

17 June 2021

Justice for Refugees SA



Dear (),

Mindful of Refugee Week being celebrated in Australia between 20 June and 26 June 2021, I encourage you to commit to introducing pathways to your university for refugees and asylum seekers currently living in Australia on temporary visas.

The refugees in particular need

The refugees and asylum seekers who are in particular need of pathways to higher education arrived in Australia between 2012 and 2014 and have applied for Australia's protection under the United Nations Refugee Convention 1951. As a result of a change in government policy in 2014, these refugees are not entitled to apply for permanent protection.

Within this cohort, children are entitled to attend primary and secondary school without charge but are considered international students for the purpose of higher education. This means they are charged full international student fees, and are not eligible for Federal Government programs designed to assist students with financing tertiary study, including higher education loans schemes such as FEE-HELP and HECS-HELP and Commonwealth Supported Places. International student fees are prohibitive for these students, most of whom arrived in Australia with few or no resources.

Most Universities in Australia offer scholarships

According to the Refugee Council of Australia, 23 universities and higher education institutions in Australia offer tuition fee waivers as well as financial support for refugees and asylum seekers living in this country. Some offer full tuition fee waivers plus stipends, while other offer tuition fee waivers only. Your university is listed among the remaining universities that offer no such support for refugees and asylum seekers on temporary visas (see <http://refugee-education.org/scholarships>).

The particular importance of education for refugees

Tertiary education is of particular importance for the life prospects of refugees, for their short and long term mental health, and their sense of hope and purpose in the future. Refugees are inherently vulnerable, having been forced to flee their countries of origin and seek protection elsewhere. Current policy settings mean they don't know where they will end up settling. A higher education provides them with a set of qualifications and recognition for their skills, offering future pathways that would otherwise be blocked to them. If they remain in Australia, they will be in a position to contribute to their host society in a meaningful way that reflects the full range of their competencies and capacities.

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Costs and benefits

The cost to the university of offering dedicated university scholarship programs for students from refugee backgrounds is minimal, and the potential benefits great. Costs include additional numbers of students on campus (perhaps between 3-6 per annum), minor additional marking costs, extra calls on support services, and the financial burden of any small stipend that is granted to students (stipends offered range from \$1,000-\$20,000, with the average being \$5,766). Importantly students do not take the place of other international students, fee-paying or otherwise. It need not be a zero sum game. Benefits include the social justice dividend of providing an educational opportunity to particularly vulnerable students, the increase in diversity on campus, and the addition of highly motivated, high performing students to the student body. The university can make an enormous difference not only to the lives of refugees and asylum seekers living in Australia, but also render a service to the community at large.

I urge you to consider introducing a fee waiver for places offered to refugees and asylum seekers in Australia on temporary visas. Please consider at least matching the only other South Australian university currently offering a dedicated university scholarship program for students from refugee backgrounds, at the University of Adelaide¹. Likewise, other models which you might find useful are those provided by RMIT², ANU³ and Monash University⁴.

Yours sincerely,



Rev Sandy Boyce
Chairperson
Justice for Refugees SA Inc.

¹ See <https://scholarships.adelaide.edu.au/Scholarships%20/undergraduate/all-faculties/adelaide-refugee-humanitarian-undergraduate-scholarship>

² <https://www.rmit.edu.au/students/work-study-opportunities/scholarships/browse-scholarships/rmit-humanitarian>

³ <http://www.anu.edu.au/students/scholarships/anu-humanitarian-scholarship>

⁴ <https://www.monash.edu/study/fees-scholarships/scholarships/find-a-scholarship/monash-asylum-seekers-scholarship-6099#scholarship-details>