



The Open  
University

# Becoming a University of Sanctuary

Feasibility Study Report

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*A great independent University which does not insult any man or any woman, whatever their background, by offering them the second best; nothing but the best is good enough.*

Jennie Lee, founder of the Open University, 1973

*I am a student at The Open University studying Higher Education Certificate in Business Management and French. I am originally from Uganda.*

*This statement is in support of the bid to make The Open University a University of Sanctuary. Public discourse about immigration and migrants is often negative and refers to migrants as a burden to society. Very few argue that migrants have dreams and aspirations and can have a positive impact within the communities they are hosted. Education is the key that can unlock this potential. It is so painful and disheartening to see the amount of time that goes by while you wait for a decision, which, if spent in education instead, would yield a qualification and a much easier way to integrate and contribute to society.*

*Unfortunately, the UK immigration system not only leaves migrants very exhausted, but also very isolated and the process can go on indefinitely - this is from personal experience. Coming out the other side after seven years, I felt empty and extremely low on confidence. Joining the Open University was a chance for me to build up my confidence and personal development. It has also been an opportunity for me to meet and interact with different people, which has given me a sense of belonging.*

*I hope this sheds some light on the need to support migrants through education and the need for the OU to become a University of Sanctuary.*

Alan Kavuma, forced migrant and student at the Open University

*You experience all of it. You have every single one of the experiences: difficulties to get a job, racism, not knowing the language, discrimination, lack of familiarity with the culture, not knowing how things work, not having a community, being far from your family, missing them so much that it affects everything else. All of these things affect your studies so much! Everything has an effect on you.*

Nick (named changed), refugee, OU alumnus

*I'm studying History at the Open University. I wholeheartedly support the OU's application to become a University of Sanctuary because I believe everyone who wants to study should have the opportunity to do so, and because my study of history has sharply highlighted the need to have voices from everyone included in the stories we create and tell. To deny people the same opportunity I've had to learn and to have their voices heard, is not only an injustice against individuals, but leaves our society a far poorer place to live, and our legacy malnourished.*

Bekka Hill, Open University student and member of OU STAR (Student Action for Refugees) group

## Foreword

How open is the OU to students and staff from forced migrant backgrounds? This is the key question we asked in this feasibility study, commissioned in January 2021 by Professor Marcia Wilson, as part of her work on improving equality, diversity and inclusion at the Open University. However, the Sanctuary Working Group was formed back in Spring 2020: a dozen, self-selected members drawn from across faculties, roles and echelons with a very diverse skill set, mostly working with disadvantaged groups, including migrants. We were concerned about the invisibility of forced migrant students and staff at the OU. We discovered that there is no data, past or present, on our forced migrant students, so the OU can make no targeted intervention to support this multiply disadvantaged group.

Our study here concludes that the short answer to our key question is that the OU is not very open to forced migrant students.

How did we arrive at this conclusion? The Sanctuary Working Group started gathering information about what we do at the OU to support our students and staff from forced migrant backgrounds in terms of teaching, research, outreach, access, and participation. This report documents much valuable work taking place across the OU, but it is dispersed and fragmented. It would benefit from being systematically documented, shared widely, consolidated and developed, in order to strengthen our knowledge and understanding, and better support forced migrant students. This will be important in our efforts to achieve recognition as a University of Sanctuary – our shared aspiration.

By becoming a University of Sanctuary, we can inspire and support our colleagues and students to foster a culture and practice of welcome within our own institution, in the wider communities we serve, and across the Higher Education sector in the UK and beyond.

A growing number of universities have gained or are applying for recognition as [Universities of Sanctuary](#) (UoS). UoS is a national network within the Cities of Sanctuary initiative, which has been gathering momentum since 2005. The UK network includes over 90 cities which have been awarded sanctuary status. Universities, and also schools, colleges and museums, apply for this status when they can demonstrate commitment to providing welcome and safety for people forced to flee due to conflict or persecution. To be awarded with UoS status, universities must show how they will meet key criteria to *learn*, *embed* and *share* knowledge and best practice with and for forced migrants.

This study is based on the knowledge, skills, commitment, and passion of an outstanding group of colleagues at the OU on the Sanctuary Working Group. It has been a great pleasure to work with them. Our report assesses how UoS status aligns with the OU's strategic goals and social justice mission. It evaluates the benefits and risks, financial resource implications and opportunity costs, so that our senior management can really understand why and how this is the right thing to do and doing so could bring great benefits to the OU. The report details essential institutional and staff resources required to make this successful and sustainable. It offers recommendations about how OU staff and students can put the vision into practice. If we improve access and better serve the needs of our most vulnerable students, then we will offer a better experience for all students – after all, this is our very *raison d'être* and social justice mission. An institution is best judged by how it treats its most vulnerable students. If the OU aspires to be truly open to all, we will take seriously the aspirations, hopes and dreams of forced migrant students and staff and offer them a safe and welcoming environment in which they can thrive.

We very much look forward to feedback and guidance from senior management on how best to proceed in light of the findings and recommendations made here. If any staff or students want to know how you can contribute to this initiative, or wish to join the Sanctuary Steering Group, contact us at [ousanctuary@open.ac.uk](mailto:ousanctuary@open.ac.uk) and/or visit our [web page](#). We anticipate in hope the long-awaited realisation of this vision of sanctuary at the OU.

Marie Gillespie, Professor of Sociology

October 2021

**Stuart Hall (1932-2014) – cultural theorist, political activist, migrant, OU academic**

*The life I have lived is one of partial displacement. I came to England as a means of escape, and it was a failure. (Stuart Hall)*

*Migration is a one-way trip. There is no 'home' to go back to. There never was. (Stuart Hall)*



Scholarships have been vital for many migrant, racialised and minoritised groups in opening up access to Higher Education. Stuart Hall came to the UK on a Rhodes Scholarship to Oxford University. The scholarship programme had deeply entrenched racist and misogynist underpinnings (mainly catering for males tasked with a 'civilising mission' upon their return to their 'homeland'), and Stuart fought against its foundational principles, speaking out tirelessly against racism, xenophobia and ethnic essentialisms. He had a huge impact on British intellectual and cultural life and was an inspirational figure for many of us at the OU.

He was one of the most celebrated academics in the first 50 years of the OU. He joined us in 1979 from Birmingham University as Professor of Sociology. He gained world-wide recognition as a leading theorist in the field of cultural studies – particularly with regard to concepts of racism, identity and multiculturalism.

He was an excellent speaker and charismatic figure, presenting many OU TV programmes for students. He published dozens of books and articles in his area of research that are still vital reference points today.

When he passed away in 2014, then Vice-Chancellor Martin Bean said in tribute:

*It was a privilege to have Stuart at the heart of The Open University – touching and influencing so many lives through his courses and tutoring. He... embodied the spirit of what the OU has always stood for: openness, accessibility, a champion for social justice and of the power of education to bring positive change in peoples' lives.*

*For over 55 years, from the time he came to Merton College, Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar from Jamaica, Stuart Hall was one of Britain's leading Black intellectuals, and a pioneer of what we now call cultural studies, who theorized not only questions of Blackness but also Britishness, not only what it was to be an immigrant in these islands, but also what it was to belong.*

**Professor Elleke Boehmer, Director of TORCH (The Oxford Research Centre for Humanities)**

## Heidi Hillman (1937-2017)

### From Child Refugee to Open University Graduate

#### Legacy shines a light on refugee education at the OU

Gifts in wills can make an enormous difference to many lives. They can even enable the Open University to be truly open to all. We are very grateful to those that have already remembered the Open University with a gift in their will. Here, we share the remarkable story of Heidi Hillman, who left a substantial legacy to the OU for the benefit of refugee students.



Heidi had a real zest for learning. A curious, generous, and creative individual, she was also passionate about breaking down barriers to education and she shared the OU's mission of being 'open to all' regardless of background.

A Jewish refugee, Heidi fled Nazi Austria in 1939 as a child to start a new life in the UK with her family.

Heidi left school aged sixteen and worked as an editor on various journals, and then as a teaching assistant while raising her two sons. Decades later, she signed up to the OU to study Humanities with Art History, graduating at the age of 63 – a very proud day for Heidi and her family. A passionate advocate of life-long learning, she was always seeking new ways to learn, hone her artistic skills, improve her education, and build her confidence. She understood the importance of learning, how it makes people more tolerant of others, and how it can open the door to new opportunities.

As a proud graduate of the OU, Heidi's journey from refugee to OU mature student and graduate was illustrated in a short film at the start of the [OU/ Cities of Sanctuary conference](#) that her legacy funded, to honour her memory and her generous gift. You can see the film made by OU about her [here](#).

Her story recently featured in [Open Door Magazine](#).

*Our mother, Heidi Hillman, was a child refugee from Nazi Austria in 1939. She missed out on Higher Education in her youth but found her academic home at The Open University where she was so proud to have been awarded an undergraduate degree. In her will, she left a generous donation to the OU to support refugee education which contributed to the inspiring conference 'Improving Access to Higher Education for Forced Migrants', organised by the OU and Cities of Sanctuary in June 2021. She would have been so proud to be part of this initiative at the OU to become a University of Sanctuary which we as a family fully support.*

Josh Hillman, Heidi's son

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## Executive Summary

This Feasibility Study investigates the benefits, costs and commitments associated with being awarded recognition as a [University of Sanctuary](#) (UoS). It was carried out by the OU's Sanctuary Working Group between January and October 2021 and funded by the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Dean, Professor Marcia Wilson.

The report adopts an evidence-based approach to inform decision-making at senior management level as to whether and how to proceed with an application for recognition as a University of Sanctuary.

The UoS award involves a public commitment to foster a culture of welcome for forced migrants, the establishment of systems of support, and the provision of scholarships based on UoS [Guiding Principles](#) and [Article 26](#) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that everyone has a right to education. It also involves working to remove barriers to accessing Higher Education, by providing appropriate resources.

Becoming a UoS would enable the OU to join a growing network of UK universities who share the vision of improving access to education for forced migrants, by learning, embedding and sharing best practice inside and across institutions and in the wider communities.

The UoS Award also involves forging a partnership with [Student Action for Refugees](#). In the course of our study, OU students set up the [OU STAR](#) group (Open University Student Action for Refugees, formerly OSTARS), to support and show solidarity with forced migrants and assist their access to HE in the UK. OU students have expressed their support for the Sanctuary vision of equal access to education for all. The Sanctuary Working Group work closely with OSTARS in creating awareness about the OU's UoS application and in developing a range of activities from homework clubs to buddying schemes.

The term 'forced migrants'<sup>1</sup> is used in this study in order to avoid pejorative connotations and to encompass the many different UK immigration statuses involved: from 'asylum-seekers' who may or may not be permitted to study at all, to 'refugees' who may have a variety of statuses (e.g. limited leave to remain or humanitarian protection), may or may not automatically be deemed 'Home students', may well be unable to afford university fees, and may not easily access appropriate advice. People are often transitioning between differential legal statuses and entitlements. If forced displacement has occurred due to circumstances beyond an individual's control, they also have very limited control over the status conferred on them by UK authorities.

The study employed a mixed method research<sup>2</sup> design in order to document diverse perspectives drawn from across diverse roles, echelons, faculties, and regions at the Open University.

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<sup>1</sup> Forced migrants is a term that includes people who have been forced to leave their home countries due to conflict, natural disaster, political turmoil or other causes. It includes refugees, asylum seekers, unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors, resettled communities, internally displaced people, those with humanitarian protection and victims of trafficking. It also includes CARA scholars, who hold regular Tier 5 visas and cannot apply for asylum but are forced to leave their home countries.

<sup>2</sup> This included two scoping surveys; a desk review of actors, networks and research in the area; focus group discussions with staff; case study interviews with students (current and aspiring); and an evaluation of ongoing and new activities and projects related to forced migrants and forced migration at the OU.



# Summary of Findings: Forced Migrants and the Open University

## 1. Forced Migrants as a “Super-disadvantaged” Group

- Forced migrant students are a ‘super-disadvantaged’ group (Lambrechts<sup>3</sup>, 2020) with multiple and intersecting deprivations impacting on their access to and experience of in Higher Education. They share many disadvantages with other minoritised and racialised groups named in the OU’s Access, Participations and Success Plans (APS) and Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) goals, but also have group-specific deprivations.
- Students from forced migrant backgrounds are ‘invisible’ at the OU. We do not record forced migration status. There is no process of declaration, making it difficult to make informed decisions about and offer support to this group. Many universities and UCAS now encourage [self-declaration of status](#) among students and make clear commitments to support forced migrant learners and staff. We are out of step with other universities in improving access to students with multiple overlapping disadvantages and responding to their needs. Here we are falling short in our mission to be ‘open to all’.
- The ‘University of Sanctuary’ (UoS) award is seen as a step in the right direction by many [leading universities in the UK](#), as well as by the 60 or more members of the [OU Sanctuary Steering Group](#), and the Sanctuary Working Group who carried out this study. By becoming a UoS, the OU would join a prestigious network of higher education institutions which share a vision to provide a place and culture of welcome and support for forced migrant academics, researchers, students and life-long learners.
- Becoming a UoS will avoid the risk of squandering important reputational gains and falling behind sectoral standards in EDI and APS. We will assertively and strategically honour our mission of being ‘open to all’.

## 2. Understanding and Tackling Barriers to Higher Education for Forced Migrant Students

- There are multiple overlapping barriers to accessing Higher Education for forced migrants. These were evidenced and debated at a recent major [conference involving key stakeholders](#), organised as part of this feasibility study in June 2021. In this section, we focus on the barriers at the OU, especially the specificities of being an online distance-learning university.
- Key initial barriers to accessing the OU include: a lack of accessible information around good quality provision in distance-education; a lack of understanding of online learning itself; lack of knowledge among university admissions and frontline staff about the differential rights of forced migrants, according to legal status, and lack of awareness of their own rights among forced migrant communities.
- Frequently changing legislation and government policy in this field mean that frontline OU staff need specialist knowledge about statuses, entitlements, barriers, and ways of tackling them. The complexity and pace of legal/policy change has made decision-makers shy away from tackling these obstacles at the OU. Sharing knowledge and best practice through the UoS network will make opening access far easier.
- Many learners from forced migrant communities (whether recently arrived in the UK or long settled) want to re-skill and/or re-accredit, but poverty in various forms (financial, digital, social capital) is often a major obstacle. For many forced migrants, scholarships, bursaries and in-kind support will be the only option to overcome these barriers.
- A commitment to providing scholarships commensurate with a university’s size and reach is a requirement of the award of University of Sanctuary.
- There is untapped potential for philanthropy to raise external funds for scholarships. (See above on the legacy from Heidi Hillman, an inspirational forced migrant donor.)

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<sup>3</sup> Lambrechts, A., (2020), *The super-disadvantaged in higher education: barriers to access for refugee background students in England, Higher Education*, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-020-00515-4>

- Forced migrants represent an extremely heterogeneous group, but many have a high appetite for formal education, and particularly the OU's online and distance education. Many need to be in full-time employment, to support themselves and any dependents, and often also to send remittances to family abroad.
- The appeal of distance learning for forced migrants is apparent not just amongst young adults, but also more mature forced migrant learners, including women, carers, people with disabilities and those in employment – all groups often neglected by conventional brick universities. This represents an opportunity for the OU to keep pace with new vulnerabilities and serve new potential cohorts who could do much to enrich OU culture.
- Not all forced migrant students are looking to complete a full qualification. Some state they would prefer to access only specific modules. Our findings indicate that this too presents an opportunity for the OU: we can meet several of these demands through our microcredentials, certificates, diplomas and other qualification programmes.
- The OU's reputation as 'open to all' and as a leader in online and distance-learning can help us attract diverse groups of forced migrant learners, provided we identify them and recognise their needs. In 2019, the OU undertook an important piece of horizon mapping, through the [Refugees Educational Resources Project \(RefER\)](#), collating over 500 free online educational resources from within and outside the OU for forced migrant students and frontline staff who work with them. These online resources cover topics such as English language skills, digital literacy and study skills, information about legal aspects of migration in the different nations of the UK, guidelines for working in the voluntary sectors, and resources on inclusion and equality.
- The RefER report is a good example of important yet isolated and dispersed prior attempts to address the needs of forced migrant background students. What is lacking is a framework, a structure and a strategic institutional approach. Much time is wasted at the OU on the isolated efforts of individuals. Becoming a UoS would help bring these activities under one umbrella, consolidate and grow them and ensure that such initiatives are properly resourced and do not rely solely on the good will and commitment of a few individuals.
- The structures, processes and mechanisms for advancing initiatives that are 'in principle' supported by senior management and the Vice Chancellor's Executive are opaque, confusing, and inefficient. The OU could save a lot of resources by better management and more streamlined processes to support innovation.
- Other excellent work in reaching forced migrant communities, already underway by the OU, includes the [OU-Uber joint programme](#) for premium drivers. This could be scaled up to encompass similar ongoing collaborations with private companies (e.g. Tesco, Amazon, Starbucks) as well as non-governmental and governmental organisations (e.g. Department of Work and Pensions). Such programmes can be important income generators for the OU. In every case, forced migrants make up a considerable proportion of the workforce.

### 3. English Language Provision and Microcredentials for Forced Migrant Students

- The OU's English language provision – especially the English as a Second Language (ESOL), and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses – is crucial in catering for forced migrant communities. The OU already provides such courses through its online platform, as do other universities and institutions. However, there are several gaps in provision and its relevance for forced migrant learners and on forced migration issues. Appropriate materials can be created, re-purposed or updated. The OU's existing targeted English for Academic Study support programme (distinct from the EAP module) could be better advertised to both students and staff. The proposed pre-sessional language programmes could be better supported with adequate funding. The Sanctuary Working Group are committed to raising internal OU funding as well as supporting efforts to obtain philanthropic funding to develop such materials.
- While ESOL and EAP courses have been identified as leading the demand amongst forced migrant students, there is demand for certain other specific courses and qualifications for forced migration communities: e.g. for nursing and social care professional qualifications. Our feasibility study shows how the OU can better respond to and target such specific interests of forced migrants in a strategic manner, by introducing short microcredentials and certificate courses in relevant fields. We can also learn from good practices in the UoS network.

### 4. Supporting Quality Online Learning and Support for Forced Migrant Students

- Our study highlights the importance of establishing new structures, changing existing systems and processes, in order to improve access and support for forced migrant background students. Having eagerly come to study with the OU, their lives continue to be affected by various forms of vulnerability.
- Everyday challenges in the lives of asylum-seekers and refugees vary, depending on where they are in the 'status journey'. Asylum-seekers may have unlimited time but limited or no rights to HE, as well as no right to work; they may be suddenly relocated to a different city or taken into immigration detention; they may be deported. Refugees can and often must work, making the OU a very attractive HE option.
- Forced migrants often have psychological vulnerabilities resulting from traumatic experiences, whether in their former home country, and/or on the journey to safety, and/or in the UK.
- These varied and changing needs and circumstances require a University of Sanctuary to go beyond the basic provision of fee-waivers, scholarships and bursaries. Frontline and support staff need to understand and address the ancillary pressures which forced migrant students may continually face when applying and when studying.
- The OU will need to appoint a key contact person who understands these different forms of intersecting economic, digital, social, gendered, racialized, cultural, legal and policy-based exclusions and discriminations and can train, advise and support other staff as they open up access to this cohort.
- Without adequate systems of support and training for staff in place, the OU risks admitting forced migrant students only to leave them feeling excluded and isolated, leading to poor study outcomes among this group.
- The OU will need a clear plan to provide wrap-around support to forced migrant learners through their student journeys, enhancing their participation, visibility and performance. Relevant knowledge and training must be provided to tutors, teachers and staff to understand and address, as far as possible, the concerns of forced migrant students, backed up by appropriate allocation of time and funds by the University management.
- Two important ideas in this regard are already being piloted by members of the Sanctuary Working Group: (i) a 'peer-mentorship scheme' with 'ambassadors' in different departments to mentor and support forced migrant students and (ii) 'Open Learning Champions' among forced migrant students to promote free learning resources.
- Our study has found that tutors at the OU demonstrated, on the one hand, a great eagerness for training in forced migrant student-support and related trauma-informed methods and approaches; however, on the other hand, they complain of the general lack of time and appropriate funding provision for professional development.
- Findings in relation to staff support for forced migrant students pointed to inadequate training in mental health support, and in career guidance for vulnerable groups in different geographies of the OU, and an ongoing need to expand learning pathways in counselling, language teaching skills, cultural awareness, and essential soft skills.
- We found that the OU has much expertise in curriculum development for forced migrants across different departments, faculties and locations of the OU (including in the Sanctuary Working Group itself). This expertise can be brought together to review, re-purpose, update and develop courses and curriculums for forced migrant students to make OU courses more relevant and sensitive to their concerns.

## 5. OU's Forced Migration Research and Partnerships for Impact

- Forced migration is a major global issue, identified as such by the UK government and in the UK Research Initiative's Global Challenges Research Fund, alongside climate change and climate migration. The UoS initiative will help the OU position itself to lead key research projects which create partnerships and capture research and impact funding.
- The OU has undertaken world-class research projects and activities centering the issues of forced migration and forced migrants, creating awareness and achieving real world impact in forced migrant education and beyond. Our study discovered more than half of current planned funded research projects at the OU aimed at working with and improving lives of force migrant communities in the UK and around the world.
- The OU has already engaged in ambitious, collaborative, and innovative projects in this area.
- The [Year of Mygration](#) (2018) displayed diverse perspectives of migrants and migration research at the OU, to celebrate our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.
- The OU's recently established [Migration Group](#) brings work together from across disciplines, enhancing collaboration, visibility and impact.

- The OU research groups on International Development and Inclusive Education (IDIE) and Innovation Knowledge Development (IKD) also have forced migration as a key focus (<https://www.open.ac.uk/ikd/research/migration-forced-displacement>).
- A recent OU project, [Covid Chronicles from the Margins](#), pioneers experimental digital research methods to document the impact of the pandemic on forced migrants in the UK and around the world.
- Sanctuary Working Group members have contributed several forced migrant related-related Impact Case Studies to REFs 2014 and 2022. Extra-academic collaborations include major national and international organisations (e.g. BBC World Service, British Council, UNHCR, UN Women, and others).
- Forced migration research developed by being part of the UoS network will deepen and develop significant and impactful partnerships and knowledge exchange.
- Forced migration is a research and impact focus area across the OU, but initiatives often remain scattered around departments and across nations. A central institutional strategy is lacking. Initiatives tend to respond to local needs, align with the aims and objectives of certain units, and engage piecemeal with forced migrants as an indirect outcome. Expertise across the OU needs to be brought into productive dialogue to facilitate the development of new forced migration-related research projects with impact partnerships. The UoS initiative will provide a fertile context for this.

## Summary of Recommendations: Getting the Balance Right

Underpinning the following recommendations is the recognition that the OU already plays an important role in meeting challenges faced by forced migrants in accessing and pursuing HE. With the OU's distance learning model, our mission to be open, and our many current activities in relation to forced migration, we are already well on our way to becoming a place of safety and sanctuary. But there is much more to be done to systematically tackle obstacles. A strategic, institution-wide approach is needed to get the balance right between delivering on our social justice mission and acknowledging the reality of financial constraints, competing institutional priorities, and workable budgets. These recommendations outline the steps the OU can take to become a University of Sanctuary, by identifying students from forced migration backgrounds, providing appropriate financial and pastoral support for them throughout their journey, and engaging our wider staff and student community in creating a space of safety and sanctuary.

### 1. Becoming a University of Sanctuary is both Feasible and Desirable

- **Approve the OU's application for UoS status** for the sake of benefits to the OU: the OU mission has much to benefit from being awarded recognition as a University of Sanctuary. The OU will become part of a rapidly expanding national network of UK universities committed to supporting forced migrants in accessing and pursuing HE, and gain a great deal by learning, sharing and embedding best practice. The UK network of UoS in turn learns from and supports a global network. Not being part of this learning and sharing, while admitting forced migrant students, can potentially involve reputational risk for the OU.
- **Commit to a sustainable short-, medium- and long-term plan** that aligns with the award's objectives and makes the OU the UK's leading distance-learning University of Sanctuary. This can help earn the OU a reputation for tackling inequalities at a global and international as well as national level.

### 2. Make OU's Forced Migrant Community Visible and Plan for its Future

- **Recognise intersectional vulnerabilities.** Although currently not named in OU policies and plans, forced migrants almost always share characteristics of other disadvantaged groups. Adopting an intersectional approach and recognising their distinctive needs as a "super-disadvantage" will help improve access and support for all disadvantaged students at the OU.
- **Identify forced migrant students at the OU.** The lack of student data should be tackled as a first step to enable an informed and joined-up approach for forced migration activity. Gathering data in relation to students from forced migrant backgrounds is essential to address their specific needs, and create targeted interventions.
- **Encourage existing and new students to self-declare forced migrant status** while ensuring their privacy, respecting the need for confidentiality and complying with GDPR guidance.
- **Create a 'Sanctuary Flag'** in OU student documentation systems (VOICE<sup>4</sup> and CI RCE<sup>5</sup>) for forced migrant / sanctuary students. Monitor this data regularly (e.g. change of legal status) and use it to inform new initiatives to the benefit of all students with access and/or support issues.
- **Commission new research in relation to Sanctuary students at the OU.** Conduct monitoring and evaluation on targeted interventions and use evidence gathered to inform and improve future programmes and offerings.

### 3. Improve Access for Forced Migrant Students through Scholarships, Bursaries and Additional Support

- **Provide Sanctuary Scholarships at Undergraduate and Postgraduate levels across different OU faculties in the four nations.** Providing sanctuary scholarships and supporting bursaries is a fundamental condition for being awarded the University of Sanctuary status. They remove the primary systemic barrier to HE entry forced migrant background students, in the form of financial deprivation. We consider 12 scholarships each year for three years (starting October 2022), at a cost of £300,000 per cohort, a good starting point. This is after

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<sup>4</sup> VOICE (Valuing Our Integrated Customer Experience) is the OU's Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, with around 3500 users, mainly front-line staff. It is used to record and manage relationships with students, enquirers, associate lecturers and partner organisations, contacted by phone, email or via the web.

<sup>5</sup> CIRCE (Corporate and Individual Records for Customers and Enquiries) is the university-wide student records administration system, supporting relevant operational activities. CIRCE integrates with VOICE.

consideration of various options with the Sanctuary Working Group, Development Office (DO), Academic Services and the Bursaries & Scholarships Management Group. Going forward, and depending on the success of Philanthropy staff in DO in raising external funding, we would hope to increase the number of scholarships to a figure commensurate with the OU's size and reach, and with similar scholarship schemes at other UK universities. The scholarship scheme should be publicised widely and target a diverse cohort of forced migrants living in the UK.

- **Offer additional non-cash alternatives to financial support or bursaries.** Cash bursaries can impact negatively on benefits and other statutory support for some forced migrants. Most asylum-seekers supported by the Home Office would not be permitted to take them up, for example. Introducing a 'digital inclusion fund' that allows students to purchase, or be provided with essentials for learning (e.g. laptops, internet connectivity) could help overcome this problem. Providing on-demand printed materials to students where needed might be an option. Such modes of support directly target exclusions due to financial and digital poverty.

#### 4. Staffing, Training, Mentoring and Peer Support

- **Improving access for forced migrant students can help improve access and support for all disadvantaged groups at the OU.** Given the overlapping and intersectional nature of identities and deprivations between forced migrants and other low-income, and/or racialized, and/or minoritised and/or disabled groups, creating structures for forced migrant support in the university will raise access and support standards for all in the communities. In our study, we propose several measures for sanctuary students that 'meet them where they are'. These are as follows:
- **Recognise the adverse impact of immigration status for forced migrant students in education** and act to mitigate these throughout their student journeys.
- **Provide staff mentoring and peer support networks for forced migrant students**, on the lines of current Sanctuary Working Group pilot initiatives ('Peer-Mentorship Scheme' and 'Open Learning Champions'). This will train a cohort of students and staff, both from forced migrant backgrounds, and wanting to support them, to represent and champion the open and inclusive vision and mission of the OU.
- **Work with Council for At Risk Academics (CARA)** to support our fellow academics at risk from persecution or war: CARA (with funding from partner HEIs) sponsors visiting academic researchers to the mutual benefit of the OU and the fellow.
- **Listen to and support the OU Student Action for Refugees group's activities and plans.**
- **Provide job-placement, skills-building and apprenticeship schemes tied to the requirements of forced migrant students**, by creating partnerships with private firms, governmental and non-governmental institutions.
- **Develop processes for sanctuary students and OU staff to respond to Home Office challenges In line with the wider HE Sector**, such as detention, removal of benefits, rejection of asylum application, or study bans, in order to defend students' rights to education and other human rights.
- **Offer dedicated support for OU's forced migrant students in line with existing provision for other widening access groups.** Ensure that future mental health and wellbeing strategies acknowledge the particular challenges that students from this cohort face, and provide guidance as how to deal with these concerns.
- **Provide a first point of contact for sanctuary students** – a named person and dedicated mailbox for enquiries – and provide training so they can support and signpost appropriately, e.g. providing information about the student's needs and the support available to them at the start and throughout their studies.
- **Allocate a career support and development counsellor with specialist training for forced migrant students.**
- **Conduct trainings to create awareness among student-facing staff**, including for tutors (ALs) and the Student Support Team to encourage sanctuary students at the point of registration, or whenever they choose to declare. Also, conduct sensitivity training for staff and awareness trainings about providing directions to specialized support and counselling systems for sanctuary students at the OU.
- **Allocate adequate time and financial incentives for training student facing staff**, recognising that many are already stretched in terms of time and opportunities for training.
- **Recognise forced migrant students in teaching and evaluation processes** for exceptional circumstances, extensions, and deferrals, in particular allowing for flexibility when sanctuary students experience life-changing circumstances, often at little or no notice, related to their immigration status.



## 5. Expand Open Learning for Forced Migrant Students: Extending English Language Learning, Microcredentials

- **Widen our provision of free, open online learning for forced migrants beyond the University.** This outreach will be one of our key strengths in our journey to becoming a University of Sanctuary. OpenLearn and OpenLearn Create put the OU in a unique position to engage with marginalised communities among the wider public, to provide free and subsidised online learning for forced migrants and organisations supporting them. Excellent resources already exist on both platforms. They can be collated and signposted. There are also gaps in provision. New content needs to be co-produced with forced migrant learners as part of the University's bid to 'decolonise'. These efforts are already central to our social justice mission.
- **Waive fees for the OU's English for Academic Purposes (EAP) module and English as a Second Language (ESOL) courses for forced migrant students; develop Study Readiness; create a Forced Migration hub on OpenLearn,** collating existing content on forced migration and of interest to their communities, learners, organisations supporting them and to the general public. New content co-produced with forced migrant communities will draw on their lived experience. The Sanctuary Working Group is seeking to raise internal OU funding to redevelop ESOL and EAP resources on OpenLearn – c.£30-50k in Year 1, to be calibrated subsequently.
- **Provide flexible qualification support for forced migrant students:** recognition for prior qualifications and knowledge. The European Qualifications Passport for Refugees may be the right framework, or else set up an alternative to recognize qualifications acquired outside the UK e.g. for those seeking graduate entry.
- **Share the database of free online resources (OU and non-OU) on UoS webpages again; promote to and engage with the UoS network.** Update the RefER resource database, in a format that is searchable and accessible by smartphone. Continue to add and audit the resources. Invite universities in the UoS network to collaborate.
- **Ensure OpenLearn is accessible to digitally excluded communities** by partnering with local and national initiatives that provide digital devices and internet access. Partner with libraries and community organisations that support forced migrants to access online learning.
- **Create new accredited and unaccredited (or badged) courses and micro-credentials on FutureLearn.** The paid platform, FutureLearn (FL) can be leveraged as a collaborative platform with other local and global partners, providing quality online distance-education programmes for forced migrant learners and also training for frontline staff supporting them in the UK or abroad. Some of this work has already been done but a scoping study will help understand the specific needs in this sector. The production of custom courses will also bring income to the OU.

## 6. Consolidating Funding Activities, Research and Partnerships for Impact

- **Allocate Academic Workload Management (AWM) time for Sanctuary Working Group (SWG) members to create partnerships and funding applications.** Aside from philanthropic funding – via the Development Office – the SWG members would need allocated AWM time to support DO's Philanthropy team to access sources of funding of which they might not be aware; prepare bids for internal OU scholarship and other funds and to external funders such as a) national organisations (e.g. BBC World Service, British Council, Migration Museum, Refugee Council, and local refugee support organisations with whom the SWG have deep and strong connections already) and b) international organisations (e.g. UNHCR, UNW, UNESCO, KIRON, Red Cross) for work such as coproducing online materials or reaching out to forced migrant communities as research partners.
- **Establish effective outreach and corporate partnerships.** Work with the OU's Head of Skills and Innovation on the Uber-OU partnership programme, to finalise creation of awareness and publicity material (short videos) with student drivers from forced migrant backgrounds undertaking OU qualifications. This can then be replicated with other current and future industry/corporate partnerships.
- **Work with Development Office (OU Alumni section) to reach out to alumni for support.** The SWG can work with the Alumni section to identify individuals from forced migrant backgrounds, to help gain support for sanctuary scholars and scholarships, as well as wider activities and projects related to learners from forced migrant backgrounds and to related issues, at the OU. Working with MarComms, OU Alumni from forced migrant backgrounds can become ambassadors for new opportunities at OU and promote outreach via social media and innovative campaigns.

- **Establish a Centre for Forced Migration, modelled on the Open Justice Centre, to coordinate and evaluate activity across the OU.** As the leading online and distance learning provider, the OU has been involved in leading many research partnerships focused on displaced populations in the UK and across the world. These projects and expertise often remain compartmentalised in departments, faculties and locations. A Centre will bring together people, expertise and resources, developing with and cross-fertilising the University of Sanctuary initiative. The Centre website will be a destination for forced migrant students and staff looking for online learning and educational guidance resources. The Centre will also serve key point of contact for liaising and building relationships with external partners for generating new project ideas and accessing funding, alongside creating a wider presence and visibility to the OU's sanctuary scholarships, research activities, events and initiatives.

## How much will it cost?

Much work is ongoing at the OU which supports access and participation for forced migrant students, so we are already well-placed to demonstrate commitment to the UoS application bid, without needing to fund the entire spectrum of activity required to satisfy its criteria. The major new financial centrepiece of the initiative – UG and PG scholarships – should be cost-neutral for the OU in the medium term, by generating philanthropic income, while incurring significant financial gains through reputational advantage and new market opportunities.

### Scholarships at undergraduate and postgraduate level

The largest initial funding cost is providing scholarships with wrap-around support. This would be £300,000 for an initial 12 scholarships each for the next 3 years (36 students), with the first cohort starting in October 2022. This number is not, as yet, commensurate with our size, reach and similar scholarship schemes. (Veterans Scholarships, for example, are 50 per year). However, the number of scholarships can be calibrated according to the availability of external funding.

We were informed that the OU would provide no upfront funding for any scholarships and that all funding for all scholarships comes from philanthropic and external funding via the Development Office who, in conjunction with Academic Services, advised us that 12 would be an appropriate start.

PhDs will not be part of the UoS for Forced Migrant students in the short-term, as they are very costly. However, there are a number of PhD fundraising options for academics to pursue and, once UoS is established, this will strengthen bidding potential and success.

This sum of £300,000 includes allocations of £20,000 for a full, 360 credits degree with an additional £5,000 to cover other costs such as digital equipment and maintenance costs. Access to appropriate equipment and study spaces is likely to be a challenge for many of the eligible students in the scheme. It will be critical to ensure that support is made available in a way that supports their study needs but does not negatively impact on the terms of their immigration status or any other statutory support they may be receiving.

Direct costs, in terms of fee waivers and additional support, will not be incurred until September/October 2022 at the earliest. At this point an estimated c.£50,000 - c.£60,000 will be required to support the first cohort of students with their module fees and initial costs with study materials and/or equipment for a 6-year qualification part-time.

As OU students take an average of 6 years to complete a degree, it is anticipated that sufficient levels of philanthropic donations will be generated to support the cost of the scheme for both the initial cohort of 12 students and any subsequent cohorts enrolled into the scheme. In the event that donations exceed our expectations, then additional places in the scheme will be made available.

Annual budget requirements for support costs will be requested via the Academic Services budget approvals process to be offset against received donations at year-end. It is possible that there may, at times, be insufficient donations available to cover all the incurred costs, which would lead to short-term overspends against income. However, it is expected that sufficient income can be generated over the 5–7-year duration of a student's study journey that the scheme would be cost neutral.



Operational design and delivery of the scholarships will be completed within Academic Services by the Policy & Controls Team in Student Fees. The team have confirmed that the resource requirements can be absorbed, and delivery of the scheme can be completed alongside existing work to develop the Black Student Support Fund.

### **Visiting Academic Research Fellows via Council for at Risk Academics (CARA)**

Our UoS initiative seeks to support academic colleagues at risk due to conflict, war or persecution. After the fall of Kabul to the Taliban in August 2021, Faculties (Exec Deans) agreed to host and fund at least 4 (potentially 5) Visiting (Afghan) Academic Research Fellows for a two-year period (2021-23) via the [Council for At Risk Academics](#) (CARA) at a cost of £20–24,000 per annum. Future funding for supporting academics at risk is yet to be ascertained but could potentially be shared across faculties and co-funded by PVC-research funds. The CARA scheme is designed specifically to enable co-designed research with often very prominent and established academics from countries in conflict who will enrich the research culture of the OU.

### **Co-ordinator for Forced Migrant Students and Staff**

A dedicated new post is required: a named person as first point of contact for forced migrant background applicants and students, and those supporting them, who will co-ordinate all the OU's work as a University of Sanctuary at a strategic level, across units, faculties and nations. Knowledge of the UK asylum system as well as OU systems will be required. This dedicated role could sit with Academic Services, APS or EDI. It is estimated that this would be a grade 7 position, at a cost of approximately £50,000 per annum.

### **Open Learning Resources**

Important support activities can be developed in terms of ESOL and EAP, mental health support, staff training, resource development, course development, etc. These activities have been identified, and indicative costs included in budget sections pending more precise costings. These activities sit across units: some in faculties, some in Student Support Teams, some in EDI or APS. An initiative which seeks to support an underrepresented cohort and provide benefits to the whole student and academic community has to be university wide and cross-departmental. A full Business Case will be made in due course for additional staffing and activities proposed, once a more thorough and accurate costing exercise can be undertaken.

## Introduction

This study was commissioned by the OU's Sanctuary Working Group to explore the feasibility of becoming a University of Sanctuary. It has uncovered existing activity relating to forced migration across the University and collated the learning from previous OU and HE sector research and initiatives in this area. While analysing the data, five key findings emerged. These identify a) critical challenges related to forced migrant students, b) potential approaches to addressing them, and c) the benefits to the OU of doing so. The findings inform five sets of recommendations which outline the steps the University could take towards becoming a place of safety, sanctuary and equality, helping us to fulfil the University of Sanctuary (UoS) criteria, to support our application, and to ensure that we implement these in a meaningful way in line with our social mission.

*As the child of immigrants, I just want everyone to be treated with respect and helped to the utmost. We do not choose where we are born, but it makes such a massive difference to your life choices.*

OU staff member and scoping survey respondent

## Purpose of the feasibility study

This feasibility study sets out to:

- assess how University of Sanctuary (UoS) status would align with the OU's strategic goals;
- evaluate the benefits and risks, financial resource implications and opportunity costs;
- consider the best organisational placing and ownership of the initiative;
- detail essential institutional and staff resources required to make it successful and sustainable; and
- develop ideas on how OU staff and students can meet the City of Sanctuary requirements to **learn** about sanctuary, **embed** this learning across the institution, and **share** learning and opportunities with the wider community.

## What is a University of Sanctuary?

A University of Sanctuary (UoS) is a place where everyone feels safe, welcome and able to pursue their right to education. University of Sanctuary recognition is awarded for building a culture of hospitality to people wishing to study there. Universities must satisfy UoS criteria and submit an application for assessment by City of Sanctuary UK. City of Sanctuary began in 2005 with a vision that our nations will be welcoming places of safety that offer sanctuary to people fleeing violence and persecution. Belfast, Cardiff and Edinburgh (the locations of OU offices) are all Cities of Sanctuary. Although Milton Keynes is not a City of Sanctuary, it is in the process of applying. Belfast, Cardiff and Edinburgh where our nation offices are located are all Cities of Sanctuary. As the OU's UoS project develops, the Sanctuary Working Group (SWG) will engage with MK Council and civil society to support the application for City of Sanctuary status.

There are currently 24 accredited Universities of Sanctuary in the UK, with many more in the process of seeking accreditation. The full list can be found [here](#).

## Becoming a University of Sanctuary

Three principles underpin the commitment needed to become a University of Sanctuary. These are:

**Learn:** learning about what it means to be seeking sanctuary, both for the community in which the university is situated (in the case of the OU, this is UK-wide), and in the context of higher education.

**Embed:** taking positive action to embed concepts of welcome, safety and inclusion within the institution including, but not limited to, the student body, Students Association, departments, faculties, senior management, administrative and estates staff. To take steps to ensure this progress outlasts the current student population.

**Share:** sharing our vision, achievements, what we have learned, and good practice with other universities, the local community and beyond.

The notion of a University of Sanctuary requires a whole-organisation approach, but it's not one-size-fits-all; the award will reflect the unique profile, complexity, funding and size of our organisation. However, there are some minimum criteria to be met, which are detailed in Appendix 1.

## Principles into Practice

There has been previous interest in becoming a University of Sanctuary in various parts of the OU, and the underlying principles and goals are widely shared, but this is the first time we have harnessed faculties and teams across the four nations to work together in an attempt to put principles into practice. In 2020, Prof Marie Gillespie at the School of Social Science, FASS, established an initial **Sanctuary Working Group** (SWG) to explore and take stock of the OU's commitment to providing a place of safety for sanctuary seekers and other initiatives to support forced migrants. The initial SWG numbered around 50 members from across the University's four nations, and with a variety of roles, academic and non-academic, including some members with lived experience of migration. The SWG met several times in 2020 to discuss the issues faced by sanctuary seeking students, recommending that the OU should prepare an application for attaining UoS status.

Professor Marcia Wilson joined the OU in December 2020 as Dean of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), within whose remit our Sanctuary work sits. Members of the SWG met with Prof Wilson and other senior staff to discuss plans for becoming a University of Sanctuary. It was recognised that this is an important step in our EDI strategy and this feasibility study was commissioned to bring us closer to a successful application process.

Following this, and with an ever-increasing number of members, the initial SWG was streamlined into two groups: the **Sanctuary Working Group** (SWG), a small group of around 11 individuals involved in carrying out the feasibility study, and the **Sanctuary Steering Group** (SSG), a larger group of more than 60 members, to oversee the work of the SWG and provide support and input into its work as required. With funding from faculties and EDI, the SWG started work on the feasibility study in April 2020.

### The feasibility research study set out to:

3. Collate learning from existing OU resources, projects, capacities and partnerships in relation to sanctuary seekers, highlighting the University's strengths and areas requiring improvement.
3. Understand the specific needs of students, learners and staff affected by forced migration in the UK and at the OU more specifically.
3. Produce actionable recommendations for future initiatives and changes required to support the OU's application for University of Sanctuary.

## Forced Migrants as Sanctuary Seekers

*You experience all of it. You have every single one of the experiences: difficulties to get a job, racism, not knowing the language, discrimination, lack of familiarity with the culture, not knowing how things work, not having a community, being far from your family, missing them so much that it affects everything else. All of these things affect your studies so much! Everything has an effect on you.*

Nick (named changed), refugee, OU alumnus

The [UNHCR](#) (2020) estimates that more than 82 million people worldwide are forcibly displaced. The majority of displaced people are not in the UK or Europe, but in countries and regions neighbouring their place of origin. Some are internally displaced. Forced migration may be due to war, climate change, natural or man-made disasters, or political and economic conditions which may be the long-reaching effects of colonialism. The situation in a region may remain volatile, affecting access to education for several generations.

We use the terms **forced migrants**<sup>6</sup> or **sanctuary seekers**, where relevant, interchangeably to cover various categories of people with different legal status, such as refugees, asylum seekers, those granted humanitarian protection,

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<sup>6</sup> Forced migrants is a term that includes people who have been forced to leave their home countries due to conflict, natural disaster, political turmoil or other causes. It includes refugees, asylum seekers, unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors, resettled communities, internally displaced people, those with humanitarian protection and victims of trafficking. It also includes CARA scholars, who hold regular Tier 5 visas and cannot apply for asylum but are forced to leave their home countries.

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASCs), those who have been resettled to the UK through UN refugee programmes and others who have experienced the asylum system or have an unresolved immigration status.<sup>7</sup> Although not all forced migrants become displaced for the same reasons, or have the same legal status, they share the fact that their migration was forced upon them due to extreme circumstances.

We simplify the terms we use in order to confer dignity, whilst offering a definition broad enough to include all possible categories. We appreciate that this is not a homogenous group and that the ambitions and desires of displaced people are as diverse as their languages, cultures, political views, economic and social backgrounds. We acknowledge that the language used may not always accurately depict how people see themselves or how others see them, but we suggest that the focus should be on *access* to higher education, rather than (often changing) legal definitions.

Though people seeking sanctuary are not a homogenous group, they are likely to encounter similar barriers to accessing higher education, according to the [Higher Education Policy Institute](#) (2019), such as finance, mental health due to trauma, lack of documentation and language. Those who have arrived in the UK as children (UASC) have experience of being in the care system. Many of them have caring responsibilities. Due to the fact that many sanctuary seekers flee war zones, there is also a high incidence of disability amongst this group (see UoS [resource pack](#)). A sanctuary seeker is likely to experience an intersection of disadvantage due to race, disability and location in areas of multiple deprivation (IMD).

Equal access to HE is enshrined in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Access to education can be fundamental to a person's ability to integrate and have a meaningful participation in society, giving them the opportunity to gain employment, build professional and social networks and contribute to their new homes. Many people who are forced to flee to the UK, find it difficult to navigate financial, cultural and institutional barriers and finding places with a culture of hospitality eases their difficulties. Whilst some of the barriers to higher education for adults with a forced migrant backgrounds are shared with other disadvantaged groups, sanctuary seeking learners experience an extreme degree of denial of equal access to educational opportunities due to the ways in which these barriers accumulate, interrelate and exacerbate each other, leading to *super-disadvantage* (Lambrechts<sup>8</sup>, 2020).

## The Sanctuary Vision at the OU

The mission of the Open University is to be open to people, places, methods and ideas. We promote educational opportunity and social justice by providing high-quality university education to all who wish to realise their ambitions and fulfil their potential. Our vision at the OU is to reach more students with life-changing learning that meets their needs and enriches society. The UoS mission of building places where everyone feels safe, welcome and able to pursue their right to education, aligns with the OU's mission and vision and our values of inclusivity, innovation and responsiveness. Becoming a University of Sanctuary will demonstrate that we are open to all.

*I am an OU student. I finished an access module last year and have started the Introducing Social Sciences module this year. I have now deferred to next year due to health, work, and family life circumstances.*

*Forced migrants need help. I personally am a refugee - I was 22 years old when I arrived in Europe as a refugee, on my own with my little brothers and sister. My dream was to go back to school and I still have the same dream 22 years later.*

*Studies for me equal dignity, freedom, stability, cultural integration, and many more other benefits like increasing self-esteem. For refugees, receiving an education is the best way to become full members of their host countries.*

*As an OU student, I have been very well welcomed and have received a very good, needed support. OU is a perfect place for a refugee to study because they really support anyone regardless of their background. They want everyone to feel accepted, supported and encouraged.*

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<sup>7</sup> We use the terms *forced migrant students*, *students from forced migrant backgrounds* and *sanctuary students* interchangeably throughout this document. More details about different categories of forced migrant students and the study conditions imposed on them are available in Appendix 1 & 2 at the end of this document.

<sup>8</sup> Lambrechts, A., (2020), *The super-disadvantaged in higher education: barriers to access for refugee background students in England*, Higher Education, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-020-00515-4>

*The OU is a perfect university for refugees and asylum seekers to do their studies without worrying much about their accommodation, especially when they are awaiting a decision for their future.*

Alice Uwizera, forced migrant and student at the Open University

Displaced people hold the same variety of dreams, goals and aspirations as the rest of society. As a widening access university with a strong social justice mission, the OU can be a leader in providing places of safety where all people can achieve their potential.

This initiative embraces the entire spectrum of the OU's faculties, programmes and nations so our Sanctuary Steering Group (currently around 60 members) has taken a shared, OU-wide approach. The group has representatives from all four nations and faculties and teams across the OU are actively involved in and supportive of this initiative. Our University of Sanctuary bid fully aligns with our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) work, the Access and Participation Plan (APP), and the Access, Participation and Success (APS) strategy.

## How becoming a University of Sanctuary will benefit the OU

Broadly, the benefits to being accredited as a UoS include:

- visibly fulfilling our stated mission to widen access to higher education, to help fulfil the potential of as many people as possible, and delivering on our strategic plans which fit in with the notion of sanctuary;
- spotlighting our EDI programme and bringing visibility to this impactful narrative;
- enriching academic discussion and outputs;
- responding to student and sector pressures as part of a growing network taking public, practical steps towards inclusion, countering discourses of xenophobia and racism within and outside of university life.

### Consolidating existing initiatives

Numerous initiatives across the OU serve the needs of forced migrants, across all four nations, past and present. These are outlined under the theme of [Research, scholarship and collaboration](#) and include our partnership with Uber, the LASER project and a pilot in Scotland to develop study skills for forced migrants. These initiatives have been funded by individual units, faculties and schools. This means that the OU is already well-placed to demonstrate its commitment to the UoS application bid, without it needing to fund the entire spectrum of activity required to satisfy its criteria. Becoming a UoS would enable the OU to galvanise, coordinate and consolidate these isolated initiatives.

### Meeting Equality, Diversity and Inclusion goals

A new Dean of EDI, Professor Marcia Wilson, joined the OU in 2020 with a clear agenda to position us as a university where equality, diversity and inclusion are meaningfully and truly at the heart of all it does. Through our [Statement on equality and diversity](#), the OU promotes the vision of a fair and just society, where people are treated with dignity and respect, inequalities are challenged and where we anticipate and respond positively to different needs and circumstances so that everyone can achieve their potential. This Statement clearly states the value the OU places on diversity and our clear commitment to challenge patterns of under-representation through positive action programmes, and places expectations on our staff and students to work towards the achievement of this mission. It recognises that discrimination arising from individual characteristics and circumstances is not only unlawful, but a waste of talent and a denial of opportunity, preventing individuals, organisations and societies from achieving their potential. It manages and mainstreams equality and diversity in order to meet our statutory equality duty and ensure that we live up to our social justice mission in a number of ways, including consultations, development programmes, inclusive policies, resource sharing and widening participation.

### Meeting Access, Participation and Success Targets

Widening access to and enhancing success in higher education is at the heart of the OU's mission. Though forced migrants are not specifically identified in our APS strategies and policies or the agreements we have in place with funders across the four nations, they are likely to share markers of disadvantage with target groups identified in these. For example, forced migrants in the UK are likely to be located in POLAR3 quintile 1/SIMD20 areas<sup>9</sup>, be

<sup>9</sup> The data on accommodation is not disaggregated by SIMD, but this can be deduced from recent [research undertaken by the Scottish Refugee Council \(2019\)](#) which shows that most refugees accommodated in Glasgow City are in social housing types and areas associated with SIMD20 locations.

disproportionately from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities<sup>10</sup>, and to have experienced trauma-related mental health issues or disability<sup>11</sup>. Unaccompanied minors seeking asylum are ‘looked after’ and will have experience of being in care<sup>12</sup>. This suggests that forced migrant students are likely to have at least one characteristic that the OU reports on to its funders. The bid also aligns with our [Student and Staff Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#).

Our [Access Participation and Success Strategy](#) ensures that the needs of students identified through funding body requirements and institutional and sector data as facing the most challenges to access HE or achieve equitable outcomes are met, alongside the delivery of the University’s overarching strategic priorities. Our [Access and Participation Plan](#) delivers on this commitment across the four nations. Our bid to become a University of Sanctuary aligns with some specific commitments and aims in the above-mentioned documents, as illustrated in the tables below. Based on the UK Government’s statistics for the year ending June 2020, [32,423](#) asylum applications were made in the UK. Most of these are Black, Asian or from minority ethnic communities (BAME), as indicated by the data sets in the [government data](#) on asylum applications, initial decisions and resettlement. Concluding that forced migrants share characteristics with the target groups in the APS Strategy and the AP Plan, our forced migration work aligns with the Plan and will also support progress with our Race Equality Charter application process.

APS Strategy 2020-25
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Commitment 2: To ensure students who identify with characteristics associated with underrepresentation and disadvantage are guided and supported to get on the right study path</li> <li>✓ Commitment 3: To enable students who identify with characteristics associated with underrepresentation and disadvantage to be supported to become study ready</li> <li>✓ Commitment 4: To enable students who identify with characteristics associated with underrepresentation and disadvantage to be supported in the financial models available to them</li> <li>✓ Commitment 5: To support students who identify with characteristics associated with underrepresentation and disadvantage through partnership arrangements</li> <li>✓ Commitment 6: To enable students who identify with characteristics associated with underrepresentation and disadvantage to successfully meet their study goals; develop confidence in their learning ability; be aware of and understand their relationship with the University and its community and how it supports their progress</li> <li>✓ Commitment 7: To develop a sense of identity and belonging for students who are underrepresented and disadvantaged</li> <li>✓ Commitment 8: To enable learning gained through proactive support campaigns and interventions to be embedded within institutional practice</li> <li>✓ Commitment 9: To develop a greater understanding of the personal and professional outcomes of students who are underrepresented and disadvantaged</li> </ul>

**Table 1: APS Strategy 2020-25 commitments**

<sup>10</sup> The majority of forced migrants in the UK are from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities (BAME), as indicated by the data sets in [UK government data \(2020\)](#) on asylum applications, initial decisions and resettlement.

<sup>11</sup> Many sanctuary seekers have a history of multiple traumas (see UoS [resource pack p.24](#))

<sup>12</sup> Celcis (2015). [Supporting the education of looked after children with uncertain immigration status](#).



Access and Participation Plan 2020-25 (key priorities summarised)	
✓	Increase the proportion of Black and Asian students registered by 2025 (PTA 1 & 2).
✓	Reduce the gap in module pass and 'good' module pass between Black and White students, Asian and White students and BAME and White students (PTS1, 2, 6, 7 & 9).
✓	Reduce the gap in module pass between students with disabilities and those with no known disabilities, and between those with mental health difficulties and those with no known disabilities (PTS3 & 5).
✓	Reduce the gap in module pass and non-continuation for students from deprived backgrounds (PTS4 ,8, 10, 12, 13)
✓	Improve employability (PTP 1-5).
✓	Ensure at least 17.0% of entrants to the University are from IMD Q1 (OUT_1).

**Table 2: AP Plan 2020-25 priorities (summary of targets relevant to forced migrant students)**

## Academic gains

The OU has much to gain by becoming a recognised University of Sanctuary. As will be outlined in the findings later in this report, our 'flexible' and 'open' distance-learning model has clear advantages over brick-and-mortar universities. We can be the leader in higher education provision for forced migrants, who may not otherwise have the opportunity or motivation to attain higher education in the UK. We are well-positioned to meet their demand for courses and degrees in a way that recognises the diversity of their communities and learning needs.

Scholars from at-risk backgrounds can also make a valuable contribution to our learning and teaching. They add a diversity of voices, skills and expertise to the University and our outreach, academic and research engagements. Hosting at-risk scholars, through CARA and programmes such as one underway for at-risk Afghan scholars and previously for Syrian Scholars, adds to innovative thinking, theoretical, conceptual and experiential learning. It also enhances our engagement with new and path-breaking decolonial and trauma-informed approaches.

Identifying and supporting cohorts of students and staff from forced migrant backgrounds will assist the OU to improve our teaching practices and student support processes for vulnerable students, and therefore attract more students from marginalised backgrounds.

Finally, investing in UoS initiatives will increase the visibility of the OU's research and humanitarian work in the area. This will position us as a leader in forced migrant education and integration and will potentially attract collaborations and funding from national and global institutions.

## Economic impact

The OU is a proud of its impact on the UK economy. The total [annual economic impact of The Open University \(OU\)](#) was **£2.77bn** in 2018-19, with £619m of that figure returning to the Exchequer. Our flexible distance learning has an impact on the UK Government's priority to "level up" as 85% of OU graduates remain in the location where they studied. As of 2018-19, the OU supported 11,865 FTE jobs across the UK, with the direct impact from the OU's expenditure on staff and operating expenses being £437.5 million. The majority of staff expenditure (55%) was dispersed around the UK outside of the main OU campuses, student support centres and offices.

Accepting refugees within a nation comes with two types of economic costs: sustaining costs, associated with providing necessities like food and housing, and integration costs that help them become part of the community, such as (English) language classes, education and employability. Research suggests that sustaining costs are much higher than integration costs, supporting the argument for making investments in programmes which lead to integration, such as higher education. The German Institute of Economic Research has calculated that Germany will experience a .5% increase in GDP within ten years as a direct result of accepting more refugees than any other European country.<sup>1314</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Legrain, P., (2016) [Refugees work: A Humanitarian Investment That Yields Economic Dividends](#), TENT

<sup>14</sup> Fratzscher, M., & Junker, S. (2015) [Integrating refugees: A long-term, worthwhile investment](#). DIW ECONOMIC

From a narrow cost-benefit perspective, research from a Danish case study shows that providing rehabilitation to severely traumatised refugee families can be an economically viable strategy, considering the economic effects observed at the family level.<sup>15</sup>

## An ethical obligation

Recognising the value that the diverse skills of displaced people can bring to society, as well as the economy, can be key to our institutional approach. This can enhance our impact on the economy, society and our reputation as a visionary, value-driven organisation that places value on the human potential of forced migrants.

The 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, to which the UK is a signatory, stipulates that those States have a legal obligation to protect them ([UNHCR](#)). Article 22.2 protects the right to further and higher education.

Through the UoS initiative, we can deliver on our ethical obligation to offer protection and education to those experiencing extreme conditions and statelessness due to war or other forms of displacement. This can be seen as “a consequence of old colonial formats and newly formed neo-colonial antagonisms between local and international benefactors.”<sup>16</sup>

## A sector-wide initiative

Currently there are 24 accredited Universities of Sanctuary in the UK, with many more undergoing the application process. The scheme has recently opened to colleges (CoS) and in addition, there are hundreds of other diverse places of sanctuary in the UK, such as libraries, gardens and local authorities. The mission is to build cultures of hospitality and openness to all.

Universities UK has recently published [guidance](#) for universities on how to support access to higher education for displaced people and communities. [UCAS](#) describes refugees and asylum seekers as an “emerging cohort” and states that 102 UK universities and colleges specifically refer to them in their widening access and participation plans. Currently, the OU does not do this.

In visibly aligning with UoS values, the OU can embed our mission of openness and equity into our processes and become accessible to all. This will add to the OU’s reputation and brand perception of being truly open and will put us in good company with institutions and organisations who share our values, following current trends of humanitarian responsiveness to global crisis.

## Conducting the Feasibility Study: Methods and Approach

For the feasibility study, we employed a mix of qualitative and quantitative research methods to capture data through the following activities:

1. **Online research** on the University of Sanctuary and other initiatives in the UK’s HE sector.
2. **Targeted OU-wide scoping survey** of existing resources, capacities, research, expertise, projects and partnerships across different disciplines, departments and offices in the four nations.
3. A **desk review and a short survey** for faculty relating to course content, modules, microcredentials, access courses, and postgraduate research projects at the OU, and on our various platforms (OpenLearn, FutureLearn, OpenLearn Create), which focus on issues of forced migration or are directed at sanctuary seekers.
4. **Student numbers research** to identify information relating to existing and/or former OU students from forced migration backgrounds – including their (indicative) total number, status as students (home, international) and locations of enrolment.
5. **Roundtable discussions** with academic and non-academic colleagues, seeking to understand existing challenges and limitations for learners and staff affected by forced displacement, as well as potential solutions and recommendations.

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<sup>15</sup> Bager et al. (2018) [Does multidisciplinary rehabilitation of tortured refugees represent ‘value-for-money’? A follow-up of a Danish case-study](#)

<sup>16</sup> Hadjioannou, C., (2021) [Beyond the social contract: why we have a duty to protect refugees | Media@LSE](#)



6. **Case-study interviews** with students and staff affected by forced displacement on issues of education, work access, opportunities and limitations. (Some case studies have been conducted as part of other projects; having identified some forced migrant students, alumni and other students from the sector during the latter stages of this study, we are in the process of planning further case studies and interviews).
7. **Evaluation of ongoing activity related to the UoS** - as the study was being carried out, a range of activities were undertaken by the SWG which we evaluated to ensure we captured the learning for the study and to inform future activity.

## Online research

We conducted extensive online research to scope out the context related to forced migration and sanctuary students in the OU and in the wider UK higher education sector. This phase of the study involved reviewing the existing scientific literature on experiences of forced migration, studies and reports published by researchers at the OU and in the wider sector, and by other (third sector and government) institutions engaged in the area. This step was also formative in documenting key actors, institutions and networks that link to the University of Sanctuary and the Cities of Sanctuary initiatives.

Following this, we made data requests to the OU's data and student analytics team. We also requested OpenLearn and FutureLearn analytics where relevant and spoke to members of staff leading on specific projects and activities.

The broader rationalisation for the online research was to bring SWG researchers and members up to date with the wider field and to document the different areas of strengths, challenges and gaps in provision within the OU and the wider HE sectors, while also understanding prevalent approaches and methodologies of engagement with displaced populations and learners.

## Scoping survey-I

We conducted two online scoping surveys. Our first survey was intended to document current, former and prospective projects and initiatives related to sanctuary seekers and forced migration in different OU departments and schools across the four nations. The survey was live from June to August 2020.

We took a targeted approach and emailed the first survey to leads within the wider Sanctuary Steering Group, academic staff from across the four disciplines, as well as professional services staff, who were likely to have an interest or involvement in forced migration related work or to know colleagues who did. We requested that they 'snowball' it to all other staff with relevant interests and engagement. We also sent it to representatives of the OU Students Association, relevant research groups and other staff communities with a presence on Yammer, such as the BME Staff Network and the AL group. Due to procedural constraints on mass emails, we could not send this survey to all staff in the University, which means that some projects and activities may remain undocumented.

The first survey yielded rich results and was completed by 42 respondents across different departments and offices, which revealed at least **23 ongoing or past projects and initiatives** on forced migration at the OU and a few more in development. A further three were identified after the survey closed. Please see Appendix 5 for an overview of the 26 projects. The survey also yielded new leads, which were followed up through emails and web-research and led to the discovery of other projects in the field. The scoping survey also generated a few (10) open responses and general views / comments from participants – which underlined persisting challenges, solutions, and potential areas for further exploration.

## Desk review and scoping survey-II

Our second scoping survey was intended to document existing OU online educational content, curriculum and resources related to forced migration or directed at sanctuary seeking students. This included information about UG/PG courses, modules, access courses, micro credentials, on OpenLearn, OpenLearn Create and FutureLearn as well as PGR (PhD) projects at the OU.

We conducted a thorough web and desk review over a three-month period and devised a short survey for faculty, which was live for six weeks from late July 2021. We uncovered diverse online materials, student (PhD) research projects and courses / modules with some focus on forced migration, as well as those with direct and indirect association or relevance, including English as a Second or Other Language (ESOL), English for Academic

Purposes (EAP), English for Academic Study support and access courses. The survey yielded 10 responses from staff about existing and planned courses.

We also made enquiries with the OU's data analytics and communications team for data on the different courses with potential forced migration content and their uptake. Importantly, this exercise uncovered curriculum and resources the OU already has in this area, and where the gaps may be for future development.

### **Student numbers research**

While we identified a few students with forced migrant backgrounds through our individual interactions with staff and follow-ups after the scoping study, to get an overall picture of student numbers at the Open University, we made a detailed data request to the Data and Student Analytics Team in early July 2020. However, this data was not available since the OU does not, as yet, have a system in place to keep track of OU students from different forced migrant backgrounds. We made follow-up requests for more data and clarifications to extrapolate from the data we gathered on nationality, triangulated with data on nationalities seeking refuge in the UK (via asylum or resettlement) and with data on how these students are being funded, but could not yield tangible data on student numbers.

Conducting this exercise confirmed the urgent need to capture information on students with forced migrant backgrounds at the point of registration which would enable us to understand the full picture of our student body and their needs.

### **Roundtable consultations with staff**

We organised two roundtable consultations in July 2021 and September 2021 with academic and professional staff interested in discussing the challenges of forced migrant students at the OU and of the staff who work with them. The aim of these roundtables was to seek solutions and make recommendations about how to set up supporting infrastructures at the OU such as staff training, peer support and mentoring schemes, and contribute to the broader vision of becoming a university of sanctuary. The roundtables consisted of more than 14 staff members, alongside members of the SWG. The thematic discussions were conceptualised and led by an SWG member, Dr. Fidele Mutwarasibo, Lecturer in Work Based Learning (Dept of Public Leadership and Social Enterprise) Faculty of Business and Law, who has lived experience of forced migration. The consultation events are ongoing and the SWG will continue to hold them past the scope of the feasibility study and potentially beyond the UoS application phase, to build on ideas arising from them. The learning from these roundtables forms a key part of the recommendations of the feasibility study.

### **Case studies and interviews with students and staff**

We sought to develop case studies of students and staff with forced migration backgrounds at the OU. However, the issues with identifying students mentioned above forced us to redesign our approach and attempt to find other ways of identifying students. Having identified forced migrant students via members of the SWG, we have now scheduled six interviews and one focus group, following ethical guidelines. These include students at undergraduate, postgraduate and PGR level and OU staff, as well as prospective OU students and students at other institutions.

- Through the OU's collaboration with Uber, we are identifying students from forced migrant backgrounds studying with us who may be willing to take part in further research.
- As part of our Open to People work taking place in Scotland, we conducted two interviews with an OU graduate with a forced migrant background and a postgraduate student attending another HEI in Glasgow, who has been resettled in Scotland through UNHCR.
- We have also identified a number of existing case studies undertaken through other projects at the OU, including the LASER (see page 29) and RefER projects (see Appendix 5)

We will collate the findings from existing and scheduled case studies and focus groups. So far, they show the interest in OU and online learning among this cohort. New case studies will elicit some of the challenges of students and staff, their experiences of working and studying at the OU and encountering our systems and processes.

### **Evaluating ongoing activity**

Aside from carrying out the feasibility study research, another key objective of the SWG was to plan, support and set up activities that will be central to fulfilling the criteria of our UoS application. To accomplish this the core members of the SWG initiated, participated in or contributed to the development of several activities and networks within and beyond the OU. We created an evaluation plan for these activities, to capture the learning and feed into the findings and recommendations of the feasibility study.

A full list of SWG activities is attached in Appendix 7. These include:

- Becoming part of the UK-wide University of Sanctuary network and associated, non-academic networks (such as City of Sanctuary);
- Setting up the OU STAR group (OU Student Action for Refugees) to encourage student participation;
- Creating volunteering opportunities related to STAR;
- Undertaking consultative activities for Student Voice Week;
- Working with the OU Students Association to ensure their input and cooperation;
- Implementing the CARA Afghan Refugees Initiative which, due to its time-sensitive nature, was undertaken as a matter of urgency. This involved meetings with Faculty heads and decision-makers to obtain commitments to fund and host Afghan scholars and liaising with CARA to understand how to make this happen;
- Participating in conferences, workshops, lectures and consultations with partners and other knowledge growth activities within and outside of the OU;
- Designing and creating content for the Sanctuary webpages;
- Collaborating with external partners to create legal guidance for sanctuary students at the OU and in the wider sector;
- Planning careers and employability activity and interventions;
- Writing scholarly articles and contributing to conferences and seminars, etc.

## Key Findings

In our analysis of the data generated during this study, certain themes emerged which are discussed in this section. While analysing our data, we were mindful of the myriad constraints on time and resources within the OU, but equally sensitive to the vulnerabilities, challenges and particular needs of forced migrant students. The findings under each theme informed the recommendations of the report.

### Key finding 1: Identifying students from forced migrant backgrounds at the OU

The biggest challenge has been the identification of students from a forced migrant background at the OU. Preliminary literature reviews and discussions with members of the Universities of Sanctuary Network suggest that identifying and gathering data on forced migrant students and staff is a challenge shared by most HEIs.

At a sector level, institutions are often unaware of how many students from forced migrant backgrounds attend, unless they are specifically targeted through outreach and scholarships. A third of England's universities do not collect any data related to students from a forced migrant background and most others collect only some data (Lambrechts<sup>17</sup>, 2020). No data was found in relation to Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland.

UCAS has recently begun to gather data on forced migrant students. However, students applying to the OU are not required to go through the UCAS application process, as we have an open admissions policy. Being able to access the data gathered by UCAS would shed some light on the numbers of forced migrant students at other HEIs across the UK.

Our Data and Student Experience teams were unable to provide any reliable information on forced migrant student numbers. Asylum seekers are classed as international students at the OU and given the cost of international fees, the lack of support and inability to work during an asylum application, it would be reasonable to conclude that we are unlikely to host asylum-seeking students. We were told anecdotally by colleagues that students had received fee waivers from their faculty, but we were unable to identify any concrete cases.

From interactions with colleagues, we were made aware of students from a forced migrant background, who hold refugee status, some form of leave to remain or are UK citizens. These are both undergraduate and postgraduate students, but their numbers are not quantifiable and the evidence remains anecdotal.

The effort required to identify forced migrant students was indirectly proportionate to the results obtained: fewer than 10 students and alumni were identified. However, the knowledge derived from interactions with these students and alumni has been extremely valuable and will feed into the future activity.

#### The reason for a lack of data

The UK has a lack of national policy to support refugee education and this, in addition to anti-immigrant sentiments, may explain why the experiences of refugees are both under-researched and under-theorised (Lambrechts, 2020). Additionally, support needs of this cohort of students may be perceived to be similar to those of other disadvantaged groups (Stevenson and Willott (2007) in Lambrechts, 2020) and most universities do not consider them a group with distinct needs.

This means there are no targets associated with this cohort which the OU needs to report to its funders on. The lack of targets, lack of data and lack of research related to this group leads to an absence of targeted interventions. What programmes of support exist are driven by the dedication of departments and individuals in the University and have no dedicated budget.

#### Declaration of forced migrant status

Moving on from identification and lack of data, we looked at the reasons why forced migrant students would benefit from declaring their status to us. The literature suggests that refugee students, or those who have attained a secure immigration status, often wish to move away from their previous experience of displacement and from labels (refugee, former asylum seeker, forced migrant, immigrant) which may feel reductionist and stigmatising, and prevent full

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<sup>17</sup> Lambrechts, A., (2020), *The super-disadvantaged in higher education: barriers to access for refugee background students in England*, Higher Education, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-020-00515-4>

integration into the host community. Another aspect of being reluctant to disclose or discuss this aspect may be the trauma associated with the process of seeking asylum and sanctuary.

Research from the [RefER project](#) (2018) revealed that forced migrant students may hesitate to reveal their situation, and some struggle with communication while students from certain nationalities do better than others. Further research is necessary to understand why this is, as well as how learning and completion rates are affected by their characteristics and circumstances.

At the OU, Associate Lecturers (tutors) are usually the first point of contact for students, who often form close working relationships of trust with their them. If study issues arise, students will contact their tutors, often disclosing personal information when seeking support. Although students are encouraged to contact their Student Support Team (SST), which offers specialist support for mental health and disability, they are more likely to do so for administrative support, such as registrations, payments, accessing funds and requesting deferrals and postponements. In the context of such conversations and requests for support, students may disclose that they are from a forced migrant background.

When students declare a mental health issue, advisors will record them on VOICE and CIRCE (our student data management systems) and have an informed conversation with students about the impact on their studies and the support available. Tutors do not have access to VOICE or CIRCE and there is no clarity on when they should report this information to Student Support. We do not provide any training on what aspect of the forced migrant background student's circumstances would be relevant or guidance on what should be recorded, missing another opportunity to identify students and provide appropriate support.

## Placing students at the centre of our approach

Ensuring students are at the centre of the process, will create resilience through strength-based approaches. Co-creation with students builds long-term capacity, *doing with*, rather than *to*, in an equal and reciprocal partnership where it is recognised that the benefits are mutual.

A co-creative approach shares effort and expertise and restores dignity, recognising the value of both partners in the process. In addition, this approach has the potential to save time and cut costs of re-designing and re-implementing. Student Voice activities are important at the OU and ensuring that the voice of this cohort is heard and that they are central to activity development is crucial to developing positive outcomes.

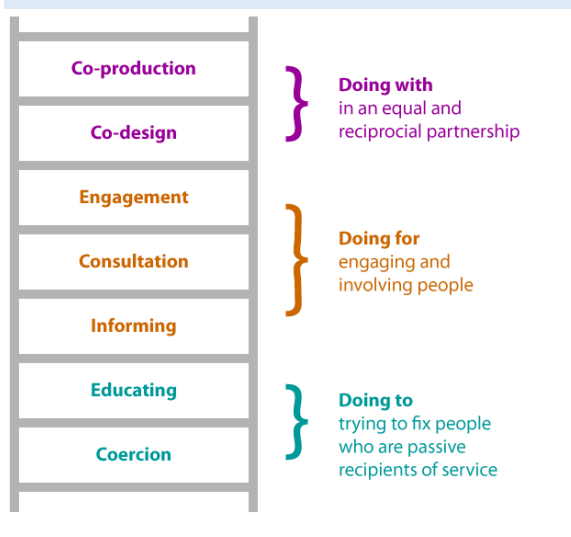


Fig 1: The ladder of co-production, original by [TLAP](#).

## Support for forced migrant students within Widening Access and Participation provision

The University of Sanctuary award requires that necessary support is put in place for forced migrant students. This would be delivered as part of existing widening access and participation provision. Most universities do not target access interventions for forced migrant students. Research conducted by Murray (2019) reveals that only two universities 'counted' forced migrant background students in widening participation initiatives at their institution and

14 recorded activities in the narrative or in the outcomes. Individual scholarships are a good start but may be limited, set up hurriedly and driven by interested and dedicated individuals, rather than embedded in access and participation practices (Lambrechts, 2020).

## Conclusion

Our research revealed that students from a forced migrant background are invisible at the OU and within our widening access and participation provision. Sanctuary students often have several widening access characteristics, but the OU does not gather any data on their forced migration status. There are no VOICE or CIRCE markers, such as those for disabled students and carers. With their visibility reduced, the opportunity to provide a safety net is limited. As it stands, there is no targeted provision for forced migrant students at the OU.

## Key finding 2: Understanding barriers to study for forced migrant students

Research conducted by and on behalf of Universities of Sanctuary illustrates the many barriers to accessing higher education for students from a forced migrant background. The recently launched report [\*Higher education on hold – Access to higher education for young people with insecure or unresolved immigration status\*](#) (Baars, Joshua, Mulcahy, 2021), adds to our understanding of the under-representation of sanctuary-seeking students in higher educational setting. In addition to the documented legal and systemic barriers relating to a person's status, the report outlines their likelihood of living in poverty, the high incidence of mental health issues arising from pre-migration trauma, and the stress of living with insecure status. It also points to a lack of quality support from HE institutions which often provide unclear information and rely on scholarship programmes which only facilitate access to a select few. Even when they access HE, the barriers sanctuary students face may limit their experience of HE and the success they achieve.

### Forced migrant students – the super-disadvantaged

Lambrechts (2020) uses the term 'super-disadvantage' to describe the intertwined nature of these barriers and their impact on the experience of forced migrant students. Although Lambrechts' research focuses on refugees in England, our research confirmed that the way in which those barriers "not only accumulate but also inter-relate and exacerbate each other" is common across all forced migrants and all four nations of the UK.

### Barriers to study

We identified a number of barriers to study, some of which are common across the HE sector and some that may be more relevant for sanctuary students intending to study at the OU.

#### 1) Uncertainty and the hostile environment

The immigration system in the UK is notorious for being difficult to navigate, complex and unfair, with long delays in decision making. This frequently leaves asylum seekers in a state of suspended animation, unable to make decisions or take action in relation to their lives. Those granted refugee status or time-unlimited humanitarian protection experience relatively less uncertainty than those with limited leave to remain or asylum seekers, and have better chances of accessing HE and funding, being classed as domestic ('home') students for fee purposes. However, years of experiencing uncertainty during the asylum process, pre-migration trauma and post-status difficulties can continue to have a negative impact on their mental health and wellbeing.

The overhaul of the immigration system which is currently being debated brings further uncertainty to forced migrants and their access to education and this will require further investigation.

#### 2) Legal and systemic barriers

Unlike other disadvantaged and underrepresented groups, forced migrants can face legal barriers to accessing higher education. Not all forced migrants have the right to study at HE level. Those still awaiting a decision on their asylum application and those undocumented are usually excluded from HE, often having 'no study' conditions attached to their status (see Appendix 2). Regularising status can take a significant amount of time and financial investment, involving costly legal advice, high application costs and a high burden of proof to evidence long-term residence. This is a systemic barrier to accessing higher education.

Eligibility for home fee status and student finance varies depending on the status a forced migrant holds. People with refugee status and humanitarian protection are classified as 'home' students (home fees in England are capped at



£9,250 per year) and are eligible for loans and grants from Student Finance. Students with indefinite leave to remain have the same eligibility but are subject to certain conditions. Students with limited leave to remain and asylum seekers are usually classed as international students and would need to finance their studies themselves or through scholarships. International fees in the UK sector are around £11,000 but can be as much as £30,000. This means higher education remains largely inaccessible for the forced migrant population, with oversubscribed scholarships in existing Universities of Sanctuary making a small dent across the sector.

### 3) Disparity across the four nations of the OU

The cost of studying at the OU can be significantly lower than the UK average, ranging from £2,110 (in Scotland and Northern Ireland), to £6,336 (in England) for a 'home' student undertaking 120 credits per year, the equivalent of full-time study.

International student fees are set at the same level as for residents in England, with a full degree costing in the region of £19,008. As asylum seekers and undocumented people are classed as international students for fee purposes, they will incur the same cost as English students at the OU but are not eligible for student finance.

Refugees and those with humanitarian protection, as well as some people with indefinite leave to remain (subject to certain conditions) are classed as 'home' students and are eligible for help with the cost of their studies, such as grants, loans and bursaries.

The table below provides a comparative overview of fees and funding at the OU.

Nation	No of Credits	Study equivalent	Cost per module	Funding available
Scotland	60	Part time	£1,056	Part time fee grant, OUSBA Loan, Employer Scholarship, Enhanced Learning Credits, Carer's Scholarships Fund, Care Experienced Bursary, Disabled Veterans Scholarship fund, Carer's Bursary, DSA
	120	Full time	£2,112	
	360	Entire degree	£6,336	
Northern Ireland	60	Part time	£1,056	Part-Time Tuition Fee Loan, OUSBA Loan, Employer sponsorship, ELCs, Carer's Scholarships Fund, Care Experienced Bursary, Disabled Veterans Scholarship fund, Carer's Bursary, DSA
	120	Full time	£2,112	
	360	Entire degree	£6,336	
Wales	60	Part time	£1,284	Part-Time Tuition Fee Loan, OUSBA Loan, Employer sponsorship, ELCs, Carer's Scholarships Fund, Care Experienced Bursary, Disabled Veterans Scholarship fund, Carer's Bursary, DSA
	120	Full time	£2,568	
	360	Entire degree	£7,704	
England	60	Part time	£3,168	Part-Time Tuition Fee Loan, OUSBA Loan, Employer sponsorship, ELCs, Carer's Scholarships Fund, Care Experienced Bursary, Disabled Veterans Scholarship fund, Carer's Bursary, DSA
	120	Full time	£6,336	
	360	Entire degree	£19,008	
International	60	Part time	£3,168	None
	120	Full time	£6,336	
	360	Entire degree	£19,008	

**Table 3. Comparative fees and funding available at the Open University across the four nations**

The biggest difference between those categorised as 'international' and 'home' students is their inability to access funding. For those classified as international students, the cost remains at the highest band, without the opportunity to access funding. However, it is within the power of each HEI to classify forced migration students, regardless of status, as 'home' students in order to reduce the barriers to HE.

The second issue is one of equivalence, where students from a forced migrant background with secure status and 'home' eligibility will face a disparity in fees, depending on which nation they reside in. For example, a refugee living in Scotland or Northern Ireland would be liable for fees of £2,112 for a year in full-time education with the OU, whilst the same refugee would need to pay three times as much if they lived in England. Refugees are eligible for free tuition costs through the Students Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS), with the Part Time Fee Grant (PTFG) covering full module fees for those with a personal income of up to £25,000 per year. The OU could explore the cost of offering the same fee liability to forced migrant students in each nation at the lowest band (Scotland and NI).

#### 4) Poverty and financial barriers

In addition to eligibility for home fees and student finance, forced migrants are in most cases impacted by poverty. Asylum seekers have no legal right to work in the UK due to restrictions attached to their status. Many forced migrants live in inadequate housing, often in areas of multiple deprivation, or are subject to a No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) restriction, which excludes them from accessing benefits or housing. A lack of knowledge around rights and legislation and an inability to access legal advice means that even those with leave to remain may not know how to access what they are entitled to.

Providing financial or non-financial support to some students can have implications for their asylum support, so this needs to be done in ways which do not cause further destitution.

#### 5) Language skills

Forced migrants are not a homogenous group and the level of language proficiency differs greatly amongst individuals. Many attain sufficient English to manage in everyday situations, but not for studying at HE level or for specific subject areas. Gaining a level of English fit for academic study purposes and the qualification to evidence this can be difficult.

Asylum seekers and refugees are eligible for English as a Second or Other Language (ESOL) classes. However, the provision differs between local authorities, as does the quality and adequacy of provision and the experience of students. There is often limited suitable language provision available. At particular disadvantage are those located at a distance from learning centres, women with children and those with no networks of support.

Migrants accessing HE must evidence English language skills, e.g. with the IELTS, which has a cost implication. Some HEIs accept alternative tests, such as Duolingo or Password, or use them in combination with their own. These tests can have security and confidentiality issues, and in addition, may not accurately test the level required for HE.

The OU offers an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) module, however, the cost of this can be prohibitive to this cohort. Our study revealed that there is an internal free offer of English for Academic Study support for students across the OU, but most tutors / ALs are not aware of this.

#### 6) Study readiness

Consultations with community organisations working with forced migrants suggest that whilst this cohort does not lack in ambition to study at HE level, they may need to develop study skills such as essay writing, referencing, avoiding plagiarism and online learning. Forced migrants may have experienced interrupted higher education in their countries of origin and may have cultural differences in their expectations of teaching and learning.

#### 7) Prior qualifications and admissions

Some forced migrant students have prior qualifications in higher education but cannot evidence these due to the circumstances of their displacement. Even with evidence, their qualifications may not be recognised by HEI in the UK. This means they may need to retake study for UK qualifications or follow a different route to re-qualifying in the UK.

*I worked as a Clinical Psychologist for 5 years in Jordan. When I came here, even though I had a Masters Degree from a very good university in Jordan, it wasn't enough. I was a Project Coordinator in Jordan and now I have to start from the beginning. I was told that my qualifications are not enough, so I have to do a Masters again. That will be 2 years, then I have to do a PhD for 3 years. Then maybe I can practice again.*

**Sana'a, forced migrant postgraduate student in Scotland**

#### 8) Digital inequality

Forced migrant students are often excluded from the full experience of higher education due to having no devices to study with, having to share devices, or only being able to access learning platforms via their smartphone with limited access to data. Many students do not have a broadband connection. They may also need support to develop the digital skills they need for studying. This digital inequality has been highlighted in the *Open to People* roundtable that took place in Scotland in January 2022, in the recommendations from the Laser project (see Appendix 3) and through the *Covid-19 Chronicles* project led by Professor Marie Gillespie.

*Covid-19: Chronicles from the Margins investigates the pandemic crisis from the perspectives of asylum seekers and refugees, using creative methods and celebrating artful acts of resistance to marginalisation. The project, which is funded by the OU and the International Institute of Social Studies (Netherlands), involves co-creating a digital archive and exhibition that chronicles the impact of Covid-19 through the use of smartphone tools.*



## 9) Widening access and participation targets

Due to the lack of recognition of the forced migrants as a distinct group with intersectional challenges, there are no targeted initiatives or support as part of [The OU's Access and Participation Plan](#). Our research found that activity with a focus on forced migration is dispersed around different units and departments, from IET, to FBL, MarComms, FASS, SSGS, with only two respondents identifying their activity as sitting within access, participation and success (in Scotland and Wales).

On being asked which policies, objectives and targets their forced migrant activity might align with, the respondents overwhelmingly chose access, participation and success, in addition to the OU's social justice mission, EDI policies and BAME objectives. This demonstrates that forced migrants are identified by colleagues as a potential APS target group.

### 8. Do you feel the activity or activities above align with any of the OU policies, objectives and strategies below? Please select all that apply.

[More Details](#)

Equality Diversity and Inclusio...	19
Access Participation and Succ...	17
Access and Participation Plan t...	7
Outcome Agreement Targets (...)	6
Higher Education Funding Co...	3
Widening Access and Particip...	4
Open University Social Justice ...	28
BAME objectives	16
Not sure	3

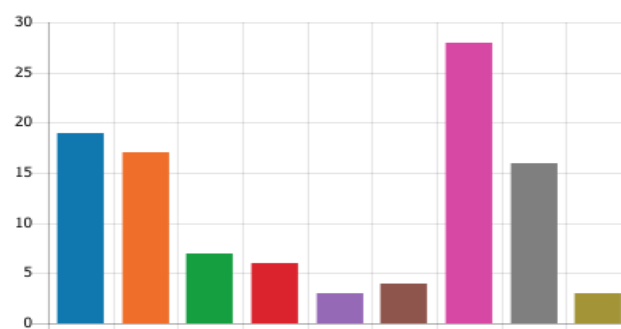


Fig 2. Alignment with OU policies, objectives, strategies and targets, according to respondents.

## University of Sanctuary mentors and ambassadors

This is a pilot programme, currently being developed by Dr Fidele Mutwarasibo, FBL.

### Role of the Ambassador / Champion

Responsible for promoting the University of Sanctuary within a specific faculty / department / unit / national office of The Open University.

### Responsibilities

- Representing the University of Sanctuary in their faculties/departments/units/regions
- Publicising the initiative with their units
- Managing the mentoring scheme within their units
- Supporting mentors and mentees within their units
- Providing feedback to the University of Sanctuary steering committee

### Mentoring programme

Tapping into existing knowledge within the university to offer mentoring support to forced migrant students joining the university. Mentoring will help in levelling the playing field for this cohort of students. Forced migrants, unlike conventional students, have unique experiences and need support to adjust to the new environment in addition to their student endeavours. Support from peers or others with an understanding of forced migration can help them build networks and the skills and motivation to succeed in their studies.

## 10) Mental health, disability and pastoral support

Students from a forced migration background often face precarious life circumstances, insecure status and uncertainty about their future. Many will have experienced trauma due to pre-migration violence, persecution, trafficking or war

and their perilous journey to the UK, and also post-migration, such as the stress of navigating the hostile environment. In addition, many are separated from their families and some are estranged from them. Some have experience of the care system as an unaccompanied minor.

Research suggests a high incidence of mental health issues among forced migrants. Inadequate access to appropriate care can mean a lack of assessment and documentation of disability, and therefore, a lack of support. Some forced migrants, even if eligible for financial support from the OU, may not be eligible for Disability Support Allowance (DLA) so may struggle to access support. This can negatively impact on their journey through higher education.

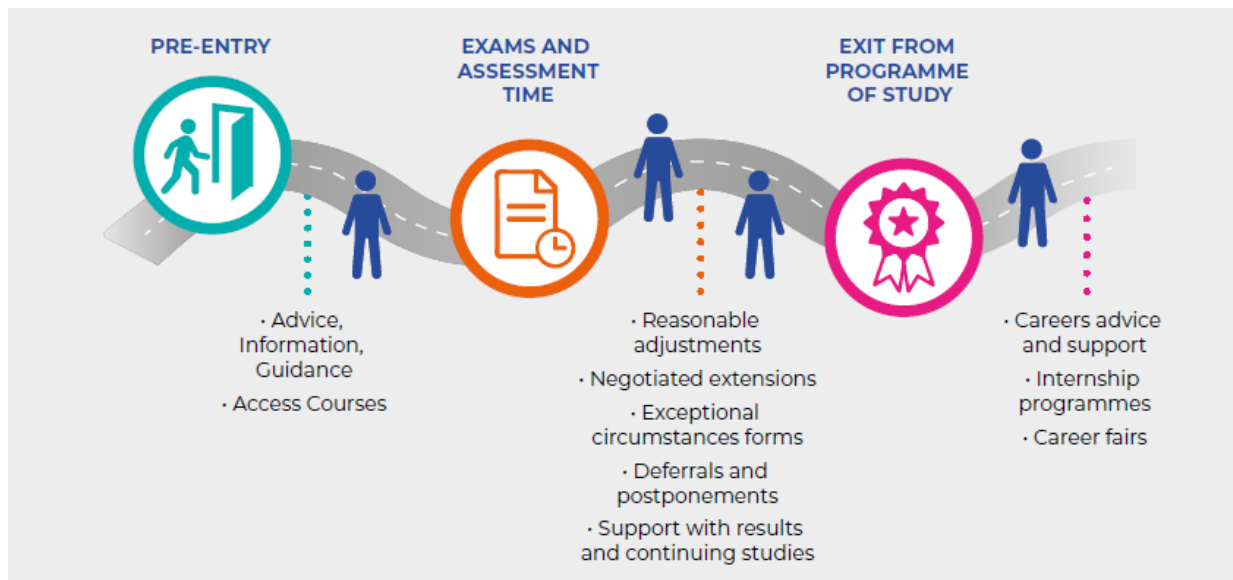


Fig 3. Student journey at the OU and pinch-points for wellbeing, the Student Mental Health Agreement 2021-23

### OU STAR – a student support group

OU STAR (Student Action for Refugees) is the student organisation supporting the University of Sanctuary initiative. There are currently 53 STAR groups attached to UK universities. An example of the campaigning and promotion they do can be seen in [Bath University](#). In order to apply to become a UoS, the OU must have an active STAR group drawn from its student body, who are supporting the campaign for equality of education.

The OU STAR group currently has a committee of five students drawn from across the University. The group includes a forced migrant student, now settled in the UK, and a student who was involved in a previous attempt to become a UoS. There are currently around 25 other OU STAR members.

The OU STAR group has short, middle and long term aims:

In the short term OU STAR members are promoting the OU's application to become UoS with students and staff, through Freshers' events and Student Voice Week. OU STAR also has an education role as its members are researching and writing blogs for the UoS website.

In the medium term, members of the OU STAR committee will attend meeting of the UoS working group to provide the (home) student perspective on how to create a sense of sense of welcome and belonging for the forced migrant scholarship students. Their perspective is invaluable in identifying where improvements can be made to the OU student experience. Reflecting that the OU is a distance learning university, with few opportunities for students to meet face to face, the OU STAR group will be collaborating with other STAR groups to learn how they supported UoS during the pandemic lockdown.

In the long term, OU STAR members will work as volunteers at the OU homework and language club for forced migrants and their children. This initiative will be modelled on the OU's Open Justice Centre. It is recognised that OU students will generally not have the time to get involved in national, face to face, STAR

events, due to their employment, domestic and study commitments. Respecting the OU STAR members' needs for flexibility, activities will be primarily online. OU STAR members will also establish a mutual support network for UoS scholars, drawing on good practice elsewhere. Finally, STAR members, in collaboration with UoS scholars, will produce staff training resources on how to support forced migrant scholars (an example of reverse mentoring).

OU STAR members will be supported at all stages in their volunteering roles by the OU. Staff resource will need to be provided to ensure the successful running of the homework and language club: volunteers will require training, supervision and the opportunity to debrief. The OU will need to establish and maintain the necessary digital platform for the clubs.

OU STAR members are volunteers. The employability benefits, however, are significant and all members will be encouraged to produce a portfolio of their experiences to discuss at interview. Committee members will develop their leadership skills as they will organise and run meetings for members, design and deliver presentations. The OU STAR members involved in research and writing will receive 1: 1 feedback from a member of staff. Joining OU STAR will increase the student's sense of belonging at the OU, which will have a positive impact on retention and success.

## Conclusion

Drawing parallels with other widening access cohorts at the OU, such as care-experienced students and student carers, we can build on learning from the support we have put in place for these student groups. We have gathered extensive data on these cohorts and the institutional benefits of putting targeted supports and processes in place, for example in Scotland we have a dedicated mailbox [OUScotland-Cares@open.ac.uk](mailto:OUScotland-Cares@open.ac.uk) and a named contact for these students. These supports have helped us to meet internal APS targets.

Similar support could be put in place for forced migrant students, prioritising them for existing support such as PLAs. Current and planned initiatives related to the UoS, such as OU STARS and the sanctuary mentoring programme, could be scaled up to provide peer and tailored support for forced migrant students.

## Key Finding 3: Understanding staffing and student support requirements

As highlighted by Lambrechts (2020), forced migrant interventions and practices are often driven by individuals within HEIs, who may lack strategic vision or institutional support. This was confirmed by our research – most scholarship schemes and targeted interventions in HEIs which we spoke to were led by individual efforts, until they subsequently gained momentum and institutional recognition, and were transformed into a cohesive university-wide strategy such as University of Sanctuary.

### A framework for establishing systems of support and transforming processes

In identifying feasible ways in which to support forced migrant students at the OU, we considered who could support current and prospective sanctuary scholars in the context of our wider strategies of promoting access, participation, success and inclusion. We have drawn on our experience of creating support networks for other vulnerable groups and have found that in order to come up with similar solutions for the forced migrant group, we need to take an equitable, inclusive approach, while considering the additional, complex needs of this group.

In order to ensure that sanctuary scholars are set up for success, we must ensure that our mission of openness is embedded into all our processes, creating systems of support which are meaningful, well-informed and holistic. Our approaches should be informed by expertise from the spectrum of University services, academic and non-academic, on legal issues, mental health and wellbeing, disability support and content development among others. A wealth of training, advice and guidance was found to be available from specialist organisations that work with these groups, such as the Refugee Council.

We have found that given the diverse needs of this cohort, the most appropriate approach is to create a framework of support, informed by a clear strategic vision, firmly placed within EDI. Any approach taken to engage with displaced people must be strategic and institution-wide and must clearly understand staffing requirements.

## Staffing – the driver of change

At the OU, activities in relation to forced migration have been undertaken by dispersed faculties and units. The recent organisation of activities under a unified set of objectives to eventually align with UoS criteria has been driven by a self-appointed working group, the Sanctuary Working Group, comprised of staff from across the OU, representing a range of roles and expertise, from academics to professional and administration services and including a number of members with lived experience of forced migration. Their work is overseen by the Sanctuary Steering Group. A list of all activities initiated since the formation of the SWG in May 2021 is available in Appendix 7.

Whilst driven by personal commitments to social justice and access to education, none of these individuals' roles include responsibility for forced migrant students, unless such work is part of any other projects which happen to share some of the same objectives. This means that work may be undertaken in addition to current workload, leading to risk of burnout or tensions in managing and prioritising competing workload demands. This has put a particular strain on ALs, whose contracts often do not make it financially viable for them to undertake any additional unpaid work. This approach is unsustainable, as it often places unfair expectations on members of staff to undertake unrecognised or out-of-hours work or, in the case of ALs, unpaid. Without a connection to OU strategy and policy objectives, the work is unlikely to be supported by adequate, sustained funding.

In addition, staff undertaking work with forced migrant students need to have adequate training and be aware of legal and political contexts, funding eligibility, trauma informed approaches and safeguarding issues. The University of Sanctuary requires the provision by the institution of a dedicated member of staff who has expertise in all areas of the forced migrant student experience, who is a first point of contact and who, if necessary, can liaise with legal practitioners and Home Office officials.

For change to be effective, staffing should be based on the three pillars of: Competence, Capacity and Compensation, as suggested in the framework below.

### A staffing framework

#### Competence

- Skills and expertise: these largely exist within the OU across units, but specialist knowledge can be further developed.
- Training and development: this can be outsourced initially, then created bespoke for the OU to eliminate repeated spending. In-house development is also a viable option, which can then become a revenue stream for the OU.
- Interest, dedication and drive: a large number of OU staff have an interest in this area of work or are driven by their commitment to social justice.
- Trauma-informed approaches: to both support and pedagogy will require training for relevant staff.
- Safeguarding: this issue must be considered in developing any support systems. Training for those in contact with this cohort should be mandatory.

#### Capacity

- Time and competing demands: existing workload must be considered when expecting staff members to take on new work. New expectations should be written within job roles or agreed with staff, to ensure that time is managed effectively and the additional work does not lead to overloading.
- A new role to oversee and manage forced migration activity should be created.
- A small team for a big job: currently, all activity has been undertaken by the SWG,

#### Compensation

- Volunteers: any staff members undertaking this work as a volunteer should be able to claim it as part of their 'volunteering' activity in their contract.
- AL contracts: ALs undertaking any activity, such as the Mentors and Ambassadors groups, should be adequately compensated for their time.
- Budgets: adequate, realistic budgets should be drawn up to support staffing for all forced migration activities, without placing undue burdens in terms of time or compensation on existing staff.

## Conclusion

If undertaken adequately, the scale of the work should be recognised as being unsustainable long-term and that a large initiative cannot rely on the goodwill and limited capacity of a few individuals. Additionally, staff working with forced migrant students require adequate training to be able to effectively support them. With proper planning, a clear strategy, robust processes and careful implementation, the staff undertaking forced migration activities at the OU can help us become a University of Sanctuary.

## Key Finding 4: Scoping research projects, activities and partnerships for impact

Our scoping study has revealed that forced migration is a focus area driving new impactful research and other initiatives across the OU. Our scoping study of recent and ongoing activities yielded rich and insightful responses. Through the survey, we were able to identify 23 ongoing or recently concluded large and small activities, including research and outreach relating to forced migration across the four nations of the UK and internationally. An additional three have been identified since the survey closed.

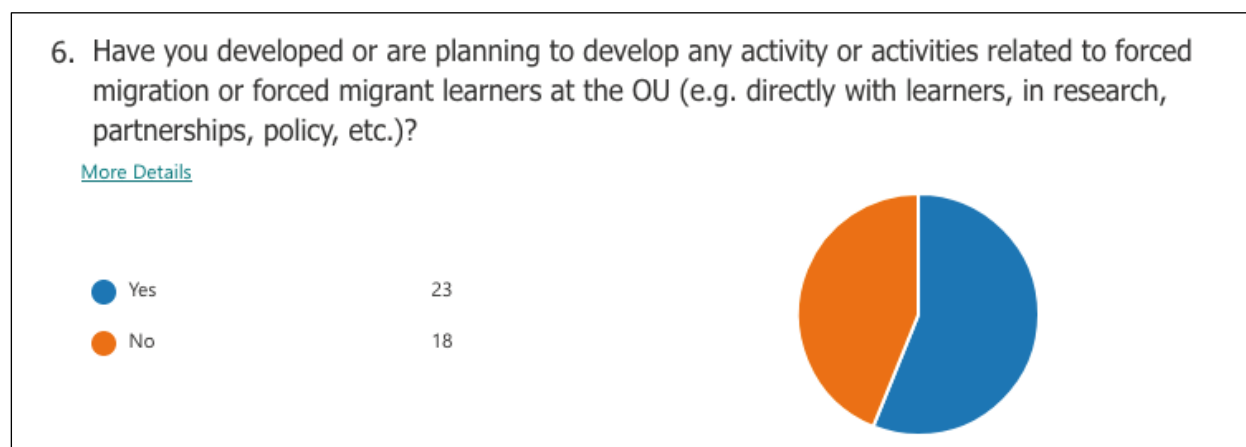


Fig 4. Survey respondents identified 23 activities relating to forced migration at the OU.

In addition to these activities, we identified at least 15 other ‘future’ or ‘planned’ activities. In total, we discovered more than 41 research and impact activities that reflect the OU’s national and global engagement, networks and partnerships on issues of forced migration.

### Showcase:

#### LASER – Language and Academic Skills and E-Learning Resources Project

The LASER project provided accredited learning opportunities for a large cohort of sanctuary-seeking students based in refugee camps in Jordan and Lebanon. It ran between 2015-2018 in partnership with the British Council. Recommendations and actions from the project are a valuable contribution to our future planning and further substantiates findings from other areas of our research (see also, Appendix 3).

- 54 forced migrant students registered with the OU.
- British Council staff managed recruitment of students to the LASER Programme, including English-language and academic skills tests, and provided coaching, study skills support and digital devices.
- Credit transfer of previous educational attainment through the standard OU process.
- Participants treated as standard OU students for enrolment and support.
- Students registered as overseas students (support via R09) and ‘sponsored’ by the British Council.

Learnings about forced migrant students and their needs:

- Lack of documentation and identification. Need to consider pathways to qualifications and commitment to this.
- Transient population with financial difficulties, work and caring responsibilities.

- Not all OU modules are suitable for a transient population based abroad.
  - The need for accessible English for Academic Study and English language skills higher than IELTS 6.
  - Digital inequality (lack of devices, digital skills, internet access) – providing offline printed materials may resolve this issue.
  - Students are not ‘standard’ and require additional academic and pastoral support.
- Support systems (SST, APS, ALs, partner organisations) need to work together, have clear roles and lines of communication, and training in how to support this cohort of students.

Conversations with individual staff and different project teams at the OU revealed an interest to engage with and to address challenges faced by forced migrants in the field of higher education and at the OU more specifically. However, our findings demonstrated that the significant and valuable work taking place at the OU around these issues is viewed as taking place in silos, it is not effectively communicated between staff, departments and nations, and gaps remain in its documentation.

### Global partnerships and humanitarian outreach with displaced people

As the leading online and distance learning provider, the OU has been involved in many partnerships that focus on displaced populations in different parts of the world. Our [International Development Office](#), and in collaboration with partners and funders, has long been undertaking significant work internationally, contributing to course and curriculum building for displaced people through various [projects and programmes](#). With the dissolution of the IDO, projects are now located within the different faculties, schools, disciplines and centres such as The Centre for Study of Global Development), with more emphasis on academic research and teaching.

An example of an ongoing, large-scale project is the UN Women Project, where the OU provides services as a content development partner, working with UN Women to develop, pilot and test an approach to the development and contextualisation of online courses, targeting disadvantaged women across six partner countries.

### Showcase: The UN Women Project

The Open University has received £400,000 funding from UN Women, the United Nations entity for gender equality and the empowerment of women, to be its content development partner. This is as part of the Second Chance Education and Vocational Learning (SCE) Programme (2018-21) which aims to develop context-specific, affordable and scalable learning and employment pathways for empowering the world’s most disadvantaged women. The target audience for the courses consists of 67,000 women and young women from indigenous, refugee, displaced, and low-income groups, predominantly based in the 6 SCE countries.

They face many constraints to accessing education, including cultural, socio-emotional, geographic, poverty, conflict and gender barriers. They may have never gone to school or may have left school at an early age. They will often not have obtained basic literacy or digital literacy skills which prevents them from being active in the labour market.

Extensive research highlights additional barriers to economic development and success of this target group, including a higher fear of business failure, less access to start-up capital and collateral security for their small businesses which affects their growth, and women’s exclusion from certain economic sectors such as agriculture, extractives, and manufacturing. Research also reveals success stories, and there are growing opportunities to address some of the persistent challenges, including through gender-lens initiatives, also championed by UN Women, that seek to prioritise and meet the specific needs of marginalised women.

Free, open, online learning resources provide a unique opportunity to support these women to gain the practical skills they need to better navigate their environment. However, currently available resources are often not relevant to their literacy levels and/or the contexts in which they live. More contextually relevant, easily accessible learning content will help improve the economic opportunities and life chances of marginalized women and their families. These online



learning resources created for the programme are being made available on our OpenLearn Create platform. See links below (courses still being added):

- [Participatory video for facilitators](#)
- [Designing an online course for women learners](#)

The OU is also member in the [Connected Learning in Crisis Consortium](#) which focuses on refugee learning in HE. Koula Charitonos (SWG member) and Tim Seal (IDO and SSG member) are co-leads on behalf of the OU. Connected Learning engages learners in ways that allow them to link different dimensions of their learning environments: personal interests, peer relationships and opportunities. Connected learning pedagogies have been particularly successful in low-resource and marginalised learning contexts, such as those experienced by refugees and asylum seekers.

### Showcase:

#### **Developing contextually sensitive Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) for out-of-school adolescents in refugee settings**

This is an ongoing project funded through the OU Impact Accelerator Scheme and led by Rebecca Jones and Koula Charitonos in IET.

Out-of-school youth, particularly refugees, are the most at risk of poor sexual and reproductive health (SRHR) outcomes (Ivanova, Rai and Kemigisha, 2018). However, there is little understanding of the SRHR needs of young refugees and a lack of contextually relevant sexuality education programmes targeted at this population. This project will help to address the long-standing neglect of the SRHR needs of out-of-school refugee youth in Uganda, the largest refugee hosting country in Africa. It will do so through two activities:

- Formative research to examine the forms of knowledge around SRHR that are valued by out-of-school refugee youth in Uganda and their preferred sources of SRHR information;
- A stakeholder workshop involving young refugees and key providers of sexuality education in Uganda and globally.

The study will draw on a Peer Ethnographic Evaluation Research (PEER) methodology, to work with a group of six out-of-school refugee youth as peer-researchers. The young people will be trained in qualitative research methods and gather data from peers on the forms of knowledge and information around SRHR that are valued. This methodology will generate otherwise hard to access data and will itself have impact on peer researchers by increasing their skills and capacity in research, interviewing and self-advocacy.

The stakeholder workshop will bring together representatives of the refugee population, the OU team, key organizations delivering CSE in Uganda, including the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) member association Reproductive Health Uganda (RHU), staff from IPPF head office, Spice FM, the Women's Refugee Commission and members of the Ugandan and UK academic community. The workshop will impact on the key stakeholders' understanding of the sexuality education needs of young refugees and effective ways to design and deliver contextually relevant sexuality education to this group. For the young refugees, it will provide an opportunity to have their voices heard and to contribute to the design of sexuality education programmes.

The [TIDE](#) and the TREE projects in Myanmar which saw substantial participation from internally displaced people are further examples of the OU developing course-content at scale in partnerships with international, national and local institutions.

#### **Areas of concern**

The OU is a university, not a developmental and implementation agency. At times, our international work has been geared towards revenue-generation rather than our social mission. Findings from some projects, including the LASER project showcased above, suggest not enough was done to work in a 'decolonial' or co-productive way with local

communities, to contextualise content or provide trauma-informed approaches for vulnerable populations. We need to address these issues going forward. Projects such as those being run by the OU Impact Accelerator Scheme (mentioned above) address some of these issues in positive ways.

The current emphasis on OU's global work and international research leans more towards creating value for the university in teaching and research, building a team with academics, generating data and using this to develop courses and feeding this back into teaching and research. This is partly due to internal policy changes and wider international developmental funding changes by the UK Foreign Office in recent years, which limits funding and autonomy of functions.

#### **Local and national partnerships and engagement – making a direct impact and responding to crisis**

Our scoping study revealed a range of partnership projects taking place across different areas of the university. Some of these projects, such as the Open to People project in Scotland, are working with voluntary organisations in order to support forced migrant communities and in particular targeting them for support to access OU study. Others, such as our partnership with Uber, did not set out to target forced migrants but have engaged these learners due to the demographics of participants.

### **Showcase: The Uber-OU Partnership**

The Uber-OU partnership, running successfully since October 2019, is a comprehensive incentive programme for Uber's UK preferential drivers (PDs). The flagship programme allows PDs to undertake formal academic study free of charge at the Open University, or to pass this credit on to a direct family member. The programme aims to retain the best drivers, whilst helping them gain education and qualifications, so they can move to better jobs and salary levels.

The programme aligns with the OU's social mission to make higher education available to all and provide opportunity for those who may not previously considered they could afford it. The demographics of Uber drivers and their families reveal that about 70 per cent of the PDs (out of the total 750 enrolled) have a migration background, having been born outside the UK.

In order to determine the programme's value to forced migrants in particular amongst those Uber drivers, we have partnered with Uber to set up a survey to identify learners from forced migration backgrounds in the programme.

Following on from this, we aim to develop short (1-2 min) high-quality digital clips (first-person narratives) to put forward as part of the UoS application, which can also be used for other promotional activities by both parties.

The project exemplifies the OU's collaborative outreach and access at scale, and can be seen as a model for other cross-funded projects for education of in-work refugees and asylum seekers.

### **Showcase: Open to People – Pathways into Study (OUIs)**

The OU in Scotland's consultations with organisations working with forced migrants in Scotland suggested that our online and distance learning model could help address identified gaps in provision to these communities. Building on our experience of delivering bespoke programmes to disadvantaged communities, we have created a 'test and learn' pilot with third sector partners, The Bridges Programmes in Glasgow and Scottish Refugee Council, to provide a study skills and ESOL skills programme to prepare interested forced migrants for OU study.

#### **Project goals**

The project goals are to provide the learning tools and support needed to create pathways into formal study for forced migrants, to help them achieve their potential, and to contribute to the outcomes of the [New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy 2018-22](#), specifically, Outcomes 2 and 3: that refugees and asylum seekers understand their rights, responsibilities and entitlements, and are able to pursue full and independent lives, and that they are able to access well-coordinated services, which recognise and meet their rights and needs.



### **Scope of pilot**

The pilot will comprise 2 x cohorts of 10 participants with the intention of participants being ready to register for the OU (or other study) commencing October 2022. Through our partner organisations we are currently recruiting participants with forced migrant background who have the interest and ESOL skills to prepare for OU study.

The participants will be supported by an OU tutor to develop readiness for higher education, particularly online and distance study skills (essay writing, referencing, research skills, accessing a digital library, online tutorials). They will further be supported through a peer system in collaboration with the partner organisations.

### **Intended outcomes**

- Participants will enter formal study at the level that is right for them.
- The learning from the pilot will inform scaling up of project in subsequent years and future targeted initiatives.
- The impact of the project will extend beyond its lifespan, as the project model, learning and any resources developed will form a free online toolkit on OpenLearn for many more people and organisations to access.
- For the OUIS, the project will help achieve outcomes related to widening access and engaging with communities who may otherwise be excluded from higher education (APS Scotland Plan 2021), and the current QAA Enhancement Theme of 'Resilient Learning Communities'. It will also feed into the wider OU bid to become a University of Sanctuary.
- The project will measure learner achievement and have tangible outputs.

Evaluation will be key to the project, and we will build in capacity with partner organisations to track participant journeys, numbers and outcomes, evaluate sessions, create case studies and provide analysis to ensure the learning from the project is captured and responded to.

## **Showcase:**

### **Afghan Academics at Risk – a response from the OU**

In August 2021, as the Taliban was making its way into Kabul, academic colleagues at the OU received an urgent and desperate plea for help from Afghan academic colleagues, in particular judges and legal academics who had used their freedom of speech to uphold justice and human rights. This request was routed to the SWG, who contacted Council for At-risk Academics (CARA) to request guidance. We were advised that CARA was in touch with Afghan scholars from all disciplines, many of whom were still in Afghanistan and at risk of persecution or death.

Members of the SWG approached the four faculties with regard to providing at least one place for an Afghan scholar at risk. The response from the faculties was swift and impressive. All those involved appreciated the critical nature, as well as the humanitarian and academic importance of this request and asserted their commitment to provide places of safety for Afghan colleagues. This commitment extended to a willingness to fund places internally, rather than request funding from the University, despite the costs involved, the timing of the request (post budgeting) and other prior commitments.

#### **Commitment to hosting Afghan scholars at the OU**

**FBL – 2 places (one per school, TBC)**

**FASS – 1 place**

**WELS – 1 place**

**STEM – 1 place**

**Total – 5 places**

The specifics of these commitments are still to be discussed, in terms of exact cost, academic matching, legalities / visas and other logistics such as travel, accommodation and families. But the Faculties have made a broad commitment to hold the door open, in preparation for Afghan scholars who are currently at risk and to allocate necessary funding to this initiative.

As the UK's widening access university with a strong social justice mission, the OU is well placed to be a leader in providing places of safety to scholars at risk. Although this project is being undertaken for humanitarian reasons, it is recognised that it will ultimately benefit our students, staff and the wider community in all our four nations. In addition, it supports our University of Sanctuary bid, as it fits with the three criteria of learning from those we offer sanctuary to, embedding the processes and practices into the wider university, and sharing our learning and expertise.

## Conclusion

Our findings have revealed a large number of activities in relation to forced migration which have been taking place at the OU, scattered around departments and across nations and without a central institutional strategy. Although valuable, they respond to local needs as and when they arise, align with the aims and objectives of certain units in the University, and sometimes only partially engage with forced migrants as an indirect outcome.

The OU's participation in developmental and humanitarian projects such as LASER, TIDE and others have made a real-world impact in the lives of the most vulnerable, including displaced populations, but also helped develop expertise within the OU. Care must be taken to learn from the findings of these projects and to take a learner-centred, collaborative and social justice approach to projects rather than prioritising income-generation.

Some of these projects have both led to the development of new and innovative research at the OU and also contributed to our teaching and pedagogy. In addition to those discussed above, a further example is the TESSA project (Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa), where the data obtained has been used both for research and for creating innovative teaching materials. The OU is a leader in innovation in distance learning with a proven track record of quality work, delivering large-scale projects with major UK and international partners. The University of Sanctuary initiative can only help the OU develop and capitalise further on existing strengths.

## Key Finding 5: OU's teaching and learning resources for forced migrants

The OU prides itself on our flexible, supported learning model that combines digital media, expert course design, and small group tuition to enable over 185,000 students from a diversity of backgrounds to access higher education while working, bringing up children, or serving in the armed forces. More than 30,000 students with a disability choose to study with the OU every year. There is no 'typical' OU student; people of all ages, backgrounds, and prior learning experiences choose to study with us for all sorts of reasons, at a range of levels and paces to suit their lives. Online education has become particularly relevant in post-COVID times in the UK and around the world (as was demonstrated by the rise in our enrolments in 2020-2021).

### Resources for forced migrant learners

Our desk research on educational resources for learners from forced migration backgrounds in the UK, conducted alongside our scoping survey, enabled us to compile a list of OU courses, modules, micro-credentials, and other teaching and learning material offered by the OU from across a range of disciplinary and subject areas, education levels (pre-sessional/pre-university, access, UG, PG and PGR) and on our open platforms, OpenLearn, OpenLearn Create and FutureLearn. We also located a list of over [500 links](#) to online resources for forced migrant learners and those that support them, compiled as part of the resources audit carried out by the Refugee Educational Resources (RefER) project, which was commissioned by the OU in 2018-2019 (see Appendix 5).

It is evident that the OU already has the capacity to develop content, offer accredited courses and other learning at scale for both learners and frontline staff that work with refugees and asylum seekers in the UK, such as our partnership with the DWP, and around the globe, such as the LASER and UN Women Programme. We can also offer bespoke, customised courses in collaboration with partners in the UK, such as the Uber partnership at a nation level, or the Open to People project at a local level.

In Scotland, the Open Learning Champions project uses open educational resources (OER) on OpenLearn and other OU platforms as a tool to widen access. In partnership with community and voluntary organisations, we provide workshops on navigating OpenLearn and planning learning journeys into higher education. This enables us to engage with target groups 'where they are at', and to build the confidence and skills they need to succeed when they are ready for formal study.

## Language support provision at the OU

In terms of accredited language provision, the OU offers *L185 English for Academic Purposes (EAP)* and *LB170 Business English*, both 30 credit modules. However, students are not eligible for funding to cover the costs. This means that courses which would most benefit the forced migrant cohort are in effect inaccessible to them. This could be resolved through a fee waiver for forced migrant students. Both modules are incorporated in the School of Languages and Applied Linguistics (LAL), who have started negotiations with other OU Faculties to bring these modules into qualifications in other parts of the University, to broaden students' opportunities to develop their English skills while already studying at the OU.

The OU already has an existing targeted *English for Academic Study* support programme across the curriculum for students in all Faculties – it works on a one-to-one basis and is delivered by School of Languages and Applied Linguistics ALs. This has been very successful and is growing rapidly. The offer is taken up by UK and international students whose first language is not English as well as those whose first language is English. This could be developed further to make it more sustainable and to grow the offer for more in-session students.

Currently, 16 non-accredited English language courses are available on OpenLearn and FutureLearn. The courses are open-access, free and badged, ensuring that anyone can take advantage of them.

The School of LAL's plan, subject to funding, is to extend accredited provision in English longer term, building on current and planned non-accredited offerings. Additionally, production for a paid for, 16-week, pre-sessional *English for Academic Study* course has started in the Open Centre for Languages and Cultures.

An ESOL curriculum is currently being planned, which is to take a number of formats, from free to paid for and from accredited to non-accredited courses. The School of LAL approach this through the OU's social mission lens, which means to provide access to education to people from all backgrounds and to particularly target forced migrants, those from areas of multiple deprivation, carers, care experienced, and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities. In Scotland, this is complemented with Scots language support, especially for non-native speakers who struggle with the mix of Scots and English spoken in educational contexts. A free 40-hour course is already available, and a Scots teacher CPD course is being developed. Furthermore, plans are being drawn up for similar courses in and on Ulster Scots.

Learning from the success of the Open Justice Centre and its online law clinic, the School of LAL is keen to set up a volunteering programme, linking OU students with high levels of English, with existing and prospective students wanting language support. This will take the form of a peer-mentoring / homework club. Students providing support can gain valuable transferable skills that could be embedded into a shareable digital badge.

In Scotland, a research project led by Dr Sylvia Warnecke is exploring the linguistic needs of migrants, in particular women and children, to help them access public services and education and fully participate in society. This is undertaken in collaboration with community organisations in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Belfast. The research will inform curriculum development, courses for and with the migrant community, and CPD courses with an intercultural and English language focus for NHS and social care workers and for teachers.

The planned language provision is ambitious and comprehensive, and it would meet a critical need for language provision and support for current and prospective forced migrant students. In order for these planned activities to be successful, funding is required. Whilst some of this funding has been absorbed by the Faculty (WELS), if this provision is to effectively fulfil the needs of this cohort, it needs to be considered strategically, as part of our UoS strategy and be provided as adequate funding.

### Areas of concern

Some of the concerns identified in relation to developing open learning for forced migration communities are shared with those outlined under Theme 3 above, such as embedding a learner-centred, collaborative and decolonial approach, even when delivering learning at scale. We must ensure that we set forced migrant students up to succeed, which means outreach to communities, building skills, motivation and digital access, and ensuring appropriate support is in place throughout the student journey.

Several of our findings and recommendations match or complement those of the larger and more comprehensive RefER (Refugees' Educational Resources) report. However, the RefER recommendations have not seen any effective follow-up due to lack of funding. We are keen to ensure that this is not the case with this feasibility study.

## Conclusion

We ascertained that the OU has several modules, courses and programmes for students with content about forced migration, across a range of disciplines and subject areas and at various degree/ educational attainment levels, as well as free content on OpenLearn. We did not undertake an assessment of their quality or approach, due to the limited nature of our enquiry, and the time and resources needed to do such an audit.

In addition to taught courses, there is content on the OpenLearn platform which can be accessed freely. In the OU's library database, we have also found three recent PGR (PhD) dissertation projects, focusing on various aspects and issues of forced migration, refugees, and asylum seekers.

Our findings suggest that the OU is in a unique position, compared with 'brick universities', to lead the development of new online content that is accessible and provides flexible learning for forced migrants and for organisations that support them (see findings from the RefER project in Appendix 5). OpenLearn can also contribute to raising public awareness of forced migration, helping to counteract some of the more negative coverage in the media. This will be one of our key strengths in our journey to becoming a University of Sanctuary.

## Key Recommendations: Getting the balance right

We approached the recommendations with the realisation that the OU can – and already does – play an important and valuable role in meeting some of the challenges faced by forced migrant students. Through our distance learning model, our mission to be open, and our current activities in relation to forced migration, the University is well on its way to becoming a place of safety, sanctuary and equality.

*I really respect the OU much more than any other institution I have experienced. Not that they were bad, as some of them were quite helpful, but because I was significantly more supported by the OU than by anyone else.*

Nick (named changed), refugee and OU alumni

We acknowledge that getting the balance right between recommendations which seek to provide a humanitarian response and deliver on our social justice mission, and the reality of financial constraints, competing institutional priorities and the need for workable budgets will require a strategic, institution-wide approach.

In framing our responses to the research, we followed principles developed by [Article 26](#) of the Helena Kennedy Foundation (see Table 4 below) and [Higher Education and Displaced People](#), a guide produced by Universities UK International (UUKI). We were also guided by the findings and recommendations in the [Higher Education on Hold: Access to higher education for young people with insecure or unresolved immigration status](#) report by the Centre of Education and Youth (2021).



### Guiding Principles on Sanctuary Scholars in UK Higher Education

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

Table 4: Guiding Principles on Sanctuary Scholars in UK Higher Education (produced by Article 26)

The primary recommendation of this report is that the OU should become a University of Sanctuary. The recommendations outlined below draw on the findings from the feasibility study in order to outline the steps the OU can take to become a UoS: identifying students from a forced migration background, providing appropriate financial and pastoral support for them throughout their OU journey, and creating a space of safety and sanctuary.

We also make recommendations on how the OU can build on its existing reputation for collaboration, research and open learning to lead the UK's higher education sector in relation to this 'emerging cohort'. In addition to reputational benefits, this activity can inform content creation for curriculum, OpenLearn, FutureLearn and microcredentials to provide income-generation and position us for collaborations with national and international funding bodies.

## Recommendation 1: Identify forced migrant students at the OU

The lack of student data should be tackled as a first step to enable an informed and joined-up approach for forced migration activity. Gathering data in relation to students from forced migrant backgrounds is essential in order to make them visible at the OU, enable an understanding of their specific needs, and create targeted interventions.

### 1.1 Recognise forced migrant students in institutional policies, targets and budgets

Although not named in our policies and plans, forced migrants share one or more characteristics of target groups that the OU reports on. We should take an intersectional approach and recognise them as a distinct group with a “super-disadvantage” in accessing higher education. A budget should be allocated to support targeted interventions for this group.

### 1.2. Gather and use data to inform future activity

- Create a GDPR compliant ‘Sanctuary Flag’ in VOICE / CIRCE to make forced migrant students visible and ensure this is visible to tutors.
- Create awareness for student-facing staff (tutors and SST) so they know to record Sanctuary students at the point of registration or whenever they choose to declare.
- Document and report on data regularly.
- Commission research in relation to Sanctuary students at the OU.
- Conduct evaluation on targeted interventions.
- Use evidence collated to inform future programmes.

### 1.3. Incentivise forced migrant students to declare status

- Provide clear and accessible information for Sanctuary students on the support available at the OU, how to declare, and the benefits to them of sharing this information.
- Display this on the UoS webpages and promote through targeted mailings and initiatives.

## Recommendation 2: Tackle barriers to access and support

Although the Open University cannot eradicate the barriers to higher education that forced migrants face, there is an expectation that as the UK’s widening access university we will live up to our commitment to challenge under-representation and disadvantage.

### 2.1. Remove systemic barriers to student finance and provide sanctuary scholarships.

- Treat students from a forced migrant background as ‘home’ students for fee purposes.
- Provide scholarships (module fee waivers plus targeted support) for forced migrant background students for both undergraduate and postgraduate studies.
- Provide fee waivers in certain circumstances, for example for the OU’s EAP module or for English for Academic Study courses.
- Provide adequate bursaries and emergency financial assistance to sanctuary scholars.
- Offer non-cash alternatives to financial support as cash can impact negatively on benefits and other statutory support for forced migrants.

### 2.2. Tackle digital inequality

- Provide digital inclusion funds for purchase of devices and internet access.
- Provide on-demand printed materials where relevant.

### 2.3. Provide language support

- Waive fees for the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) module for students from a forced migrant background.



- Improve awareness of the internal free English for Academic Study support at the OU.
- Set up an English for Academic Study summer school.
- Develop a suite of free English language (ESOL) resources on OpenLearn.
- Provide adequate budgets for English language support and resource development.

## **2.4. Create pathways into higher education for sanctuary students that ‘meet them where they are’**

- Work with local partners to design and deliver pre-sessional courses and Advice, information and Guidance (AIG) sessions for students with English as a second or other language (ESOL) to develop the study skills they need to prepare for higher education, such as the Open to People project in Scotland (see page 32).
- Partner with colleges to create pathways into HE through articulation from Higher National courses.

## **2.5. Provide recognition for previous qualifications and knowledge**

- Investigate and if suitable use the [European Qualifications Passport for Refugees](#) or set up an alternative framework to recognise qualifications already acquired outside the UK for those seeking graduate entry.

## **2.6. Offer dedicated support for forced migrant students in line with existing provision for other widening access groups**

- Provide a first point of contact for Sanctuary students – a named person and dedicated mailbox for enquiries – and provide training so they are able to support and signpost appropriately.
- Provide relevant markers in VOICE / CIRCE.
- Consider how forced migrant students are impacted throughout their student journey and work cross-departmentally to ensure a holistic approach to support for sanctuary students.

## **2.7. Provide pastoral and mental wellbeing support**

- Train Personal Learning Advisors (PLAs) in forced migration issues and ensure sanctuary students are a priority group for this support.
- Provide training to SST staff and ALs on forced migration issues.
- Support ALs working with sanctuary students to ensure they are trauma-informed and have all the information they need about the student and the support available to them at the start of a module.
- Ensure access to mental health support and counselling via Togetherall or another partner.
- Provide mentoring and peer support networks, such as the initiative currently being piloted at the OU by members of the SWG.
- Recognise forced migration issues within processes for special circumstances, extensions and deferrals, allowing for greater flexibility for students who can experience life-changing circumstances often and without notice.
- Ensure that future Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategies recognise the particular challenges that students from this cohort face.

## **2.8. Recognise the impact of immigration challenges for forced migrant students and take action to mitigate these.**

- Provide guidance for students on their rights and options and inform staff of the actions they can take. Guidance is currently being developed by Universities of Sanctuary and [Migrants’ Rights Network](#).
- In line with the wider HE sector, develop processes for sanctuary students and OU staff to respond to Home Office challenges such as detainment, removal of benefits, rejection of application, or study bans to ensure the rights of the students are upheld.
- Develop courses on OpenLearn to provide public legal education in relation to immigration issues and challenges faced by forced migrants.

## **2.9. Foster a cohort of students and staff from forced migration backgrounds who can represent, support and champion the open and inclusive vision and mission of the university.**

## Recommendation 3: Provide adequate staffing resources

We recommend that the most appropriate approach would be to create a framework of support, informed by a clear strategic vision, firmly placed within EDI. Any approach taken to engage with displaced people must be strategic and institution-wide and must clearly understand staffing requirements. This should be adequately budgeted for, so that the necessary staffing levels are provided and that staff have the training and expertise to ensure positive outcomes for this cohort.

**3.1 Employ a dedicated staff member to coordinate OU activity related to sanctuary students, in line with the UoS criteria.**

**3.2. Undertake training and development to ensure that staff involved in activities with forced migrants develop competence in this area of work and have the necessary expertise.**

**3.3. Ensure that staff undertake training in safeguarding and trauma informed approaches.**

**3.4. Write additional workload expectations within job roles and agree them with staff, to ensure that time is managed effectively, and additional work does not lead to overloading.**

**3.5. Compensate staff adequately for time spent on additional activities. This can be done by:**

- Providing adequate budgets
- Providing opportunities for staff to claim time spent volunteering on additional activities as part of their volunteering allowance.
- Provide adequate compensation to ALs for time spent on forced migration activities, such as on the Mentors and Ambassadors groups.

## Recommendation 4: Consolidate research, scholarship and partnerships

Through years of experiences and engagement with international partners and stakeholders, and directly within refugee camps, the OU has developed expertise that should continue to be utilised for projects in this area. This expertise is distributed across several faculties and should be consolidated and utilised in an efficient and socially just manner.

**4.1. Establish a cross-faculty Centre for Forced Migration**

- The Open Justice Centre would provide a good model for the Centre, which would help to coordinate University of Sanctuary activities and forced migration-related research, scholarship and related projects and collaborations.
- Centre the lived experience and expertise of sanctuary students and staff to ensure a participatory, co-produced and decolonial approach to research and content development.
- Ensure all OU activity to support forced migrants has monitoring and evaluation built in.
- Use the research and evaluation output from the Centre to inform future development of the OU's curriculum, content for OpenLearn and potentially income-generating content on FutureLearn, such as microcredentials.

## Recommendation 5: Develop teaching and learning resources

Our OpenLearn platform provides the opportunity to widen our provision of online learning beyond the University. This outreach will be one of our key strengths in our journey to becoming a university of sanctuary.

**4.1. Create a Forced Migration Hub on OpenLearn.**

- Collate existing content on forced migration and of interest to forced migrant learners and organisations supporting these communities.
- Create new content, co-produced with the forced migrant community, that centres their lived experience.
- Develop a suite of free ESOL resources.
- Share learning from OU projects and research related to forced migration.
- Use open educational resources to create tailored pathways into OU study for forced migrants.
- Create content aimed at the general public to raise awareness of forced migration.

#### **4.2. Expand the open learning champions project.**

Building on the recent evaluation of the open learning champions project in Scotland, the model could be scaled up across the OU nations.

#### **4.3. Revisit the recommendations of the RefER project (see Appendix 5).**

- Update the RefER resource [database](#) in a format that is searchable and accessible by smartphone.
- Share the RefER database on our UoS webpages and promote to the UoS network.
- Continue to add to the resources audit and invite other universities in the UoS network to do so.

#### **4.4. Ensure OpenLearn is accessible to digitally excluded communities.**

- Provide offline formats for all content.
- Partner with local and national initiatives that provide digital devices and internet access.
- Partner with libraries and community organisations that support forced migrants to access online learning.

#### **4.5. Continue to collaborate with local, national and international partners that can help us deliver outreach at scale.**

#### **4.6. Engage current OU students with forced migration backgrounds as champions to reach out to forced migrant communities.**

#### **4.7. Create content related to forced migration for FutureLearn and micro-credentials.**

#### **4.8. Develop trauma-informed pedagogies.**

## Further considerations

### Potential income generation from becoming a UoS

This feasibility study report has already outlined the benefits that previous development, humanitarian and research projects have brought or continue to bring to the OU. These projects don't just add to the OU reputationally, enhancing its public and international image. They develop its own internal expertise and standing in this crucial area of policy and national and international development, and attract research and development funders and donors.

The projects identified are either led by OU staff or are projects (such as Gensem) with a key partner for knowledge development or technical input (LASER, UWE). Projects currently underway, such as the partnerships with Uber and DWP, have potential for further collaboration and funding. These projects built on strengths that the OU already has in:

- providing quality online and distance education,
- reaching a diverse range of students (not just school-leaving young adults),
- customising and delivering content for specific learner groups and stakeholders, both nationally and internationally, at scale.

The recommendations in this report are intended to help the OU is to build on these strengths and potential for future project and income-generation. Here we outline why forced migration communities represent a relatively untapped resource and constituency for the OU.

- Forced migrants represent a diverse group that have a high appetite for formal education and particularly distance education.
- We have found that this demand may be higher from 'in-work' refugees and their families, who may not be able to access education for themselves unless they have an income to support themselves or their families.
- Another example is of the demand among women who may not have the time or do not prefer to devote to education full-time due to caring or family responsibilities (based on feedback from forced migrant students).
- Forced migrants who are looking to re-accredit and reskill may not necessarily be looking for a full-time degree programme and prefer to access only specific modules and training courses. While language and ESOL / EAP / English for Academic Study courses have already been identified as leading this demand, there will be other programmes which certain populations within forced migrant communities may be interested in accessing more than others. For example, migrant women are over-represented in nursing and social care professions. the OU could therefore focus on understanding and responding to this demand.

There is also ample scope for using existing and new resources for those who work with forced migrant communities. Existing partnerships and ties with local institutions and bodies that do similar work, such as the Scottish Refugee Council, can be scaled up by the OU and we can use our online platforms, including FutureLearn, to make resources available to a wider audience. Courses such as microcredentials could be fully-funded, part-funded or cross-subsidised by employers, public funding bodies or private institutions.

### Potential risks

If we choose not to become a UoS, there is a risk of not being able to engage OU students who are forced migrants as they are not identified through OU systems. Students may well prefer not to identify themselves as forced migrants, if there are no benefits to doing so. If we do not offer them support, this could contribute to a widening in the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic community degree award gap. Without action taken to reclassify asylum seekers as 'home' students, the cost of offering scholarships at international fee liability would be unaffordable.

Not proceeding with this proposal or failing to obtain UoS status could lead to a perception that we are not living up to our social justice mission. As a significant number of universities and colleges have now been accredited under the scheme, with a substantial number of others by now offering scholarships, undergoing the accreditation process, or undertaking targeted initiatives for forced migrants, the OU risks being out of step with the sector. In addition, the OU risks not living up to its potential to create value at a sector, societal and economic level.

If we become a UoS, there is a potential risk of negative public reaction to targeted support for forced migrants. This probably minor risk would need to be managed as part of a cohesive approach to institutional communication.

## Timescale

Table 5 below outlines actions that can be undertaken to support sanctuary scholars at pre-application and application stages, and throughout their studies, transitions, and graduations. Some are relatively simple and less costly and can be taken immediately, whilst others require more planning and a strategic approach over the next several years.

Timescale	First year	1-3 years	3- 6 years
<b>Type of action</b>	Immediate actions, issues that can be readily addressed, aligning with sector responses, working towards UoS criteria, limited cost to university outside of existing budgets. Begin strategic planning.	Embedded in APS and EDI objectives, policies and processes are reviewed and updated. Costs could be medium as investment is made by the OU. New revenue streams are identified.	Embedded in OU strategies, actions are evaluated in relation to strategic objectives. Costs may be medium to high but initial investment begins to pay off. Some initiatives to become self-funded.
<b>Examples of action</b>	Named person from existing staff; developing and maintaining relationships with relevant forced migrant agencies; some training and development to staff; limited number of guidance resources produced; participating in relevant events; fees reduced from 'international' to 'home'; limited no of scholarships / bursaries to those meeting 'home' status ; dedicated sanctuary website; working /steering groups; mentoring programmes; curating existing resources in a Forced Migration Hub on Open Learn, etc.	Additions to short-term offers: a dedicated manager of Sanctuary activities; developing, maintaining co-productive partnerships with relevant forced migrant agencies; bespoke training and development to staff; adequate number of guidance resources co-produced with sanctuary scholars and partners; hosting and co-producing events; dedicated scholarships to those not meeting 'home' status; non-repayable grants; priority access to discretionary funds and digital accessibility funds; creating a Centre for Forced Migration - interdisciplinary centre for research and teaching, community outreach, and training; creating new resources for Forced Migration Hub on OpenLearn; inclusion of sanctuary scholars in all APS initiatives, etc.	New modules on forced migration and related issues; non-repayable finance offered to sanctuary scholars on graduating to get them started; bespoke language tuition courses; dedicated advisory service; research and development of resources, courses, modules (and income-generation); MOOCs; micro-credentials; apprenticeships and internships for sanctuary scholars; upskilling programmes; community partnerships, etc.
<b>Value to: Sanctuary scholars</b>	Medium	High	High
<b>OU</b>	Low	Medium	High to Very High
<b>Sector</b>	Low	Medium	High to Very High
<b>Society and economy</b>	Low to Medium	Medium	High to Very High

Table 5: Timescale of the UoS with short-, medium-, long-term plans and objectives

## Measuring progress

We will measure progress against the criteria of the UoS: engagement, impact of migration, dedicated staff member, scholarships and reaching out. We will gather evidence from a range of qualitative and quantitative sources including: numbers and attainment of students identified as forced migrants; learning analytics; case studies, focus groups and interviews; feedback from partner organisations; resources developed and how many are distributed and accessed; OpenLearn data; and UoS and OU Students Association website analytics.



## Conclusion: Becoming a UoS – a feasible and desirable action

The findings from this feasibility study suggest the Open University is well on its way to becoming a place of safety and sanctuary for forced migrants through our distance learning model, our mission to be open to all, and our current strength in activities in relation to forced migration.

Our recommendations seek to fulfil the dual purpose of strengthening OU leadership in EDI and in our social justice mission, at the same time as satisfying UoS criteria required to ‘earn this award’.

The evidence base provided by this feasibility study and its recommendations should ensure we implement our goals in a strategic, sustainable, viable and meaningful way in line with our social mission and institutional interests.

As a first step, the University needs to begin collecting data on students with a forced migration background so that it can inform UoS activity and ensure we can provide targeted support.

We have found that forced migrants are ‘super-disadvantaged’: likely to experience multiple, overlapping disadvantages shared with existing target groups, as well as specific disadvantages as a result of their migration status and history. Forced migrants should be named as a target group in our Access, Participation and Success plans and EDI goals. These initial changes can be made at little or no cost to the University.

Providing appropriate support for forced migrant students that recognises their specific challenges, from language and study skills support to trauma, mental health issues and a hostile immigration process, will require more investment but this would be in line with existing target groups such as support for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students, care-experienced and disabled students.

We considered the costs and benefits of providing scholarships. The largest cost would be module fee waivers but these need to be accompanied by wraparound support such as a Personal Learning Advisor, access to peer mentoring and bursaries for living costs. Training for tutors and advisors is essential to ensure support for forced migrants is appropriate and trauma informed. Working with Prof. Marcia Wilson, the Development Office, Philanthropy, Student Services, Academic Services, APS and others, we have developed strategies for this, presented in the recommendations.

We are well-positioned at the OU to assume a leading role in responding to the needs of forced migrants via distance learning in areas of research, pedagogy and collaborations at a local, national and global level, building on the learning of previous initiatives. We recommend pulling related activity together in a Centre for Forced Migration.

The OU is uniquely positioned to reach wide audiences including forced migrant learners through OpenLearn and our other open learning platforms. We have outlined significant, potential benefits to the OU in terms of expertise, reputation and income-generation from research and content development.

Our conclusion is that becoming a University of Sanctuary is not only feasible but imperative, as we rise to global challenges of injustice and instability to support an emerging cohort of sanctuary-seeking students.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Minimum Criteria for a University of Sanctuary Award



### Minimum Criteria for a University of Sanctuary Award

From: [Universities of Sanctuary](#)

The following minimum criteria must all be evident in your Sanctuary Award application:

- A public commitment to the City of Sanctuary vision through endorsement of the charter and signing of the local group pledge where relevant.
- Offer Sanctuary Scholarships which should be underpinned by the Article 26 Guiding Principles.
- A commitment to taking steps to minimise the impact that changes in government legislation has for forced migrants on the experience of applying for and attending university.
- A web page dedicated to the sanctuary initiatives and commitment of the university to a culture of welcome.
- Support the establishment of a student-led awareness group on campus (such as a STAR group).
- A dedicated member of staff/team of staff as a contact point for sanctuary students. This provision should be communicated to the students, be easily accessible and the staff member(s) must be appropriately trained.
- Create a three-year plan or embed into existing plans how the institution can continue to develop a culture of welcome.
- Evidence of effective communications that ensure sanctuary scholarships and other opportunities are taken up by people seeking sanctuary. See the Article 26 resource 'Reaching Out to Sanctuary Scholars'.
- Active engagement with the wider community including people seeking sanctuary and their local City of Sanctuary network or refugee support network if there is one.
- Active engagement with the national University of Sanctuary stream. This could be through financial/in kind contributions, contributions to the work of the University of Sanctuary national steering group, or email group (see resource section below for a link to join the email group). It's also vital to provide case studies to share good practice with others and help with the development of resources and furthering the movement.

## Appendix 2: Migration status terms and HE study conditions for forced migrants

The Open University uses the term **forced migrants** to cover all the different categories below, which describe distinct legal categories. This is from a wish to confer a level of dignity, whilst simplifying the terminology we use.

An **asylum seeker** is a person who has fled from their home country in search of safety and who has applied for asylum in another country. (A better term might be **person seeking asylum**, as 'asylum seeker' has acquired negative connotations.) A person seeking asylum is not allowed to work in paid or unpaid employment, has no recourse to public funds (NRPF) or (commonly) access to education (note: entitlement to FE and HE study differs in nations; note also recent decisions with regards to HE education not falling under 'recourse to public funds' and implications for other groups), but is entitled to asylum support (currently £39.63 / person /week) and housing. Extra payments are made in some situations (+£3/week to pregnant women; +£3/week to child 1-3; +£5/week to baby under 1). If an asylum seeker's claim is accepted, they can become a 'refugee' or may be granted 'humanitarian protection' (below). If it is rejected, they are asked to leave the UK voluntarily, or can be forcibly removed (deported). In certain circumstances, a fresh claim can be brought to the Home Office. This is an ever changing, complex area of law and the conditions are likely to drastically tighten under new proposed legislation.

A **refugee** is a person whose claim for asylum has been accepted and who has been granted refugee status in the UK under the 1951 Refugee Convention. They are often granted leave to remain in the UK for five years or, increasingly, for a shorter period (**Limited Leave to Remain**). Following this, they can apply for **Indefinite Leave to Remain** (ILR), which allows them to become **settled** in the UK. Whilst on limited leave, refugees have the right to work, recourse to public funds (benefits) and right to education.

A child who arrives in the UK without a relative/family member or a customary care giver is placed into care and considered as an **unaccompanied asylum-seeking child** (UASC), or **unaccompanied child** (UC) in Scotland. Where no documentation is available, usually, an age assessment is carried out to determine age and/or whether they are

children or adults (how immigration legislation is applied differs). Asylum seeking children in the UK are entitled to primary and secondary education. *(See further details below for updated immigration law)*

Some children were resettled in the UK through **VCRS (the Vulnerable Children Resettlement Scheme)** – they were given **refugee** status.

Some applicants are granted **Humanitarian Protection (HP)**, where they are found not to be a refugee but are nevertheless at risk of serious harm on return to their country of origin. Those with HP status are given an initial Limited Leave to Remain and generally benefit from the same rights as refugees. Whilst on limited leave, those with HP have the right to work, recourse to public funds (benefits) and right to education.

Some forced migrants, most from Syria, were **resettled** in the UK through UNHCR (through **VPRS - the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme**). **Resettlement** is the transfer of refugees from an asylum country to another State, that has agreed to admit them and ultimately grant them permanent residence. Those resettled in the UK were granted refugee status with an initial **Limited Leave to Remain** for a period of 5 years.

The VPRS and VCRS have come to an end and have been replaced by the new UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS), Community Sponsorship and Mandate Resettlement Scheme.

### Implications for those wishing to study at HE

Table 6 below aims to provide details of who can study at HE level. **The details should be treated with caution.**

Immigration status	Eligibility to study HE	Details and eligibility conditions
Refugees	Yes	Also eligible for student finance and home fees.
Humanitarian Protection status	Yes	Also eligible for student finance and home fees.
People seeking asylum	No (but potential exemptions)	Not eligible for home fees or student finance. Can probably access non-cash e.g. fee waiver support. Can be detained without notice at any time or moved to different accommodation anywhere in the UK. If their applications are rejected during their course of study, they are at risk of deportation or removal and can be detained without notice.
Indefinite leave to remain (ILR) (without refugee status)	Yes	Eligible for home fees and student finance, when moving on to HE / FE, if lawfully resident in the UK for 3 years prior.
Limited leave to remain	Yes for pre-sessional courses, possibly for other HE.	Depends in part on period of leave (may be 2 to 5 years). In some limited circumstances, may also be eligible for home fees and student finance, under the 'long residence' rule, if they <b>BOTH</b> : a) have lived in the UK for at least half their life (if aged 18-25), or for at least twenty years (if aged 26 or above), <b>AND</b> b) have been ordinarily resident in the UK for three years prior to the course start date.
Undocumented	Yes if under 18, No if over 18	Must apply for a route to settlement first and then will be subject to the long residence rule.

**Table 6: Legal immigration status and HE entitlements**

**NOTE: the details given above are subject to confirmation from expert legal practitioners and are not to be used for any purposes – they are intended here only as an indication of the complexity.**

## Appendix 3: Recommendations from the LASER project, BDU, 2019

### Six recommendations from the internal review of LASER

**Recommendation 1: Recognise that Open University study is difficult and only a minority of students are capable of success. Guide potential students accordingly.**

Degree-level study at a distance is always challenging. OU LASER students have additional barriers, over and above the complexities of their everyday lives due to their experiences and refugee status. OU LASER students are busy, with work and caring responsibilities, so the time available for studying is limited. OU modules assume a proficiency in English for academic purposes, which is a higher level than for everyday communication (IELTS 6). This causes issues in group tutorials online and in producing written assignments.

#### *Possible actions for Recommendation 1*

1. Be very clear about the commitment and level of English required for this type of study. A 60 credit module typically needs at least 12 hours per week of study over 9 months. Suggest OU provides examples of assessment questions for a range of modules, so students can see the level of English required.
2. Within the range of options available across providers, consider OU study to be the most challenging and communicate this to the students. Ensure that any student considering OU study first completes at least one English-language MOOC. These are far lower in workload but give a sense of the commitment required and an opportunity to practise English.

**Recommendation 2: Restrict the curriculum offer.**

Although one of the strengths of the OU is the broad curriculum, not all modules are suitable for LASER, due to the students' overseas status and unreliable access to the internet. Also, the path to a qualification should be considered when choosing a study plan, because some qualifications require several years of study.

#### *Possible actions for Recommendation 2*

1. Only offer modules that are suitable for students who cannot travel to the UK at all. (Some OU 'overseas' modules assume the student is able to travel to the UK for a short period for residential school).
2. Restrict the curriculum to Level 1 modules in the first instance, unless there is an exceptional case to be made.
3. Ensure that the linked qualification can be obtained in reasonable time. Sub-degree qualifications, such as Certificates and Diplomas, may be more suitable than a full degree.
4. Where possible, choose modules that have a high proportion of print rather than online delivery.

**Recommendation 3: Students need extra support to understand the norms of OU student behaviour.**

There have been some cases where students went beyond the boundaries of what is considered acceptable in assignments and communication with tutors and other students. These instances are likely due to misunderstanding the norms of student behaviour and the boundary between peer support and collusion.

- Two students worked on the same computer for the same assignment and submitted very similar work. Although some peer support is acceptable, when two very similar assignments are submitted, this has to be investigated as collusion, and the assessment may be declared invalid.
- One student produced a final assignment that showed much greater proficiency in English than earlier assignments (possibly due to help from a friend). The mismatch was so pronounced that the tutor was unable to verify the work as the student's, so the module was failed due to suspected collusion.
- Some students asked other students and their tutors for personal email addresses and help in travelling to the UK. This is a very sensitive topic, and care is needed to balance the student's needs with those of the tutor and UK student peers.

#### *Possible actions for Recommendation 3*

1. Consider whether in-country support staff might take on some of the responsibilities of an Education Officer. This role is typically face to face within a partner organisation outside the OU. The EO works with vulnerable students to establish boundaries of appropriate behaviour, intervenes to offer support beyond academic skills and is in

contact with the tutor or staff tutor. Local support with English for academic purposes could then be documented, so the assessment processes are respected whilst helping the students.

2. Produce clear written guidance for LASER students about the norms of UK student behaviour. Provide support for travel and asylum applications outside OU processes, where appropriate.

**Recommendation 4: Ensure that computer and internet access are available. Provide off-line alternative material where possible.**

Many OU modules require a computer with internet access for the teaching content, tutorials and assessment. Some teaching material can be printed on demand, although this removes the interactive content that is central to some modules. A tablet computer may be sufficient for most modules, and some students were issued with those during the project. Many of the LASER students had only a smartphone and some computer access at the Jordanian Learning Centre, although internet access was unreliable.

*Possible actions for Recommendation 4*

1. Lend or give every student a tablet computer with internet access for the duration of the module.
2. Investigate downloading offline versions of web-based material where possible. The OU is currently developing these across the curriculum.
3. Continue to offer computer and internet facilities in a dedicated centre where possible.
4. Provide printing facilities for essential course components such as the assignment booklet, which are usually available as PDF.
5. For modules without much interactive content, obtain print-on-demand versions of teaching material at an early stage in the course.

**Recommendation 5: In-country support and OU systems need to work together to support each student. Roles and relationships need to be defined clearly.**

The project has evolved since its inception, with processes, roles and responsibilities renegotiated reactively. The relationship between the British Council and the Open University appears to have been managed primarily as a partnership. Most of the communication between the organisations has been via one or two key staff in each organisation. Whilst this works well for a simple partnership, it can create issues when OU specialist student support colleagues are unable to contact students or in-country staff directly. Effectively, the OU colleagues in the line of communication take on the roles of the Student Support Team and Special Needs Advisors. This restricts the support available to the student.

*Possible actions for Recommendation 5*

1. If a similar scheme is considered in future, take a design approach even before bidding for funds, to clarify roles and relationships. Be proactive rather than reactive.
2. Involve the Staff Tutors and Student Support Teams in the communications between the partner organisations, where appropriate, to support the students.

**Recommendation 6: Within the OU, clarify roles and lines of communication to ensure students are supported**  
Within the OU, the refugee status of the LASER students was invisible until first contact from the tutor. These students were managed alongside other overseas students. Advance communication to Staff Tutors and Associate Lecturers would be helpful in ensuring support processes work smoothly. Colleagues in Registration and Fees have considerable experience in managing non-standard students within partnership schemes and can offer their expertise in helping to design any future partnership scheme. IF the available curriculum is restricted (Rec 2), the process of management is simplified.

*Possible action for Recommendation 6*

1. Hold an internal OU workshop for support and management staff to clarify roles, responsibilities and lines of communication.





## Appendix 4: Fees and Scholarship Costings

Nation	Credits	Study equivalent	Cost module per	Funding available
Scotland	60	Part time	£1,056	Part time fee grant, and:  OUSBA Loan, Employer Scholarship, Enhanced Learning Credits, Carer's Scholarships Fund, Care Experienced Bursary, Disabled Veterans Scholarship fund, Carer's Bursary, DSA
	120	Full time	£2,112	
	360	Entire degree	£6,336	
Northern Ireland	60	Part time	£1,056	Part-Time Tuition Fee Loan, OUSBA Loan, Employer sponsorship, ELCs, Carer's Scholarships Fund, Care Experienced Bursary, Disabled Veterans Scholarship fund, Carer's Bursary, DSA
	120	Full time	£2,112	
	360	Entire degree	£6,336	
Wales	60	Part time	£1,284	Part-Time Tuition Fee Loan, OUSBA Loan, Employer sponsorship, ELCs, Carer's Scholarships Fund, Care Experienced Bursary, Disabled Veterans Scholarship fund, Carer's Bursary, DSA
	120	Full time	£2,568	
	360	Entire degree	£7,704	
England	60	Part time	£3,168	Part-Time Tuition Fee Loan, OUSBA Loan, Employer sponsorship, ELCs, Carer's Scholarships Fund, Care Experienced Bursary, Disabled Veterans Scholarship fund, Carer's Bursary, DSA
	120	Full time	£6,336	
	360	Entire degree	£19,008	
International	60	Part time	£3,168	None
	120	Full time	£6,336	
	360	Entire degree	£19,008	

**Table 7: Comparative modules and degree costs at the Open University by nation. These are based on average module costs and may vary depending on module choice.**

Year of Study	Scotland 'home'			Northern 'home'		Ireland		Wales 'home'		England 'home'		International	
	OU	OU with PTFG	Other (with SAAS)	OU	Other	OU	Other	OU	Other	OU	Other	OU	Other*
1	£2,112	£0	£0	£2,112	£4,530	£2,568	£9,000	£6,336	£9,250	£6,336	£11,000	-	30,000
2	£2,112	£0	£0	£2,112	£4,530	£2,568	£9,000	£6,336	£9,250	£6,336	£11,000	-	30,000
3	£2,112	£0	£0	£2,112	£4,530	£2,568	£9,000	£6,336	£9,250	£6,336	£11,000	-	30,000
4			£0										
Total Degree cost to student	£6,336	£0	£0	£6,336	£13,590	£7,704	£27,000	£19,008	27,750	£19,008	£33,000-£90,000		

**Table 8: Comparative university study costs at the OU and other UK universities, by nation, based on FTE study**  
**\*Note: This is based on international students in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. International students in Scottish universities may pay as much as £15,000-£52,000/year.**

## Eligibility of forced migrant students for financial support in Scotland

In Scotland, people recognised as refugees by the British government, their spouses and children, may have the residency conditions for student finance (SAAS) funding waived (including the Part-time Fee Grant) and may be eligible to have their full module costs funded. For some modules, the SAAS funding does not cover the entire cost and this is topped up by the University. Asylum seekers are not eligible for SAAS funding and are currently liable for international fees.

## Policy changes – fee classifications and scholarships/fee waiver costs

The tables below outline the implications of treating asylum seekers as if they were “home” students, in two different models. A policy change on classification would mean that they would be liable for home fees rather than international. This would make most difference in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland but would make no difference to students living in England.

### Model 1 – Reclassify asylum seekers and undocumented people as ‘home’ students.

Fee comparison with and without this policy change giving asylum seekers and undocumented people ‘home’ eligibility.

Year of Study	Scotland AS		Northern Ireland AS		Wales AS		England AS	
	With**	Without	With	Without	With	Without	With	Without
1	£2,112	£6,336	£2,112	£6,336	£2,568	£6,336	£6,336	£6,336
2	£2,112	£6,336	£2,112	£6,336	£2,568	£6,336	£6,336	£6,336
3	£2,112	£6,336	£2,112	£6,336	£2,568	£6,336	£6,336	£6,336
<b>Total Degree cost to student</b>	<b>£6,336</b>	<b>£19,008</b>	<b>£6,336</b>	<b>£19,008</b>	<b>£7,704</b>	<b>£19,008</b>	<b>£19,008</b>	<b>£19,008</b>
<b>Can student access finance?</b>	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No

Table 9: Cost of Study: Policy Change Model 1

### Model 2 - Reclassify asylum seekers and undocumented people as ‘home’ students with *lowest nation ‘home’ fee* eligibility.

Now we compare fee costs assuming an OU policy change making asylum seekers and undocumented people liable for *lowest nation ‘home’ fee* eligibility. This would predominantly benefit students resident in England. Consistency in fee liability would improve parity. It should be noted here that asylum seekers may be moved by the Home Office to another nation during their studies.

Year of Study	Scotland AS		Northern Ireland AS		Wales AS		England AS	
	With**	Without	With lowest	Without	With lowest	Without	With lowest	Without
1	£2,112	£6,336	£2,112	£6,336	£2,112	£6,336	£2,112	£6,336
2	£2,112	£6,336	£2,112	£6,336	£2,112	£6,336	£2,112	£6,336

3	£2,112	£6,336	£2,112	£6,336	£2,112	£6,336	£2,112	£6,336
Total cost to student	£6,336	£19,008	£6,336	£19,008	£6,336	£19,008	£6,336	£19,008
Additional cost to OU	£0	£0	£0	£0	£1,368	£0	£12,672	£0
Can student access finance?	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No

Table 10: Cost of Study: Policy Change Model 2

Note: 'Additional cost' figures are based on difference between 'home' fee in that nation and lowest 'home' fee.

### Model 3 – Combination of reclassifications and scholarships

This table (11) illustrates the cost of study to a sanctuary student when offered scholarships or fee waivers by a university. Reclassifying asylum seekers as home students reduces the subsidy cost to the university. These costs are based on the 'home' fees in different nations, assuming that the university subsidises the 'home' fees as part of its scholarship / fee waiver. The cost to the OU is lower, relative to other HEIs.

KEY: HPC = 'home' policy change; SP/FW = scholarship/fee waiver

	Scotland		Northern Ireland		Wales AS		England AS		Other UK Universities	
	With HPC + SP/FW	With SP/FW, without HPC	With HPC + SP/FW	With SP/FW, without HPC	With HPC + SP/FW	With SP/FW, without HPC	With HPC + SP/FW	With SP/FW, without HPC	With HPC + SP/FW	With SP/FW, without HPC
Cost to student	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0
Cost to HEI per student***	£6,336	£19,008	£6,336	£19,008	£7,704	£19,008	£19,008	£19,008	£7,280 (in Scotland < £27,750)	£33k-£90k (in Scotland < £200k)

Table 11: Costs of Study: Policy Change Model 3 with UoS scholarships

## Appendix 5: Recommendations from the OU's RefER project, 2018

[Read the full report on the Refugees' Educational Resources Project \(pdf\)](#)

### **Include refugees and asylum seekers in planning, development and implementation of solutions**

The RefER project focused on ascertaining data from staff and volunteers, rather than from refugees and asylum seekers themselves. The starting point for any follow-up work must therefore necessarily be to consult refugees and asylum seekers on the findings from the project, and to include members from these groups in the planning, development and implementation of any follow-up interventions. In line with this recommendation, one valuable suggestion made at the RefER workshop was to identify frontline workers in organisations who themselves have refugee backgrounds, and who would be willing to act as “brokers” between the refugees/ asylum seekers and their supporting organisations.

### **Develop the Resources Audit database further**

The Resources Audit has already been publicly disseminated in its current Google Spreadsheet format, and has received some attention via social media (for example, retweets on Twitter and visits to the respective blog posts where it was first shared). It is therefore clearly already meeting a need for information about relevant resources for the audience. To get the maximum benefit from this output from the project in future, it is recommended that the Resources Audit spreadsheet be repackaged in a more user-friendly format and made more widely available. Some suggestions for doing that follow.

#### **Reformat the database**

The Resources Audit would play a greater role in supporting the sector if it were reformatted in a more visually appealing and more user-friendly way, modifying the database to ensure that:

- It can be accessed and viewed with ease on a smartphone;
- It can be searched by filtering based on the different categories available;
- Tags are added to every item, so that a single resource can be categorised in different ways;
- A more granular breakdown of topics is provided;
- Levels of difficulty are clearly stated using a single, consistent measure (for example, the PEARL website's “Levels of study”).

#### **Host the database on an OU platform**

The database would obviously have greater reach if it were to be hosted on a platform with a wide community of users, such as OpenLearn.

#### **Curate themed collections on OpenLearn Create**

The Resources Audit demonstrates that there is a very large body of free, online resources in existence which have been found to be relevant to refugees, asylum seekers and frontline support workers in the UK. However, it is easy for users to feel overwhelmed when trying to find the right resource for a specific situation. Collating some of these resources into themed collections on OpenLearn Create, in partnership with their creators, would have two key benefits: the creation of meaningful learning pathways for all users, and the possibility for individuals and organisations to contribute further relevant resources in the future, as discussed below.

#### **OpenLearn Create as a framework for creating learning pathways**

Several respondents in the study expressed a desire for learning pathways that incorporate different resources, activities and courses, delivered using a range of different media. Learning pathways created in the form of collections on OpenLearn Create would make it explicit where the learner should start, what they should learn first, and what they will be able to do as a result of their learning. For refugees and asylum seekers, these learning pathways might be organised around topics such as rights and responsibilities in the UK, how to cope with a new setting, language learning skills, how to learn online, etc. For staff and volunteers, the learning pathways could address topics such as counselling techniques, language teaching skills, cultural awareness, and essential soft skills for all involved in refugee support. Since there is already so much material in existence, it may not be necessary to create new material. Where existing resources are not published under an open licence, negotiation would be needed with those providers; alternatively, those resources could simply be hyperlinked to as additional/ supplementary materials. It may also be

possible to follow the example from Kiron Higher Education Organisation of creating a series of “Study tracks”, which was done by mapping the stated learning outcomes of selected free, online courses against those of programmes offered by typical German universities. In the OU’s case, the learning pathways would need to map onto adult basic education and further education as well as higher education in the UK - ideally leading to credits which would be recognised by institutions and employers.

### **Possibility for contributions from members of the public**

Through OpenLearn Create, members of the public could contribute additional materials or updates to existing materials. Members of the wider community of refugees, asylum seekers and organisational staff could submit resources that they have created themselves or that have been created by others. Users could upload clips of people speaking in accents typical of their local environments; items could be translated; additional media added, and so on, addressing the need for localisation, translation and adaptation. This could become a catalyst for refugees and asylum seekers to proactively go out into their local communities to find or create source material, for example capturing short audio recordings of senior citizens speaking in the local dialect.

### **Offer a Co-creation and Co-curation (“CoCo”) MOOC**

One way for the OU to support both the refugee/ asylum seeker community and the frontline workers in the sector simultaneously would be to offer a MOOC on co-creating and co-curating free, online learning resources, which could be branded the “CoCo” MOOC. The aim of the CoCo MOOC would be to help build communities of practice, where refugees/ asylum seekers and frontline workers learn skills and techniques for collaboratively developing and adapting online resources to meet specific needs of local community members. These communities of practice would be primarily local, with participants meeting in the learning centres of their organisations or at local libraries, and would also include the element of virtual support and networking amongst the wider community of participants. The CoCo MOOC would be pedagogically driven by team-based project work, and supported by the provision of guidelines, checklists and models of good practice from the OU. A key learning outcome would be the submission of jointly created/curated, openly licensed resources to OpenLearn Create. This would have the added benefit of increasing the pool of resources that are directly relevant to refugees and asylum seekers in specific local contexts in the UK. The CoCo MOOC would complement existing MOOCs aimed at the same audiences (e.g. Volunteering with Refugees, Migrants and Refugees in Education: a Toolkit for Teachers, Working Supportively with Refugees: Principle, Skills and Perspectives, and Aim Higher: Access to Higher Education for Refugees and Asylum Seekers, as well as those offered by the PADILEIA project, Kiron and other programmes), and may even contribute to ongoing development of resources for those MOOCs, thus amplifying the OU’s impact.

### **Provide recognition for the skills of staff, volunteers and learners**

Many teachers and volunteers lack time and encouragement to spend on professional development, even if some spend a great deal of unpaid time learning how to use digital tools and resources in their teaching. Recognition and incentives for teachers and volunteers in terms of badges and certificates that can be used in job applications would provide a welcome contribution to professional development. One way of doing this could be a development of the badges concept already in place in some OpenLearn courses and OpenLearn Create. A series of professional development courses could be offered on OpenLearn, as proposed above, with verifiable badges as recognition. Where refugees and asylum seekers themselves contribute to course curation and creation, they would of course also be eligible for such recognition. The badges would be meaningful additions to recipients’ CVs and would enhance their opportunities for further employment. If possible, there should be pathways towards converting these badges into credits recognised by educational institutions or employ

[Read the full report on the Refugees’ Educational Resources Project](#) (pdf)

## Appendix 6: Forced migration related activities at the OU

Projects and initiatives (ongoing and completed) captured in the scoping survey. This is in addition to SWG activities captured in Appendix 7.

No	Name of Activity	Description	Status	Unit	Geographical Location
1	<b>OpenLearn Champions</b>	This group will be championing the Open University's free learning resource website OpenLearn - and our Wales and Welsh language specific content on OpenLearn Cymru.	Present/ongoing	OUIW Partnerships Team	Cardiff
2	<b>OU Ambassadors</b>	This group are passionate advocates of learning, can be based anywhere in Wales and will be supported to learn more about everything from free study to signposting to formal study pathways, undergraduate to postgraduate and Degree Apprenticeships.	Present/ongoing	OUIW Partnerships Team	Cardiff
3	<b>Introductions to OpenLearn</b>	a series of workshops delivered through Covid Chronicles on Introductions to OpenLearn as a free learning and study resource. Specific attention is on the Everyday English Skills courses to support IELTS exams. Also, as a result of these workshops we have been strengthening the relationship with Welsh Refugee Council and will be delivering further Everyday English sessions with them.	Present/ongoing	OUIW Partnerships Team	Cardiff
4	<b>Unlocked Archive</b>	The Unlocked Archive is a digital exhibition in response to the Covid-19 pandemic by a community of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants and part of the Cov-19 Chronicles from the Margins project.	Present/ongoing	OU in Wales Marcomms, OU in Wales Partnerships, FASS	Cardiff
5	<b>Pathways to Learning events</b>	The Pathways to Learning events are a series of free online workshops for asylum seekers, refugees and migrants and organisations who support asylum seekers, refugees and migrants in the Swansea/south Wales. The workshop explores relevant free learning resources that the OU in Wales offers.	Present/ongoing	OU in Wales Marcomms, OU in Wales Partnerships, FASS	Cardiff
6	<b>Open Access audit</b>	Worked with the Scottish Refugee Council on an audit of open access learning materials aimed at (or suitable for) refugees (e.g. English language skills).	Past	FASS	Glasgow
7	<b>Migration for Inclusive African Growth project</b>	This is the first multi-country comparative study of contemporary migrant communities in Africa that uses the concept of inclusive growth. The overarching aim of the project is to	Present/ongoing	FASS, International Development	Milton Keynes



		understand whether and to what extent recent migration within and to Africa is contributing to more sustainable and inclusive growth on the continent, and to enable policymakers and practitioners to harness this knowledge for more inclusive growth		Research Office	
8	<b>Forced migration roundtable event</b>	<p>Forced migration roundtable event in January 2021 to determine how we can work in partnership with third sector organisations to support these communities. Now scoping three projects to pilot in 21/22:</p> <p>Skills for employment - digital and employability skills with wraparound ESOL support and career guidance (initial cohort of 20 participants)</p> <p>Skills for study - support from an OU tutor to build academic skills, advice and guidance re course choice and funding options (initial cohort of 20 participants)</p> <p>Community-based ESOL resources - WELS colleagues will be working with minority communities in Glasgow to co-create online ESOL resources</p>	Past & future	APS Scotland team, External Engagement and Partnerships team, WELS	Glasgow
9	<b>Time for action: integration policies in Scotland post Covid-19</b>	<p>Following the Covid-19 pandemic a new approach is needed to unleash the benefits migrants, refugees and asylum seekers bring to Scottish society and the Scottish economy. This is an often-overlooked area as discussions around migration tend to be driven by a Westminster agenda.</p> <p>Drawing on Scottish democratic principles and human rights this event explores the potential for inclusive employment, entrepreneurship and innovation that can be generated both for and by new arrivals in Scotland. Following the event organisers plan to draft a policy paper. Drawing on research, lived experiences and plenary discussions this will highlight the opportunities and longer-term benefits of a coherent policy in relation to migrant, refugee and asylum seekers in this area.</p>	Past	OU in Scotland, FBL	Glasgow
10	<b>OU in Scotland Fika session (informal staff knowledge exchange event) for Refugee Week</b>	Open to People: how the OU in Scotland can support pathways into education and employment for forced migrants	Past	OU in Scotland, FBL	Glasgow
11	<b>Citizens: Milton Keynes (Cmk) alliance</b>	This group is part of Thames Valley Citizens and the Citizens UK network in England and Wales. See the Cmk website on the support by some of the alliance members for Syrian Refugees in Milton	Present/ongoing	OU	Milton Keynes

Keynes  
<http://www.citizensmk.org.uk/?s=pillar>

12	<b>How does communicative language teaching take place across crisis contexts?</b>	This research project aims to generate evidence on improving English language teaching in crisis contexts and to support wider uptake of communicative language teaching. English language skills are a significant barrier to tertiary education for refugees. The research will produce three outputs: a research paper, a database of teacher narratives and a professional development resource on contextualising new language teaching strategies. Likely focus on refugee teachers in Jordan and Lebanon. It is a collaboration between the OU and two NGOs - Mosaik Education and Centreity	Ongoing	IET	Milton Keynes
13	<b>Connected learning in crisis contexts: Educators' perspectives on needs and support in the context of refugee tertiary education.</b>	The study aims to advance knowledge around connected English language learning programmes in tertiary education and to provide a roadmap for evidence-based approaches to the design and delivery of technology supported professional development opportunities for language teachers in refugee settings. To carry out this inquiry the study will use qualitative methodologies and participatory approaches, particularly drawing on teachers as peer-researchers in their work environment. The focus is on refugee teachers in Jordan. It is a collaboration between the OU and two NGOs - Mosaik Education and Centreity	Past	IET	Milton Keynes
14	<b>Evaluation of the Frontline Immigration Advice Project</b>	The project was primarily concerned with the development of the FIAP as a technology-supported professional programme in the Voluntary and Community sector in the UK with the aim of improving access to good quality, regulated immigration advice and support to vulnerable people. The	Past	IET	Milton Keynes
15	<b>EdD Reserch</b>	David O'Callaghan, is doing research on the educational experiences of children living in Direct Provision in Ireland while waiting for their asylum applications to be examined.	Present/ongoing	IET	Dublin
16	<b>Community Partnerships Project (CPP)</b>	This group works with partners who support forced migrants. In the past we have had a number of Syrian refugees study through the CPP, and the plan is to expand the project to reach a more diverse range of partners. We are currently actively looking for more community partners due to be being awarded additional funding from the Department for the Economy - this	Present/ongoing	Widening Access	Dublin

		should include more forced migrant learners being part of the project.			
17	<b>SALSA: Smart cities and language learning</b>	The SALSA project has grown from a number of different research strands in the Open University. We wrote a paper about the benefits of incidental learning on smartphones and some of the challenges it faced in 2012, and suggested that a smart city might be the place to maximise the benefits of this innovative approach to teaching and learning	Past	IET	Milton Keynes
18	<b>MASELTOV</b>	MASELTOV researches and develops innovative information technologies to facilitate bidirectional integration via local community building and to empower cultural diversity	Past	IET	Milton Keynes
19	<b>An interdisciplinary process of designing educational technology systems for displaced war-affected children</b>	PhD Research	Past	IET	Milton Keynes
20	<b>BJT immigration manuals</b>	Designing online provision for BJT immigration manuals. These are used to train OISC advisers (making them qualified to give legal advice in immigration/ asylum law in differing levels).	Present/ongoing	FBL	Dublin
21	<b>Decolonising Peace Education in Africa</b>	We are helping to learn about pedagogies and how they can be more inclusive and equitable. Influences various groups at the OU through the decolonising the university work. Partners in various African countries. Also working on this with IMISCOE, the European migration network	Present/ongoing	SSGS	Milton Keynes
22	<b>Children Caring on the Move</b>	I am currently conducting a research project titled Children Caring on the Move which explores separated child migrants care of others as they navigate asylum and welfare systems in England. We use participatory approaches to migrant young people as Young Researchers. They then collected data from other lone child migrants.	Present/ongoing	Psychology & Counselling	Milton Keynes
23	<b>Linguistic support needs and available/ suitable support for forced</b>	This initiative is focusing on multilingual communities, identity, diversity and social cohesion in the Greater Glasgow area as the most populous, multi-cultural and -lingual part of Scotland. The aim is to establish a major field	Present/ongoing	WELS, School of LAL	Glasgow

	<b>migrant women and children</b>	study in Greater Glasgow with key stakeholders, to ask in what ways speakers from migration backgrounds, especially women and children, are able to use their mother tongues within the community, are supported to participate and integrate in society and access English/Scots language learning opportunities, and are supported in terms of their language use and skills in education contexts. How access to vital services is supported or not through translation/interpreting.			
24	<b>Connected Learning in Crisis Consortium</b>	In collaboration with Koula Charitonos (IET) we are representing OU at the Connected Learning in Crisis Consortium.	Present/ongoing	IET	Milton Keynes
25	<b>Non participatory arts based methods for migrants' civic engagement</b>	Research/engagement activity on participatory arts based methods for migrants' civic engagement. This includes a partnership with Refugee Forum North East	Present/ongoing	SSGS	Milton Keynes
26	<b>Asylum Seekers club</b>	We have an Asylum Seekers club who are looking to become a Society.	Present/ongoing	OU Students Association	Milton Keynes

Table 12: Projects and initiatives captured in the scoping survey (ongoing and completed)

## Appendix 7: Recent activities led by the Sanctuary Working Group

No	Name of Activity	Description	Status	Unit/ Location
1	<b>Access to HE for Forced Migrants</b>	This conference aimed to improve access to higher education and employment opportunities including the role of further education for forced migrants in Wales and beyond	Completed	Wales
2	<b>Covid Chronicles</b>	Cov19: Chronicles from the Margins is a participatory project co-created by a group of researchers who have experience of forced migration and/or have worked and lived with refugees, asylum seekers and undocumented people.	Ongoing	FASS, Online
3	<b>Ambassadors/ Champions Programme</b>	All faculties, regions and units of the OU should have University of Sanctuary champions. Their role would involve among other things, linking up with related initiatives to avoid duplication, raising awareness on the plight of refugees and asylum seekers, building up support networks for forced migrant students. There will be a recruitment process and training and support will be available to address individual needs.	Ongoing	Central, currently online
4	<b>Mentors Programme</b>	Mentors will support mentees (forced migrant students) in a variety of ways, including language support (including academic English), employability skills, career coaching, essay writing, immigration services, recognition of prior learning and prior qualifications, IT skills, rights and entitlements, and budgeting skills. Mentoring should start early for example during the access programmes, such as the Study Skills Pilot Project in Scotland.	Ongoing	Central, currently online
5	<b>OSTARS</b>	In 2020, some of our OU students set up the OSTARS group, to support the plight of forced migrants and their access to HE in the UK. Latterly renamed OU STAR.	Ongoing	Central, currently online
6	<b>Sanctuary Webpages</b>	Temporary webpages to showcase Sanctuary activity – on FASS website	Ongoing	FASS, Central, online
7	<b>Sanctuary Website</b>	A dedicated OU UoS website that can be a resource hub for forced migrant students and staff	Planned	Online

8	<b>Student Voice Week Activities</b>	4 events being held during SVW in November 2021 making students and staff aware of the UoS project and the work the Working Group is doing	Ongoing	Central, currently online
9	<b>Uber partnership research and video production</b>	Collaborative Research Project with Uber Student-Drivers at the OU. The flagship programme ( <a href="https://skillshub.online">https://skillshub.online</a> ) allows PDs to undertake formal high-quality academic study free of charge at the Open University, or to pass this credit onto a direct family member. This programme aims to retain the best drivers, whilst aiming is to help them gain education and qualifications so they can move on to better jobs and salary levels. We are currently documenting learning experiences of any drivers from forced migrant backgrounds enrolled in the programme, through a survey and interview-based research. This learning will feed into our Feasibility Study and as outreach material for the programme	Ongoing	Central
10	<b>Sanctuary for Afghan academics at risk Initiative (SAAARI)</b>	All four faculties have been approached with regards to providing a place for an Afghan scholar at risk, through CARA (Council of At Risk Academics). All those involved have appreciated the critical nature and humanitarian and academic importance of this request and asserted their commitment to this, as well as their willingness to fund places, despite the costs involved, the timing of the request (post budgeting) and other prior commitments which also require funding.	Ongoing	C  entral
11	<b>Careers / employability / internships</b>	<p>Paid placement/internship scheme for a Wales graduate* funded through GROW. GROW (Graduate Opportunities Work Experience), is a new, HEFCW-funded project, set up in response to the coronavirus pandemic to support graduates* looking for work.</p> <p>*The GROW project is open to those who have completed their studies since 2019 or are expected to complete this year. This includes all modes of study (full time and part-time) and levels (certificates, diplomas, first degree, other UG, PGR and PGT).</p>	Planned	Wales
12	<b>MK Community initiative with local council</b>	Partners and local activities to get MK becoming a City of Sanctuary	Planned	Central, Milton Keynes



13	<b>Open to People – Pathways into study</b>	The programme is designed to support you to develop your academic and study skills. The programme focusses on key skills such as time management, reflection, critical thinking, research skills and academic writing skills.	Ongoing	Scotland
14	<b>Legal guidance documentation</b>	Creating legal guidance documentation in collaborations with Migrants Rights Centre and Universities of Sanctuary	Planned	Law School, central
15	<b>City of Sanctuary Conference</b>	Annual City of Sanctuary conference	Completed	External
16	<b>Student Voice Week – APS Scotland</b>	This is a student blog on access to education to be published during SVW	Ongoing	APS Scotland, central
17	<b>Proposed article in <i>Journal of Lifelong Studies</i></b>	Details yet to be confirmed	Planned	External
18	<b>Named person and dedicated email</b>	Setting up a dedicated sanctuary email box and named person	Completed	Central
19	<b>Forced Migration Hub on Open Learn</b>	Creating a forced migration Hub on Open Learn in collaboration with the Open Learn team	Planned	Central, online

Table 13: Sanctuary Working Group activities