## City of Sanctuary Midlands Regional Conference

# Workshop notes – Universities of Sanctuary

Different universities have different experiences – building on a scholarship programme; wish to turn intention into practical reality; individual initiative; adding coordination and an ‘umbrella’ to various activities already going on. However, some elements must be common: support from the university leadership; a group of enthusiasts working from the bottom-up; student involvement; someone able to navigate university administrative systems. Links with local CoS groups are helpful too.

## Discussion points

ESOL and English for Academic Purposes are a key need; offering spare places free to sanctuary seekers is easy and essentially zero-cost. Staff may be willing to help and up-skill volunteer ESOL teachers too.

Hold a campus Refugee Week as the national one is outside term time: STAR have an action week every March so that could be an opportunity for campus-based events focused on refugee issues

I will be sending an e-mail to everyone who came on Saturday. I plan to include any notes and presentations as part of that so will include your notes if that is OK and then everyone who was there will get it. I can ensure that Abigail gets it and the steering group as well. Let me know if you are OK with that.

Identify and remove simple barriers (e.g. unaffordable application fees, IELTS fees) - local partners can help identify such barriers

Be able to refer students elsewhere for preparation if not yet ready for university

Migration, asylum and refugee issues are important research topics; research interests can help engage academics with practical aspects of supporting sanctuary seekers.

Follow ethical storytelling principles – don’t invade privacy or press sanctuary seekers to tell their stories if reluctant

Include CARA activity (Council for At-Risk Academics) as part of the support for sanctuary seekers (HEI contacts at <https://www.cara.ngo/who-we-are/partners-and-supporters/cara-scholars-at-risk-uk-universities-network/> )

Recognise the positive benefits sanctuary seekers bring to the university community

Aleks Palanac is setting up a JiscMail group which should be ready soon – address probably sanctuary@jiscmail.com but to be confirmed.

## Essentials for University of Sanctuary status should include

* Explicit commitment from Vice Chancellor / University leadership
* Adoption of CoS Charter and link to university strategic plan and KPIs (e.g. connected to diversity / widening participation plans)
* Establishment of a steering group
* Working relationship with local CoS group, if one exists (and possibly help form one if it doesn’t)
* Scholarship programme (fees plus living costs) on a scale commensurate with the sie of the university
* Clear pathways provided to help students access university and avail themselves of support provided
* Formation of a STAR (<http://www.star-network.org.uk/> ) group or equivalent
* Language support (ESOL / IELTS etc)
* Access to and help with qualifications checking via NARIC
* Appointment of a designated person whose job (or part of whose job) it is to advise on scholarships/applications etc
* Appointment of a person (probably same as above) to whom sanctuary seeker students can turn for confidential support

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