EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM TO

The Student Fees (Amounts) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025

S.R. 2025 No. 164

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 4(8) and 14(4) of the Higher Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2005 ("the 2005 Order") and is subject to the negative resolution procedure.

2. Purpose

2.1 These regulations amend the Student Fees (Amounts) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005 (S.R. 2005 No. 290) by increasing the basic and higher amounts of tuition fees that may be charged to full-time undergraduates in respect of an academic year beginning on or after 1st September 2026.

2.2 This rule will amend regulation 3 of the 2005 Regulations to further increase the higher rate to £4,985 and the basic rate to £1,960 in respect of an academic year beginning on or after 1st September 2026. It also amends regulation 4 of those regulations to increase the half-rate higher and basic amounts that apply in respect of specific courses to £2,475 and £955 respectively, also with effect from 1st September 2026.

3. Background

3.1 Article 4 of the Higher Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2005 ("the Order") enables the Department for the Economy to impose a condition in relation to any grant made to the governing body of any Higher Education Institution (HEI) in Northern Ireland.

3.2 The Order provides that HEIs in Northern Ireland which have an access plan approved by the Department for the Economy may charge variable fees not exceeding the level approved in their access plan, and which cannot exceed the higher amount specified in regulations. HEIs in Northern Ireland which do not have an access plan may only charge fees up to the level of the basic amount. The higher and basic amounts are set out in regulation 3 of the Student Fees (Amounts) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005 ("the 2005 Regulations") (as amended).

3.3 In the case of certain prescribed courses, HEIs are only allowed to charge a reduced, or "half-rate", higher or basic amount. These amounts and courses are set out in regulation 4 of the 2005 Regulations.

3.4 Amendments comparable to those effected by these regulations have been made annually to increase the maximum basic and higher tuition fee rates for students on higher education courses in line with projected inflation rates. The All Items Retail Prices Index Excluding Mortgage Interest Payments (RPI-X) is used as the basis for these inflationary uplifts.

4. Consultation

There is no statutory requirement to consult on these regulations, which continue an established policy of inflation-linked uplifts to the basic and higher fee amounts.

5. Equality Impact Assessment

A Section 75 Equality of Opportunity Screening exercise has found that the proposals will not have an adverse impact on any of the Section 75 categories.

6. Regulatory Impact Assessment

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

7. Financial Implications

The amendments made by these regulations are considered affordable within existing budgets.

8. Section 24 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998

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

9. EU Implications

This 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

While Northern Ireland's fee arrangements differ from those elsewhere, the policy linking fee increases with predicted inflation using RPI-X as a measure is consistent with the policy of the Department for Education in England which, when it makes inflation-linked changes to fees, uses this rate in accordance with the Student Fees (Inflation Index) Regulations 2006.

11. Additional information

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