

CYPE(6)-21-23 - Paper to note 6

**Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc
ac Addysg**

**Children, Young People
and Education Committee**

Vice Chancellors

Welsh Universities

7 July 2023

International students

During our recent work on mental health support in higher education we heard concerns about the support that is available to international students. We heard this directly from international students, as well as from a range of organisations. As a result, we made this recommendation, which we are pleased was accepted by the Welsh Government:

"Recommendation 2. The Welsh Government, HEFCW, the incoming Commission, higher education providers and student representatives need to work together to set a base level of provision for international students, taking into account the specific needs of the different groups which make up the international student community. This may involve the development of specific peer networks for groups of international students. This base level of provision should not be too prescriptive, as each provider will need to tailor their provision to meet the specific needs of their cohort, and takes account of their own institutional circumstances, but it should ensure that there is a clear minimum of support that all international students across Wales know they can access. This framework should be clearly publicised in ways that will reach the different parts of the international student community, from pre-application right through to post graduation."

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However, we are aware that international students can face wider challenges. During the debate on our report in Plenary, our Committee member, Buffy Williams MS highlighted some of these issues. The issues she raised chime with other Committee Members who have heard similar stories during their casework.

A key concern is the disconnection between the promises that may be made to some students prior to them moving to Wales, and the reality of what is available on arrival. They then must secure their own accommodation, often struggling to find affordable and suitable accommodation. For those students who bring their families, these challenges can be even more significant. They have no recourse to public funds and cannot not take paid employment. They and their families can find themselves destitute and often reliant on food banks and other voluntary support.

We would like to see universities in Wales do more to ensure that all international students thinking of studying in Wales know what support they can expect from an institution, and the financial implications of their studies. We know for many students coming to study in Wales is a positive, and can be a life changing opportunity, and we want to ensure this is the case for all students.

There are also some additional issues and challenges faced by those students who are accompanied by their families. We are aware that the UK Government has recently announced it will restrict the ability to bring dependents to only those who are on a post-graduate research programme. However, we are aware that some students and their families are currently facing destitution in Wales right now, and that they have no recourse to public funds, because of their immigration status. We think it is important the universities provide sufficient support, guidance and advice to ensure students and their families can make the most of the opportunities available that comes from studying in Wales.

We are writing to all Welsh universities to ensure you are aware of our concerns and to ask that you do everything you can to ensure international students have the right information pre-application as well as ensuring they have timely and effective support once they move to Wales.

We are also writing to the Welsh Government to raise our concerns. A copy of this letter is attached.

Yours sincerely,

Jayne Bryant

Jayne Bryant MS

Chair

Enclosure: Letter to Minister for Education and Welsh Language

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

