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1 Introduction

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that **everyone has the right to education**. Yet the right to education is being denied to people seeking refugee protection in Britain. The NUS (National Union of Students) and STAR (Student Action for Refugees) are working together to change this and invite you to join us through the *Equal Access* campaign. We want people who have fled war, torture and persecution to fulfil their academic potential and build successful lives. We know that universities benefit from opening their doors to people seeking refugee protection through the diversity of cultures and life experiences they bring. *Equal Access* has two goals:

- All those seeking refugee protection will be able to study as home students.
- Students seeking refugee protection will be recognised as having additional needs just like other vulnerable groups and be given the same access to additional support, such as bursaries.

A number of universities have already adopted *Equal Access* including Manchester, Leeds and Royal Holloway.

The Challenge

People seeking refugee protection and those granted discretionary leave to remain are classed as overseas students and charged high international fees, which presents them with an almost impossible situation if they decide to take up their course. Most people seeking refugee protection are not allowed to work or take out student loans and must live on state support of just £5 a day plus accommodation, therefore paying international student fees is well beyond their pocket. People who have been granted discretionary leave to remain are allowed to work, however they do not have access to loans. Many came to the UK unaccompanied as children and have grown up in care without the support of a family to pay their fees. Unlike other care leavers, they are now excluded from education at a crucial point in their lives. This is affecting the lives of people who are in the UK not out of choice but as a result of life threatening situations in their home countries. They cannot return home to study and cannot gain the education they crave to build new lives.

This *Equal Access* Guide will take you step by step through how to campaign for change. It gives you the facts about seeking refugee protection in the UK, shows where the barriers to accessing university are and gives you the tools you need to put pressure on your institution and national policy makers so they give students seeking refugee protection the education they dream of. Together we can make sure our universities are open to everyone who wants to learn, so that collectively we can build a safer and brighter future.

We look forward to working with you,

*Emma Williams, Chief Executive, STAR*
*Dannie Grufferty, Vice President Society & Citizenship, NUS*
2 What is the Equal Access Campaign?

*Equal Access* is the campaign to open up colleges and universities to people who are in the UK seeking refugee protection so that they can fulfil their potential.

**What’s the problem?**

Individuals who are waiting for a decision on their asylum application, or who have been granted discretionary leave to remain (DLR) in the UK as a result of an asylum claim, do not have the same access to university as home students. They must pay the same fees as international students and have no access to student loans and grants. This excludes most of them from going to university.

As student networks, Student Action for Refugees (STAR) and the National Union of Students (NUS) believe that this is wrong and that colleges and universities should have fair admissions policies for all.

- How can you claim that someone who has fled their home country to avoid war, torture or persecution is the same as an international student who has chosen to study in Britain?
- How can you expect someone who is not allowed to work and receives just £36 a week for all their living costs to pay up to £60,000 in university fees?
- What is our world going to look like if people seeking refugee protection cannot learn the skills they need to build the future?

**What’s the solution?**

NUS and STAR are campaigning together to open colleges and universities to those seeking refugee protection in the UK. Our campaign is supported by a broad coalition of agencies, including:

- coram
- nrsn
- article 26
- Employability Forum
- RRF

Student activists and Student Unions are in a unique position to affect this change. We want:

- All those seeking refugee protection to be able to study as home students
- Students seeking refugee protection to be recognised as having additional needs just like other vulnerable people and to be given the same access to additional support, such as bursaries.

In addition to influencing change at the local level at institutions across the UK, the Equal Access campaign is working to change national policy in partnership with the Access to Higher Education Working Group (AHEWG).
3 What does Equal Access look like?

The Equal Access campaign is calling for:

- All those seeking refugee protection to be able to study as home students
- Students seeking refugee protection to be recognised as having additional needs just like other vulnerable people and to be given the same access to additional support, such as bursaries.

NUS and STAR are working together towards equal access at the national level alongside the Access to Higher Education Workshop Group (AHEWG).

We are calling for an immediate U-turn on recent reforms which have blocked those granted DLR on the basis of an asylum application from accessing higher education, to have asylum seekers classified as home students for fee purposes and for asylum seeker students to be given access to government support, such as student loans.

The Equal Access campaign also seeks to influence change at individual institutions across the UK. There are lots of ways in which your university can take action. These include:

- Reclassifying students seeking refugee protection as home students and charging them home student fees.
- Opening up access to additional support available to other vulnerable groups, such as through:
  - bursaries
  - grants
  - fee waiver places
  - scholarships
- Ensuring that the university is a welcoming place for all refugees.

Vice-Chancellors can use their discretion to take action on all of these points. In fact, many universities already have!
4 Background Information

Why do people seek protection?

Jargon guide!

Students seeking refugee protection: This term is used throughout this Guide to refer to asylum seeker students and students with discretionary leave to remain (DLR).

Asylum Seeker: Someone who has fled their country for fear of persecution and is in the UK asking for protection as a refugee. They are in the UK legally and are waiting for the Home Office to process their case and decide whether to grant them on-going protection as a refugee. This process can take many years, during which time most are not allowed to work and live on state support of just £36 per week. Children who are seeking asylum are able to go to school.

Refugee: Someone whose claim for asylum has been accepted by the Home Office. People with refugee status have the same rights as British citizens; they can work, pay home fees and access student loans. They can still face barriers in accessing university e.g. their exam qualifications gained abroad may not be recognised here.

DLR (discretionary leave to remain): Some asylum seekers are not granted refugee status but are given DLR instead. People with DLR are allowed to remain in the UK and to work but are classed as overseas students and cannot take out a student loan, even though they may have been living in the UK for many years, studied at British schools and cannot return home.

In 2011, 15.2 million people were driven from their homelands by war, torture and persecution, leaving behind family, friends and livelihoods. Most came from countries with widespread human rights abuses, such as Iran, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan.

How many people seek protection in the UK?
The UK hosts less than 3% of the world’s refugees. In 2011 it received just 19,894 applications for asylum.

Why don’t asylum seekers have equal access to university?
Asylum seekers are entitled to go to university in the UK provided they meet the course entrance requirements and can pay the course fees. This is impossible for most asylum seekers because of the following:

£ Overseas fees
Publicly funded Higher Education institutions in the UK may charge students ‘home fees’ (£6,000 - £9,000 per year) or ‘overseas fees’ (£8,500 to £29,000 a year). The situation and needs of asylum seekers differ greatly from international students, yet they are routinely charged overseas fees.

£ No right to work
Almost all asylum seekers are denied the right to work in the UK and are forced to live on Government hand-outs of around £36 a week while awaiting a decision on their application. This is not nearly enough to meet essential living needs, let alone fund higher education!

£ Not allowed to apply for student loans
In 2010/11 approximately 81% of all English students took up a student loan of an average value of £3,630 (Student Loans Company 2011). This loan combined with income from work, savings or other support allows students to cover tuition and living expenses. Many
students would not have been able to go to university without a student loan, yet the
Government refuses to give student loans to asylum seekers.

National focus: Scotland takes a stand on Equal Access for asylum seekers

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland asylum seekers must generally pay
international fees and are not eligible for a student loan. In Scotland, however, if they
are the child of an asylum seeker or a ‘young asylum seeker’ and meet precise
residence conditions, they are classified as home students and are eligible for a student
loan for their tuition fees. (Sadly this does not apply to Student Support for living costs.
And nor does it apply to NHS Bursaries.)

Check out the UKCISA website for more details: www.ukcisa.org.uk/

Why don’t individuals with DLR have equal access to university?
Now you see it, now you don’t! Until February 2011, individuals granted DLR (discretionary
leave to remain) in the UK as a result of an asylum application were eligible for student
loans and paid home fees across the UK, just like British citizens and those with refugee
status. In February 2011 the Government reversed this decision.
This change has disproportionately impacted on vulnerable young people who have sought
asylum in the UK. Of the 3,000 separated children who apply for asylum in the UK each
year from countries such as Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq, most are granted DLR until
they are 17 ½.
Before reaching 17 ½, they can apply for an
extension for another three years, after
which they will apply to stay in the UK
indefinitely. The number of young people
who receive an extension of DLR and who
are in a position to go through university is very low – around 290 for the past five
years. Unlike other care leavers, they are
now excluded from education at a crucial
point in their lives.

Who benefits from Equal Access?
Here are just a few reasons why Equal
Access is good for everyone:

★ Students seeking refugee protection
Research by UNICEF (2005) and the
Refugee Support Network (2012) has shown
that, once in the UK, education is a high
priority for many refugees and in recent
years countless asylum seeker students
have proven their ability to achieve fantastic
results at university in the face of many
obstacles. Upon completing their degrees, for example, asylum seeker members of STAR
have gone on to successful careers in diplomacy, advocacy, banking and healthcare.

As most asylum seekers are denied permission to work, attending university gives them an
opportunity to build skills that will help them to build their life in the UK or when they
return to their country of origin. University is a great place to make new friends and
studying provides stability which can mitigate the negative effects of traumatic experiences

National focus: regulations on access to higher education for students with DLR vary around in the UK

England: students with DLR must pay
international fees and they are not eligible
for student loans or NHS bursaries

Wales and Northern Ireland: students with
DLR may be given ‘home fee’ status,
although if the student is a family member
certain conditions apply. They may also be
eligible for a student loan, however they
must have been living in the UK for 3 years
and if the student is a family member
certain conditions apply. Northern Ireland
allows access to NHS bursaries, Wales
doesn’t.

Scotland: students with DLR are entitled to
pay ‘home fees’ and eligible for student loan
and NHS bursaries (yey!).

Check out www.ukcisa.org.uk for more
details.
(Refugee Council 2005). The lives of those seeking refugee protection are already extremely difficult and current policy is making their lives unnecessarily harder.

★ Universities

Imagine if Einstein and Marx had never been given the chance to study... Yep, you guessed it. Both of these great thinkers were refugees! Universities want the very best students, with academic skills and commitment. Students who are in the UK seeking protection have often studied hard in difficult circumstances to meet the entry requirements and demonstrate strong motivation and intellectual ability. Because each university has the power to exercise discretion in the granting of ‘home’ or ‘international’ fees they are in a unique position to welcome such students on the same terms as their British-born peers.

Several universities are already enjoying the benefits of Equal Access and, in doing so, have demonstrated their commitment to diversity and equal opportunities. These include: Manchester University, Leeds University, Royal Holloway University, Salford University, Canterbury Christ Church University and other members of the Cathedral group of universities.

★ British society

82% of Brits believe that protecting the most vulnerable is a core British value and 67% are sympathetic to refugees coming to Britain (Refugee Council 2011). We should be proud to welcome them into the respected academic institutions which help make our country what it is!

Ensuring that everyone has an equal opportunity to access education is fundamental for British society as a whole. Asylum seekers are not asking for special treatment, simply the same opportunities as other UK residents.

Fahran (18) from Afghanistan: why Equal Access is important

“When I came to the UK from Afghanistan, going to school was an adventure for me – I had never been before. I would stay late at school, until it was dark. I loved to learn then and I still do. At first I was put in Set 5 for English, right at the bottom...[but] I was working really hard and I was moved up to Set 2 after a few months.

It was only when I got halfway through Year 11 that I realised about GCSEs. I had never sat exams in Afghanistan, some older men in my village would just teach me and my brother at our house. I got 4Bs and 2As, as well as distinctions in two BTEQs.

I am now starting Year 13, and try to act as a role model for younger boys...I hope to become a civil engineer...My teachers think I could go to Oxford or Cambridge.

I didn’t know about student finance, that I am not eligible, until I met with a Connexions worker. It has made me worried, and along with my asylum case has been difficult to deal with. It can be distracting, and I know I need to put work in to my A-Levels if I want to apply to good universities.”

With thanks to Refugee Support Network.
5 Pathways to *Equal Access*

The way to achieving equal access will be different at each institution, but this road map should help guide you along the way.

*(You can skip to each section on the following pages)*

- **Research your institution’s policy** (pg 9-10)
  - **Good policy** (pg 11)
  - **Bad policy** (pg 11)
- **Gather support** (pg 11)
- **Gather evidence and support** (pg 11-14)
- **Campaign actions!** (pg 14; 16-18)
- **Lobby your university Vice Chancellor** (pg 14)
- **University commits to *Equal Access* and signs the *Equal Access Pledge*** (pg 15; 23)

**Equal access for students seeking protection**
Research your institution’s policy

Every institution is different and so might have a different policy on access for vulnerable groups of people, such as care-leavers or those seeking refugee protection. This is why the first thing you need to do is research your institution’s policy to make sure that you’re heading in the right direction!

Your university’s policies on admissions and fees should be easily accessible online on the admissions and fees section of its website. If not, you can request them from the admissions department by phone or email.

And a gold STAR for good access policy goes to... University of Manchester!

“The University of Manchester is committed to minimising the barriers that talented students from all backgrounds may face in accessing higher education. We know those seeking sanctuary/asylum in the UK face particular financial obstacles in accessing Higher Education, so we have pioneered the introduction of tuition fee concessions so that the net costs to such groups in the same as for home students.”

Julian Skyrme, Head of Undergraduate Recruitment and Widening Participation, University of Manchester

Check out Manchester University’s website for an example of what a good access policy might look like: https://www.manchester.ac.uk/undergraduate/studentfinance/international-2012/concession/

When considering your university’s policy, be sure to ask the following questions:

1) Are asylum seekers and students with discretionary leave to remain (DLR) classified as home students or international students?
2) What rate of tuition do they pay?
3) Are they eligible for other forms of support, such as bursaries, fee-waivers, scholarships or hardship grants?
4) Are they grouped with other populations on campus who are in need of extra support, such as care-leavers?
5) Does the university offer any special bursaries or scholarships for asylum-seeking students or students with DLR?

Remember, don’t presume the worst!

Just because your university doesn’t state that it offers any of these concessions on its website, it doesn’t mean that it hasn’t already taken positive action to support students seeking protection. For example, they may have used their discretion in the past to help individuals on a case by case basis.

Other universities may have never even considered the issue before and will be grateful to you for bringing it to their attention. Max Wakefield, outgoing Vice President Community, at the University of Bristol Students’ Union, explains what happened when he met with the Pro Vice Chancellor for Education and Head of Admissions to discuss Equal Access campaign:
“We spoke about what STAR had been doing over the last couple of years, with the video, petition etc... It was quite clear that they were on board with the principle of colleges categorising asylum seekers as home students”.

What Equal Access means to me: Jonatane from Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

"I arrived in the UK as a teenager together with my family. We had to flee the DRC due to the political activities of my father. While growing up in the DRC I witnessed many injustices. I dreamed about the rule of law and how it can protect the innocent and punish the guilty. That’s why I wanted to become a lawyer.

I was lucky to be offered a place to study law at the University of Kent, even though my claim for asylum had not yet been decided. However the university said that I had to pay “international student fees”. I could not afford this. My solicitor said I should wait until a decision on my asylum case had been made and then go to university. So while most of my friends from school started their degrees I had to wait.

This was particularly bitter for me because it turned out that I had already been granted refugee status before the start of the academic year – I just didn’t know it. The Home Office told my solicitor about their decision only four months after they granted me asylum. To my dismay, the university insisted that I had been offered a place as an “international student” and had to pay international students fees even though I now had refugee status. It took me nearly nine months to convince them to let me pay “home student fees”. I had great support and many advocates, which kept me going and in the end the university agreed. I finally started my law degree in 2003 and paid the same fees as my UK course mates.

Looking back now I have many good memories of my university days. One of my favourite memories of university is attending my graduation ceremony and seeing how proud my father was of my achievements. I have since obtained a Masters degree in International Law with International Relations and have worked with a number of organisations in the UK and in South Africa. I am also now a British citizen.

I hope that all of you will get involved with the Equal Access campaign. You are in a perfect position to bring about this much needed change. You are an important voice at the universities that need to change their policies and practices to allow equal access to people like me.

You also understand what it is like to want to study. Students who are seeking asylum want to study for the same reasons as you do. They also want to study to find their dignity and self-respect again, which has been crushed by persecution in their home countries and often by the asylum system in the UK, too. Essentially we all want the same: to do well in our studies and build a good life for ourselves and others around us.”
Good policy!

So, your research shows that your institution has a policy that welcomes students seeking protection. Congratulations! But your work isn’t done yet...

The next step is to invite your Vice Chancellor to sign the Equal Access Pledge to help gather momentum for the campaign.

You can find the Equal Access Pledge on page 23 of this Guide.

★ Spread the word – Getting your Vice Chancellor to sign the Pledge will inspire other institutions to get on board with the campaign.

★ Aspirational - Even if your university is not currently meeting all of the asks in the Pledge, signing up shows their long-term commitment to Equal Access, and gives them something to aspire to.

★ Celebration - You could celebrate the fact that your university is an Equal Access institution by hosting a Refugees Welcome Here awareness week or event.

★ Support - You could lobby your university to increase support offered to students seeking protection on campus. For example, your university may offer home fee places on an ad hoc basis, but could they do the same for all?

★ National policy change – your Vice Chancellor may be willing to write a letter to the Minister of State for Universities and Science, explaining the benefits of welcoming asylum seeker students and students with DLR to your university. Showing support at the university level will help convince the Government that they should also do more at a national level too!

Don’t forget to also get students and staff at your university to sign the Equal Access petition and write to the Minister highlighting the benefits of equal access.

See Section 7 of this guide, Campaign Resources, to find out how.

Bad Policy

Alas, it looks like your university has no access policy for asylum seeker students or students with discretionary leave to remain (DLR) and you find yourself travelling down the right hand side of our roadmap on your way to Equal Access. Don’t worry! The road is not as long as it seems. These simple steps will help you on the way.

Gather evidence and support

(1) Gather Evidence

The first thing you need to do is get some evidence to help you make the case for Equal Access at your university.

Remember, you need to now make your case as to both (i) why students seeking protection should be considered ‘home’ students, for both the purposes of fees and wider support and also (ii) why the unique needs of those seeking refugee protection should be considered in overall institutional policy. See Part 6 of this guide, Dealing with difficult questions, to help you make this argument.

You can strengthen your evidence base through appealing to the following:
Leeds University SU and STAR group specifically referenced the experience of students who have volunteered with asylum seekers and refugees locally when they passed a motion in support of Equal Access: “Many University of Leeds students already volunteer, campaign and fundraise for the refugee and asylum seeker communities in Leeds. This demonstrates recognition of the need for an inclusive and supportive attitude towards those seeking sanctuary in Leeds.”

**Be a local** – research the situation locally e.g. by asking local colleges or refugee organisations to provide information on the situation of those seeking protection.

**University culture** – Is there anything about your university culture that favours Equal Access? E.g. does it have any departments or research centres that deal with refugees and/or migration issues? Does it pride itself on being an international institution?

**Student ambassadors** - Does your university have alumni or current students from a refugee background who may be willing to support the campaign?

**Widening Participation and Access Agreements** - Your university should have both a widening participation programme and an access agreement, representing both an opportunity to gather information about your university’s policies on access for hard to reach groups, and a direct route to influencing them!

### Widening Participation and Access Agreement explained

**Widening participation** is a set of principles adopted by universities which seek to address issues of social exclusion and can be an important hook for the Equal Access campaign. The widening participation agenda strives to open up higher education to those that are traditionally hard to reach, such as those from lower income backgrounds and minority groups. Almost all universities are funded by HEFCE (Higher Education Funding Council for England) to fulfil widening participation programmes. These programmes are a direct means of enacting access agreements.

Any university that wants to charge home and EU tuition fees above the standard rate has to have an **access agreement**. An access agreement sets out the fee limit for the institution and requires the institution to show how they plan to open up access to low participation groups. This will include how scholarships and bursaries will be allocated, how outreach will be coordinated and the partnerships the institutions will make in their community. The agreement is approved and monitored by the Office for Fair Access (OFFA). You can find your institution’s access agreement on OFFA’s website [www.offa.org.uk/access-agreements/](http://www.offa.org.uk/access-agreements/).

Mala, outgoing President of Bristol STAR, explains how appealing to the widening participation agenda helping them to make the case for equal access at Bristol University: “The Pro Vice Chancellor for Education and Head of Admissions were very supportive of the campaign, could see a real way of making it work and were sympathetic with the situation that asylum seekers find themselves in. They also saw the positive impact it could have on Bristol University as part of the Widening Participation Scheme and improving the lives of people who have had often come from incredibly difficult and harrowing backgrounds.”
(ii) **Gather support**

It is crucial that you identify your key campaign partners early on so that you can plan ahead. Here are some ideas of who you might involve.

- **University staff and Vice Chancellor** – The Vice Chancellor ultimately makes decisions regarding access. However, you might not be able to meet with him or her straight away. Meeting with other officials, like the Head of Admissions or the Pro Vice Chancellor for Education, is a good way to reach the Vice Chancellor indirectly.

- **Students’ Union and STAR group**: STAR groups will be the most knowledgeable about refugee issues while SUs can provide wider access to students and student networks and can also make the campaign an institutional priority by passing motions in their executive councils.

- **Students seeking protection**: Try to include the perspectives of students seeking refugee protection in your campaigning work. Use case studies and, if possible, link up with refugee organisations locally.

- **Students and academics**: Getting them to pledge support for the campaign will show that it has a wide support base. Ask other student societies and university departments to pledge their collective support too!

- **External organisations**: Many trade unions, faith groups, and refugee community organisations also run campaigns or provide education provisions to asylum seekers or to support those seeking protection in the local community. Think how you could involve them in your campaigning.
**Campaign actions!**

Campaign actions are a great way to gather support and build the profile of the *Equal Access* campaign at your university. Campaign actions can also be the most fun part! See Section 6 of this guide, Campaign Action Ideas, to get started.

**Lobby Your University**

So you've done your research, gathered your evidence and collected loads of support for *Equal Access* at your university through your campaigning. Great! Here are some top tips to make sure that your university takes note...and all your hard work pays off!

**Passing a motion**

Getting your student council to pass a motion is an important part of the campaign. Not only does a motion mean that your SU will fully support it, it also shows that you've got the support of a larger proportion of the student body. Once the motion has passed, the SU can use its relationship with university staff to highlight the issues and to get senior staff onside (in other words, it's a way in to getting them to meet with you!). See Part 7 of this guide, Campaign Resources, for a model motion.

**Meeting with university staff**

The SU can secure a meeting with senior staff at your institution. Don't be disheartened if you can't arrange meeting with your Vice Chancellor straight away, other senior members of university staff can also help get behind the campaign.

The most important thing to remember, whoever you are meeting, is to have a clear and confident case for equal access with reliable evidence and wide support from students (see above to find out how). Be prepared to answer a whole range of questions, but don’t try to answer what you don’t know! See Part 6 of this guide, Dealing with difficult questions, for some model answers. The friendly team at STAR National can also help you to prepare for your meeting. Just give them a ring at any time!

Remember that for your Vice Chancellor this might not just be about equality of opportunity or fairness; rather, the Vice Chancellor has to consider a wide range of issues when considering access, such as financial costs, how to facilitate additional support for asylum seeker students and students with DLR and the overall image of the institution. This is where case-studies come in handy. Use them to show that equal access has been achieved at other institutions and can be achieved at yours too!

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**STAR groups and SUs, a match made in heaven!**

Partnerships between STAR groups and SUs have been key to *Equal Access* campaigning at Royal Holloway University and Bristol University. Here are their top tips for a perfect partnership!

*"It is an absolute MUST to get involved with your students’ union. Our VP Communities was a life saver. The SU were very clued up on everything to do with members of staff at the University, how to go about booking meetings and they had already had interactions with these members of staff which made everything much easier.”* Mala Savjani, outgoing President of Bristol STAR

*"We sought the support and involvement of the Students’ Union. We passed policy at the SU’s democratic forums. We paid particular focus on SURHUL societies, lecturers, heads of department, national and local charities, campaigners.”* Richard, outgoing President of Royal Holloway STAR
**Keep records**

Keep the momentum of your campaign going by keeping a good record of each step, from your first stunt to your first meeting with senior staff. Campaigning for *Equal Access* can be a long process and is different for every institution. Keeping track will enable you to evaluate what you’ve done and to have a log of commitments your institution has made. This will help you to handover the baton to next year’s leaders of STAR and the SU.

**University commits to *Equal Access***

So your university has promised that it will review their policy on access for asylum seekers and those with DLR. Great! But where do you go now?

The end point should be a commitment from your institution that they will sign the *Equal Access* Pledge, adhering to the two main principles. Some universities may be closer than others, some may be apprehensive about signing the Pledge. The Pledge is designed to be as inclusive as possible so that universities can implement *Equal Access* in a way that is consistent with their existing policies and commitments.

Some universities won’t want to broadcast the fact they’ve changed their policy on access, others will see it as a good practice. Where possible, celebrate *Equal Access* successes and keep on raising awareness on access issues. While getting equal access at your institution is an enormous win, there is a chance that equal access can be achieved at every institution!

Keep up the pressure by pushing for change at a national policy level. See the Part 7 of this guide, Campaign resources, for a draft letter to the Minister of State for Universities and Science.

Don’t forget to tell STAR National and NUS about your successes! We can help spread the word to refugee students.
6 Campaign Action Ideas

Campaign actions are an important way to raise awareness and gather support for the campaign – they are also great fun! Here are a few ideas to get you started.

Letter

Using the template letter in this pack, get together with friends, SU societies, volunteering partners and professors and write to the Minister of State for Universities and Science, asking him to take action on *Equal Access* through national policy change. If your university has a good policy, why not ask your Vice Chancellor to write too?

Teach-out!

Take the *Equal Access* campaign outside with a ‘teach-out.’ It’s easy, all you need is:

- A public space
- Some basic facts
- Some eye-catching posters
- Some ‘students’!

You could hold a free lesson in which you educate people about *Equal Access*. This ‘lesson’ should be accessible to all! You could finish your teach-out with a quiz, and wear a graduation hat to make you stand out from the crowd!

Banner drop

Make a banner with the *Equal Access* logo and a campaign message such as ‘Refugee Students Welcome Here’ and put it up somewhere visible on campus e.g. the SU, library, or entrance to your university. Take a photo and contact your student paper to see if they would like to cover it. Oh, and be sure to ask permission!

Written Petition

Take the *Equal Access* Petition (included in this Part 7 of this guide, Campaign resources) around campus and ask people to sign up to the principles of the campaign. Don’t forget to ask professors and staff too! You could also involve your volunteering partners and members of the local community. Make sure you keep a good record of those who have signed it, and scan in/photocopy signatures in case you lose them!

Online Petition

Get your voice on the web! Sign the *Equal Access* petition online, then get your friends to sign up, then your tutors, then your SU sabbatical officers, then other SU societies, then your parents, then your old teachers, then your local barman...we want everyone to care about *Equal Access*! Use social media to encourage them. Don’t forget to tell STAR National as your support base mounts so that we can tell all our members too!

Photo Petition

Take a colourful photo on campus with the *Equal Access* logo. Send it to students@star-network.org.uk or tweet it to @STARnational. We’ll put the pics together in a big collage which will be presented at STAR National Conference 2012.

Film

Budding film makers amongst you could make a film in which you explain why *Equal Access* is important at your university. You could coordinate with the film society or other groups.
Check out this fantastic film shot at Bristol University and STAR national conference for inspiration: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oV5QzW0bG7E](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oV5QzW0bG7E)

Some inspiring examples of Equal Access campaigns

**Manchester University**
The University of Manchester is a long standing *Equal Access* pioneer. Since 2008, it has allowed asylum seekers who meet the academic entry requirements to pay home fees instead of overseas fees. In 2011, Manchester pushed the boundaries further by linking up with the charity [Article 26](http://www.article26.org.uk/) to offer a scholarship, covering full tuition fees. These bold advances have marked Manchester as an institution willing to invest in bright and capable students regardless of their status.

Students have been promoting Manchester’s good work and calling on other universities to do the same. As Christina, outgoing President of Manchester STAR and STAR Trustee explains, "*We wanted to make [our university’s policy] a visionary model for other institutions to follow.* In April 2012 students held a national conference at Manchester University. They finished with a flashmob outside their SU to proudly spread the word, ‘EQUAL ACCESS HERE’!!”

**Royal Holloway University**
2011-12 was a busy campaigning year for Royal Holloway STAR and Royal Holloway Students Union! They passed a motion in support of Equal Access, organised a huge speaker event and even found time to make a campaign video! Their hard work paid off. In March 2012 Royal Holloway STAR secured a meeting with the Admissions Office and Vice Principal to present support for the campaign. As a result of this meeting Royal Holloway agreed to a tuition fee waiver.

Richard, outgoing President of Royal Holloway STAR, said: “*Ultimately, this campaign means that a student from a difficult background will be able to go to university. And that is something really worth working for!*”

**University of Bristol**
STAR Bristol has been campaigning for *Equal Access* in partnership with their students’ union for the past 3 years, making a [campaign video](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oV5QzW0bG7E), writing [articles](http://www.star-uk.org.uk/news/), passing a SU motion and collecting over 1,000 petition signatures from students and academics. Having researched the situation of those seeking refugee protection locally through their contacts at STAR volunteering projects, members from the Bristol STAR group and the Vice-President Community at the Students’ Union went to meet with the Pro Vice Chancellor for Education and Head of Admissions in May 2012.
This meeting was "a big success!" They are hopeful that Bristol University will begin treating individuals seeking protection as home students in 2013-14 in addition to providing access to hardship bursaries. They will be continuing the campaign this year in order to achieve this.

**University of Leeds**

Leeds University also gets an *Equal Access* thumbs up! Like Manchester University, it gives asylum seekers who meet the academic programme requirements a tuition fee concession equivalent to the difference between the 'home' and 'overseas' rate. Keen to make the university an even more welcoming place for refugee students, Leeds STAR is now working with the students’ union and local partners such as City of Sanctuary.

In February 2012, the University of Leeds SU voted 14/0 in favour of the motion 'Should the Union support asylum seekers?' They have committed to welcome refugees and asylum seekers in the university by putting up a welcome sign at the union’s entrance, promoting positive attitudes among students and staff, and mandating executive officers to continue supporting STAR campaigns to help refugees!
7 Campaign Resources

1. **Model Motion**

   This Union Notes:

   1. According to Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights "Everyone has the right to education... and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit".

   2. The term refugee applies to any person who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, or membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.

   3. An asylum seeker is someone who has lodged an application for protection on the basis of the 1951 UN Refugee Convention.

   4. Discretionary leave to remain (DLR) is a 3 year renewable status that may be granted to individuals on the basis of an asylum claim, including many separated children from countries such as Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq.

   5. Officially, current university policy on asylum seekers at [insert name of University] is as follows [insert current policy]. Meanwhile asylum seekers are:
      - not allowed to take out student loans;
      - not allowed to apply for grants and bursaries;
      - unable to study in another country;
      - denied the right to work in the UK;
      - sometimes required to wait like this for years while a decision is made as to whether they can stay in the UK.

   6. Officially, current university policy on individuals granted DLR as a result of an asylum application at [insert name of University] is as follows [insert current policy]. Meanwhile those with DLR are:
      - not allowed to take out student loans;
      - not allowed to apply for grants and bursaries;
      - unable to study in another country.

   7. Asylum seeker students and students with DLR are routinely charged overseas fees, yet their situation and needs are different to those of international students.

   8. There is no consensus policy from UK universities on access to education for asylum seekers and individuals granted DLR on the basis of an asylum claim.

   9. A number of UK universities have amended their admissions policies to allow asylum seekers and/or students granted DLR as the result of an asylum application to pay ‘home’ tuition fees, or have waived fees entirely. These include: Manchester University, Leeds University, Royal Holloway University of London, Salford University and many more.

   10. [number of students] have taken [campaign action e.g. signed a petition] at [name of university] supporting equal access to university for students seeking refugee protection as part of the Equal Access campaign.
11. The *Equal Access* campaign is being led by the National Union of Students and Student Action for Refugees and is supported by a range of other organisations, including *mention any significant ones, e.g. local schools*.

12. The experiences and insights of students seeking refugee protection have the potential to greatly enrich the intellectual and social life of the university.

13. *details about university life which support Equal Access e.g. international outlook, specific research departments, famous refugee alumni*

   This Union Believes:

   1. The University should adopt a fair and equitable approach in providing access to higher education on the basis of merit for all, including asylum seekers or individuals granted DLR on the basis of an asylum claim.

   This Union Resolves:

   • To support the *Equal Access* campaign and work closely with NUS and STAR to create a campaign specific to our institution/students’ union.

   • To lobby the university to sign the *Equal Access* Pledge and remove financial barriers preventing students seeking refugee protection from studying here. Specifically to:
     o Enable all those seeking refugee protection to be able to study as home students
     o Recognise that, like other vulnerable groups, students seeking refugee protection have additional needs and give them access to additional support, such as fee waivers, bursaries, scholarships and grants.

   • For the executive team to request a meeting between the Vice Chancellor and representatives from [STAR/ the Students Union/ other local stakeholders] to discuss how this can be achieved.

   • For the executive team to sign a letter to the Vice Chancellor to outline the benefits of providing equal access to higher education to this university, and to liaise with STAR [local group or STAR National] in the creation of this letter.

   • To support campaigns on the national level for equal access to higher education for students seeking refugee protection and the right to work for asylum seekers.
2. Template letter to the Vice Chancellor

Dear [insert names of Vice Chancellor],

Re: Fair access to university for people seeking refugee protection

We are writing to you regarding access to education at [insert name of your institution] for students who have come to the UK seeking refugee protection. We represent the [insert name of your institution/campaign group] Equal Access group which is working with people across the UK who are currently denied access to university. We would be very grateful if you could meet us to hear how potential students, who have already been given a place to study here, are barred from taking up that place because of admissions policies.

The Equal Access Campaign is a national coalition including students’ unions, Student Action for Refugees, academics and refugee charities. We want people who have fled war, torture and persecution to fulfil their academic potential and build successful lives. We believe that this university will benefit from opening its doors to people seeking refugee protection and that it has a responsibility to ensure education is available to all, regardless of their social or economic situation.

Equal Access has two goals:

- All those seeking refugee protection will be able to study as home students.
- Students seeking refugee protection will be recognised as having additional needs just like other vulnerable groups and be given the same access to additional support, such as bursaries.

A number of universities have already adopted Equal Access policies and have recognised the advantages this brings to their institution in terms of diversity and equal opportunities, these include: Manchester University, Leeds University, Royal Holloway University of London, Salford University, Canterbury Christ Church University and many more.

The Challenge

People seeking refugee protection and those granted discretionary leave to remain (DLR) are classed as overseas students by this university which presents them with an almost impossible situation if they decide to take up their course. Most people seeking refugee protection are not allowed to work, cannot take out a student loan and must live on state support of just £5 a day plus accommodation, therefore paying international student fees is well beyond their pocket. People who have been granted DLR are allowed to work, however they do not have access to loans. Many came to the UK unaccompanied as children and have grown up in care therefore they cannot rely on family support to pay their fees. Unlike other care leavers, they are now excluded from education at a crucial point in their lives.

We would like to share with you how this is affecting the lives of people who are in the UK not out of choice but as a result of life threatening situations in their home countries. They cannot return home to study and cannot gain the education they crave to build new lives in exile.

We would be delighted if you could meet with us to discuss these issues and how our university can be at the forefront of empowering people through education. Please do contact [name of student contact/SU officer] to arrange a meeting on [insert phone] or [insert email]. We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

[insert name of your institution/campaign group] Equal Access campaign
3. **Template letter to the Minister of State for Universities and Science**

RE: Equal Access to higher education for students seeking refugee protection

Dear [insert the name of the Minister here],

I am writing on behalf of [insert name of STAR group or Student Union] to raise the issue of a policy change which has effectively prevented a group of vulnerable young people from accessing higher education and therefore building successful lives. Young people who have arrived in the UK as children, grown up here and been granted discretionary leave to remain (DLR) have previously been able to attend university as home students alongside their British born classmates. Last year this suddenly stopped, they are now expected to pay overseas fees and cannot access student loans to do so. [I/we] would like you to reverse these changes made via the Education (Student Fees, Awards and Support) (Amendment) Regulations 2011 and thereby restore the life chances of these young people.

[As members of STAR I/we regularly volunteer with refugees and know that] many of the young people who have been granted DLR work very hard at school, achieving excellent grades and offers from good institutions. In addition to providing the basis for a successful life of contribution to society, studying provides stability and normality which can help heal the effects of the trauma from which they fled. If these students stay in the UK or return to their countries of origin, UK qualifications will help them to integrate and contribute to the country’s strength. Individual young people are not the only ones who are suffering as a result of this change; our universities are less diverse and inclusive.

This issue affects a relatively small number of individuals, but the impact on their lives now and in the future is significant. Should you wish to know more please contact Student Action for Refugees students@star-network.org.uk who can introduce you to talented young people whose lives are in disarray because the university place they worked so hard to attain has been denied them. I trust you will look into the matter and look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

[insert name of your institution/campaign group] Equal Access campaign
The Equal Access Pledge

National Union of Students (NUS) and Student Action for Refugees (STAR) are calling for equal access to education for students seeking refugee protection in Britain.

The Issue
Individuals who are waiting for a decision on their asylum application or who have been granted discretionary leave to remain (DLR) in the UK as a result of an asylum claim do not have equal access to university. They cannot access student loans and grants and must pay international fees. Most asylum seekers are denied the right to work and live on just £36 a week. They cannot afford up to £30,000 a year in university fees. Furthermore, someone who has fled their country of origin to avoid war, torture or persecution is not the same as an international student who has chosen to study in Britain.

82% of Brits believe that protecting the most vulnerable is a core British value and 67% are sympathetic to refugees coming to Britain (Refugee Council 2011). We should be proud to do all we can to welcome them into the respected academic institutions which help make our country what it is!

The Pledge
The Equal Access campaign is calling for individuals and organisations to sign up to two simple principles that will ensure equal access for students seeking protection. For:

★ All those seeking refugee protection to be able to study as home students;
★ Students seeking refugee protection to be recognised as having additional needs just like other vulnerable groups and to be given the same access to additional support, such as bursaries.

I pledge my support to the Equal Access campaign

______________________________________________ (name)
______________________________________________ (role)
______________________________________________ (institution)

This campaign is supported by a broad coalition including:

[Logos of supporting organisations]
The Equal Access Petition

The National Union of Students (NUS) and Student Action for Refugees (STAR) are calling for equal access to education for students seeking refugee protection in Britain.

The Equal Access campaign is calling for:

★ All those seeking refugee protection to be able to study as home students;

★ Students seeking refugee protection to be recognised as having additional needs just like other vulnerable groups and to be given the same access to additional support, such as bursaries.

Individuals who are waiting for a decision on their asylum application or who have been granted discretionary leave to remain (DLR) in the UK as a result of an asylum claim do not have equal access to university. They cannot access student loans and grants and must pay international fees. Most asylum seekers are denied the right to work and live on just £36 a week. They cannot afford up to £30,000 a year in university fees. Someone who has fled their country of origin to avoid war, torture or persecution is not the same as an international student who has chosen to study in Britain.

The Equal Access campaign is supported by a broad coalition including:

Please sign below if you support equal access to higher education for students seeking refugee protection in Britain.
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 are fleeing persecution and 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 friends.

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 gives them an opportunity to build skills that will help them to build their life in the UK, or when they return to their country of origin. It is unreasonable to expect everyone to put their life on hold because the Government has not made a decision.

3. “Ok, so it seems fair enough for asylum seekers, but what about those with DLR? They have the right to work, so can’t they fund themselves?”

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 start of 2011, Education Minister Tim Loughton, asked in a Ministerial speech: "...doesn’t a talented care leaver deserve the same chance to go to one of our top universities as anyone else? Why deny young people in care the same educational opportunities we would want for our own children?” Most working British students paying home fees would be unable to go to university without a student loan. In 2010/11 approximately 81% of all English students took up a student loan of an average value of £3,630 (Student Loans Company 2011). Expecting a student with DLR to cover the costs of international fees through work alone and without a student loan is simply double standards.

4. “We’re already too soft. Letting them into university will just encourage more people to come here.”

Evidence shows that people do not seek asylum in the UK based on 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 applying to study at the home fees rate will be relatively low and students will still need to fulfil the entry requirements for the course they wish to study. 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 student 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 is not given funding for asylum seeking students by the Government through Higher Education Funding Council of England (HEFCE) funding, so we have to charge them overseas fees. Why should the university pick the tab because of the Government’s failure to do so?”

Vice-Chancellors 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. Several 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. These include: Manchester University, Leeds University, Salford University, Royal Holloway University of London, Canterbury Christ Church University and many more. Universities are institutional citizens and are uniquely placed to affect such change.

If the government sees that universities wish to enfranchise students seeking protection then there is a real chance of changing polices 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 Higher Education Working Group who are lobbying for national policy change to HEFCE funding. This will make government funding available to students seeking protection in Britain.

7. “What will happen if a student receives a final negative decision on their case (they have no more opportunities to appeal) and has to leave the UK before the end of their course?”

There are various reasons why someone may not be able to complete their course, but this applies to all students. It would be unfair to penalise people seeking asylum because there is a chance they may need to leave the country before completing their course. There is also a chance they will stay! Research shows the commitment to education that many young refugees have and there are many examples of students in this position who have completed their degrees and gone on to successful careers. Upon completing their degrees, for example, asylum seeker members of STAR have gone into diplomacy, advocacy, banking and healthcare.

8. “An asylum seeking student would not be eligible for 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 both for students seeking protection to be recognised as having additional needs in the same way that other vulnerable groups are and to be given the same access to additional support, such as bursaries, access to hardship funds to help cover living costs, scholarships or 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. Universities are in a unique position to assist with some of these costs.
The experience of students like Jonatane (see page 10) shows that many asylum-seeking students are determined and can study successfully, even under huge financial pressure. It is their choice to make the commitment to study on low finances and in a difficult situation.

STAR and NUS are also campaigning for reform at the national policy level to open up access to student loans and for the right to work.

9. "How many asylum seekers would be likely to apply to come to the university?"

The numbers of asylum seekers applying to study at the home fees rate will be relatively low and will depend on the area. This is because most asylum seekers are tied to their government accommodation and so the only plausible choice is to study at their local university.

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.
9 More information

"I just want to study" Access to Higher Education for Young Refugees and Asylum Seekers, February, 2012. A comprehensive report on barriers to access to higher education for students seeking refugee protection in the UK, including case studies.
http://refugeesupportnetwork.org/sites/all/sites/default/files/files/I just want to study(1).pdf


UKCISA (UK Council for International Affairs) website. An explanation of access and entitlements broken down by immigration status and country.
www.ukcisa.org.uk

STAR website. Facts and figures about refugees in the UK.
www.star-network.org.uk

For more information or support with the Equal Access campaign, contact:

★ Jennifer Allsopp, Student Network Coordinator, STAR
students@star-network.org.uk
or

★ Lucy Hawthorne, Campaigning Partnership and Policy Officer (Society and Citizenship), National Union of Students
lucy.hawthorne@nus.org.uk