



Universities of Sanctuary





Becoming a University 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 100 City of Sanctuary initiatives have been established by local people in towns and cities across the UK and Ireland. Our network of local groups usually include refugees and bring refugee support 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. In many cases this includes local universities, their departments, or student unions.

Universities of Sanctuary

The Universities of Sanctuary stream is an initiative to recognise the good practice of universities which welcome people seeking sanctuary into their communities and seek to foster a culture of awareness and inclusivity. Being located in a 'City of Sanctuary' is not a prerequisite; in fact, higher education institutions can also play a role in catalysing welcome beyond their campuses and in the local community.

This pack provides an overview of this particular stream and demonstrates how a university can develop as a place of welcome, how it can apply for a Sanctuary Award, and as such become an accredited University of Sanctuary. But this pack is just a starting point, and it's important to research beyond it. The Article 26 resources (which can be found on the University of Sanctuary website) offer essential guidance.

Streams of Sanctuary

We believe the sanctuary message of welcome and inclusion is vital in all spheres of society. We are committed to helping schools, 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. Universities of Sanctuary is one of these streams.



Contents

Page 1

Becoming a University of Sanctuary

Page 3 - 4

SECTION 1

Why become a University of Sanctuary?
What is a University of Sanctuary?

Page 5 - 19

SECTION 2

Becoming a University of Sanctuary
Guidance for Application

Page 20 - 24

SECTION 3

Seeking Sanctuary
Barriers to accessing higher education
for people seeking sanctuary

Page 25 - 26

SECTION 4

Resources

Why become a University of Sanctuary?

Becoming a University of Sanctuary brings a wealth of benefits to an institution, its students, staff and the local community. Some of these include:

- **Sanctuary seeking students enrich academic discussions and campus life by bringing new perspectives and cultures together.**
- **Universities, as key institutions within our society, have a responsibility to support people from all walks of life to reach their potential.**
- **Establishing a culture of welcome for sanctuary seekers, where people feel valued and safe, will have knock-on benefits for other university-users.**
- **Student pressure is a key driving force in the movement, and this reflects the expectations of students who want to attend a university which is compassionate and socially progressive as well as having good academic credentials.**
- **Equipping graduates 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 universities working to improve the culture of sanctuary in higher education (HE) and in society generally.**
- **Having your voice heard as part of a collective that is gathering momentum. At the time of printing, there have been 9 universities recognised as Universities of Sanctuary with more than 30 working towards recognition. In addition, over 70 universities have started initiatives to support forced migrants to access HE programmes.**
- **The notion of sanctuary fits with the values and strategic plans of most universities; it contributes towards progress in inclusivity, diversity, and sustainability.**
- **Taking a practical, public step towards inclusion, and countering discourses of xenophobia and racism both within and outside university life.**



What is a University of Sanctuary?

A University of Sanctuary is a place where everyone feels safe, welcome and able to pursue their right to education. University can seem like an impossible goal for some, while others might not even consider it as an option available to them. But going to university should be a possibility regardless of one's own personal history.

Equal access to HE is enshrined in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Access to education can be fundamental to a person's ability to integrate allowing them to meet new people, build professional networks, gain meaningful employment at a suitable level and contribute to their new society. Yet, many people who are forced to flee to the UK encounter and are forced to navigate significant financial, cultural and institutional barriers.

Beyond access to Higher Education, universities are able to offer a wide range of opportunities and benefits to people seeking sanctuary, including the use of sports and library facilities.

Ensuring that people who have sought sanctuary in the UK – including refugees and asylum seekers – can be contributors and collaborators in these spaces means that we are investing in their futures as well as being able to benefit from the wealth of knowledge and experience they bring. Universities, and groups within them, are also well-placed to lead on fundraising, campaigns and research which could help locally and globally. It is groups such as these that could take a leading role in promoting the positive messages of welcome and inclusion in opposition to the dangerous politics of fear.

This resource pack shares some of the many ways in which universities are embodying the City of Sanctuary ethos. It offers some practical ideas and inspiration for how universities can work towards this goal. We want this ethos to spread throughout universities and other HE institutions.



Becoming a University of Sanctuary

There are three principles that underpin the commitment needed to become a University of Sanctuary. These are:

LEARN:

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

EMBED:

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

SHARE:

sharing your vision, achievements, what you have learned, and good practice with other universities, the local community and beyond.

A University of Sanctuary should follow these three main principles across all their activities and seek to implement them at every level of the university structure. The notion of a University of Sanctuary requires a whole-organisation approach, but it's not one size fits all; the award will reflect the profile, complexity, funding and size 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 principles in turn and illustrate them with case studies of best practice from universities across the country.





LEARN

The learn principles encompass 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 people to reflect on how they might help and better focus their efforts. This is often best achieved by including people seeking sanctuary - either extending learning opportunities to them or finding ways to learn from them.

It might include activities such as:

- Making training optional for all staff, but mandatory for those who might work directly with sanctuary scholars, be it admissions, student welfare or mentors, about the issues they might face and how best to support them. This could be done in person or online.
- Having a member of staff represent the university at local forums, meetings or conferences, and bring back learning from these.
- Including refugee issues or the wider refugee crisis into course syllabuses where relevant.
- Hosting a refugee week each year on campus, with annual events and talks to inform people and create engagement with the issue. The national Refugee Week normally falls in June, but universities may wish to do their own when more students are on campus. Alternatively, Student Action for Refugees (STAR) holds a national week of campaigning in February each year.
- Inviting people seeking sanctuary to give lectures or share their experiences as part of professional training – e.g. for immigration law students, midwives hearing about birth stories, teachers in training learning from refugee families, medical students learning from refugee experiences of the barriers to accessing healthcare, the need for interpreters, and so on.
- Sharing and implementing ways to respond to restrictive government legislation that forms part of the hostile/compliant environment and that makes forced migrants feel unsafe or singled out at universities and beyond.
- Using innovative ways to raise awareness about refugee issues, such as film, drama and creative visual arts.
- Membership of the Council for At-Risk Academics (CARA) and engaging with them to find ways of hosting refugee academics.
- Liaising with local authorities to reach out to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in their care in order to understand their educational needs and support their progression. These young people should, at the very least, be targeted and included in widening participation outreach to children in care and care-leavers.
- Learning to make connections between the situation of refugees and broader systems of exclusion and exploitation and migration controls.




Learning from Experts by Experience

IN DETAIL Training

A vital part of a university's learning experience is through feedback from people seeking sanctuary. This can be a very powerful tool in developing a culture of welcome. It means involving those sanctuary scholars in the planning of initiatives, and taking on board feedback wherever possible. However, we acknowledge that this is not always straightforward. Universities must be mindful of the barriers to participation in feedback sessions; it is possible that people will not want to seem ungrateful by criticising, or that they will feel worried about the ramifications. Universities should take steps to ensure feedback can be given anonymously, and that people feel secure in the knowledge that any negative feedback will not have any implications for their funding or support. This will ensure that consultations are meaningful, and that people feel empowered to speak honestly.

Training is particularly important for those members of staff working directly with any sanctuary scholars or students who are known to have experienced forced migration. This might include training for admissions staff about the different terminology involved, or how to respond sensitively to requests for scholarships or bursaries. Similarly, it is essential for student welfare staff to be aware (and recognise signs) of the different psychological or emotional struggles which can accompany seeking sanctuary, and to be ready to support students through this. For example, the occurrence of PTSD, depression or feelings of loss are common amongst this demographic. But institutions shouldn't be limited in their approach to training 'relevant' staff - the training can be fruitful at all levels of the university structure. For instance, not only does the University of Leicester run training sessions for staff who work directly with sanctuary students, they have also delivered teacher training to teaching staff. The aim of this is to raise awareness about barriers to learning that students from sanctuary-seeking backgrounds might face, and how to teach students suffering from trauma where appropriate.





Case Study: Research

Research and knowledge exchange are central to universities and there are many practical ways to build links between academia and the community in which you are building a culture of sanctuary. The University of Exeter funded the production of a video to support people seeing sanctuary going to appeal. Building on research carried out at the university by Professor Nick Gill and his team, the video informs asylum seekers about what to expect at their asylum appeal hearings. It was launched in November 2018 in English, with numerous translations planned in 2019. The video was jointly funded by the University of Exeter, Asylum Aid, Number 5 Chambers, and the Economic and Social Research Council, and it is hosted on Asylum Aid's website. This is a terrific example of how collaborative working across sectors can be beneficial; it provides a vital resource to help people during appeals.

Case Study: Refugee Week

Cardiff Met University overcomes the challenges of the timing of Refugee Week by embedding refugee issues within their annual Global Week. The University uses the opportunity to celebrate the number of different nationalities within its student body and to raise awareness of the experience of international students both whilst studying, and in their journey to gaining a place at university. Amnesty and STAR student groups are involved in delivering the activities for Global Week, including some workshops raising awareness of refugees' experiences.

Case study: Forced Migrants Network, University of Winchester

In 2016/17 the University of Winchester established an internal Forced Migrants' Network which meets regularly. The group comprises academic and support staff from across the University who are involved in activities relating to asylum-seekers and refugees. Activities include research, knowledge exchange, teaching, outreach, and support for displaced students. The purpose is to share information, establish inter-disciplinary collaboration and link academics and practitioners. Outcomes have already included an international conference held at the University in September 2018 - called 'Boundary Crossing: an international, interdisciplinary conference on refugees and social justice' - and the achievement of a University of Sanctuary Award in 2018.

The network has expanded to include representation from the Wessex Global Health Network Refugee Interest Group, which brings together medical practitioners who have a particular interest in the needs, and access to services, of refugees. They are exploring effective ways in which, during 2019, the University can actively collaborate with the group to create shared resources, host multi-agency meetings and make the pool of knowledge and expertise more widely available.



EMBED

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

Some ways to make this happen are:

- Create bursaries, fee-waivers or scholarships for sanctuary-seeking students at undergraduate, masters and/or PhD level, always ensuring that they are underpinned by the Article 26 principles (see the 'Minimum Criteria' section below for more information).
- Pledge to hold an annual refugee week on campus every year and designate a member of staff or team who will be responsible for this, regardless of the student turnover.
- Include steps towards your vision of sanctuary in strategic planning and professional development plans where possible.
- Consider how the university, as a key employer in its local area, could help people seeking sanctuary access the job market and improve their skills. This could involve making sure vacancies are well-known to local refugee communities, creating training or work experience opportunities, sharing the use of career support offices and offering CV advice sessions.
- Create a staff champion and/or interdepartmental working group to keep encouraging people to build on the culture of welcome in the university. For instance, both the University of East Anglia and the University of Leicester now have a dedicated paid post, or have specifically written it into an existing job description.
- Students, with the help of their students' union, can set up a STAR student group which would be supported by the national organisation. As much as possible this should be encouraged and supported by staff and the wider university community.
- Build a relationship with the local City of Sanctuary group, (or help to establish one if there is not already an active group), or other local refugee support organisations, and consult them on how best to support their work. For instance, students may wish to volunteer or help raise funds.
- Open up the facilities of the university for sanctuary-seekers to make use of where possible. This might be the library, sports facilities, places of worship or meeting spaces. If they are already open to the public, make sure people seeking sanctuary are aware of them and offer free or subsidised entry or bus fares to access them. As many sanctuary-seekers encounter significant financial hardship, this can be a huge help to people who otherwise would not have access to such facilities.
- Waive society or sports club fees, and support sports teams and activities that involve people seeking sanctuary.
- Ensure the university coordinates and assesses what they already do to make it more effective and communicates this well internally and externally.



IN DETAIL Scholarships and fee-waivers

Asylum seekers are currently classed as international students in the UK and are therefore charged tuition fees at the international rate. However, a number of universities including UEA and Edinburgh have chosen to recognise asylum seekers as home students as part of their scholarships which reduces the fee-waiver offered by the university and can attract other benefits at some institutions. Most people seeking sanctuary receive just over £5 per day in government support meaning that any costs including books, travel and accommodation can put university out of reach.

A growing number of universities now offer scholarships as part of their commitment to equal access. A full list of scholarships is available on the STAR website (see the resources section of this resource pack) and STAR itself is able to support universities looking to establish scholarships. There is also a set of resources, developed by Article 26, which is available on the University of Sanctuary website to assist universities in developing scholarship programmes. For example, the 'Guiding Principles' document, written by Article 26, outlines essential considerations and minimum standards for providers in designing, administering and implementing initiatives for sanctuary scholars.

We have made the offering of full-fee scholarships one of the minimum criteria for an award because we feel strongly that it tackles the essence of the problem facing people seeking sanctuary.

Further, many universities recognise that whilst potential students may be able meet most of the entry criteria, English language requirements can be a barrier. Some universities therefore offer fee waivers for pre-sessional summer courses or academic English courses. For more information on overcoming language as a barrier to education see Section 3 of this resource pack.





Case study - Courses with Crèches at Cardiff Met

In 2015, the Cardiff School of Education and Social Policy at Cardiff Met began to offer the Cambridge CELTA Course, an initial teacher training qualification for teachers of English, to speakers of other languages. In order to engage with the English language-learning communities, which are more highly concentrated around the city centre, it was important to identify what the main barriers of access to English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes were. Researchers and practitioners who work in ESOL in the UK are acutely aware that one of the biggest barriers is the lack of childcare to support learners, primarily women, in attending free-of-charge English classes.

But, since the School also offers BA courses in Early Childhood Studies with Early Years Practitioner Status (EYPS), where, aside from studying theoretical and policy-based knowledge, practical work experience is required, it seemed logical to link these two together.

As a result, the university-based crèche, 'Minimets', was opened in September 2018. Thus far, three children are attending the crèche whilst their mothers, two of whom hold refugee status, are studying English. The places in the crèche are specifically ring-fenced in order to support the attendees at the English classes and it is a situation where everybody wins: the learners, some of whom are already considering studying MA courses at the University; the trainee teachers on the CELTA courses, who are gaining their practical teaching experience; the students, who are working towards the EYPS; and the staff, who are facilitating and assessing the students' development.

Furthermore, when the (by then qualified) teachers reach the 3rd year, they are asked to teach assessed IELTS classes on behalf of the Widening Access programme in a high BME concentration area of Cardiff. Not only is this a great experience of teaching academic exam English for third year students, but last year these classes helped five people from the refugee community to join their chosen courses at Cardiff Met.

Case study - Bradford Health Studies Midwifery

The Faculty of Health Studies at the University of Bradford has already received another sanctuary award as part of the 'Sanctuary in Health' stream. The faculty was the first university department in the UK to receive such an award. The Faculty started working towards the award in 2012 when a number of refugee and asylum-seeking women joined the service-user group and began to participate in the interviewing of prospective health care students. They also teach students about their experiences of asylum and childbirth in the UK, assess students' communication skills within exams and take part in research.



Case study - Scholarships at Exeter

The University of Exeter has offered Sanctuary scholarships since September 2017. Each year they offer three scholarships which include a full tuition fee waiver and living costs at £9,500 per year of study and £14,500 per year of study for PhD students. The scholarship scheme is notable because the Vice-Chancellor's Executive Group has committed to support the scholarships indefinitely, with the intention of them being financed by donors in the future. In designing the scheme, the Article 26 Guiding Principles were consulted closely. Currently there are six scholars on sanctuary scholarships at the University of Exeter studying at undergraduate and postgraduate research level, dispersed between the Exeter and Penryn campuses.

'When I applied for a Sanctuary scholarship and had successfully been granted it from University of Exeter, I felt more secure about my future here and it gave me a sense of stability and purpose as a student. This has also reflected positively on my mental health and I feel how much it helped me cope with life in the UK.'

'The Sanctuary Scholarship removed the obstacle of accessing education as a refugee, but in the process this allowed me to have a roof over my head in a warm room I can call my own for the first time on this continent. It also paved the way for me to focus on the things that matter the most and on a personal level, such as social integration and building a network. This scholarship allowed me to move on after the atrocities I have faced in my home country and abroad since 2011.'



Case study - Residential Summer Schools

The University of Winchester works to support the wider refugee community both in the city and in the region. An example is their relationship with the Rural Refugee Network, which helps Syrian refugees settle into rural communities. In 2017 and 2018 they hosted 'family days', bringing Syrian families together to help them socialise and meet volunteer University staff and students. The days included creative and sporting activities for children as well as advice for adults and young people on education and careers.

In August 2017 and 2018, they held a 3-day residential on campus, attended by 27 asylum-seeker children and young people. These incorporated welcoming and supportive activities with the involvement of staff and student alumni, including those from their Performing Arts Department. Sanctuary scholars were also invited to share their experience in HE at this event. They engaged in conversation with the attendants, answered questions and gave a short talk. The residential events are now a firm commitment in the university's 'Access and Participation Plan'.

Case study - Space to Grow

Universities are often lucky enough to enjoy large grounds and remain some of the best green spaces in our communities. The University of York St. John harnessed this asset by designating an area of land as an allotment for people seeking sanctuary, enabling them to quite literally embed their commitment to welcome into their campus.

The spaces are ordinarily reserved for staff of the university, but offering one plot for others who might benefit is just one of the many ways they have developed a culture of welcome. Research shows that community growing can impact positively on physical and mental wellbeing. For more information on this see the Gardens of Sanctuary resource pack.

Not only is horticulture an area of knowledge where people from different cultures can learn from each other, it also encourages regular exercise and healthier eating patterns. In addition, as most people are forbidden from working while their asylum claim is processed, and many people suffer health issues which make it hard for them to access work, an allotment can provide meaningful activity for people and thus help with their mental wellbeing.

Mental stress and social isolation are often big issues for people seeking asylum. Gardening can be very therapeutic and provides a chance to meet new people, or get some peace and quiet.

In addition, grounds staff at the University have agreed to provide job-shadowing opportunities with the local refugee support organisation which will also help people to learn new skills and improve job prospects.



SHARE

Universities often occupy a prominent role within a town or city and so can be a source of inspiration to other educational institutions, businesses and organisations. They are seen as social leaders 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 universities to spread the ethos within the sector. This can be done through local media, conferences, open days or social media.

Ways to share your learning and best practice include:

- Feature on local and/or campus media, talking about your initiatives and why they are important.
- Share articles via the City of Sanctuary website about events or projects.
- Create a link with other universities and facilitate ideas exchange.
- Hold an event and invite other university groups or staff and local people.
- Share information about campaigns around refugee issues with others in the university and wider community.
- Support campaigns directly by offering a platform, endorsing a report or becoming a partner in a coalition (such as the Detention Forum - see the resources section for more information).
- A crucial way to share information and celebrate what your institution is doing is to have a webpage that details the work that the university is doing to make itself a (better) University of Sanctuary. For examples, see the University of Bradford, University of Warwick or University of East Anglia pages.



IN DETAIL Events (Theatre, Collections, Fundraisers)

Holding an event which is open to students and/or the wider community can have a huge impact on the way people think; events can challenge assumptions about people who are seeking sanctuary in the UK, and, equally, can highlight the positive effects of inclusion and richness of culture.

Examples from the University of Sanctuary network include:

A Professor of Writing for Children at the University of Winchester published an illustrated book and web-based resource entitled 'The Boat' in order to raise awareness and understanding of refugees among schoolchildren. This is being widely rolled out, with plans to engage schools in a competition to add their own endings to the story. The launch event raised £600 for the Rural Refugee Network. The resources pack for this can be found [here](http://www.the-immigration-boat-story.com)

www.the-immigration-boat-story.com

The group at the University of East Anglia had an exciting line-up of events to celebrate their one-year sanctuary anniversary in January 2019. It included an interactive debate-cum-theatre performance, a winter clothes collection for the British Red Cross, and a volunteering fair to encourage students to support local organisations. It was a huge success and led to the creation of a STAR group at UEA for the first time, and the promotion of the Lift the Ban campaign on campus.

David Attenborough stressed the importance of his alma mater, Leicester University, becoming a University of Sanctuary at their centenary celebrations

Case study - Local media engagement

Whether it's the campus newspaper or the local radio, getting coverage of your initiatives and events can be tricky. The University of Leicester Sanctuary group has succeeded in gaining the attention of readers through their proactive social media presence, and with a little sparkle from a famous alumni...

Sir David Attenborough highlighted the importance of the University's status as a University of Sanctuary when he visited in November 2018:

'it is not just money that supports this university, this university as the city itself, is notable for its general humanity and support of the community in which it is placed... I believe it will continue, because you have now become a University of Sanctuary'

His address, in honour of the unveiling of the Centenary Square dedication plaque, tapped in to local sentiments of pride and compassion and will no doubt encourage solidarity with the group's aims.

The group's Facebook page shares news, events and short films, and provides a snapshot of the many things going on at the University to raise awareness and foster a culture of welcome.



Photograph Credit - Osborne & Hollis Ltd.



Accreditation

We are encouraging every university in the UK to explore how it can meet these three principles and become recognised as a University of Sanctuary.

Every institution will vary in its strengths and context so the approaches taken will not be identical.

All applicants should start with endorsing the City of Sanctuary charter and agreeing to its values and principles with commitment to embed these as appropriate within their own context. www.cityofsanctuary.org/about/

Minimum Criteria

- A public commitment to the City of Sanctuary vision of welcome through endorsement of the charter, and signing of the local group pledge where relevant.
- Offer Sanctuary Scholarships which should be underpinned by the Article 26 Guiding Principles.
- A commitment to taking steps to minimise the impact that changes in government legislation has for forced migrants on the experience of applying for and attending university.
- A web page dedicated to the sanctuary initiatives and commitment of the university to a culture of welcome.
- Support the establishment of a student-led awareness group on campus (such as a STAR group).
- 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.
- Create a three-year plan or embed into existing plans how the institution can continue to develop a culture of welcome.
- Evidence of effective communications that ensure sanctuary scholarships and other opportunities are taken up by people seeking sanctuary. See the Article 26 resource [‘Reaching Out to Sanctuary Scholars’](#).
- Active engagement with the wider community including people seeking sanctuary and their local City of Sanctuary network or refugee support network if there is one.
- Active engagement with the national University of Sanctuary stream. This could be through financial/in kind contributions, contributions to the work of the University of Sanctuary national steering group, or email group (see resource section below for a link to join the email group). It's also vital to provide case studies to share good practice with others and help with the development of resources and furthering the movement.

Award assessment

The application form for all awards, be it for healthcare organisations, faith groups or, indeed, universities, is the same. Therefore, we have written some guidance to be read alongside the application which specifically reflects the university award criteria and addresses the key points to include in your application. You can find this document on the Universities of Sanctuary 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 and your City of Sanctuary regional coordinator. They will read and feedback on the application and arrange for a visit to the university 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 university and identify its particular strengths. A formal decision is then provided by the appraisal team in writing. Once 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, universities will be accredited for three years. During this time universities are expected to continue to meet the minimum criteria. After three years, the university 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.



UNIVERSITY OF
SANCTUARY AWARD
WELCOMING ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES





Guidance for 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 university 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 principles of the Sanctuary Award, please reflect on how you have achieved these principles, 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 university is developing. Try to be concise but don't assume that the recognition team will have knowledge of your university (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 principles 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 university 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 the current cohort of students has moved on, how will the university 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 university's mission statement, strategic plan or various policies and procedures?

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

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 principles, 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 university take note of feedback from sanctuary scholars and adapt accordingly?

And, importantly, has the university 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 implications for their own funding.

Additional points to include where relevant:

Evidence of self-evaluation

Do students, staff and others involved feel that the university has met the principles? 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 university's endeavours.



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. Whilst the headlines have largely moved on, the crisis of forced migration has not. According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) nearly 70 million people, roughly the same as 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.

In the year to March 2018, just over 1 million people sought refuge in Europe with more than a third making the perilous crossing of the Mediterranean Sea. Just 25,500 people (including children), less than 3% of those who reached Europe, claimed asylum in the UK in that same period. The UK asylum system is intentionally hostile, with thousands of people waiting months, or even years, for a decision and just 32% of initial applications being granted in the last year. Most people whose initial asylum claim is refused, appeal against the decision, and a high number of appeals are successful. In 2016, the courts overturned Home Office decisions in more than 40% of appeal cases, raising huge questions over the initial application process.





Barriers to accessing higher education for people seeking sanctuary

As already mentioned, students who are eligible to study in the UK can still face many obstacles before they are able to continue, or begin further education here. Immigration status is something which can affect many aspects of a person's life; it can mean difficulty in accessing financial support, can cause anxiety or stress, can mean a person is subject to reporting requirements and can make them a target for hostility. Below we touch on a few of the barriers people face and outline ways that universities themselves can help people overcome them.

Finance

People seeking sanctuary are classified as overseas students at many institutions and so they have to pay international fees. They also cannot access student finance (loans) to pay for their tuition or living costs and, as noted elsewhere, people seeking sanctuary are not allowed to work and can become destitute when financial support from the government is stopped. On top of this they might have to pay legal fees or renew their status.

Those with Humanitarian Protection (a form of immigration status granted by the Home Office to a person who it decides has a need for protection but who does not meet the criteria for refugee status) are classified as home students, so pay the lower fee, and can work but cannot access a student loan until they can claim '3 years of ordinary residence' in the UK.

Even for students with refugee status, their personal or family upheaval, along with the likelihood that for at least some of the time during their asylum application they were unable to earn a living, means that they are often not financially secure.

While some students might be able to secure a scholarship for their studies, this is often not equivalent to Student Finance funding and can still lead to financial hardship.

Educational Documentation

Many applicants encounter problems when it comes to the documentation required by universities. Often people have had to disrupt their studies part-way through or have lost their transcripts or certificates during their displacement. Universities should be mindful of this when it comes to assessing applications and, where possible, find ways to ascertain grades in a different way if transcript evidence can't be given. Equally they may be able to overlook incomplete records if enough evidence of qualification can be shown through circumstantial evidence and ability.

There are examples in which universities have made allowances for transcript discrepancies within the network, such as the University of Bristol which includes this information on its web-page for prospective sanctuary students:

'We understand that your studies may have been interrupted, that you might not have evidence of your previous qualifications or that your qualifications aren't transferable'.

The implications of Immigration Status

Language

Even once people are offered places at their chosen university, the offers are often conditional on an English language requirement, meaning that many people are unable to take up their offer to study. The tests and scores required vary amongst universities but almost all tests cost money. This exam fee, and the associated cost of the lessons to get someone to the right level can be a final, dispiriting hurdle for many who are so close to pursuing their futures. As such, it is important that universities are clear on which courses genuinely require the student to undertake such exams so as to avoid unnecessary costs to the student or 'over-compliance'.

RefuAid is just one organisation working to tackle this issue by working with private language schools, but even their vital efforts are insufficient to meet the needs of so many prospective students, meaning they are having to turn down students who ask them for help. They emphasise the capacity for universities themselves to help tackle this problem.

For instance, if universities conducted free, internal language assessments, students would not have to shoulder the additional expenses of their exams. This is already happening at many universities but remains a barrier to others.

As previously mentioned, a person's immigration status, an asylum seeker or refused asylum seeker, can mean people are subject to reporting requirements, can be detained in an immigration removal facility and have the threat of deportation looming over them.

People awaiting a decision on their application to remain in the UK are required to regularly sign on at their local reporting centre. However, this location is often many miles away from where they live and so it is not unusual for such journeys to take an entire day. Each person or family is assigned a day of the week, and a one or two-hour window in which to report. Frequency is determined by the Home Office but is normally on a weekly, monthly, or six-monthly basis. Universities should be mindful of this and ensure additional support is offered for sanctuary scholars who may have to miss classes for this purpose.

'Immigration detention' refers to the Home Office practice of detaining people seeking sanctuary and others on an administrative basis, rather than as part of a criminal procedure. For instance, the reasons to hold someone in immigration detention can include: to effect a person's removal; to establish their identity or basis of immigration/asylum claim; where there is reason to believe that there is a risk of absconding; or where there is a risk of harm through trafficking or to the public. However, research has shown that detention is often used unnecessarily, which is all the more worrying when we consider that the UK is the only country in Europe without a statutory time limit on length of detention. Detention can be very traumatic, and the prospect of it can be extremely daunting for people seeking sanctuary awaiting their decision, so it is important that staff are aware of the implications.



Mental Health

Many sanctuary seekers share a history of multiple traumas which may display in many different ways. Whilst in some people it might not be immediately obvious, it is important to be aware of some of the signs of stress and to have a clear process if you need to support someone.

What can universities do?

- Make sure student counsellors or student wellbeing staff are aware of the challenges people seeking sanctuary face and are equipped to support and/or signpost where necessary.
- If your university is offering a sanctuary scholarship, ensure there is a designated contact for those students to go to with any issues they face, or concerns about mental health.
- Be sensitive to cultural factors, such as the stigma around mental health in some cultures, different expectations or measures of success and so on.
- Make sure that there is an easily identifiable point of contact for someone if they feel like they are struggling or need to reach out for extra support. This could be a mentor, a students' union representative or a counsellor.
- Have a clear policy on mitigating circumstances, deferrals and repeat years to ensure that anyone who does encounter problems, or has to delay the completion of their studies, is given good advice.
- Refer to the 'The City of Sanctuary Mental Health Resource Pack' as a really useful tool to help understand the challenges people face.
- It can be very helpful to sanctuary scholars to be assisted in setting up a peer support network amongst themselves, should they wish it. This can be done through a virtual group or by arranging a first meeting for them face-to-face, perhaps with a designated member of staff also in attendance. For instance, the University of Winchester asks applicants (on the Sanctuary Award application form) if they would like to meet existing sanctuary scholars on their interview day, or at enrolment, as part of a welcoming environment.





Some Definitions

Immigration law is a complex area, 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; particularly useful are the Article 26 materials featured on our website.

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 around £5 per day).

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. However, some people cannot be returned to their country of origin, regardless of their refusal.

Refugee

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.



Resources

Statistics, tools and useful guides

- The **City of Sanctuary** resources section has a wide range of information, tools and templates available at: www.cityofsanctuary.org/resources/
- 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
- The **Refugee Council** publishes regular briefings on UK asylum statistics at: www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/stats
- **Refugee Week** happens every year in June and there are lots of resources and ideas at: www.refugeeweek.org.uk/resources/
- **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/images/uploads/documents/Equal_Access_Toolkit_-_Low_Res.pdf
- **Universities UK** published a report in 2018 called, 'Higher education and displaced people: a guide for UK universities' which can be found here: www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Pages/higher-education-and-displaced-people-a-guide-for-UK-universities.aspx
- **Refugee Study** is a useful page for Sanctuary Seekers looking for options to pursue their education, but can also help universities to see what others are doing to help: www.refugee-study.co.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
- **Refugee Support Network** regularly updates the resources section of their website with useful reports and guides: www.refugeesupportnetwork.org/lists/3-resources
- **The Article 26** guiding principles to follow when creating scholarship programmes and information on how to identify, reach out to and then select suitable candidates can be accessed via the Universities of Sanctuary website: <https://universities.cityofsanctuary.org/article-26>
- **The City of Sanctuary Mental Health Resource Pack** can be found here: <https://health.cityofsanctuary.org/resources>
- **Universities Scotland** have produced a guidance document on refugees and higher education in collaboration with the Scottish Refugee Council: www.universities-scotland.ac.uk/publications/refugees-welcome/



Key organisations

The following is a list of some of the key organisations supporting people seeking sanctuary in the UK to access HE.

It is also worth finding out about your local refugee support groups who may run their own training sessions.

STAR is a national charity, made up of over 40 groups at universities across the UK and a national team which coordinates and supports the groups. They work on campaigns and awareness-raising as well as with local refugee support organisations to help teach English via conversation classes or to provide volunteers. STAR also provide expert support and guidance on setting up sanctuary scholarships.

www.star-network.org.uk/index.php/campaigns/equal_access

CARA (Council of At-Risk Academics) works in partnership with universities and research institutes, as well as many academics and other individuals, to offer practical and financial help to academics who find their lives endangered. CARA offers assistance to reach a place where they can continue their work in safety and can help rescue their families too.

www.cara.ngo

Refugee Action offers help and advice for people seeking sanctuary on issues including the asylum process and how to access support. They also champion some really effective campaigns. www.refugee-action.org.uk/our-services/

Detention Forum is a network of organisations working together to challenge the UK's use of detention. www.detentionforum.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

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

Refugee Support Network provides a range of services which help 15-25 year olds seeking safety in the UK to get into, stay in, and do well in education. This includes educational mentoring, a national helpline offering advice and support for young people who have the academic potential to attend university but who face challenges in doing so because of practical and immigration status-related barriers. They also run training aimed at university staff and student ambassadors. www.refugeesupportnetwork.org

Access to Higher Education Working Group (AHEWG) is a group of NGOs and higher education bodies working to achieve sustainable change that will secure opportunities in university-level education for migrants. To join, email equalaccess@star-network.org.uk

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

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

Here is a link to sign up to the email group, used by universities, NGOs and interested individuals for any queries regarding sanctuary initiatives.

www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?SUBED1=SANCTUARY&A=1



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