

Jump in part-time students accessing support following introduction of most generous support package in the UK

The statistics report on the new student support system for the first time, also showing a 58% increase in the number of postgraduates supported. Welsh post-grads were eligible for dedicated bursaries and support from Welsh universities this year, thanks to Welsh Government funding. Means-tested grants and loans will be introduced from September.

There is no Government-backed living costs grant funding for part-time undergraduates or post-graduate students elsewhere in the UK. Last year, the Education Minister set a goal of a 10% increase in the number of Welsh post-graduate students by the end of this Government's term.

The Education Minister, Kirsty Williams, said:

"This is fantastic news and a real vote of confidence in our student support package, the first of its kind in the UK or Europe.

"We have always said that high living costs are the main barrier for students when thinking about university. Our package of support was specifically designed to address these concerns, making it easier for people to study part-time, especially if they have work or family commitments.

"Our radical approach to supporting part-time study is essential to improving social mobility, employment outcomes, access to the professions and delivering on our commitment to lifelong learning."

Louise Casella, Director of The Open University in Wales, said:

"The OU in Wales saw a 49% increase in our October student recruitment last year. This represents hundreds more people embarking on learning that will transform the lives of their families and communities. We've had a 67% increase in students from Wales' most economically disadvantaged areas, a 57% increase in disabled students and a 30% increase in BME learners.

"I am pleased the Welsh Government is highlighting the impact the new funding system is having on part-time study in Wales. With maintenance grants now available for part-time distance learners as well, flexible study has never been more affordable. This is helping The OU in Wales make studying for a degree a reality for those who may not have considered it in the past."

Julie Lydon, Chair of Universities Wales, said:

“We are delighted to see this increase in the number of students choosing to study part-time in Wales, clearly demonstrating that the new student support and higher education funding package in Wales is working.

“In the coming decade, Wales will face many challenges from the changing workplace and advancements in technology. These changes will mean that Wales will need a more highly skilled workforce. Flexible learning, such as part-time study, will play a key role in preparing the people, places and businesses of Wales for the future.

“This increase in part-time and postgraduate study shows that, with the new student support and higher education funding package in Wales, we are on the right path to providing people of all ages and backgrounds with opportunities to benefit from higher education.”