



## **Nasc Submission to the Department of Education and Skills on the New Statement of Strategy 2015 – 2017**

10 October 2014

### **Introduction**

Nasc, the Irish Immigrant Support Centre, is a non-governmental organisation working for an integrated society based on the principles of human rights, social justice and equality. Nasc (which is the Irish word for link) works to link migrants to their rights through protecting human rights, promoting integration and campaigning for change. Nasc was founded in 2000 in response to the rapid rise in the number of asylum seekers and migrant workers moving to the city of Cork. It is the only NGO offering legal information and advocacy services to immigrants in Ireland's second city. Nasc's legal team assist some 1,200 immigrants annually in navigating Ireland's protection, immigration and naturalisation systems. We also assist migrants and ethnic-minority Irish people who encounter community-based and institutional racism and discrimination. Our campaigning strategy is informed by the issues emanating from our legal case work and our day-to-day work with migrants.

Nasc welcomes the opportunity for organisations and individuals to make submissions to the Department of Education and Skills on the strategic issues and priorities that we feel should be incorporated into the new Statement of Strategy 2015 - 2017. We also welcome the fact that the new Statement of Strategy will be informed by the document 'Ireland's Education and Training Sector – Overview of service delivery and reform', and in particular the theme of 'Supporting Inclusion and Diversity'. Nasc does a significant amount of work, at a local and national level, promoting integration and migrant access to education. Based on our experience of working with vulnerable groups such as asylum seekers, children of work permit holders, and in particular 'Separated Children', we are acutely aware of the significant barriers that exist which exclude these groups from accessing education and further skills development. We believe that if the

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Department is committed to ‘Providing additional supports to tackle educational disadvantage’<sup>1</sup>, then the new Statement of Strategy must include specific actions to support migrant children, asylum seekers and Separated Children in order to truly ‘contribute to the development of a more equitable society and to support those most at risk of not succeeding in education’.

### **Asylum Seekers**

Asylum seekers living in direct provision are entitled to avail of pre-school, primary and post-primary education. Although there are no clear policies preventing asylum seekers from accessing third level education, in Nasc’s experience the non-EU fees required are prohibitive and function to exclude asylum seekers from accessing training that would allow them to upskill and enter the labour force upon getting residency.

This barrier to access further education beyond secondary school is particularly pertinent to the case of asylum seeking children, many of whom have spent a considerable number of years in the Irish educational system. These young people, having completed their Leaving cert and in some cases achieving high point results, are then completely excluded from any further development. We believe this to be an exceptional waste of potential both for the individual and for Irish society as a whole. This policy also serves as a disincentive to attend school or to achieve academically for other young asylum seeking children.

With regard to this issue, Nasc welcomed a recent statement of intention from a spokesperson for Minister for Education Jan O’Sullivan to amend the Student Support Act 2011 in order to allow asylum seekers who are school leavers to have the same rights as their classmates when it comes to grants for third level education<sup>2</sup>. However, we

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Education and Skills (2014), “Ireland’s Education and Training Sector – Overview of service delivery and reform”

<sup>2</sup> The Journal, “Third-level grants could be open to asylum seekers next year”, August 31 2014

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would assert that this commitment to change must be extended to all asylum seekers rather than just those who are ‘school leavers’.

Nasc recommends that the new statement of strategy implements specific actions to improve educational opportunities for asylum seekers, including access to English language classes, tertiary education and skills training to make them active and productive members of Irish society. It must also include the introduction of dedicated programmes to support and retrain migrants who have left the Direct Provision system upon attaining a residency permission to prepare them adequately for entry into the workplace.

### **Separated Children**

Separated children who enter the State as asylum seekers are not entitled to State support should they wish to avail of vocational education and training upon turning 18 years of age (when they become known as ‘aged out minors’). The lack of State funding effectively prohibits this vulnerable group from continuing in education. Formerly Separated children in the asylum process receive a weekly allowance of €19.10 and do not have the financial means to enter into vocational education and training. Nasc has provided support to 28 formerly separated children to access vocational education and training through a dedicated Separated Children Education Fund since July 2012. This fund has enabled separated children aged from 16 – 24, who would otherwise have been unable to access education due to their lack of financial resources, to continue with their education. More must be done by the Department of Education and skills to ensure access to education for this particularly vulnerable category of young people.

We recommend that the Department supports a policy change that affords ‘aged out minors’ the same system of aftercare as Separated Children granted status and other residents and citizens. This includes the provision of a basic living and rent allowance so that the young person can continue in education.

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## Community Education

Nasc has been delivering courses to disadvantaged learners through community education for over thirteen years. We have traditionally experienced a high learner retention rate, with over 600 people accessing our courses in that time. Approximately 80% of students either progressed to further education i.e. PLC, FAS/SOLAS courses, Third level degree/diploma courses or entered employment. In 2008, Nasc produced a report, 'Evaluating the Barriers to Employment and Education for Migrants in Cork', which documents some of the issues migrants experience in accessing education in Ireland<sup>3</sup>.

Community education provides a vital link to education for migrants experiencing disadvantage and has been especially successful in targeting those most hard to reach learners. It has proven to be an effective means to combat social exclusion and re-connect those to education and the labour market<sup>4</sup>. However, the sector is currently facing challenges posed by current labour market activation policy and employability agenda.

While Community Education has been recognised in the new Further Education and Training Strategy (FET)<sup>5</sup> as an important component of further education, the sector has often been the least well funded stream of education and lacks multi-annual, dedicated funds which impacts the long term planning and sustainability of the sector. Additionally outcomes that are focused on accreditation and employment cannot compete with more well resourced, intensive FET programmes in private and statutory sectors. As hard to reach migrant learners that have experienced disadvantage and exclusion from education require more support, resources and time, swift outcomes are not possible to achieve.

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<sup>3</sup> Nasc Irish Immigrant Support Centre (2008) Evaluating the Barriers to Employment and Education for Migrants in Cork, Available at <http://www.nascireland.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Barriers-to-Employment-and-Education.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> 'More than just a Course' (AONTAS Research on the outcomes and benefits of Community Education, commissioned by DES 2011) available at [http://www.aontas.com/download/pdf/community\\_education\\_more\\_than\\_just\\_a\\_course.pdf](http://www.aontas.com/download/pdf/community_education_more_than_just_a_course.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> SOLAS (2014) 'Further Education and Training Strategy 2014 – 2019' available at <http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/Further-Education-and-Training-Strategy-2014-2019.pdf>



We recommend a commitment to the continued support of the community education sector and improved access to community education for asylum seekers and vulnerable migrants. A greater number of funded training programmes in English language and IT skills training is particularly needed to improve access for vulnerable migrants to further education and the labour market.

### **Children of Migrant Workers**

We have found in our work with migrant families and migrant children that a lack of clear policy around the immigration status of dependent migrant children has a profound impact on children's ability to access education in the state.

Children of migrant workers are not required to register with immigration authorities until the age of 16 when they are granted an immigration permission that is dependent upon a parent. These children are usually granted a Stamp 2 or 2A as the dependent child of a migrant worker. Dependent children who hold Stamp 2 or 2A immigration permission face significant barriers if they wish to access third level education or enter into employment in the State. Many Stamp 2 or 2A holders will be required to pay international fees as opposed to EU fees in order to enter into third level education. The prohibitive disparity in EU and non-EU fees means in many cases, third level education becomes impossible for many migrants who have spent the majority of their childhood being educated in the Irish system.

The Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) does not have clearly stated policy whereby dependent children may apply for a change of immigration permission which would allow them to enter into education and employment on the same basis as Irish or EU citizens. Applications for a change of immigration permission in order to allow access to education and employment are dealt with on a discretionary and case by case basis by INIS.

The Irish government should be facilitating migrant children's access to long term residency, employment and education. If the young person's residency is determined by their parents, it should be equal to the parent's residency at

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the age of majority. Children who grow up and are educated in the state should have access to third level education at a fee structure that is reflective of their long term residency.

Nasc advises that the Department of Education and Skills supports the reform of immigration policy to permit children of migrant workers, who have completed second level education, to have equal access to third level education, to third level education grants and a fees waiver.

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