

Petitions Committee

PET(3)-06-09 Paper 1 : 31 March 2009

New Petitions

This paper provides brief background information on each of the petitions to be given initial consideration by the Committee on 31 March 2009.

(i) P-03-203 Further education for young people with complex impairments

Petition wording

Scope Cymru calls upon the Welsh Assembly Government to provide co-located further education provision for young people with complex impairments on the campuses of existing mainstream further education colleges across multiple sites in Wales.

Background

This petition was raised by Scope Cymru.

Additional information (provided by the petitioner)

Provision of Further Education for young people with complex impairments and specific support needs

A Summary

Scope Cymru is the Welsh regional office for Scope the national organisation for disability.

Scope Cymru's mission is to drive the change to make our society the first where disabled people achieve equality.

The problem

The numbers of children and young people with complex impairments (profound physical impairments; learning difficulties, challenging medical conditions, sensory loss and, often, cognitive delay and behavioural issues) is increasing rapidly.

The Learning and Skills Act 2000 places a statutory duty on the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG).

"To secure the provision of proper facilities for education and training suitable to the reasonable requirements of persons who have reached the age of 19."

However, current further education provision in Wales does not meet the needs of young disabled people with very complex impairments.

"There are a number of students that would like residential college options in South Wales so they are still close to home but independent. At present there are no suitable facilities for students with severe learning difficulties in the area.' "

Special school principal, South Wales

At age 19 many young disabled people have no destination: a significant proportion end up going back home to live with their parents, or end up in residential care placements, frequently with older people.

In the academic year 2007/8 193 young people with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities left year 14 of schooling. 21% of this cohort, 41 young people, did not secure a suitable placement in further education.

Where a young person with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities and complex needs is able to secure a further education place, they have to attend a specialist college in England. All of these colleges are oversubscribed (four applications per place is common), and 90% of placements are residential.

The Welsh Assembly Government spends up to £94,000 per student per year in specialist further education colleges in England. The level of fee is determined by the young person's level of disability and their support requirements.

Recent changes to the funding regime for further education (from the Learning and Skills Council to local authorities) means that specialist colleges will increasingly be expected to recruit students from their own region. This will make it more difficult for Welsh students to attend colleges in England. Also in the last 10 years the number of colleges in England offering any sort of provision has dropped from 72 to 48, with further reduction expected this year.

The solution

Wales needs further education provision that meets the needs of young adults with very complex impairments, where an individual's medical, educational and social needs can all be met in one place.

It is clear that it is time for the Welsh Assembly Government to develop a "Made in Wales" solution to this problem so students with complex needs have the option to undertake their further education in Wales.

There are a number of ways in which such provision could be made and the range of options needs further exploration. However, Scope Cymru would hope that any such provision would do two key things:

Be co-located on the campus of an existing mainstream further education college to enable disabled and non-disabled students to live and learn together and enable disabled students to access a wider range of social and educational opportunities.

Be located on multiple sites across Wales to allow easy access for students from all parts of the country and to reduce the need for residential placements, which are the norm at specialist colleges in England.

Conclusion

Scope Cymru is urging the Welsh Assembly Government to fund and support further education provision for students with very complex impairments in Wales so this group of young people can access further education on an equal basis with others.

Scope has tabled a Petition through the National Assembly's new Petitions process to support our campaign.

(ii) P-03-207 Support for the unemployed in Monmouth

Petition wording

We, the undersigned urge the Welsh Assembly Government to investigate how to provide support and effective information to people in Wales, who are looking for employment, training or trying to initiate a business enterprise, locally.

Background

This petition was raised by Monmouth Town Council's Community Affairs Committee and it collected 286 signatures.

Further information (provided by the petitioner)

Since February 2007, when our Jobcentre was closed, Monmouth jobseekers have had to travel to Abergavenny, a round trip of 35 miles for their compulsory fortnightly registration.

In this extremely difficult economic climate, unemployed people in Monmouth are being put at a humiliating, time consuming and expensive disadvantage to the surrounding area.

Before the Jobcentre was closed and ever since, Jobcentre Plus has brushed off the once-a-week, serviced-office premises that has been offered by Monmouth County Council.

We enclose the evidence collated from press requests for jobseekers to contact Monmouth Town Council to record their difficulties, caused by the removal of their local Jobcentre.

Monmouth Town Council Community Affairs Committee urge that Jobcentre facilities be made available one day a week in Monmouth. We seek the support of Members of the National Assembly for Wales.

Committee Service

March 2009