The aspiration and access to higher education of teenage refugees in the UK

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Aims

To establish the aspirations of young refugees to access to higher education and whether these aspirations were being supported, to identify the barriers and to examine whether homogenising their support needs within those provided for other minority ethnic groups is sufficient.

Methodology

A mixed method qualitative approach was taken with extensive semi-structured interviews with 18 young asylum seekers and refugees and eight parents, 37 web-based questionnaires were completed by educational and support organizations plus 10 interviews undertaken. A series of activity-based discussion

groups were held with young refugees and unaccompanied asylum seekers in Leeds.

Key issues

The research produced findings around emotional support needs, high aspirations of individuals, the impact of poverty on access to education, lack of knowledge about the UK education systems, the effects of uncertainty over immigration status, inadequate and interrupted educational backgrounds, language needs to improve English, lack of encouragement to access FE / HE, and issues specific to unaccompanied young asylum seekers who face multiple barriers.

Conclusions

There are high levels of aspiration among young refugees, so their continued under-achievement and under-representation in UK higher education represents a failure by educational institutions and support services to provide adequate advice and guidance.

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