

Equal Access

Dealing with Difficult Questions



Here are some suggested responses to some of those awkward questions you might get about the Equal Access campaign.

“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 are fleeing persecution and looking for protection. They did not come for the purpose of studying like international students.
- Asylum seekers are not allowed to work so cannot raise large funds themselves.
- Many asylum seekers have studied for years in the British education system alongside their friends.
- EU citizens are charged home fees, so not all non-British students pay international fees.

“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 case. It is unreasonable to expect everyone to put their life on hold because the Government has not made a decision.
- The Home Office target is to reach initial decisions within 2 months (and finally resolve all cases after 6 months) after an asylum claim is made, but in 2007-08 this target was only met for 35% of cases. This suggests that many people continue to wait for a final decision after 6 months.
- The previous asylum system (before March 2007) created a large ‘backlog’ of unresolved cases, meaning that thousands of asylum seekers were stuck living in the UK without status and unable to continue their education.¹ A new backlog of cases is now building up as the number of unresolved asylum cases had doubled in 2008, jumping from 4,200 to 8,700 cases. As long as the government is struggling to cope to resolve asylum cases in an appropriate timeframe some asylum seekers might have to wait for many years for a decision in their case and would be unable to apply to university in the meantime.

“We’re already too soft and letting them into university will just encourage more people to come here”

- There is no evidence that people seek asylum in the UK based on particular benefits available. Many people who are seeking refuge in the UK did not choose this country as their destination. Others come because they speak the language, have family here, or simply because they feel that the UK will offer them security.²
- Asylum seekers are not asking for special treatment, but simply the same opportunities as other young people living in the UK.

¹ In January 2009 a report by the National Audit Office recorded that the government was not resolving the backlog of 335,000 so-called “legacy asylum cases” fast enough in order to meet its’ target to resolve all these cases by July 2011. Current figures are that around 200,000 cases remain, although the actual number is likely to be less (around 100,000). Grants of leave to remain to date have been approximately 30%.

² *Chance or Choice? Understanding why asylum seekers come to the UK*, Heaven Crawley, Refugee Council January 2010

- Asylum seeking students would still need to fulfil the entry requirements for the course they wish to study. Not every asylum seeker would be qualified.
- People seeking asylum should not be punished because through no fault of their own they have not had a final decision on their claim or cannot leave the UK.

“It’s not fair because asylum seeking students who get financial help won’t have to pay it back once they get refugee status like British students”

- It is not appropriate to make direct comparisons between asylum seekers and other students. After being forced to leave their home they find themselves in an uncertain situation with no right to work, no control over where they live and often no family. They should have the opportunity to study and we should look for ways to make it possible.

“At a time when university funding is being cut it is unreasonable to expect them to subsidise asylum seekers”

- Ensuring everyone has the opportunity to access education is fundamental. Low financial costs are worth paying to achieve this.
- The numbers of asylum seekers applying to study at the home fees rate will be relatively low:
 - Most asylum seekers are tied to their Government accommodation and so the only plausible choice is to study at their local university (some areas have a very low or no population of asylum seekers).
 - Students will still need to fulfil the entry requirements for the course they wish to study.
- Many universities have offered a fixed number of places (e.g. 5 per year) to cap the potential costs within the university’s budget.
- When courses at certain universities are under subscribed the actual cost of extra student attending the course is negligible.

Further Information

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