



Department for the

**Economy**

An Roinn

**Geilleagair**

[www.economy-ni.gov.uk](http://www.economy-ni.gov.uk)

Peter McCallion  
Clerk to the Committee for the Economy  
[peter.mccallion@niassembly.gov.uk](mailto:peter.mccallion@niassembly.gov.uk)  
cc [committee.economy@niassembly.gov.uk](mailto:committee.economy@niassembly.gov.uk)

Adelaide House  
39-49 Adelaide Street  
Belfast BT2 8FD  
02890 529333

**Our ref: SUB-0138-2026**

**Date: 17 02 2026**

Dear Peter

## **SL1 - The Education (Student Support, etc.) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026**

The Department for the Economy (DfE) proposes to make this amending Statutory Rule under powers conferred by Articles 3 and 8(4) of the Education (Student Support) (Northern Ireland) Order 1998. The Statutory Rule will be subject to the negative resolution procedure before the Assembly.

### **Purpose of the Statutory Rule**

This Statutory Rule will make amendments to the Education (Student Support) (No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2009 (“the Student Support Regulations”).

### **Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA)**

The regulations will increase the maximum amount of DSA payable annually in respect of eligible students' course-related needs from £25,000 to £27,500. DSA is intended to cover the additional course-related costs incurred by students over and above any reasonable adjustments for disability that can be made by their institution. The actual level of support available to individual students will vary in line with their own specific needs, and is subject to Education Authority approval, but will generally take the form of support for one-to-one non-medical help; specialist equipment; and support towards the cost of travel to and from their place of study.

The regulations will also clarify that DSA support is available to eligible students who are undertaking their course by 'exam only' or 'assessment only', in the event of a resit situation, for example.

### Maximum tuition fee loan

An increase of 2.7%, from £4,855 to £4,985, will be applied to the maximum tuition fee chargeable by local higher education institutions by way of S.R. 2025 No. 164, which will come into operation from 1 September 2026. The proposed amending regulations ensure that the maximum a student can borrow by way of a tuition fee loan for study here matches this figure.

Maximum borrowing entitlement will also track the new maximum fee levels of £9,790 for academic year 2026/27 in England, Scotland and Wales for our students studying there.

### Maintenance grant and loan

The proposed amending regulations deliver a 2.7% inflationary uplift to the maximum maintenance loan and grant support available to full-time undergraduate students from here studying in this jurisdiction, in the south of Ireland or in England, Scotland or Wales, to help track increases in the cost of living. Students from lower-income households are eligible for a maintenance grant which they do not have to pay back. Receipt of maintenance grant affects how much maintenance loan can be awarded.

The proposed amending regulations will apply uplifts as follows:

<i>Current Amount</i>	<i>After 2.7% uplift</i>
<b>Maximum Maintenance Grant</b>	
£3,475	£3,569
<b>Maximum Maintenance Loan</b>	
Living with parents: £6,300	£6,471
Living away from parents: £8,132	£8,352
Living away from parents in London: £11,391	£11,699

Students eligible to claim means-tested benefits such as Housing Benefit or Universal Credit are eligible for a Special Support Grant which is payable instead of the maintenance grant. Unlike the maintenance grant, the amount of Special Support Grant awarded does not have any bearing on the level of maintenance loan provided. The maximum Special Support Grant will also see a 2.7% uplift from £3,475 to £3,569.

## Technical amendments

It is proposed that the amending regulations will also make some minor but necessary technical amendments, including:

- to omit redundant references to the “Scottish Healthcare Allowance” in the 2009 Regulations, for which NI students are not eligible;
- to omit redundant reference to the Regional Health and Social Care Board; and
- to insert a previously omitted paragraph to ensure students studying graduate entry medicine are not eligible for special support grant, aligning with arrangements for the maintenance grant.

## **Previous Engagement with the Committee**

At its meeting on 10 September 2025, the Committee considered the proposed statutory rule: The Student Fees (Amounts) (Amendment) Regulations 2025. This proposed an increase to the maximum tuition fee chargeable by local higher education institutions by 2.7% to £4,985. The Committee agreed that it was content for the Department to make the rule. The subsequently made S.R. 2025 No.164 will come into operation from 1 September this year.

The provisions in this current set of amending regulations are needed to ensure that the maximum a student can borrow by way of a tuition fee loan for study here matches this figure £4,985 figure.

## **Financial Implications**

### Disabled Students' Allowance

Around 2,600 students are supported through DSA annually, with a total of approximately £4.5m awarded. Numbers of students requiring DSA support in excess of £25k annually have been very low to date. The additional cost of the change is estimated to be around £5k to DfE annually.

### Maximum tuition fee loan

Increased fee loans to accommodate increased fee maxima here and in Britain are expected to cost approximately an additional £10m in AME loan funding, with a corresponding Ring-fenced DEL RAB impairment of £0.4m. Approval in principle has been received from both Treasury and DoF, none of this is considered to be of concern with regard to relevant budgets.

### Maintenance grant and loan

Treasury approval has been received in respect of additional AME loan budget requirements linked to increased maintenance support amount to c. £5m, with ringfenced DEL requirements not considered material.

### **Consultation**

There is no statutory requirement to consult on these regulations as they do not give effect to any major policy changes.

### **Compliance with Section 24 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998**

The making of this rule complies with Section 24 of the Northern Ireland Act.

### **Equality Impact**

An Equality screening exercise has been carried out in respect of these amendments and has found that the operational and technical changes in this amendment do not negatively impact any Section 75 categories.

### **Regulatory Impact**

A Regulatory Impact Assessment has not been prepared for this Rule as it does not place an additional burden on business, charities or voluntary bodies.

### **Rural Needs Impact**

A Rural Needs Impact Assessment screening exercise has been carried out in respect of these amendments and has found that the operational and technical changes in this amendment will be applicable to all prospective eligible students undertaking eligible courses across NI, irrespective of location. In light of this it is not considered that individuals residing in rural areas will be more affected / impacted than those who reside in non-rural areas.

### **Data Protection Impact**

A Data Protection Impact Assessment has not been prepared for this Rule as the proposed amendments do not require the processing of personal data.

## **Child Rights Impact**

An assessment has not been carried out as the number of students under 18 in the Higher Education system is negligible. In addition, the changes:

- to the Tuition Fee loan represents continuation of an existing policy that balances students' needs with institutional sustainability;
- to DSA represent an improved position for those with disabilities, regardless of their age on application for support; and
- to Maintenance Support are positive irrespective of the age of the individual afforded support.

## **Position in Great Britain**

### Disabled Students' Allowance

For comparative purposes, during academic year 2026/27 the following maximum annual DSA allowances are available in other jurisdictions:

- England: £27,783;
- Scotland: £22,245 annual allowance in relation to consumables and Non-medical Help, plus a £5,160 course allowance in respect of equipment; and
- Wales: £34,671.

### Maximum tuition fee loan

The UK Government announced in the Budget on 26 November 2025 that maximum fees in England would increase by forecast inflation for the next two academic years, 2026/27 and 2027/28. These increases will be based on the latest forecast RPIX inflation figures for the first quarter of 2027 (for the 2026/27 academic year) and the first quarter of 2028 (for the 2027/28 academic year), which will be published by the Office for Budget Responsibility. Maximum fee loans will increase correspondingly.

This means that the maximum undergraduate tuition fee loan applicable in respect of attendance at institutions in England increases from £9,535 to £9,790 for the 2026/27 academic year (for universities with a teaching excellence award). The same position applies in Wales. Although the tuition fee maximum in Scotland for an undergraduate degree is currently £1,820 for Scottish students (normally paid by the Scottish Government), Scottish institutions charge students from elsewhere in the UK the same amount as in England and Wales.

### Maintenance grant and loan

Students domiciled in England can avail of the following maximum maintenance loan support in academic year 2026/27, subject to household income:

- for students living at home up to £9,118;
- for students living away from home up to £10,830; and
- for students living in London up to £14,135.

Maintenance grant has not been available to students from England starting courses on or after 1 August 2016, although there is a proposal to reintroduce targeted grants for low-income households by 2029 paid for by a new levy on international student fees.

Students from Wales are eligible for a non-means tested base grant of £1,020 which they do not have to pay back. A means-tested maintenance grant is also available, along with a maintenance loan. The total amount of maintenance support and the balance between grant and loan is dependent on where the student is living and studying, and their household income. Students from lower-income households will have more of their living costs met through an increased maintenance grant. The following maximum maintenance support, comprising grant and loan, will be available in academic year 2026/27, subject to household income:

- for students living at home up to £10,685, of which the maximum grant is £7,020;
- for students living away from home up to £12,590, of which the maximum grant is £8,260;
- for students living in London up to £15,720, of which the maximum grant is £10,325.

Students from Scotland can avail of a maximum loan for living costs of up to £9,400 in academic year 2026/27, dependent upon household income. A bursary of a maximum of £2,000 is also available to students from low-income households.

### **Any other information**

None

### **Proposed timing of consideration of the SL1**

This SL1 has been submitted to the Committee in accordance with the minimum four-week timeframe for their consideration. It is proposed that the Committee considers the SL1 on 18 March 2026.

## **Proposed Operational Date**

The Student Loans Company is planning to open its full-time undergraduate application portal on 22 March 2026. It is proposed that the rule be laid before that date, coming into operation as soon as possible thereafter whilst adhering to the 21-day rule.

The draft of the proposed Statutory Rule and Explanatory Memorandum are attached, and you will wish to bring this matter to the attention of the Committee for the Economy.

Yours sincerely



**Departmental Assembly Liaison Officer**

**cc**

Human Rights Commission  
Equality Commission