

P-05-884 Amendment to Education (Student Support) (Wales) Regulations 2018 to include UK institutions with operations overseas, Correspondence – Petitioner to Chair, 17.06.19

Dear Chair,

I am writing to you in response to Kirsty Williams AC/AM's letter dated 14 May 2019.

First, I would like to express my disappointment with Ms Williams's response and lack of understanding of the issues raised in my petition. I believe it is imperative that the goal of this petition regarding the Welsh Government's Student Support is fully understood by yourselves as Ms Williams has missed a vital detail. By presenting this petition, I am not asking the Petitions Committee to extend financial support to Welsh Students who wish to study the entirety of their degrees overseas in foreign institutes, but merely students who wish to study at British universities who offer degrees studied in an overseas British Campus. This was made quite clear in the title of the petition:

'Amendment to Education (Student Support) (Wales) Regulations 2018 to include UK institutions with operations overseas'

As Ms Williams states, the University of London Institute in Paris is the only UK institution to currently offer a degree taught entirely overseas. Therefore, the petition is asking you as the Petitions Committee to consider amending the Education (Student Support) (Wales) Regulations 2018 to ensure that Welsh students can study where they want and to ensure that the higher education system, and especially the university system does not become elitist once again. As it stands with the new regulations, Welsh students who wish to study at ULIP can only do so if they or their family have the means to pay the annual fee of £9250, plus enough funds for necessities such as rent, transport and grocery shopping, which would normally be covered by a maintenance loan. Due to the change in regulations, all students based in Wales who were intending to begin their Undergraduate degree in ULIP in September 2019 have had to find an alternative university as they could not finance their studies without the financial support of the student finance system.

I understand the apprehension surrounding the idea of funding students to study outside of the UK. However, ULIP is a British institution which is part of the University of London group which includes the London School of Economics and Political Science, the Royal Academy of Music, King's College London and Queen Mary University of London. In fact, as students of ULIP, our tuition fees are paid to Queen Mary University of London. I have enclosed a copy of my Tuition Fee Invoice for the academic year 2018/19 which confirms the above.

Ms Williams refers to the Diamond Review of Higher Education and Student Finance in Wales in her correspondence. I had previously read this review when I had issues with my own student finance. I understand that the new regulations are only based on this review, however I would like to draw your attention to specific aspects of the document.

Throughout the review, studying abroad is mentioned and as early on as the Foreword, it states:

“We have thought deeply about whether Welsh students should be funded to study out of Wales and have concluded that it is both in the students’ and, indeed, Wales’ interests to enable students to study across national boundaries including Europe and, potentially, further afield.” (The Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance Arrangements in Wales: Final Report, 2016, p.6)

I have included below excerpts from the Diamond Review which support my petition. I have also included page numbers so that you can easily find the whole excerpts in the Review if you wish to do so. For your information, these page numbers correspond to the online version of the Final Report on the Welsh Government’s website.

- The Review Panel recommends that the holistic funding system described above should be available for study in Wales, across the UK, and across Europe (subject in the latter case to any implications of the result of the recent referendum on membership of the European Union). (p.8)
- The funding system should not impact negatively on institutional autonomy and academic freedom. (p.17)
- The Review Panel have thought deeply about whether Welsh students should be funded to study outside of Wales and concluded that it is in both the students and Wales’ interests to enable students to study across national boundaries, including in Europe and, potentially, further afield. It is recommended that student support should be available to Welsh domiciled students that choose to study anywhere in the UK or in other European Union member states, depending on the form of the UK’s on-going relationship with the EU following the conclusion of exit negotiations. (p.57)
- The Welsh Government should also explore the possibility of running a pilot scheme to establish whether it is possible to extend the student support package beyond the UK and EU for Welsh domiciled students that choose to study further afield for the whole of their degree programme⁵⁸. This proposed pilot would be applicable to Welsh domiciled students wishing to study at not for-profit higher education providers beyond the EU and those

institutions with a recognised track record of quality provision (as agreed by HEFCW). (pp.52-53)

- Student support should be portable and available to Welsh domiciled students that choose to study anywhere in the UK or in other European Union States (subject to the UK remaining in the EU) (p.53)
- The Welsh Government to explore possibility of running a pilot scheme to establish whether it is possible or desirable to extend the student support package beyond the UK and EU – for Welsh domiciled students that choose to study further afield for the whole of their degree programme. (The proposed pilot would be study at not-for-profit organisations with a recognised track record of quality provision). (p.53)
- In conclusion, the proposed package of recommendations outlined above comprises interlocking elements and should be seen in its entirety; it therefore requires implementation as a whole. (p.69)

From the information above, I believe that it is evident that the Diamond Review supports providing finance for Welsh students to study overseas, therefore I do not understand why the Welsh Government and above all, the Minister for Education are so against providing Welsh students with the funding they need to study at the University of London Institute in Paris. I am of the opinion that my university is actually providing two important aspects which are mentioned in the Final Report, supporting British institutes and studying abroad. Firstly, it is a British institute therefore it is a part of the British higher education system. As a student of the University of London Institute in Paris, I pay the same amount for fees (£9250) as a student studying in the University of Bristol, for example. Secondly, the university's building (which it shares with the British Council) is as the name implies, in Paris, hence students have the opportunity of studying and living abroad whilst gaining a British degree from the University of London. It is important to note here that the University of London Institute in Paris specialises in French Studies, therefore the majority of students will study French as a major or minor subject in their degree. Ms Williams made an interesting comment about studying abroad. She claimed that "from a purely academic point of view, it is not obvious why a long period of study abroad is necessary." I would hope that I do not need to list the benefits of studying the French language, French History, French Literature, history of French art and French linguistics in France!

I would also like to make a few comments on the other constraint mentioned by Ms Williams, the protection of the public purse. I am in total agreement that we must protect the Welsh economy and tax payers' money; however it would theoretically benefit the public purse if Welsh students decided to study French at the University

of London Institute in Paris as opposed to a university in Britain. The French studies degree at the University of London Institute in Paris is only three years long whereas a French degree in Britain is normally four years as there is a year abroad. Obviously, this is not needed if you study at the University of London Institute in Paris as you are already abroad! This means that only three years of studies would need to be funded instead of four.

From my personal experience, I receive around £18,000 per year and I will have received this amount for three years at the end of my degree which will total to £54,000. If I had decided to study at the other universities I applied for (Strathclyde, Dundee, Aberdeen and Swansea) my tuition fee loan and maintenance loan would have totalled £72,000 if I'd studied at Swansea University and £90,000 if I'd studied in Scotland (French degrees last five years in Scottish universities). Obviously these figures are approximate, but I hope they highlight the financial advantages of giving Welsh students the opportunity to study at the University of London Institute in Paris.

Additionally, if the Minister of Education is so concerned about the public purse and investment in higher education in Wales, why can Welsh students receive loans and funding to study at British institutions outside of Wales? (Except if they wish to study at the University of London Institute in Paris, a British institution with one main difference to any other British university – its location.)

I hope the above information is helpful in explaining some more about my petition and the University of London Institute in Paris.

I look forward to meeting the Committee on June 18 when I hand the petition over. If you have any questions, I would be more than happy to answer them.

Yours Sincerely,

Alanna Jones