

P-05-702 EMA Attendance Requirements for Young Adult Carers

This petition was submitted by the Carmarthenshire Young Adult Carer Project having collected 60 signatures.

Text of the Petition

I call upon the National Assembly to urge the Welsh Government to amend the current Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) criteria in respect of Young Adult Carers (YACs) in Wales.

Currently, the EMA Learning Agreement Form's 'Attendance, Performance and Behaviour Criteria' says 'students must meet the college's attendance requirements of 100% relating to the agreed programme unless prevented from doing so by illness or other good reason agreed by the college'... and 'attend all classes at the correct time and place and submit all work by the deadlines set.'

These criteria act as a barrier to YACs engaging in further education and contribute to the high number of YACs who subsequently drop out due to the demands of their caring role. This is evidenced by the findings of the research 'Time to Be Heard' which says that of the 22,655 YACs in Wales 21% are NEET (Not in Education, Training, Employment) and that they are four times more likely to drop out of college than those without caring commitments.

Under the current EMA guidelines there is no allowance for the caring responsibilities which can impact YAC's ability to engage in education which is discriminatory, which limit their options to realise their full potential, further their career and make a positive contribution to society.

In order for the number of YACs who are NEET to be reduced and the number engaging in and completing further education to increase I believe that the vital role YACs have needs to be acknowledged through making special compensation for their caring responsibilities through introducing a lower attendance requirement of 80%.

I propose that a question be included on the EMA registration form which identifies YACs so as to identify their need for potential support to engage in and remain in further education, encourage YACs to register with a Carers Service and/or Social Services and assist the WAG to monitor the number of YACs in Wales.

Additional information

Real life YAC case studies:

“I have cared for my mum since I was 11 and as mum can’t do a lot herself I do all the household chores, give mum her daily medication and take her to any appointments. We live 14 miles from the nearest town so it takes a long time to get to and from college on the bus. I am in my third year at college and rely a lot on my EMA money as mum is on benefits so money is tight. When mum is having a bad day I am late for class as I miss the school bus and also miss college due to taking mum to her medical appointments. Because of this I have had my EMA money stopped which has meant I haven’t been able to buy food some weeks so I think greater flexibility should be given within the EMA’s attendance requirement.”

(Female YAC aged 18, Carmarthenshire)

I care for my mum who has a brain tumour which has left her virtually blind. Dad works full time and as I am the eldest of 8 children I am the primary carer, also looking after my siblings. I do find this a struggle as I am in my third year at college but am keen to finish my education, though lately have been thinking I may have to drop out as I find it difficult to keep my attendance level high enough and am sometimes late with assignments so think it would help if there was more flexibility for YACs within the EMA’s learning agreement so at least I wouldn’t have to also worry about my EMA being stopped as I rely on this money as my only income.”

(Female YAC aged 18, Carmarthenshire)

I have been the main carer for my mum who has mental health issues since I was 16 so I had to drop out of school to look after her. I would have liked to carry on with my education but money is very tight and I knew I wouldn’t have been able to have 100% attendance because of looking after mum so knew I wouldn’t get EMA. If the

rules were different for YACs then maybe I could have gone to college but now I am what is known as 'NEET'" (Male YAC aged 16, Carmarthenshire).

Assembly Constituency and Region

- Llanelli
- Mid and West Wales