

Dealing with difficult questions

1. Why should asylum seekers be allowed to pay 'home' fees while other international students have to pay 'overseas' fees? Asylum seekers did not come to the UK by choice. They have fled persecution and are looking for protection. International students on the other hand have chosen to come to the UK, some are even entitled to apply for student support in their home country. Studying at a UK university is the only opportunity asylum seekers have to access higher education as they cannot leave the country while claiming asylum. They are not allowed to work so cannot raise funds themselves. Many asylum seekers came to the UK as children and have grown up in the British education system alongside British born peers.

2. Why can't asylum seekers wait until they have refugee status before they go to university? Asylum seekers often have to wait for many years to get a decision in their asylum application. As asylum seekers are unable to work, attending university is often their only to build skills that will help them rebuild their life in the UK, or when they return to their country of origin. It is unreasonable to expect asylum seekers to put their life on hold because the Home Office is taking too long to make a decision.

3. Ok, so it seems fair enough for asylum seekers, but what about those with Discretionary Leave to Remain? They have the right to work, so can't they fund themselves? Most working British students paying home fees would be unable to go to university without a student loan. In 2013/14 approximately 89% of all students in England took up a student loan. Expecting a student with DLR to cover the costs of international fees through work alone and without a student loan is simply double standards. Many individuals granted DLR as the result of an asylum claim will have fled to the UK as children without their families and will have been in the care of a local authority since arriving in the UK. The government has recognised the need to encourage more students from disadvantaged backgrounds to go to university, especially care-leavers. At the second reading of the HE Bill, Justine Greening, Secretary of State for Education said *"...this Government want to give everybody, no matter what their background; the opportunity to go as far as their talents will take them, in a country that works for everyone. Our higher education institutions are crucial to giving people the power to determine their own futures. They present opportunities for individuals to better themselves—to broaden their knowledge base, sharpen their skills, and participate in the groundbreaking research that can make the future brighter for everyone"*.

4. We're already too soft. Letting them into university will encourage more people to come here

Evidence shows that people do not seek asylum in the UK based on the particular benefits available. A 2010 study by the Refugee Council found that over two thirds of refugees did not choose to come to the UK. They had to leave their home countries very quickly – within a few days or weeks – because their lives were in danger, leaving them little time to plan or pick their destination. Those that did choose the UK came mostly because of family, language, colonial connections, and a sense that the UK is democratic and tolerant country. They had little knowledge

of the asylum process, education system or the benefits available. Asylum seekers are not asking for special treatment, simply the same opportunities as other UK residents. Asylum seeking students still need to fulfil the entry requirements for the course they wish to study.

5. Universities are already under financial pressure at the moment following budget cuts.

Why should the university make asylum seeking students a priority? Ensuring that everyone has an equal opportunity to access education is fundamental for our society and a crucial part of universities' widening participation agendas. The numbers of asylum seekers who would be eligible for a scholarship scheme is likely to be relatively low as students will still need to fulfil the entry requirements for the course. This will greatly restrict costs to the university. Some universities have also chosen to offer a fixed number of places (e.g. 5 per year) to cap the potential costs within the university's budget. When courses are undersubscribed the actual cost of extra students attending the course is negligible. Universities are in a unique position to make this small but important stand against inequality and low financial costs are worth paying to achieve this.

6. The university isn't given funding for asylum seeking students by the government through Higher Education Funding Council of England (HEFCE), so we have to charge them overseas fees. Why should the university pick the tab because of the government's failure to do so?

Universities are self governing, independent institutions that can exercise discretion to set fee rates and so are in a unique position to take a moral and pragmatic stand to ensure that students seeking protection have equal access to education in Britain. [Other universities](#) have already agreed to allow all or a set number of asylum seekers to study at their institutions at home fees rates and taken additional action to promote Equal Access at their universities, such as through bursaries, fee waivers and scholarships. If the government sees that universities wish to enfranchise students seeking refugee protection then there is a real chance of changing policies at the national level too. This will, in time, ease the requirement on universities to provide financial support. STAR and NUS are part of a coalition of organisations known as the Access to Higher Education Working Group who are lobbying for national policy on this issue.

8. Where is the money for these scholarships going to come from?

Universities will have different financial resources available to them. Not all universities will be able to provide a big living costs grant. If the university won't agree due to financial reasons, reduce your ask to just a tuition fee waiver rather than a living costs loan, or agree to cap the scholarships at 1 or 2 to keep costs down. You could also speak to the finance office about potential sources of revenue. At the University of York, the STAR group contacted the alumni office who had some funds available that they put towards the scholarships. You could also suggest that the university run an alumni donation drive specifically for the asylum seeker scholarships.

7. What will happen if a student receives a final negative decision on their case and has to leave the UK before the end of their course? There are many reasons why someone may not be able to complete their course, but this applies to all students, not just those seeking refugee protection. Even if asylum seekers have exhausted all their appeal rights, they can still submit a fresh claim if new evidence comes to light. Research also shows that many young refugees are committed to education. Many students in this position have completed their degrees and gone on

to successful careers, for example asylum seeking members of STAR have gone into diplomacy, advocacy, banking and healthcare.

8. An asylum seeking student isn't eligible for a student loans and has no right to work. How would they be able to support themselves throughout University? Could they even afford to pay home fees? We believe that treating asylum seekers as 'home students' for fee purposes is a first step towards Equal Access, yet it is not the solution. It is true that many asylum seekers will be unable to afford to pay home fees since they are unable to work and ineligible for student loans. That is why we are also asking that universities introduce a scholarship scheme comprising of bursaries and fee waivers. Local Authorities may be in position to financially support young care leavers with DLR as they go on to university to pursue their education.

9. How many asylum seekers would be likely to apply to the university? From our experience with other universities who have recently introduced scholarship schemes we know that applicant numbers tend to be low but this depends on the area. Students will still need to fulfil the entry requirements for the course they wish to study, which limits the numbers who would be eligible to apply. [You could do some research about the number of potential asylum seeking students in your area to back up your argument]. The numbers of young people who receive an extension of DLR is low – around 290 over the past five years. At present, most local authorities in the UK have just 1 or 2 individuals in this situation. To ensure the greatest number of applicants, don't impose arbitrary criteria such as which countries an asylum seeker must come from or an age limit. It's also important to promote the Equal Access policies as much as possible so that word gets out there!

