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The Scottish Parliament
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Refugees and Asylum Seekers: Under 22s Bus Travel

13 May 2022

Dear Elena,

Thank you for your letter of 13 April to Shona Robison MSP, the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government, forwarding the British Red Cross' response regarding refugees and asylum seekers applying for the [Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme](#). Your email has been passed for me to respond as Minister for Transport.

While Transport Scotland is responsible for the policy and some aspects of the operational delivery of the scheme (such as reimbursing bus operators), the application process, card renewals, card replacements and all other cardholder management are the responsibility of the [Improvement Service](#) (online applications) and individual local councils (all other applications).

I am acutely aware of the issues that some applicants have faced when using the online application process [getyournec.scot](#). I have met with the Improvement Service, who manage this process, on a number of occasions to further the improvements we require to see this. I am advised that the Improvement Service has made improvements to their online platform, whilst remaining compliant with child safety requirements, identity verification standards, and the UK National Proof of Age Standards Scheme ([PASS](#)), which are requirements of the process, and are continuing to explore ways in which to facilitate online applications. However, as I have made clear, I am not ruling out more substantive changes to the scheme in future.

Transport Scotland has been proactively engaging with numerous public bodies and third sector organisations that work with families and young people who may face particular barriers in applying. The aim is to ensure that as many families and young people as possible are aware of the scheme and can be supported through the application process they are eligible for. In particular officials have been in discussion with organisations that

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support asylum seekers, including the Scottish Refugee Council, on how to make the application process more accessible, and have put Glasgow Life, who administer the NEC scheme, in touch with organisations that support asylum seekers to discuss application routes.

Regarding the specific recommendations by the British Red Cross:

- Adding other forms of Photo ID to the online application, i.e. BRP and ARC
 - I can confirm that the Improvement Service has updated their system since the launch of the scheme to include the Biometric Residence Permit as a valid form of photo ID on getyournec.scot. This can also be used to apply through local councils. The Application Registration Card can be used in conjunction with other proofs documents when applying through local councils.
- Standardising where young people need to go across Scotland to have paper forms verified/sent to Young Scot. This would allow for clearer messaging to be created for young people and families, rather the current practice of providing a link to their local authority's websites
 - The application process is the responsibility of the Improvement Service and local councils, who have the best understanding of local service provision and are best placed to decide on the most appropriate options for their residents. This provides a flexible approach that allows councils to respond to their own change in demand / capacity.
- Offer clear advice, and online training to third sector and education staff (including colleges and Universities) on how to support with applications
 - Transport Scotland has been ensuring information is being shared with young people through a variety of stakeholder communications channels. They have also been working with practitioners and partner organisations who support and advise young people and their parents, carers and guardians, including SAAS, Skills Development Scotland, Education Scotland, Scottish Funding Council, Colleges Scotland and Universities Scotland. This is to ensure that education staff are given the most up-to-date information about the scheme and are equipped to advise young people on how to apply.
 - The National Entitlement Programme Office (NECPO), which supports councils with the integration of various national and local public services on the National Entitlement Card, are also working with councils and education staff to explain the schools bulk process, which is a particularly effective way of handling applications.
- Increase the number of 'trusted verifiers' and offer this more broadly to community organisations (this is where an organisation can send their forms directly to Young Scot and bypass the local authority)
 - NECPO have been working with third sector organisations to explain and facilitate the Trusted Verifier process. If anyone is interested in becoming a trusted verifier, they should contact NECPO at infonec@dundeecity.gov.uk for more information.

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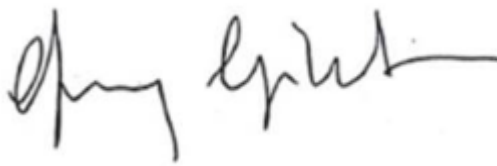
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- Continue to circulate information to all local authorities and schools, to make sure they know that this provision is not dependent on immigration status, and they know the many alternate forms of proof of age and address that can be accepted
 - Guidance on supporting asylum seekers and refugees through the application process was sent to local authorities in September 2021 by the National Entitlement Card Programme Office and the Improvement Service. We understand the Improvement Service is working with COSLA to recirculate this guidance in response to the Ukraine crisis.
- Create clear guidance on how to apply for those without passports/driving licences. This should be translated into community languages.
 - Transport Scotland is currently reviewing its website and will look to clarify its guidance on this point. Thank you for bringing it to our attention.
 - NECPO is currently working with the Improvement Service to create guidance in community languages. In the interim, local councils can provide assistance to applicants if needed.

I hope you find this information useful.

Yours sincerely



JENNY GILRUTH

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