

Kirsty Williams AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Addysg
Minister for Education



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-05-962
Ein cyf/Our ref KW/01308/20

Janet Finch-Saunders MS
Senedd Cymru
Ty Hywel
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

20 May 2020

Dear Janet,

Thank you for your letter of 5 May regarding the ongoing Petition submitted by Mike Charles, that seeks the Welsh Government to amend the law to extend age of entitlement to additional educational support from 25 to 26 years of age, and to define within Government guidance the COVID-19 pandemic as an exceptional circumstance.

The Welsh Government recognises the importance of ensuring suitable educational provision is made available to all learners. At this unprecedented time, we understand how disruptive the coronavirus outbreak has been for the delivery of education across all sectors. This is unsettling, particularly for some of our most vulnerable learners who may not respond well to sudden changes in routine or to periods of time away from a familiar environment.

In response to this challenge, the Welsh Government has made clear its position that special schools and special settings should, where safe to do so, continue to care for children where possible. Special settings include specialist further education (FE) establishments who are funded to deliver education, training and in many cases, also care, to young people with severe and complex learning difficulties.

To ensure young people can continue to be cared for in specialist FE establishments, now and in the future, the Welsh Government has agreed to continue funding until the end of this academic year (July 2020) for those programmes of study already agreed which are disrupted by COVID-19. This funding will be provided even where a young person is not attending due to COVID-19 and even if a specialist FE establishment temporarily closes or reduces its services, in response to the coronavirus outbreak.

The Welsh Government guidance referred to in the petition is our policy '*Securing provision for young people with learning difficulties at specialist further education establishments*'. The policy is clear that most young people that apply to Welsh Government for support are able

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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.

to have their identified needs met through a programme of study delivered over a two year period. Our policy does however provide flexibility in considering a longer duration if appropriate. Where the education and training needs of a young person requires a programme of study longer than two years, which is supported by the outcome of the Careers Wales assessment process, then an appropriate decision will be made by the Welsh Government, which could result in a specialist placement being secured based on a three year programme of study.

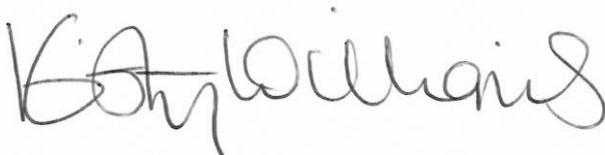
Furthermore if a young person is unable to complete their agreed programme of study, then a request for an extension to the young person's agreed programme of study can be made. The guidance to support this is contained within the policy and associated technical guidance documents for Careers Wales and specialist FE establishments. Requests to extend a young person's placement beyond the programme's original agreed end date will be considered on a case-by-case basis. However, the length of time required must be proportionate to what remains to be completed within the young person's agreed programme of study.

In light of the flexibility the policy already provides, I am not convinced that the policy needs to be amended in light of COVID-19. If the circumstances relating to COVID-19 were evidenced to support an application for a programme of study longer than two years or to support a request for an extension to an agreed programme of study, then these can be considered accordingly against the policy as it stands.

The Welsh Government continues to consider applications for September 2020 start dates. Therefore currently there is no disruption to programmes of study beginning from the next academic year. As a consequence, I see no reason at this time to extend age of entitlement to additional educational support from 25 to 26 years of age.

The Welsh Government continues to monitor the impact of COVID-19 on the delivery of education across Wales and will continue to respond to challenges as they emerge. In the meantime, I hope you agree that the announcements we have made demonstrates our commitment to supporting our most vulnerable learners during this challenging time.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kirsty Williams', written in a cursive style.

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