

Supporting Sanctuary Students and Staff:

Understanding the needs of students and staff from refugee and asylum-seeker backgrounds

'As a refugee, I know the key thing is to feel welcomed, understood and also find strength in our differences and connection through our common experiences' (survey participant).

Foreword

“Newcastle has been welcoming people seeking sanctuary for many years. As a city we are committed to doing what we can to welcome those seeking sanctuary and to help rebuild lives. We are honoured to be a recognised City of Sanctuary; part of a network of towns and cities throughout the country that are proud to be places of safety, and which include people seeking sanctuary fully in the lives of their communities.

Newcastle City of Sanctuary welcomes Newcastle University’s interest in becoming a recognised University of Sanctuary. This important report provides an excellent reference point for Newcastle, as well as other universities at different stages of their journey, towards becoming a University of Sanctuary. Each university is different, and the ways in which they create a culture of welcome will be different, however as this report rightly highlights it is important to position the voices of people seeking sanctuary at the centre of any discussions or strategies around this.

At the time of this report's publication, and as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the higher education sector is undergoing a period of financial uncertainty and of rapid change from a predominantly face-to-face teaching style to an online or blended learning approach. These are unsettling times for students and staff alike. But it is essential that we do not lose sight of the ambitions we had before the crisis to create a more welcoming and accessible higher education sector which enables people from refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds to reach their full potential and contribute to our society.

Having worked alongside Sanctuary Seekers in Newcastle, many of whom have been desperate for the opportunity to continue their studies and engage with higher education, we have witnessed the impact that schemes such as Sanctuary Scholarships can have upon individuals lives. These, alongside other university initiatives, are a welcome antidote to the hardship that many seeking sanctuary have faced and continue to face seeking asylum in the UK.

It is essential that during this crisis we continue to learn from people seeking sanctuary, who themselves have dealt with extreme personal adversity. That we continue to embed a culture of welcome in our universities so that these initiatives can endure future crises. And that we continue to share the successes and good practice, which is going on across the sector, as a way of inspiring others to do more.”



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Executive Summary

Following the #PGRWellbeing4All project at Newcastle University funded by Office for Students which adopted an equality, diversity and inclusion approach to understanding student wellbeing, and in line with the growing commitment to diverse student and staff trajectories at Newcastle University, this research project set out to better understand the specific needs of students and staff affected by forced displacement and to produce actionable recommendations for change.

In this report, we provide an overview of key literature in this area, then discuss findings from our research and propose actionable and practical recommendations. The research is based on interview and survey data with students and staff from refugee backgrounds at Newcastle University as well as representatives from external organisations and charities working within the asylum sector of the North East. Despite the focus of this research on Newcastle University, we believe that the findings have wider resonance for other Higher Education Institutions.

This is a growing and developing area of work and this research makes a key contribution in identifying the needs and concerns of students and staff from refugee backgrounds, mapping best practice, and considering the way forward. Newcastle University and other institutions engaging with University of Sanctuary have an opportunity and responsibility to make a real difference to refugees' lives, in a way that will be of benefit to them, the universities that welcome them, and the communities they live in. This report is being shared with relevant people within the university in order to take the recommendations forward.

We have listed the overarching recommendations below. Page references are provided to the corresponding findings and discussion within the report.

Recommendations

Clear and Informed Communication (pages 13 - 15)

- Provide a trained point of contact for staff and students from refugee and asylum-seeker backgrounds (e.g. Sanctuary Liaison Officer).
- Make available appropriate training and awareness-raising to staff and students.
- Create a UoS webpage and ensure the clarity, accessibility, relevance, consistency and breadth of university-produced resources, support and information available online for students and staff, prospective and current, as well as external partners working with people seeking sanctuary.

Peer Support Networks and Pedagogical Support (pages 15-16)

- Incorporate understanding of the impacts of forced migration into existing peer support mechanisms (e.g. buddy schemes, student mentor programmes).
- Ensure provision of academic support and English language support for sanctuary scholars (e.g. In-sessional English, Academic Skills Toolkit).
- Review course requirements in advance (e.g. clarify if sanctuary students can undertake work placements).
- Further support for sanctuary scholar and student-led initiatives amongst sanctuary seekers.

Wellbeing, Mental Health and EDI (pages 16 -18)

- Ensure attention to the experiences of forced migration and subsequent impact on students in Support Plans and PECs.

- Ensure effective communication about existing relevant services and support to current students and staff affected by forced migration.
- Incorporate awareness of asylum experiences and their impacts into existing Equality, Diversity and Inclusion work.

Widening Access to HEIs (pages 19 -20)

- Review the sanctuary scholarship application process.
- Integrate support for forced migrants in existing widening participation initiatives.
- Provide a range of means of proving previous qualifications and certificates.

Financial Support (pages 21 - 22)

- Provide flexible support to mitigate the financial barriers facing students from refugee and asylum backgrounds.
- Ensure that scholarship financial support matches the actual cost to sanctuary seeker.

Enhancing the Operation of the UoS Steering Group (page 23)

- Formulate a strategic plan based on the guidelines presented in Article 26 (Hudson and Murray, 2018).
- Continue to review the University of Sanctuary steering group membership.
- Gather data and feedback from sanctuary scholars as a mechanism for reflection and improvement.

Supporting Staff from Refugee Backgrounds (page 24)

- Continue CARA membership and review support for CARA fellows at the university.
- Review how to best support the recruitment of staff from refugee backgrounds.
- Review how to best support existing staff from refugee backgrounds in line with recommendations in this report.

Immigration System Awareness (pages 24 -25)

- Develop procedure for dealing with Home Office challenges that ensures the rights of the asylum-seeker student are upheld and no blanket bans are used.

Terminology

Key terms from Murray's (2019a, 2019b) publications:

Sanctuary scholar is an umbrella term that refers to any forced migrant who is undertaking, or seeks to undertake, a higher education course or programme in the UK. The term is broad in scope, including all stages of the student lifecycle that a forced migrant experiences with HEIs.

Forced migrant is used as a non-legal term to reflect the broad spectrum of individuals who have been forcibly displaced. Forced migrants are persons who, being present in the UK, are seeking or have sought international protection in the UK and are either awaiting a decision on their application for such protection or have been granted a form of status by the UK Home Office that permits their leave to remain in the UK. The word 'forced' is used to reflect the fact that the displacement experienced by such persons is due to events and circumstances beyond their personal control.

Sanctuary scholarships usually support those forced migrants with no access to student finance or funding to access higher education (HE) studies in any of the UK's Higher Education Institution (HEI) such as universities.

Educational opportunities for forced migrants are wide-ranging in their design and content. **Sanctuary initiative** is used as an overarching term to describe the range of inclusion initiatives which include and extend beyond the scholarship scheme specifically.

Introduction: Forced Displacement and Higher Education

The latest statistics from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2020a) show that there were 79.5 million forcibly displaced people worldwide at the end of 2019. That is 1% of the world's population who have fled their homes due to conflict and persecution. These individuals face great loss, physical and psychological implications, financial hardship, work precarity and often also live in vulnerable conditions. The role of education, for forcibly displaced persons, is significant in supporting individuals and communities to rebuild and has been described 'as a bridge between emergency response and sustainable development' (Parkinson et al., 2020). Under Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, everyone has the right to education (United Nations, 2020). The UNHCR emphasises that access to education is not only 'a basic right,' but also 'an 'enabling right,' 'a right through which other rights are realised' (cited in Dryden-Peterson, 2011, pp. 8–9). The right to education for refugees may be formally acknowledged, but it lacks formal protection by EU Member States due to a complex combination of determinants mainly related to the asylum process: demographic, psychological, economic, legal and sociological (Essomba, 2017, p. 209). Baker et al. (2019) suggest policymakers and humanitarian workers overlook the issue of education when discussing refugees which solidifies global hierarchies and inequalities.

Today it is estimated that only one percent of refugees have access to HE compared to a world average of 32 percent of all people (Gaulee et al., 2020). Global initiatives such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) developed a renewed focus on post-primary education, however HE is often overlooked (Gladwell et al., 2016). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and partners have committed to ensuring that 15 percent of refugees can access the benefits of HE by the year 2030 (UNHCR, 2020b). This is pertinent as UNESCO forecasted a global shortage of 40 million tertiary-educated workers by 2020 (Gaulee et al., 2020). In addition to supporting refugees to rebuild their lives and careers, accessing HE provides great benefits to society.

The United Kingdom has a history of supporting individuals fleeing war and persecution into academia. As early as 1933 the Academic Assistance Council (later known as the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning) was formed in the UK originally supporting academics who were fleeing Nazi persecution and later going on to support at-risk academics. As such, the Society was again renamed *the Council for At-Risk Academics (CARA)*. *CARA's (2020) founding statement and aim is 'to prevent the waste of exceptional abilities exceptionally trained.'*

In 2005, the national City of Sanctuary charity was founded to support a network of groups, streams, awards and activities that build toward their vision 'that our nations will be welcoming places of safety for all and proud to offer sanctuary to people fleeing violence and persecution' (City of Sanctuary, 2020). University of Sanctuary is one of their streams devoted to inspiring and supporting universities to develop a culture and practice of welcome within individual universities, wider communities and across higher education in the UK. Sanctuary scholarships is one part of this stream's work. Other key UK organisations include the charity, Refugee Support Network, which was founded in 2009 to offer educational mentoring, a toolkit for students thinking of accessing HE and a national helpline; and Student Action for Refugees (STAR) which leads an Equal Access Campaign to create scholarship pathways to provide HE to refugees and asylum-seekers in the UK as well as supporting a national network of student-led university societies (STAR, 2020).

We reviewed academic literature to gain a better understanding of forced migrants' experience of HE and HEIs. There are many challenges in bringing about cultural and structural changes to make HE a viable 'option for the many, rather than a struggle for the few' (Stevenson and Baker, 2018, p. 21). Individuals confront hostile immigration systems impacting working rights, financial stability, housing security and mental health and wellbeing. Individual experience goes on to significantly impact

interactions with HEIs. This experience is particularly crucial during study applications and experiences within HEIs, exacerbated by poor communication and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) considerations being overlooked.

Impact of the Immigration System

Hudson and Murray (2018) argue that there are specific barriers for forced migrants accessing HE due to immigration status. The stage that an application is at can be a barrier to HE due to the uncertainty of the status (Bajwa et al., 2017; City of Sanctuary, 2019). Obtaining refugee status allows individuals to claim benefits and housing, gain employment and access HE (Stevenson and Baker, 2018) but circumstances remain precarious. City of Sanctuary (2019) highlights several barriers including students' lack of awareness about whether they can actually study, conflicting or confusing information and a lack of information available through colleges and schools which are specific to them. Treating individuals as migrants rather than acknowledging refugee backgrounds means the experiences of trauma or shock are not always accounted for (Essomba, 2017). Students may prefer not to disclose their status, perhaps due to shame or embarrassment (Stevenson and Baker, 2018), which can lead to their need for specialised support being overlooked.

Challenges of Accessing HEIs

Barriers to accessing studies or work within HEIs are numerous. Writing a personal statement may be very difficult for refugees who may not want to share their experiences (Stevenson and Baker, 2018). Gaps in refugee students' education may negatively impact individuals during the application process (Earnest et al., 2010; Essomba, 2017; Stevenson and Baker, 2018). Furthermore, refugees may experience limited recognition of prior learning and work experience (Lenette, 2016; Vickers et al., 2016) as certificates are not recognised and may have been left behind when individuals fled (City of Sanctuary, 2019; Essomba, 2017; Gaulee et al., 2020; Gilchrist, 2018; Gladwell et al., 2016).

Several studies mention the cost of HE as a barrier to accessing it (Stevenson and Baker, 2018; Sontag, 2018). Refugee students may have limited financial resources on arrival (Bansak et al., 2018) and may face material disadvantage (Naidoo et al., 2018) which can be further impacted by financial pressures to support family (Student et al., 2017) and difficulties in paying for applications with no access to a bank account or debit card (Stevenson and Baker, 2018). Murray (2019d) suggests the need to include scholarships prioritising asylum-seekers who cannot access student finance and to promote understanding across the university.

Displaced scholars need support from institutions to ensure they can engage in academia and employment to make sure potential from the likes of Albert Einstein or Felix Bloch (both refugees) is not wasted (Goodman, 2016). Unemployment is high among refugees and asylum-seekers (Bajwa et al., 2017; Stevenson and Baker, 2018). There is a gap between the jobs available to refugees and their skill set and they are often underemployed (Essomba, 2017). Immigration status can act as a barrier for staff employment (Vickers et al., 2016). 'Highly skilled migrants are deemed to have networks, an understanding of the system and market and the time and means to prepare their move – possibilities which refugees often do not have' (Sontag, 2018, p. 541; see also Campion, 2018).

Language was reported as a barrier to HE, both for academic writing, where students noted difficulties in adjusting to new academic systems (Earnest et al., 2010), as well as social language to form friendships (Gaulee et al., 2020). Individualised support may be difficult for students to obtain due to the 'massification of HE' where academics may be inadequately resourced to support students with specific needs due to zero hour or temporary contracts (Stevenson and Baker, 2018). In some cases, it was found students need to develop their ICT skills in order to access HE in the UK (Vickers et al., 2017). Moreover, often the teaching force has little training in multi-cultural pedagogies (Naidoo et al., 2018). In order to support refugee students to succeed in HE, Ferede (2018) suggests encouraging

HEIs to host language learning initiatives by using online programmes. For staff, ESOL support could also be included by the employer (Vickers et al., 2016).

There is a call to provide alternative accreditation of past qualifications and skills (Colburn, 2018). The Council of Europe, for example, has launched the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees Project (Ferede, 2018). When previous qualifications cannot be proven (no certificate etc.) candidates can be asked to prepare a portfolio of what they did in the past, and are asked for a sworn statement, and an interview or presentation to assert their level of knowledge from previous qualification (Hannah, 1999). Creation of a 'life CV' has been piloted in the UK where individuals are encouraged to consider new ways of knowing themselves and presenting their existing knowledge and skills to potential employers (Schultheiss et al., 2011).

Health and Wellbeing Concerns

It is widely documented that many refugees suffer from poor mental and physical health, trauma, isolation, family separation and loss and malnutrition whilst adapting to a new country and facing unemployment (Bajwa et al., 2017; City of Sanctuary, 2019; Frigerio and Nasimi, 2019; Kone et al., 2019; Stevenson and Baker, 2018). Many face 'endemic financial difficulties' creating worry and stress (Earnest et al., 2010), with little or no family support (Bajwa et al., 2017). Further worries about family abroad and the financial pressures to support family, coupled with emotional distress relating to previous trauma can act as a barrier to HE (Student et al., 2017). Many refugees are living in poverty (Bajwa et al., 2017) and may often have to move to a new house at short notice when living in temporary housing (Collyer et al., 2018). The number of bereavement days may fall short of the days needed by grieving students and faculty members (Shelton et al., 2020). Specialised wellbeing support (Collyer et al., 2018) and early engagement with studies and campus community life can lead to greater psychosocial wellbeing (Earnest et al., 2010).

Clear, Informed Communication

Several studies comment on students' feelings of confusion from a lack of support and mixed messages from universities (Bajwa et al., 2017; Earnest et al., 2010; Gilchrist, 2018; Stevenson and Baker, 2018; Student et al., 2017). There is also a lack of information about potential opportunities (Gladwell et al., 2016). The communication barrier can lead to isolation or 'invisibility of the refugee' (Essomba, 2017). Difficulties in understanding the educational systems and practices were noted by Gaulee et al. (2020), compounded by a lack of staff awareness and university support for refugees (Lenette, 2016). There is a pressing need for institutions to offer cultural sensitivity training to staff regarding asylum issues (Hannah, 1999; Refugee Support Network, 2020) in order to improve communication, understanding and campus integration and student retention.

EDI Considerations

University may be a culturally alienating place (Earnest et al., 2010) and the neo-liberal values underpinning universities create conditions for bullying to occur (Ahmed, 2019). Unangst and Crea (2020) advocate an intersectional approach to programme development for sanctuary initiatives that seeks to understand and consider the numerous challenges faced by refugees in higher education. The BAME category collapses the diversity of refugee populations into one category (Stevenson and Baker, 2018) overlooking specific experience. Some dominant western discourse uses the label of 'refugee' in a negative way (Naidoo et al., 2018) leading to misinformed perceptions. Several studies highlight discrimination, prejudice and social exclusion experienced by refugees in HE (Campion, 2018; Gaulee et al., 2020; Harris et al., 2015; Newman et al., 2018; Student et al., 2017). Refugees can face confrontation in the community (Essomba, 2017) where certain behaviour is fuelled by the surge of anti-immigration and anti-Islamic rhetoric (Stevenson and Baker, 2018). Pejorative vocabulary used in

the media and visual representations leading to 'othering' creates a 'dehumanised political problem' (Stevenson and Baker, 2018, p. 31).

Even with settled status, women refugees particularly remain impoverished (Stevenson and Baker, 2018). Women remain less 'visible' than men in the context of education and employment, where their 'very success in the western context of tertiary education often marginalises them in their own cultural communities by virtue of their seeming abnegation of familial and cultural duties' (Harris et al., 2015, p. 381). Caring responsibilities and a lack of affordable childcare also reduce the opportunity to pursue education (Campion, 2018; Collyer et al., 2018). Often there are gender role expectations (Campion, 2018), where family responsibilities such as caring for siblings, cleaning, and cooking, disproportionately impact women (Baker et al., 2019; Harris et al., 2015; Naidoo et al., 2018). The particular experiences of asylum-seekers who have endured persecution for their sexual orientation or gender identity has gained attention in more recent times. Hopkinson et al. (2016) report that LGBTQ+ asylum seekers have a higher rate of childhood persecution and experiences of sexual violence which has grave impacts on mental health and wellbeing.

Methodology: Our Research

This research was undertaken following the #PGRWellbeing4All project at Newcastle University which adopted an equality, diversity and inclusion approach to understanding student wellbeing. We wanted to better understand the needs of students from forcibly displaced backgrounds in line with the growing commitment to diverse student trajectories at Newcastle University. This project set out to better understand the specific needs of students and staff affected by forced displacement and to produce actionable recommendations for change.

The first sanctuary scholarship award holders enrolled on their study programmes in September 2020, parallel to Newcastle University's continued efforts to become a University of Sanctuary. The university is also a member of the Council for At-Risk Academics (CARA) and host of CARA fellows. This project forms an essential part of this broader work and was granted full ethical approval in January 2020.

We conducted two online surveys, having first secured appropriate ethics clearance. Our first online survey aimed to understand the experiences of current, former and prospective Newcastle University students and staff who are from refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds, including those affected by forced migration in some other way. This survey was live from February to April 2020. The first survey was emailed to leads within each of Newcastle University's three faculties (UG, PG, academic staff, professional services staff) with a request to 'snowball' among all students and staff. We also sent the survey to Newcastle University Students Union (NUSU) and various relevant research groups. The aim was to gain the highest possible participation without completion of the survey risking disclosure of refugee, asylum and/or other forced displacement status. A number of organisations/charities working in the North East region with refugees and asylum-seekers also helped with recruitment to the survey. The first survey was completed by 11 people (9 women/2 men). Participants included 5 current students, 2 current staff members, 2 prospective students, 1 former student, and 1 participant who didn't specify student/staff status.

Our second online survey aimed to understand the experiences and expertise of those working within the asylum sector of the North East. This survey was live for a period of six weeks from mid-April 2020. The survey was a replacement research method for a face-to-face 'roundtable' with representatives from external organisations and charities which could no longer go ahead due to Covid-19. Twelve people completed the second survey and participants included workers at a number of regional charities and refugee initiatives, local authorities and other practitioners working with sanctuary seekers in the North East. Participants included representative voices from the student led NUSU group North East Solidarity and Teaching (NEST) through to figures at Regional Refugee Forum, Citizen Songwriters, Just Fair, Freedom from Torture, City of Sanctuary, Newcastle College and DiversiPly.

We also undertook five interviews (one man/four women). The interviews were carried out between April 2019 and February 2020 as part of a wider PhD research project focusing on the work-life experiences of Syrians in North East England. The five interviews were with current, former and prospective Newcastle University students and staff and have been included in this project's analysis to provide more in-depth personal accounts. They include one prospective staff/student, one current UG student, one current PGR student and two former students, one of which was a current staff member. Participants had a variety of experiences with the immigration system: asylum-seeker, family reunion, claiming asylum during studies, refugee and obtaining Indefinite Leave to Remain. Participants were recruited for interview based upon the interviewer's contacts in the community from volunteering and working, and snowballing was used to reach further participants. Following ethical guidelines, the five participants were contacted again to obtain their consent to use the

interviews in this separate project. As a measure of good practice, each participant was also sent the case study written, based on their interview and included in this report, for their approval.

The report's recommendations have been devised in response to the question: How can the University best support forced migrants? Two research questions formed the basis of data collection and analysis. They were:

Q1. From your experience what are the key issues individuals from refugee and asylum-seeker backgrounds face when trying to study or work at university in the UK? (The second survey asked from experience *working with* those from refugee and asylum-seeker backgrounds)

Q2. What would you like to see change at Newcastle University, to better support students and staff who are seeking asylum, refuge or those who have been affected by forced displacement?

Despite the focus of this research on Newcastle University, we believe that the findings have wider resonance for other HEIs.

Findings: The Experiences of Sanctuary Scholars in Higher Education

Clear and Informed Communication

Awareness of refugee experiences plays a vital role in successful communication and understanding between HEIs and sanctuary seekers. One survey participant from a refugee background wrote, 'Destigmatising difference all around is important. As well as a recognition that war, climate change, colonialism, the military industrial complex and energy and resource security creates the situations that lead to displacement. Hence, self-awareness is important.' A participant from City of Sanctuary added, there is a 'lack of awareness about whether they can actually study. Conflicting or confusing information. Lack of information available through colleges and schools which is specific to them.' One female staff member shared her experience, highlighting the importance of 'raising awareness of cross-cultural differences and the corresponding challenges'. She went on to explain: 'I am constantly being told by colleagues how challenging their daily lives are because of competing priorities of having family nearby and there seems to be a general awareness of the university that support should be given in such cases (which should undoubtedly be the case). Yet for many of us who are international and far away from our families (and some clearly due to very difficult circumstances) we seem to be largely forgotten.' A participant from a Local Authority proposed possible solutions: '[Improve] communication within university so that different departments are aware of issues relating to sanctuary scholars, refugees and those affected by forced displacement - thinking of all levels of the university and outside of the 'usual' places that may be aware of and working in these areas. Possible training/briefings for staff, online modules etc.'

Often a lack of communication and miscommunication were reported. Some participants said they didn't know what support and services were available at the university including if there were scholarships for refugees and if asylum-seekers paid home or international student tuition fees. The need for relevant, clear, accessible, consistent and compassionate communication is key for sanctuary seekers at Newcastle University and other HEIs. A participant from a Local Authority discussed the challenges of accessing information for sanctuary seekers: 'Finding out information and contacting prospective universities may be harder for people without connections and who may have ESL (big institutions hard to know who/where to speak to about issues such as finance/applications/courses etc).' One female student participant wrote that 'with the encouragement from a member of staff' she was able to access services and engage more at university. This highlights the luck of who individuals come into contact with. It is often one great person who encourages participation, shares information of services, and boosts moral and confidence due to the friendly nature they present, often going above and beyond. What about those that don't happen to meet someone like this member of staff? The positive consequences of effective communication and the value of clear leadership from senior staff are highlighted by one male student participant who was discussing communication in relation to racism in light of Covid-19: 'I really appreciate our Vice-Chancellor's email because I feel really helpless during these days.'

Participants also spoke about the need to have a dedicated point of contact trained in asylum issues. One participant advocated for 'a specialised help and support service that is fully educated on the asylum process and is able to give tailored advice to affected students/ staff would make this journey much more manageable' (female refugee participant, former student). A participant from a Local Authority asked if sanctuary seekers have a 'named contact within the university who knows about their situation? Do the people working closely with them know about Home Office restrictions and the pressure that they may be under' to ensure that relevant information and advice is given to the student. Participants from Regional Refugee Forum North East highlight key requirements: 'The administrator or main contact person at the university should be someone familiar with the Asylum Process to ensure more deserving candidates are identified. Those still awaiting their status in the UK

are in more need of support than someone with refugee status who may be eligible to apply for the student finance loan. In addition, the administrator should be familiar with NARIC processes for recognition of equivalence of overseas qualifications in the UK and be able to advise the caller on where to access NARIC for free.’ They also mentioned that, ‘there should be some way in which potential applicants to a sanctuary programme can talk to an ‘administrator’ of the programme – a single point of contact - to find out more information that will help them with their application, and not waste time if they are not eligible. Some people who have tried to call universities offering sanctuary awards have found that people they talk to seem unaware that such awards exist, and just start to give information on student loans. One member said, “My conclusion therefore is that although the universities put this out on their websites, the rank and file university staff supposed to deal with this issue is not aware”. Another said “there is a lack of right advice and educational councillors, there is not one to one session to have advice from universities. The open days are too busy.”

Recommendations

Provide a trained point of contact for staff and students from refugee and asylum-seeker backgrounds (e.g. Sanctuary Liaison Officer):

- Named contact to whom students/staff who disclose status/displacement history can be directly referred. The point of contact has received specialised training, they are informed/trained on rights, educational options, sanctuary seeking issues, familiar with NARIC. Their responsibilities should include, but are not necessarily limited to, the following:
- Link with external refugee/asylum support services that can also support individuals.
- Signpost to relevant initiatives going on in the region.
- Timetabled dedicated 1:1 session(s) during first semester to establish a pattern of support for those students/staff whose situation is known (sanctuary scholars/CARA fellows etc.).
- Acting as referral point to other departments and services students may need, which serves two functions: i) ensure students receive the support they need as quickly as possible and ii) communicate with other departments to ensure awareness and understanding and appropriate advice/support.
- The dedicated point of contact is involved in sanctuary scholarship recruitment, application and selection (i.e. interviews) processes, which results in sanctuary scholars getting to know this individual. Possibly a separate registration from the wider student population supported by the point of contact. One point of contact for questions regarding scholarship applications (personal touch needed so preferably by phone/face to face not just email). Consistent, compassionate communication required to manage expectations during and post application. Follow up support/feedback if application unsuccessful.
- Awareness of the one point of contact needs to be shared widely so students and staff know who to come to/where to signpost for specialised support.

Make available appropriate training and awareness-raising to staff and students:

- Make awareness-raising online module available to all staff. Communication so all departments/staff are aware of UoS work.
- Specialised training for staff in contact with sanctuary seeking students/staff.
- Sanctuary champions in departments/school to raise awareness, as localised point of contact.
- Line managers, supervisors, tutors to engage and understand those with sanctuary circumstances.
- Support Newcastle University student-led initiative North East Solidarity and Teaching (NEST) to expand their awareness-raising and training sessions amongst students.

Create a UoS webpage and ensure the clarity, accessibility, relevance, consistency and breadth of university-produced resources, support and information available online for students and staff from refugee and asylum backgrounds:

- One clear place on the university webpage with all information relating to UoS work and scholarships including links to useful sources.
- Videos/clear information that explains where to access information, what support is available, detailed and thorough information regarding the sanctuary scholarship application process, and how the university is committed to sanctuary seekers.
- Videos to explain working in academia/requirements.
- Consider using case studies of prominent sanctuary seekers in the UK (working/studying) as success stories.

Peer Support Networks and Pedagogical Support

Peer support plays a significant role in sanctuary scholars' experiences within HE. Interviewee Sham said: 'When you go to uni and see people from all different backgrounds, you feel more accepted. Because with my friends as well, I feel like they do as well. Like when I start to have friends who are not Arab, and I start to feel like, oh even if I'm Syrian, like accepted in here. So, like this is the time when I got more confident.' One female staff member participant shared her positive experiences: 'In many ways Newcastle University is one of the better universities I have worked at - though I think this might be that I have been lucky in regard to the line managers I have had here who have kept me on. Many of my colleagues are lovely, supportive and hard working.' Interviewee Reemie faced challenges with her classmates: 'They were not welcoming to us. I told you I had only one friend who I am still in contact with, but the rest they didn't, they would go on Fridays for example, we are all working together and they would go for drinks, they would wait for each other, nobody would ask us "would you like to join?" or whatever, I mean they were kind of isolated.' Whereas interviewee Amani spoke of emotional support and peer learning from classmates: 'I had lots of support from them, so they were like this, I'm here, next to you, kind of voice, so you know that you are not all to yourself.' Sanctuary scholar and student-led initiatives and societies can play an influential role in providing peer support to students from sanctuary backgrounds. They are organised at the national, regional and institution level, for example Student Action for Refugees is a national network of student societies and North East Solidarity and Teaching (NEST) is a Newcastle University student-led initiative.

Pedagogical support that understands the experience and particularities of seeking asylum is vital. Participants highlighted the importance of academic English and support with UK academic learning and new systems. One female student suggested the need to, 'organise much more group discussions before the deadline.' Interviewee Reemie spoke about the impact of adapting to the UK academic system and culture: 'I was good at that, I was really good, and I was always the top, but here it's always essays and things, so I wasn't used to this kind of system, so I struggled a bit to be honest.' In addition, participants from the Regional Refugee Forum North East (RRFNE) wrote about important considerations that must be made: 'Courses that require placements must be thought through carefully to avoid disappointing students who may be unable to take up placements at a later stage.' Some participants discussed the challenges of undertaking postgraduate research degrees, Reemie said: 'I would have preferred it if I could do modules, at least you go and sit in a class, you share with people, you know, a PhD you start your own research, your own journey, alone, you feel you are alone, you don't know who is doing what, even if you talk to your colleagues, everybody has their own different journey and they, I don't know, sometimes you don't know if you are on the right track.' A representative from NEST highlighted the language and academic support their learners, many of whom are prospective students from sanctuary backgrounds, were provided by student volunteers including English language learning, subject specific sessions, and support with UCAS, applying to university and personal statements.

Other participants spoke about participating in campus and department events and paid campus work which helped to build networks and confidence. One female student said more participation will 'ensure good integration.' A Local Authority participant asked if individuals are 'encouraged to join societies/meet with other people from similar backgrounds? Having the possibility (not compulsory as not everyone may want to declare status to others) to link in with other sanctuary scholars/students/staff from displaced backgrounds.' Charity Just Fair highlighted the need for 'support groups and networks for sanctuary scholars so that they can share experiences and support each other.' Another solution was proposed by a female staff member: 'An open forum (open to all staff not just 'displaced') where we can discuss and share some of our individual stories, learn from one another and support each other.' Developing support networks and mentoring groups to help refugees feel less isolated, helps build on language and communication skills for study or working (Frigerio and Nasimi, 2019). A representative from Newcastle University's NEST highlighted the impactful role peer support has for both their learners from sanctuary backgrounds and for their volunteers, some of whom are from sanctuary backgrounds, and went on to say, 'since its foundation in 2016, N.E.S.T has supported individuals with a range of different needs in addition to the main English Learning and Community Integration Services. These range from supporting families enrolling into schools, helping victims of hate crime report their abuse to the police and making hygiene items and warm clothing available to those who need it.' Leeds Beckett University runs a refugee-mentoring scheme to address the refugee-gap in information (Stevenson and Baker, 2018). Issues relating to attendance or academic progression should be raised by the personal tutor, with the student and the point of contact, to ensure maximum support is received to overcome any challenges (be they practical or academic) (Murray, 2019d).

Recommendations

Incorporate forced migration understanding into existing peer support mechanisms (buddy schemes, student mentor programmes, NEST support):

- Tour of campus/facilities.
- Share information and encourage participation in initiatives and groups such as campus events, research events, campus work and/or volunteering, student societies etc.

Ensure provision of academic support and English language support for sanctuary scholars (e.g. In-session English, Academic Skills Toolkit, NEST support).

Review course requirements in advance (e.g. clarify if students can undertake work placements).

Further support for NEST and other sanctuary scholar and student-led initiatives amongst sanctuary seekers that play a vital role in providing peer and pedagogical support.

Wellbeing, Mental Health and EDI

Individuals are facing precarious, vulnerable situations and need a variety of support. Without timely access to the required mental health and wellbeing support, the impact can be detrimental to the individual and their journey within HEIs. Amani discussed the impact for her: 'I have not dealt with the shock so I stayed in the shocked phase for quite a long time and that's why it affected my study.' She also said: 'I couldn't (do uni work) because I was on survival mode if that makes sense... it's just making sure that you have your next rent covered and you have your next food shop covered and stuff like that so I was not able to write anything.' Interviewee Zara spoke of the challenges she faced being an asylum-seeker whilst studying. Her data collection was impacted by the war and her PhD was on the 'backburner.'

One participant from City of Sanctuary expressed the need for ‘pastoral care and wellbeing support for students from this background with staff being well trained and equipped to deal with the issues specific to sanctuary seekers.’ Similarly one student from a refugee background commented, ‘for those who are in desperate need and suffering from the effects of forced displacement, I believe there should be allocated mentors who can swiftly remove students from their situation and offer them a place of retreat, where reintegration into the community can take place and mental health improved.’

A City of Sanctuary participant highlighted the challenging and precarious nature of individual ‘chaotic life situations including having to move accommodation regularly, childcare or family caring needs, changes to immigration status, mental health issues. Financial constraints or concerns.’ Freedom from Torture commented that cultural misunderstandings and poverty were amongst the key issues affecting refugees and asylum-seekers. One male student participant wrote about the uncertain times and the challenges of managing life in the UK and back home: ‘This made me really worried about my future plan and I am facing a kind of depression both inside concerning my family members, and outside worrying about unfair treatment and potential discrimination.’

The impact of such vulnerable and challenging circumstances on mental wellbeing is profound. Interviewee Zara talks about the suicidal thoughts she had whilst studying and having to claim asylum. Interviewee Reemie spoke about her depression, great stress, feeling sad and overwhelmed and missing family back home. Interviewee Amani said that university breaks such as Christmas were very challenging as she was on her own and the uncertainty of the situation back home meant not being able to contact her family. Interviewees also mentioned the great loss of family and friends dying in conflict.

Asking for help can often be a challenge. Interviewee Hamid spoke about the shame and pain of asking for help for example from foodbanks; ‘the problem is for the Syrians we didn't used to ask (for help) and sometimes it's hurting us to ask.’

The role of religious wellbeing was mentioned by Amani: ‘I used to go to the mosque and have my Iftar after sunset with the people. I'd help them clean and have all this kind atmosphere and family atmosphere and get all the charge I need and go to the library and study.’ Amani also spoke about the role of practising martial arts whilst going through the asylum system: ‘It was something different and it kind of gave me this mental resistance in my brain.’

The importance of space and place was highlighted by participants. Freedom from Torture expressed the need for sanctuary scholars to have access to ‘a space to work/study if sharing a room.’ One female staff member expressed the lack of quiet spaces and that unsatisfactory noise, temperature and lighting were key issues, often associated with open plan workspaces.

Murray (2019d) argues that the wellbeing form in the sanctuary scholarship application helps universities to understand the students’ current situation and what support is needed from the outset as well as how their situation may unfold and what potential support may be needed in the future. A Local Authority participant asked if links were made with refugee and asylum support services, so additional specialised support was made available to individuals. One student said that working with these specialised support agencies in the asylum sector would help.

The precarious nature and varied experiences of sanctuary seekers pose important reflection for equality, diversity and inclusion teams within HEIs. A representative from Newcastle University student-led initiative North East Solidarity and Teaching (NEST) draws attention to the multifaceted issues affecting prospective students and staff including isolation, poor or no accommodation, food poverty, racism, trauma as well as wellbeing and mental health issues and financial and geographic

barriers. The intersections of these experiences must be considered by HEIs and incorporated into EDI work.

Interviewee Hamid explains the differences in the Syrian community here, due to politics, class and educational background and how this impacts upon culture and work-life goals. This is a reminder that not all nationals share the same experiences, background, political views, immigration route and aims: 'They're from different social lives and different cultures and different backgrounds which sometimes makes clashes in their opinions.' It is also important to understand the political nature of the academic contexts from which scholars come. A recent report by Scholars At Risk (2019) highlights the extent of attacks on higher education communities around the world including violence, wrongful imprisonments and prosecutions of scholars, pressures on student expression and restrictions on academic travel.

One participant talks about the stressful experience of balancing finances, being a single parent, and studying, particularly after having been out of academia for 10 years and being a mature student, using terms like, 'out of my depth and isolated,' and 'anxiety, low self-esteem and confidence,' which went on to impact upon her participation in class, despite being prepared (female student). Interviewee Reemie also discussed childcare barriers. Cardiff Met has set up a crèche for mothers enrolled in certain courses (City of Sanctuary, 2019) as one way of addressing this barrier. One female staff member said she wishes 'line managers/supervisors (were) fully engaged with these special circumstances (in the same way they are when having children).' Ferede (2018) suggests the creation of scholarships for women refugees as one way of addressing the challenges faced by women.

One participant suggested the creation of an annual event to celebrate diversity across the University for staff and students (female staff member). Howard-Baptiste and Harris (2014) found that seeing examples of the first Black women to earn doctoral degrees gave strength to other students. Drawing on this example, promoting success stories of students and academics from refugee backgrounds can not only potentially provide strength to other sanctuary scholars but also work towards raising awareness.

The varied experiences of intersectional forms of discrimination are highlighted through interviewees' and participants' experiences. Naidoo et al. (2018) argue that inclusive classrooms and curriculum is one way of raising awareness and addressing structural barriers and cultural stereotypes, including social justice pedagogy in the classroom, rather than an us/them binary. They highlight that a 'safe space that can allow for deeper understandings between those who are in positions of power and those who may be marginalised leading to a more conscious and careful interaction in the spaces between different cultural positions' (p. 30). Collyer et al. (2018) express the need for clear support and ways to report discrimination and hate crimes on campus and support individuals if they have experienced any type of hate crime on campus or off.

Recommendations

Ensure attention to the experiences of forced migration and subsequent impact on students in

Support Plans and PECs:

- Applicants' responses included within the sanctuary scholarship application regarding wellbeing are fed into Wellbeing Services so sanctuary scholars can be linked up with any support from the get-go.
- Any known student from a refugee or asylum-seeker background has the opportunity to access support from Student Health and Wellbeing Services. Evaluate whether a support plan should be put in place.

- Incorporate an understanding of the impact of forced migration within the Personal Extenuating Circumstances (PEC) procedure (i.e. flexibility with deadlines and extensions).
- Understanding and flexibility of support for students and staff whose situation can change drastically and quickly without any notice.

Ensure effective communication about existing relevant services and support to current students and staff affected by forced migration:

- Encourage participation in existing support networks at the university (student/institution-led) as one way to counter intersectional discrimination (e.g. societies, groups and/or networks relating to LGBTQ+, women, ethnic minorities, disabilities, asylum, carers etc.)
- Raise awareness of religious support and places of worship on campus.
- Ensure wellbeing support during holidays.
- Link and signpost women to women-centred support.
- Promote places to work/study on campus.
- Extend compassionate leave/bereavement days for sanctuary seekers if need be.
- Consider crèche/childcare support for single parents.

Incorporate asylum experiences into existing Equality, Diversity and Inclusion work:

- Embed refugee issues within Global Week, EDI conference and other events as appropriate.
- Annual event to celebrate diversity across the university for staff and students.
- Incorporate refugee family issues within existing work (e.g. For Families Project).

Widening Access to HEIs

Accessing higher education in the UK presents challenges for sanctuary seekers. Murray (2019b) highlights that the 'Home Office pressures to exclude sanctuary scholars in Participation and Access Plan (PAP) – but they should be included' and they can be. The Article 26 project found that including sanctuary scholarships in widening access/participation work reinforces the commitment and promotes understanding across university (Murray, 2019d).

Interviewee Sham (current UG student) attended two widening access programmes before securing a place to study. She said that these experiences helped her to decide on her course, gain confidence in the university setting and build her network. Survey participants championed university library access for refugee and asylum-seekers before studying so they can build their subject knowledge and academic English, helping individuals to work towards studying at university in the UK.

Participants highlighted the need to support sanctuary seekers not coming through further education systems. One Local Authority participant wrote, 'could links be made with colleges locally to support those from asylum backgrounds thinking of applying? There is a feeling that often those who find it easier to get into university are people whose family have been in the UK for some time and who have been through some schooling, this then misses out lots of people over 18 who come alone and would like to pursue higher education but struggle to do so.' One participant from Newcastle College highlighted that 'Lots of the ESOL learners at Newcastle College would like to study at the same level as they have studied in their country. They have expert subject knowledge and are intelligent people, whose functional English is often very good, but they lack the Academic English to be eligible to study at Newcastle University.' The same participant continued, 'There is no clear route for displaced people to move from learning functional English at Newcastle College to being ready to use Academic English at Newcastle University (or other universities). There are places to learn this Academic English (IELTS courses at International House, Newcastle University Into; Newcastle College EFL), but scholarships

for expensive IELTS courses are irregular. Could there be a regular number of scholarships offered to Newcastle College ESOL learners who wish to study at Newcastle University?’

Many participants spoke about the sanctuary scholarships. One participant highlighted the need for a ‘specialised department/office to support individuals through the application process’ (female refugee participant, prospective student) and other participants wrote about the need for open days or taster days to give sanctuary scholars an opportunity to gather information, familiarise themselves with campus and find out about studying and working at university. Participants called for a revised sanctuary application process that included an opportunity to discuss the application in more detail before submission, a clearly communicated timescale of the application process, and a dedicated person who could be contacted (not just via email) to answer questions. Participants commented on the importance of having someone at the university who knew their situation and understood the challenges they faced and the pressures they felt with regard to the Home Office. Some participants thought more support is needed with the application and if it’s rejected, support is needed to understand the next steps. Survey participant, charity Citizen Songwriters said working with refugees and asylum-seekers highlighted the lack of awareness of courses available and support needed to transition to UK systems. Similarly, the RRFNE added, ‘potential applicants need more guidance on what courses are on offer, to find a match with their own area of academic study as terminology may be very different. It would be useful to be able to talk to course tutors to understand what the focus is.’ A representative from NEST outlined the support they had been providing and the desire to expand their service to meet the needs of students, ‘When Newcastle University first offered the Sanctuary Scholarships, many N.E.S.T learners wanted to apply and N.E.S.T began to receive many individualised requests for help in the process of researching and applying for University. N.E.S.T volunteers provided a range of support including, assisting learners at open days, talking to learners about University experience, assisting with IELTS preparation, demonstrating how to use UCAS, reviewing and supporting with CV’s, personal statements and interview preparation and assisting learners in attempting to communicate with University staff about entry requirements. N.E.S.T was able to successfully support two learners in achieving places at Northumbria and Teesside University this year. Whilst the efforts of the student volunteers are much appreciated by the learners, more information, training and resources and specifically direct lines of communication with appropriately informed University staff members would increase the capacity of N.E.S.T to support the University in achieving the most supportive recruitment process for their Sanctuary scholars.’

Participants highlight key issues regarding the role of the application process for sanctuary scholarships. The RRFNE highlighted the importance of ‘understanding the role of the written application form. It is not always clear to (refugees and asylum-seekers) what information the questions are aimed at identifying. They are not used to completing forms that include personal advocacy (making their case) and are more likely to focus solely on facts and numbers.’ Participants also stated the need to include a suggested word count on the application form to encourage applicants to make their case, and to ensure flexibility in the selection of referees. There are issues with qualifications awarded in different countries not always being recognised and challenges in proving qualifications when documentation has been left in home countries. Participants asked whether the university can be more active in its academic assessment during the application process. One prospective student proposed an alternative when university certificates from home countries were not accessible, ‘it could be enough for the university to have my mark history’ (female refugee participant, prospective postgraduate student). The RRFNE also said, ‘As well as more robust and knowledgeable support during the application process, a university should also provide enough information and guidance about the interview process too. To help someone prepare for it appropriately as it may be very different to their own countries.’

Recommendations

Review sanctuary scholarship application process:

- Allow more flexibility in the selection of referees required in the application.
- Include a visual timeline of application process on the website.
- Ensure enough space to write answers on application form. Include a suggested word count to encourage participants to make their case.
- Incorporate a course search tool on sanctuary scholarship webpage to assist individuals to find their desired course.
- Support NEST to expand their support assisting prospective sanctuary scholars.
- Open days/session to break down the written application form, hear from current students, go over package (finances included) and discuss before submission.
- One point of contact for questions regarding applications.
- Guidance around interview process/exams.
- Follow up support if application rejected.

Integrate support for forced migrants in existing widening participation initiatives:

- Include the UoS and sanctuary scholarships work in the university's widening access/participation work, actively include places for sanctuary seekers in widening participation preparation courses.
- Working with NEST, offer taster days or an on-campus residential with specific focus for sanctuary seekers not coming through high schools.
- Explore where departments can incorporate sessions/talks from sanctuary seekers to inform research, learning and understanding.
- Provide university library access for prospective sanctuary seekers by waiving the joining fee.
- Identify which opportunities sanctuary seekers can partake in at university (attend talks, participate in research, give a keynote, guest lecture).

Provide a range of means of proving previous qualifications and certificates:

- Information on website about NARIC to inform prospective students on how to convert qualifications.
- Provide alternative accreditation of past qualifications and skills.
- When previous qualifications cannot be proven (no certificate etc.) candidates can be asked to prepare a portfolio of what they did in the past, accompanied by a sworn statement and interview or presentation to assert their level of knowledge from previous qualification.

Financial Support

The precarious situation of sanctuary seekers frequently results in financial hardship impacting individual experiences within HE. One female prospective PG student from a refugee background wrote, 'I feel it's too hard to find time and money to study (for IELTS exam) as there's no courses focusing on it except in private schools which cost lots of money. So the shortage of money and time as I need to work to get my loaf of bread for me and my kids is making studying postgraduate a dream for me.' Interviewee Zara highlighted the financial precarity faced whilst seeking asylum and studying and its knock-on effect. Another student highlighted the financial strains throughout the academic year and whilst juggling parenting: 'The large gap between the last payment of the year in April, and the first payment of the new semester in September, meant there was always a shortfall at the end of the summer holidays. As a student with a child and no alternatives for childcare throughout the summer, I did not have the option (to) work and would therefore end up having to borrow money; leaving me short of money for the new academic year.' Some participants and interviewees spoke about seeking one-off financial support from the university: 'It was made very

clear: no postgraduate student should be requesting funding from the hardship fund as at this stage in education, you are expected to fund yourself.'

A participant from City of Sanctuary expressed the need for, 'scholarships which are accessible and realistic (this may mean accompanying maintenance loans, accommodation offers or in-kind support).' A participant from one Local Authority suggested, 'Sanctuary scholarships to support people unable to access financial support; make sure these are flexible and well supported both financially but also with other elements of university life.' Whilst the RRFNE said, 'A university offering a sanctuary award should factor in the cost of other expenses such as transport and related study costs. If the award is given to someone outside Newcastle, accommodation costs needs to be considered. It is important that the student can be included fully in university life. Asylum-seekers cannot fill any financial gap that exists between the sanctuary award and the actual costs. University should make it very clear what the bursary will or will not cover. Sometimes people can be put off from applying because they do not realise some other costs are offered beyond the tuition fees. Also include information about whether the university can play any role in people securing IELTS qualifications – do they offer summer courses, what about costs etc.' Charity, Just Fair highlighted the need for, 'offers of financial support to ensure these students have access to home internet and travel costs covered if need be.' From time working with refugee and asylum-seekers, charity Freedom From Torture highlighted the financial constraints experienced and need for 'grants for e.g. laptops.' Citizen Songwriters highlighted issues regarding 'access to the web: Certainly, at the moment during Covid-19 it is around mobile data access (or Wi-Fi) which is affecting sanctuary seekers, some of whom have no access to data to complete their studies.' Just Fair also mentioned the high cost of internet and inadequate financial support from the government which sees students rely on attending university buildings to complete assignments. Therefore, consideration must be made regarding internet needs and travel necessities. However, one participant from a Local Authority expressed 'issues around willingness to access student finance if recently recognised refugee' and interviewee Zara spoke about how she waited until her situation was dire before reaching out for financial support.

Recommendations

Provide flexible support to mitigate the financial barriers facing students from refugee and asylum backgrounds:

- Enhanced access to hardship funds.
- Signposting to eligible funds and support beyond the institution.
- Access to support over summer period.
- Finance support in advance for conferences and other student activities that are usually reimbursed retrospectively.
- Flexibility with paying tuition fees (monthly rather than quarterly).
- Reduced fees to access university sports centre.

Ensure that scholarship financial support matches the actual cost to sanctuary seeker:

- Continue to flexibly fund sanctuary scholarships (e.g. funding can be used flexibly to cover a variety of degree programmes to match successful applicants' chosen programme).
- Ensure sanctuary scholarships are prioritised for those students who cannot access student finance.
- Sanctuary scholarships should include:
 - Transport/accommodation costs
 - Study-specific costs including internet access
 - English pre-sessional/summer courses for students who have accepted offers of places
 - UCAS bursaries and scholarships for IELTS exams for students who have accepted offers of places

- IT skills course
- Access to university sports centre

Enhancing the Operation of the UoS Steering Group

A participant from City of Sanctuary outlined the need 'to have a robust strategic plan for improving access to university and support for students once they arrive. Greater engagement with people with lived experience through meaningful (anonymous) feedback mechanisms and opportunities for them to feed into the initiatives and plans.... Reflection on how the university can be a place of welcome for people other than their scholars (local NGOs using facilities etc).' Another participant stressed the need to be honest, open, show by example and review the advisors on the boards/council (DiversiPLY).

From discussions with a representative from University of Sanctuary regarding the strategic organising of this work within respective universities, many found it useful when someone was assigned to take the lead and feed into the steering group. This person was sometimes linked to widening participation work, student finance or student services more broadly. It is very important that this person is trained and has experience working with refugees and acts as a liaison with NGOs in the area about potential links and support. Having this role included in the person's job description helped. Some steering groups had many members (approx. 30) with interest and/or experience in asylum issues with a smaller number of active members (around 10).

Recommendations

Continue to review the University of Sanctuary steering group membership:

- Ensure there is representation from students, and individuals from refugee/asylum backgrounds.
- Ensure the designated point of contact sits on the Steering group.

Gather data and feedback from sanctuary scholars as a mechanism for reflection and improvement.

Formulate a strategic plan based on the guidelines presented in Article 26 (Hudson and Murray, 2018) which include:

1. The right of forced migrants to access higher education
2. Equal treatment and non-discrimination
3. The right to privacy
4. An outline of sanctuary initiatives
5. Underlying principles for the design, administration and implementation of sanctuary initiatives
6. Selection processes and removal of procedural barriers
7. Communication
8. Academic, pastoral and professional support
9. Student progress and participation
10. Staff training
11. Adoption
12. Dissemination, reporting and policy development.

Supporting Staff from Refugee Backgrounds

There is a need to support the inclusion of sanctuary scholars advancing within academia. The Council for At-Risk Academics works in supporting fleeing scholars. Universities along with CARA champions and advisors support the charity's work by providing fellowship opportunities in HEIs (CARA, 2020).

However, for sanctuary seekers already within the UK, there are immediate challenges due to 'difficulties with lack of experience of working and application process in the UK/university sector' (Local Authority). Participants discussed the pressures of working within academia referring to universities as 'neoliberal machines' (female staff member). Interviewee Zara highlights the multitude of challenges faced in addition to the difficult particularities of finding secure work within academia. Zara took work 170 miles away and commuted and accepted hourly casual work, as it was something to add to her CV especially with the long gap of not being able to work while claiming asylum and undertaking her PhD. Zara also discusses the implications of the recruitment process when applying for jobs and experienced her immigration status as a barrier. A bridging course or preparatory courses (Earnest et al., 2010) are advocated to support the transition of refugee academics and to prevent losing out on talent. One Local Authority participant suggested the need for, 'work placements/internships/trial days in place of interviews or other creative ways of interviewing candidates for jobs so as to give people without/with less experience in the UK workplace a better chance to get a job.'

Recommendations

Review how to best support the recruitment of staff from refugee backgrounds:

- Commit to get sanctuary seekers represented within the workforce.
- Incorporate the understanding that study/work gaps due to forced displacement are valid life experience generating transferable skills.
- Consider offering work placements/internships/trial day opportunities to provide experience for academics from asylum-seeker backgrounds.

Review how to best support existing staff from refugee backgrounds:

- Appoint sanctuary champions in departments/schools to raise awareness and act as localised point of contact for affected staff.
- Dedicated and specialised wellbeing support for affected staff.

Continue CARA membership and review support for CARA fellows at the university to echo relevant student-focused recommendations in this report.

Immigration system awareness

There are various ways claiming asylum can affect individuals studying and working in HEIs. One participant highlights the difficulties of having to go through the asylum immigration system whilst studying, 'I had to apply for asylum while I was doing my PhD at Newcastle University. That was a very stressful time emotionally and financially and there was little to no specific help in this regard. I did have access to counselling in my capacity as a student and I applied for and received the hardship fund once, but there was no specific advice specifically for asylum-seekers or refugees. The uncertainty, feelings of desperation and isolation were the worst and the experience was very alienating. There was also a sense of shame for having to go through it and having a specialised service with enough knowledge of the process would have been tremendously helpful' (former student and former staff member).

This highlights that not all cases are known and therefore the issues aren't visible. It seems that CARA fellows and sanctuary scholars are among those students and staff whose situation and experience may be known to universities. However, there is often little awareness of students and staff who have historically claimed asylum, or students who have to claim asylum during their studies. One participant writes, 'The University seems to be entirely unaware of my background. During the 4.5 years of working at Newcastle no one has ever indicated that any support might be available or even just a simple acknowledgement/awareness of past and current circumstances and challenges' (female staff member).

It is important for universities to understand the implications on students if a decision is made on their case during their studies. One Local Authority participant asks, 'Has thought been given to what will happen if given a positive or negative decision on their asylum claim?' The Regional Refugee Forum North East said, 'It is vital that a university offering a sanctuary programme takes legal advice and is absolutely clear how it will respond to any Home Office challenge BEFORE it offers a sanctuary programme. Young people have been hugely damaged by being offered such an opportunity, then having it withdrawn from them... All universities offering sanctuary programmes need to have a procedure for dealing with Home Office challenges that ensures the rights of the AS are upheld and no blanket bans are used.'

Recommendations

Develop procedure for dealing with Home Office challenges that ensures the rights of the asylum-seeker student are upheld and no blanket bans are used:

- Take legal advice.
- Manage expectation and spend time to communicate any decisions with compassion (face to face where possible).

Conclusion

In summary, this is a growing and developing area of work and this research makes a key contribution in identifying students' needs and concerns, mapping best practice, and considering the way forward. Newcastle University and other institutions engaging with University of Sanctuary, have an opportunity and responsibility to make a real difference to refugees' lives, in a way that will be of benefit to them, the universities that welcome them, and the communities they live in.

Interview Accounts

The following accounts are based on interviews carried out with prospective, current and former students and staff of Newcastle University from refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds. Pseudonyms are used throughout to protect individuals' identity. The accounts demonstrate the diverse experiences and issues faced.

Hamid

Hamid is Syrian and completed his studies in Egypt. He has over 15 years' experience working in his sector. He claimed asylum in the UK as war broke out in Syria. He applied for family reunion and his family joined him. Hamid speaks about the difficulty of trying to access work as his qualifications were not recognised here. Hamid didn't think retraining or converting the qualification was an option as it required time and money. He resorted to academia as the only viable option to rebuild his career in the UK. He applied for lectureship positions at various universities including Newcastle as he thought his qualifications and vast experience in the sector would be suitable for teaching positions. Hamid spoke about the discrimination in the recruitment process due to being Syrian, a refugee, a foreigner, and possessing foreign qualifications, saying his application is at the 'third or fourth line before (recruiters) come to me.' With no luck he applied to return to study as his friends told him that 'whatever you get whatever your (previous) experience, nobody looks at this'. He also talks about some of the challenges his son faced in studying in the region. As his family were waiting for ILR status, his son didn't have access to Student Finance so all the family worked to pay the tuition fees. Hamid felt the financial burdens and strains of trying to support the family here when he couldn't find work. Hamid discussed the tension and stress within his family. Everyone had their trauma from what had happened and then the difficulties and pressure from UK life. Hamid assisted his children adapting to school here, he supported friends and family with administrative tasks. Hamid spoke of the pain when asking for help as his family were self-sufficient back home. A university outside the region had accepted Hamid's application to study. They offered a place on their Masters course in account of his experience and previous qualifications. He has now graduated.

Amani

Amani came on a master's scholarship from her home country to study at Newcastle University. The situation at home in Syria was getting worse during her studies. She confronted several challenges and had to claim asylum during her degree programme. Amani spoke of the impact on her mental health, suffering from depression and anxiety, experiencing family death, the uncertainty of the situation due to intermittent contact with her family in Syria and holiday periods at university feeling isolated where ruminating thoughts crept in. She tried CBT but said it didn't work. Amani acknowledged that she hadn't been able to deal with the shock causing her to extend deadlines and her final submission, she said 'I have not dealt with the shock so I stayed in the shocked phase for quite a long time and that's why it affected my study until probably 2013.' She mentioned the impact of claiming asylum on her living situation, finances and morale. Amani spoke about the support systems she used to get through this testing period. She would visit the mosque: 'I used to go to the mosque whenever I can... between the lectures I just go and sit and whoever is in there you just talk, and the good thing about mosques is that you have people from different countries so you have this kind of support from different backgrounds.' She spoke of the support from her classmates, she said, 'I had lots of support from them, so they were like this, I'm here, next to you, kind of voice, so you know that you are not all to yourself.' She started attending a sports club, 'It was something different and it kind of gave me this mental resistance in my brain.' She said that despite it all she had a sense that things would get better. Since graduating and obtaining refugee status, she has found full time employment in the region.

Sham

Sham is a current Newcastle University undergraduate student from Syria. Her father sought asylum in the UK and she joined him with her mother and siblings via family reunion. Sham completed her GCSEs and A-levels here and now studies at Newcastle University. She explained that she had the support of her family and school in getting to university. She took part in the Summer School programme and the Partners Scheme at NU. She spoke positively of her experiences, making friends and preparing her for the transition. Sham spoke of the confidence and social skills she had built from her time in Sixth Form, 'By (year) 13 when I started making friends I got more confident so like going into uni I was more confident, I made lots of friends, people from different backgrounds so like even within our course there is people from like really different backgrounds which is nice like good diversity' and 'when you go to uni and see people from all different backgrounds, you feel more accepted.' Sham also spoke of the support she gives to her family as she continues to live at home. She spoke of the confidence boost she gets from her university volunteering experience and through her weekend job outside of university. She said the workload is more than anticipated but she likes the increased sense of independence.

Reemie

Reemie is from Syria. She came to Newcastle University on a postgraduate scholarship from her home country. She undertook a Masters and a PhD and had to claim asylum during her studies. She married, had a child and subsequently divorced during her studies. She spoke about the challenges of being a single parent, also impacted by the lonely nature of PhD life. Reemie talked about the stress and depression experienced during these years. She experienced loss and isolation and felt overwhelmed trying to manage on her own. She said she had support from family back home, some friends here and two friendly tutors. Reemie said that the home students weren't welcoming and spoke of the difficulties when making friends with other Syrians, she said, 'they classify you, you come from this region you are by default this, this, this! It doesn't work like that you know.' Reemie mentioned the financial difficulties she was experiencing, the childcare barriers and the challenges of raising a child alone. She completed her studies and is now undertaking some seminar teaching on an hourly basis. Reemie mentioned the difficulties of fitting this around her child's needs and that there was no time or support for her own needs.

Zara

Zara came on a student visa to study a PhD on a scholarship from her home country. The start of war impacted Zara's studies. It also meant that it was increasingly difficult for her husband and child to join her in the UK as planned. During her postgraduate studies, she experienced several barriers and challenges. Zara spoke about her challenging experiences with the Home Office and UK immigration system. She applied for a dependent visa for her family to join her whilst she completed her PhD but this was rejected. She appealed in court and it was overturned. During this time she was away from her husband and child. She spoke of her family pressuring her to act quicker and that they didn't understand that it was out of her hands. When her husband finally arrived, he was very thin and stressed. He struggled with English and confronted many barriers trying to find work. Zara mentioned several challenges faced in her personal life whilst studying. Her son was traumatised, and specialised support was needed at school to help him adapt. She managed this as she dealt with everything outside the house because her husband wasn't fluent in English and didn't know the systems. Zara constantly worried about family stuck in war back home. She experienced death of family members and friends.

The situation back home worsened so Zara and her family claimed asylum. An immigration solicitor wrongfully advised her that she might not be allowed to continue studying. However, when she tried

to clarify that at the asylum interview, the Home Office worker was 'mean' and no one could tell her if she had the right to continue studying or not. Due to lack of advice she withdrew the family's claim as she was worried that she wouldn't be able to continue studying and if rejected that she would be immediately deported. Given her political activism, this posed an immediate threat on her life. As the situation worsened back home, she later decided to make a second claim, this was classed as further submission and took a lot longer to hear back. This all happened while she was studying and after having had a second baby. There was a lack of informed support from the university. It took 2.5 years from the further submission to get a decision. Zara said these were the worst years of life in the UK. She said that subsequently her PhD was on the 'backburner' and it wasn't the ideal PhD journey she had intended.

Her mental health was significantly impacted, she spoke of her depression, feelings of devastation, insecurity, danger and stress. 'I don't know how to put it, I had not suicidal thoughts, but suicidal fantasies if you will, like it would be so much easier if I just died of natural causes, because I wouldn't kill myself because you know it is forbidden in Islam and then that would be cruel to my kids, but if I just happened to die then you know things would just be so much easier..... so, I was in a very, very dark place but in spite of all that, I had to kind of keep things moving in terms of everything, home life, the PhD.'

She talked about the significant financial strains that she faced. Her scholarship was stopped from her country, she only applied for support from the British Council once the situation was dire as she thought that was more honest, she had to borrow money to cover rent. When she eventually got asylum support, it was given on a Morrisons' card and there was no Morrisons near her house. Her family waited 2.5 years for an answer on their case, during this time she had no right to work, and the financial burden was all-consuming, 'I applied for a hardship fund from the university, but it was like a one-off payment. We were borrowing money from a friend, you're literally burying yourself in debt with no prospect because you don't know when the case is going to be resolved, when you are going to be able to work and earn enough money to pay somebody back and all that.' Zara won an abstract competition so got free entrance to a conference, however the university's policy of reimbursing conference travel retrospectively meant that she had to ask a friend to buy her train tickets. Without a social network, this type of support would be difficult to find.

Her family had to move several times during the asylum process. She had to pay for public transport in order to get to university which put even more pressure on the family's budget. She couldn't work at home as there was no internet and she also said 'it is a very crumbly flat, it was a 2 bedroom, one for the kids, one for us, it was very small, very damp, very dark and the door was painted black. Now I read that the doors of asylum-seekers are always a different colour to kind of like identify them so in less than ideal neighbourhoods that puts you at risk of racial attacks and that.'

Zara spoke of the challenges faced with university administration when having her second baby. 'I went to talk to the visa team and said, oh I have a baby can I have an interruption? It was like as a tier 4 student you're only allowed an interruption for up to 6 weeks otherwise your visa is going to be revoked because you are here to study not to have a baby, that's what they told me. So if you want to have a longer interruption you and the whole family will have to leave the country to another country, or go home, it was like hello (disbelief laugh) you know and then reapply for a visa. That's... you know that is impossible. It's like A we can't go home and B nobody is going to give us a visa and C can you imagine the cost, it's like impossible, it's like what the hell am I going to do. And then one of my friends actually told me oh well you know for Syrian students, because of the situation, the university is doing a retrospective interruption so it's really an extension but an unpaid extension, so I had that 7 months.'

Zara reflected on the disparity of experience of the UK immigration system for sanctuary seekers, 'the ones who came here on the resettlement scheme they just whoosh into the system right away with no hiccups so to speak.' These individuals have support, instant refugee status so they can work and access student finance. However she did talk about the socio-cultural impacts of this, 'I have a network outside of being refugee, most of their network comes with being a refugee, their dealings with the council, their dealings with the Job Centre, they do have a social worker but all of it comes within the experience, within their experience of being a refugee, I have another parallel experience as it were.'

Since graduating from her PhD, Zara is undertaking teaching work. She spoke of the heart-breaking realities of the academic sector; hourly contracts, insecurity and the long commutes to get to the only available work. Zara highlighted the discriminatory implications of her experience of being a refugee and applying for jobs, 'with many of the applications that I'm putting in, especially with the permanent ones, obviously they ask you: "are you eligible to work in the UK?" and I am eligible to work in the UK, but then they ask for details, and you know my refugee leave to remain expires in 2022, and you can then apply for indefinite leave to remain, but that is kind of like theoretical even though that is like an automatic process but universities I think don't like that.' She also spoke of the profound impact her PhD experience is having on her academic employment prospects, 'my PhD journey wasn't as perfect as I would've liked it to be, so I did go to conferences but I didn't have time to write and publish and mingle with academic types and go on networking events and that type of stuff and make myself known to the important people.'

Good Practice Case Studies

Below we highlight some case studies and recommendations found from reading associated literature and reports as well as the University of Sanctuary Resource Pack (City of Sanctuary, 2019).

Communication, Training and Awareness Raising

Murray (2019d) advocates a three-tier communication process for HEIs: i) Internal Promotion – university, ii) Local Promotion – local / regional area and iii) National Promotion. (p. 1) which in turn helps raise awareness particularly regarding sanctuary initiatives, research and scholarships. Specialised training for staff working with sanctuary scholars helps to raise awareness and inform communication practice. 'Refugee Support Network (RSN) deliver interactive and informative training which combines technical information about immigration statuses and university eligibility with personal stories, practical tools and examples of best practice. This training provides participants with comprehensive information, as well as the skills and confidence they need to support forced migrants on their higher education journey' (Murray, 2019c). City of Sanctuary (2019) use example case studies from various Universities of Sanctuary to highlight best practice and effective communication tools, for example the University of Exeter recorded a video for those seeking sanctuary going to appeal and 'Cardiff Met University overcomes the challenges of the timing of Refugee Week by embedding refugee issues within their annual Global Week. Amnesty and STAR student groups are involved in delivering the activities for Global Week, including some workshops raising awareness of refugees' experiences' (City of Sanctuary, 2019, p. 8).

Dedicated point of contact

'The University of Salford established their Article 26 scholarship scheme in 2012 with an appointed person to act as dedicated point of contact for scholarship recipients. This emulated Salford's wider practice in affording all 'vulnerable' student groups a dedicated point of contact to recruit and retain students – in order to ensure that vulnerable students are well supported, engage in university life and can access services. The dedicated point of contact is involved in recruitment, application and selection (i.e. interviews) processes, which results in sanctuary scholars getting to know this individual from their first contact with Salford. Prior to starting their degree programme, sanctuary scholars meet the point of contact as well as other students supported through the scholarship scheme. This is combined with meeting the compliance team to check documents pertaining to their immigration status. Registration takes place separately from the wider student population and is supported by the point of contact to ensure there are no complications and enrolment is a smooth and stress-free process. The point of contact acts as referral point to other university departments and services students may need, which serves two functions: i) ensure students receive the support they need as quickly as possible and ii) communicate with other university departments to ensure awareness and understanding of the sanctuary scholarship scheme' (Murray, 2019d, p. 1).

Sanctuary Scholarships

The sanctuary scholarship application form designed as part of the Article 26 project (Murray, 2019e), requests information on 5 key areas so that in one document, university staff can understand overall circumstances of applicants. This process draws attention to any supplementary support the student may need in advance of undertaking studies, so that the university can respond. 'The aim of this tool is to also ensure that the applicant, once awarded a scholarship, can begin their degree programme or pre-sessional qualification with the necessary support in place. This in turn will inform the student contract, aid student retention and improve the student experience' (p.2).

Widening Participation

The University of Winchester has developed an on-campus residential for forced migrants aged between 14 and 20. The residential is targeted at those who arrived as unaccompanied minors, although those who arrived with families are not excluded. 'Key aims of the residential included: (1) Raise participants' awareness and understanding of higher education and pathways to entry. (2) Provide information about the local sanctuary scholarship award scheme at the University of Winchester and similar scholarships within the national network of Article 26 universities. (3) Introduce prospective students to welcoming, interactive and creative activities on a university campus. (4) Encourage socialisation with each other, with university staff and students, thus improving English language skills and cultural awareness. The residential is now an annual event at the University' (Murray, 2019d).

'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 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' (UoS, p. 11).

'The University of Winchester hosted 'family days', bringing Syrian families together to help them socialise and meet volunteer university staff and students' (UoS, p. 13).

The Connected Learning in Crisis Consortium offers free online courses. Open University UK is a member. This allows sanctuary scholars to access online learning opportunities building subject knowledge, Academic English and experience in preparation for applying to university.

Credit transfer among various university programmes allows for 'stackable' credentials (Ferede, 2018) which can be a more accessible format to getting sanctuary seekers into HEIs in the UK. Birkbeck University's Compass Project offers 20 scholarships per year based on credit rather than a full course allowing individuals to gain UK university experience; the scheme gives an opportunity to understand the systems and culture whilst practising the language and topping up on course-based knowledge, which can help facilitate earlier transition into employment.

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Useful links

International & National

UNHCR <https://www.unhcr.org>
Refugee Council <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk>
City of Sanctuary <https://cityofsanctuary.org>
STAR <http://www.star-network.org.uk>
CARA <https://www.cara.ngo/who-we-are/partners-and-supporters/cara-scholars-at-risk-uk-universities-network/>
Red Cross <https://www.redcross.org.uk>
Mind <https://www.mind.org.uk/>
Freedom from Torture <https://www.freedomfromtorture.org/>

Regional

North of England Refugee Service <http://www.refugee.org.uk/node/164>
North East Regional Refugee Forum <http://www.refugeevoices.org.uk/index.php/contact/>
West End Refugee Service <http://www.wers.org.uk/>
Action Foundation <https://actionfoundation.org.uk/projects/action-language/>
West End Food bank <https://newcastlewestend.foodbank.org.uk>
Volunteer Centre Newcastle
<https://www.volunteercentrenewcastle.org.uk/volunteer/iwanttovolunteer.php>
Jet <http://www.jetnorth.org.uk/>
Newcastle Law Centre <https://www.newcastlelawcentre.co.uk/services/free>
Student Law Office <https://www.lawworks.org.uk/legal-advice/individuals/northumbria-university-student-law-office>
Talking Helps <https://www.talkinghelpsnewcastle.org/>
Talking Therapies <https://www.mytalkingtherapies.com/>
Advocacy Centre North <http://www.advocacycentrenorth.org.uk/services/community-services>
Disability North <http://www.disabilitynorth.org.uk/>
The Angelou Centre <http://angelou-centre.org.uk/>
The Millin Charity <http://www.themillincharity.co.uk/>
First Step <https://www.facebook.com/firststepne>
The Comfrey Project <http://thecomfreyproject.org.uk/>
Curious Monkey Theatre <https://curiousmonkeytheatre.com>
The Multilingual Library <http://www.multilinguallibrary.org.uk/>
Rainbow Home North-East <https://www.facebook.com/RainbowHomeNE/>
Nightstop North East <https://uk.depaulcharity.org/nightstop/nightstop-north-east/>

*Please note this list is not exhaustive.

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