

Alun Davies AC/AM
Gweinidog y Gymraeg a Dysgu Gydol Oes
Minister for Lifelong Learning and Welsh Language



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-05-702
Ein cyf/Our ref ARD/05238/16

Mike Hedges AM
Assembly Member for Swansea East
Chair - Petitions Committee
Ty Hywel
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

government.committee.business@wales.gsi.gov.uk

17 August 2016

Dear Mike

Thank you for your letter of 4 August, regarding a petition submitted by Melanie Rees to the Petitions Committee, to consider amending the current Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) criteria for Young Adult Carers (YACs) in Wales. The EMA Scheme falls within my portfolio.

I recognise the challenges that young carers and adult carers face and the important role they play in providing care to family members whilst they are studying.

My officials were aware of the petition and met (on 12 July) Melanie Rees, who runs the Young Adult Carer Project in Carmarthenshire, and a small group of YACs from the Project to discuss their concerns. A representative from our delivery partner, the Student Loans Company (SLC), the body delegated to administer the EMA (Wales) Scheme on behalf of the Welsh Ministers, also attended.

A number of options such as including a question in the EMA application were discussed with Melanie and the YACs. Officials are undertaking exploratory discussions with SLC to consider the practicalities, benefits and costs to amend the EMA application form to help identify young carers/YACs in future academic years (applications for academic year 2016/17 are already published and available to students). My officials have also contacted Carers Trust (Wales) who have agreed to take forward some of the issues with their Young Adult Carer Advisory group. The Trust will feed back comments to my officials in due course.

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1NA

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
0300 0604400

Gohebiaeth.Alun.Davies@llyw.cymru
Correspondence.Alun.Davies@gov.wales

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.

In terms of attendance requirements, schools and colleges in Wales are responsible for their own attendance policies and, within reason, a level of discretion can be applied for EMA attendance. The SLC also provides guidance to those schools/colleges who administer EMA annually, setting out examples for authorised and non-authorised absences. Schools/colleges who run EMA are responsible for electronically submitting weekly attendance confirmations to SLC to allow the Company to release eligible payments to EMA students.

My officials also informed Melanie that, prior to her petition, a separate Young Carers Network in Wales, who met the then Health Minister in February 2016, had raised similar concerns in February 2016 about EMA. Following the Network's comments, positive steps were taken to help raise awareness of the issues. The SLC included a session as part of their annual Further Education Seminars (held in April 2016). Around 140 school/college representatives attended. SLC's EMA guidance for academic year 2016/17 has also been strengthened for schools/colleges, acknowledging the important role of young carers/YACs when schools/colleges are making informed decisions about authorised and non-authorised absences. The guidance was issued to those schools/colleges who administer EMA in July.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alun', with a horizontal line underneath.

Alun Davies AC/AM

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