

# Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee

## Asylum Seekers in Scotland Inquiry

### University of Glasgow Submission June 2023

The University of Glasgow is one of top world 100 universities and is the fourth-oldest University in the English-speaking world. We are a proud international actor, hosting students from 140 countries and with an alumni network of over 220,000 people.

In June 2023 the University of Glasgow was ranked 13<sup>th</sup> overall in the world in the [Times Higher Education \(THE\) Impact Rankings](#) for our commitment to achieving the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (or SDGs). Overall we came 2<sup>nd</sup> in the UK and 1<sup>st</sup> in Scotland- performing 2<sup>nd</sup> overall in the world for SDG 11 concerned with sustainable cities and communities and 6<sup>th</sup> in the world for SDG 16, concerned with peace, justice and strong institutions.

Universities in general have an important role to play in Scotland's responsibility for asylum seekers and in May 2023 the Scottish Government [announced](#) that tuition fees will be extended to migrant students in Scotland, following the publication of the [consultation analysis](#) on the Residency criteria for access to financial support in Further and Higher Education. This was welcomed by the sector and as noted by Universities Scotland:

*'higher education institutions are well placed to be able to provide wide ranging support to people who are fleeing violence and persecution. They can and are supporting people and communities in different circumstances: in their home countries, in refugee camps, and when they are settled in the UK. Our academic staff contribute research and knowledge on issues around international law, immigration, displacement, conflict, health, integration, language, community, construction, design, and many other areas. Institutions have experience delivering services like housing, career advice, counselling, health and welfare services, English language training, and immigration advice. Universities have access to large student and staff bodies willing to dedicate their time, skills and resources to helping people fleeing conflict who are trying to make better lives for themselves'<sup>1</sup>.*

The Committee may wish to recommend that in the development of an international education strategy for Scotland, the role of universities in supporting asylum seekers, refugees and those fleeing forced migration be taken into consideration.

This submission consists of a summary of the work taking place to support asylum seekers at the University of Glasgow, with hopes the Equalities, Human Rights & Civil Justice Committee will seek to highlight the wider role of universities in

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.universities-scotland.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Guidance-on-Providing-Asylum-Seekers-and-Refugees-with-Access-to-Higher-Education-Nov-2016.pdf>

supporting asylum seekers, refugees and those fleeing forced migration. This response will focus on the following key issues set out in the Terms of Reference:

- **What public resources are available to asylum seekers?**

A 2022 report by Enhancement Themes, the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Scotland [report \*Supporting refugees and asylum seekers in Scottish higher and further education\*](#), highlighted that institutions have adopted different approaches to supporting refugees and asylum seekers, informed by their understandings of the needs of their students, staff, and the communities in which they are based. There's potential for the Scottish Government to do more to highlight best practice across the sector and to support institutions seeking to develop approaches and resources.

As aforementioned, asylum seekers in Scotland will now have recourse to access tuition fee support. However, a number of universities in Scotland were already providing fee waivers, scholarships and additional support for asylum seekers. For example, at the University of Glasgow we have committed to welcoming all applicants, regardless of their background. We offer places each year to displaced people who have arrived in the UK through resettlement as well as schemes from Ukraine, Syria and Afghanistan. As part of our commitment to Widening Access, Access Fee Waivers are offered each year to students who are seeking asylum and we have tailored support available throughout a student's time at Glasgow. We offer guidance from the pre-application stage such as providing information on entry routes and which courses are available, offering adjusted entry requirements, through to supporting students when on-course here at the University of Glasgow. Our Widening Access team has developed a suite of resources and we have named points of contact dedicated to supporting applicants who are asylum seekers. Our Widening Access team also support young people from families seeking asylum in Scotland to access our Summer school programmes, and we provide bespoke support for applicants for certain disciplines like Medicine to access application support (for writing personal statements, interview preparation etc).

For students who are currently seeking asylum and do not have recourse to SAAS funding for tuition fees, we help explore alternative funding sources which may be available.

Both asylum seekers and refugees are encouraged to apply to the University's [Sanctuary Scholarships](#), which provide financial support for the duration of an individual's studies. At present the University hosts 20 Sanctuary Scholarships for applicants to Glasgow who have been forced to travel to the UK for humanitarian reasons and are facing challenges in progressing onto Higher Education. We have designed these scholarships to specifically support people who have come through schemes such as the Afghan citizens Resettlement Scheme and the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme. The scholarships are open to prospective undergraduate and postgraduate taught students and meet the cost of tuition fees for the duration of a programme for applicants who are unable to access mainstream funding through Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS) or Student Finance. The Sanctuary Scholarship also provides a £5,000 per year stipend, to

assist with study costs. In addition, if the eligibility criteria for university accommodation is met, this will also be provided for the duration of an individual's degree, if required.

- **The impact of current Home Office policy and legislation on asylum seekers in Scotland**

The Committee may wish to note the case study from earlier this year of the challenges faced by the Linda Norgrove Charity to bring 20 female Afghan medical students to Scotland to study. In early 2023 the University of Glasgow agreed to support an initiative organised by the Linda Norgrove Foundation to accept female Afghan medicine students who were forced by the Taliban to abandon their studies. The University has been coordinating efforts to accommodate 20 female Afghan students between Scotland's five medical schools, all of which have agreed to accept the students. However, the resettlement in Scotland of these students has been held up by the Home Office, which has previously been unable to confirm when they will be allowed into the UK.

Professor Matthew Walters, Head of the University's School of Medicine, Dentistry and Nursing, is representing the University of Glasgow in the initiative, which was organised by the Linda Norgrove Foundation, a charity which offers scholarships to young Afghan women training in medicine, nursing and midwifery. The Foundation was set up in memory of Linda Norgrove, an environmental expert who was overseeing a USAID project in Jalalabad when she was kidnapped in September 2010 and killed 12 days later during an attempted rescue mission by US forces, at the age of 36.

However, this is conditional on the students' access to the UK Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS). The first year of ACRS opened in January 2022, and encompassed three pathways through which Afghans could seek resettlement in the UK. Pathway one is for those who would have qualified for evacuation during Britain's withdrawal when the Taliban regained control of Kabul in August 2021. Pathway two is through referral by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), thus meaning refugees who have already fled Afghanistan and are in another country. Whilst Pathway three was supposed to allocate 1500 places in the first year for Chevening alumni (a scholarship for international students to study at UK universities), British Council workers, and GardaWorld contractors.

According to the Home Office, the second year of the ACRS will look beyond these three pathways to identify wider Afghans who are vulnerable by working with international partners and NGOs. The Linda Norgrove Foundation was keen to engage with this approach, but was told the first year is counted as having begun in August 2022 rather than the January, since this is when applications closed. The University understands the Home Office will open the second year of ACRS this August, and that the 20 Afghan women waiting to come to Scotland to resume their medicine studies will be considered for asylum then.

- **The experiences of people seeking, granted and refused asylum**

The University is committed to understanding and sharing the experiences of people seeking sanctuary and asylum. We are proud to count the founders of the charity Refuweegee and the Chair of the Scottish Refugee Council as members of our alumni community, and we have a variety of ongoing initiatives which will be of interest to the work of the Committee noted below. In making recommendations, it is suggested that the Committee consider the importance of strengthening and promoting initiatives like these across the Higher Education sector. There is an opportunity for the Scottish Government to use its convening power to bring together the relevant expertise across Scotland's universities in this space.

- The University hosts [GRAMNet- the Glasgow Refugee, Asylum and Migration Network](#) which has built an extensive range of expertise relating to migration, refugees and asylum, and with a particular interest in researching aspects of community cohesion since its creation in 2011. GRAMNet conducts research and qualitative evaluation on migration, refugees and the asylum process. The network consults on migration-related policy across the UK and internationally, and it brings together researchers and practitioners, NGOs and policymakers working with migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Scotland. The network is currently funded by the University and works closely with our students through the Student Action for Refugees (STAR) Glasgow group which regularly campaigns and raises awareness of the issues facing refugees. The University also works in partnership with a number of other groups supporting asylum seekers in Scotland, including the [Bridges Programme](#) to provide work shadowing opportunities to asylum seekers and refugees.
- One of our former Co-Conveners of GRAMNet, Professor Alison Phipps, is the UNESCO Chair in Refugee Integration through Languages and the Arts at the University. Most recently, Professor Phipps has joined the Scottish Government, COSLA and the Scottish Refugee Council as part of the New Scots Refugee Integration Delivery Project. Professor Phipps is an [Ambassador for the Scottish Refugee Council](#) and chairs the [New Scots](#) Core Group for Refugee Integration, which was awarded an additional £1.6 million from the Scottish Government in February 2023 to develop a refreshed New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy. The University's participation in the [UNESCO's UNITWIN and Chairs programme](#) promotes international cooperation and networking to mobilise collaboration around the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030 and in key priority areas related to UNESCO's fields of competence – education, natural and social sciences, culture and communication. The UNESCO Chair supports learning from contexts which have long-term refugee and migratory experiences and where resilience has been developed, often in the face of overwhelming linguistic and cultural destruction. Working with our cross-sectorial partners, we engage in research and advocacy for creative and artistic approaches to

integration, which sustain linguistic and cultural diversity, foster creativity and intercultural capabilities and promote peace.

- The University has appointed Deputy Vice-Chancellor Rachel Sandison as 'Sanctuary Champion', to ensure decisions taken at the highest level of the University are made with consideration of those within our community who are asylum seekers, and to ensure the partnerships we build internationally are rooted in equity and respect. The work of Rachel Sandison's division also oversees the World Changers Together: World Changing Glasgow 2025 strategy, built around three pillars of Community, Connectivity and Challenge. A key aspect of the Community pillar is a commitment to enabling access to university education and it articulates a commitment to supporting those communities who are not proportionally represented in Higher Education, including forced migrants and asylum seekers.
- In October 2022 we launched a new anti-racism campaign which reinforces what action we must take to become the anti-racist institution we want to be. This joins the work we've already begun following the 2021 [Understanding Racism, Transforming University Culture Report](#) and following our commitment to address Glasgow's historic links to slavery. Next year we will also commemorate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Windrush Scheme within our College of Social Sciences.
- For Refugee Week 2023, the University held a series of events led by members of our community who have experience of the asylum process. For example, the University's Hunterian Museum featured artist Iman Tajik's photography, which conveys his own experience of border-crossing. His work includes images from his photographic series on Calais and the migrant camp infamously dubbed 'the Jungle', as well as footage from his Bordered Miles project which spotlights the Dungavel Immigration Removal Centre. Iman Tajik's 'Who Is?' flag is also currently being flown on our North flagpole as part of the *Unravelling Times* exhibition, which aims to draw attention to the plight of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, and comments on the borders, both visible and invisible, that we have created throughout history.

### **Additional Information of Interest to the Committee**

#### **University of Sanctuary Status**

In November 2022, the University was awarded Sanctuary Status in recognition of our commitment to supporting people who have been displaced through forced migration. University of Sanctuary status recognises good practice in organisations that facilitate access to Higher Education for forced migrants and is part of the City of Sanctuary UK initiative, which promotes the UK as a welcoming place of safety for all those displaced forcibly from their homes. We are also embedding a culture of sanctuary into University policies and processes, such as adjusted offers of entry for those who have experienced forced migration, fee waivers, dedicated financial support and developing curriculum content based on lived experience. We also want to ensure that our admissions and visa compliancy teams have the means by which to handle any applications quickly and with as few barriers as possible.

The award recognises our work with external networks such as the Council for at Risk Academics (CARA), Scottish Refugee Council (SRC) and within our own community, through Student Action for Refugees (STAR) and our Glasgow Refugee, Asylum and Migration Network (GRAMNet).

We are proud to be recognised as University of Sanctuary but we know the work doesn't stop here. We're committed to ensuring we continue to review all of our activity in this area and that we continue to develop and expand the support available. We want the University of Glasgow to lead the way for our sector in supporting refugees, asylum seekers and forced migrants and we have committed to a three-year action plan overseen by the University's Sanctuary Working Group.

### **Council for at Risk Academics (CARA)**

The University has had a longstanding partnership with the Council for at Risk Academics (CARA) which was established in April 1933 by William Beveridge after he learnt of the Nazi authorities' dismissal of a number of leading professors from German universities on racial and/or political grounds. He moved to launch a 'rescue operation' for the increasing number of displaced academics and CARA was born. CARA has provided protection and support to refugee and 'at risk' academics ever since and the defence of academic freedom continues to underpin CARA's work assisting academics who, for reasons of persecution and conflict, are unable to continue their research in their countries of origin.

In 2022 the University of Glasgow supported CARA in the launch of the [Researchers at Risk Fellowships scheme](#), which brings Ukrainian academics to the UK to safely continue their research through a host institution. The scheme is delivered by the British Academy and CARA, with the support of the Royal Academy of Engineering, the Academy of Medical Sciences and the Royal Society. The programme has previously received funding from the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT), the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), the Nuffield Foundation and SAGE. In its first year, the Researchers at Risk scheme:

- Supported 177 Ukrainian academics and 200 dependents to relocate to the UK
- Partnered with over 70 different institutions to host awardees, including the University of Glasgow.
- Supported research across a broad range of disciplines and subjects, from Egyptology and Elizabethan England to diaspora engagement policy in Europe, postquantum cybersecurity, coastal erosion and biotechnology.

At Glasgow, we are proud to host Dr Ievgeniia Dragomirova, who was appointed as a Research Fellow in Adult Education. From 2022-24, she will join Glasgow's Centre for Research and Development in Adult and Lifelong Learning, researching the processes of integration of newly arrived older migrants in crisis (particularly those, but not exclusively, from Ukraine) into society in the UK through their exposure to later life learning opportunities.

## **Ukraine Crisis**

Like many institutions across Scotland, we have also been eager to do all we can to support humanitarian efforts in Ukraine and we have just recently welcomed our second cohort of Ukrainian students through the Twin for Hope Scheme. Organised by Universities UK International with Cormack Consultancy, the scheme has supported institutions to twin with Ukrainian universities to help minimise the negative impact of the conflict on students' education. The University of Glasgow is proud to have partnered with three Ukrainian institutions – the National University of Kyiv Mohyla Academy (NaUKMA), Poltava State Medical University and Lviv National Medical University. Our partnership has allowed us to welcome and host 100 Ukrainian students during the course of this academic year from NaUKMa, as well as a further 21 students from Poltava State Medical University to undertake clinical observerships within the NHS in Scotland. A key focus of this initiative has been on ensuring opportunities for student mobility, however research collaborations have also been developed with our partners in the areas of Law, Computing Science, Physics and Business. We were also pleased to announce in March that we will commit further resource to this initiative for 2023-24.

We will also receive a further £270,000 from the [UK-Ukraine R&I grants](#) to expand our partnership activities further and deliver additional support for research and research mobility programmes across a range of academic disciplines including Physics, Cancer Research and War Archaeology. Of this, £200,000 will be used to strengthen our partnership with NaUKMa and £70,000 for our partnership with Lviv National Medical University.

The University of Glasgow has made clear it stands in solidarity with the people of Ukraine and denounces in the strongest terms the actions of the Government of the Russian Federation. The University has signed public statements with our peers across Europe (via The Guild for European Research-Intensive Universities and CIVIS- the European Civic University Alliance), and we immediately reached out directly to members of our community who we knew had links to Ukraine, the Russian Federation and Belarus, and we continue to extend support to all those affected through a variety of channels, such as through our network of Student Support Officers. This has included referrals to the immigration and counselling teams, student societies, as well as charities such as Action Trauma and EdCamp Ukraine, which are able to counsel in the Ukrainian language.

University colleagues also launched a campaign with our alumni network to fundraise for additional student hardship funds and prior to the Scottish Government announcing plans for free tuition and living cost support to displaced Ukrainian students, we committed to apply fee waivers for enrolments next year as well as increasing our Sanctuary Scholarships offering.

Beyond these efforts, we also committed to supporting staff members who wanted to participate in the Homes for Ukraine scheme. Staff and students also established a donation hub to support the work of Edinburgh AUGB (Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain), and colleagues in our College of Medical, Veterinary & Life Sciences

offered medical consultation services and support for the completion of medical training for Ukrainian students.

In terms of our research partnerships, following a statement published by the Russian Union of Rectors in early March 2022 in support of the Russian Federation Government's invasion of Ukraine, we have taken the decision to suspend our partnerships with Russian and Belarusian academic institutions. We have also suspended any Russian and Belarusian partner engagement across events or activities that the University is hosting or leading. This was not a decision that was taken lightly, but it is in line with our peers in the sector as Universities UK International (UUKi) suspended their strategic Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Russian Union of Rectors and the European Universities Association (EUA) has suspended membership of 12 Russian universities.

The war in Ukraine has sharpened our awareness of the plight of those affected by conflict around the globe, and the University is very clear in our aspiration to be a university of sanctuary for all those seeking refuge from war-torn countries. We are committed to being a proactive institution providing support as and when required for emerging crises across the globe, for example earlier this year the University mobilised quickly to support those impacted by the earthquakes in northwest Syria and southeast Türkiye.

**Overall, the University remains highly-committed to fostering an inclusive and welcoming community for asylum seekers in Scotland. Colleagues remain available to speak with the Committee about any of the initiatives mentioned in this submission and the University welcomes the Committee's interest in the lived experiences of those seeking asylum in Scotland.**