

THE IRISH TIMES

Asylum seeker says being in university is 'a dream come true'

KATHRYN HAYES

An asylum seeker who was at the centre of controversy surrounding access to third-level education has described how being in university is a "dream come true".

Anna Kern (19), who is originally from the Ukraine, went to school at Coláiste Nano Nagle in Sexton Street, Limerick, and received 575 points in her Leaving Cert.

However, she could not afford to accept her place in physiotherapy at the Royal College of Surgeons in Dublin (RCSI) as the rules concerning college admission for asylum seekers meant she faced the full €17,000 a year tuition fee.

After her case attracted considerable media attention, the RCSI decided to make her an offer outside of the CAO system and to waive her tuition fees.

Ms Kern was one of 125 students who received 2015 All-Ireland Scholarships at a ceremony held at the University of Limerick on Saturday.

Sponsored by JP McManus, the scholarships are worth €6,750 per year and continue

for the duration of the undergraduate programmes chosen by the scholarship winners.

Speaking at the awards ceremony, Ms Kern said: "I am very grateful to the Minister for Education and to everyone who was involved in my case."

Ms Kern was living in direct provision accommodation in Knockalisheen, Limerick, with her mother Lyudmyla, who is not permitted to work and is therefore unable to help her daughter with fees.

"I am really enjoying college and studying physiotherapy was a dream come true for me and I hope to work in Ireland after I graduate," she said.

She was accompanied to the ceremony by her former school principal Marion Cummins, who was central to highlighting her case.

Former champion jockey AP McCoy was guest of honour at the ceremony. He said the scholarships would give the recipients a great start in life. Mr McCoy, who left school at 16, said he never stopped learning during his career, but he would like his children Eve (8) and Archie (2) to remain in education.



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■ Anna Kern (19), one of 125 students to receive an All-Ireland Scholarship, with former champion jockey AP McCoy, who was guest of honour at the awards ceremony at the University of Limerick. PHOTOGRAPH: ALAN PLACE/FUSIONSHOOTERS