

Refugees In Higher Education

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For those forced to leave their countries and homes because of war, famine or persecution, participation in higher education can support positive engagement with a new country and culture. However, HEIs need to understand the specific challenges that refugees encounter and work with them to explore and develop provision that is truly supportive and promotes shared learning. This online NERUPI session is an opportunity to consider how universities can support access to and successful participation in undergraduate provision.

13.30 **Welcome and Introductions**

Fatmata, Sumaya and Annette

13.40 **NERUPI Updates**

Annette Hayton and Clare Gartland

13.45 **Why don't more refugees make it through the door?**

Speaker: Mir Abdullah Miri - University of Bath

Universities often celebrate belonging and inclusion once refugee students are enrolled, but little is done to support them before entry. Drawing on lived experience and recent research, this talk highlights the barriers that keep refugees out. It argues that widening participation must start earlier, through practical partnerships and door-opening interventions, if universities are serious about inclusion.

14.15 **Practice Example: Cardiff University Aspire Programme**

Speaker: Dr Anna Varadi – Cardiff University

The Cardiff University Aspire programme is critical to the institution's University of Sanctuary mission. Aspire provides bespoke services for sanctuary seekers looking to enter UK HE, including an open day, a summer school, scholarships for asylum seekers on lifelong learning access programmes, and, historically, English tuition and exam support. This talk will highlight how collaborative delivery and the holistic way in which Aspire activities work together, fostering transition from one element to the next, develops learners' confidence and sense of belonging at Cardiff University, in turn facilitating their next steps into HE.

14:30 Practice Example: University of Leeds Plus Programme

Speaker: Alex Ferguson – University of Leeds

Alex Ferguson, Lead Officer for the Plus Programme at the University of Leeds, will outline how Sanctuary Scholarships support access to higher education for forced migrants and asylum seekers. Delivered through the Plus Programme, these scholarships provide tuition fees, a maintenance award, and tailored guidance. Since 2018, more than 30 students have enrolled via this route, many of whom are ineligible for mainstream funding due to their immigration status. In this session, Alex will examine the role of personalised support and strategic partnerships in helping students engage with university life. He will also reflect on how targeted provision contributes to improved participation and progression outcomes.

14:45 Questions R.E Practice Examples

14:50 Breakout room

15:10 Feedback to Main Room

15:30 Close