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