



Your ref P-05-789
Our ref EM/05006/17

David John Rowlands AM
Chair - Petitions committee.
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff Bay
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government.committee.business@gov.wales

14 November 2017

Dear David

Thank you for your letter of 17 October, regarding a petition submitted by Gulnar Sohail to the Petitions Committee. The petition asked for a review of support for asylum seekers accessing further education. The petitioner has specifically named the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA), Welsh Government Learning Grant (Further Education) (WGLG (FE)) and Financial Contingency Fund (FCF) schemes.

The Welsh Government is working with the Welsh Refugee Coalition's Nation of Sanctuary steering group to develop a new Refugee and Asylum Seeker Delivery Plan, with reference to the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee report, "I used to be someone". As part of that work, officials will be reviewing what more can be done to support refugees and asylum seekers to integrate into Welsh life and access to education is a key consideration.

All universities and further education institutions (FEIs) have student support centres which provide a range of services, including financial support and counselling, to all students. Information would be made available prior to induction, and on institutions' own websites. The student support centres have expertise, experience and understanding of the barriers to study faced by students and they have links with a range of external organisations supporting priority groups, such as refugee and asylum seeker-related organisations.

FEIs in Wales operate within the post-16 planning and funding framework guidance provided by the Welsh Government. Asylum seekers may be able to access funded programmes of learning provided by FEIs and should contact the student support centre at the FEI to ask about eligible courses/programmes of learning.

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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.

Existing eligibility criteria for further and higher education support from Student Finance Wales, and the FCF Scheme administered by the FEIs in Wales, stipulate that only certain categories of students are eligible for student support and home fee status. In general terms these are:

- Persons who have permanent residence status in the UK and have been resident here for three years;
- EEA and Swiss workers and their spouses/civil partners and children in the UK who have been resident in the EEA or Switzerland for three years;
- EU nationals and their spouses/civil partners and children who have been resident in the EEA or Switzerland for three years;
- Refugees (recognised by the UK government) and their spouses/ civil partners and children; or
- Persons who have applied for asylum and have been granted Humanitarian Protection or Discretionary Leave, and their families; or granted Discretionary Leave where no application for asylum has been made; and

A person with refugee status or has been granted Humanitarian Protection or Discretionary Leave do not need to satisfy the three year ordinarily resident in the UK criteria to qualify for support from EMA, WGLG (FE) or FCF schemes, subject to satisfying other criteria. A person must however be ordinarily resident in Wales to qualify for the EMA or WGLG (FE) schemes; or studying at an FEI in Wales to qualify for FCF support.

Asylum seekers, whose status has yet to be resolved, and do not fall into any of the above categories, are not currently eligible for further or higher education student support. However, FEIs and universities in Wales have discretion to charge home fee status and may also provide their own scholarship/bursary schemes or other forms of support in supporting asylum seekers to access education. Similar criteria are applied across the UK.

Officials will continue to explore whether additional support can be given to enable participation in education services.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. E. Morgan'.

Eluned Morgan AC/AM

Gweinidog y Gymraeg a Dysgu Gydol Oes
Minister for Welsh Language and Lifelong Learning