

# TRANSITIONS TO HIGHER EDUCATION FOR REFUGEE YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE UK

## ADVICE FOR UNIVERSITIES

This advice sheet provides university admissions teams and other relevant departments with key information about how they can help refugee and asylum-seeking young people reach higher education (HE). It accompanies the research report [Education Transitions for Refugee and Asylum-Seeking Young People in the UK](#).

### KEY FACTS: RIGHTS AND ENTITLEMENTS TO HE

All young people, regardless of their immigration status, have the right to access education. But globally, only 3% of refugees reach university.<sup>1</sup> There are a number of challenges preventing many young refugees and asylum seekers from accessing university in the UK, including immigration status.

 IMMIGRATION STATUS	 TOP-LEVEL SUMMARY OF ENTITLEMENTS IN ENGLAND <sup>2</sup>
Asylum seekers	Likely to be classified as overseas students and unable to access student finance
Limited Leave to Remain <sup>3</sup> Discretionary Leave to Remain <sup>4</sup>	Likely to be classified as overseas students and unable to access student finance. However, a number of exceptions exist including the 'Seven year/half-life rule'
Indefinite Leave to Remain Section 67 Leave Calais Leave	Eligible for home fees and student finance but required to prove three years' ordinary residency
Refugee status Humanitarian protection <sup>5</sup>	Eligible for home fees and student finance

### 'NO STUDY' CONDITIONS

While the 'no study' conditions that were introduced in 2018 have led to some restrictions to access to education, being Appeal Rights Exhausted (ARE) does **not** automatically equate to being unable to study. For more information on the 'no study' condition, please see Coram Children's Legal Centre's [fact sheet on 'no study' conditions and immigration bail](#).

**NOTE:** The above is a summary. Always check Coram Children's Legal Centre's [fact sheet on access to HE](#) and [UKCISA](#) for detailed and up to date information.

# REACHING HIGHER EDUCATION: HOW TO HELP

Lots can be done to help young refugees and asylum seekers access university. There are actions that you as an **individual** can take now, and things your **institution** can do in the longer term. Below are **4** challenges young people may face, and how you and your institution can help.

1

## CHALLENGE: INSUFFICIENT INFORMATION, ADVICE AND GUIDANCE

 MECHANISM FOR HELP	 THINGS YOU CAN DO NOW	 THINGS YOUR INSTITUTION CAN DO
 <p><b>PROVIDE CLEAR AND ACCURATE INFORMATION</b></p>	<p>Provide clear, publicly available information about refugees' and asylum seekers' eligibility for courses and financial support.</p> <p>Highlight successful case studies.</p> <p>Be friendly and patient in your communication; unfriendly or dismissive tones can make young refugees or asylum seekers feel unwelcome.</p>	<p>Appoint a trained focal point to respond to queries from refugees and asylum seekers.</p> <p>Work with <a href="#">RSN</a> to ensure all admissions and other relevant staff are trained on the education entitlements of young refugees and asylum seekers, and the challenges they may face.</p> <p>Ensure that unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) are included in any Looked After Children communications and activity.</p>
 <p><b>PRE-UNIVERSITY OPPORTUNITIES</b></p>		<p>Organise open days for refugees and asylum seekers to visit campus, ask questions, and meet current students from forced displacement backgrounds.</p> <p>Ensure refugees and asylum seekers are included as named target groups in Access and Participation Plans.</p> <p>Identify ways in which your institution or students can engage with the wider community. For example, ask student teachers to offer English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) or IELTS lessons to refugee and asylum-seeking students preparing for university.</p>

## 2

## CHALLENGE: INELIGIBILITY FOR HOME FEES OR STUDENT FINANCE

 MECHANISM FOR HELP	 THINGS YOU CAN DO NOW	 THINGS YOUR INSTITUTION CAN DO
 <p><b>SCHOLARSHIPS AND FEE WAIVERS</b></p>	<p>Ensure that the availability of scholarships for refugees and asylum seekers (sanctuary scholarships) is well-advertised on the university website.</p> <p>Work with <a href="#">STAR</a> to ensure that information for prospective students about your scholarships is included on their Equal Access web page.</p> <p>Conduct outreach to schools and colleges in the local area about the availability of these scholarships.</p> <p>Recognise that universities can exercise their discretion to offer fee waivers to those categorised as overseas students.</p> <p>Engage with your Development and Alumni department, as they may be able to create specific fundraising campaigns for you.</p>	<p>Become a <a href="#">University of Sanctuary</a>, use the helpful <a href="#">handbook</a>, and provide scholarship opportunities – ideally at least two – for seekers of sanctuary.</p> <p>Ensure that sanctuary scholarships take into consideration the full cost of tuition fees and maintenance costs, including hidden expenses.</p> <p>Be inclusive in the eligibility criteria for scholarships. Ensure they are accessible to those required to pay overseas fees, those with time-limited statuses, and those who are ARE.</p> <p>Consider including formerly looked after asylum-seeking young people in eligibility for any care-leaver bursaries.</p>

## 3

## CHALLENGE: ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

 MECHANISM FOR HELP	 THINGS YOU CAN DO NOW	 THINGS YOUR INSTITUTION CAN DO
 <p><b>FLEXIBILITY AND CONTEXTUAL ADMISSIONS</b></p>	<p>Use contextual data during the admissions process to widen participation for refugees and asylum seekers.</p> <p>Consider studies completed in countries of origin, and any additional barriers students have overcome while progressing their learning in the UK, which demonstrate skills and resilience.</p>	<p>Explore alternatives to evidencing prior learning if documentation from the home country cannot be provided.</p> <p>Explore alternatives to evidencing English language proficiency. IELTS is costly and not always accessible to refugees and asylum seekers.</p> <p>Develop a contextual admissions policy, including reduced grade offers, for prospective students from refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds.</p> <p>Ensure admissions staff are aware of the contextual admissions policy.</p> <p>Make fair and sensitive administration of the contextual admissions policy a priority for the university.</p> <p>Nominate an informed advocate to liaise with admissions on students' behalf.</p>

 <b>MECHANISM FOR HELP</b>	 <b>THINGS YOUR INSTITUTION CAN DO</b>	
 <p><b>PRE-UNIVERSITY OPPORTUNITIES</b></p>	<p>Organise pre-university courses – from summer schools to foundational years – for young people from refugee or asylum-seeking backgrounds to help improve academic English, adjust to studying at a UK university, and bridge an attainment gap if they are accepted contextually.</p>	<p>Include refugee and asylum-seeking students as a widening participation (WP) eligible category and make them a priority group for all WP opportunities.</p>

**4 CHALLENGE: INSTITUTIONAL RELUCTANCE**

 <b>MECHANISM FOR HELP</b>	 <b>THINGS YOU CAN DO NOW</b>	 <b>THINGS YOUR INSTITUTION CAN DO</b>
 <p><b>FLEXIBILITY</b></p>	<p>Recognise that being ARE does not always equate to being unable to study.</p> <p>Do not restrict access to university if a young person has a status that is due to expire before the end of a course. Young people will often have to apply for an extension of status (or make a fresh claim) during their time at university. As long as this is made in time, this should not affect their eligibility to study.</p> <p><a href="#">Read about</a> the challenges to refugee and asylum-seeking pupils' education progression and ask your institution for additional <a href="#">training</a> and upskilling.</p> <p>Recognise individual circumstances and respond in flexible ways; recognise potential rather than solely focusing on immigration status or current grades.</p> <p>Ask your Vice Chancellor for an audience with a focus group of forced migrant students.<sup>6</sup> Often these authentic conversations can lead to institutional buy-in and senior level influence.</p>	<p>Ensure the presence of trained members of staff at enrolment processes to respond appropriately to young refugees and asylum seekers.</p> <p>Integrate actions for refugees and asylum seekers into the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion strategy – including ensuring training for all staff on supporting seekers of sanctuary.</p>

For more details, contact [Refugee Support Network](#) or [Unicef UK](#).

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1 UNHCR (2020). Coming together for refugee education: education report 2020. UNHCR. [www.unhcr.org/5f4f9a2b4](http://www.unhcr.org/5f4f9a2b4)  
 2 For a detailed overview of entitlements in Scotland and Wales please see [UKCISA](#).  
 3 While government guidance on LLR and DLR was updated following the 2015 Tigere case, Coram Children's Legal Centre notes that a narrow interpretation of the guidance still excludes those who have arrived in the UK as teenagers.  
 4 As above.  
 5 That those with Humanitarian Protection no longer have to demonstrate 3 years ordinary residency is a new progression [March 2020] that may not yet be reflected in Coram's fact sheet. See [UKCISA](#) for more.  
 6 Make sure you are familiar with [core principles for ethical discussions](#) with refugee and asylum-seeking young people before conducting focus groups.