



Access and Awareness: The Higher Ed Guide For Young Migrants & Refugees

Introduction

We Belong and STAR have created this information pack to help you to support young migrants and refugees in your school or college who may be facing barriers to accessing higher education. We want your help to ensure that all young migrants and refugees get the right advice and are provided with information about the support that is available to them.

We Belong Story - launched in 2019, [We Belong](#) is the first UK-wide charity to be set up and run entirely by and for young migrants who have experienced first-hand the impact of government hostile environment policies. We Belong have worked with over 1,300 young people who were previously unaware of their status and the effects it has on accessing support for university.

Every year, We Belong raise awareness about the importance of young people securing their immigration status and how to overcome barriers to education. We have found this to be very successful because of the referrals received from teachers regarding young people who are unable to access higher education.

STAR Story - [Student Action for Refugees \(STAR\)](#) is a movement of students building a society where refugees are welcomed and can thrive as equal members of the community. Set up by students at Nottingham University in 1994, today we are a network of over 40 groups at universities and colleges across the UK. Together we:

- Volunteer at local refugee projects
- Campaign to improve the lives of refugees
- Educate people about refugees and asylum
- Improve access to university for people seeking asylum and refugees.

STAR leads the [Equal Access Campaign](#) in partnership with the NUS and works with universities to set up and maintain scholarships for students from refugee and asylum seeking backgrounds in the UK ([see full list here](#)).

During the pandemic, We Belong and STAR have continued to offer online support to young migrants, refugees and asylum seekers who are planning to pursue higher education. At this challenging time, we believe that access to higher education is more important than ever to support the well-being and future development of the young people at your school or college, and we thank you for taking the time to support your students on this journey.



What does this information pack include?

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1. Immigration status and access to university

The Issue

Many young people, who are living in the UK, do not have equal access to higher education because of their immigration status. They may be treated as international students and denied access to student finance, often only finding this out after they have already been accepted at university, leaving their education and career ambitions in tatters. The good news is that there are now around 70 universities who offer some kind of scholarship for people who find themselves blocked from accessing HE. The purpose of this guide is to make sure that young people get given the correct information as early as possible and are also made aware of the support and scholarships that are available to them.

How does immigration status impact access to university?

Below is a brief overview of some different immigration statuses and what they mean for eligibility for home fees and student finance in England. This information was taken from the Coram Children's Legal Centre [website](#). For more detailed guidance on eligibility for home fees and student finance in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, see [UKCISA's Information Sheets](#).

Refugees who live in the UK and those granted **Humanitarian protection** (*this is a very recent change*) are normally eligible for student finance and treated as home students.

Asylum Seekers are not normally eligible for student finance and will be charged international fees. Almost all are not permitted to work and live off around £5 a day of government support.

Those with British citizenship and **Indefinite Leave to Remain** are eligible for student finance if they've been living in the UK, The Channel Islands or the Isle of Man for 3 years before starting their course. They must have their status (with no restrictions on how long they can stay) on the first day of the first academic year of the course- which could be September, 1 January, 1 April or 1 July.

Those with other limited forms of leave, such as **Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children Leave**, **Discretionary Leave** or **Limited leave to remain**, may only be eligible if:

- they are ordinarily resident in England, AND
- they have 3 years [lawful](#) residence in the UK on the first day of the first term of the start of the academic year of the course; AND
- they are either:
 - under 18 years old and have lived in the UK for the preceding 7 years, OR
 - over 18 and have lived half their life in the UK.

2. University scholarships for refugees and migrants

Many universities have set up scholarships or offer fee waivers to help refugees and migrants access higher education - at STAR and We Belong, we are always campaigning and lobbying for more to be set up. You can find detailed information of which universities offer support:

- Check out the [STAR website](#) to find details and links to universities offering scholarships & fee waivers which are open to refugees and people seeking asylum
- Check out the [We Belong website](#) for details and links to details and links to universities offering scholarships & fee waivers for people with other immigration statuses which mean they are not eligible for student finance.

There are also a number of trusts and foundations who provide scholarship funding and financial support.

- [Westheimer Health and Social Care Scholarship](#) - 3 scholarships for young asylum seekers (aged up to 28 years old) pursue higher education in health and social care, medicine, nursing or related professions.
- [The Black Heart Foundation](#) - dedicated to improving the educational access, quality and outcomes for children from under-privileged backgrounds.
- [The Brittan Scholarship](#) - For those who want to study a masters course or another higher education course of no more than two years duration (such as a university foundation year). The scholarship is available for students of International Law, International Aid or International Business.
- [Marks Family Charitable Foundation](#) - A scholarship for asylum seekers to pursue a degree in the humanities, medicine or health and social care.
- [The Leathersellers Company Student Grant's Scheme](#) - The Leathersellers' Company now awards Student Grants of up to £5,000 a year, for a maximum of 4 years, to study full-time for a degree at a UK University. The scheme is open to students of any nationality who can show a commitment to the UK.
- [The UNITE Foundation](#) - Free university accommodation for care leavers and estranged students aged 25 or under, holding home fee status and undertaking an undergraduate degree.
- [Family Action](#) - Provides grants to support people begin or continue their studies (for people with right of residency only)
- [Prospects scholarships list](#) - List of further available scholarships for higher education.



- [Hope for the Young](#) - Provides small grants towards tuition and living expenses for asylum seekers
- [Refugee Survival Trust \(Scotland\)](#) Small grants to enable refugees and asylum seekers to access education and employment such as application fees, book costs etc.
- [Ruth Hayman Trust](#) - Small grants to support the education and training of adults who have come to settle in the UK, speak English as a second or other language and have difficulty paying for their studies.

3. How to apply for scholarships; a step by step guide

Here are some simple tips to share with young people who are planning to apply for a scholarship or fee waiver. You and your students may also find this [STAR webinar](#) about scholarships and applying to university useful.

1. Check your eligibility for student finance

People with different immigration statuses have different eligibility for financial support. Coram Children's Legal Centre have put together a [fact sheet on access to higher education](#) in England for refugees and migrants which outlines the eligibility for different groups. [UKCISA](#) also has guidance on eligibility for England, Scotland, Wales and N. Ireland. If you think you may be eligible under the "long residence" category you can find useful guidance on the [We Belong website](#) about how to apply for student finance.

2. Check which universities offer scholarships or fee waivers

If you aren't eligible for home fees or students support, a scholarship might be the only option. Whilst you can't rely on being offered a scholarship, applying to the universities that offer them will improve your chances. Take a look at our scholarship lists and see which universities offer the course you're interested in. We try to keep the lists as up to date as possible but recommend that you check with the university to make sure.

[STAR's list of scholarships](#)

[We Belongs's list of scholarships](#)

3. Check eligibility for the scholarship

Universities set up their own scholarships so they are all slightly different. For example only people with certain immigration statuses may be eligible and your age or location may also affect eligibility. Please read the information on the universities website carefully and get in touch with the university if you are uncertain of the eligibility criteria. Make a note of the scholarship deadline.

4. Apply for your course:

In most cases, you must apply for the course before you apply for the scholarship.

a. Undergraduate – to apply for an undergraduate degree you must apply through [UCAS](#). The deadline to apply is usually January 15th. UCAS produces some guides to applying for international students in [different languages](#) that may be helpful. You can apply for up to 5 universities through UCAS. Make sure you also apply to universities which have confirmed scholarships. If you applied to universities that don't offer scholarships, there is the option of applying through UCAS Extra which is usually open until June 30th.

b. Postgraduate – to apply for a postgraduate degree you can either apply directly through the university's website or through UCAS depending on the type of course. Whilst there isn't usually a deadline for postgraduate applications, it's better to apply early to ensure there is time to apply for the scholarship.

5. Apply for the scholarship!

Each university will produce their own guidance on how to apply for the scholarship so make sure you follow that. Give yourself enough time to complete your application so you aren't rushing.

Frequently Asked Questions

- **How long do I wait before hearing a decision on my scholarship application?**
Universities have different processes. Some scholarship applications will have an interview stage whereby the applicant will be notified if they were successful after. The university will provide a time frame in which to expect their decision.
- **What can I do to increase my chances of obtaining a scholarship?**
This list is not exhaustive but some useful things to do are: Be honest in your application and statement. If you are someone who has taken extra-curricular activities or volunteering, highlight that. Submit all required documents on time. Stand out and focus on what makes you unique.
- **What grades do I need to be eligible for a scholarship?**
*Your predicted **grades** must meet the entry **requirements** for the degree concerned. It is also important to double-check your eligibility for the scholarship on the university website first.*
- **How do I prepare for my scholarship interview?**
We Belong instructed the help of members who are Sanctuary scholars to create a [Sanctuary Scholarship Prep Guide](#). It will help you navigate some anxieties you might experience during the scholarship application process.



4. Useful organisations providing advice and support

- [We Belong](#) – for young migrants aged 16-25 wellbeing support, information on barriers in accessing university and assistance finding options available (if you are not a UK national, but have lived in England for a substantial period of your life).
- [Refugee Support Network](#) – helpline to support asylum seekers, refugees and migrants aged 16-24 access higher education.
- [Coram Children's Legal Centre](#) – legal advice and information on education for young people.
- [Direct-gov – Student Finance](#) for information on student finance and how to apply.”
- [Migrant Children's Project](#) – provides information and legal support about entitlements to education (for young people as well as children).
- [The Refugee Council's Guide](#) -Short guide on access to further education in England for asylum seekers and refugees
- [RefuAid](#) – Access to education support including funding for English exams.
- [Right to Remain](#) – Right to Remain is a UK-based human rights organisation. We work with communities, groups and organisations across the UK, providing information, resources, training and assistance to help people to establish their right to remain, and challenge injustice in the immigration and asylum system.
- [UK NARIC](#) – recognition and comparison of international qualifications.
- [UKCISA](#) – The UK Council for International Students Affairs provides information and support to students classed as international and can answer questions about your eligibility and other complex queries.

5. Personal stories from We Belong and STAR activists



“I ended up going to uni after completing my 3 year wait as per the supreme court decision. I’m now about to complete my foundation year in psychology”
(Ijeoma)

“I got into uni by applying for the Access to Higher Education Scholarship at LSE. Without being awarded this scholarship, which is only available to 2-3 students per year, I wouldn’t be at university.”
(Andrew)



“If it was not for the Sanctuary scholarship I would not have been able to go to university. The scholarship was the first time in the UK that I had any financial freedom and it allowed me to make the most of my university experience. This also meant that I didn’t have to work overtime in my jobs anymore and could concentrate fully on my education. Lastly since I was living at home, my scholarship also allowed me to save money and contribute towards sorting out my family’s immigration applications.” **(Arkam)**

“I was able to get to university after taking a forced gap year after my A-Levels. In this year I managed to raise over £20 000 to cover tuition fees through working, saving and crowdfunding which have allowed me to pay for my first, second and half of 3rd year.” **(Agnes)**



“I’m a recent graduate from the University of York, but my journey to university was different. I moved to the UK when I was 14 years old as an asylum seeker. I went to school and college like any other student in the UK but when it came to applying for universities I wasn’t treated like the rest of my peers. I was classed as an international student and I was expected to pay international student fees, with no access to government student loans and no right to work I couldn’t pay to continue my studies. But, unlike many other students in my situation, my education wasn’t put on hold because I was able to get a scholarship and graduate from the University of York. Honestly, there’s no words to describe how I felt when I got the scholarship!” **(Maryam)**