

Student  
Action for  
Refugees

# Higher education for young migrants and refugees in the UK

## An information pack for schools and colleges

<b><u>Introduction</u></b>	<b><u>2</u></b>
<b><u>1. Immigration status and access to university</u></b>	<b><u>3</u></b>
<b><u>2. University scholarships for refugees and migrants</u></b>	<b><u>6</u></b>
<b><u>3. How to apply for scholarships: A step-by-step guide</u></b>	<b><u>8</u></b>
<b><u>4. Useful organisations providing advice and support</u></b>	<b><u>10</u></b>
<b><u>5. Personal stories from We Belong and STAR activists</u></b>	<b><u>11</u></b>

## 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.

If you find this information pack helpful or would like to suggest improvements, please use our [feedback form](#).

**About We Belong** - Launched in 2019, [We Belong](#) is the first UK-wide youth led charity to be set up and run entirely by and for young migrants aged 16-25 who have experienced first-hand the impact of government hostile environment policies and fights for wider immigration change. We Belong have worked with over 1,500 young people who were previously unaware of their status and the effects it has on accessing support for university since inception as a campaign group in 2014. Every year, We Belong raise awareness about the importance of young people securing their immigration status and how to overcome barriers to education by providing university access support, [personal statement clinics](#) and conducting information sessions both online and in person. The sessions are catered to a variety of students in school, young people who have left school, university staff, teachers, local authorities and other practitioners. The charity has found this to be very successful because of the many referrals received each year regarding young people who are unable to access higher education.

This year, We Belong contributions saw a change to the Immigration Rules, which introduced [a new policy](#) in June 2022, making it faster and more affordable for young people who have grown up in the UK to get Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR), cutting the time in half from ten years to a five-year route.

**About STAR** - [Student Action for Refugees \(STAR\)](#) is the national network of students building a more understanding and just society where refugees are welcomed and can thrive in the UK. 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 locally working directly with refugees, building understanding and connections
- Campaign nationally for policy change and equal access to higher education for refugees
- Learn about refugee protection and the asylum journey in the UK with experts and peers

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

# 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 over 80 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. The information in this section was drawn from guidance on the [UKCISA website](#), the [GOV.UK website](#), and the [Student Finance England practitioner site](#). This summary is correct as of November 2022, but please note that details are subject to change and information included in this document should not be used as an alternative to professional legal advice.

For more detailed guidance on eligibility for home fees and student finance in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, see [UKCISA's Information Sheets](#). UKCISA also has a [Student Advice Line](#) on **+4420 7788 9214** which is open Monday to Friday (except for public holidays): 1.00pm to 4.00pm (UK time).

## ***Barriers to student finance***

- **Asylum seekers** (individuals who are waiting for a decision on their asylum claim) 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. However, higher education institutions can decide to charge home fee rates to asylum-seeking students at their own discretion and may offer scholarships for asylum-seeking students (see Section 2, below).

- In England, individuals with **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 meet **long residence** criteria - meaning 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.

This includes people who have been given limited leave to remain as the result of an asylum claim or as the result of an Article 8 claim on the right to private and family life in the UK.

- **British National (Overseas) visa holders** from Hong Kong are currently classed as international students and unable to access student finance until they complete a pathway to settlement and receive indefinite leave to remain. [See the Government's Welcome Pack for BN\(O\) holders for more information.](#) Many BN(O) holders are in the UK for sanctuary-related reasons, including political persecution.

### ***Eligibility conditions for other immigration statuses***

- **Refugees** (individuals who have been granted refugee status) who live in the UK and those granted **Humanitarian protection** are normally eligible for student finance and treated as home students.
- 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.
  - Individuals from Afghanistan on the **ACRS and ARAP schemes** are exceptions to this rule, and have been granted immediate access to student finance
- In [Scotland](#), the following groups are also normally eligible for student finance:
  - Individuals who have been refused refugee status but granted **limited or discretionary leave** or another type of immigration leave;

- Individuals that meet [long residence](#) criteria;
- Individuals that have a ['Relevant connection' with Scotland](#).
- In [Wales](#) and [Northern Ireland](#), individuals with **discretionary or limited leave to remain and their family** are normally eligible for student finance if they have been ordinarily resident in the UK and Islands since the leave was granted. Their spouses / civil partners and children may also be eligible.
- Individuals who are in the UK on **the Ukraine schemes** (Homes for Ukraine, Ukraine Family Scheme, and Ukraine Extension Scheme) have been granted access to student finance and home fees in England, Scotland and Wales.
- Individuals with **stateless leave, Calais leave and Section 67 leave** are normally eligible for student finance if they have been ordinarily resident in the UK and Islands since the leave was granted.

Please note that this is an overview of the guidance and is correct as of November 2022. For more detail and for up-to-date information, check the [UKCISA website](#).

### ***Impact of the Nationality and Borders Act***

On 28 June 2022, the provisions of the Nationality and Borders Act came into force. As a result of these provisions, individuals who claim asylum in the UK may be granted [two types of refugee permission](#) - Group 1 refugees will be granted refugee permission to stay in the UK (equivalent to refugee status), while Group 2 refugees will be granted temporary refugee permission to stay in the UK (an initial period of 30 months leave to remain with additional restrictions). Individuals who qualify for humanitarian protection will be granted temporary humanitarian permission to stay (an initial period of 30 months leave to remain with additional restrictions).

Eligibility criteria for student finance for these individuals has not yet been clarified - we are monitoring the situation and will update our guidance accordingly once student finance regulations are announced.

### ***Other criteria for student finance***

Anyone intending to apply for a student loan will also need to check they meet other criteria. Full information about the criteria that individuals need to meet to apply for student finance can be found on [GOV.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 that 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.
- In December 2022, a new website is launching with information about accessing university for people who are displaced in the UK - [\*\*Displaced Student Opportunities UK\*\*](#).

There are also a number of trusts and foundations who provide scholarship funding and financial support. For up to date information, check [\*\*STAR's list of additional support\*\*](#).

- ⇒ [\*\*Westheimer Scholarship\*\*](#) - Three scholarships for asylum seekers aged 28 or under to pursue an undergraduate degree in social care, medicine, nursing or related professions. Applications are open between April and June each year.
- ⇒ [\*\*Marks Family Charitable Foundation\*\*](#) - A scholarship for students from asylum-seeking backgrounds who are embarking on a postgraduate degree programme. The scholarship covers 'home' tuition fees (up to £9500 per year). Applications are open between April and June each year.
- ⇒ [\*\*The Ralph N Emanuel Scholarship\*\*](#) - Three scholarships for an undergraduate degree with a clear humanitarian purpose. The specific amount awarded will be dependent upon the candidate's individual circumstances and university location. See website for full eligibility criteria.
- ⇒ [\*\*The Jane Goodman Charitable Trust Scholarship\*\*](#) - One scholarship for an undergraduate degree in Dentistry. The scholarship will pay home tuition

fees and associated study costs. The specific amount awarded will be dependent on the candidate's individual circumstances and university location. See website for full eligibility criteria.

- ⇒ [\*\*The Black Heart Scholarship Programme\*\*](#) - The Black Heart Scholarship Programme awards several annual bursaries to qualified candidates to advance their educational goals and life aspirations. The process is open to all stages of education from preparatory education to postgraduate schooling and the bursaries can be applied to the costs of formal (classroom/school) education or experiential education (field/community).
- ⇒ [\*\*The UNITE Foundation Scholarship\*\*](#) - Free university accommodation for care leavers and estranged students aged 25 or under, holding home fee status and undertaking an undergraduate degree.
- ⇒ [\*\*Helena Kennedy Foundation HE Awards\*\*](#) - Awards of up to £2,250 for students in publicly-funded further education institutions to continue their studies at certain 'badged' higher education institutions. Open to applicants who are experiencing barriers to continuing their education and are able to demonstrate severe financial hardship.
- ⇒ [\*\*RIBA John and David Hubert Bursary\*\*](#) - A bursary of up to £6,000 for students who have experienced forced displacement and who are enrolled in a professional qualification in architecture validated by the RIBA as either a Part 1 or a Part 2 course in the UK.
- ⇒ [\*\*The Leathersellers' Company Student Grants Scheme\*\*](#) - Grants of up to £5,000 per year for up to 4 years for students who are enrolled on a full-time degree course at a UK university. The scheme is open to students with at least five years leave to remain who can show a commitment to the UK.
- ⇒ [\*\*Hope for the Young\*\*](#) - Grants of up to £4,500 for refugees, asylum-seekers, and undocumented young people who have no access to government funds, or to those who are facing extreme financial hardship.
- ⇒ [\*\*Lawrence Atwell's Charity\*\*](#) - Grants of up to £1,500 for young people aged 16-26 living in England and Wales from low-income backgrounds, to help them gain vocational, accredited qualifications.
- ⇒ [\*\*The Ruth Hayman Trust\*\*](#) - Grants of up to £1,000 to support the education and training of adults who have come to settle in the UK, and whose first language is not English and cannot afford the full fees 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.

#### Helpful resources:

- [VIDEOS: Applying to uni](#)
- [VIDEOS: About student finance](#)
- [VIDEO: Applying for scholarships](#)
- [READ: Guide to applying for scholarships](#)



#### 1. Check eligibility for student finance

In the UK, people with different immigration statuses have different eligibility for student finance (see section 1, above). For a detailed explanation of student finance eligibility for refugees and people seeking asylum, visit the [UKCISA website](#). 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

If you aren't eligible for student finance, you may be able to access a scholarship to fund your studies. Over 80 universities in the UK now offer scholarships for refugee and asylum-seeking students. Although you can't guarantee that you will be awarded a scholarship, you can maximise your chances by applying to universities that offer a scholarship that suits you.

Take a look at STAR's [scholarships list](#) to see which universities offer the course you're interested in. This list is regularly updated but we recommend that you check the details with the university.



#### 3. Check eligibility for the scholarship

All of the scholarships offered by universities are slightly different. Some are only open to asylum seekers or to people who are not eligible for student finance. Check the eligibility column of the [scholarships list](#) and the university's website. 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.

**Undergraduate:** To apply for an undergraduate degree, you must apply on the UCAS website. The deadline to apply is in January. UCAS has guides to applying

for international students in different languages. You can apply for up to five universities through UCAS - make sure you apply to universities that have scholarships for which you are eligible. If you applied to universities that don't offer scholarships, you can apply through UCAS Extra which is usually open until 30 June.

**Postgraduate:** To apply for a postgraduate degree you can apply directly through the university's website. While deadlines for postgraduate applications vary, it's better to apply early to ensure there is time to apply for a scholarship.



## 5. Apply for a scholarship

Each university will produce their own guidance on how to apply for a scholarship so make sure you follow their advice. Give yourself enough time to complete your application so you don't need to rush.

## 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 enlisted 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. You can also check out this [STAR webinar](#) and [guidance sheet](#) about scholarships and university.*

If you have further questions, take a look at STAR's [Frequently Asked Questions](#).

## 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 Education UK](#) – helpline and mentoring to support asylum seekers, refugees and migrants aged 16-25 to access higher education.
- ⇒ [Coram Children’s Legal Centre](#) – legal advice and information on education for young people.
- ⇒ [Direct-gov – Student Finance](#) – 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).
- ⇒ [RefuAid](#) – access to education support including funding for English language exams.
- ⇒ [Right to Remain](#) – information, resources, training and assistance to help people to establish their right to remain, and challenge injustice in the immigration and asylum system.
- ⇒ [STAR](#) – resources to support your application. Students and applicants from refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds can also join the [Equal Access Network](#) to connect with peers and sign up to our [access to uni mailing list](#).
- ⇒ [UCAS](#) – The University and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) offers guidance for undergraduate applications, including [advice for advisers on supporting refugees, asylum seekers, and those with limited leave to remain in the UK](#). There are also useful guides for applicants, including [advice on writing your personal statement](#), [advice for people seeking asylum and refugees](#), and [advice on choosing a reference](#).
- ⇒ [UK ENIC](#) – 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.

You can find information about other organisations that may be able to support your students on the [Resources and support](#) page of the STAR website.

## 5. Personal stories from We Belong and STAR activists



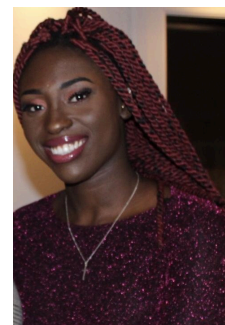
"I ended up going to uni after completing my 3 year wait as per the supreme court decision. I have now completed my foundation year in Psychology"  
**(Ijeoma)**

"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 have been able to go to 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 graduated 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)**