



# Equal Access Campaign Toolkit



# star

Student Action  
For Refugees

SUPPORTING REFUGEES EVERYWHERE

[www.star-network.org.uk](http://www.star-network.org.uk)





## STUDENT ACTION FOR REFUGEES

STAR is the national student led charity which welcomes refugees to the UK. Our 25,000 student members take positive action for refugees by:

- Volunteering to support refugees and asylum seekers in the community
- Campaigning to change policies which adversely affect the lives of refugees and asylum seekers
- Educating people about asylum in the UK

[www.star-network.org.uk](http://www.star-network.org.uk)

## NATIONAL UNION OF STUDENTS

NUS is a voluntary membership organisation, which represent around 600 students' unions, accounting for 95% of all higher and further education unions in the UK. NUS is committed to making a change in the lives of students with a mission to 'promote, defend and extend the rights of students'.

[www.nus.org.uk](http://www.nus.org.uk)

# Executive Summary

People who have sought refugee protection in the UK do not have equal access to university; most are classed as international students which mean they are charged higher fees. On top of this most cannot get a student loan and do not have the right to work to earn money to pay their fees and living costs.

Student Action for Refugees (STAR) and the National Union of Students (NUS) teamed up in 2012 to change this and since then we have been campaigning for Equal Access to university for all people seeking refugee protection here in the UK. We have seen huge successes in the campaign with over [40 universities](#) now offering scholarships or fee waivers, as well as improvements in government policy. But there is still much more to be done to ensure that people forced to seek protection in the UK have the opportunity to continue on into higher education.

## **We are calling on universities to:**

1. Classify all those seeking asylum as home students for fee purposes
2. Offer at least 10 scholarships that cover study and maintenance costs for people who have come to the UK seeking refugee protection
3. Publicise their Equal Access policies so that potential students can easily apply

Fewer than 40,000 people sought asylum in the UK last year while countries such as Lebanon and Turkey are hosting millions of refugees displaced by ongoing conflicts. Yet despite these low numbers and our often-stated “proud tradition of welcoming refugees”, Britain is not providing the welcome and educational support these survivors need to rebuild their shattered lives.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “Higher Education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit”. Let’s make that a reality for people who have lost everything due to war and persecution.

This Equal Access Campaign Toolkit will guide you through the process of campaigning for Equal Access at your institution. It will give you the facts to build your arguments and the resources you need to put pressure on key decision makers. We hope this toolkit inspires you to create change for asylum seekers in the UK and we look forward to seeing many more institutions giving asylum seekers the opportunity to access the education they dream of.

**Emma Williams,**  
Chief Executive STAR

**Mostafa Rajaai,**  
Internationals Students’ Officer, NUS



# What's the problem?

## ENGLAND

### Asylum Seekers

- Classified as 'overseas students' and have to pay international student tuition fees.
- Cannot access student finance (loans) to cover the cost of tuition fees or living costs.
- Cannot work and if they have no money, must live on government support of just £36.95 per week.

### People granted 'Discretionary Leave to Remain' (DLR)

- Classified as 'overseas students' and have to pay international student tuition fees.
- Cannot access student finance (loans) to cover the cost of tuition fees or living costs.
- Allowed to work but cannot access student finance. In most cases this would mean a university education is out of reach.
- As of June 2016, a small number of people with DLR are eligible for student finance, under a category called 'long residence' for those who have lived in the UK for half their life.

### People granted 'Humanitarian Protection' (HP)

- Classified as 'home students' and can pay home tuition fees.
- Cannot access a student loan to cover the costs of their fees or living costs until they have '3 years of ordinary residence'.
- Allowed to work but cannot access student finance. In most cases this would mean a university education is out of reach.

## WALES & NORTHERN IRELAND

### Asylum Seekers

- Classified as 'overseas students' and have to pay international student tuition fees.
- Cannot access student finance (loans) to cover the cost of tuition fees or living costs.
- Cannot work and if they have no money, must live on government support of just £36.95 per week.

### People granted 'Discretionary Leave to Remain' (DLR) and 'Humanitarian Protection' (HP)

- Classified as 'home students' and can pay the home rate of fee.
- Cannot access student finance (loans) to cover the cost of tuition fees or living costs until they have '3 years of ordinary residence'.
- Allowed to work but cannot access student finance. In most cases this would mean a university education is out of reach.

## SCOTLAND

### Asylum Seekers

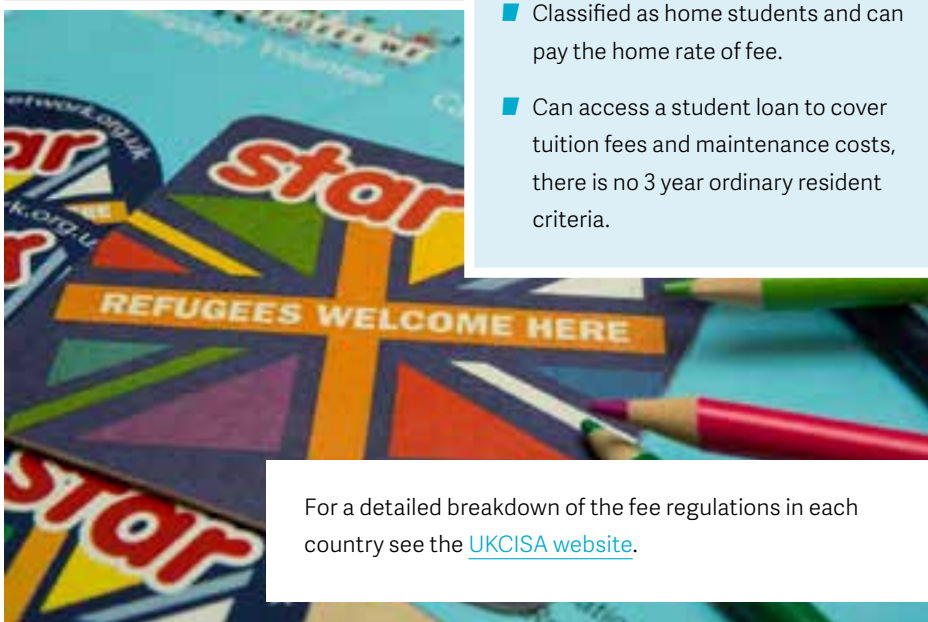
- Classified as 'overseas students' and have to pay international student tuition fees.
- Cannot access student finance (loans) to cover the cost of tuition fees or living costs.
- Cannot work and if they have no money, must live on government support of just £36.95 per week.
- Young asylum seekers and children of asylum seekers who made a claim before 2006 are eligible for home fees and student support but this is a very small number.

### People granted 'Discretionary Leave to Remain' (DLR)

- Classified as 'home students' and can pay the home rate of fee.
- Can access a student loan to cover tuition fees and maintenance costs, there is no 3 year ordinary resident criteria.

### People granted 'Humanitarian Protection'

- Classified as home students and can pay the home rate of fee.
- Can access a student loan to cover tuition fees and maintenance costs, there is no 3 year ordinary resident criteria.



For a detailed breakdown of the fee regulations in each country see the [UKCISA website](#).

# What's the solution?

Over [40 universities](#) are already doing brilliant work to ensure equal access by offering home fees, tuition fee waivers or scholarships. We want all universities to join in by:

1. Classifying all those seeking asylum as home students for fee purposes
2. Offering at least 10 scholarships that cover study and maintenance costs for people who have come to the UK seeking refugee protection
3. Publicising their Equal Access policies so that potential students can easily apply

## **Classify all those seeking asylum as home students**

Reclassifying asylum seekers and those with limited leave to remain following a request for asylum as home students reduces the cost of attending university.

## **Offer at least 10 scholarships that cover study and maintenance costs for people who have come to the UK seeking refugee protection**

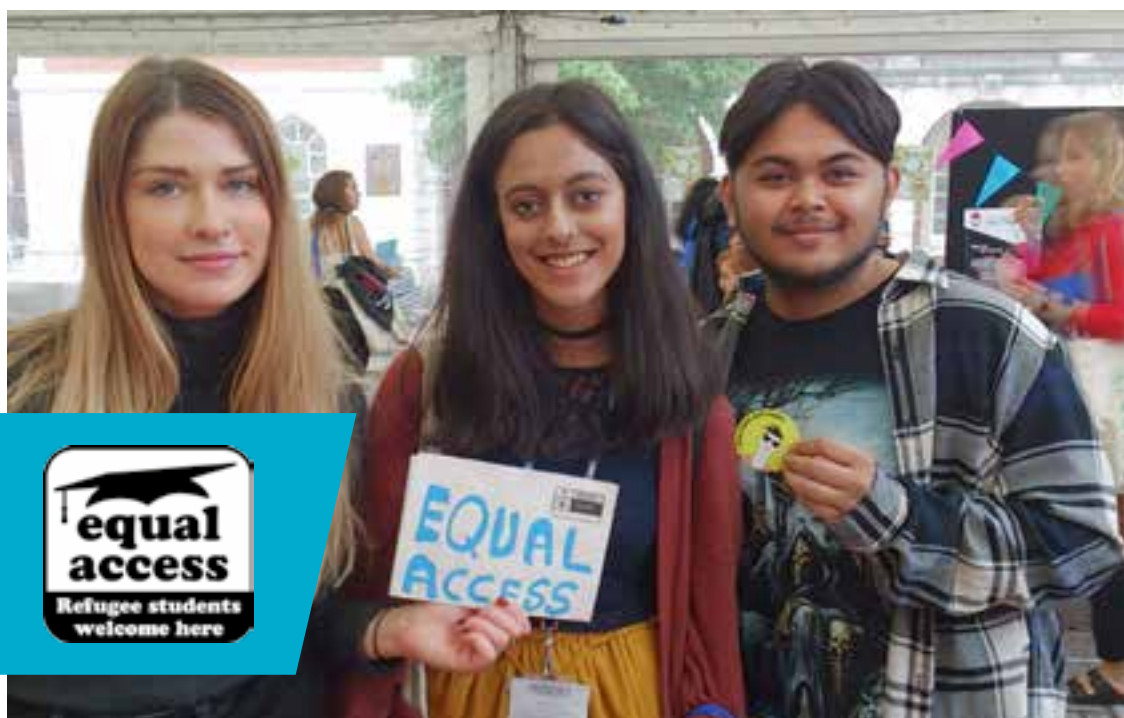
Whilst getting home fee status for asylum seekers is a good place to start many people will still struggle to find the fees and their living costs, particularly if they cannot access student loans or work and have no other funds.

## **Publicise their Equal Access policies so that potential students can easily apply**

Universities need to publicise their Equal Access policies widely by working with local charities, schools and refugee organisations so that students from a refugee background can get to university.

*“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.”*

Justine Greening, Secretary of State for Education, October 2016



# Why is this important?

## EVERYONE HAS THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION.

Yet students who are in the UK seeking refugee protection are being denied the opportunity to access higher education. Providing equal access to higher education simply levels the playing field giving asylum seekers and people with DLR or HP the same opportunities as other UK residents.

The benefits of higher education are clear.<sup>1</sup> According to a 2013 study, obtaining a degree increases net lifetime earnings by 28% for men (approximately £168k) and 53% for women (approximately £252k).<sup>2</sup> Not only that, people with degrees are reported to have improved well-being and life satisfaction than those with lower levels of education.<sup>3</sup> Aside from these long term benefits, for most young asylum seekers, education is the most important thing in their life as it helps them focus on the future rather than the past.<sup>4</sup>

*“I was offered a place to study Psychology at three universities in London and another near Manchester. My friends went off to study and have since begun work as teachers, doctors and chemical engineers. I could not help but feel less of a person because my story was that I was a failed asylum seeker whom the press had chastised and vilified. I felt powerless because for years I had enough qualifications to go into higher education but, because I was not allowed to work, I could not afford to pay for my education. Asking my family to help me with costs of almost £10,000 for my tuition alone was not an option”*

Gamu Sadomba, Refugee, STAR Trustee



## ASYLUM SEEKERS ARE NOT INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Asylum seekers and people with DLR or HP are not international students since they haven't chosen to come to the UK to study. They have come here because they had no choice but to flee and seek our protection from war, torture and persecution. Introducing an Equal Access policy ensures admittance is based on educational merit and capability rather than financial background.

*“I arrived in the UK as a teenager together with my family. We had to flee the Democratic Republic of Congo (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.”*

Jonatane Bidiaka Budiaki, LLB, LLM, Refugee

## THE POWER OF EDUCATION IS LIFE CHANGING

University provides a safe, empowering environment where people fleeing persecution can make friends and learn new skills. Studies have shown that education can mitigate the negative effects of traumatic experiences.<sup>5</sup> Educating asylum seekers benefits everyone; if they go on to receive refugee status they will be able to contribute to the UK economy. Alternatively, if it becomes safe for them to one day return home then it ensures that they have the skills needed to reconstruct their countries post conflict. Enabling people to go to university not only enables asylum seekers to follow their dreams but means that universities can benefit from the contributions of the most gifted students from different cultures and perspectives.

<sup>1</sup> Bis Research Paper No. 146 (2013) [The Benefits of Higher Education Participation for Individuals and Society: key findings and reports “The Quadrants”](#)

<sup>2</sup> Walker & Zhu, BIS, 2013. [The impact of university degrees on the lifecycle of earnings: some further analysis](#)

<sup>3</sup> OECD 2011 [Education at a Glance 2011: OECD Indicator](#)

<sup>4</sup> Refugee Support network, 2012. [I just want to study](#)

<sup>5</sup> Hopkins, P and Hill, M. 2010. “The Needs and Strengths of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Young People in Scotland”, Child and Family Social Work, February 2010, pp 1-10.

# Campaigning for Equal Access

There are many different routes to campaigning for Equal Access, so don't feel you have to follow all these steps. Take a look at our various [case studies](#) to see how Equal Access was achieved at other universities.

## GETTING STARTED

### Research your university's policy

Contact your admissions office and find out what your university's policy is for asylum seekers, people with Discretionary Leave to Remain and those with Humanitarian Protection. It may be that the university charges home fees on a discretionary basis. Either way, having your university's policy in writing is the vital first step in finding out what change is needed.

### Speak to STAR

Get in touch with STAR's dedicated Equal Access to University Coordinator ([equalaccess@star-network.org.uk](mailto:equalaccess@star-network.org.uk)) who will help you plan and deliver your campaign strategy. STAR is here to share resources and give you information.

### Arrange a meeting with your Students' Union

Students' Unions are great places to go for advice and help with campaigns. Many have a member of staff or elected student officer who is responsible for campaigns. They understand who the key decision makers are. Getting SU officers on board with the campaign can be incredibly helpful!

## CAMPAIGN IDEAS

### Demonstrate support from your fellow students

Take a look at our [campaign action ideas](#). STAR groups have done petitions and photo campaigns with a sign saying "I support Equal Access" ([template petition](#)). Other methods include taking a motion to your student council ([template motion](#)) to ensure that the Students' Union is democratically mandated to do something about this issue. Get creative; there are loads of different ways you can demonstrate support for the campaign.

### Demonstrate support from university staff

Whether they are academics, professional staff, or administrative staff, demonstrating support from staff is incredibly helpful to your campaign. It proves that the university community supports refugees and means the decision makers have more people to answer to if they refuse to get on board with the campaign. You could get in touch with your local UCU branch or check if the university has any departments or research centres that deal with refugees or migration issues. You may find that some staff are passionate to help and want to get more involved in the campaign!

### Demonstrate support from your wider community

Proving that your local community is welcoming to people seeking refugee protection may encourage the university. Check if you're in a [City of Sanctuary](#) and if so, get in touch with your local branch to get their support. You could also contact local refugee organisations to ask them to back your campaign. They may be able to provide a statement stating that they would support any asylum seeking students that the university accepted. They could also help you demonstrate the need for equal access by providing case studies of asylum seekers looking to go to university in the local area. You could also ask your local MP or local councillors to back your campaign.



### Take a proposal to your university

Most university decisions are made through committees. Therefore, writing a persuasive proposal or letter outlining why your university should adopt equal access can be a powerful tool. Make sure that you write clearly and fact check everything. It also helps to make it personal to your university and local area. Things to research when writing your proposal:

- a) Your university's strategy: each university will have a strategy. Often this includes aspirational aims around internationalisation, global citizenship and widening participation. In your proposal, try to demonstrate how equal access fits into the university's strategy.
- b) Departments, programmes or units: see if your university has a centre for migration studies or offers any courses to do with migration or asylum issues. Mention this in your proposal to remind the university of their commitment to this issue.

Take a look at our guide on [dealing with difficult questions](#). And remember, STAR has a dedicated Equal Access to University Coordinator, so get in touch ([equalaccess@star-network.org.uk](mailto:equalaccess@star-network.org.uk)) and we can look over your proposal before you submit it.

## SEALING THE DEAL

### Stay involved in the conversation

When your university has agreed to discuss Equal Access, it's crucial that you stay involved. Going to a meeting with senior university staff can be a little scary but as a student you have a powerful voice. If you're not at the meeting speaking on behalf of your proposal, it is easier for the committee to get side-tracked and decide against it. Get in touch with STAR as we can help you prepare for your meeting or one of us can accompany you to the meeting for support.

### Don't refuse to compromise

Don't feel you have to win everything straight away. Campaigning is about steps to change and sometimes, in the long run it's better to make concessions. Find out what kind of scholarships your institution already offers and you will get a better sense of what would be suitable to ask for. If it doesn't look like your university is going to offer a living costs grant, then a tuition fee waiver is a good place to start; you can ask for the scholarship the following year! Different universities will have different financial resources, and any form of help is better than none at all. Being stubborn isn't always helpful; you have to put the best interests of asylum seekers first.

## AFTER YOU'VE WON!

### Getting the word out there

Once your university has agreed to introduce an Equal Access policy make sure you celebrate and spread the word! Some universities have only had a small number of applicants in the first couple of years of introducing their scholarship because potential applicants don't know about them, so it's important that you do all you can to help publicise your university's equal access policies.

Here are our top tips when it comes to spreading the word

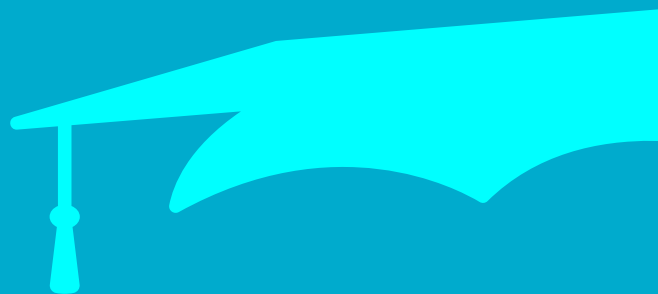
1. Tell STAR so we can add it to our [list of universities with Equal Access](#).
2. Publicise all year round so that people seeking refugee protection know which universities to apply to. This is especially useful between August and January when students are submitting their UCAS applications.
3. Tell local refugee and migrant organisations.
4. Tell local schools and colleges; here's a [template letter](#) you can send to your old school!
5. Ask your university to provide a named contact on their scholarship webpage so that potential applicants can get in touch.
6. Get a press release in the local newspaper.

## WIDENING PARTICIPATION

Universities have widening participation strategies but asylum seekers and people with limited leave to remain are rarely recognised in them. Most universities already offer a variety of financial support to other disadvantaged groups such as first generation scholars, students from low income families and care-leavers. STAR and NUS want refugees and asylum seekers to be included in these strategies too.



# Facts about refugees



The global refugee crisis has seen an estimated 12.4 million people driven from their homes by war, torture and persecution in 2015, but there were only 32,414 people claims for asylum in the UK. Most came from Eritrea (3,729), followed by Iran (3,248), Sudan (2,918) and Syria (2,609), countries with widespread human rights abuses. The current refugee crisis has had a far more significant impact on our European neighbours than the UK; the highest rate was Germany which received 476,510 applications, followed by Sweden (162,450) and Hungary (177,135).

- A refugee is a person who 'owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, 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; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it' (United Nations High Commission for Refugees).
- An asylum seeker is someone who has fled their country in 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.
- Humanitarian Protection is granted to people who arrive through resettlement programmes, which is the case for Syrian refugees arriving in the UK through the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS).
- Discretionary Leave to Remain (DLR) is sometimes granted to people who have applied for asylum and after some years they are able to apply for British Citizenship.
- Last year, 35% of refused asylum claims were overturned in appeal, indicating that the initial decision had been made incorrectly.
- People who are granted refugee status are classed as home students and can access student finance.
- Student finance is a devolved matter; the regulations are different in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- The fee regulations in England and Wales were set out in 1997 in a Statutory Instrument (1997 No. 1972) which established how higher education institutions operate the then new, student fee structure. These Regulations were then amended in 2011 (Statutory Instrument 2011 No. 87) to also exclude people in England with DLR. They were amended again in 2016 to include some people with DLR (2016 No. 584).

**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?**

## UNIVERSITIES OF SANCTUARY

Universities of Sanctuary is an initiative through which universities can build good practice in welcoming asylum seekers and refugees into their community.

Universities of Sanctuary is part of the Cities of Sanctuary movement and they have created a handbook showcasing the variety of ways that universities can be welcoming to asylum seekers; offering practical ideas and inspiration for how to make universities into places of sanctuary. It encourages universities to:

1. Do everything possible to secure equal access to higher education for asylum seekers.
2. Reach out to and support asylum seekers in their local communities who could benefit from university resources in a sustainable way.
3. Undertake activities to nurture a welcoming culture across all parts of the institution.

# Further Campaign Resources:

## [Dealing with difficult questions](#)

How to respond to difficult questions your university might ask you

## [Campaign action ideas](#)

A list of ideas to get your campaign noticed!

## [Template motion](#)

A template motion to take to your student council

## [Template petition](#)

A template petition to print off and get people to sign

## [Case studies](#)

Get inspired by other students who campaigned for equal access

## [Full list of universities with Equal Access](#)

Show your university that now is the time to act!

## [Template letter to your old school](#)

Tell your old school about the scholarships for asylum seekers

# Further Research

■ Refugee Council (2013), [A lot to learn: refugees, asylum seekers and post-16 learning](#)

■ Refugee Support Network (2012) | [just want to study: Access to Higher Education for Young Refugees and Asylum Seekers](#)

■ Refugee Children's Consortium: [Briefing on Access to Higher Education for Refugee Young People](#)

■ Coram Migrant Children's Project, July 2016: [Fact sheet on Access to higher education for young refugees and migrants](#)

# Get in touch!

STAR and NUS are here to help you with this campaign, so please do not hesitate to get in touch with us. We can chat about how to get your campaign off the ground or provide more tailored advice and support when things start to get a little difficult negotiating with your university. We'd love to hear from you!

## STUDENT ACTION FOR REFUGEES

Equal Access to University Coordinator

**e:** [equalaccess@star-network.org.uk](mailto:equalaccess@star-network.org.uk)

**p:** 0207 697 4136

[www.star-network.org.uk](http://www.star-network.org.uk)

## NATIONAL UNION OF STUDENTS

Alaa Elaydi, Policy Officer (International)

**e:** [alaa.elaydi@nus.org.uk](mailto:alaa.elaydi@nus.org.uk)

**m:** 07813 015550

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