overseas (Overseas Study Pilot: Scoping Study, Government Social Research, 2018). The pilot I mentioned above is the result of that study. That report noted a low level of latent demand for study of full degrees overseas.

For these reasons, I am not minded to amend the general regulatory requirements regarding the location of provision at this time.

However, the issues the petitioner raises are worthy of consideration and I shall ask my officials to review them further.

I trust the above is helpful.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Kirsty Williams". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'K' and a long, sweeping tail on the 's'.

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