

Wales Refugee and Asylum Seeker Advocacy Forum Minutes

20th October 2020 - 1:00-4:00pm

Venue: Online Zoom Meeting

Minutes taken by: Sarah Allen

Forum Topic: Education

Guest Speakers: EMTAS Cardiff, EMTAS Swansea, Reach Wales, ReStart, University of South Wales, Cardiff University

Members: 15 Asylum Seekers and Refugees

Names and specifics have been removed in some areas to preserve the anonymity of members and guests. Where these remain, permission has been granted.

Feel free to contact me at sarah@dpia.org.uk or on 07496 840 479 if you would like to make any comments or amendments to the minutes.

If you are a Refugee or Asylum Seeker and you'd like to become a member of the forum, please fill in this form: <https://forms.gle/tvhdKmSJjY93msj9>

Follow up from forum outlined in green.

Minutes:

1. Sarah introduces the forum. She explains that the topic of the forum is **Education** and that the forum will be split into three sections with the following guest speakers:

1-2pm Schools:

Olwen Evans- EMTAS Cardiff

Pam Cole- EMTAS Swansea

2-3pm Colleges and ESOL:

Mary Ann Hale- Head of Reach Wales

Mike Chick- Senior Lecturer TESOL

Tiffany Edmunds – ReStart Project Manger

Kathy Oakwood- ESOL Gower College

3-4pm Universities:

Mike Chick – Refugee Champion University of South Wales
Sian Catley- Cardiff University Widening Participation
Jan Stephens – Cardiff University Continuing Education
Elin Osmond – Cardiff University International Student Support
Paula Barker – Cardiff University Student Advice and Finance team

Guest professionals: Welsh Refugee Council, British Red Cross (Voices)

Schools

2. Olwen Evans introduces herself as from the Education Department of Cardiff Council, but working predominantly with the **Ethnic Minority and Traveller Achievement Service (EMTAS)**.

Pam Cole introduces herself as the **lead for minority ethnic learners** in the education Directorate in Swansea Council.

Sarah notes that an individual was due to attend on behalf of Gwent Education Minority Ethnic Service (GEMS) in Newport, but isn't in attendance. She notes that if you are outside of Swansea or Cardiff, you can still ask questions or comment and this will be passed on to the relevant professional.

3. Olwen **gives an update** that she says covers **all local authorities in Wales**. There was an announcement yesterday (19/10/2020), that schools **close for half term for a week** this Friday. Following that, there will be a firebreak lockdown for 16 days, so there'll be a slight change after half term for children that are in school.

She adds that **primary school children** and all children that attend special schools are **to attend as normal after half term**. There's lots of rules and regulations that the head teachers and the safeguarding staff and all the teachers are putting in place. For **secondary school children, there will be a slight change**. So it's only if your children are year seven or eight, they should continue to go to school as normal. If your children are doing any external exams, **like GCSEs, then they will be expected to go in in order to sit that exam**, but otherwise for years 9, 10, 11 and sixth form school will be closed for them for classroom teaching for that one week, but they will be taught offline. She says this should go back to normal after.

Free school meals in Wales will continue throughout the holidays until the end of the Easter break. This is new because of COVID. Normally, there would not be any free school meal support during school holidays but they will be getting what they had through lockdown. This is usually a voucher system, a parent pay system or the local authority might have a different system.

4. Pam Cole adds to this on the matter of free school meals. **Families in Swansea** during lockdown had their **free school meal payments put into their bank account or onto their Aspen cards**. That will happen in Swansea again for the half term holiday. Groups not going back to school for the week after the holiday (Year 9, 10, 11 and sixth form) will continue to have this payment onto their bank

or aspen card. New families that have come into schools since September, will be offered food parcels that would cover the one or the two weeks, until their details are in the system.

Whilst in general whole schools across Wales haven't had to close because of coronavirus, there may have been year groups or certain classes where **children have had to isolate** because there's been a coronavirus case. In this situation, **the school or the local authority still has to provide Free School Meals**. In Swansea, they've been getting food parcels. Schools still have to provide learning to children who either have to be in this short lockdown. This could be learning provided via the internet, packs of lessons, etc.

She adds that there are **lots of safety precautions and very strict measures taking place in schools**. So in general, it's best to try and get children into schools.

5. Olwen notifies the group that in Cardiff, it is now the **time to apply for secondary school places**. There is quite a strict deadline which is in about 10 days. If you have or know of families that have children in the last year of primary (year 6), they need to be applying for secondary school now. The application process is all online, but some of the hubs are still open for support.

Pam notes that this is also the case for Swansea.

6. A member says that he has heard from teachers that lessons on online platforms aren't as good as face to face education. There are a lot of strict measures for entering schools, so it is good that pupils can get lessons face to face.

- Olwen notes that having **online classes is very new** to everybody. She says it's much better to have a teacher in front of a class who can introduce the lesson can explain what they need to do. There's lots of issues with online learning, such as quality of families' IT equipment and Wi Fi. Some find it hard to motivate the children to join the online class, if it's a live stream. Nobody thinks it's ideal. **Teachers are adapting well** and coming up with innovative ways to make that **learning more interesting and meaningful** for students. But she says he is right, you can't replace a good classroom teacher with anything online. She thinks parents are starting to realise how tough a job it is to get children to learn. She thinks it's easier to send children to school in the morning than to try and get them out of bed to listen to a lesson online.

- Pam notes that it is a **priority to try to keep children in school** as the learning and wellbeing of children is very important. That's why in this firebreak lockdown they're closing non-essential shops and businesses, but **as much as possible, they want to keep children going into school**.

She notes that schools have more time with the children back in school to **ensure children understand how to access online learning**. Nothing will really compensate for being in school every day with the teacher there, but this must be balanced against safety and trying to stop the spread of the virus.

7. A member says that she has **two children in primary school**. She really struggled in the COVID lockdown. They started school in September 2019, but then had to begin home learning in March.

She was a teacher in her home country, but the **system here is completely different**. They come back without notebooks, and all they have is to read stories from small books.

She says that when her children stayed at home **during the lockdown, both her and her children lost a lot of their English skills**. So when they started this year, she decided to go and volunteer at their school so she would understand what is going on. This volunteer work has helped her learn more about how the classes work and the system in general in schools.

She feels her children **need more support in their language** in the school. Her two children are smart enough to understand Welsh and English, but still struggling with a lot of things. She says that even as a teacher, in a parent role it's hard to get your child sit with you about maybe 30 minutes or more. It's really **tricky for them to understand that you are in the role of teacher**, not mother. She says that it would be great if the council or schools **could provide more support** for this.

She was surprised that in the UK school system **behaviour is seen as the main issue**. Parents will be **called for a behavioural action, but not given education notes** so they can understand the weakness their kids have at school.

Last year, one of her sons began Year 2. Before that he hadn't been to school. The **other students knew how to read and write but her son didn't**. They had just arrived in the UK, and it was strange for her son to go to the school without any support. There were **no notebooks or notes sent to the house on how to help** him. She says that **"I qualified as a teacher... What about the other parents? What about the other families?"**

-Olwen answers that translation of resources, is a forever growing need. In Cardiff, there is over 96 languages with 116 dialects. She says that is **practically impossible for them to translate into 96 languages on a regular basis** to share information. She does understand the value of having that in a home language. There are things that they are trying to do to make that accessible to families.

One way of doing that is Google Translate. A lot of the worksheets and work packs will be sent through Word Documents which has a **tool called Immersive Reader**. It works on Teams, which is an application most schools use to transfer information to pupils. If the document is in English, you can click on View, then on Immersive Reader, and then it will give you options to translate the document text. You can also have it read the document out loud in that language. She says there's a **at least 50 languages** there and from the testing they've done it's quite a good quality translation. Once children know how to use Immersive Reader, they can show the parents, and it becomes easier for them to be able to access communications from schools. If there is a **specific need they will hire a translator for safeguarding purposes**.

- Pam responds that in Swansea, they've got 140 languages and dialects. It's not practical to translate everything, so they very rarely do written translations unless it's applicable to all schools.

- Olwen says that in regards to behaviour, **schools tend to share the negative more than the positive**. It varies due to the school's behaviour policy, which is determined by the head teacher and school governors. **You can become a school governor if you're interested in**

how a school operates. They tend to report more on negative behaviours so you can address it, because they don't want it to escalate. **If you're not happy you can always go to the school to ask them a question**, and then they can explain why things have happened in a certain way.

- Tiffany (ReStart) notes that on the Sanctuary website (<https://sanctuary.gov.wales>) there is a page with **Covid-19 information translated into many languages**. It has an option that can read to you as well.

She says, in terms of **parent's language skills**, all dispersal areas in Wales have a **Reach Hub** where you can go for a language assessment to be given an **English language course**. Find out more at: <https://reach.wales/en>

8. A member notes an issue he has had where Clearsprings has not been sending information in his home language to his NASS accommodation. Sarah says that she will contact him after the forum about this issue.

9. A member notes his **worries that asylum seeking children are disadvantaged by schools going online**, as they **don't have the same access to laptops and WiFi**. He asks what the government and schools are doing to support these families

- Olwen responds that **Welsh Government has provided local authorities with funds to provide devices such as laptops**. This came in phases, with at the beginning of lockdown schools being asked to give all their stock to families who needed it. They then provided MiFis or dongles to ensure they had WiFi.

She adds that the local authorities **provided tens of thousands of laptops** to schools to give to those who had no devices. In Cardiff, schools did house visits to distribute these. Families had to sign an agreement to say that they'd received the equipment, they would look after it, and that they would only use it for educational purposes.

Those **families now should all be covered**. There may be one or two, that we aren't aware of, but there's a system in place to address that.

- Pam said that there was a similar system in Swansea and that the aim of getting students devices was the same across all the authorities. Some schools may have taken equipment back when term started. Schools have been working on making sure that all the children can access the learning if they have to isolate.

If families still haven't got devices, they need to approach the school. She says realistically it **may not be one device per child**. This is because of limited money and trying to make sure that every family is covered. In Swansea, we prioritise asylum seekers, we phone the families to check in, and to make sure they are provided.

10. A member asks **whether primary schools will be reopening** after half term.

Olwen responds that nothing will change. Primary school will close on Friday, for a one-week holiday. **All primary school children will go back** then the following week.

This is **different for some of North Wales and West Wales**, where schools are closed for half term this week too, and will have a two week holiday.

11. An individual notes that parents who have English as a second language, are finding this period difficult in terms of their own language development. She wondered **whether schools are linked in with ESOL to help parents to access this**. This would also help parents have a better connection with their children's education.

- Olwen replies that ESOL classes used to be run in school, with coffee mornings for parents to practice language. Some schools still do this, but not many. As a result of Covid **every school has a family engagement officer**, somebody with a responsibility to link in with families. At the schools she's worked with, when they phone homes they **will often ask parents whether they are accessing ESOL** or give them advice on where to go. She has **raised it with their education management team** as an issue, so they should be addressing as a wider issue within the area.

She says in person classes won't be possible in schools, or at the college, for a while. Some kind of link needs to be made with the Reach project. She says that maybe it's something to discuss in the next section on college and ESOL

12. One member notes that she is in Newport and the guest speakers are from Cardiff and Swansea. She has a child in secondary school. She **agrees** with the earlier point that they **only get negative rather than positive feedback** from the school.

She says that in Newport, they **finally did receive a laptop, but then they had to give this back**. However, they have still **been given assignments that need a laptop to complete**. The school gave her feedback that her daughter hadn't completed an assignment, but it was posted online. She told the school about this, but they haven't got back to her. It's a big problem as she doesn't know if there have been given more assignments since. She asks if we could ask somebody from Newport.

- Sarah notes that GEMS in Newport was invited but couldn't attend. She says that she will pass on this situation to her to follow up on.

- Olwen notes that this may be a glitch in the system. If **she goes back to the school and explains the situation**, they should be able to resolve it. The member notes that she has already tried contacting the school, to no effect.

- GEMS and Newport Council were contacted by DPIA to help resolve this issue.

Colleges and ESOL

13. The guest speakers for the section on colleges are introduced:

MaryAnn Hale- Head of REACH Wales

Mike Chick- Senior Lecturer TESOL

Tiffany Edmunds- ReStart Project Manager in Welsh Government.

14. MaryAnn Hale gives more of a detailed introduction to REACH. She says they **look after all of the essential referrals for ESOL provision** for anybody wanting to access ESOL in **Wrexham, Swansea, Newport and Cardiff**. They also have a hub for refugees for support with integration activities. They've been working on the ReStart project with the Welsh Government in the four areas since June 2018. They will be continuing until at least March 2021, with the hope to continue until the end of the following year.

Mike Chick introduces himself further. He says he's a university lecturer who researches ESOL in the UK and Wales. He is also a ESOL teacher and organiser for the lessons ran with the Welsh Refugee Council.

15. A member says he goes to college in Swansea. **Most asylum seekers don't have access to equipment such as laptop and internet**. The college asks them to use Teams, and this doesn't work on some phones. The college said they will lend them laptops, but they are still waiting. Asylum seekers **don't have the WiFi to attend classes**. It is too expensive to be able to join these classes using phone data.

- MaryAnn responds that **Swansea have just put in an application for devices and Wi-Fi dongles for refugees**. It was quite a substantial number to support the refugees that are engaged with the project. These are being purchased within the next week so should be going out soon. Gower College are looking for funding to support asylum seekers with devices and Wi Fi. They've got the same problem in Cardiff. They've **alerted Welsh Government to this gap**. They appreciate that it's exceptionally difficult to engage with ESOL without appropriate devices or WiFi.

In terms of **Teams**, this is used by Gower College and Cardiff and Vale College. She says that **is their platform for delivery they can't manoeuvre on that** because of data protection and security issues. They recognise this can produce difficulties, but are investing in supporting and training people on this.

- Gower College updated us that 92 of their full time ESOL student's learners requested laptops which they began to distribute on 9/11/2020

16. A member asks if there are online courses and what kind of courses are happening online at the moment.

- MaryAnn responds that the four dispersal areas (Wrexham, Swansea, Newport, and Cardiff) **all delivery is set up to go remotely** as we go back into lockdown. The majority of people enrolled onto college provision have already started some form of remote delivery. It's **been about 20% of face to face, 80% online**. Adult Learning Wales have had face to face provision, but they are equally able to deliver online and will move to online provision as well. **There are courses that are just online**, because we've had individuals that don't want to have face to face contact.

- Gower College updated us that their full time delivery is 75% face to face and 25% online. This varies for part time between 33%-50% face to face and 66%-50% online.

17. Mike Chick asks whether those attending classes **outside of dispersal areas** such as Neath Port Talbot **are receiving similar support** with regards to devices and online classes?

- MaryAnn responds that she can only really speak for the dispersal areas. She passes on a contact who is very involved with the other areas and offering support. She knows that third sector organisations are also offering support. If Reach can support refugees outside of the areas who can't access anything else, they do.

- Tiffany says she **will take this back and ask the head of inclusion** in their team to see what provisions are for outside of the dispersal areas.

- Tiffany received the following information from the WG Post-16 Team. They are currently **administering Welsh Government grant funding to Post-16 learning providers** for them to purchase equipment (including items such as **laptops, tablets, chromebooks and MiFi devices** to help address connectivity issues) for use by learners. The Welsh Government has made **£8.1 million** capital funding in total available to **eligible learning providers**, with the majority of funding for **Further Education Institutions** (and some funding is available to local authorities delivering adult learning in the community). **Each learning provider is responsible for identifying and prioritising learners for support, and for distributing equipment to learners registered with their organisation.**

18. Mike informs the group that ESOL provision at the Welsh Refugee Council is voluntary provision rather than college provision. These classes are aimed **for those who are on the waiting list for college provision**. There's a complete beginners class and a higher level conversation class. Learners who are beginners or would like more opportunity for conversational practice **can get in touch with the Welsh Refugee Council to join**.

19. Sarah informs the group about **DPIA's Digital and Data Project** which can help individuals access education by **providing digital devices and data**. This is available across Wales, email info@dpia.org.uk or Sarah@dpia.org.uk for more information.

20. An individual asks if anything will be put in place for those **travelling from Newport to do Level 2 in Cardiff**. She says she knows multiple asylum seekers in this situation who are **struggling to afford** the transport, but want to continue studying. **Are there any transport funding schemes** to help with this?

- MaryAnn responds that they've been working closely with Coleg Gwent and Adult Learning Wales to **put on a Level 2 course in Newport**, as Cardiff and Vale College has been inundated with these new learners, and there isn't the capacity. **There's a recognised need, so this needs to be provided in Newport**. This will mean those individuals won't have to pay for transport to Cardiff. She says she'll share any updates on this with Sarah.

- MaryAnn responded following the forum, stating that she has spoken to Coleg Gwent and the Newport REACH + Hub and suggested they **look into providing Level 2 in Newport** next year. She said that "They will **need time to put this into their curriculum** planning and ensure they have demand. We currently have 4 students studying with us from Newport on CAVC provision so I would think it is viable. This is an **ongoing action**, and I will feedback when I have more detail hopefully early next year."

21. One individual said that he began studying at Gower College last year. This became really hard with Covid because of **having to adapt to the new system in a second language**. He says it is also difficult as they are **waiting for their asylum interview whilst trying to focus on college**. He says that they have two days in class and two days of online learning a week. These are for 1 or 1 ½ hour classes.

-Mike asks **whether he feels this is enough time in class** to cater for his needs, and the member **feels it is not**. Especially when it is online as a **second language is hard to understand over the computer**. He adds that it is also **harder to focus online** and lessons become boring more easily.

22. An individual asks whether moving online has had any effect on **waiting lists for ESOL**. They also ask **whether there is a limit on online class size** in the same way as in person classes. Lastly, they ask if there has been a **reduction in the number of hours offered** at each level.

- MaryAnn responds that there has **not been a reduction in hours** at CAVC, they still offer six hours a week for part time, 16 hours a week for full time. She believes this is similar for the other colleges. When they could, they delivered around **20% as face to face and 80% online**. They to slightly reduce numbers when they planned to deliver face to face as they can only do a certain amount of this. **Groups can't be too big online as it becomes unmanageable** to provide good quality teaching.

In Cardiff there is no waiting list and they're still filling spaces, so anybody looking for provision should go to their Reach hub to be referred to the most appropriate provision. In Cardiff you would be seen within a few days. **Swansea has filled its provision**, but Adult Learning Wales are looking to provide more. There are **also unaccredited courses available**, such as those run by Oasis and FAN's conversational coffee groups.

- Gower College updated us that they have spaces on fulltime courses for afternoon classes and classes due to start in January. They are regularly filling in students on waiting list for part time classes where spaces become available.

23. A member asks **if it is possible to attend any other courses** apart from English, and **whether only English is free**.

- MaryAnn responds that you have to be at a certain level of English to be able to do a mainstream course. **Those referred to mainstream are usually at Level 2**, with Newport sometimes referring at Level 1. In Cardiff, we do **ESOL+ courses**, which are **ESOL and a vocational subject**. This is about nine hours a week of ESOL, and five or six hours of a vocational course. This includes business admin, hospitality, home beauty, business accounting, construction and more. Hubs assess speaking, listening, reading and writing to assess what level people are at, and what they can attend.

- It is asked what happens if someone has reached a good enough level of English to join mainstream provision.

- MaryAnn responds that there are **grants available to help refugees with fees**. Also, if you are **16-19 years old the courses are funded**. There is funding available, but it depends on the

course. She says they can support with this process if you apply through one of the Reach Hubs.

24. A member says she started doing Entry 2 in Gower College in 2016, followed by Entry 3 and Level 1. She failed her Level 1 reading or writing, and was told she couldn't progress to Level 2 until she passed so she did it a second time. This time she **passed Level 1, but the college said that she was not eligible for Level 2** and had to do Level 1 a third time. She says she **wants to learn new things**, but she is learning the same by repeating the course. Her teacher says she'll get more experience by repeating Level 1, but she feels she will get more from Level 2, even if she fails at first. Because of this she decided not to enrol this year. **She asks why they are keeping her in Level 1?**

- MaryAnn asks if she can pass on the details of this situation to her through Sarah so she can resolve this issue.

- The details of this situation were passed to MaryAnn and Gower College to resolve this issue.

25. A member asks **which online college courses are free?** He says there are **sometimes fees for 3-day summer courses**. He says it is interesting for him and others to get new knowledge, but these courses are not fully funded so he **can't access them**. Is there any chance to **remove these fees for asylum seekers** and refugees?

MaryAnn notes that **ESOL is free**, but with those other courses, there are **fees attached for everybody**. She says her main area is ESOL so she isn't sure what grants are available.

She recommends that refugees go to a Reach ReStart hub as they can **support with grants and accessing other provisions**. She says that unfortunately they don't offer support with holistic assessments for asylum seekers, it's **just for refugees**.

Sarah notes that she tried to invite the college to speak about this issue, but received no response. She asks if MaryAnn might have a contact who would be appropriate for the forum to speak to about this.

- MaryAnn passed this information onto Sarah following the forum.

- Mike notes that there are many **free courses online**, such as Future Learn (www.futurelearn.com). Refuaid (www.refuaid.org) also **provide funding** for refugees and asylum seekers who are looking to get into formal education.

- Gower College updated us that asylum seekers at their college receive grant/funding support from their Student Services team. ESOL teaching staff and their admissions team provide advice and guidance regarding wider College provision.

26. Jessica Moser (British Red Cross) communicates a point brought up to her on the chat by a **Voices ambassador**. They noted that there are **extra costs involved with practical college courses** that come with **buying equipment**. This individual had **£265 to pay for a hairdressing kit**, which is almost **impossible for an asylum seeker to afford**.

- Jessica notes that the **Princes Trust has a Development Award for asylum seekers** and refugees under 30 years old. They can help with cost of course fees, tools and equipment, but not with transport. (Link: <https://www.princes-trust.org.uk/help-for-young-people/get-funding-train-learn>)

- Sarah adds that the **Ruth Hayman Trust also gives educational grants to Asylum Seekers.** This can pay for registration and course fees, exam fees, a DBS fees, the cost of joining professional bodies, and dictionaries and essential textbooks.
(Link: <http://www.ruthhaymantrust.org.uk/grant>)

Universities

28. Guest Speakers for this section on universities are introduced.

Mike Chick- Mike Chick – Refugee Champion University of South Wales

Sian Catley- Cardiff University Widening Participation

Jan Stephens – Cardiff University Continuing Education

Elin Osmond – Cardiff University International Student Support

Paula Barker – Cardiff University Student Advice and Finance team

Sarah notes that unfortunately not all universities could attend. She says that questions can be asked about other universities, and she will try to take that question or comment to the university to follow up.

29. Mike gives a further introduction to his role. Two years ago University of South Wales (USW) launched the **University of South Wales Asylum Seeker Bursary** which supports **two asylum seekers with a postgraduate** (master's level) degree each year.

USW also offers **up to 20 weeks of full time free language preparation.** They give a **free USW language assessment** as part of this. That means those who apply for university at USW don't need to do the IELTS examination. He says that USW is a University of Sanctuary which means it's in the university's policy to do what it can to support refugees and asylum seekers.

30. Paula Barker is a student support advisor at Cardiff University. She says she is able to answer any queries about statutory funding that students are eligible for. **For asylum seekers, there isn't currently any statutory funding.** Those with **refugee status are entitled to student finance.** She says she's happy to answer questions related to this.

31. Elin Osmond is an international student advisor at Cardiff University. Helping asylum seekers is part of her role. **Cardiff University has the 'Opportunity Award' scholarship for two asylum seekers** who have a conditional or unconditional offer on an **undergraduate programme of study** (that doesn't include NHS funded courses).

Successful candidates will get their **tuition fees paid in full and £4000 towards living costs.** That is for the duration of their course or until their status changes. Their undergraduate asylum seeking students are also charged home student fee levels rather than international fee levels.

32. Jan Stevens works at continuing professional education in Cardiff University. They **offer Level Three courses, which are free to all, including refugees and asylum seekers.** The courses don't include English language, they are chance to use and develop English language skills. Unfortunately, **asylum seekers are not eligible for statutory funding to progress to Level Four** courses.

33. Sian Catley works on the widening participation outreach team at Cardiff University. They work on reduce barriers into higher education. She says she's keen to listen to what they can put into place to support asylum seekers and refugees.

34. A member notes that a friend from his country **is a doctor.** Their country doesn't give any certificates or any documents to prove this. Since he **doesn't have these papers,** he doesn't have the access to work his profession. He asks what he can do?

- Sarah notes that she manages the Wales Asylum Seeker and Refugee Doctors and Dentists **(WARD) group.** They **support medical professionals to revalidate their qualifications in the UK and join the NHS.** She asks him to email her and they can try to assist.

35. A member asks Mike about asylum seekers not needing to do the IELTSs course. He asks if this is the **case for both graduate and undergraduate** courses?

- Mike responds that USW provide **two postgraduate (master's level) scholarships** a year for asylum seekers. This pays for the whole of the course and up to 20 weeks of English language support. USW has **no undergraduate scholarship for asylum seekers.**

Those with refugee status have access to mainstream student loans and support, but there is no support for English language development. Therefore, USW's refugee scheme pays for up to 20 weeks full time English language preparation. This **includes an examination so you would not need to sit IELTSs.**

- The member asks how long the language course usually takes.

- Mike responds that they give a **language assessment to work out how many weeks** of full time English language teaching the individual requires to get them up to the level required.

- The member asks if you must apply to the university to access this. Mike responds that this language course is **only provided for those who have applied to university.**

36. A member asks **if Cardiff University's undergraduate scholarship is for any subject**

- Elin (Cardiff University) responds that the scholarship is for **any subject except for NHS funded subjects** such as a nursing course, occupational therapy or speech and language therapy.

37. As **Cardiff Metropolitan University** couldn't attend, Sarah informs the group of their Sanctuary Awards. They have **two undergraduate and two postgraduate scholarships available,** which include full fee waiver, a bus pass a daily lunch voucher as well, and personal support.

<https://www.cardiffmet.ac.uk/international/study/applying/Pages/Sanctuary-Award.aspx>

She also notes student action for refugees have a webpage with a **list of all of the university scholarships** that you can access as a refugee or asylum seeker in the UK. (http://www.star-network.org.uk/index.php/resources/access_to_university)

38. A member asks **how to apply for Cardiff University's undergraduate scholarship.**

- Elin responds that Cardiff University applications will **open around March** next year for the 2021 academic year. You can find the application form and guidance notes at :
<https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/funding/bursaries/asylum-seekers-opportunity-award>
<https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/funding/support-for-asylum-seekers>

39. A member sent in the following comments for Sarah to read out.

- Can Universities be **clearer on the deadline** for the submission of university application forms, particularly for Scholarships. The officer in charge should mention it to the prospective student at the 1st contact.
- Can Universities ensure they put **an officer to attend to Asylum seeker or Refugees** when the officer in charge goes on leave or is unavoidably absent. This is to ensure there are no gaps in the application process and to all **enquiries are attended to in good time.**
- Officers in charge of Scholarships **should communicate better** with asylum seekers and Refugees. Remember **English is often their 2nd language.** There is often a **breakdown in communication between the school and the applicant.**

-Mike responds to this. He says that launching sanctuary schemes is not easy. **Many different university departments are involved** in an asylum seekers applying to a university (Such as academic departments, inquiries and admissions departments and international compliance departments). Dealing with all these different departments and **also language differences can create issues with communication.**

He says that It's also not easy to please everybody, as there's a **limited number of scholarships.** Universities have to **comply with certain Home Office rules** which creates issues with regards to getting hold of documentation that may be needed

He says there are issues and delays and obstacles, but they are trying to get everybody involved and sort these out.

40. Elin notes that one asylum seeker was **awarded their scholarship**, then was **given by the Home Office a prohibition on study.** Sarah agrees to find out more and follow up on this after the forum.

- This **condition was lifted.** See next follow-up point.

41. A member notes that when he applied to be an asylum seeker he was not allowed to work. A few years later he was sent to was sent to a detention centre. When he was released and came to Cardiff, he was **given a new immigration bail which showed the condition that he wasn't allowed to study.**

He says that in his experience, **those who have got an immigration bail after detention have been told they aren't allowed to study.** He says he is confused why the Home Office have given this condition to so many asylum seekers. He sent the Home Office an email **asking why he is not allowed to study, and how they are defining study.** He doesn't know whether he is even allowed to go on a two-day training course or do online courses. They **haven't given him an answer.**

- Sarah agrees to follow up on this point.

- The Home Office has issued the following guidance in regard to right to study:

- "There is **nothing in the Immigration Rules to prevent asylum seekers studying.** Therefore, anyone who claims asylum should not have a study condition applied to them.

- A condition prohibiting study **may be applied at the point an asylum seeker becomes appeal rights exhausted,** if considered necessary on the facts of the individual case."

- "If an asylum seeker who has exhausted their appeal rights submits further representations and these are **accepted as a fresh claim,** the decision maker **must lift any study restriction** applied to the person.

- To read more of this document, go to:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/919793/Immigration-bail-v5.0ext.pdf

- Asylum Seekers who feel this condition has been incorrectly applied to them **could contact their solicitor to request to the Home Office that this condition is lifted.**

- This information was passed on to the relevant forum individuals and the issue was raised with the Welsh Strategic Migration Partnership.

42. An individual asks **if there is an age limit** to who can apply for USW's **postgraduate scholarship.**

- There is **no age limit** for the scholarship.

43. A member shares her experience of applying for a scholarship with University of South Wales. She came to the UK by visa, then had to claim asylum four or five months ago. With lockdown happening, she **hadn't received her ID card, only her Bail 201.** As this wasn't the **document necessary for applying,** so she **lost the chance to get the scholarship.**

At the time the University wanted to contact the Home Office to verify instead. She asked her solicitor for permission for this. She said **the solicitor said no,** saying that no one is eligible to know about her case or why she's claiming asylum after having had a visa.

She says she applied for postgraduate additional learning needs. She was told that her **application was strong enough to win,** but because she **didn't have the correct ID,** her application couldn't go through and she **lost this opportunity.**

- Mike says that he is familiar with this individual's case. She had an extremely strong application. He was **previously unaware of this process** of Universities contacting the Home Office to **confirm an applicant's identity.** They spoke with the Welsh Refugee Council who **confirmed that this was due process.** He says that universities don't contact the Home Office as a reporting mechanism, but rather as an enquiring and confirmation mechanism.

- Elin notes that at Cardiff University, they **have to do quarterly checks**. In October, January, April and July, they contact the Home Office about all their asylum seeking students to check that are still **eligible for study**. The students are then issued with a temporary ID, to cover them for three months until they do the next right to study check.

44. A member asks **what language assessment is the prerequisite** for university?

- Mike responded at the University of South Wales if you're a refugee or asylum seeker, you can get **free language assessment** of the university. So you **don't need to do IELTS**.

45. A member asks whether it is **full time and part time available for the scholarships?**

- At Cardiff University and University of South Wales the scholarship is only available for full time study.

46. The member then asks **if somebody from Swansea can apply for Cardiff University**, and complete the courses from Swansea, or would they have to move to Cardiff? He has children, and a family so it'd be difficult to move to complete the studies. Would someone from outside the city **be given transport facilities** by the university?

- Elin responds that they **can't stop someone from Swansea studying at Cardiff University**. However, the student **would have to pay for the transport themselves**, which may be too expensive for an asylum seeker. Though over coronavirus a lot of learning is taking place, we are hoping that we will get back to learning in the classroom as things improve.

Cardiff University would provide the full tuition fees and students **£4000 pounds towards living expenses**. She thinks this **wouldn't be enough** to cover the frequent travel from Swansea to Cardiff.

- Mike says this would be the **same situation with University of South Wales**.

47. A member **asks for websites and contact details** to be able to find out more about the University application process. The following details are shared in the forum chat:

- University of South Wales Sanctuary Scheme Page:

<https://www.southwales.ac.uk/study/fees-and-funding/undergraduate/undergraduate-home/usw-refugee-sanctuary-scheme/>

- Mike Chick (USW) email:

mike.chick@southwales.ac.uk

- Cardiff University Support for Asylum Seekers Page:

<https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/funding/support-for-asylum-seekers>

- Cardiff Met University Sanctuary Award Page:

<https://www.cardiffmet.ac.uk/international/study/applying/Pages/Sanctuary-Award.aspx>

-STAR list of UK scholarships:

http://www.star-network.org.uk/index.php/resources/access_to_university

48. A member notes that there is a **fee for Cardiff University's pathway classes**. As an asylum seeker, she **may not be able to pay** if she cannot access funding for it. She asks if they are able to set it up so they **can pay by instalment**. One 10 week course was almost 200 pounds.

-Jan (Cardiff University) responds that with the pathway courses paying in **instalments are only available for courses over £250**. Level three courses are free, but level four courses have fees attached. **Refugees can access the Tuition Fee Loan** to meet those fees. Asylum Seekers often take level three courses on the community programme until they're eligible, and then they can access fees to pay for level 4.

- Sarah asks **whether it might be possible to allow instalments** for these courses that are under £250, to help asylum seekers to be able to access this. She asks whether Sian can look into this as part of Cardiff University's widening participation team?

- Sian says that they **can definitely look into this** and take it forward. She adds that she'll be reporting on the forum to their equality and diversity managers, to inform what changes might be made.

- The member is happy that she will look into it. She says it was hard that there was no option as she doesn't have that kind of money in bulk. She says she's **willing to sacrifice other things to be able to go to class and pay the money in pieces**.

49. A member notes that as an asylum seeker you **can do Level 3 for free, but not Level 4**. This means that **as an asylum seeker you cannot progress**. He did Level 4, but really struggled to pay the fees. He feels that asylum seekers **shouldn't have this barrier** to progressing beyond Level 3.

- Jan responds **it is the same for everybody**, that Level 3 is free, and Level 4 has to be paid for. She says that there's a **range of Level 3 Courses available**, meaning progression is not limited.

- The member asks **if an exception could be made for asylum seekers**, since there is very low levels of asylum seekers who would be looking for this. He says that as they don't know how long they have to wait for the decision, so there should be more progression available. He notes that this is the case for the colleges too.

- Sarah asks whether this is something the Widening Participation team has been looking into?

- Sian says it's **an area they're beginning to look at**. They did the Aspire Project which involved community level three courses. This wasn't run last year because of covid, but will potentially happen next year, possibly online.

50. A member missed the section on colleges and asks if her question can be passed on to Cardiff and Vale. She is currently studying for Level One ESOL. She **applied to do ESOL+** and was put in the waiting list in March. She **saw people who applied after her get spaces**, but she only got the ESOL part. She wants to know why this happened as the registration department didn't give her a straight answer.

- Sarah says that she will pass this question on to MaryAnn from Reach at Cardiff and Vale College. (This question was passed on)

51. The forum is brought to a close. Sarah notes that her email address is sarah@dpia.org.uk if anyone wants to add anything they didn't manage to bring up during the forum.

End of forum