

Response ID ANON-XCXE-UDBH-U

Submitted to Changes to residency criteria for access to financial support in Further and Higher Education
Submitted on 2023-03-30 11:34:18

Questions

1 Do you agree with the overarching policy aim that students need to be able to demonstrate a connection to Scotland in order to obtain financial support from the Scottish Government for their studies?

Yes

2 Please provide any relevant comments you may have in regards to your answer at question one.

Please give us your views:

The RAF Families Federation (RAFFF) conducted a snapshot Further / Higher Education (FE/HE) Funding Survey in March 2023. Respondents were asked whether they agreed with the overarching policy aim that students need to be able to demonstrate a connection to Scotland in order to obtain financial support from the Scottish Government for their studies, 68% of those who responded either agreed or strongly agreed with this principle.

The RAFFF request that the Scottish Government consider what constitutes an appropriate connection to Scotland and ensure that the Armed Forces community are considered in any changes to the residency criteria for accessing FE/HE funding to ensure they are treated fairly.

The RAFFF have evidence to suggest that some members of the RAF community feel that they are disadvantaged by the current FE/HE funding systems. We encourage the Scottish Government to engage with the relevant stakeholders, including the MOD and Families Federations, on this matter and review the FE/HE funding arrangements for students from an Armed Forces background.

Further Education

The Scottish Government lays out three basic conditions which students need to fulfil in order to qualify for a fee waiver and bursary support. The first condition is that the students must "Be ordinarily resident in Scotland on the relevant date."

The Student Awards Agency Scotland defines ordinary residence for students from an Armed Forces background as follows:

"... the Scottish Government and the Student Awards Agency Scotland's (SAAS) policy is to consider the place in which the serving forces member was living before they first joined up as their place of ordinary residence."

The RAFFF is aware that students from an Armed Forces background may encounter challenges accessing funding for FE courses in Scotland as this does not appear to be a reciprocal agreement, thus putting them at a disadvantage compared to their civilian peers and Armed Forces children living in England who are funded for FE studies irrespective of where their parents joined the military. The Education & Skills Funding Agency (England) state that "students of all nationalities who are dependants of serving members of the British Armed Forces and studying in England must be considered eligible for funding throughout their period of service on the same basis as other young people legally living in England where they attend funded institutions."

We encourage the Scottish Government and SAAS to review their FE funding policies and entitlements impacting students from an Armed Forces background in light of the The Armed Forces Covenant to ensure that "those who serve or who have served in the Armed Forces, and their families, are treated fairly" and ensure all students aged 16-18 from a UK Armed Forces background are eligible for FE funding.

Higher Education

As highlighted previously, funding eligibility guidance from SAAS states that "the Scottish Government and the Student Awards Agency Scotland's (SAAS) policy is to consider the place in which the serving forces member was living before they first joined up as their place of ordinary residence."

Our understanding is that, unless the Service person enlisted in Scotland, they and by default their family will not be classed as ordinary residents irrespective of the amount of time they have lived in Scotland and are therefore unlikely to be eligible for educational funding from SAAS. We have evidence to suggest that some members of the RAF community believe that this policy is discriminatory and disadvantages them in comparison to their civilian peers as one respondent to our FE/HE survey articulated:

"I have lived in Scotland, in my own home, for 10 years. For non-military personnel this would mean I was considered to be a Scottish resident. Yet the Scottish government policy to determine ordinary place of residence does not consider me to be Scottish because of the job I choose to do. This is discriminating against Service personnel and particularly their children."

At a time when some organisations are encouraging the Armed Forces community to inform educational institutions that they are from an Armed Forces background to enable their unique circumstances to be considered and supported, the RAFFF are aware that there is a risk that some families may choose not to share this information for concern that they may be disadvantaged by doing so.

As the Scottish Government considers what may constitute an appropriate connection to Scotland to obtain HE financial support, the RAFFF believe that the entitlements for serving members of the Armed Forces and their families should be reviewed to ensure the Armed Forces community are not unfairly disadvantaged as a result of the serving members commitment to the Armed Forces.

The RAFFF request that the Scottish Government and SAAS review the policy on HE funding for serving members of the Armed Forces and their families in collaboration with the student finance agencies from the other home nations to ensure they are treated fairly.

RAFFF Evidence

To inform the RAFFF's response to this consultation, we put out a FE/HE Funding Survey to members of the RAF community in March 2023. The findings highlighted that under the current funding arrangements, some members of the RAF community feel that they are being disadvantaged due to their connection to the military:

"My son was born in Scotland and brought up in Scotland. This would make him Scottish in any other context.... This feels like he is disadvantaged due to his parent's background"

One respondent highlighted how leaving the Armed Forces enabled them to access educational funding which had previously been refused while they were serving:

"I had served at [RAF Base in Scotland] for 15yrs and was in resettlement wanting to become a social worker.... My initial application for SAAS was turned down as I wasn't considered committed to Scotland. I formally left the RAF and two weeks later reapplied getting full funding."

The RAFFF are acutely aware of the potential impact educational funding arrangements may have on spouses, partners and children of serving personnel. One respondent to our survey highlighted that "...service children who have no choice in where they live are rejected for funding." Others commented on the impact the current funding arrangements have on spouses and partners:

"Because of my husband's job in the RAF, I was unable to begin my medical studies."

"My husband is not me, his career is not mine and yet I am being punished..."

The RAFFF are keen to encourage supportive policies which ensure members of the Armed Forces and their families are treated fairly. We understand that, due to the different HE entitlements across the Devolved Nations, while it is important to ensure the RAF community is not disadvantaged by policies on funding eligibility, it is also important that members of Armed Forces and their families are not given an unfair advantage over their civilian peers. This was highlighted in the RAFFF FE/HE Funding Survey where one respondent commented that "it's important that Scottish people get the funding for universities as it's only offered here." One respondent shared that they "do not agree to opening or reducing the eligibility criteria for those born outside of Scotland."

The RAFFF understand that there may be differing views on how best to establish the place of ordinary residence for members of the Armed Forces community. We encourage the Scottish Government and other relevant stakeholders to review the current policies and educational funding arrangements for students from an Armed Forces background to ensure due regard has been given to ensure the Armed Forces community is being treated fairly and their individual circumstances are considered in applications for FE/HE funding.

The Living in our shoes summary report made numerous recommendations focusing on the impact of Service life on children and young people. These included:

"Recommendation 15

The Governments of the UK to make 'Getting It Right for Service Children' a national education priority in all nations of the UK, and take all necessary steps to ensure that Service children, especially those with special educational needs and disabilities, are not disadvantaged by Service life."

"Recommendation 43

All UK Governments to include the voices of Service children and young people in the development of all policies and support services that impact on them."

The RAFFF urge the Scottish Government to consider these recommendations as part of the wider review into any changes to the residency criteria for FE and HE funding in Scotland to ensure the non-homogenous experiences of the Armed Forces community are taken into consideration and that due regard is given to ensure they are treated fairly. Forces Children Scotland have reported that many young people have told them that they feel like a seldom-heard group and we believe that, in line with Recommendation 43, the Scottish Government should engage with Service children and young people to ensure their voices are heard in the development of policies which will impact them.

The RAFFF have identified that it is not always easy to locate and interpret the policies and arrangements in place regarding access to education funding for students from an Armed Forces background. We encourage the Scottish Government to engage with the relevant stakeholders to ensure that information on education funding eligibility and entitlements is clear and easily accessible to support Armed Forces personnel and families to make informed choices about their educational pathways.

The RAFFF would welcome the opportunity for further engagement with the Scottish Government to discuss the issues raised in this response in more detail.

3 Do you agree that the length of a person's residence in the UK (together with a requirement to be ordinarily resident in Scotland on the relevant date) is an appropriate way of assessing whether a person has a sufficient connection with Scotland to qualify for the financial support package in Further / Higher Education?

Don't Know

4 Do you agree that 3 years' residence in the UK is a suitable minimum residence requirement for setting eligibility for student support in Scotland?

Don't Know

5 Do you agree that residence based on any form of leave to enter or remain from the Home Office in the UK should entitle a person to student support in Scotland, provided they otherwise meet the residence requirements?

Don't Know

6 Do you agree that individuals who are here specifically for education purposes and are on a student visa, should remain ineligible for the financial support package from Scottish Government?

Don't Know

7 Do you think eligibility should be extended to the dependents (child, spouse or civil partner) of those with student visas?

Don't Know

8 Should financial support beyond support already given through discretionary funds be extended to students who are currently ordinarily resident in Scotland and have sought asylum from the UK Home Office, but whose application is still pending?

Don't Know

9 Do you think eligibility for student financial support should be fixed according to an assessment at the start of their course (i.e. with reference to the relevant date)?

Don't Know

10 Do you have any comments on the sort of 'events' or changes in circumstances that should trigger reassessment of a student's eligibility after the first academic year of their course?

Please give us your views:

11 Do you have any other comments on the current policy of carrying out an assessment of eligibility on the relevant date, or the proposals to change it?

Please give us your views:

About you

12 What is your name?

Name:

Alexandra Stokes

13 What is your email address?

Email:

alexandra.stokes@raf-ff.org.uk

14 Are you responding as an individual or an organisation?

Organisation

15 What is your organisation?

Organisation:

RAF Families Federation

16 The Scottish Government would like your permission to publish your consultation response. Please indicate your publishing preference:

Publish response only (without name)

17 We will share your response internally with other Scottish Government policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss. They may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for Scottish Government to contact you again in relation to this consultation exercise?

Yes

18 I confirm that I have read the privacy policy and consent to the data I provide being used as set out in the policy.

I consent

Evaluation

19 Please help us improve our consultations by answering the questions below. (Responses to the evaluation will not be published.)

Matrix 1 - How satisfied were you with this consultation?:

Slightly satisfied

Please enter comments here.:

Matrix 1 - How would you rate your satisfaction with using this platform (Citizen Space) to respond to this consultation?:

Very satisfied

Please enter comments here.: