



The Rt. Hon. Nicky Morgan MP,
Secretary of State for Education,
Ministerial and Public Communications Division
Department for Education
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

24th June 2016

Dear Secretary of State,

Re. Funding for English Language Classes for Refugees

This is Refugee Week. I am writing to you on behalf of the Oldham Council Liberal Democrat Group to call for more Government action to ensure that refugees can access more English classes in the UK.

Refugees who have found safety in the UK want to rebuild their lives and be part of their new communities. Sadly, they have a huge obstacle to restarting their lives – there are simply not enough English classes.

You may be aware that the charity Refugee Action has launched a campaign to 'Let Refugees Learn' by ensuring that they are able to get timely access to English classes and the support they need to attend them.

Refugees in this country want to learn English and they know that they must do so in order to build friendships, do their shopping, talk to their doctor, and, most importantly, find work so that they can contribute back to the country and community that has offered them a new home.

They need to be able to access accredited courses, such as English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). These are usually run by local further education colleges or community education providers. However, in recent years, the UK government has cut funding to these classes by over 50%.

As a result there is a shortage in places and long-waiting lists. I am sure that as Minister for Women and Equalities, you will also share my concern that in the case of women, the lack of childcare facilities can create a real barrier to participation. This means that they are at greater risk of becoming further isolated at home, rather than being able to get involved in their new communities and make friends.

Recent research by Refugee Action, published in a report 'Let Refugees Learn', identified that for refugees learning the language was both positive and empowering, and independent research by BritainThinks has shown that 73% of the public believe that refugees speaking English is beneficial for Britain.

I would like therefore to call upon you to make a commitment in Refugee Week to find more Government funding for places on English classes for refugees and to ensure that the barriers they face in participating are lowered.

An investment of this nature represents good value as refugees with better English will find work more quickly and so be able to contribute productively to Britain's economic and social life at an earlier stage.

I shall look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G Harkness', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Councillor Garth Harkness,
Shadow Cabinet Member for Employment and Skills,
Oldham Liberal Democrat Council Group
Home Address: 29 The Wharf, Wool Rd, Dobcross OL3 5QR