

Cylchlythyr | Circular

Consultation on the Proposed PGT Interim Support Package 2018/19

Date: 09 August 2017
Reference: W17/20HE
To: Heads of higher education institutions in Wales
Principals of directly-funded further education colleges in
Wales
Response by: 20 September 2017
Contact: Name: Leanne Holborn
Telephone: 029 2085 9724
Email: leanne.holborn@hefcw.ac.uk

This consultation seeks comments on HEFCW's initial proposals for an interim Postgraduate Taught (PGT) support package for Academic Year (AY) 2018/19, to be delivered for a single year prior to the implementation of the Student Loans Company (SLC) PGT support package.

If you require this document in an alternative accessible format, please email info@hefcw.ac.uk.



Noddir gan
Lywodraeth Cymru
Sponsored by
Welsh Government

Introduction

1. This consultation seeks comments on HEFCW's proposals for an interim Postgraduate Taught (PGT) support package for Academic Year (AY) 2018/19, to be delivered for a single year, prior to the implementation by the Student Loans Company (SLC) in AY 2019/20 of a PGT support package, for both full-time and part-time Welsh domiciled students. It outlines the background to HEFCW's proposals and poses a number of questions, the responses to which we will use to inform, develop and refine the final arrangements.

Background

2. [The Review of Student Support and Higher Education Funding in Wales](#) ('The Diamond Review') included recommendations on PGT Masters provision.
3. Recognising the value of postgraduate study for students, the economy and society, and acknowledging that in some fields, postgraduate qualifications are becoming the expected standard for individuals to have attained, the Welsh Government partially accepted the recommendations in their published response in November 2016 ([Welsh Government response to recommendations](#)). The Welsh Government have confirmed to HEFCW, in May 2017, that the following will be implemented in Wales -

Support for PGT students

- *'Postgraduate students receive an equivalent level of maintenance and tuition fee support as undergraduate students (i.e. Tuition Fee Loan up to the current £9,000 maximum). However, this support will be provided as a contribution to study rather than as specific elements for tuition and maintenance.*
- *A re-application process should be introduced for any student seeking to undertake a PGT course (whether as an additional year of study added on to their undergraduate degree course or as a stand-alone Masters degree course).'*¹

PGT tuition fee level

- *'To control the amount of public investment/government contribution towards the cost of PGT provision it is recommended that:*
 - *HEIs in Wales continue to set their own fee levels for PGT provision.*
 - *HEFCW would also be required to obtain and monitor evidence of cost data as part of a basket of goods comparison.'*

¹ Welsh Government have confirmed that the interim package does not include integrated Masters courses. The intention is for support for students on these courses to continue to be funded in the same way as present.

4. Whilst they accept the principle that postgraduate students should be entitled to the same level of support as undergraduate students, the Welsh Government consider the complexity in regulating postgraduate courses would outweigh the benefits of providing support in this way. The Welsh Government will therefore, prepare legislation to allow a means tested contribution to the costs of undertaking a postgraduate course. The general contribution can be used to cover students' tuition fees or maintenance costs and will be equivalent to the undergraduate full-time support. The support will only be available for one year or on a pro-rata basis if study is undertaken over a two year period and will be portable, and so available to students wherever they choose to study in the UK. It is intended to minimise bureaucracy while providing the students with flexibility.
5. In February 2017, the Welsh Government informed HEFCW that the SLC were unable to implement the Diamond package of support for postgraduate students undertaking a taught Masters course in time for implementation in AY 2018/19. As a result, the Welsh Government propose to provide an interim package of support to students, through HEFCW, by making extra funding available to allocate to Welsh HE providers to provide students with additional funding support for their PGT costs. This will be in addition to a postgraduate loan, administered by the SLC, which will be available from AY 2017/18 to Welsh domiciled students studying throughout the UK ([Support for Students on PG Masters Degrees](#)).
6. The Welsh Government have confirmed that they propose to make this funding available to HEFCW under section 68 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, and have indicated that the funding available, which is not yet confirmed, is likely be in the region of £5m. This funding will be made available in financial year (FY) 2018-19 from August 2018 onwards with further funding potentially available in FY 2019-20, prior to the SLC implementation of the PGT funding scheme from August 2019. The frequently asked questions relating to the student finance support in Wales 2018/19 statement, published on 11 July 2017 ([FAQ-Student Finance Support 2018/19](#)), indicate that future PGT support funding is expected to be equivalent to around £4,000 per student, when the full scheme is implemented. However, there are no firm budget commitments available at the moment and the funding for this scheme is unlikely to be confirmed before January 2018. It should also be noted that this figure was derived based on certain assumptions by the Welsh Government and so will be influenced by changes in factors such as student recruitment and demand for support.
7. HEFCW will therefore deliver a package of funding support for postgraduate provision which will allow funding to be provided for postgraduate study in Welsh providers in AY 2018/19, prior to the SLC implementing the proposed PGT arrangements from AY 2019/20. Although HEFCW cannot fund students directly, the Welsh Government's request is for HEFCW to provide funding via the Welsh higher education providers

(HEPs). The funding package will be structured in such a way that HEFCW can provide the funding to providers for postgraduate Masters provision, with terms and conditions that require the funding to be used for providing support for postgraduate students, both those studying on a full-time basis and those studying on a part-time basis.

8. WG have clarified that the eligible population will be the same as the current eligible population for loans set out in the [2017/18 Postgraduate Masters Degree Loans regulations](#) (currently there are few changes planned for AY 2018/19). It will include some research programmes, where that research leads to a Masters degree, but will not include, for example, PhDs, integrated Masters and PG Diplomas.

Proposal for one year of PGT funding from HEFCW in AY 2018/19

9. Officers have looked at the landscape of PGT activity in Wales, both full-time and part-time, in terms of the numbers of students and the levels of fees that are charged across the providers, for a wide range of subject areas. The volume of information is vast. Recognising this complexity, and the fact that this funding will be for one year only, it will be challenging for HEFCW to put an interim process in place that can recognise the individual students' circumstances in terms of fee levels, sources of funding and need.
10. HEFCW officers propose a less complex system whereby the total amount of funding from the Welsh Government will be distributed to HE providers, based on their proportion of the Welsh sector volume of PGT activity. These proportions will be calculated initially based on the volume of their PGT full-time equivalent (FTE) activity, for Wales and EU domiciled students in AY 2015/16, returned on the HESA Student Record, with the actual allocation being based on AY 2016/17 data. This data will include all course aim codes relating to a Masters course for all FT and PT new entrants. PT new entrants will be counted as 50% FTE.

Question 1: Should HEFCW take any account of the demographics of the PGT body in calculating the allocation to each institution? Are there any measures that could be used as a proxy for need, in the absence of any means testing information?

Question 2: Do you foresee any issues with the proposal to estimate allocations to institutions on the basis of AY 2015/16 HESA student data and then update those allocations using the AY 2016/17 HESA student data when available? If so, please suggest an alternative method that would be appropriate for a one-year interim arrangement.

11. It is proposed that the funding allocation from HEFCW will be made available for the provider to develop a distribution method within their institution, for Welsh and EU domiciled students undertaking a Masters

course in AY 2018/19. The institution's funding distribution method would need to take into account the potential for fee waivers or alternative awards available to the students where appropriate. For example an alternative award such as a bursary may be more appropriate for students whose tuition fees are employer funded.

12. We would require providers to inform us of the distribution method that they proposed to use and confirm that the details had been made available to prospective PGT applicants. The timescales for finalising the details of the distribution method cannot be confirmed until Welsh Government are able to confirm the funding that will be made available for HEFCW to allocate for this one year PGT funding arrangement.

Question 3: How could, and/or to what extent should, HEFCW ensure consistency between institutions' individual methodology of allocations criteria for award?

13. At the end of AY 2018/19, HEFCW will request a monitoring report that will be designed to provide confirmation from each institution that all the funding had been spent in accordance with the terms and conditions upon which it was allocated, i.e. the fees charged for Welsh/EU domiciled students had been waived partially or in full, or bursaries had been awarded. In developing a distribution method, providers will have to be mindful of any relevant courses that they may franchise.

Question 4: Are there any unintended consequences arising from the proposed method of allocation taking into account that this is a one-year interim arrangement?

Question 5: Are there any practical issues, within institutions, which would make this proposed method of allocation, and the expectation of institutional distribution, problematic?

Question 6: Can you foresee any issues with this proposal and its interaction with other similar arrangements within institutions?

Question 7: This funding proposal is intended to be in place for AY 2018/19. What are the critical dates for confirmation of the details of the funding that institutions will need in order to have adequate time for marketing and implementing the arrangements?

Question 8: Are there any impacts of this proposal relating to the safeguarding against discrimination, the promotion of equality, and/or in relation to the Future Generations Act that we should consider.

Further information

14. Our initial proposal has been shared with Welsh Government officials to ensure that it is in keeping with their intentions for the interim package, and

the Cabinet Secretary has agreed that we should consult on our proposals at this early stage.

15. Please return your comments to David Hunt, Funding and Statistics Officer (email: david.hunt@hefcw.ac.uk) by 20 September 2017. The responses will then be collated and final proposals presented to the Council as part of the funding proposals for AY 2018/19. For ease of reference a summary of the questions posed are included at Annex A.

Assessing the impact of our policies

16. Informed by this consultation, we will be carrying out an impact assessment to help safeguard against discrimination and promote equality, and consider the implications in relation to the Future Generations Act. We will also consider the impact of the plans on the Welsh language and Welsh language provision within the HE sector in Wales. Contact equality@hefcw.ac.uk for more information about Impact Assessments.
17. A similar responsibility rests on higher education providers to assess the impact of their proposals for distribution, to safeguard against discrimination and promote equality.

Summary of Questions

Question 1: Should HEFCW take any account of the demographics of the PGT body in calculating the allocation to each institution? Are there any measures that could be used as a proxy for need, in the absence of any means testing information?

Question 2: Do you foresee any issues with the proposal to estimate allocations to institutions on the basis of AY 2015/16 HESA student data and then update those allocations using the AY 2016/17 HESA student data when available? If so, please suggest an alternative method that would be appropriate for a one-year interim arrangement.

Question 3: How could, and/or to what extent should, HEFCW ensure consistency between institutions' individual methodology of allocations criteria for award?

Question 4: Are there any unintended consequences arising from the proposed method of allocation taking into account that this is a one-year interim arrangement?

Question 5: Are there any practical issues, within institutions, which would make this proposed method of allocation, and the expectation of institutional distribution, problematic?

Question 6: Can you foresee any issues with this proposal and its interaction with other similar arrangements within institutions?

Question 7: This funding proposal is intended to be in place for AY 2018/19. What are the critical dates for confirmation of the details of the funding that institutions will need in order to have adequate time for marketing and implementing the arrangements?

Question 8: Are there any impacts of this proposal relating to the safeguarding against discrimination, the promotion of equality, and/or in relation to the Future Generations Act that we should consider.