

NRPF and International Students Meeting Notes

Thursday 3rd November 2022

Present – Iona Rennie (Shelter Scotland; NRNE Partnership Coordinator - Chair), Susan Bains (NRPF Tackling and Preventing Destitution Project Coordinator), Olushola Ajide (Fountain of Love), Filippo Antoniazzi (Director for Student life, RGU), Cathy Beattie (Home-Start Aberdeen), Roda Bird (Equality & Diversity Assistant at NHS Grampian), Laura Keith (Turning Point Scotland, NRNE Co-ordinator - Minutes), Jennifer Macrae (NHS Grampian Senior Primary Care Link Practitioner), Julie McLennan (University of Aberdeen)

Apologies:

Dave Black (GREC; NRNE Partnership Coordinator), Nicola Dickie (NHS Grampian Health Visitor Team Lead), Gerry Keogh (NHS Grampian - Specialist Nurse Child Protection), Jemma Murdoch (University of Aberdeen)

Purpose of Group

Iona spoke about the original purpose of the group, which was set up last year to respond to the problem of large numbers of international students struggling financially and accessing services. Some have not been receiving payments/stipends from their home countries and there has been significant impact on the universities' hardship funds, third sector, health visitors, etc.

Initially set up as a fact-finding group, to establish what the situation is and why, Iona re-iterated that our aim is to make sure that students struggling with the status of NRPF are well supported going forwards. We need to consider what are the best next steps for the group.

Minutes, matters arising and actions since last meeting

The minutes from the 15th September were agreed, and then Susan gave an update about the NRPF training sessions and website.

Two pilot training sessions have been completed with Home-Start – one in person and one online – and 6 further sessions are booked in with third sector organisations. Please do get in touch if training is required for your teams. Susan has been developing the website, which is nearly ready to go; we are hoping to go 'live' on 17th November (in time for the next NRNE Partnership meeting). On the website there is a section for students – Susan will run this by Filippo and Julie to ensure that the correct information is there.

As regards data collection – the NRNE project is funded by the Fairer Aberdeen Fund (FAF) and their 6 month reporting form asks for numbers of people being supported who have a status of NRPF – there is a possible issue with double counting here as organisations may be helping the same individual or family without knowing. Susan contacted FAF about this issue – they support 40 projects, although not all related to NRPF, and they are willing to work with us to look at this issue and perhaps arrange some joint training through them with the projects they support. Please do send us anything your organisation does in the way of NRPF counting for data collection.

Shola (Fountain of Love) and Filippo (RGU) agreed to arrange a catch-up so that both parties understand what is provided, especially around academic support – the uni is seeing higher levels of failure than would be expected.

Updates from partners

Shola (FoL) advised that the situation for students is even more precarious now – one family paid £2300 to stay in a flat for 2 weeks and then had to pay 6 months rent in advance (one month = £650) and it is unfurnished, so they have not moved in yet. Fountain of Love (FoL) are providing a programme this weekend to support students, including academic advice. Also providing appropriate information, signposting, helping in job club – about 25 people joined job club in last few months – most are dependants of students, but some are students. They are also meeting families who have not been able to register their children with GPs or schools.

Shola mentioned a video from High Commissioner to Nigeria saying UK is open and ready for the best of the best students – so this is a fault with UK government communication – they are asking for people to come, but not then making arrangements for them once they arrive in the UK. MPs need to put pressure on UK government. e.g. For a family of four, they are paying £3000 health surcharge, and are not even able to access a GP. People are being told there are jobs available by UK government, but reality is different when they arrive. Important to try to gather figures of children to discuss with ACC. FoL are also doing work around cultural education with families – e.g. can't physically discipline children in the UK.

Filippo (RGU) – reported that there were over 1200 students in the September intake – 72% are from Nigeria – of whom a large number are bringing dependents, including children of school age. 500 more students are expected in January. The biggest issues are the cost of living and accommodation. RGU has done a piece of work to look at purpose built student accommodation and 3 of the big private rental agencies – but there is very little available in the financial range of these students. Many are now staying in AirB&Bs or B&Bs – RGU believes this to be the impact of Ukrainians and Afghan refugees also looking for housing and the improvement in oil sector fortunes which has made housing more expensive. **All RGU accommodation is full.** Not finding accommodation has a knock-on effect on registering children with schools as they have no permanent address. RGU has been talking to Education – a large number of international students (mostly on post-grad courses) have applied for school places but as yet there is no accurate update of how many have been allocated places. Some schools have said a place will not be available for one, or even three months.

RGU don't have accurate data around family numbers, but an added problem is lack of available childcare, which has resulted in some families then bringing children onto campus, which is not appropriate. There is also pressure on GP places and there has even been an instance of one pregnant woman arriving in the UK at 36 weeks pregnant and immediately giving birth.

There is a huge amount of pressure on these students. There is an absolute will by the university to support these people, but the situation is much worse than anticipated in February. RGU has spoken with MPs to ensure they are aware of the issues. Getting work is also an issue – only 20 hours per week on student visa. There have been a series of emergency meetings in RGU. There is now a breakfast club once a week – 200/300 people go there on a Tuesday morning – this has provided an opportunity to engage with people. A dedicated person has been employed in the RGU study skills team to support international students.

The university has encouraged student union to lead on the food poverty issue and there have been positive meetings with Inchgarth Community Centre and Aberdeen Cyrenians. Rather than re-invent the wheel, the focus from RGU is to provide more volunteers from the uni and help with donations to support existing charities.

The tone of communications with prospective students will now start to reflect the reality of the situation in Aberdeen – cost of living, use of temp accommodation for *at least* a month. Due to wait on visas, people are often booking the next flight as soon as visa comes through which is then more expensive. RGU are now providing information about costs of accommodation and how long it will likely take for kids to get into school. Advising need to have child care in place because cannot take children on campus – clear on UK policies on leaving children on their own. Being realistic with tone. This has been raised to highest level of the university, but there are difficulties across the whole of the UK. There has been a massive increase in recruitment, particularly from Nigeria.

Nicola D (NHS Health Visitor Team Lead) sent the following message for the minutes:

We are just starting to see the rising numbers of students & their families registering with GP's and therefore HV's for any dependants in 0-5 age range. I haven't gathered numbers as it has just started increasing in the last few weeks. I will be asking the teams for numbers going forward. If you require any further information or anything I need to action please just ask.

Roda asked a question around getting visas as dependents – can family members follow after a period of time as they can with working visas? And therefore arrange accommodation first and family come once settled? Filippo said that the universities cannot control the visa situation, just react to it, but they are learning a lot about it – e.g. NHS surcharge. Messaging might need to be “seriously consider whether or not you need to bring dependents”. Roda mentioned that GP practices are closing and Filippo agreed that people are struggling to register with GPs. Pregnant women coming over at 38 weeks – NHS has been fantastic, but definite pressure.

Iona mentioned that families have been turning up at the Shelter office with their children saying they're in overcrowded accommodation or in AirB&Bs with no security of tenure. We will look at taking forward with MPs.

Jen asked about some GP practices having said they are their closing lists after taking on Ukrainians and asked if Roda had a list of surgeries which have closed – Roda advised her to contact Ali Chapman. Filippo asked what to do in this situation and Roda said she will take this forward, but she knows that NHS Grampian have put forward to council and government to say we cannot accept more refugees/Ukrainians as they cannot provide services due to being over-stretched.

Julie (AU) – spoke about supporting a Chinese student this week who arrived at the weekend with her 5 year old son who having applied for a school place was told she would get response in May 2023, as Mile End school is currently full. Julie called a few other schools and all said had 50-odd applications waiting. Filippo advised that Kirsty Blackman MP is aware of this. The normal process is for Education to get all planning info by June/July, but this is impossible when students are not arriving until September. Julie – perhaps marketing needs to change to advise people that they need to apply for schools sooner. AU doing breakfast clubs, 50p soups, warm banks, cost of living work – but it's not enough to cope with all the international students. Filippo reported that RGU uni staff have had to sit with unattended children and then have serious discussion with parents when they return from lectures to make clear they cannot leave children unattended. RGU does have a nursery on site which is subsidised, but it's expensive. These issues can't be addressed overnight – more child care and more family accommodation are definitely needed, but it all takes time. At the moment we can only let students know clearly what is and is not available for them.

Iona – Shelter is about to work with RGU providing some awareness workshops around tenancy rights and services that Shelter offer. One about ending tenancies for students who are leaving; another in Jan about students who are moving into private rented sector. Q&A drop in after. Migrant populations tend to experience the most discrimination or bad practice within private rented sector – trying to ensure they're aware of their rights. The maximum a landlord can charge as deposit is 6 months, so unfortunately this cannot be challenged. Can raise it with MSPs as housing is devolved. Private rents becoming more and more unaffordable. This is causing additional pressure on homelessness services. Iona to contact Anna at University of Aberdeen about this offer too.

Cathy – spoke as representing the under-5s. When they are working with families who are students, firstly it is difficult for the families to find time to meet with support agencies, and then the main thing they ask for is accommodation and childcare places which Home-Start can't provide. Training with Susan has been helpful for knowing which resources are available to those with NRPf status.

Roda – suggested maybe to liaise with Chris Fox re situation with under-5s. More support available via NHS for asylum seekers and refugees, but not for this cohort.

Jen – maybe worth linking in with maternity services – midwives advised quite a few cases of women arriving at around 36 weeks and not seeking health support and babies being born quite unwell. Marywell Healthcare centre (specialist in providing healthcare for people experiencing homelessness) has a questionnaire out about how their service should be designed – we could feed into that – unsure if people could register there if unable to register anywhere else.

Shola – some people are having to look for accommodation further away in the shire, for example Portlethen and Newtonfields, and this could impact on attendance. There is a fear that people may be being reported to Home Office or of visas not being renewed because the conditions of their visa have not been met. This could impact on people's willingness to access support due to a fear of being reported. Iona – we can make partnership messaging clear that support agencies do not have a duty to report anything to the Home Office and certainly none of the partnership agencies would be encouraging people to access support which would breach their visa.

Iona is to arrange another meeting soon – she will email today to engage MPs and local MSPs. Picked up key things in terms of messaging, but perhaps we have taken things as far as we can as agencies sitting round the table. Next change needs to be at higher level. Susan to share info about training and share website with unis and Shola.

Next meeting: 2/12/2 at 2pm

*NB See next page for summary **List of Actions**

List of actions at 3/11/22

Action	Person(s)
Share access to the new NRNE website for NRPF info and check specifically that the info on the students pages is correct	Susan to contact unis
Send us anything your organisation does in the way of NRPF counting for data collection	Every organisation
Liaise regarding provision at FoL and RGU for Nigerian students and dependants, in general but also around academic support	Shola and Filippo
Find out an up-to-date list of which GP practices are closing	Jen to ask Ali Chapman and share with the group
Iona to extend awareness workshops for students around tenancy rights and services that Shelter offer	Iona to contact Anna at UoA
Suggestion to liaise with Chris Fox re situation with under-5s	Cathy at Home-Start
Link with maternity services	NRNE facilitators group
Respond to Marywell Health Centre survey	NRNE facilitators group
Look at improving messaging around No duty to report to Home Office and making people feel safe to approach agencies with NRPF problems	NRNE facilitators group
Organise next meeting with elected members of parliament to discuss higher level decisions which could alleviate the growing problems	Iona