

## Equal Access Case Studies

### Cardiff University

Cardiff STAR started by campaigning for home fees for asylum seekers. They took a **motion to Student Council** which called for the Students' Union to work with STAR to lobby the university. This opened the door for the STAR group to have access to decision makers and in 2012 they achieved **home fees** for all asylum seekers.

The next stage was to **lobby for bursaries** so they started **compiling a report** to submit to the university. They worked with a **local refugee organisation** called Fair and Square to hold sit down interviews with young asylum seekers who wanted to go to university then used these quotes in their report. They also **collected testimonies** from a variety of staff members including Heads of Departments and admissions staff. They calculated how much money they would be asking for by using the university's living costs calculator. They used this to estimate how much money the living costs bursary should cover by adding the costs together minus the cost of rent as most asylum seekers would have accommodation in the area.

Once they had completed their report outlining why the university should introduce bursaries for asylum seekers, they gave this report to their sabbatical officers who passed it on to the Pro Vice Chancellor. After sending a several follow up emails asking the university for a response, and getting their sabbatical officers to keep bringing it up the university finally announced that they would be introducing 2 scholarships for the coming academic year. Cardiff STAR have now formed a working group with other key organisations to bring Equal Access to all other Welsh universities!

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### University of Surrey

Equal Access looked really daunting at first, but **following the straightforward step-by-step guide** made it really manageable. I started off gently by **printing off a petition** and bringing it to our events. I then got some of the sabbs to sign pledges, and **got written support from various organisations** and our religious chaplains. People weren't always as responsive as I hoped, and I had to chase a few of them up, but those that were really passionate about the case got back to me straight away with powerful and moving messages of support.

I was very lucky to have a friend who knew the university system inside out. He told me about **Student Exec meetings where students could bring motions** to try and implement change in university policy. Student Unions aren't always very forthcoming with this kind of information, so I would recommend getting to know your sabbs as soon as possible so that you feel comfortable asking them any questions you have. I only slightly adapted the motion from the Equal Access guide, and almost all of the resolves were accepted. This was really exciting at the time, as it was starting to seem like we could get the whole process done within the year.

When the new Vice Chancellor started in April, I made sure to meet him as soon as possible, and **presented him with all the evidence I had for Equal Access**. Unfortunately, though, exams got in the way, and as the year came to a close, I started to settle with the idea that we'd done as much as we could.

When I started working at the STAR office in June, though, it occurred to me that I hadn't heard anything about it for a while, so I sent an email to the VC. He told me that he had prepared a proposal for the Executive Board meeting. Our Equal Access Coordinator, Alicia, suggested that if nothing happened at the first meeting, I should start putting pressure on them by turning up at board meetings.

Luckily, though, the VC had actually taken what I'd said seriously, and just a week later emailed to say that the University of Surrey would be granting bursaries to asylum seekers. This was an incredible outcome for something that had proven to be so straight-forward, and I was so proud to have implemented such important change in my university after just one year of being there.

I know that not all universities will be as ready to take on change as mine was, but there are a few things that really helped. **Making my presence as visible as possible in the Student Union** meant that people knew who I was and what my cause was. When the people voting on your motion have seen how much you care about it, they are more likely to take it seriously – the Exec chair even offered to call an emergency meeting when one got cancelled, as she knew that Equal Access was a big deal. **Speaking directly to the VC whenever I could** was also no doubt beneficial. There is a fine line between being persistent and being pushy, and luckily I don't think I crossed it. When his proposals were accepted, he requested that I be personally notified, and this is probably because of the last few emails I sent him which made sure he knew that Equal Access hadn't been forgotten.

*Maddy Robinson, Surrey STAR President 2015-16*

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## University of York

We started by voting in equal access as our campaign for the year, this way we made sure that the entire society was behind focusing on it. We hired tables at the university to get students to **sign the petition**. We also took the petition to any relevant events about refugees and asylum seekers, asked the organisers for a chance to explain the campaign and then asked the audience to sign it. When we got over 200 signatures we **emailed our deputy vice chancellor** explaining the asks of the campaign, the rationale for it and the student interest. **We also asked for a meeting**. (We emailed the deputy Vice-Chancellor as there was a new Vice Chancellor starting in the next year)

She agreed to meet us and liked the idea, agreed to take it to finance and admissions. However when she invited us back for another meeting she had her concerns. It was understood that she had spoken to someone in the admissions team who had worked for the home office and had some negative ideas about what Equal Access would bring. (I've included many of the issues below)

After this I emailed the new Vice Chancellor once he had started. I included the original email and explained the issues we had come against along with STAR's responses to those problems. He wanted to meet us about it and very quickly got the scheme going. I **provided details of all**

**universities that had implemented similar equal access schemes.** This argument worked very well, especially with the other Russell Group Universities. The only problem he found was the potential finances. We arranged to meet with the **Alumni office to discuss potential sources to fund Equal Access** at York. This went well as the alumni office actually had a large amount of fund left for international students so decided they could use this. When the Refugee Crisis gained huge media traction in August 2015 the Vice Chancellor wanted to show the University responding so quickly and publicly launched their [Equal Access and Scholarship scheme](#).

My advice to anyone running the campaign is to Make sure you brief everyone who is working on the campaign, so that anyone at meetings can answer any difficult questions. Be patient and persistent. Also think ahead, many of the concerns we faced were about money and approaching the alumni office was one of the best things for the campaign as it made Equal Access a reality. At the same time, make sure you time things right. Get student support and approach the alumni office if Equal Access is a possibility. Keep in contact with STAR national team, they know a lot and can really help!

*Alice Welsh, York STAR President 2015-16 and STAR Student Trustee*

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## University of Bristol

Securing the approval of the university and getting the scheme off the ground was **an intensive, albeit relatively rapid, process**. The initial lobbying was undertaken by a group of academics and research students, the Migration Research Group, of which I am a member. We submitted a letter direct to the Vice-Chancellor and the Communications and Marketing Division at the university, requesting that a commitment be made to help those who have been forcibly displaced to the UK and who face seemingly insurmountable barriers in continuing their education. Our proposal was based on **in-depth research** into schemes ran by other universities, especially those Bristol considers to be its competitors. Crucial at this point was speaking to as many people as possible across the university and Bristol Students' Union, including students, staff, professional services, and middle and senior management, in an attempt to really **get people talking and believing** in the possibility of establishing such a scheme.

After much lobbying, the Vice-Chancellor made a personal commitment, stated publicly online, to establish the Sanctuary Scholarship Scheme. However, securing this commitment, as well as the associated funding, was only the beginning. **Keeping up the momentum** and being prepared to be in it for the long haul was key to ensuring the scheme gained traction and really got off the ground. In this respect, **collaboration between different groups at the university was absolutely essential**. Specifically, finding the right people within key university departments (e.g. admissions, marketing, student funding, student services, and widening participation), who were each fully vested in developing such a scheme, was crucial, as many of these individuals were undertaking much of this work on top of their usual workload. The process was also formalised quite early on, in the form of a working group, so as to ensure regular steps forward were taken, and to help professionalise the scheme and establish direct, official reporting channels to senior decision-makers.

At Bristol, timing was also on our side, with a new Vice-Chancellor and a new University Strategy having recently been launched. Indeed, **connecting the scheme directly to the university's objectives**, namely diversity and inclusivity, has meant we have been able to demonstrate how the scheme also helps the university to achieve its own strategic aims.

While those of us involved in the scheme are immensely proud of what has been achieved so far, and are very much looking forward to welcoming our first cohort of Sanctuary Scholars to Bristol this September, much work still needs to be done to secure funding for the scheme in future years. No doubt this will involve continued discussions and negotiations with key decision-makers, and further work to really embed the scheme within the permanent scholarship structure at Bristol.

*Ben Hudson - PHD Candidate (Law)*

