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Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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Dear Delyth

Thank you for your letter of 10 March regarding access to Student Finance Wales support for specialist creative and performing arts higher education courses delivered outside Wales.

The Welsh Government recognises the strength of feeling expressed by students, families and the sector, and we fully acknowledge the important contribution that specialist creative education makes to Wales' cultural life and creative economy. I am keen to clarify the current position, the steps being taken to support students, and the work underway to review the policy framework.

Context and policy position

Eligible Welsh-domiciled students can apply for statutory student support for designated courses of higher education by way of regulations made under the Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998. Course designation is a longstanding regulatory mechanism designed to protect both students and the public purse by ensuring that public funding supports good-quality provision delivered by well-managed, financially viable providers, subject to appropriate regulation or due diligence assessment.

Courses may be designated by virtue of meeting certain conditions on the face of the Welsh student support regulations. Where they do not meet those conditions, the Welsh Government will designate a course once a provider has passed a due diligence

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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.

assessment with Medr, the sector regulator in Wales. This is established policy and is widely understood in the higher education sector.

The courses giving rise to the current concerns are delivered by providers that are not registered with the Office for Students ('OfS') in England. As such, they are not regulated. The OfS regulatory register was introduced in England in 2018, following the Higher Education and Research Act 2017. Registration is now the primary route through which providers are regulated and courses designated for student support in England.

In the absence of regulation, courses delivered by these providers are not designated by the Welsh Government for the purpose of statutory student support. This has been a consistent policy position since the introduction of the OfS register.

It is the responsibility of providers to ensure that their courses are designated before admitting Welsh students. The Welsh Government is aware that these courses may be designated in England due to a different regulatory approach taken by the UK Government. It has become apparent that a number of English providers have admitted students in error in recent years and there is no lawful basis for providing statutory student support to a student on a non-designated course.

Student support in Wales and England operates on a two-tier tuition fee system. Courses delivered by regulated providers are designated at the higher tuition fee rate, reflecting the assurance provided by full regulatory oversight. Courses delivered by unregulated providers may be specifically designated, following due diligence via Medr, and are designated at the lower tuition fee rate. This approach balances access to specialist provision with the need to protect students and the public purse and has been applied consistently across sectors for many years.

This is not a sector wide issue. This issue is limited to a small number of unregulated providers in England, however many specialist providers, including in the performing arts sector, have courses designated for support by the Welsh Government (and examples are provided in Annex A).

Support for students already on courses

Where students were admitted in error and were already committed to, or studying on, courses in the 2025/26 academic year, the Welsh Government acted swiftly to ensure that those students continue to receive support. This included students on performing arts courses, reflecting the Government's priority to avoid harm where errors had occurred through no fault of the student.

Following these issues, Student Finance Wales tightened its administrative processes, reducing the scope for errors and ensuring that both providers and applicants are now clearer about whether courses are designated. This has understandably led to greater awareness among prospective students that some courses are not designated for support.

I hope that this context is helpful and explains the issue clearly. I have addressed each of your questions in turn below.

1. Certainty for the 2026 audition cycle and 2027 entry

For the 2026 audition cycle and 2027 entry, students can be confident that:

- courses delivered by **regulated providers**, including universities and conservatoires, remain designated in the usual way; and
- courses delivered by **unregulated providers** are not designated unless they have successfully applied for designation via Medr.

As noted, unregulated providers may apply for specific designation via Medr, enabling appropriate due diligence to be undertaken. This route has been available for many years and there is nothing to prevent providers from seeking specific designation for their courses through this process.

2. Temporary or transitional arrangements

The exceptional arrangements put in place in 2025/26 applied to students already on courses. They were a time-limited response to provider error and did not represent a change in policy.

However, in light of representations from students and providers, including those who had already auditioned or received conditional offers, the Welsh Government has agreed to adopt a one-year, temporary specific designation of identified performing arts and related courses by certain English providers who are not registered with the OfS and who have not applied for the specific designation of its courses with Medr for the 2026/27 academic year. This decision was set out recently in a Written Statement: [Designation of Performing Arts and Related Courses \(24 March 2026\) | GOV.WALES](#).

This is an exceptional, time-limited measure. Support for these courses will be capped at the established lower private provider fee loan rate for specifically designated courses with students funding the difference between the maximum tuition fee loan and the fees charged by the provider. This will ensure we maintain parity with students on other specifically designated courses where those providers have followed the correct process with Medr and who will receive fee support capped at the lower fee rate of £6,525 in 2026/27.

A broader review of designation policy will be undertaken ahead of the 2027/28 academic year in line with established regulatory and operational timescales. This will include a review of tuition fee levels. Any announcement of policy, were it to change, will be set out later this year, with amendments to student support regulations then made ahead of the launch of the Student Finance Wales service in March 2027.

3. Engagement with Medr, Student Finance Wales and providers

Officials are working to:

- reinforce providers' responsibilities regarding designation; and
- ensure that the application process for specific designation is clearly understood.

Officials are working with Medr, Student Finance Wales, and Colegau Cymru. As this work continues, further engagement will be considered.

The Welsh Government agrees that there should be a proportionate and streamlined route to designation for small, high-quality specialist institutions, provided it does not undermine regulatory safeguards. That is the purpose of the specific designation route operated by Medr on our behalf. This has been in place for many years and allows providers who chose not to fully participate in sector regulation with the sector regulator, Medr in Wales and the OfS in England, to have their courses designated.

4. Impact on Wales' cultural and creative sectors

The Welsh Government does not consider this to be a performing arts sector-wide issue. There is a wide range of designated, high-quality provision available to Welsh students in this field, including at specialist providers and conservatoire-level institutions, many of which have operated successfully for decades. I have provided an overview of this provision at Annex A.

The Welsh Government has also demonstrated its commitment to the sector through direct investment, including most recently £2m of support for the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama.

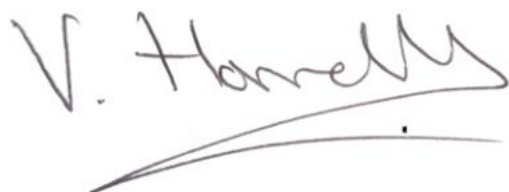
That said, I do recognise the issues raised about access to niche specialist training not available in Wales, and the potential longer-term implications for the creative pipeline. Indeed, I commissioned Medr to undertake a review of this, and they published their report in February¹. These considerations will form a key part of the broader policy review which will consider:

- the regulatory landscape across the UK;
- developments in England, including new UK Government requirements for providers to register with the Office for Students;
- the provision of tuition fee support; and
- the balance between student choice, quality assurance, and value for money.

In the meantime, the Welsh Government will continue to provide clear information to students and providers, and to work with partners to minimise uncertainty during forthcoming admissions cycles.

I hope this response provides reassurance about the Welsh Government's approach and the work underway.

Yours sincerely,



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¹ Subjects of study – demand, provision and distribution of subject areas across higher education in Wales.
<https://www.medr.cymru/en/News/medr-2026-04-subjects-of-study-demand-provision-and-distribution-of-subject-areas-across-higher-education-in-wales/>

Annex A

Overview of sector provision designated for student support by the Welsh Government

The Welsh Government provides support across a wide range of courses and has invested directly into the sector. Many courses in the sector are designated, including at providers who have followed the established process and successfully undergone due diligence with Medr. This Annex is intended as a brief overview of designated course provision, illustrating only a subset of the provision which is available.

The following are examples of unregulated providers who have successfully undergone due diligence with Medr and so have **specific designation** from the Welsh Government:

Mountview Academy

- One of the UK's leading drama schools based in London.
- 16 courses designated from 'Performance (Acting)' to 'Performance (Musical Theatre)' and 'Musical Theatre'.

The Royal Academy of Dance

- 100-year-old independent educational dance charity based in London.
- Six courses designated from 'Ballet Education' to 'Dance Education'.

In total, **36 courses** are **specifically designated** at **eight specialist providers**.

Further, a number of specialist providers of higher education are registered with the Office for Students and so have their courses **automatically designated** at the higher tuition fee rate. In addition to these specialist independent private and charitable providers, there is considerable provision in the traditional University sector and the highly regarded Conservatoire colleges which is designated by virtue of the registration with the OfS. The following sets out examples.

BIMM

- The UK's leading music college, at five locations in England.
- Numerous courses designated from 'Event Management' to 'Music Performance' and highly specialised courses – 'Vocals', 'Songwriting'.

Rose Bruford College

- Based in London, specialist provider of various disciplines of stagecraft.
- Courses include 'Acting' and 'Scenic Arts (Construction, Props and Painting)'.

Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts

- Routinely attracts artists and students from North Wales.
- Extensive portfolio of courses including 'Acting (Screen & Digital)', 'Theatre & Performance Design' and 'Sound Technology'.

Royal College of Music

- A leading music conservatoire over 140-years-old, a charity based in London.
- One undergraduate (BA (Hons) Music and Six Masters courses designated e.g. Masters in Performance and Masters in Composition.

Laine Theatre Arts Limited

- A specialist provider based in Epsom, Surrey.
- Two courses designated in Music Theatre.

Central School of Ballet

- A charity providing professional dance training based in London.
- Three designated courses ranging from 'Professional Dance and Performance' to a Masters in Choreography.

National Centre for Circus Arts

- A charity with specialist provision with particular reference to the Circus Arts.
- One designated course.

The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama

- Offering training in speech and drama for young actors and other students, based in London.
- Numerous courses designated including 'Musical Theatre' and 'Drama and Movement Therapy'.

University of Chester

- Historical institution founded in 1839, gaining university status in 2005.
- Numerous designated courses ranging from 'Musical Theatre' to 'Popular Music Performance'.

University of Gloucestershire

- Campuses in Cheltenham and Gloucester.
- Eleven courses designated ranging from 'Popular Music' to 'Sound and Music Production'.

Nottingham Trent University

- Campuses in Nottinghamshire and in London.
- Sixteen designated courses including 'Music Performance' and 'Popular Music Performance'.