



Welsh Refugee Council

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David J Rowlands AC/ AM
Cadeirydd/ Chair
Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru
Bae Caerdydd
Caerdydd
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27th February 2018

Petition P-05-789 Review support for asylum seekers accessing further education

Dear Mr Rowlands,

Further to your letter dated the 12th of December 2017, I am writing to provide the Welsh Refugee Council's view on the matter raised by Gulnar Sohail in his petition, "support for asylum seekers accessing further education".

The Welsh Refugee Council believes that people seeking asylum should have access to further education, as access to further education contributes to health, integration and community cohesion outcomes. In line with Prosperity for All and with our national Wellbeing objectives, we believe that young people should be supported to make the most of their potential and that we should be rewarding ambition and encouraging learning for life. Barriers to such should be addressed and access to further education should not be inhibited by an individual's economic background.

In the last quarter of 2017, there were approximately 2,888 asylum seekers living in Wales¹. Asylum seekers in the United Kingdom have no right to work, no recourse to public funds, with those claiming support under Section 95 of the Immigration and Asylum Act entitled to a weekly allowance of £36.95. This allowance can be terminated abruptly, contributing to the problem of destitution amongst people seeking asylum, to which Gulnar Sohail refers in petition.

The Welsh Refugee Council hold that, even when it is available, Section 95 support is insufficient to allow a person seeking asylum to meet the costs of attending Further Education. In January 2018 the

¹ Data taken from the number of asylum seekers claiming support under Section 95 of the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act. Office of National Statistics. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-statistics-october-to-december-2017-data-tables>

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Welsh Refugee Council ran a focus group in partnership with Swansea City of Sanctuary on the theme of 'access to education', at which a number of people seeking asylum were present. When asked whether they were able to access Further Education, participants replied that the combined costs associated with accessing college, including travel; course registration fee; resources (including books and stationery); exam fees; and childcare, often rendered enrolling on a Further Education course financially unviable.

The Welsh Refugee Council considers access to Further Education for people seeking asylum to be essential to successful integration in Wales. As people seeking asylum have no right to work, many have ambition to study in order to occupy their time constructively as they await a decision on their case. For people seeking asylum for whom English is not a first language, access to Further Education and ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes is an essential component of their integration into local communities. The Welsh Refugee Council are particularly concerned that young people aged 16-19 may not be enrolling in Further Education due to the associated costs, and that their lack of participation at Further Education level may significantly impact their future prospects for employment and enrolment in Higher Education.

If we are to realise the full potential of the Well-being of Future Generations Act, then we must harness the clear ambition and passion to learn that exists amongst communities of people seeking asylum and ensure that people have fair and equitable access to learning opportunities.

For the reasons listed above, the Welsh Refugee Council unilaterally supports calls to extend eligibility for the Welsh Government Learning Grant for Further Education and the Education Maintenance Allowance to people seeking asylum and living in Wales.

Access to further and higher education was recently raised at a meeting between members of the Welsh Refugee Coalition and Julie James AM. Julie James expressed interest in the issues outlined in this letter and particularly the call to extend the eligibility of EMA grants. Welsh Government agreed to explore this call, including costs, in more detail. Welsh Refugee Council support Welsh Government in this endeavour and would be happy to provide evidence and insights as and when these are helpful.

If you have any further questions or would like clarification or additional evidence related to the above, then please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Yours sincerely,

Iona Hannagan Lewis
Researcher – Education and Employment

on behalf of
Salah Mohamed
Chief Executive Officer

