

COLLEGES of SANCTUARY Resource Pack



City of Sanctuary

Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights enshrines the right to education. But many people face huge disruption to their education in times of conflict, or as a result of fleeing their homes. Yet, it is during these times that education can be most valuable; it can bring a sense of normality and control to a person's daily life, it can provide a safe space for them, and it can provide hope for a better future.

If you are interested in becoming a **FE College of Sanctuary** then please read on - this Resource Pack has been written to inspire you and guide you. It shares and celebrates just a glimpse of the amazing work going on in Further Education colleges around the UK today and provides plenty of practical tips to get you up and running. Please also check out [our website](#) for more information, case studies and resources from around the CoS UK network.

Please note that there is a fee of £450 for Colleges applying for the award to help support CoS UK sustain the growth of resources for FE colleges and undertake the appraisal process.

Please note: for our purposes, we are referring to Further Education Colleges in this stream. English Sixth Form Colleges are considered as Schools of Sanctuary and we suggest those institutions refer to the **[Schools of Sanctuary website](#)** and resource pack.

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Becoming a COLLEGE of SANCTUARY

City of Sanctuary

City of Sanctuary is a **network** contributing to building the movement for **welcome** and inclusion in the UK. We promote understanding, recognition and celebration of the ways in which **people seeking sanctuary enrich society**. Our goal is to create a network of places that are proud to offer safety to people seeking sanctuary and local communities which are inclusive and welcoming.

The City of Sanctuary vision began in October 2005 in Sheffield. Since then, over 120 City of Sanctuary initiatives have been established by local people in towns and cities across the UK and Ireland. The network of local groups usually includes people seeking sanctuary and brings refugee support groups and other organisations together.

Local groups commonly work to gain support from a wide range of groups and organisations in their community, which can take the form of a support pledge and Sanctuary Awards.

“Further Education Colleges are often the first place people seeking sanctuary encounter educational opportunities in the UK, either through ESOL classes or to gain new professional qualifications. The experience they have on campus will shape their futures in their new country; receiving thoughtful support and attention is crucial to ensuring students from a background of seeking sanctuary can learn and achieve the best possible outcomes.

For this reason, FE Colleges that demonstrate a commitment to a campus-wide welcome are ones that we at CoS UK want to celebrate with a sanctuary award across our network”

Sara Trewitt, CoS UK

Refugees need practical and fast paths to integrate into new societies. This begins with quality education.

Eloise Todd

Streams of Sanctuary

A Stream of Sanctuary encourages professionals or practitioners within 'communities of practices or interests' to come together to embed the concepts of welcome, safety and inclusion within their professions, sectors and organisations. We believe the sanctuary message of welcome and inclusion is vital in all spheres of society.

We are committed to helping the education sector, health and maternity services, faith groups, theatres and arts centres and other focal points in local communities to become **‘places of sanctuary’**. A key element of these streams of sanctuary is awareness raising; giving a platform to the voices of people seeking sanctuary, so that they can be heard by those who might otherwise never hear them. Colleges of Sanctuary is one of these streams.



City of Sanctuary Values

The City of Sanctuary organisation and network is guided and informed by a commitment to the following values, as enshrined in our [Charter](#):

Inclusiveness: We welcome and respect people from all backgrounds, place the highest value on diversity and are committed to equality.

Openness: We are committed to a culture of working collaboratively within the network and in partnership with others.

Participation: Those who support our vision work together with people seeking sanctuary. We value and recognise the contribution of all involved. We aspire to ensure people seeking sanctuary are fully involved in decision-making processes and supported to become leaders within the City of Sanctuary organisation and network as well as the wider movement.

Inspiration: We work with enthusiasm and positivity and are determined to surpass what has already been achieved to welcome refugees and people seeking sanctuary. We act as a catalyst for change by being open to new and innovative ideas and through sharing knowledge gained with others and working in partnership.

Integrity: We aspire to high standards of honesty and behaviour, and always act in the interests of people seeking sanctuary.

The values are outlined in the [CoS Charter](#) which was developed as the strategic framework for the work of the City of Sanctuary UK organisation and the networks we support.

What is a College of Sanctuary?

A College of Sanctuary is a college that has been recognised for its work with refugees and asylum seekers. It is a place that fosters a culture of welcome and safety for people seeking sanctuary, including asylum seeking and refugee families and unaccompanied minors.

Every college is different and so the way that a culture of welcome manifests itself varies greatly. The award could reflect their efforts to improve the **awareness** of their student and staff body about the challenges facing people seeking sanctuary. It might also include colleges which go the extra mile to support students from sanctuary seeking backgrounds to **achieve their potential**, maybe through pastoral care, exceptional **ESOL** provision or careers guidance. It can also be about very **practical** things such as allowing their sports facilities to be used by local people who are seeking sanctuary outside of term time or **fundraising** for their local refugee support organisation.



Why become a College of Sanctuary?

Colleges are often at the forefront of receiving and supporting those forcibly displaced. For many young people, further education colleges are where they begin their education in the UK. The support colleges provide is instrumental in helping these young people get the education that will allow them to thrive in the UK.

For adult learners in particular, the benefits of accessing education ensures that they have the language and other skills to integrate into a new area, make friends, find jobs and support their own children with their learning.

In addition, learners in the UK who have not faced conflict or displacement, need not only to learn about these issues but where possible meet people face-to-face who have **lived experience** of displacement in order to understand both their local communities and the wider world better.

Colleges of Sanctuary teach the importance of integration, and help people seeking sanctuary strive for continuous improvement.

Arooba, student with a sanctuary seeking background

Recent research by UNICEF and Refugee Education UK identified that the three most significant overarching supportive factors, affecting progression to both FE and HE, were:

- **Persistent support through challenging times**
- **Personal resilience**
- **Welcoming and encouraging educational environments**

Link to report

<https://www.unicef.org.uk/policy/education-transitions-refugees-report/>

Becoming a College of Sanctuary brings a wealth of benefits to an institution, its students, staff and the local community.

Some of these include:

- Supporting sanctuary seeking students to enrich classroom discussion and campus life by bringing new perspectives and cultures together

- Establishing a culture of welcome for sanctuary seekers, where people feel valued and safe, will have knock-on benefits for all learners who will be able to achieve more because of the nurturing environment of the college.

- Equipping students to go into a range of professions with the necessary skills to address barriers to equal opportunities and ensure welcome and inclusion.

- Being a part of a dynamic group of colleges in a network working to improve the culture of sanctuary in education and in society generally.

- Taking a practical, public step towards inclusion, and countering discourses of xenophobia and racism both within and outside college life.

- Improving pastoral care at colleges as a result of recognising the background that sanctuary seekers may have experienced.

- Making a strong statement of principle in support of the Black Lives Matter Movement and against the hostile environment and dehumanising immigration policies.

How to become a College of Sanctuary

STEP ONE - Contact the [nearest local City of Sanctuary group](#), or City of Sanctuary [regional coordinator](#) and express your interest in pursuing the award.

STEP TWO - Read and review this resource pack and the Colleges of Sanctuary website for ideas and inspiration.

STEP THREE - Sign up to an [organisational pledge](#), committing the college to acknowledge and support the [CoS charter & organisational values](#)

STEP FOUR - Undertake an audit of what the college has done to date to meet the [award minimum criteria](#). Consider who in your college may be seeking sanctuary and what support they may need, as well how your curriculum planning could be adapted to include learning about sanctuary.

STEP FIVE - Create a plan to fulfil outstanding criteria and consider linking this to the college strategy or development plan. Decide how you will evidence against the plan. Ideally, develop this plan in collaboration with a local CoS group, other aspiring or accredited Colleges of Sanctuary or other partner organisations near you.

STEP SIX - Ensure your application journey is documented and celebrated via social and local media and in the college and wider community.

STEP SEVEN - Complete and [submit an application](#) to the local CoS group, partner organisation, Regional Coordinator or via the CoS UK website.

STEP EIGHT - An appraisal panel will be selected, and a site visit will be organised, if possible, or a virtual meeting arranged. The panel might include members of the local CoS group, partner organisation (such as Refugee Support Network) or the CoS UK staff team. They will make a decision about whether to grant the award and identify opportunities for applicants to strengthen their sanctuary activities on campus.

STEP NINE - Once awarded, plan a celebration and highlight achievement on the college website & social media.

STEP TEN - Continue to implement and develop a plan for re-appraisal in three years.

There are three processes that underpin the commitment needed to become a College of Sanctuary:

1 Learn

This means learning about what it means to be seeking sanctuary, both in general (for the community in which the college is situated), and specifically (in the context of education and the college environment).

2 Embed

To embed means to take positive action to incorporate concepts of welcome, safety and inclusion within the institution including, but not limited to, the student body, students' union or council, the principle, departments, faculties, senior leadership and management, administrative and facilities management staff. To take steps to ensure this progress outlasts the current student population.

3 Share

Sharing includes publicising your visions, achievements, what you learned, and good practice with other colleges, the local community and beyond.



COLLEGE OF
SANCTUARY AWARD
WELCOMING ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES

In summary, Colleges of Sanctuary are colleges that **learn** about what it means to be seeking sanctuary, that **embed** concepts of welcome, safety and inclusion into their very fabric, and that **share** and celebrate their achievements.

The notion of a College of Sanctuary requires a **whole-organisation approach**, but it's not one size fits all; the award will reflect the profile, size and local context of the organisation. However, there are some minimum criteria to be met, which are detailed later in this resource pack.

In this section, we take a closer look at each of these processes in turn and illustrate them with case studies of best practice from colleges across the country.

Learn

The learn process encompasses any activity that seeks to improve awareness of the sanctuary-seeking community and the reasons why people are forced to migrate. Knowledge of the asylum system or of the many challenges and institutional barriers which face people seeking sanctuary can help institutions to reflect on how they might help and better focus their efforts. This is often best achieved by including people seeking sanctuary - either by extending learning opportunities to them or finding ways to learn from them.

You may like to consider:

- Visiting another college to learn from their sanctuary initiatives

- Speaking to your local refugee support service to better understand the local context

- Inviting people who are refugees or people seeking asylum to speak to students and learn from their lived experience

- Considering how learning about sanctuary can be integrated into the curricula of relevant courses

- Arranging a visit to or from a local organisation working with refugees & asylum seekers to speak to the college management or staff

- Screening a film or documentary in a staff meeting

- Mapping your curriculum as part of your audit. Ask: What do you want your students to leave college knowing and understanding about refugee/asylum/migration issues?

- Running a training workshop about refugee issues such as mental health (stress, trauma), ESOL or asylum claims

- Providing hand-outs or infographics to dispel common myths about asylum

- Allowing staff members to undertake trainings to understand more about the experience of seeking sanctuary

- Analysing learning outcomes for young people seeking sanctuary in your institution, and developing a strategy to improve these

Training

Training and awareness-raising opportunities on refugee, asylum, trafficking and migration issues is one of the key things we look for when awarding the College of Sanctuary Award.

General training on what it means to be a refugee or asylum seeker is important (these could be provided by a local refugee support organisation, or by an organisation like the British Red Cross, Refugee Action or Scottish Refugee Council/Refugee Council.) There are online learning modules courses offered by [FutureLearn](#) and [Edx.org](#) on displacement, migration and supporting refugees and asylum seekers. But you might also want to consider whether specific roles within the college need specialist training. For instance, pastoral staff might need training about the types of issues commonly encountered by people seeking sanctuary.

Equally, staff working in admissions might need more technical training in order to best help new students. The Refugee Council conducted many interviews with asylum seekers and found that staff perceptions of their status were often a barrier. Many students felt like staff did not understand their situation. The interviewees requested that knowledge about refugee issues were shared among all staff, including information on the processes asylum seekers have to go through, the forms they have to complete and the support they can receive.

Check out the [CoS UK webpage](#) for more information and ideas on training opportunities.

Sanctuary in Politics Course

The first Sanctuary in Politics led by CoS UK course took place at Preston College in 2018. The aim of the course is to support students to gain skills in advocacy and campaigning. It consists of a series of modules about how the political system works, campaigning and working with the media effectively. Since its development, the course has been run across the UK and Ireland.



“The best thing is that the training not only gives knowledge but also gives participants the opportunity to implement what they have learnt into a project. I like the flexibility of the CoS team and their understanding”

Sanctuary in Politics Participant

Embed

Embedding ideas is essential to ensure that the culture of welcome is sustainable. This is particularly important for colleges, as a sizeable portion of their community is transient. We want changes to be far-reaching, tangible and long-lasting.

You may like to consider:

- Including students from sanctuary backgrounds in the development of sanctuary initiatives

- Having a refugee champion within the outreach team who is knowledgeable about the eligibility requirements and can explain them to prospective students

- Having a designated member/team of staff who is responsible for the well-being of students with sanctuary seeking backgrounds and including this responsibility in their job description so that if they move on, their replacement will continue the work

- Training staff on what the barriers to accessing education might be for people seeking sanctuary

- Ensuring that students from sanctuary seeking backgrounds have a say in the development of initiatives

- Supporting student led activism or awareness raising in this area

- Including sanctuary initiatives in the strategic plans of the college

- Embedding learning about forced migration into the curriculum



Share

Colleges often occupy a key role within their local area and so can be a source of inspiration to other educational institutions, businesses and organisations. They are seen as central institutions and can act as role models for inclusion, compassion and the celebration of diversity.

As well as developing a wider culture of welcome in the local area, you can also tap into the national (or international) network of colleges to spread the ethos within the sector. This can be done through local media, conferences, open days or social media.

Examples included under share might be:

- Hosting events for Refugee Week

- A twitter takeover to highlight the experiences of sanctuary seeking students

- Inviting local media to events which celebrate the contribution of sanctuary seekers to the college and local community

- Offering to give a presentation or talk to another college in the area that wants to become more inclusive

- Contribute to the City of Sanctuary newsletters, webpages, conferences and forums

- Share good practice with the College of Sanctuary network



“Together we are Stronger”

“Together we are Stronger”

The Sheffield College

Over the past year students have been involved in a project called

“Together we are Stronger.”

It included the 16-18 ESOL students giving a presentation to bid for funding from The Home Office. The funding was part of an initiative to encourage people seeking sanctuary to engage in sport to support their integration into life in the UK. The students chosen were either traumatised by the effects of war, or extremely vulnerable and therefore would benefit the most from this project. It has been incredibly instrumental in opening the learners' minds to the possibility of a happier, more secure future in the UK.

They really rose to the challenge, were completely dedicated and forged

“forever friendships”

with Asylum Seekers and Refugees from numerous groups of young people throughout the city.

They covered a range of activities from

“Critical Thinking”

sessions to

“Team Building”

games and

“Sports Tournaments”

hosted by the English Institute of Sport. The critical thinking sessions have proved to be an invaluable means of bridging the study skills gap that the ESOL learners often struggle to navigate.

It has meant that they are much better prepared for moving to the Level One and Two vocational areas, as they can now plan and write assignments and essays which adhere to the criteria of the Functional Skills and GCSE Syllabuses.

Another component of the project was team building. Students from Burngreave Big Brother group buddy up with other new young people seeking sanctuary in the area. Their passionate role models inspired the Sheffield College students to join in and we have found that these groups are beginning to merge, with students becoming “Big Brothers” and “Big Sisters” and in turn those young people went on to enroll at the college the following year.

Further enrichment came via sport sessions that took place during the programme which allowed sanctuary seeking students to try new activities they had never done before such as rock climbing, ice skating, bowling and dodgeball. These activities raised all the participants' confidence levels and they flourished in an atmosphere of mutual respect, tolerance and inclusion.

All the students received a Certificate of Participation and a few of them even achieved an Award in Leadership.



“Being acknowledged as a College of Sanctuary also comes with a level of responsibility - to share our vision and pride in both our learners' achievements and also the committed work of the staff to build this safe and welcoming environment, with the wider FE sector.

Derby College is currently involved in planning a Teach meet with the Skills and Education Group which will be an opportunity to share our good practice in this field and also showcases our ideas and projects through other regional City of Sanctuary networks”

Diana Smith, Derby College

“Feeling welcomed at a College has helped me in many ways (make friends, get skills, find opportunities, gaining confidence, giving back to my community). In an ever changing and challenging world, I believe Education is now more than ever important especially for people seeking Sanctuary; I always say that the best tool in life you can give a person is Education.”

Samsoudini Mohamed Abdou Moussa, student from a sanctuary seeking background

Minimum Criteria

LEARN

1. Training and awareness-raising opportunities are provided for college staff and senior management on refugee, asylum, trafficking and migration issues.

2. Commit to raising awareness of sanctuary issues amongst students. This might be through the curriculum, where relevant, or as additional sessions such as during the student induction.

EMBED

3. A dedicated member of staff/team of staff as a contact point for sanctuary students. This provision should be communicated to the students, be easily accessible and the staff member(s) must be appropriately trained.

4. Commitment to supporting active student voice on sanctuary and welcoming activities in the college. For example, this might mean supporting the establishment of a student-led awareness group or ensuring that your student council, governors or other student-led groups are actively involved in the process of working towards recognition.

5. If your college has students from a sanctuary seeking background, ensure that there is a plan in place for a holistic assessment of their needs and an enhanced induction. This should include a language assessment and an assessment of previous education and gaps in education as well as interests and aspirations. Try to find ways in which the young person can be supported to develop their interests even if this is via an extra-curricular programme.

NB: You may need to use an interpreter for this. Also ensure that any responsible adults in the young person's life are involved in this process so that they can continue to support and complement the work of the college.

6. Recognition of and participation in the annual Refugee Week or other annual/regular celebratory events which highlight the contribution of people seeking sanctuary and migrants to the UK.

7. The college should demonstrate how it will continue to develop and sustain a culture of welcome beyond the award and ideally, this should be linked to or made clear in policy documents and induction for new staff. This strategy should also consider how the college will widen participation to courses and projects to those seeking sanctuary.

8. Wherever possible, ensure that people seeking sanctuary are involved in the development of your plans and action and on relevant committees.

9. Active engagement with the wider community including people seeking sanctuary. Where relevant, this may also include the local City of Sanctuary network or refugee support organisations or local authority.

SHARE

10. A public commitment to the City of Sanctuary vision of welcome, including the endorsement of the [City of Sanctuary charter and signing up to organisational pledge of support](#). This pledge should be included on the college's website and/or in a public space in the college. Some local City of Sanctuary groups have their own pledge and therefore colleges would be encouraged to sign these pledges if appropriate.

11. Celebrate and promote the welcome and contribution of people seeking sanctuary. The college publicly highlights its activities in support of welcome and inclusion. This can include social media/website posts, newsletter updates or attending regional activities or meetings.

12. Commitment to on-going engagement with the Colleges of Sanctuary stream. This may include sharing resources, ideas and achievements via the college's website or the national City of Sanctuary website, and/or with other colleges and at conferences and meetings.

REFUGEE WEEK

Leeds City College Refugee Week

Leeds City College worked with Leeds City Museum during Refugee Week and gained funding for an art project in which students attended weekly art classes at the college and had their final pieces displayed at Leeds Museum entitled

‘Picture My World’.



Award Assessment Process

The College Application form can be found on the Colleges [website](#). Your completed application will be assessed by an appraisal group made up of one or more professionals in the sector, experts by experience, members of the local City of Sanctuary group or your City of Sanctuary regional coordinator.

They will read and provide feedback on the application and arrange for a visit to the college to discuss any areas for improvement or requests for more information and evidence. These conversations are often a very productive way to hone the aspirations of the college and identify its particular strengths. A formal decision is then provided by the appraisal team in writing. In some cases, we will identify recommendations to help colleges improve in certain areas, before they can progress to the appraisal.

If a positive decision is made, the appraisal group will discuss with you when and where you would like the certificate of recognition to be presented. The award presentation can be linked to a public celebratory event and is an opportunity to engage positively with the media.

Following an award, colleges will be accredited for three years. During this time, they are expected to continue to meet the minimum criteria. After three years, the college can apply to continue their recognition, signified by the giving of a second award, providing they can show evidence that sufficient progress has been made.

There is a fee of £450 for Colleges applying for the award to help support CoS UK sustain the growth of resources for FE colleges and undertake the appraisal process.

How long does it take to become a College of Sanctuary?

Every college is different and the journey to becoming a College of Sanctuary is unique - so there is no standard or expected length of time to complete the process. Some colleges may have already met many of the criteria and may only need to document their efforts and share their work with CoS UK for recognition.

Other colleges may have significant learning to do about sanctuary issues and may need more time to embed best practice. We also recognise that colleges without pupils from a sanctuary seeking background may have less direct experience and want to spend more time learning about asylum and migration in the UK context.

In general, we suggest that colleges commit to spending a full academic year completing the process so that there is ample time to work on ensuring they achieve the criteria and fully embed the ethos of welcome across the whole institution. Often setting a target award date helps create momentum for completion; Refugee Week in June is a popular time to celebrate the achievement of an award.

“It is also incumbent upon us to maintain and strengthen the great work which goes on and the College of Sanctuary steering group, which meets throughout the year, oversees this.”

Diana Smith, Derby College

Belfast Metropolitan College

Listening to learners with lived experience

Testimonial - Belfast Metropolitan College

‘My name is Daffulla, I have been living in Belfast since 2016 as a family reunion. I joined Belfast Met as a highly recommended location to improve my English language skills. I studied Level 1 and 2 ESOL plus the Cambridge Advanced English Certificate. Studying English language at the Belfast Met not only enhanced my English language abilities, but also, I experienced studying in an extremely joyful and friendly environment with unlimited cooperation and help from all the staff of the college.

I would like to express my deep thanks and appreciation to all Belfast Met staff for all their help and support. My thanks expanded also to the Belfast community for welcoming migrants from different countries, and of course my thanks and gratitude to University of Ulster staff for all their assistance and encouragement during my postgraduate study.’

Daffulla Abdulla Bkheet Hamid, who studied at Belfast Metropolitan College

‘I was forced to leave Syria with my family because of the war. We were refugees in Jordan for a few years before being resettled through the Vulnerable Person Relocation Scheme (VPRS) in Northern Ireland – Lurgan. I was able to match my previous qualifications as equivalent to A levels in the UK and my determination to speak English let me progress to an IELTS Level 1 preparation course at Belfast Met.

We also covered personal development, good relations and awareness of diversity in Northern Ireland, citizenship and employment.

I felt especially included and welcome at Belfast Met. The people in Northern Ireland have only shown me kindness. The college staff have also helped me with all aspects of my life, not just my education – but things like housing too.

My family came here looking for a safe place and we found it. I am living my best life here in Northern Ireland and everyone around me is friendly. Now I am confident I am going to have a good life and achieve my goals.’

Hassan Al Khawam – testimonial - Belfast Metropolitan College

Guidance for submitting an application

In this section we will provide some guidance notes, to be read alongside the form, on how to answer the questions in the application.

Q: Please provide a summary of how your organisation engages with people seeking sanctuary.

In this section, outline the ways you have engaged with people seeking sanctuary. How has your college sought to build relationships with local people seeking sanctuary? Has it formed partnerships with any local support organisations? What about the student body - have those within it who have a background of forced migration been consulted on your initiatives? Is there a mechanism for feedback from them?

Q: Using the 3 processes of the Sanctuary Award, please reflect on how you have achieved these processes, attaching evidence to support your answer.

Here we are looking for evidence of your initiatives, projects, policies and progress. Even if something is ongoing, include it as it helps to build a picture of how the college is developing. Try to be concise but don't assume that the recognition team will have knowledge of your college (so please explain all acronyms and give context where necessary). See the previous sections for more detail on what is required for each of the key areas - **Learn, Embed, Share.**

Q: How does your organisation intend to build on your achievements over the next 3 years in order that your award can be renewed?

We want to acknowledge and celebrate institutions which show a commitment to the processes in the long-term and which have a forward-looking approach; receipt of the sanctuary award is just the beginning! Every institution will need to re-apply after 3 years to retain its award and ensure a lasting commitment.

So, use this section of the application form as an opportunity to share information about your strategic planning.

Has your college demonstrated a sustainable commitment to improving access to education in the foreseeable future? How will it reevaluate and adapt to improve the experience for people seeking sanctuary? What happens when key staff members or the current cohort of students have moved on? How will the college ensure the engagement continues? What evidence is there that this commitment will continue after the award is granted?

For example, is it embedded in the college's mission statement, strategic plan or various policies and procedures? Are sanctuary initiatives included in someone's job description so that if they move on, their replacement will carry on the work?

Q: Please identify how people seeking sanctuary have been involved in helping you achieve these processes.

All applications for a Sanctuary Award are expected to involve people seeking sanctuary, refugees and migrants, in the planning, delivery and/or evaluation of activities for each of the processes, where appropriate.

Building on the examples you have given, identify the ways in which people seeking sanctuary have contributed to these successes. For instance, have you learnt from them directly as 'experts by experience'? Does the college take note of feedback from sanctuary scholars and adapt accordingly?

And, importantly, has the college ensured that there are mechanisms for critical feedback, particularly from people seeking sanctuary; which enable them to be honest, anonymous and confident that there will be no negative implications on their learning?



Additional points to include where relevant:

Evidence of self-evaluation

Do students, staff and others involved feel that the college has met the processes? How do you know?

Feedback from others involved

Has feedback from the local community, prospective students or the refugee and migrant support sector been taken into account? Have there been any changes or actions arising from the activities?

Feedback from refugee/migrant involvement

It is always useful to include quotes or comments from an asylum-seeker, refugee or other migrant who has engaged with any aspect of the college's endeavours.

Focus

Safeguarding

Safeguarding is a concern for all education institutions but working with people from sanctuary seeking backgrounds requires a deeper understanding of the issues they may face and an awareness of how best to help someone within a local context.

One example of where enhanced safeguarding policies may be important is in the case of **trafficked children**, or those suspected of being trafficked. These children are at a high risk of being re-trafficked and therefore any unexplained absences or failure to attend classes should be investigated promptly. This information will not be readily available to colleges in the case of adults but it is important that where it is known, the correct precautions are taken as they may still be vulnerable to re-trafficking.

Other safeguarding issues frequently seen in colleges working with refugee and asylum seeking students include **homelessness, suicide ideation and self-harm, gang and drug related exploitation including county lines** (this is the term used to describe a form of organised crime where criminals based in urban areas pressurise vulnerable people and children to transport, store and sell drugs in smaller county towns).

We really encourage colleges to make links with their local City of Sanctuary group or local refugee support organisation. Having a strong working relationship with these organisations can be beneficial as it means that staff can reach out for support if an issue arises or can **signpost** the student to someone who might be able to provide more specialist assistance. Additional resource agencies can be found in the Resources section.

Free Thinking

The Free Thinking programme is a residential course for survivors of modern slavery, based at The Northern College, Barnsley. The course intends to develop students' confidence and skills through a creative curriculum. The content of the course includes confidence building, study and digital skills, development of communication, team building skills, Geography and History of the UK, the Equality Act and discrimination, understanding body language and employment skills. Students must have been through the NRM to qualify to attend the course.

For more details please contact pgibson@northern.ac.uk.



Focus

English Language

For many people seeking sanctuary, learning English is a gateway to accessing other education, paid work and a sense of belonging in their new home. However, accessing ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) is not always straightforward; cuts to funding, confusion over eligibility, mental health and childcare are just some of the issues which people might face.

Writing in August 2018, the IPPR think tank argued that "historic under-funding" of ESOL played a significant part in "curtailing the ability of mainstream public services to support integration and disproportionately affected services that migrants rely on for integration support". [Refugee Action](#) have been at the forefront of the campaign to improve access to ESOL, so check their reports and resources to support sanctuary seekers access English courses.

Colleges might want to focus on how they can improve the learning experience for students seeking sanctuary. A trauma-informed approach to teaching can be a useful tool when considering how best to support these students. Please see the Trauma in the Classroom – English Language Training for Refugees presentation by Aleks Palanac on YouTube in the resources section below.

It is also important to remember that, for someone who has been forced to leave their home, it might be more important to support the student to maintain links via their native language. For example by working with local libraries to find them books in their own language or allowing time in the breaks for them to talk with other students who speak the same language as this will help them to feel at ease and form social networks.

Making links with your local library

ESOL learners from Newcastle City Learning attended either a morning or afternoon session in their class groups accompanied by their class tutor. To promote their engagement the learners were given a quiz to complete which included a feedback section.

Learners enjoyed the visit and found something that could help them now or something that would be of use in the future. They also commented on how friendly and helpful the staff and other library users were.

After the visit, students reported that they would use the library to **"use the computers and read the books, [to] meet a friend and [to] speak with staff"** also for **"printing, photocopy, borrowing books and bringing children to borrow books"**.

Tutors found that this was an extremely worthwhile visit and one which should be repeated in the future.

Focus

Covid

The Covid pandemic brought unprecedented challenges to many sectors and areas of life. Unfortunately, the further education sector is no different and colleges have had to adapt to remote-learning and virtual support for their students. The effects of this crisis have exacerbated many of the challenges facing refugee and asylum seeking students; from increased feelings of loneliness and isolation to further economic hardship. Issues around students' lack of data and devices, online safeguarding and how to teach ESOL virtually are likely to occur. However, there are also opportunities for new ways of working and innovation to help students continue to learn and feel part of college life.

Refugee Education UK have been working with The University of Nottingham to produce a briefing on the effects of Covid on the education of young people seeking sanctuary. You can find a link to this briefing in the resources section at the end of this pack.



For many years, **Gower College Swansea** has supported learners seeking sanctuary into education and guaranteed opportunities for these learners to progress onto higher level courses and employment. Ultimately the goal of any College is to provide opportunity coupled with a safe environment and sanctuary for all learners to achieve their goals and aspirations.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the College met with the support group to see how we could influence and action key issues for the benefit of learners seeking sanctuary.

The main topics they worked together to resolve were:

- **Removal of course enrolment fees so no barrier in place for education**
- **Equality of transportation to support learners travelling to College for education**
- **Digital deprivation to ensure learners were not disadvantaged from their studies**
- **Single point of contact to resolve issues in a timely manner**

Case Study: Fircroft College - ESOL response to COVID19 brings joy to the local community

Fircroft College of Adult Education is a social justice mission-based College situated in Selly Oak Birmingham. Occupying a former Cadbury family home and set in six acres of grounds, Fircroft provides a range of courses that provide the opportunity for students to be residential and stay while they learn.

Being a college that offers adult education, Fircroft works with those often disadvantaged and excluded from education. More recently due to receiving a variety of funding, the college has been able to tailor both its curriculum and approach to widen participation to refugees and asylum seekers. You can read more about their **'Free Thinking programme'** at: <https://www.fircroft.ac.uk/free-thinking>

Speaking of Fircroft's support to those seeking sanctuary, Mel Lenehan Principal and CEO tells us about the college approach:

"As a residential adult college, many of our students describe Fircroft as a retreat for learning, being able to escape the challenges of everyday life. The college provides an immersive, transformative learning experience for adults. It is therefore a natural extension of the College's ethos to extend the opportunities to learn to adults from refugee and asylum seeker communities."

Fircroft's previous community based and volunteer powered ESOL projects Talk English and Midlands Engine came to an end in March 2020 due to COVID19 and they were eager to keep the momentum of their ESOL work in the local community.

Neena Chauhan, Project Manager shares why this was important:

"We have successfully delivered two challenging projects in the past 3 years, working closely with partners in the local community and our amazing volunteer tutors. This has given us great reach into the local community especially with newly arrived asylum seekers and refugees. COVID19 threw a huge spanner in the works and abruptly stopped this progress in March leaving many of our students without any ESOL opportunities. We wanted to ensure we could provide some accessible education as we know this community group experiences a wide range of challenges especially having minimal to no digital access."

Focus

Pastoral Care and Mental Health

The mental health and wellbeing needs of students should be at the centre of any educational environment. When it comes to supporting students from sanctuary seeking backgrounds, this requires some careful thought about how these needs might differ from other groups of students. CoS UK has developed a [resource pack](#) for organisations working with people seeking sanctuary to identify some of the mental health challenges that may be experienced by those that have fled violence to claim asylum in the UK.

A report by UNICEF and Refugee Education UK identified that the process of applying to college or university itself often produces a sense of pressure that "can be extremely triggering". They also found that when students start their education, mental health issues continued to negatively impact students; over a fifth of the young people RSN worked with under their Access to FE programme were, at some stage, at risk of suspension or exclusion as a result of mental health-related behavioural issues.

Students who are also refugees or asylum-seekers may lack the same social support networks that other students have. They may also be dealing with feelings of loss, trauma or shouldering the stigma of being a refugee can include. This is why it is important that the college is proactive in ensuring that students have opportunities to engage with the non-asylum-seeking community of the college in positive ways. It is also important that the college has rigorous anti-racist and anti-bullying policies in place. Check the resource section for a report on how to support. They may also find it harder to navigate the education system in the UK because they are not familiar with it - this can lead to increased anxiety about course or career choices.

It is also recommended that colleges work with parents, carers, social workers and guardians. This might mean sharing targets, curricula or Personal Education Plans or Individual Education Plans with them so that they are able to support the learner outside of college.

Pastoral Care and Preston College

Traditionally, pastoral support for Preston's College's ESOL full time teen (14-18 yrs) programmes was provided by designated specialist ESOL teaching staff. However as the provision expanded it was recognised that the needs of the learners themselves was becoming more complex and required a dedicated Student Manager appointment who could act as a link with the college's support mechanisms. The appointment has been very successful and provided that much needed knowledge of the complexities of asylum seekers and refugee learners to enable tutorial programmes to be sensitively adapted to take into account the cultural and religious beliefs of the learners. For example, the local police were invited into College to talk to the groups once it was realised that for some learners, the police were viewed as people to be avoided, rather from whom to seek assistance in an emergency situation. Sexual health education also focused on UK laws on consent and also the age of consent.

Through pastoral tutorial support programmes, young ESOL learners will have listened to guest speaker presentations on:

- **Safe Drive, Stay Alive**
- **Diet and Nutrition**
- **Addaction: Life shares**
- **Mental Health awareness**
- **Victim Support – Child Sexual**
- **Exploitation and Sexual violence**
- **Police – Hate Crime**

They also will have had group discussions on LGBT, Sexual Health, Finance, bullying, e-safety, Alcohol and Drug Awareness, British Values, PREVENT, Sports Relief activities and other national charities.

Enrichment Opportunities on Campus

Leeds City College established a **Friendship Garden**, which was created by one of the tutors and some students as part of their **Garden Club**. It provides opportunities for students to develop their wider skills, interests and relationships. The creation of a **Friendship Garden** on unused wasteland at the side of their building means that students can now run a **Gardening Club** and also benefit from an outdoor library box. The Garden has enhanced the area to be one of sanctuary, peace and learning.



Halesowen College

Halesowen College - ESOL football

Halesowen have been very proactive in promoting the ethos of sanctuary throughout the college. Here they describe just some of the events they have hosted which brings students seeking sanctuary together with other students to socialise, support each other and have fun.

We had a few ESOL students who were keen to start a football team. This project was supported as part of a Sport England initiative and quickly grew to 28 students who attend a training session each week. The interest from so many students enabled us to create an ESOL football team which has FA accreditation. The team participated in 5 tournaments last year.

In 2019 over 50 students, staff and members of the local community came together on Friday 10th May, to participate in an evening of exciting, competitive football. The event was supported by Birmingham County Football Association to recognise the period of Ramadan.

We began at sunset with prayer and the breaking of the fast, which involved everyone sharing a light meal prepared onsite by College catering staff, before the football tournament commenced. Students from courses including Adult ESOL, Public Services and Sport enjoyed fast paced games against a team of veteran staff.



Student Abdul commented

“This has been a brilliant event for us to enjoy, when we are fasting and observing Ramadan it can be difficult to find time to enjoy sport and socialise with others, so this was a great way to do both.”

To celebrate World Mental Health Day in October, there was a match between our ESOL football team and the College’s 3rd football team which is made up of Sport students – the ESOL team was well supported from the side lines and was victorious. Our ESOL footballers have also had the opportunity to visit Liverpool United Football Club.

Many of our ESOL students would have had nothing to do on Christmas Day, so we organised a Christmas Day football match, which was attended by ESOL students and staff from a large number of College departments. Staff not only cheered on the footballers, but also supplied the refreshments and bought them Christmas gifts. Following the Christmas Day match, ESOL footballers were given tickets to watch West Bromwich Albion play later the same week. This year our ESOL footballers are part of the Birmingham County Flexi College League. This league has enabled us to enter both male and female teams with varying levels of football experience and ability and has encouraged non-sporting students to engage with football activities.



“Halesowen College is delighted to be the first College of Sanctuary in the Midlands. Becoming a College of Sanctuary has given us an opportunity to celebrate the diversity of our students and the positive impact they make within the college and the wider community. We will continue to raise awareness of the issues faced by people seeking sanctuary and further develop ways to work with City of Sanctuary.”

Erika Wallington,
Halesowen College

COVID

Working in partnership with **Birmingham Centre of Art Therapy, Fircroft College** collectively designed an ESOL and wellbeing pack which included an ESOL workbook for a range of levels and a calming pack aimed to promote positive wellbeing through therapeutic based activities. The ESOL workbook was a huge collaborative effort led by Neena Chauhan, Project Manager and involved Volunteer Teachers, Marketing and Tutor teams at Fircroft College.

Both workbooks were accompanied by colouring pencils and pens and delivered to three community partners in June (British Red Cross, Birmingham, Birmingham and Solihull Women’s Aid and Barnados).

Rohima Khatun from Banardos, one of the recipients of the bundles said:

“I received the workbooks yesterday, and I am absolutely blown away by the quality and content. You have all done an amazing job. I have already handed out the first booklet and full distribution will start next week.”

Fircroft continues to work closely with the partners to track the impact this will have on the households who receive these and supported efforts to launch some online ESOL.

Focus

Financial Information

The entitlement of a student to educational funding can be confusing. This often leads to potential learners being given incorrect or out of date information about their eligibility. More worrying still is the idea that, if an institution does not totally understand the rules in this area, and because there may be sanctions in place for getting it wrong, they might "err on the side of caution" and apply the criteria too strictly, thereby excluding people who should have access.

Luckily, there are some really useful resources out there to help you stay up to date - see our resources section at the end of this handbook for links. The following is an excerpt from the [Education Transitions for Refugee and Asylum-seeking Young People in the UK report](#) by UNICEF and Refugee Education UK which summarises the rights and entitlements in respect of further education in England. For more information on colleges in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, please consult the resources section.

From the UNICEF and Refugee Education UK report:

Immigration status and age are both variables which affect eligibility for state funding from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) for FE study.

In order to access funding for FE study, a student **"must have the legal right to be resident in the United Kingdom at the start of their programme"**.

Additionally, institutions are directed to ensure that **"there is a reasonable likelihood that the student will be able to complete their study programme before seeking funding for the student"**.

Many students – including those with refugee status, humanitarian protection, asylum-seekers and Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) – are eligible to access state funding. And, despite misconceptions, those eligible for funding do not have to have been ordinarily resident in the preceding three years. However, having a time-limited immigration status can still be problematic. Some institutions may restrict access to students who are awaiting a decision on an asylum claim from the Home Office or who have limited leave to remain (LLR) that is due to expire before the course finishes.

Despite misconceptions age is a significant determining factor in refugee and asylum-seeking young people's access to FE. The ESFA is responsible for funding tuition fees for all students in full or part-time education between the ages of 16 and 18 and students must be under the age of 19 at the start of the teaching year in order to access this funding at any time in that year.

For those who are over 19, the funding available is 'more restrictive' and 'focused on making students ready for either advanced learning and HE, or work'.

Colleges might want to think more creatively about funding for students from refugee or asylum-seeking backgrounds. For instance, they might be able to offer a small bursary (like Sheffield College which offers a bursary of £50 for vulnerable persons aged 16-18), pay bus fares to and from college or reimburse students for lunches at the college. Though colleges should always be cautious about paying money directly to someone who is receiving support as an asylum seeker, as direct financial support could cause the Home Office to withdraw their financial support.

Equally, a college might be able to support a student to fund their own studies by supporting them to seek grant funding, make a crowdfunder appeal or work with local support groups to see if specific funds can be raised. People often prefer to donate money when they can see the direct benefit to an individual, and when the total needed is a manageable sum; so partner up with local people, CoS groups, Amnesty International groups or student groups at a local college or university to see if they can help.



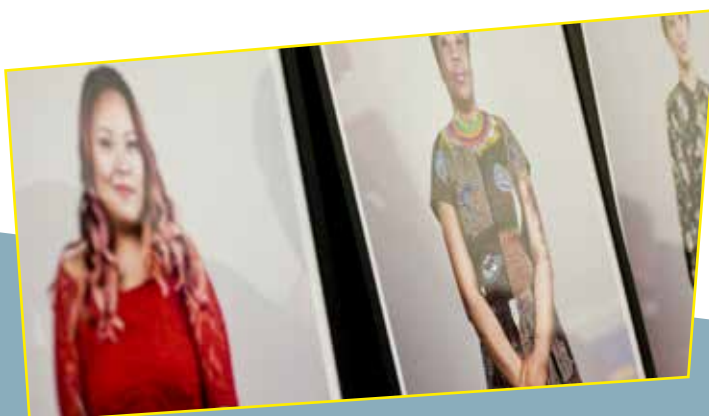
"The lunch voucher and bus pass at South Leicester College was really fantastic. I could not have afforded to study without them."

Jafor at
South Leicestershire College

"It was great to get to level II hairdressing, but I needed £3,300 to do my level III and I could not afford it. I managed on my own to get a grant of £2,000 and I am grateful to the college for making up the difference from their hardship fund. This allowed me to graduate with the level III to become a hairdresser as soon as I was given leave to remain."

I would have liked more help from the college to find a charitable foundation to support me."

B * name changed



Focus

Careers Support

Thinking ahead about careers can be daunting for any student, with lots to understand; from UCAS, student finance and personal statements, to apprenticeships and CVs. On top of this many people from sanctuary seeking backgrounds "put up barriers in their own mind [about their abilities]" (UNICEF and Refugee Education UK report) and so really benefit from emotional support or mentoring as well as practical support.



College -> Employment

Colleges can be instrumental in preparing a student for the world of work. Whilst the focus is often on acquiring **English language skills**, it is also important to ensure the student's preferences and interests are taken into account as much as possible to help identify future courses which would be most suitable for a career.

Conducting a holistic assessment of the learner's needs at the beginning of their studies can really help with this. It might be possible, for instance, for a student to attend classes for another subject (even if this is unaccredited) so that they can start to develop the skills needed outside of English. It might also be possible for the college to support the student to gain **work experience** in their desired area of work.

Any support in this area can really help maintain a person's sense of self and identity and boost confidence even if they are going through the challenges of the asylum process or are unable to work in their given profession because of language barriers or difficulties getting their qualifications acknowledged.

Skills for life: real world employability at NCL

Managers at **Newcastle City Learning (NCL)** were aware that several learners were keen to become self-employed and set up their own micro-enterprises so came up with the idea of running a Christmas Market at the Westgate campus to test out such an opportunity and teach enterprise skills. Liaising with a range of agencies, including Trading Standards, successfully resulted in planning for an on-site market which took place in mid-December 2015 for the first time and was widely promoted across the city, including via social media. There have been 13 markets since and it has grown to about 30 stalls. More than 100 learners have participated.

Many of the stalls are taken up by ESOL learners including those from a sanctuary seeking background, but also by students with learning difficulties and /or disabilities, and other learners and a range of goods are sold - from food to jewellery to clothes. Putting it all in place has given NCL tutors the opportunity to involve students in planning the event and led the students to undertake further independent research.

A pre-event session, preparing would-be vendors for the market, is held some two weeks before the event and covers basic marketing principles, self-employment and the law, and signposting where to go in Newcastle for more help with business set-up. Learners wanting to sell food are required to have Food Hygiene training which the college offers and they prepare and store the food on the college premises, with the cookery tutor supervising food preparation on the day. They also used the market as a focus for class-based activities on business communications, promotion and publicity. Tutors continue to provide support, but it has become a learning-through-action project.



"Hidden Talent"

Case Study:

Preston's College Hidden Talent

- A Community Approach to supporting Asylum Seekers and Refugees to Gain Employment

Faced with lots of new learners from refugee or asylum-seeking backgrounds into the college, the ESOL department sought out local professional and voluntary groups to improve support mechanisms for their learners.

The College's Mission Statement is to educate our learners to be the most employable. Employability skills are integrated into teaching sessions but it was recognised that employment was a real barrier for asylum seekers and refugees, many of whom were highly skilled professionals in their native country.

An Advice and Guidance "speed dating" event was held with teaching staff from across college vocational and professional areas for learners to learn more about the qualifications they would require to obtain employment in their chosen areas. It was apparent that staff in different areas of the college were unaware of the skills and qualities of the ESOL cohort which led to some innovative approaches to including learners within their areas.

Through a local partnership network, Preston's College hosted an event to engage local businesses and encourage them to consider changes to their recruitment processes to make them more inclusive for refugees.

The "Hidden Talent" event was held in November 2019. Speakers brought a wealth of knowledge to share with attendees from local businesses and voluntary organisations.

The Red Cross spoke about the journey for asylum seekers to the UK and explained the legalities of employing refugees. Asylum seeker learners spoke emotionally about their life before fleeing to the UK and JobCentre Plus gave details of "Job Trials". Preston's College explained the different areas of language skills. A local company spoke about the advantages of employing a diverse workforce and a local construction company spoke about his experience in employing a Syrian refugee, who also spoke at the event.

The event was a resounding success with other areas interested in replicating the event in other parts of the county and 100% of attendees responding that they would consider employing a refugee. Opportunities for voluntary employment were also opened up for Asylum Seekers through the college network.

College -> Higher Education

There is so much to think about when it comes to higher education;

Which course to study?

What are the entry requirements?

Is it better to study at a large city university or a smaller campus university?

Or does the college itself deliver HE provision?

Will this course help to get a job in a relevant area?

Is funding available?

College career advisors play a key role in helping students to navigate these questions and find the right course for them.

The Refugee Support Network have created a "Thinking Ahead to Higher Education Toolkit" which is updated annually. They also provide training on this topic. It is designed for young asylum seekers and refugees as well as teachers, careers advisors and support workers and aims to make the transition from college to Higher Education that bit smoother. The link to this resource can be found in the resources section of this pack.



Another excellent resource is the [S.T.A.R \(Student Action for Refugees\)](#) website, where there is an up-to-date list of available sanctuary scholarships.

We expect that, as we strengthen the Colleges and Universities of Sanctuary Streams, there will be more opportunities to work across the network in supporting students through the transition from college to university, and we encourage colleges to reach out to their nearest universities. This might mean linking local institutions together to provide joint open days or application support workshops.

In addition, by engaging in the City of Sanctuary network, providers will be able to share information about scholarships, foundation courses and English pre-sessional courses for prospective university students. The number of universities offering at least one sanctuary scholarship has risen from one in 2008/2009 to 72 in 2018/2019.

"I know a few students who don't even do UCAS because they think there is no point, no hope"

(Student, REUK & UNICEF report)

Syrian Futures Open days

Syrian Futures offers open days in partnership with Scottish Universities of Sanctuary

Syrian Futures offers open days in partnership with Scottish Universities of Sanctuary. Syrian Futures is based in the Alwaleed Centre, at The University of Edinburgh, and offers Scottish Syrians of all ages advice, support and training to help them access higher/further education and find their way to fulfilling jobs and careers. Many of the Syrians they work with are students in their final year of college and so they have organised special open days at Scottish universities, during which students can talk to academics and students to get a feel for university life. They also discuss access courses available through local colleges which will help them in their journey towards university.



In February 2020, Syrian Futures organised a visit to the University of St Andrews. The young people really enjoyed walking around the campus and learning about different aspects of university life. They then took part in a workshop with St Andrews PhD student, Nouha Idrees (School of Psychology and Neuroscience) on the Importance of self-compassion in adolescents. Afterwards, the group had a really memorable session with archaeological material led by Prof. Rebecca Sweetman, Head of the School of Classics and Professor of Ancient History and Archaeology, who, as chair of the Refugee and Forced Mobility Network within the University, led the St Andrews initiative to become a University of Sanctuary.

It was a greatly beneficial day, helping to build connections between the Universities of Edinburgh and St Andrews, both Universities of Sanctuary, and raise awareness among the Syrian community of different higher education options.

Key members of the College of Sanctuary group at Derby College regularly attend the local City of Sanctuary network meeting so the college is informed of local developments impacting the communities concerned.

Within the college, learning has taken the form of staff awareness sessions run on INSET days and within Professional Development sessions and is being extended out through the student body via a planned focus within the tutorial framework. In addition, students from sanctuary seeking groups are invited to speak in cross-college meetings and have also been involved in organising enrichment sessions for their peers to raise awareness of issues.

The stories penned by the sanctuary seeking communities are often poignant and thought provoking – <https://www.derbybookfestival.co.uk/community/lexis>

Initiatives to value diversity and create a culture of inclusion helps embed concepts across the college - and in recent years, collaborative projects, for example, one undertaken between Lexis and Business students, have helped build integration opportunities. This saw students working together to discuss needs and produce useful information regarding local businesses for new arrivals into Derby. Even more high profile has been the annual joint work of the Art and Lexis students in producing a published book for the Derby Bookfest project - this is a high quality publication which involves a large commitment from the staff involved but offers students an important opportunity to tell their stories and ultimately see their work in print.

"I am Rishma and I am 19 years old. My brother is Riham and he is 17 years old. We are from Sri Lanka. We are asylum seekers. We arrived in Swansea November 2019. So, since that day we tried to enroll into many Sixth Forms but we were unsuccessful as the course had already started. So due to that, both me and my brother had to wait until next September 2020 wasting a year without studying, doing nothing. We were so worried about our education. So, our mentor tried to help us. She introduced us to the Gower College Swansea staff, Paul Vincent and Caryn Morgan. They talked to me and helped us both to get into the college and helped us a lot throughout the college enrollment. They helped both me and my brother to sit in the classroom rather than wasting time.

And another problem we faced was the transport. Because we had to travel to Gorseinon every day and as we are asylum seekers my family was not able to afford the bus tickets for both of us. So, they even offered both of us with the bus passes. Both of us were so happy about getting into education. So now we enjoy our time in the college with new friends and the studies. I would like to thank Paul, Caryn and all the others at Gower College who helped us to get into education!"

Rishma, Sanctuary Student at Gower College Swansea

General INFORMATION

Seeking Sanctuary The Global Picture

Over the last few years, images of men, women and children fleeing war zones and making dangerous and often fatal sea and land crossings have become tragically familiar. According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) over 100 million people, greater than the entire population of the UK, are currently forcibly displaced from their homes. The vast majority are internally displaced within their own countries or living in neighbouring countries - very few reach UK shores. To learn more about the global refugee crisis, and who is on the move and why, check out the [UNCHR website](#) which provides comprehensive and up to date information.

Moreover, the UK is not the most popular destination in Europe for those seeking asylum. In the year ending June 2020, there were 32,423 asylum applications made in the UK; during the same period, Germany received 115,435 asylum applications. The number of asylum applications in the UK equates to a tiny fraction of non-EEA nationals arriving. The UK asylum system is deliberately hostile with thousands of people waiting months, or even years, for a decision and just 53% of initial asylum applications being granted in the year to June 2020.

The quality of decision making is often poor, with many refugees having to rely on the courts to award protection following an appeal of the Government's initial decision. The proportion of asylum appeals allowed in the year to June 2020 was 45% - demonstrating that nearly half of all negative decisions are overturned by the judiciary. The appeals process can be complex and lengthy, with people seeking asylum having to wait months or years for their appeals to be heard and to know if they will be permitted to remain in the UK. To learn more about the situation faced by people seeking sanctuary, the [Refugee Council website](#) is an excellent source.

Key Definitions

Immigration law is a complex area - and one which will become more complex as the UK leaves the EU - so whilst we have provided some basic definitions below for your reference, it is essential that further information is sought on the different types of leave people are granted in the UK. The resources section can help signpost you to more information.

Asylum Seeker

A person who is in the UK legally, having requested asylum, and who is waiting for the Home Office to make a decision on that application. They may be waiting to receive an initial decision on their claim, or they may have had their claim refused but they are appealing the decision. **There is no such thing as an illegal asylum seeker; everyone has the right to have their claim considered.** In the UK the application process is long and complicated, it can take years; many appeals against negative decisions are upheld. Most people in this situation are not allowed to work or claim mainstream benefits, instead they must survive on Home Office support (which is £5.65 per day at the time of writing).

Refused Asylum Seeker

Someone whose application for asylum has been refused by the Home Office in the country in which they have requested asylum, and who has exhausted all rights of appeal. Despite this, some people cannot be returned to their country of origin, regardless of their refusal, due to UK rules. This means many asylum seekers can fall into destitution.

Refugee

A person who is in the UK legally, having The meaning of the term refugee in international law is someone 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 of their country of nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside of the country of their former habitual residence is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to return to it.'

People Seeking Sanctuary

In this resource pack, we mainly use this term to refer to refugees or asylum seekers or others forced to migrate from any background. This is to combat the dehumanising rhetoric which can occur when referring to people by their immigration status.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASCs)

These are children and young people who are seeking asylum in the UK but who have been separated from their parents or carers. While their claim is processed, they are cared for by a local authority.

Barriers to accessing education for people seeking sanctuary

There are many factors which might reduce access to education or hinder a young person's educational progression in the UK.

“The most prevalent factor hindering transitions to FE was immigration status – exacerbated by age. This was described by just under half of key informants, and emerged in more than half of the casework notes examined. Key informants described how young people aged over 18 often find themselves ineligible for state funding for their chosen course, as a result of a combination of their immigration status or length of residency and age.”

(UNICEF & REUK report)

- Mental health
- Lack of sufficient paperwork: many people struggle to provide the required documents at the point of enrolment
- Incorrect or insufficient information or advice
- Insufficient access to the internet
- Poverty and destitution: this can lead to poor mental health, inability to pay transport costs, the pressure to prioritise formal or informal work, and, for those eligible for Universal Credit, the impossibility of both claiming this support and studying full time.
- Having to move, often mid-term, between NASS dispersal locations or local authorities in different cities or regions
- Regular appointments at the Home Office or with solicitors: absence rates can then be detrimental when applying for the next stage of education
- Lack of awareness about funding leading to reluctance from colleges
- Asylum process is emotionally and mentally draining, with frequent short notice meetings which may result in students missing classes or not feeling up to attending
- Asylum process is draining and difficult and may make people miss classes
- Lack of consistency in ESOL provision across the country

- Lack of holistic learning opportunities for people seeking sanctuary
- Difficulties in integrating wide range of ages into the same class
- Childcare can pose a challenge for some sanctuary seekers to access classes
- Overall funding cuts to FE colleges limit staff time or course availability
- Backgrounds of deprivation and language learning challenges and dyslexia in the student population
- Lack of funding for pastoral care
- Need for pre-sessional programmes for students who don't have the necessary language level
- Challenges to accessing adult learning (Level 3) - they are not entitled to study A' levels as they are not financially supported by the government. This issue is something that is shared by all adults over 24 years old in England who do not qualify for full fee remission at Level 3, but there are also restrictions placed upon asylum seekers, because of their immigration status, which restricts access to particular courses
- Accepting prior experience from country of origin meaning people may not be studying at the level that is most appropriate to them
- Perceptions that all refugees and asylum seekers are uneducated
- Stigma and social exclusion

College might be considered as the first foot-step of people seeking sanctuary into the educational system in the United Kingdom. Lots of people seeking sanctuary enrol to colleges to study a wide range of courses in a variety of levels. I have personally studied an Access to Higher education course in one of the further education colleges in Greater Manchester. From my own experience, I can say that people seeking sanctuary face a number of challenges during their education in college. One of the challenges I faced was that during enrolment day, I was told that I cannot be enrolled into the Access course because my Refugee status is limited to 5 years and studying medicine takes 5 years and as such, they won't be able to accept me!

Many people I know found it hard to convince the college of the validity of their qualification gained back in their home country. Colleges should be seen as a welcoming institutions for people seeking sanctuary by supporting them in their educational journey through accepting their qualifications from their home country, assist them with their degree choices and UCAS application, provide support in writing personal statements for university and provide academic references for them when applying for university. Training college staff on recognizing different kinds of residence permits and entitlements would be vital to ensure that everyone has equal access to education.

Abdul Rahman Sanhat



Resources

Statistics, tools and useful guides

- Refugee Education UK Policy Brief, 2020, COVID-19 crisis: emerging impact on young refugees' education and wellbeing in the UK https://hubble-live-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/rsn/redactor2_assets/files/617/COVID-19_crisis_and_young_refugees_Refugee_Support_Network_RSN_policy_briefing_and_recommendations.pdf
- UNICEF, 2019, Education Transitions for Refugee and Asylum-seeking Young People in the UK Report <https://www.unicef.org.uk/policy/education-transitions-refugees-report/>
- Coram Children's Legal Centre, 2019, Migrant Children's Project Fact Sheet: Further education in England https://www.childrenslegalcentre.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Further-education-August-2019.final_.pdf
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- The City of Sanctuary Mental Health Resource Pack can be found here: <https://health.cityofsanctuary.org/resources>
- Refugee Support Network, 2018, Education for refugee and asylum seeking children: access and equality in England, Scotland and Wales. <https://www.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Access-to-Education-report-PDF.pdf>
- RSN Report (10 page summary + fact sheets) on educational progression
- Refugee Action, 2019, Turning Words Into Action: Why the Government must invest now to let refugees learn <https://www.refugee-action.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Turning-Words-into-Action.pdf>
- Papyrus Project, Toolkit on Abuse, Safeguarding and Young Refugees and Migrants <https://papyrus-project.org/abuse-prevention-and-safeguarding-young-refugees-and-migrants/>
- The City of Sanctuary resources section has a wide range of information, tools and templates available at: www.cityofsanctuary.org/resources/ - this includes a section of resources on Solidarity with Black Lives Matter Movement <https://cityofsanctuary.org/2020/06/23/solidarity-with-blacklivesmatter/>
- The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) has detailed information and statistics on asylum in the UK at: www.unhcr.org/uk/asylum-in-the-uk.html
- Refugee Week happens every year in June and there are lots of resources and ideas at: www.refugeeweek.org.uk
- 'The Survivors A to Z' series from Freedom From Torture is a set of powerful audio clips and resources, available at: www.freedomfromtorture.org/an_a_to_z_of_poverty
- Amnesty International run a free online course called 'Human Rights: The Rights of Refugees' at: www.edx.org/course/human-rights-the-rights-of-refugees-0
- For those in Wales, information regarding places and funding for Further Education can be found here <https://sanctuary.gov.wales/education>
- The Scottish Framework for Fair Access has lots of useful information under the Publications, Articles and Resources section at the bottom of the page <https://www.fairaccess.scot/connect/>
- A short inspiration video from refugees who studied at Belfast Metropolitan College describing their educational journey. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oG1bcTY8Ek8>
- In this presentation, Aleks Palanac (University of Leicester, UK) discusses ways in which language teachers, though they are not usually trained therapists, are often in a unique position to create the conditions in which refugee students who have experienced trauma can begin to recover and even grow from their experience. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kSD23XnyJ6s>

Key Organisations

City of Sanctuary is a network of groups, which includes villages, towns, cities and regions across the UK, and others engaged in Streams of Sanctuary, Sanctuary Awards and activities intended to welcome people seeking sanctuary. <https://cityofsanctuary.org>

Refugee Support Network exists to help young refugees and asylum seekers access, remain and progress in education. Their core programmes include educational mentoring, where volunteer tutors support young people to achieve specific educational goals; education wellbeing and support, which provides specialist case-work support to enable young people with particularly complex needs to re-enter or remain in education; and education progression, which helps young people progress to FE and HE, through a national helpline, case-work and advocacy. They also work with networks of schools, colleges and universities across the UK providing training and advice and carrying out research. www.refugeesupportnetwork.org

UKCISA provides up-to-date immigration, fees and international student experience information for students and colleagues working with them. www.ukcisa.org.uk

STAR (Student Action for Refugees) has produced a toolkit for their Equal Access campaign which aims to get universities to class sanctuary seekers as home students and give them access to bursaries and scholarships open to other vulnerable people www.star-network.org.uk

The Association of Colleges (AOC) is the national voice for further education, sixth form, tertiary and specialist colleges in England. The AOC is a not-for-profit membership organisation established in 1996 by colleges, for colleges. Our members make up almost 95% of the sector - transforming 2.2 million lives each year. <https://www.aoc.co.uk/>

Colleges Wales is an education charity which promotes the public benefit of further education in Wales. Colleges Wales is the first point of contact for further education in Wales. It convenes the Further Education Principals' Forum, which represents the interests of further education (FE) providers and undertakes research and policy development and provide practical support to the FE community. <https://www.colleges.wales/en/page/who-we-are>

College Development Network (CDN).

CDN works with colleges across Scotland to develop their people; through events and webinars, CDN LearnOnline, college board training, and Leadership development. <https://www.cdn.ac.uk>

The Welsh Government website

<https://sanctuary.gov.wales/education> which has a page on education for all ages which it might be useful to include as it has 'recite me' translation & covers access to FE for people with different statuses

RefuAid supports access to language tuition, education, finance and meaningful employment. Their effective model involves partnering with private language schools to help students attain the required level of English and make use of their university offers. www.refuaid.org

Schwab Westheimer is a charitable trust which aims to promote and encourage the education of young asylum seekers and refugees and to encourage a positive public perception of these young people. They provide grants for education to sanctuary seekers. www.swtrust.org.uk

The British Red Cross supports vulnerable people seeking sanctuary, providing refugee services in 58 towns and cities across the country. www.redcross.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/how-we-support-refugees

Coram Children's Legal Centre are experts in all areas of children's rights, immigration, child protection, education and juvenile justice. They offer training on the asylum process and refugee and asylum seeking children's rights including access to education. <https://www.childrenslegalcentre.com/about-us/>

The Human Trafficking Foundation works to shape policy and legislation by equipping parliamentarians and policy makers, lead government departments, local authorities, police and statutory agencies to better understand the extent and nature of human trafficking, and the need to adjust rapidly to changing trends. The organisation has developed a directory of local organisations and support services for victims of trafficking. <https://www.humantraffickingfoundation.org/support-services>

The Anti-bullying alliance. We are a unique coalition of organisations and individuals, working together to achieve our vision to: stop bullying and create safer environments in which children and young people can live, grow, play and learn. We welcome membership from any organisation or individual that supports this vision and support a free network of thousands of schools and colleges. <https://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/>

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City of Sanctuary