

Migrants' Access to Further and Higher Education

Background

As part of the JustCitizens Panel we are conducting community research across a number of different policy areas to support our aim to create a fairer Scotland for migrants. Two of these topics are access to health and access to further and higher education. These topics were chosen by migrant members on the panel and all research and recommendations were developed by them.

Across February and March 2021 we conducted a survey for migrants to complete to tell us about their experiences of healthcare (including mental health) and education (specifically accessing colleges and universities) this survey was completed by 62 people. This was also supported with the delivery of 2 focus groups with 7 migrants.

What we found out:

58% of those involved in the research felt there was a lack of inclusion for migrants in Scotland



"There is a sense of loneliness since moving to Scotland. Every time you try to speak you are shut down with 'Is that how it is done in your country'. Feel like there is a massive unconscious bias towards migrants. This sense is probably heightened by current pandemic"

"A lot of the belonging and inclusion campaigns are very surface level and there is a lack of a real commitment in facilitating migrants from accessing health and well-being – for example, language barriers are not always addressed"

On education:

- ▶ **1 in 4** people needed financial support for education and training but were unable to access it.
- ▶ Over **1 in 4** migrants surveyed have experienced barriers in access education.
- ▶ Almost **2 in 5** migrants felt their education from their "Home" country was not valued in Scotland.



What migrants said:

"I couldn't apply for any universities without my ARC card. I had to wait more than one and a half year until the Home Office issued it. Moreover, I had to drop my application to several universities because they are too scared of the Home Office."

"I feel it's quite hard to validate your University Degree, an expensive and confuse process."

"My qualifications wasn't valued. I had to start from access courses to gain qualifications for University."

"I was doing a PhD at Edinburgh University. There was no funding available for EU nationals. Even the hardship fund was available only to British students. I had to switch into part-time studying to be able to work and support myself. I also had to rely on my parent's financial support. I only managed to get a national grant supporting women during my last year of PhD as I already had a child then. Otherwise all funding was limited to British students."

"College not accepting without english course or approving outside courses and most migrants have higher education level then anyone in class"

"It affected my health because I was working full time alongside a full time study/placement, because I cannot live with just studying and not money support coming in".

Recommendations from our snapshot research:

- ▶ Access to some form of financial support (regardless of immigration status) to access higher education
- ▶ More flexibility and understanding in regards to providing proof of prior education or certificates when accessing courses.
- ▶ Access to support, rights and entitlements need to be clearer and available in more languages
- ▶ Universities and college need to have recruitment and admissions teams well informed and trained on migrant's access and rights.
- ▶ Simplification of process and support within colleges to have education recognised in the Scottish system
- ▶ Further investment in evening and weekend courses that are relevant to the labour market to allow workers and caring migrants to access learning opportunities
- ▶ Deliver a consistent approach across all universities and colleges in regards to admissions and support mechanisms which are dependent on the interpretation of regulations by institution staff; calling on the Scottish Funding Council to create guidelines which state that regulations should be interpreted in a way to provide as much support as is legally possible.

Next steps:

The Just Citizens panel will be working to disseminate this information across Scotland. We will be conducting Freedom of Information requests to identify more data on these two policy areas, we will be writing articles for media and will be talking to key public institutions to promote our recommendations.

In autumn 2021 we will be producing a full report which includes recommendation, data and commentary across five key policy areas to promote a social citizenship strategy for migrants in Scotland.