

Access to Higher Education for Resettled Refugees in England

A Guide for
Community
Sponsorship Groups

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Refugee Support Network is a UK-based charity helping refugee children and young people build more hopeful futures through education. Their direct programmes and research combine to enable young refugees to access education, thrive in education and use their education for positive impact in the world. Find out more about Refugee Support Network [here](#).

Key terms

Community Sponsorship

Community Sponsorship is a UK government programme enabling communities across the UK to welcome refugees into their local area and support them as they rebuild their lives. The scheme was set up in 2016 and is now happening across the UK.

Resettlement

Many refugees cannot return to their homes because of continued conflict, wars and persecution in their countries of origin. Resettlement is the term used to describe the process of moving a refugee from a host country in which they have sought asylum, to a country that has the capacity to support them in the longer term.

Higher Education

For the purposes of this guide, higher education (HE) describes post-18 learning that takes place at universities.

Acronyms

BTECs	Business and Technology Education Council
ESFA	Education and Skills Funding Agency
IELTs	International English Language Testing System
FE	Further Education
HE	Higher Education
NVQs	National Vocational Qualification
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SFE	Student Finance England
UCAS	The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service

1. Introduction and context

The importance of education

Refugee young people in the UK consistently prioritise education. They have high aspirations to study, including at university¹, and often talk about education as one of the most positive things in their lives.² Education has well-documented benefits for young refugees who have been forcibly displaced from their homes.

Firstly, education can benefit refugees' psychosocial well-being as they come to terms with the hardships that forced them to flee their homes, and their experiences during their journeys to safety. The normalising routine that education provides can help them cope and find purpose in their new homes.³ And, when learning in safe and supportive environments, education can generate a sense of belonging and promote self-esteem and resilience.⁴ The friends and support networks that young refugees often find at school, college or university are important, and help them to settle into their new environments.⁵

Education is also a gateway to opportunities for the future for refugee young people, whether for onward education or employment. This is particularly important for those who have experienced adversity in the past; education helps young refugees to look forward and make plans for their future.⁶ Higher education (HE) is particularly critical in this sense. UNHCR, the United Nations refugee agency, describes how HE "opens new horizons and creates opportunities that seemed to have disappeared in the chaos of displacement".⁷

Global statistics

Despite its benefits, there are many obstacles that make accessing education difficult for refugees around the world. Globally, an estimated 48 percent of refugee children of a school age are out of school.⁸ Education options dramatically narrow at the post-primary level: in 2019, only 31 percent of refugee children are enrolled in secondary school, and a mere three percent of refugee young people were enrolled in university courses.⁹ For a stark comparison that emphasises the challenges facing refugees attempting to access

¹ Stevenson, J and Willott, J. 2007. The aspiration and access to higher education of teenage refugees in the UK. *Compare: a journal of comparative and international education*, 37(5), pp. 671-687; Gateley, D.E. 2015. A Policy of Vulnerability or Agency?: refugee young people's opportunities in accessing further and higher education in the UK. *Compare: a journal of comparative and international education*, 45(1), pp.26-46.

² Elwyn, H, Gladwell, C and Lyall, S. 2012. "I just want to study": access to higher education for young refugees and asylum seekers. Refugee Support Network.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Orrnert, A. 2020. Interventions to promote wellbeing of refugees in high- and middle- income countries. Institute of Development Studies.

⁵ Taylor, S. and Sidhu, R.K. 2012. Supporting refugee students in schools: what constitutes inclusive education? *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 16, pp. 39-56.

⁶ Elwyn et al. 2012. "I just want to study". (See note 2.)

⁷ UNHCR. 2019. *Stepping Up: Refugee Education in Crisis*. UNHCR, p.40.

⁸ UNHCR. 2020. *Coming Together for Refugee Education*. UNHCR, p.9.

⁹ Ibid.

HE, 38 percent of youth in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries are estimated to obtain a university degree.¹⁰

“I want to go to university”: how this guide can help

This guide intends to help Community Sponsorship Groups who are supporting young refugees resettled to the UK with aspirations to study at university. This guide first provides information on the key issues that may emerge as resettled refugees apply to university. It then provides step-by-step guidance on how to support young refugees with the university application process. The guide concludes by providing information on alternatives to university and additional helpful resources and organisations.

The role of Community Sponsorship Groups

As a Community Sponsor, your role will be to walk with a resettled refugee through the university application process. While you cannot make decisions on their behalf, you can:

- help them find the information they need to make decisions that are right for them
- provide emotional support throughout the university application process
- provide practical support, such as by reading through personal statements and helping them to prepare for interviews

This type of support can be really valuable and play an important role in helping refugee young people reach university.¹¹ It is suggested that, if you are supporting a young person with applying to university, you should put in place regular support meetings from the summer before applying to university, through to preparing to go to university, with more regular meetings around the time that young people are preparing their applications.

Scope of guidance

This guide refers to young people or young refugees. While this guide has been developed with young people, aged 17-25, in mind, much of the guidance applies to older groups of resettled refugees who aspire to study at university in the UK.

This guide applies to resettled refugees living in England. While much of the guidance is relevant for refugees living in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland in terms of the support that can be provided, there are some variations. In particular, the process of applying for university is noticeably different in Scotland. If you are supporting young people outside of England, please visit the [UK Council for International Student Affairs](#)

¹⁰ UNESCO. 2018. Global Education Monitoring Report 2019. UNESCO.

¹¹ Ashlee, A and Gladwell, C. 2020. Education transitions for refugee and asylum-seeking young people in the UK: exploring the journey to further and higher education. Unicef UK.

(UKCISA) to understand the specificities of fee status and costs of university for [Wales](#), [Northern Ireland](#) and [Scotland](#).

This guide is aimed at support for refugees applying for undergraduate courses at university. For more information about supporting a resettled refugee to apply for postgraduate studies, visit Refugee Support Network's Frequently Asked Questions on the subject [here](#).

2. Key issues for resettled refugees in accessing university

This section summarises the key issues pertaining to resettled refugees' access to university.

Fee status

Whether a young person is categorised as a 'home student' or an 'overseas student' will depend on the type of immigration status they hold. Those with refugee status are normally categorised as 'home students', which means that they are eligible for university tuition fees which are capped at a lower level than overseas students. 'Home student' fees are currently up to £9,250 a year for full-time students, but the cost may be slightly lower for some universities and/or courses chosen.

Eligibility for student finance

Young people with refugee status will also normally be eligible for student finance (financial support provided by the Government to some university students). There are two main loans that undergraduate students with refugee status can apply for:

- A Tuition Fee Loan, which is a loan that is paid directly to the university to cover the cost of a student's tuition fees
- A Maintenance Loan, which is a 'means-tested'¹² loan that helps students to cover their living costs (such as rent, food, transport etc...) while studying at university

Currently, all student loans will need to be repaid once the young person starts earning a salary of £25,000 per year.

It is important to note that refugees may not be eligible for full student finance if they have already completed some or all of an equivalent degree programme before. This may affect those who studied at university in their country of origin before they were forced to

¹² This loan is 'means-tested', which means that amount a student receives will vary depending on where they live and how long they have lived there, their household income, and where they study.

flee. If this is the case, they should consider applying for scholarships. See [here](#) for more information.

Some refugee young people may be nervous about taking out a loan. This might be because they do not fully understand what they involve, or have negative associations with the term 'loan'. Some refugee young people may be unable to take out loans for religious reasons (see [here](#) for more information). These young people may need to apply for scholarships (see [here](#) for more information).

Evidencing prior learning

To be accepted onto an undergraduate course, a young person will usually need one of the following Level 3 qualifications:

- A Levels
- BTEC (Business and Technology Education Council) awards, certificates and diplomas at Level 3
- International Baccalaureate
- NVQs (National Vocational Qualifications) at Level 3
- Access to HE courses¹³

If a young person has not studied in the UK before applying to university, they will need to evidence the level of their existing qualifications, including those from their countries of origin and/or other countries. They can do this through UK NARIC, an organisation that provides statements of comparability for people who have international qualifications and want to study in the UK. An application can be submitted through the UK NARIC's [website](#), and there is a small cost for doing this.

Some refugees may be unable to prove their qualifications achieved before they arrived in the UK: young people could have fled their homes without their certificates or transcripts, or they may have been lost or destroyed. Some universities have alternative ways of assessing a young person's academic level in order to process their university application.

Universities should also take into account some of the challenges refugee students may have faced in pursuing HE. This is known as contextual admissions. See [section 2](#) for more.

Contextual admissions

Many students, including British students, will have faced challenges in their education. The majority of refugee students will have faced significant barriers to progressing in education including gaps in their learning and studying in another language. All universities should take this context into account when deciding who to offer a place to but in reality some institutions give more weight to this context than others.

¹³ Access to HE courses are specifically designed to give adults learners (19+) without traditional or formal qualifications the right qualifications in order to apply to university. Access to HE courses take one year and are studied at Further Education colleges. Individuals with refugee status are eligible to apply for an [Advanced Learner Loan](#) to cover the cost of the course. Currently, this loan is written off if the individual then proceeds to university and completes a degree programme.

Academic English

Some young refugees, particularly those recently arrived in the UK, may not have the academic-standard of English needed to thrive at university, and may need to consider postponing applying to university in order to take further English courses. See [section 4](#) for alternatives to university if this applies to a young person.

Many universities require applicants to have a good level of English before they will offer them a place. They may want an applicant to have passed (usually obtaining a 4 or a C) in GCSE English Language, or to sit an alternative English language test and achieve the minimum score required.

The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) is the most popular English language test used by universities to determine English levels. However, taking an IELTS test costs money, and financial support may be required. Find out more about IELTS [here](#).

Application pressures and mental health

Applying for university can be a time of heightened pressure and stress for young refugees. They may find the UCAS application process daunting, and having to navigate it in English can make applying particularly stressful and difficult.

The cumulative pressure of applying for university while often studying for exams can put a strain on a young refugee's emotional well-being.¹⁴ And, given the significant importance that young refugees place on university and the pressure of securing a place, receiving negative outcomes can be particularly devastating and, sometimes, triggering. See [section 3](#) of this guide for more information about how you can support young people struggling with their mental health.

Inaccurate information, advice and guidance

The eligibility criteria for studying at university for those from forced migration backgrounds can be complex and, at times, confusing. Refugees may misunderstand what they are entitled to. Additionally, those who provide advice and guidance to refugees (including teachers, parents/guardians or social workers) may also find navigating this information challenging. Young refugees often receive inaccurate information and, as a result, may wrongly believe that they are not eligible for home fees or student finance.

¹⁴ Ashlee, A and Gladwell, C. 2020. Education transitions for refugee and asylum-seeking young people in the UK. (See note 11).

Providing accurate advice

It is important that you do your research before providing advice to young refugees. Check Coram's Children's Legal Centre's [fact sheet](#) on HE for migrant young people, and UKCISA [guidance](#). If you have any specific questions after reading through this guide, you can read Refugee Support Network's [FAQs](#) or email Refugee Support Network's Access to HE [helpline](#).

3. Applying to university: step-by-step guidance

This section of the guide is designed to help Community Sponsorship Groups supporting a young person with refugee status to apply for university.

Mental health and safeguarding

As outlined in the previous section, applying to university can, on some occasions, put pressure on young refugees' mental health. It is important that, as you support a young person to access university, you are mindful and alert to their emotional well-being and mental health. There are different services and supports available to them if they need them, including:

- Their GP, who can make referrals to local NHS mental health services.
- The NHS list of [helplines](#), which is available for anyone seeking support for their mental health.
- [These resources](#) from Talk To Us Off The Record (translated into different languages), which are helpful if a young person is struggling with anxiety.

If at any stage you become seriously worried about a young person's mental health, you should report this to your Group's designated safeguarding lead.

Step 1: Deciding to apply for university

It is important that a young person feels ready and is in the right position to apply for university. There are several things to consider before fully embarking on the process of applying for university.

Hopes for going to university

In the early stages of the process, it is worth having a conversation with the young person you are supporting about why they want to go to university. Talk to them about what they hope to get out of university and the type of course they want to study.

Use the [course search](#) section of the UCAS website and spend some time browsing possible courses to help the young person understand their options. Encourage them to think about a course that brings together things they enjoy, things they are good at, and the careers that they are interested in.

You could help a young person book on to an open day at universities they are interested in. Many universities now offer virtual open days too.

It is also worth contacting the 'Widening Participation' (sometimes also called 'Widening Access') team at universities to ask if there are any events for prospective students (particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds). For example, some universities are able to arrange for prospective refugee students to meet current students who are also from a refugee background, should this be of interest to the applicant. Joining the Equal Access Network [members group](#) (see below for more) on Facebook is another way that the young person you are supporting could connect and learn from other refugee and asylum-seeking students' experiences at university.

The Equal Access Network

The **Equal Access Network** is an interactive and friendly forum where students from refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds in the UK can connect and learn from each other's experiences of Higher Education. The Network is supported by Student Action for Refugees (STAR) and led by STAR Equal Access Activists with experience of accessing university while claiming asylum or with a temporary immigration status. The young person you are supporting could join the **members group** on Facebook. Community Sponsorship Groups and the families they are supporting can stay up to date on events and opportunities by liking the **Equal Access Network** on Facebook, following [@equalaccessnetwork](#) on Instagram, or signing up to the **Equal Access Mailing List**.

Remember, university is not for everyone. There are valuable alternatives to university that may be better suited to some young people based on their educational backgrounds and their career aspirations. See [section 4](#) of this guide for more information on alternatives to university.

Prior learning and qualifications

It should become clear from browsing courses the type and level of qualifications that a young person will need to successfully secure a place at university. Remember, A Levels are not the only qualification that allows young people to go to university (see [section 2](#) of this guide for qualifications that may be accepted).

If you have any doubt that a young person's qualifications will be accepted (both those achieved in the UK and in other countries), it would be worth calling the Admissions teams at universities to double check at this stage. It may also be useful to enquire, even at this early stage, about whether the university has a contextual admissions policy.

If the universities will not accept a young person's grades or qualifications, you may need to talk with the young person about postponing and doing one of the qualifications required at their nearest Further Education (FE) college before applying to university. See [section 4](#) of this guide for more.

English language

It is important that a young person's English language meets the academic standard required to study at university. When the young person has identified what they want to study and the universities they want to apply to, you or the young person can call the Admissions teams at those universities to ask about their particular English language requirements – whether they need them to have passed their GCSE English Language or sit an alternative English language test.

However, at this stage, it might be clear that a young person's English language does not reach the academic standard required. And, even if you think the young person could achieve the minimum score in an English test, you may feel that they would benefit from waiting a year and taking further classes to improve their English. Talk this through with the young person. You could explain that they are more likely to enjoy university and get the most out of it when they are confident with their English. This might be a difficult decision for the young person to make, so make sure your conversations are sensitive and do not push them.

If a young person wants to proceed and apply for university, it is advisable that they take their IELTSs (or GCSE English) before they apply. (Some universities may, however, give a young person a conditional offer, conditional on them getting a particular IELTSs score or GCSE grade). If a young person needs to take an IELTSs test, there are some free online preparation courses that you can recommend:

- [Understanding IELTS](#) (British Council)
- [Understanding IELTS: Listening](#) (British Council)
- [Understanding IELTS: Writing](#) (British Council)
- [Inside IELTS: Preparing for the Test with the Experts](#) (University of Cambridge)

At this stage, it can be helpful to work with a young person to prepare for any English language tests that they will need to undertake.

Step 2: Deciding where to apply to university

Once a young person has decided on the course that they want to study, it is time to decide what universities to apply to. Depending on the young person's chosen university course, they will normally be able to apply to four or five different universities. There are some important questions to consider when thinking about the universities to select.

Which universities are best for the young person's chosen course?

To help identify suitable universities for a young person based on their chosen course, you can compare statistics on student satisfaction and employment for different universities and courses on the [Discover Uni website](#). Some young people also find it helpful to look at league tables on [The Complete University Guide](#) or [What Uni](#).

What are the specific entry requirements for the chosen course at these universities?

Each university has different requirements that their students need to meet before they can start a course. Some universities ask for a certain number of UCAS Tariff Points (which are points gained by completing qualifications).

What is the best location for the young person?

The location of the university a young person chooses will have an impact on their university experience. Some universities are in the middle of cities, some are in the countryside and others are on 'campuses'. Some universities offer distance learning courses (such as the HE degree programmes with vastly reduced fees).

Talk with the young person about where in the country they want to study. Some students like to be close to home and others may be keen to explore new places. Suggest that the young person checks exactly how long it takes to get to the universities they are considering, and how much this journey costs.

Which universities have a community that supports refugees?

Student Action for Refugees (STAR) is the network of students building a society where refugees are welcomed and can thrive. There are around 50 student led groups across the UK working to create a culture of welcome, supported by a small staff team. The STAR network volunteers in the community, campaigns to change policy, improves access to university, and educates people about asylum in the UK. Find out if the university a young person wants to apply to has a [STAR group](#) and, if they do, [get in touch](#) with the STAR national team to see what support they might be able to offer.

Other universities will have gained '[University of Sanctuary](#)' recognition - these universities have made a commitment to support students seeking sanctuary (both refugees and asylum seekers). If a university has this award, contact the focal point within the university to find out what support can be provided for the prospective student, such as scholarships, free access to university facilities, careers, or legal advice, as well as support with English language courses.

Which universities have contextual admissions policies?

If a young person does not have evidence of their qualifications, because they fled their homes without them or because they were destroyed or lost on their journeys, the young person should be encouraged to call the Admissions team or Widening Participation/Access team at the universities they are considering. They should tell them that they are interested in applying to the university but that they do not have any proof of their previous qualifications due to their background as a forced migrant. They should explicitly ask, "Do you have a contextual admissions policy that allows for people in my situation to apply to your university, and a process that works out if I am academically eligible". See [here](#) for more on contextual admissions.

Step 3: Applying to university

If the young person decides that it is the right time to apply for university, there are key steps to follow throughout the application process.

When to apply

The following are key deadlines for the university application process:

- **The summer before applying to university:** If possible, start to think about university courses the summer before applying to university. The summer can be a useful time for a young person to build up additional experience or complete some reading that will help with their personal statement and university application.
- **Mid-September:** The application form can be started, but a young person can register with UCAS before then.
- **15th October:** All applications to Oxford or Cambridge, or any course in medicine, veterinary medicine/science or dentistry must be submitted, including references.
- **15th January:** The majority of other applications must be submitted, including references. But, try not to leave the application until the last minute.

How to apply

To apply for a full-time undergraduate degree, a young person will normally need to apply through [UCAS](#). The UCAS online application allows a young person to save their progress as they go through. This means that they will be able to check details with you, or someone else, and come back to it. UCAS produces guides to applying for international students in [different languages](#) that may be helpful.

The young person can apply for up to five universities through UCAS. They should check the university webpages for information on how to apply for other courses, such as part-time or language courses, as these may require a direct application to the university.

Please note that the young person will need to pay £20 (for one university choice) or £25 (for multiple choices) to submit their application. See [here](#) for information on grants that could help to cover small costs associated with applying for university. UCAS provides further helpful information about applying to UCAS [here](#).

Personal statements

The young person will need to write a personal statement for their UCAS application. A personal statement is their chance to explain why they want to study a particular course, and what skills and experience they have to make them suitable to study at university.

As a Community Sponsor, you could play a valuable role in helping a young person craft their personal statement, including by helping them plan it and providing constructive feedback on their drafts. There is lots of helpful advice about writing a personal statement from UCAS [here](#), including a [tool](#) for writing an undergraduate personal statement.

If a young person is comfortable doing so, encourage them to include some information about being a refugee in their application. This could include how being a refugee has

created barriers to accessing education, how they have overcome these barriers, and how this experience has driven their motivation to study their chosen subject. Although this is sensitive information and should only be included if a young person wants it to be, explain to the young person that including this information could be to their advantage. It should help admissions tutors and university staff to provide them with the support they need, and could possibly mean a young person is considered as a contextual admissions candidate.

References

Information about a young person's refugee background can also be provided in their reference. If you are in touch with the person providing a reference for the young person (whether their teacher or tutor), and if the young person gives you permission to do so, discuss with them including information about how a young person's forced migration experience has affected their educational experience. Encourage the referee to include any evidence that demonstrates the young person's rapid educational progress or academic resilience. See [here](#) for more information about getting a reference for UCAS.

Costs associated with the university application process

During the application process, costs may arise. Some may be small, including the cost of submitting an application on UCAS, the cost of getting previous qualifications completed in other countries recognised by UK NARIC (if required), and travel costs if a young person attends open days or in-person interviews. Some [small grants](#) may be able to help cover such costs.

Some costs may be more significant, namely the cost of taking IELTSs, if required. There is information about financial help for IELTS [here](#). The young person could also look to apply for a [small grant](#) for costs related to IELTSs.

Step 4: Waiting for responses

Waiting for responses can be a nerve-wracking time for any student, including young refugees. The UCAS website explains the process for receiving and accepting offers in detail and it worth familiarising yourself with the key information on the website.

Receiving and accepting offers

Universities take varied amounts of time to assess an application and get back to the applicant, depending on when the application was submitted. Candidates who submitted their UCAS application by the 15th January deadline should expect to hear back from universities by the end of May. Offers will be made via UCAS and candidates must decide on their first and second choice universities by the required deadline.

It is normal for candidates to select their preferred university, and then to add a second choice that requires slightly lower grades – rather than selecting a first and second choice that both require high grades that may not be achieved.

Possible stresses during this period

The pressure of securing a place at university can create stress for the young person, and this waiting period can potentially undermine emotional well-being or mental health.

Keep an eye on a young person during this time, and make sure that the young person knows that emotional and mental health support is available to them. See [here](#) for more information about possible avenues for support.

If a young person does not receive any offers

If a young person does not receive offers to study at university this time, see [section 4](#) of this guide for further guidance on alternatives to university in the short and long term. There is also the possibility of securing a university place through UCAS Clearing. See below for more.

Clearing

If a young person does not receive any offers of a place from any of the universities that they have applied to, or they fail to meet the conditions of their offer (i.e. by achieving a lower grade than the offer stipulates), they can still secure a university place through UCAS Clearing. Clearing is the process that universities use to fill any remaining spaces on their courses.

A person can use Clearing if:

- they are applying for university after 30th June
- they didn't receive any offers (or none they wanted to accept)
- they didn't meet the conditions of their offers
- they've paid the multiple choice application fee of £25

From the 6th July, universities will advertise their vacant course spaces on the UCAS website. The young person must then call the university directly (universities will have dedicated Clearing lines) and express their interest in applying for a course. The university will then make the young person a verbal offer. This should be followed up in the Clearing section of the young person's UCAS application account. The UCAS website has lots of good advice about the clearing process - but it can still be daunting.

Step 5: Planning where to live

Once a young person has been offered and has accepted a place at university, it is time to start planning and thinking about where they will live whilst they study – unless they can remain in their current living arrangement. There are different kinds of accommodation, and the young person can contact their university of choice's Accommodation office or Student Services to find out more. Some options will be better suited to a young refugee than others, depending on their preferences and personal circumstances.

Halls of residence

Halls of residence, often shortened to 'halls', are buildings owned by the university and rented out solely to students who go to that university. Information about 'halls' can be found through the university's website. It is worth noting that not all universities allow students to remain living in halls outside of term time. If this is the case, the young person

will need to have somewhere else to live during university holidays. Encourage the young person to check with their university in advance whether this applies to them.

Private accommodation

Private accommodation is housing that is rented from an individual, instead of from the university. University websites often advertise private accommodation offered by individuals, but it is usually necessary to go through a letting agency to arrange to rent the flats and houses. In contrast to halls of residence, private accommodation is available to the student all year round. The student would be paying for this accommodation during the university holidays even if they did return to live with their family members for a few weeks over this time.

Family home

If there is a possibility of living at home with parents or other relatives, this may be a helpful option. Some parents ask their children to contribute a small amount to renting the family home, or expect them to help out with household chores when they become a student to help encourage independence.

Living with friends or relatives

Living with friends or relatives can be similar to living in the family home. Friends and relatives will probably want a contribution towards the rent, but it may be possible to negotiate a lower rate of rent than when renting through a letting agency.

Step 6: Applying for financial support

Applications for student finance

Resettled refugees are normally eligible for home tuition fees, usually around £9,250. They should also be eligible for student finance (see [section 2](#) of this guide for more information). At this stage, you can help young people to apply to student finance for tuition and maintenance loans. This support can include helping them prepare the evidence they need for an application to Student Finance England (SFE). There is helpful information about applying for student finance [here](#).

It is worth keeping an eye on the application to SFE. SFE may, on occasion, misunderstand a refugee young person's eligibility for student finance, and make a mistake when processing their application. If this happens, work with the young person to call SFE to understand why an application was rejected and explain that a resettled refugee is eligible for financial support.

Addressing hesitancy to take out a loan

If a young person is hesitant about taking out a loan, including because they do not understand what it involves, there are some useful websites and information that you can

talk through with them. For example, this [article](#) on Money Saving Expert provides helpful information about what a student loan involves.

If a young person cannot take out a loan because of religious reasons, they may need to apply for a scholarship to study at university. See below for more.

Scholarships

Because they are normally eligible for student finance and home fees, those with refugee status will not usually need to apply for scholarships to cover the full cost of attending university. But if a young person is unable to access student finance, there is the possibility that they can apply for scholarships. There are two types of scholarships:

- **University-provided scholarships** for students from forced migration backgrounds (known as sanctuary scholarships). Check STAR's comprehensive [list of universities](#) with scholarships and their eligibility criteria. Some scholarships will be aimed at young people with forms of immigration status not eligible for student finance, and so not accessible to young people with refugee status.
- **Scholarships from private charitable organisations.** See [here](#) for some organisations that they could consider applying to.

Step 7: Getting ready to start

Budgeting

Before a young person goes to university, you could help them plan ahead and budget for their time there. The main costs of university, aside from tuition fees which SFE will pay directly to the university, are living costs, including accommodation, transport, food and socialising with others. Living costs may vary, depending on where the young person has chosen to study, whether they need to pay for their [accommodation](#), and other factors.

On average, and including accommodation, a young person will need to budget £1,000 per month (minimum) to cover their living costs. You could work with a young person to figure out their budget. [This resource](#) could be helpful to work through together.

Additional funding

While the maintenance loan should cover most of a young person's living costs, depending on where the young person is going to university, they may need additional funding. Universities often have internal hardship funds that students can apply to. Encourage them to make an appointment with a funding adviser at their university. There are other possible sources of funding you could look at together. See [here](#) for more information.

As a refugee, the young person will have the right to work. You could talk with the young person to see if they want to consider getting a part-time job at university to help with their living costs. However, they should consider what job they would want to apply for, and whether they think they can balance work with studying.

Forward planning for support networks at university

University can be a time of transition, and many students find it difficult to be away from familiar environments and support networks. For many students, this is a big change and can sometimes feel overwhelming.

Remind the young person that there will be places they can go to seek support and speak with someone about their mental health and well-being when they get to university. Below are some suggestions.

- There will be local NHS services, which they will be able to access through their GP.
- The university is likely to have well-being services available for students, such as counselling and advice sessions, which they can access through the Student Services department, Student Union or personal tutor.
- Peer support groups may be available at their university, which they can find out about through their Student Union.

Remind the young person that university is more than just getting a degree. There will be many different student groups and an array of hobbies that they can get involved with through their Student Union. These can be ways that young refugees meet others and build their support networks at university.

4. Alternatives to university

This section provides information on the alternatives to university. As previously mentioned, university is not for everyone, and there are lots of other avenues that young people can pursue. If a young person does not receive university offers, or decides to wait a year before applying, remind them that whatever they do – whether more study, work, volunteering or something different – will all help towards their future university application.

The impact of unsuccessful university applications

Having an unsuccessful university application can be difficult for refugees, particularly given the importance they may place on studying at university. It is possible that this could trigger poor mental health. See [here](#) for more information about possible support mechanisms for young people.

Further education and training

There are lots of courses that can be taken at FE colleges. If a young person wants to use FE to help them reach university, they could look into [Access courses](#) (which are nationally-recognised Level 3 qualifications designed to prepare adults to study at HE).

Depending on the young person's age, there may be some restrictions in access to government funding to study at FE level. While young refugees between the ages of 16-19 are eligible for funding from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), funding for those over the age of 19 is more restrictive and focused on making students ready for

advanced learning, HE, or work.¹⁵ For more information, see Coram Children's Legal Centre's [fact sheet](#).¹⁶ For a list of education funders, see [here](#).

Apprenticeships and T-Levels

Apprenticeships are available to anyone over the age of 16, living in England and are available at intermediate, advanced, higher and degree levels. At higher and degree levels, a young person can gain a qualification, learn professional skills and gain a wage. Like university courses, apprenticeships can be a great route into a young person's career. Find out more about apprenticeships [here](#).

Additionally, at present, T-Levels are being introduced by the UK government. These are new courses which follow GCSEs and are equivalent to three A Levels. They are two year courses that have been developed in collaboration with employers and businesses, and their content meets the needs of industry and prepares students for work, further training or study. T-Levels combine classroom learning and 'on-the-job' learning during an industry placement of at least 315 hours (or around 45 days). The first T-Levels became available in September 2020 and currently are available at select colleges, schools and other providers. For more information, see [here](#).

University-run preparatory courses

Some universities run programmes which act as stepping stones for young refugees and asylum-seekers to reach undergraduate study at university.

The OLIve programme (University of East London)

[The OLIve programme](#) at University of East London is a ten-week preparatory course which helps to provide refugees and asylum-seekers with the skills and knowledge needed in order to apply for and progress through HE in the UK. The programme introduces refugees and asylum-seekers to UK HE and provides modules and workshops on: English language and academic writing; research skills; academic tutoring and academic discussions; and advice on pathways into HE.

The Compass project (Birkbeck, University of London)

The [Compass project](#) at Birkbeck, University of London, is a one year, funded course for up to 20 young people each year. It is focused on helping refugees and asylum-seekers who are either not eligible for student finance or face difficulty in accessing HE (including because they have been out of education for a long period of time or struggle to evidence their qualifications) to access undergraduate study. Young refugees are provided with

¹⁵ Coram Children's Legal Centre. 2017. Further Education in England: Migrant Children's Project fact sheet. Coram Children's Legal Centre. Available at: https://www.childrenslegalcentre.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Further-education-August-2019-final_.pdf

¹⁶ Please note that, at the time of writing, this advice sheet is currently being updated by Coram Children's Legal Centre and there may be some updates in the coming months.

scholarships to study on a range of HE degree programmes at Birkbeck, including, amongst others: HE certificates and foundational years.

Foundation Year (University of Cambridge)

University of Cambridge's new [Foundation Year](#) is a fully funded one year foundation course, aimed at students from educationally and socially disadvantaged backgrounds who want to study courses in Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. Students do not have to pay tuition fees and are granted a scholarship to cover living costs for the year. Students will study an academic curriculum which prepares them for studying a degree course at University of Cambridge, as well as being introduced to studying at undergraduate level. At the end of the year, students will gain a nationally recognised Certificate of Higher Education and, once finishing the course, will have the option to continue to a number of suitable undergraduate degree courses (although these will not be funded).

Online courses

There are free, online courses that can be undertaken by the young person you are supporting. Think through the options below.

- [Kiron Campus](#), an online learning platform for refugees worldwide
- [IF free university](#)
- Free university level [online courses](#)
- [Aim Higher](#), an online course designed to help refugees and asylum seekers get the information and the support they need to apply for and enter university in the UK

Volunteering

The young person you are supporting could consider volunteering opportunities, particularly if they will be valuable for their university application or other studies. Check out this [government website](#) for ideas, as well as [Do It](#) for more local opportunities.

5. Further information and support

Here are some suggestions for useful resources and organisations that can provide you and the young person you are supporting with further information or support.

Useful resources

- Refugee Support Network's [Frequently Asked Questions](#).
- Refugee Support Network's [Thinking Ahead to Higher Education Toolkit](#) (aimed at young people).

- The Equal Access section of STAR's website has some particularly helpful resources, including:
 - [A list of sanctuary scholarships](#)
 - [Information about pre-sessional programmes, access programmes, and online courses](#)
 - [Advice on how to apply for an equal access scholarship](#)
- Unicef UK and Refugee Support Network's [advice sheets](#) on Access to HE and FE for education institutions.
- Unicef UK and Refugee Support Network's [2020](#) and [2018](#) research on access to and progression through education for refugee and asylum-seeking young people.
- UKCISA's [guidance](#) on fee statuses for accessing HE and FE, categorised by England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

Organisations that may be able to help

- Refugee Support Network has an [advice line](#) that you can email if you have questions related to supporting a refugee or asylum-seeking young person to apply to university.
- [Refugee Council](#) may be able to provide general information about your eligibility for education, other local sources of support and advice on issues such as housing, employment and healthcare.
- [UKCISA](#) works to support international students, including advice and guidance on fee status and eligibility for student support.
- [STAR](#) is made up of 50 student groups from universities and colleges across the UK. They campaign to improve the lives of refugees and educate people about issues facing refugees and asylum seekers.
 - The [Equal Access Network](#), supported by STAR, has a [members group](#) on Facebook where prospective students can connect and learn from refugee and asylum-seeking students at universities.
- [RefuAid](#) provides support in accessing language tuition, education, finance and employment.
- [Universities of Sanctuary](#) is a network designed to inspire and support universities to develop a culture and a practice of welcome within their own institutions, in their wider communities, and across the HE sector in the UK.
- [Coram Children's Legal Centre](#) provides free legal information, advice and representation to children, young people, their families, carers and professionals, as well as international consultancy on child law and children's rights. You can also search for qualified legal advisers [here](#).
- If the young person is care-experienced, the charity [Become](#) has lots of information about [accessing and funding higher education](#).
- [Turn2Us](#) has a helpful tool to help young people search for grants that they could be eligible for.

