

Third of students eligible for maximum grant under new support system

From 2018/19, Wales will be the first country in Europe to introduce equivalent maintenance support across full-time and part-time undergraduates, as well as post-graduates.

Government estimates show that a third of full-time students will receive the maximum grant, which is £8,100 for a student living away from home.

The average household income for a student in the current system is around £25,000. Under the new system such a student will receive around £7,000 a year in non-repayable grant.

Part-time students will receive parity of support for maintenance costs on a pro-rata basis. Students will be supported through a mix of grants and loans equivalent to the National Living Wage.

Speaking in the Assembly chamber, the Cabinet Secretary also confirmed that in 2018/19 there will be a return to the pre-2012 policy of an inflation-linked maximum tuition fee level. This will be in place for the next three academic years. This follows Universities Wales's confirmation that all Welsh universities will become Real Living Wage employers. They have also confirmed that they will sign-up to the Government's Code of practice: Ethical employment in supply chains."

Kirsty Williams said:

"It is now widely recognised that high living costs are the greatest barrier to young people studying at university. Our new progressive system is a fundamental shift in the way we support students and our institutions.

"By investing in the success of full-time, part-time and post-graduate students, Wales will be the only country in Europe to have taken this huge step forward.

"Having confirmed that students will receive support equivalent to the National Living Wage, I welcome Universities Wales' announcement that all Welsh universities will become living wage employers. We can be proud that Wales' sector will be the first in the UK to achieve this."

Commenting on fee levels, Kirsty Williams said:

"Welsh higher education operates in a UK-wide and international context. We are leading the way with our shift to support living

costs. But policy in England also has a direct knock-on effect.

“Wales needs a stable and sustainable higher education sector that delivers for our communities and economy. Our universities must be able to compete domestically and internationally. Jobs, prosperity and national well-being depend on it.

“We will address the real-terms reduction in the value of fee levels by once again linking them to inflation for the next three years. I can confirm that they will continue to be paid for through a publicly supported loan system and only repaid after graduation, linked to income-levels.”

Reviewing the current system, the Diamond Report recommended a shift to maintenance support, it said:

“There is a strong consensus, particularly amongst students, students’ representative bodies, support staff and widening participation professionals, that the level of maintenance support available is inadequate to cover actual costs incurred by students and that this is a bigger issue for students than the level of tuition fees and tuition fee support. There is also a view that students from middle-income households, in particular, are inadequately catered for under current arrangements.”