



POLICY AND STRATEGY, DOCUMENT

Changes to higher education course designation arrangements (SFWIN 06/2026)

Explains changes to the rules for the 2027 to 2028 and 2028 to 2029 academic years that determine whether higher education courses qualify for Welsh student support.

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Background

Students can only receive statutory student support in the UK if they:

- are studying a designated course, and
- satisfy relevant residency conditions

Course designation is a longstanding regulatory requirement. It ensures that public funding is directed towards courses provided by organisations that are subject to appropriate regulation, quality assurance and oversight.

This notice explains changes to the arrangements used to determine whether a course is designated for Welsh student support.

Why designation arrangements changing

The Welsh Government is changing the rules that determine whether higher education courses are designated for Welsh student support. These changes will:

- reflect the new regulatory framework established by the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022, from 1 August 2027
- align the designation of certain franchised courses delivered in England with the strengthened regulatory oversight arrangements in England, from 1 August 2028

The new arrangements will:

- align designation with the regulatory frameworks in Wales and England simplify
- the designation system
- reduce the number of courses that require a separate designation decision by Medr, the Welsh tertiary education regulator

These changes do not alter providers' responsibility to ensure that courses are designated in accordance with the student support regulations.

Courses must be designated before they are added to the Student Loans Company's Course Management System (CMS). The CMS allows students to select an uploaded course when applying for Student Finance Wales. It is used to assess eligibility for statutory student support.

Changes for courses provided directly by providers from 1 August 2027

Courses provided directly by Welsh higher education providers

Under the new arrangements, automatic designation will be linked to a provider's registration status with Medr.

Undergraduate courses

Medr core category

Courses provided directly by Welsh providers registered in Medr's higher education core category will:

- be automatically designated attract
- support at the higher tuition fee rate For the 2026 to 2027 academic year, the higher tuition fee rate is £9,790. The rate that applies in future academic years may differ.

Medr alternative category

Courses provided directly by Welsh providers registered in Medr's higher education alternative category will:

- be automatically designated
- attract support at the lower tuition fee rate

This replaces the current system, which relevant providers may need to apply to Medr for specific course designation. For the 2026 to 2027 academic year, the lower tuition fee rate is £6,525. The rate that applies in future academic years may differ.

Postgraduate courses

Postgraduate courses delivered by providers registered with Medr in the core or alternative categories will be automatically designated for postgraduate student support. This replaces the current system, where providers may need to apply to Medr for specific course designation.

Courses provided directly by English higher education providers

The current designation arrangements for many English higher education providers providing undergraduate and postgraduate courses will continue.

Undergraduate courses

OfS Approved (fee cap) category

Courses provided directly by providers registered with the Office for Students (OfS) in England in the Approved (fee cap) category will:

- continue to be automatically designated attract
- support at the higher tuition fee rate

OfS Approved category

Courses provided directly by providers registered with the OfS in the Approved category will:

- become automatically designated attract
- support at the lower tuition fee rate

This means many providers that currently require specific course designation via Medr will no longer need to obtain it before Welsh students can access support.

Postgraduate courses

Postgraduate courses provided by providers registered with the OfS in either category will be automatically designated for postgraduate student support.

Providers that currently require specific course designation via Medr will no longer need to obtain it before Welsh students can access postgraduate support.

Teacher training provision

The Welsh Government will extend automatic designation to courses provided by accredited School-Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) providers in England.

These courses will attract support at the lower tuition fee rate.

This means Welsh students studying on these courses will be able to access Welsh student support without the provider needing a separate designation decision from Medr.

Changes for franchised and partnership provision from 1 August 2027

Some higher education courses are delivered by one organisation on behalf of another. These arrangements are often referred to as franchised or partnership provision.

The current designation arrangements for franchised provision can be complex. It often requires providers to obtain specific course designation via Medr before Welsh students can access support.

The new arrangements will simplify the system. It will align designation with the regulatory frameworks in Wales and England.

Courses delivered on behalf of Welsh core category providers

Courses delivered on behalf of a Welsh provider registered in Medr's higher education core category will generally be automatically designated if the delivery partner is subject to appropriate regulatory oversight. This includes any of the following:

- another provider registered (in either category) with Medr
- a provider funded by Medr
- an English provider registered (in either category) with the OfS

These courses will continue to attract support at the higher tuition fee rate.

Under the new arrangements, automatic designation will no longer depend on the delivery partner being a charity. Instead, the key requirement will be that the delivery partner is appropriately regulated. As a result, some courses that currently require specific course designation via Medr will become automatically designated.

Courses delivered on behalf of Welsh alternative category providers

Different arrangements will apply where a course is delivered on behalf of a Welsh provider registered in Medr's higher education alternative category. In these rare cases, specific course designation via Medr will be required.

Where designation is granted, the lower tuition fee rate will apply.

The Welsh Government will keep these arrangements under review.

Courses delivered on behalf of English registered providers

Courses delivered on behalf of an English provider registered with the OfS in the Approved (fee cap) category will be automatically designated if the delivery partner is also appropriately regulated. This includes:

- registered Welsh providers
- Welsh funded providers
- registered English providers

This will reduce the need for separate designation decisions by Medr. It will improve consistency between Wales and England.

These courses will attract support at the higher tuition fee rate.

Where a course is delivered on behalf of an English provider that is approved by the Office for Students and is not subject to fee limits, it will generally continue to require specific course designation by Medr before Welsh students can access support.

Designated courses will attract support at the lower tuition fee rate.

Qualifying for tuition fee support during the academic year: removal of the 3-month designation rule

The Welsh Government will remove an existing rule that affects a student's eligibility for tuition fee support.

Currently, a course must become designated within 3 months of the start of the academic year for students to receive tuition fee support during that year. If designation happens later, tuition fee support is usually not available until the following academic year.

Under the new arrangements, this restriction will be removed. Eligible students may be able to receive tuition fee support in the same academic year, even if a

course becomes designated later in that year. This will help ensure students do not miss out on support because of delays in the designation process.

The change applies only to tuition fee support and does not affect the existing conditions for maintenance support.

Performing arts and related courses from 1 August 2027

The Welsh Government recognises the importance of specialist performing arts provision. It also recognises the challenges that can arise where courses are delivered through providers that are not part of the OfS regulatory system.

These issues have affected a small number of performing arts courses in recent years.

Temporary course designation arrangements introduced for the 2026 to 2027 academic year will be extended for a further year. They will continue to apply to eligible performing arts and related courses in the 2027 to 2028 academic year. This will ensure that new students choosing these courses can access Welsh student support. Tuition fee support will continue to be available at the lower fee rate.

Changes for franchised and partnership provision from 1 August 2028

From 1 August 2028, the Welsh Government intends to introduce new arrangements for certain franchised higher education courses delivered in England. These changes follow reforms introduced by the UK Government to strengthen the regulation and oversight of franchised higher education provision.

Under the new arrangements, franchised courses will become automatically designated for Welsh student support where they are delivered through providers that are one of the following:

- registered with the OfS
- exempt from registration
-

below the 300-student regulatory threshold

The changes are intended to:

- ensure consistency between Wales and England
- reduce the need for separate designation decisions
- link the provision of student support to appropriate regulatory oversight

Performing Arts and related courses from 1 August 2028

From 1 August 2028, wider reforms to the designation of franchised courses will provide a long-term solution for performing arts and related courses.

Courses delivered by providers covered by the strengthened regulatory framework will generally become automatically designated for Welsh student support. This means more performing arts and related courses are expected to become eligible for support without needing a separate designation decision by Medr.

For franchised courses, the higher or lower tuition fee support rate will depend on the registration status of the provider on whose behalf the course is delivered, in line with existing fee support arrangements.

When will the changes take effect

The temporary designation arrangements for performing arts and related courses will be extended for a further year from 1 August 2027.

Subject to the approval of Welsh Ministers and the making of the necessary regulations, the remaining changes described in this notice will apply to courses beginning on or after 1 August 2027 or 1 August 2028, depending on the specific change.

Providers remain responsible for ensuring prospective students receive accurate information about course designation before accepting an offer of a place. This includes whether a course is designated for Welsh student support.

The process for applying for student finance will not change.

Enquiries

If you have questions about applications, how to apply, payments or any other aspect of the service, please contact **Student Finance Wales** (<https://www.studentfinancewales.co.uk/contact/>).

If you have any questions about this Information Notice, please **email the Strategy and Funding Division** (<mailto:studentfinancedivision@gov.wales>), Welsh Government.

Large print, Braille and alternative language versions of this document are available on request.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.