

Dear Cabinet Secretary for Education and Committee Chairs,

I'm writing as a mum from XXXXXXXXXXXX. My daughter, XXXX, has trained since she was a little girl to audition for a specialist musical theatre and/or dance degree at a leading college in England. We have discovered that, because she is Welsh-domiciled, she may be unable to access Student Finance Wales for these courses even if she earns a place through a competitive audition.

Over recent weeks I have tried to understand the position. I have contacted multiple specialist colleges and Student Finance Wales. I am attaching our email thread with SFW (16 Sept 2025, 24 Sept 2025, 7 Oct 2025, 8 Oct 2025) for your information. In summary, I was advised that some providers do not meet the current designation conditions for Welsh students; that automatic designation in franchise arrangements requires both the lead university and the partner provider to be OfS-registered; and that where specific designation hasn't been sought, SFW applications will be declined. Colleges have begun posting notices to that effect, leaving Welsh families with no viable funding route for a musical theatre and/or dance degree.

I understand that, on paper, the routes of automatic and specific designation still exist. But in practice, the way the arrangements are now operating has shut Welsh students out of specialist training unless providers choose to apply for specific designation (which only enables a reduced tuition fee loan, leaving families to bridge several thousand pounds per year). For ordinary families, that shortfall is impossible and it turns an audition success into a closed door.

It is also impractical and unfair to expect families to chase eight or more separate colleges for answers and hope that each one understands and navigates Welsh designation in time. Parents cannot and should not be responsible for fixing a systemic issue college by college. Some specialist colleges have indicated they will not go down the specific designation route at all. That leaves Welsh applicants with no pathway, regardless of talent or effort. This is compounded by the fact that most of the long established, industry-recognised conservatoires and specialist colleges for musical theatre and dance are in England. If Welsh students cannot access support for those courses, they are effectively shut out of the main professional training pipeline.

The timing is now critical. XXXX is aiming to start in September 2027, which means auditions begin from September 2026 and decisions will move quickly. Without clear funding arrangements, Welsh students will have to withdraw or decline offers purely because of where they live.

This isn't about special treatment; it's about fair access. XXXX knows places are won through audition, and we aren't assuming an outcome. We simply need to know that funding rules won't be the reason she has to say no whether it's for a musical theatre degree or a dance degree.

I am asking for urgent, higher-level scrutiny and a practical route forward:

1. A clear public statement (in plain language) on what Welsh-domiciled students can expect for 2026 audition season and 2027 entry to specialist musical theatre and/or dance degrees in England, without sending families back to each individual provider.
2. A workable pathway that does not place the burden on families, for example, a time-limited, streamlined process (with Medr and providers) to secure specific designation where appropriate, or an interim arrangement that restores fair access while the system is reviewed.

3. Recognition of the impact of the reduced tuition fee loan under specific designation and consideration of transitional support so successful Welsh applicants to musical theatre and/or dance degree programmes are not excluded purely because of funding.

An audition year is not just a date, auditions are seasonal, momentum matters, and opportunities don't always return. This is about the future of Welsh talent in dance and musical theatre, and about making sure our young people are not disadvantaged because of where they live.

Thank you for your time and for anything you can do to provide clarity and a fair route forward. I would welcome the opportunity to give evidence or supply further details.

With thanks,

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