

Equal Access to University for Asylum Seekers

People seeking asylum do not have the same right to university education as their British born peers. STAR is campaigning to ensure that asylum seekers have equal access to higher education and can join us at university as equals.

Why are people seeking asylum in the UK?

People seeking asylum have been driven from their homelands by war, torture and oppression. They arrive looking for a place that will provide protection from the horrors of persecution they are trying to leave behind.

Can people seeking asylum study at university?

Yes. They are entitled to study in higher education in the UK provided they meet the entrance requirements to the course and can pay the course fees.

What are the barriers stopping asylum seekers studying at university?

Asylum seekers are charged 'overseas' fees of up to £20,000 per year instead of the current 'home fee' rate of £3,225. Asylum seekers cannot afford these fees or living costs because they are:

- ⇒ Denied the right to work in the UK
- ⇒ Not allowed to apply for student loans
- ⇒ Not allowed to apply for grants and most bursaries

"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... So while most of my friends from school started their degrees I had to wait.."
Jonatane Bidiaka Budiaki, (LLB, LLM)

Do all UK universities charge 'overseas' fees?

No. Some universities such as Manchester, Liverpool Hope and Middlesex allow some or all students seeking asylum to pay 'home' fees.

All Scottish universities charge certain young asylum seekers home student fees (to be eligible you need to have been under 18 when you or your parent claimed asylum and been living in Scotland for 3 years before the start of the course.)

Most universities in England and Wales charge asylum seekers 'overseas' student fees. This is because asylum seekers are not eligible for the Government funding through the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) funding as they classify them as international students.

But it is at the discretion of the university to decide what fees to charge. Vice-Chancellors can make a positive statement for widening participation by accepting asylum seekers as home students.



"Everyone has the right to education... and higher education shall be equally accessible to all..."

- Article 26 (1), Universal Declaration of Human Rights

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Why should asylum seeking students be allowed to pay ‘home’ fees?

- ⇒ Asylum seekers come to the UK for protection from persecution. They were forced to leave their homes and come to the UK. They did not choose to come here to study.
- ⇒ Many asylum seekers have been in the British education system for years studying alongside their friends for GCSEs and A Levels. It is right that they are able to continue their education with their friends.
- ⇒ They are not allowed to work and receive little financial support (£35 a week for single adults).
- ⇒ It can take many months or years to get a decision on an asylum claim. Studying at a UK university is their only chance of accessing higher education as they cannot leave while claiming asylum.

“I had to escape my native country Togo and came to the UK for protection. It was very hard for me... I then realized that the only way forward for me was education.”

Guinah Houssein, 23 Years old

Why can’t asylum seekers wait until they have refugee status?

- ⇒ Some asylum seekers have to wait 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 is not currently meeting its target of completing cases 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.
- ⇒ 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.

What are the benefits?

For students seeking asylum

- ⇒ A good education is vital for finding work for both those who stay in the UK and those who may return home.
- ⇒ Being able to attend university helps people make friends and avoid isolation while they wait for their decision.
- ⇒ The opportunity to continue your education is central to personal development.

For universities

- ⇒ Universities are looking for the best students, with academic skills and a commitment to their studies. Asylum seekers who meet the academic entry requirements and want to enter higher education demonstrate both an intellectual ability and a strong motivation.
- ⇒ In supporting the initiative, higher education institutions will demonstrate that they are embracing widening participation and actively promoting diversity and equal opportunities.
- ⇒ Studying at university is often more about making new friends and having new experiences than a qualification. A student population with refugees and asylum seekers is an opportunity for UK students to meet and learn from incredible people.

For UK society

- ⇒ Allowing people to participate in higher education is good for local communities. The government agrees, noting that there is “a strong positive correlation between the cohesiveness of local communities and participation in higher education”.
- ⇒ Giving asylum seekers access to HE will have a long-term return for the local, regional and national economies through strengthening the skills and earning potential of those granted leave to remain in the UK.

What can I do?

- ⇒ Join STAR in campaigning for equal access to university for asylum seekers.
- ⇒ Work with your STAR group to lobby your Vice-Chancellor to allow asylum seeking students pay ‘home’ fees.
- ⇒ Ask your Student Union for support (the NUS is a supporter of STAR’s campaign)
- ⇒ Contact STAR national for further information and advice: campaigns@star-network.org.uk