

Jeremy Miles AS/MS
Gweinidog y Gymraeg ac Addysg
Minister for Education and Welsh Language



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-06-1251
Ein cyf/Our ref JMEWL/00144/22

Jack Sargeant MS
Chair - Petitions committee
Senedd Cymru
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1SN

9 February 2022

Dear Jack,

Thank you for your letter of 22 January regarding the petition (P-06-1251) registered by Caley Crahart about securing the right to remote access learning for disabled and Neurodivergent people.

The Welsh Government recognises that the pandemic has brought about unprecedented challenges and changes for students, colleges and universities. We also recognise that the situation continues to provide additional worry and anxiety for students, and that many students face challenges during their time at university and that these challenges can often be exacerbated for students with disabilities and who require additional support.

With regard to Ms Crahart's petition, colleges and universities in Wales are autonomous bodies and are committed to widening access and participation in further and higher education for students from all backgrounds. This is underpinned with the aim of providing an excellent student experience during their time at college or university. They also have dedicated disability and wellbeing support teams who can offer a range of support and make reasonable adjustments, ensuring that the individual needs of students can be met and promoting inclusivity and accessibility across their campuses to enable students from under-represented groups to stay in further or higher education and complete their studies.

As autonomous bodies, it is a matter for individual colleges and universities to ensure they meet their responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010; this includes making any reasonable adjustments to ensure that disabled students can participate in the education and other benefits, facilities and services provided for students. The Welsh Government is unable to intervene in such matters.

We do however, through our work with HEFCW, ensure that universities have compliant widening access and inclusion plans, and, while HEFCW do not regulate equality and

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

diversity in higher education, they do have a role to support, champion and challenge HE providers to improve the equality and diversity of staff and students.

We are committed, along with our universities, to ensuring that students have the support they need to access higher education and to help them reach their full potential. We provide a generous student finance package and eligible students receive the same student finance as other students who are undertaking a designated 'in attendance' course, as confirmed by their university, and cannot normally attend owing to their disability.

When studying a designated higher education course, eligible students can also receive up to £31,831 in Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs) for in attendance and distance learning courses, per academic year. DSAs are non-means tested, non-repayable grants, and are designed to cover in full, or as a contribution towards, the additional study-related costs a student may face as a direct result of their disability, long-term health condition, mental health condition or specific learning difficulty. DSAs can help with the costs of essential support such as equipment, non-medical help and travel.

We also recognise the importance of supporting students with additional learning needs in colleges and are introducing new statutory support system for children and young people aged 0 to 25 in Wales ALN. Through this new statutory framework we aim to ensure that all students with ALN in schools and colleges are supported to overcome barriers to learning and can achieve their full potential.

FE colleges offer a range of support and provision for young people with ALN and this includes supporting students who need study remotely. As a result of the pandemic, colleges have significantly expanded their distance and digital learning delivery and the Welsh Government has invested over £21m since the start of the pandemic in order to support students who are digitally-excluded and/or have additional accessibility requirements.

The nature of FE provision means that some courses lend themselves more than others to remote or digital delivery. Awarding body requirements often include mandatory workshop or workplace hours; this is particularly the case for courses in Engineering or Construction and for the Health and Social Care and Childcare sectors.

At a strategic level, the Welsh Government is working closely with FE, work-based learning and adult learning providers on how digital technology can be integrated and embedded into delivery to enhance the learner's experience; and how learners and staff can be equipped with digital capabilities and confidence, under our existing ten year strategic framework for digital learning in the Post-16 sector: [Digital 2030](#).

Building on various pieces of research and reviews undertaken during the pandemic, we are continuing discussions with learning providers and key stakeholders to help develop a more planned, sustainable and strategic approach to blended learning.

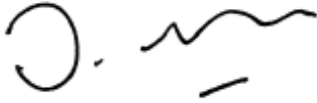
We understand that for some students attending college can cause anxiety and that this might particularly be the case for some neurodivergent students. Improving provision and support for neurodivergent learners is a priority for the Welsh Government and we are providing additional funding for colleges to pilot new curriculum approaches and for college staff to undertake training in order to develop specialist teaching and support approaches appropriate for engaging with neurodivergent learners.

With regards to student finance in the FE sector, our arrangements mean that students who need to study remotely can still access vital EMA or the Welsh Government Learning Grant Support even if they are not attending in person. The Financial Contingency Fund can also provide support with course-related costs for students on low income.

I welcome the comments raised and I can assure you and Ms Crahart that the Welsh Government is committed to working with our universities, colleges, key stakeholders and Unions to support students.

I trust the above provides clarity on the arrangements.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large 'J' followed by a series of wavy lines and a short horizontal stroke at the end.

Jeremy Miles AS/MS

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