

SL(6)480 – The Education (Student Support) (Postgraduate Master’s Degrees) (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2024

Background and Purpose

The *Education (Student Support) (Postgraduate Master's Degrees) (Wales) Regulations 2019* (“the **2019 Regulations**”) set out the financial support available for eligible students studying postgraduate Master’s (“PGM”) degree courses in Wales.

The current PGM support package comprises loans and grants. There are two components to grants: (i) a universal ‘base’ grant of £1,000, and (ii) a means tested contribution-to-costs grant of up to £5,885.

These Regulations amend the 2019 Regulations to:

- remove the base grant and the contribution-to-costs grant from the PGM package of support, and replace the grants with a loan to offset the difference; and
- increase the maximum support value by a measure of inflation (RPIX) to £18,950 (an increase of 0.9%); by increasing the amount of available loan.

The amendments to grant support and the maximum support value will apply to new PGM students who begin courses on or after 01 August 2024.

Procedure

Negative.

The Regulations were made by the Welsh Ministers before they were laid before the Senedd. The Senedd can annul the Regulations within 40 days (excluding any days when the Senedd is: (i) dissolved, or (ii) in recess for more than four days) of the date they were laid before the Senedd.

Technical Scrutiny

No points are identified for reporting under Standing Order 21.2 in respect of this instrument.

Merits Scrutiny

The following two points are identified for reporting under Standing Order 21.3 in respect of this instrument.

- 1. Standing Order 21.3(ii) – that it is of political or legal importance or gives rise to issues of public policy likely to be of interest to the Senedd.**



Whilst the Explanatory Memorandum states that the proposals have been discussed with a number of 'key stakeholders' (including Universities Wales, NUS Wales and representatives of the sector), no formal consultation has been undertaken in respect of these Regulations.

2. Standing Order 21.3(ii) – that it is of political or legal importance or gives rise to issues of public policy likely to be of interest to the Senedd.

The Explanatory Memorandum contains a Regulatory Impact Assessment ("RIA") setting out six options considered by Welsh Ministers to amend PGM financial support. It states:

6.3 [...] Removal of [the grants described above] has been prompted by significant pressures on Welsh Government budgets for the 2024/25 financial year. Savings are required. Change is necessary ahead of the 2024/25 academic year because of the particular pressures on this year's budget.

6.4 Options for support for PGM students for the 2024/25 academic year were considered against this need to restructure budgets for Welsh Government, in light of significant budgetary pressures. In addition, sustained inflationary pressures impact the cost of living for students.[...]

Paragraph 8.4 in the 'Costs and Benefits' section of the RIA states:

Compared to existing policy, a student will lose a minimum of £1,000 and a maximum of £6,885 in grant assistance but can apply for an increased loan. Therefore, a student's debt is likely to increase. This may deter some prospective students from undertaking a course of postgraduate study – a disincentive effect. It is not possible to quantify this disincentive effect. However, the mitigation of replacing grants with loans will mean that new students will not experience any loss of in-study income compared to previous cohorts, minimising the disincentive effect. [emphasis added]

Welsh Government response

A Welsh Government response is not required.

Committee Consideration

The Committee considered the instrument at its meeting on 29 April 2024 and reports to the Senedd in line with the reporting points above.

