

WIDENING PARTICIPATION

The Refugee Support Network offers support to young people trying to access higher education amidst difficult and often harrowing circumstances.



Interview by
Roz Moore, QAA

Emily Bowerman and
Hamid Khan from
Refugee Support Network
share their story.

How does the Refugee Support Network help young people access education?

A presentation by Emily Bowerman, Programmes Manager from Refugee Support Network (RSN), and Hamid Khan at the Conference highlighted an area of work in the field of widening participation that is little reported: that of support for young asylum seekers who want to access UK higher education.

Hamid Khan was a young boy when he was forced to flee, alone, from Afghanistan. He found himself in the UK as a teenager seeking asylum and became a looked-after child in the care system. He worked hard to learn English and eventually enrolled in Mathematics at a further education college. Seeking to go on to study Mechanical Engineering, Hamid was offered a place at the University of Brighton, but then his efforts to rebuild his life stalled. Categorised as a temporary UK resident with 'Discretionary Leave to Remain', Hamid discovered his immigration status meant that he would have to enrol as an international, rather than a UK, student and pay corresponding fees that he could not afford, especially as his immigration status also prevented him from accessing student finance.

It was then that the RSN provided the help he needed to move forward. Emily Bowerman takes up the story:

'Along with a solicitor, we were able to communicate with the University to explain Hamid's status and negotiate on his behalf over fees, and we advocated for Hamid to get the appropriate support he needed from Social Services. The University of Brighton offered a partial fee waiver to enable him to enrol, and eventually Hamid was given indefinite leave to remain in the UK which enabled him to apply for student finance.'

Now in his second year at Brighton, Hamid is passionate about the role that education provides. 'Education offered me the only hope I had to pick up my life and succeed in society,' he says. 'Being able to access education offers a message of hope to others in my situation and I would like to thank the Refugee Support Network for all their support.'

Hamid's story provides a powerful illustration of the work of RSN. Emily Bowerman adds: 'Providing the one-to-one, regular support to a young person that enables them to continue their journey into higher education is a high-cost enterprise. Our main higher education resource is our national advice line which acts as a starting point providing information on how to access higher education as a young refugee, asylum seeker or survivor of human trafficking.'

'Another key strand of our work involves mentoring young refugees and asylum seekers in schools or colleges to help with a pre-agreed aspect of their education. Mentors meet



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the young person weekly and often become important people in their life, acting as role models and helping to combat isolation and loneliness. Around 300 people a year are helped through our programmes. Supporting young people in this way sends a clear message that they have a future that is worth investing in and preparing for.

'We also offer training to staff working in universities, and to social workers, teachers and youth workers, to help them develop the skills needed to support young refugees and asylum seekers.'

Hamid now wants to contribute to help others who are passionate about studying Mathematics at university or college. 'I would like one day to write a Mathematics text book', he says, 'to help other students like me.'

RSN is a charity, funded through a mixture of grants from trusts, donations from individuals and fees from the training they provide. The advice line for information about accessing higher education as a young refugee or asylum seeker is 07597 583228 or 0800 331 7292, 2-5pm on Mondays and Wednesdays.

More information is available at:
refugeesupportnetwork.org