

CYPE(6)-21-23 – Paper to note 5

Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg

Children, Young People and Education Committee

Jeremy Miles MS
Minister for Education and Welsh Language

6 July 2023

International students

Dear Jeremy,

As you will be aware, during our recent work looking at mental health support in higher education we raised issues around support for international students. We were pleased to see this recommendation accepted by the Welsh Government.

As my fellow Committee Member Buffy Williams MS raised in the [debate in Plenary on 14 June](#), we have some broader concerns about the support for international students. Other Committee members have also had similar issues which have come to light through their own casework.

We are concerned that for some international students there is a significant disconnection between the promises that may be made to students prior to them moving to Wales, and the reality of what is available on arrival. We are particularly concerned about the promises made in relation to accommodation. While we understand that higher education institutions are autonomous institutions, can you outline what steps, if any, the Welsh Government can take to address these issues?

Those who are accompanied with their families may face additional challenges. We are aware that the UK Government has recently [announced](#) it will restrict the ability to bring dependents to only those students who are on post-graduate research programmes. However, we are aware that some students and their families are currently facing destitution in Wales right now, and that because of their immigration status they have no recourse to public funds.

We are incredibly concerned about the impact this destitution could have on the students' dependents, in particular their children. We understand that there can be varying practice across local authorities as to whether these children can access other support such as free school meals. While we acknowledge that the Welsh Government is currently rolling out universal free school meal provision in primary schools, this offer is not yet available across all primary years and does not cover children

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and young people in secondary schools. This means there are children and young people in Wales who are unable to access this much needed support. These are families whose only support may come from foodbanks and other voluntary support so being able to access free school meals could make a significant difference to them. What are your views on ensuring that access to free school meals is available to this cohort of children across Wales? What steps can the Welsh Government take to ensure all local authorities provide this support?

Can you outline what actions the Welsh Government can take to ensure that these students and their families are able to access some level of financial support to ensure they are not living in substandard accommodation, facing food and fuel poverty, and can fully maximise the opportunities that studying in Wales should provide for them?

We will be writing to all the universities in Wales to highlight these issues, and in particular the support they can provide to international students. We will copy you into this correspondence.

We are copying this letter to the Minister for Social Justice because of her responsibilities for mitigating child poverty.

We would appreciate a response by 14 September 2023.

Yours sincerely,



Jayne Bryant MS
Chair

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

Cc: Minister for Social Justice