EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM TO

The Education (Student Support) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026

SR 2026 No. 56

1. Introduction

1.1 This Explanatory memorandum has been prepared by the Department for the Economy ("the Department") to accompany the Statutory Rule (details above) which is laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly.

1.2 The Statutory Rule is made under Articles 3 and 8(4) of the Education (Student Support) (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 and is subject to the negative resolution procedure.

2. Purpose

2.1 This Statutory Rule amends the principal student support regulations - The Education (Student Support) (No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2009 ("the Student Support Regulations").

2.2 This Statutory Rule also makes necessary corrections and technical amendments.

3. Background

3.1 Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA)

The Statutory Rule will increase the maximum amount of DSA payable annually in respect of eligible students' course-related needs from £25,000 to £27,500.

The Statutory Rule 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.

3.2 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 Statutory Rule ensures that the maximum a student can borrow by way of a tuition fee loan for study here matches this figure.

Tuition fees charged by Higher Education Institutions across the rest of the United Kingdom will also increase from academic year 2026/27 to up to £9,790 for a full-time undergraduate course. The Statutory Rule increases the fee loan available to eligible students from Northern Ireland studying in other

jurisdictions of the United Kingdom to enable them to fully fund their tuition fees.

The Statutory Rule also increases the tuition fee loan available for part-time and distance-learning students from £3,641.25 in academic year 2025/26 to £3,738.75 in 2026/27.

3.3 Maintenance grant and loan

The Statutory Rule delivers 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 Republic of Ireland or in England, Scotland or Wales.

Current Amount	*After 2.7% uplift*
Maximum Maintenance Grant	
£3,475	£3,569
Maximum Maintenance Loan	
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

3.4 Miscellaneous

The Statutory Rule will also make some minor but necessary technical amendments to the Student Support Regulations.

4. Consultation

There is no statutory requirement to consult on this Statutory Rule as it does not give effect to any major policy changes.

5. Equality Impact Assessment

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.

6. Regulatory Impact Assessment

A Regulatory Impact Assessment has not been prepared for this Statutory Rule as it has no adverse impact on business, charities or voluntary bodies.

7. Financial Implications

The amendments made by this Statutory Rule are considered affordable within existing budgets.

8. Section 24 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998

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

9. EU Implications

This Statutory Rule does not relate to withdrawal from the European Union / trigger the statement requirements under the European Union (Withdrawal) Act.

10. Parity or Replicatory Measures

Historically, the Department's Regulations were made in broad parity with England and Wales but following the wholesale changes that were implemented in England and Wales from academic year 2012/13 as a result of the Browne Review this is no longer necessarily the case.

11. Additional information

Further details regarding this Statutory Rule can be requested by contacting studentsupport@economy-ni.gov.uk.