

# A Guide for Higher Education Institutions

Supporting students from a refugee or asylum  
seeking background to access and succeed in  
higher education



**CREATE**



**Refugee Education**  
Special Interest Group

## Authors

Ali Khan  
Karen Dunwoodie  
Alex Newman

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## Contributors

We would like to thank the many people who have contributed to this guide including; the support agency representatives, academics and student liaison personal in higher education across Australia, as well as our international colleagues. Your contribution acknowledges that in some way we all want to make the world a better place.

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Please note this guide provides general information, and is not intended to and does not constitute legal advice regarding access to education for those from a refugee or asylum seeking background.

The law, particularly in relation to access to education and the legal status of refugees in Australia and overseas, is complex and subject to change based on government policy and legislation. The particular circumstances must be considered in every case, and for that reason legal advice should be sought.

The authors disclaim any and all liability arising from reliance on the contents of this report however caused.

## Acknowledgements

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# The purpose of this guide

Education is the best way to transform the lives of young people who have sought protection on our shores. In recent years a growing number of higher education institutions in Australia have begun to offer humanitarian scholarships for students from a refugee background (SfRB). All those who have contributed to this guide, acknowledge and congratulate the many wonderful initiatives some of our higher education learning institutions across Australia have implemented in order to support SfRB, including but not limited to, English language and higher education preparation programs, case management support, jobs-on-campus, bursaries and living allowance scholarships, welcome events and targeted mentoring support.

In recognising all this tremendous effort over the past few years, one may question why such a guide is needed. The answer is two-fold. Firstly, we would like to provide higher education institutes across Australia with a simple, brief and concise guide that highlights what we have found from intensive research to be the key factors that higher education institutes may wish to take on board when considering the admission and management of SfRB. Secondly, we have drafted this guide in response to requests from potential as well as current students who have highlighted difficulties they have faced in accessing higher education and navigating it once admitted. Many have remarked that some higher education institutions have difficulty in acknowledging refugee students as a group with specific learning needs and requirements.

In many cases, the services and support provided to SfRB in many institutions is extremely limited. Although, a growing number of higher education institutions are improving the support they provide to SfRB, our research shows that SfRB typically require greater support than they are actually provided at present <sup>[1, 2, 3]</sup>. In saying this, we would also like to recognise the higher education institutions and people from within those institutions on whose good work and best practice we have drawn upon to produce this material. Without their commitment, care and collaboration this guide would not have been possible.

In light of the above, this guide has been developed as a resource that Australian higher education institutions can draw upon to better engage with and support SfRB. It highlights best practice guidelines for higher education institutions on how to introduce initiatives to support students. It is hoped that the guide will also promote greater consistency across institutions in the higher education sector in terms of the quality of support provided to SfRB.

The guide provides valuable information on the visa entitlements of different students, it defines key terminologies in the field and advises staff in higher education institutions how to develop trusting relationships with SfRB through adopting appropriate styles of communication and streamlining administrative processes. This should ensure that SfRB are not discouraged from accessing education due to overburdening administrative requirements, misinformation and errors of judgment.

We hope that the production of this guide will help higher education institutions better support a group of students traditionally excluded from higher education study, as well as encourage further collaboration amongst higher education institutions, State and Federal government and concerned stakeholders to support SfRB.

## Glossary of Terms

### Asylum seeker

A person who has left their country of origin, has applied for recognition as a refugee in another country and is awaiting a decision on their application.

### Higher Education Institutions

A generic term to describe universities, TAFE and VET.

### Humanitarian Protection Visa

1. Onshore asylum/protection component – offers protection to asylum seekers in Australia who are found to be refugees according to the United Nations refugee convention or who for other reasons are under complementary protection.
2. Offshore resettlement component – offers resettlement to refugees and people from refugee-like backgrounds who are overseas.

### Refugee

Any person who because of 'a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside their country of his [sic] nationality and is unable or owing to such fear is unable or unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who not having a nationality and being outside the country of his formal habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it' (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 1951).

## Abbreviations

**BV** – Bridging Visa

**CREATE** – Centre for Refugee Employment, Advocacy, Training and Education

**RCOA** – Refugee Council of Australia

**RESIG** – Refugee Education Special Interest Group

**SfRB** – Students from a Refugee Background

**SHEV** – Safe Haven Enterprise Visa

**TPV** – Temporary Protection Visa



# Higher education in Australia for students from a refugee background



## The right to education as a path to lifelong learning and successful resettlement

At the time of writing, people from a refugee background, including those who have sought asylum onshore, have the right to access higher education. However, an individual's refugee status and visa type will determine if they can access Commonwealth funded places or if they are required to pay international fees.

The right for all people to be provided with access to higher education is recognised in the United Nation's sustainable development goals, whose aim it is to increase refugee access to education from 3% to 15% by 2030 (UNHCR SDG4) <sup>[4]</sup>. The right is also entrenched in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that access to 'higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit,' and Article 13(2) (c) of the United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights which states that 'higher education shall be made equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity'.

## The Australian context

Currently people arriving in Australia as humanitarian refugees and those who have been granted permanent protection visas are entitled to access higher education as domestic students. However, SfrB (in particular those who have sought asylum in Australia) who hold bridging visas (BVs), temporary protection visas (TPVs), or safe haven enterprise visas (SHEVs) are not eligible to access federal government programs designed to assist students with financing higher education study, including higher education loans schemes such as HEPP, HELP, and CSP. As such they are classified as 'overseas students' and expected to pay full international student tuition fees. They are also not eligible for Youth Allowance, Austudy or Centrelink support.

In 2016, Australian higher education institutes began to recognise that high international fees prevented SfrB from accessing higher education. In response they began to offer scholarships to students on TPVs, SHEVs and some BVs. In recent years, some state governments have also begun to offer SfrB fee exempt vocational education training for courses up to diploma level. Also in many states, the publicly owned TAFE institutes and other private providers offer undergraduate degree study as non-university providers. Applications to such providers are made directly to the institutions.

In addition, it is important to note that in Australian higher education, as mandated by the Australian Government, the equity groups that institutions focus on currently include low socioeconomic status (low SES) students, students with disabilities, indigenous students, women in non-traditional areas (WINTA), regional students, remote students, non-English speaking background (NESB) students, also referred to as 'Culturally and Linguistically Diverse' (CALD) students <sup>[5]</sup>. It has been argued that these categories do not reflect the changing needs and profile of an increasingly diverse and multicultural Australian society. Despite facing enormous financial, cultural, and social challenges, SfrB are not generally recognised as a distinct equity group. However, in noting this, it is important to acknowledge that some higher education institutions capture SfrB in their 'low SES' category. In addition, depending on their visa type they are either classified as domestic or international students, resulting in the risk that their distinct needs, such as those for academic support, specialised counselling, access to trusted mentors and recognition of the impact the Australian Border Force policies have on their well-being, will be simplified and homogenised.

## Determining whether students from a refugee background have a right to study

SfRB hold different categories of visa. Whether a person is eligible to study and receive a full-fee waiver scholarship depends on their visa and the higher education institute's requirements for a scholarship.

Below is a summary of visas commonly issued to people from a refugee background.

For work and study entitlements attached to each visa please see Appendix 1.

### Bridging Visas

Bridging visas are temporary visas provided to non-citizens to allow them to remain lawfully in Australia while: 1) a visa application is being considered, 2) a judicial review process is ongoing, or 3) preparations are made for leaving Australia. Whether a person on a bridging visa is allowed to work and study depends on their visa conditions.

These are subclasses of BV commonly issued to people with a refugee background:

- **BVA (Subclass 010)**
- **BVB (Subclass 020)**
- **BVC (Subclass 030)**
- **BVD (Subclass 040)**
- **BVE (Subclass 050 & 051)**

### Temporary Visas

#### Temporary Protection Visa (Subclass 785)

A temporary protection visa (TPV) is a temporary visa and can be granted for a period of up to three years at one time. TPV holders have access to work and study rights, Medicare and Centrelink benefits. If a TPV holder wishes to stay in Australia and be granted a further protection visa at the end of their visa period, it is necessary to conduct a reassessment of their protection claims. If it is determined that Australia's protection obligations are still in force, a subsequent TPV may be granted, subject to meeting all other visa criteria. If individuals do not meet the pathway requirements, SfRB may still be eligible to apply for renewal of their TPV or apply for a SHEV.

#### Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (Subclass 790)

A safe haven enterprise visa (SHEV) requires the holder to work or study in regional Australia. A SHEV will remain in effect for 5 years. If the visa holder works or studies full time in a SHEV-designated regional area for 42 months without receiving social security benefits, or a combination of these options (the SHEV pathway requirements), they will be eligible to apply for one of a restricted number of onshore substantive visas, though they will be subject to the criteria of that subsequent visa. If individuals do not meet the pathway requirements, SfRB may still be eligible to apply for renewal of their SHEV or apply for a TPV.

### Permanent Visas

#### Protection Visa (Subclass 866)

This visa allows a person who arrived in Australia to live in Australia permanently if they fulfil their obligations under the visa.

#### Refugee Visa (Subclass 200)

This visa is for people who are subject to persecution in their home country and are in need of resettlement. The majority of applicants considered under this category are identified by the UNHCR, and referred to the Australian Government for resettlement consideration.

#### In-Country Special Humanitarian Programme Visa (Subclass 201)

This visa offers resettlement to people who have suffered persecution in their home country of nationality or usual residence, and who have not been able to seek refuge elsewhere. It is for those living in their home country and subject to persecution there (MCA, p.71).

#### Global Special Humanitarian Programme Visa (Subclass 202)

The Special Humanitarian Programme (SHP) visa is for people who, while not being refugees, are subject to substantial discrimination and human rights abuses in their home country. People who wish to be considered for a SHP visa must be sponsored by an Australian citizen or permanent resident over the age of 18, an eligible New Zealand citizen or an organisation operating in Australia (MCA, p.71).

#### Emergency Rescue Visa (Subclass 203)

The visa offers an accelerated processing arrangement for people who satisfy refugee criteria and whose lives or freedom depend on urgent resettlement. It is for those subject to persecution in their home country and assessed to be in a situation such that delays which occur as a result of normal processing could put their life or freedom in danger.

#### Woman at Risk Visa (Subclass 204)

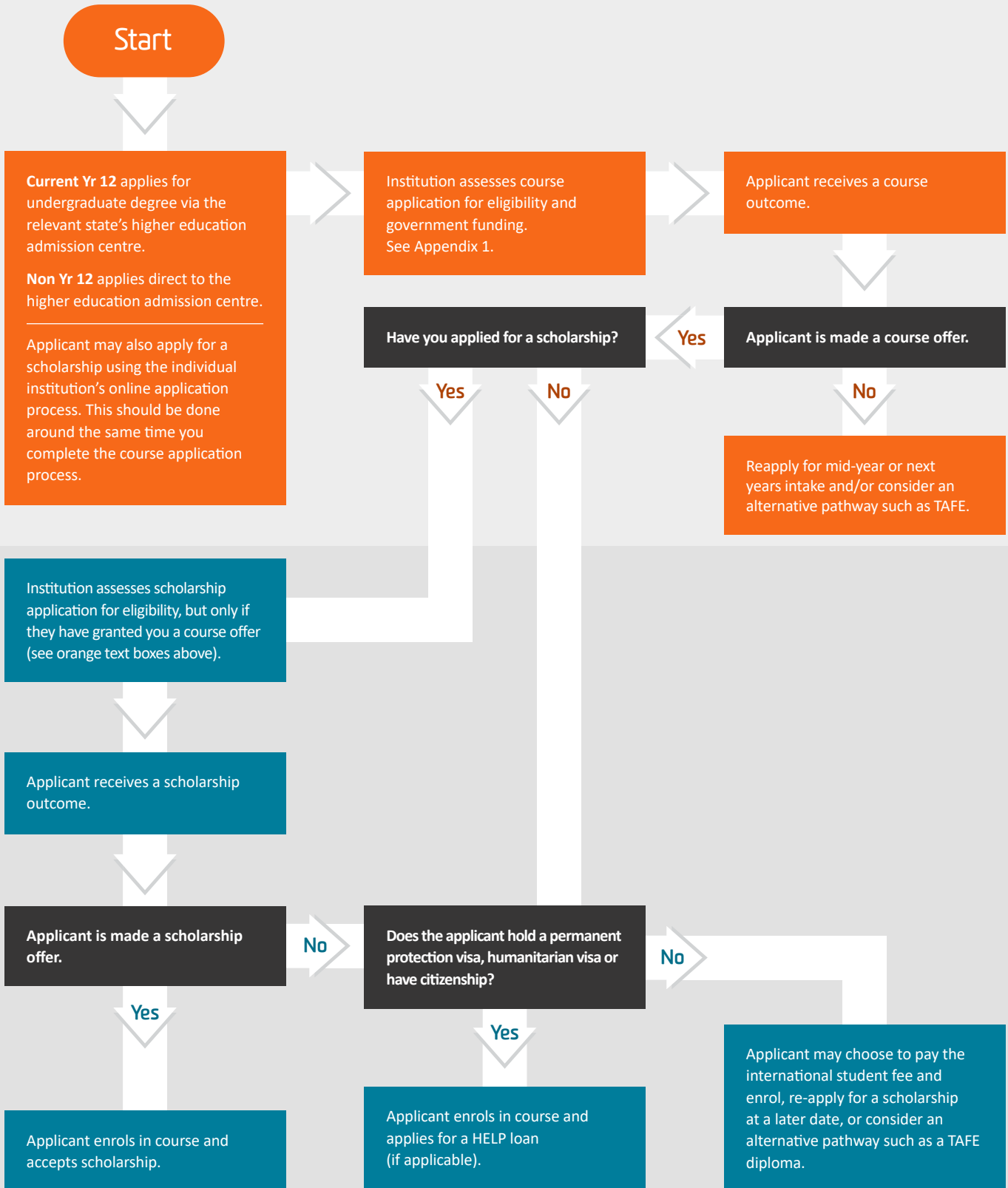
This visa is for female applicants and their dependants, who are subject to persecution or are of concern to the UNHCR, are living outside their home country without the protection of a male relative and are in danger of victimisation, harassment or serious abuse because of their gender. The majority of applicants who are considered under this category are identified and referred to the Australian Government by the UNHCR.

### Checking a student's visa entitlement using a Visa Entitlement Verification Online check

The condition and entitlement of each visa (whether permanent or temporary) may change constantly due to legislative amendments. You can use VEVO, a free service available 24/7, to help verify the conditions on a student's visa, including study and work authorisation. For a VEVO check, you might need a photo identification known as 'ImmiCard' or the passport details of a student.

**Note:** The contents of this publication, current at the date of publication set out above, are for reference purposes only. They do not constitute legal advice and should not be relied upon as such. Specific legal advice about your specific circumstances should always be sought separately before taking any action based on this publication. We also suggest users refer to the Australian Department of Home Affairs Visa listing website: [immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/visas/getting-a-visa/visa-finder](https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/visas/getting-a-visa/visa-finder)

# Pathways for students from a refugee background to access Australian higher education





# TAFE/VET as a pathway to university study

In Australia, many TAFE/VET providers also offer higher education programs including Associate Degrees, Bachelor degrees and Graduate Certificates and Diplomas in specialised occupational areas. Further information about which institutions offer these programs please see [tda.edu.au/tda-networks/higher-education/australian-tafe-higher-education-provider-network](https://tda.edu.au/tda-networks/higher-education/australian-tafe-higher-education-provider-network) and explore the websites for these providers.

A Vocational Education and Training (VET) course at a TAFE or private provider can also be a pathway into university. For students who did not finish 12 years of schooling, or did not get the prerequisite results or subjects, a TAFE/VET qualification may allow them to enter university.

Many higher education institutes will accept a Certificate IV qualification as an equivalent entry as a Year 12 certificate. Higher education institutes may differ as to whether this certificate needs to be from a related field of study.

A TAFE/VET Diploma or Advanced Diploma qualification may gain some credit into a Bachelor degree. Some TAFEs and registered training organisations have specific articulation arrangements with universities, while other universities will accept a VET qualification from any provider.

TAFE/VET study is generally skills-focused and competency-based, so students transitioning to university may be unfamiliar with the types of learning and assessment tasks they will experience there. Students may need some support to make this transition. This can be even more important for those students who get some credit for their TAFE/VET study and don't start in the usual first semester so miss a lot of orientation and scaffolding into university study. Please see the link below for the Australian Government fact sheet on competency-based training.

[myskills.gov.au/media/1776/back-to-basics-competency-based-training.pdf](https://myskills.gov.au/media/1776/back-to-basics-competency-based-training.pdf)



# Challenges faced by higher education institutions in admitting students from a refugee background

The admission and scholarship application process for SfrB varies considerably across higher education institutions. This has resulted in significant confusion and uncertainty amongst students who are typically unaware that scholarships exist and have limited knowledge about how to apply for them. This is especially poignant for SfrB who are on bridging visas, TPVs or SHEVs.

## Difficulties faced by students and higher education institutions

### Inconsistency, confusion, and lack of support:

- SfrB are often unaware of the different scholarships provided by higher education institutions. Additionally, the titles of scholarships targeting people from a refugee background are not consistent and include titles such as Asylum Seeker, Sanctuary, Welcome or Humanitarian Scholarships. In addition, higher education institutions have different visa and documentation requirements as well as different due dates for admission and scholarship applications.
- The online applications systems used by some universities and other higher education institutions may make the application process more complex. Many applicants make errors by submitting incorrect documentation and application forms for a scholarship.
- Application guidelines and instructions provided for applicants are often insufficient.
- In many instances applications require applicants to retell their story about being a refugee, instead of highlighting how the scholarship could assist them in their studies. This may lead to re-traumatization as the applicant recalls difficult events they faced in the past.
- There may not be a designated team within a specific higher education institute to assist applicants with their queries regarding scholarships. As a result, applicants from a refugee background are often misinformed, as student service staff treat them as being a standard international student. In some instances, even after receiving a scholarship offer, they are told they are ineligible to study due to their inability to provide documentation that would be expected for an international student.

- Applicants for a refugee scholarship sometimes mistakenly assume that the course application and scholarship application are the same application rather than separate applications.
- For applicants who apply directly to higher education institutions with prior education in their home country, the application process can be traumatic due to the lack of any formal method in place to recognise their prior qualifications.

### Reaching out to potential applicants:

- It is often difficult for universities and other higher education institutions to reach out to potential applicants from refugee communities. Many higher education institutions do not have a specific team or strategy to identify students who could be eligible for a scholarship, and fail to engage with community organisations that work with applicants as they may not be aware of who these organisations are.

### How can you help

Please keep your scholarship details up to date on your website and ensure you inform RCOA and Deakin CREATE if you have updated your online links, personnel contacts and/or made changes to your scholarship process or eligibility.

Appoint 1–2 staff to assist with admission and scholarship applications during peak periods (eg: December/January).

Consider specific staff training for those not familiar with SfrB.

You may also consider running specific information sessions on your open days.

Join up with other institutions running SfrB scholarship information session in your state.

### Understanding study rights attached to different visas:

- Many universities or other higher education institutions are unaware of the study rights attached to different visa categories.

### How can we help

We will do our best to keep abreast of current changes in policy and will keep you updated with our online version of this guide: [deakincreate.org.au/resources](https://deakincreate.org.au/resources)

Alternatively please check the Federal government's study assist webpage: [studyassist.gov.au/help-loans/non-australian-citizens](https://studyassist.gov.au/help-loans/non-australian-citizens)

### Issues with submitting applications:

- Due to a lack of support from the universities or other higher education institutions themselves and high school support staff and community organizations that support people from a refugee background, applicants are often forced to complete and submit their application on their own. This in many instances leads to incomplete applications, where applicants fail to address the questions asked, provide incorrect documents, and/or submit the application to an incorrect email address.

### How can you help

Please ensure your instructions on your website are clear, concise and user-friendly. We suggest you also provide a detailed checklist for applicants to follow and the contact details of a staff member who is able to assist and answer frequently asked questions. Some higher education institutions have found it useful to allocate times and locations where potential applicants can meet a student administrator for a one-on-one support to complete the application for admission and scholarship.

# Some important facts and suggestions

For SfRB who have recently arrived in Australia	Suggestions
<p>1. Those arriving by boat are in most instances undocumented. So unless they have been granted citizenship many do not have passports.</p>	<p>1. If you require proof of identity, request forms of photo ID other than a passport, such as a driver's license or immicard (if relevant).</p>
<p>2. Since 2011 Australia has received in excess of 4000 unaccompanied minors seeking protection. Currently there are a number of these young adults studying at higher education institutions across Australia.</p>	<p>2. Be aware many of your students may not have family support whilst studying. So please think about checking in with them on a regular basis to see how they are faring. This may include sending emails pre and post exam times to offer them support and or guidance.</p>
<p>3. SfRB who are on BVs, TPVs and SHEVs are classified as international students and must pay full international fees (if they are not awarded full-tuition fee scholarships) and are not eligible for Austudy or Youth allowance.</p>	<p>3. Consider offering SfRB jobs-on-campus, an annual living support allowance, travel cards and laptop as part of their scholarship package.</p>
<p>4. If a SfRB visa expires or their application for refugee status is rejected, the student could potentially lose their rights to study. This can often be reversed with a letter to the Department of Immigration requesting re-instatement from a lawyer, refugee support agency case manager or higher education institute representative.</p>	<p>4. Please ensure the people within the unit responsible for supporting SfRB are aware of free legal services such as Legal Aid (in some states), RACS (NSW), Refugee Legal (Vic) etc.</p>
<p>5. If you have a SfRB requiring legal, material aid or trauma counselling support, there are a number of agencies across Australia providing these services.</p>	<p>5. Please enquire with local councils, health providers and/or refugee support agencies in your region about services available. For example the Salvation Army or Monash Health.</p>
<p>6. When fleeing conflict, packing certificates and qualifications is not a priority. Additionally, contact with higher education institutions in their home country may also be constrained. Hence, some SfRB arrive in Australia without the documentation higher education institutions require in the application process.</p>	<p>6. Create clear, transparent and coherent frameworks to recognise prior learning. Be aware of existing qualification recognitions services, eg: The Overseas Qualifications Unit Victoria (OQU Victoria). You may suggest that the student attempts to seek access to certified copies of qualifications if possible. However, if this is not possible you may suggest they complete a statutory declaration or recommend a pathway for them to gain the desired qualification.</p>

# Principles to help higher education institutions support students from a refugee background

We would like to explicitly acknowledge the work of Hudson and Murray (2018) who produced the first guiding principles for sanctuary scholars in UK higher education, upon which this section of the guide is based.

To ensure SfrB have a positive and rewarding experience at any higher education institution, we suggest the sector consider the following 9 principles when designing, awarding and administering scholarships <sup>[6]</sup>.

It is crucial that higher education institutions ensure that they develop a supportive and caring environment for refugees, recognising their strengths, rather than frame them as vulnerable equity group.

## 1. Staff training and support

- Appropriate training should be provided to all higher education institute staff and associated personnel who during the course of their work interact with SfrB. The extent and content of such training will depend on the level of interaction that a particular individual has with the student and in what capacity.
- The higher education institute must safeguard and protect the wellbeing of those working with SfrB by providing them with mental health first aid courses and access to counselling services in cases where they are affected by traumatic stories.

## 2. Promote equitable treatment and a non-discriminatory environment for students from a refugee background

- Holders of humanitarian scholarships should not be discriminated against at any time during their studies on the ground that they are forced migrants, or they came by boat. Any such discrimination, if it occurs, should be treated urgently.

- SfrB share many of the same issues and concerns as other equity groups. Wherever possible, the higher education institute should refrain from labelling the support services as 'refugee' specific. Instead, the higher education institute should consider offering services as part of a wider program of student support. This is critical given many SfrB want to avoid the stigma that is associated with the labels of 'refugee' or 'asylum seeker'.
- In providing scholarships for SfrB higher education institutes should avoid using the term refugee or asylum seeker in the title.

## 3. Ensure and secure the privacy of students from a refugee background

- All higher education institutes should respect the right to privacy of SfrB.
- Sensitive data such as the name or immigration status of a student should not be disclosed to any external party in strict accordance with the Privacy Act 1988 and other relevant legislation, unless required by law.

## 4. Additional Support

- Due to the precariousness of their visa status and/or past traumatic experiences, institutions should provide SfrB ready access to counselling services.
- Due to recent changes in government policies, many students on BVs, TPV, and SHEVs have lost their government benefits. Therefore, higher education institute should consider providing dedicated bursaries for living costs, casual employment opportunities and food vouchers.
- Institutions might work with employers to provide opportunities for students to get work experience and financially support themselves during their studies.

## 5. Designing, awarding and administering scholarships that meet the needs of recipients

- In designing scholarships the institution should consider the academic interest of students and avoid limiting their choice to a narrow range of subjects.
- In awarding and administering scholarships the institution should recognise the applicant's prior experience and qualifications, and allow them to gain recognition for prior learning where appropriate.
- In assessing credit for prior learning, institutions should recognise that it is not always possible for students to provide relevant documents or evidence of their prior study or work experience. The inability to do this may result from a number of factors: 1) they have had to flee their home and leave certificates behind, 2) the government higher education institutions in their home countries will not provide access to their documents, and 3) the process of getting their experience evidenced is expensive.
- In the case that applicants are unable to provide verifiable documentation, institutions should adopt a flexible approach to determine whether the applicant meets the entry requirements. First, they may use alternative methods such as practical tests or interviews to verify the ability and motivation of the student. They may also rely on alternative ways to evidence the applicant's qualifications such as getting a signed statement from a person in authority such as a former professor.



- If the applicant's first language is not English, the institution should also include access to language support bridging programs prior to and throughout their study as part of the scholarship offer where required.
- When administering scholarships the institution should be aware that SfRB face significant challenges due to their immigration status and personal histories. They should ensure that the application process does not exacerbate such challenges and prevent students from beginning or completing their studies.

### 6. Selection processes and removal of procedural barriers

- The institution should implement a non-discriminatory, accessible, fair, inclusive and transparent selection process.
- In particular, the institution should provide applicants with clear, transparent and accessible selection criteria and streamline the application process as much as is feasibly possible.
- Institutions should not seek to predict or assess the applicant's chances of success in their application for protection to the Australian government. The exact nature of an applicant's immigration status should not influence their eligibility for or chances of getting a scholarship.
- When making an offer, the institution should highlight the conditions of the offer clearly to the applicant.
- A decision to reject an application or discontinue an existing scholarship on the grounds of their visa status should only be made when it is in the best interests of the applicant or student, and when it is reasonable to assume that their visa status means they will be unable to continue their degree or course.

- Institutions should conduct an annual review of their selection process to identify procedural barriers faced by applicants, any government policy changes, refugee statistics and shifts in domestic refugee demographics, and revise internal policy and processes when required.

### 7. Create trusted relationships and specific contact points

- Institutions should establish a dedicated first point of contact for all enquiries from SfRB. This could be achieved by appointing a dedicated case manager.
- As research has found that SfRB are unlikely to draw on formal support services, it is critical for higher education institutes to develop informal mechanisms through which students can obtain support <sup>[7]</sup>. For example, we strongly encourage institutions engage with peer mentors from a refugee background or individuals from the local community to assist SfRB during their studies, especially in the first year.

### 8. On the ground support

- As the first year of study is a critical and difficult one for many SfRB, institutions should support SfRB to develop their English and computer literacy skills.
- One-on-one mentoring also aids in unpacking and exploring how to navigate life at a higher education institute, for example class attendance and assignment due dates.
- Higher education institute should provide medical and counselling services to SfRB that take into account their personal history and challenges faced.

### 9. Monitor the progress and wellbeing of students from a refugee background

- Institutions should monitor the progress and wellbeing of SfRB. However, in doing so they should ensure the privacy of such students is protected.
- Institutions should encourage SfRB to participate in academic and social communities or groups. In doing so they should work with student groups and communities to encourage the inclusion of SfRB in higher education institute clubs/societies.
- Adopt a proactive approach to supporting SfRB with visa renewals and rejections. If a student awaiting the outcome of their application for protection gets a negative decision, the institution should support the student to deal with the legal and emotional consequences of such event. For instance, if a student loses their right to study and withdraws from their course, the institution could support the student to access specialist legal advice and provide psychological support until the matter is resolved.





# Current case studies

## 1. My first year of university was hard

My name is Hadi. I am a 21-year-old Hazara male born in Afghanistan. I came to Australia in 2013 as an unaccompanied minor. I was in a child detention centre for four months where my friends and I were bussed to school every day. The idea of attending school, learning English, watching and listening to other students, and most importantly feeling a sense of belonging and inclusion were something we all desired. All we wanted was to be just like the local kids.

After four months, I was released from the detention centre and Melbourne became my home. My case manager helped me to enrol in a language school and after a semester I was admitted to a public secondary school where I studied VCE, became a college captain, and formed my new family which included my teachers, students, and others in the community. Life was getting better. However, the fear of not being able to study at university would always keep me up at night. My teachers were also concerned because I was categorised as an international student and I was not eligible for a government funded place at University. Despite this massive hurdle, I never gave up. I visited every university with the hope that someone would care and hear me out.

Finally, my faith in my new home and community was confirmed when one of the universities in Melbourne offered me a scholarship. It opened a new door to growth, freedom, and the opportunity to have a dream.

My first year of university was a critical one. I felt like I was the chosen one who had the opportunity to sit in a lecture theatre with students who were more privileged than me, and importantly who will be the leaders, doctors, engineers, politicians, and lawyers of tomorrow. However, it was also a nerve-wracking experience.

1. Firstly, the scholarship application process was confusing and I had difficulty in answering some of the questions and providing a few of the required documents, such as a passport.
2. Secondly, once I was awarded the scholarship, the whole journey from course selection to submitting my assignments was a huge challenge. I felt like I was lost. I was not as confident as other students. I always thought my English was not as good as others in the class.
3. Thirdly, I was shy. Making friends or approaching others was so difficult.
4. Additionally, not knowing how to use the university website, make notes, find lecture slides, references or write academically were just some of the many barriers I faced. However, it was who I should ask for help that I struggled with the most.
5. Luckily, during orientation week I signed up for a peer-mentoring program, organised by my Faculty, and met a student from the second year. She helped me with some of the challenges that I faced. Although, the peer-mentoring program was not designed specifically for students from a refugee background, it did help. Upon reflection, I wish there was someone in the first year, like my peer mentor, who would have helped from the start of my journey. The peer-mentoring program made a huge difference to my university life. Although, there was a lot to learn, knowing that someone was there for me certainly made me feel as though I belonged easier.

### How can higher education institutes make a difference?

- Inform and train academic and professional staff about our situation and our right to apply for scholarships. Even though we are classified as international students, please understand there are often no 'tick boxes' for us.
- Update your systems so there is a 'tick box' for us. Just like there is for our first nations people.

- Implement a customised peer-mentoring program for SfRB.
- Have an educational counsellor help students with understanding and selecting course subjects.
- Provide customised training on how to use the higher education institute website, many of us have never had extensive exposure to IT.
- Allocate a team of academics and/or librarians who we can refer to for help referencing and academic writing.
- Highlight what services we are allowed to access and how to access them. For example, medical services, academic support, or material aid supplies.
- Highlight alternatives places where we might go to get support e.g. The Salvation Army Asylum Seeker Centre, the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre.



## 2. Students benefit from relationships based on trust

I am Masooma. I am 22 and I came to Australia in 2012. I am studying a Bachelor's of Nursing. I was born in Afghanistan and raised in Iran. Going to school was a dream in Iran, a dream that never became a reality. I was a refugee and not allowed to study. My parents were hardly able to provide me with food and shelter. Growing up as a refugee was hard. We were treated as second class citizens. I still remember how my mum would be forced to wait for everyone to buy bread despite being the first in the queue. We left Iran after the government started to deport Afghans. Many were separated from their family members and many lost their homes and assets. Gradually, it felt like we were caged. Home became like a chicken coop.

Coming to Australia was a life transforming experience, a decision that changed everything. After arriving in Sydney I realised that I had rights, I could dream, I could be treated equally like others, and the support of my case manager made me see the humanity of people around me. My case manager encouraged me to study hard. She believed in me and gave me hope in the hard moments of life. Most importantly, she motivated me. After seeing her love, compassion, and support I decided that the only way I could pay her back and thank her for every act of kindness, was that I should work harder. She became the reason I found myself, and fostered my passion for nursing so I could help others in my community, the way she helped me.

When I started university the environment was different. I was on my own. My only desire was that someone like my case manager would have become a part of my university journey, someone I could trust. I needed someone whose presence would encourage me to work hard, make me feel good, and approach without having to retell my story. Although, there are various services available in the university, I never had the courage to discover or use them. Instead I would call my case manager and seek her advice on any matter such as accessing health services, how to write an essay, unit selection, and job search. If she had no knowledge, I would ask someone from my own background at university.

### How can higher education institutes make a difference?

- Appoint a person whom we could approach easily: someone from a refugee background or someone who cares, can be trusted and understands our situation.
- The appointed person should maintain regular contact and check in on students.
- The higher education institute should organise regular social events to allow SfRB to meet their peers who have faced the same challenges.

## 3. I do not have a passport

I was very happy to finish year 12 knowing that I had the opportunity to study in a university. I submitted my application and preferences to different universities via VTAC. It was the happiest day of my life when I received an offer in the first round. However, I made a mistake. Instead of making two separate applications, one for my course and one for a scholarship, I thought my course application via VTAC will cover the former. I was on a Bridging Visa, therefore, categorised as an international student, not eligible for HECS, and was asked to pay the full tuition fee. I tried to apply for a scholarship at a number of universities but the submission date had already passed. So, I had to wait for a year and apply for a scholarship in the following round.

After waiting for one year, when I started to apply for scholarships, I realised that it was very confusing. I was on my own and struggled to answer the questions properly. I was asked to provide my passport and visa. However, I did not have a passport because I came by boat. Regarding my visa, I had an expired one because the government had stopped sending me evidence that they renewed the visa every three months. Instead, I submitted my ImmiCard. But the university seemed to be unfamiliar with the ImmiCard and again asked me for my passport. On top of this, there was no central person or direct helpline to discuss the matter. I would call the main university helpline and was forced to explain the matter and my situation to a random person over and over again, until they could find the relevant staff with knowledge of the scholarship.

After resolving all the issues when I finally received the scholarship and started my degree, I thought no one would bother me about my passport. However, I was wrong. Every time when I visited the student services to make enquiries about travel concession or changing units, their first question is 'do you have your passport?'

### How can higher education institutes make a difference?

- Make the scholarship application process easier and provide contact details for the person who can answer questions.
- Consider adopting a more flexible approach for provision of documentation, for example immicard instead of passport.
- Set aside dates and times to help potential students with the scholarship application process.
- Upskill front line staff at students services to deal specifically with SfRB.

## 4. How a TAFE pathway worked for me

I have always wanted to be a nurse as I want to help other people. I was 25 years old when I arrived in Australia after spending 8 years in refugee camps. I only thought about study at university as my family wanted me to do that, but found I couldn't go straight to university as I hadn't finished 12 years of high school. The careers advisor told me about two options for entry into nursing at university: I could do Year 12 in school or TAFE, or I could study the Diploma of Nursing at TAFE.

I chose to study nursing as I wanted to start my nursing study as soon as possible, and because this pathway would give me some credit to continue nursing study in university. I took a while to get used to studying in TAFE. I had studied English at TAFE, but it was very different being in a mainstream course with Australian students and with a lot of new vocabulary. The education advisor for refugee students made sure I knew about all the support services at TAFE and helped me settle into the study. She showed me how to structure my study time, plan my assessment tasks, and oriented me in using the online systems. It wasn't always easy, but I finished my diploma 18 months later and then applied for university.

I received help from the advisor from TAFE to apply for university and apply for scholarships, which would have been very difficult for me to do alone. She informed me about the support services at the university and sent an email to their support person to introduce me. It was so hard starting at university. It was very different to TAFE, so much bigger, and harder to find everything. Having received credit for all my first year subjects, I also missed the orientation offered to all first year students. Additionally, I hadn't connected with the support services, because I didn't think I'd need to, since I'd been studying for a while by then. However, I realised that university can be a very lonely place and it was hard to reach out for help because I didn't know who to turn too. By the end of the first semester I felt more settled, but there was a lot of stress up until then.

### How can higher education institutes make a difference?

- Consider appointing a person whom the students can approach easily for support and guidance.
- Ensure that people working in student services and admissions know the correct current information about visa eligibility and the different visa types.
- Foster connections and networks with student support staff at the local TAFE providers, VET institutes and Universities, to ensure students have a smooth transition from one institute to another.

# Possible next steps for your institution to take:

- Setting up a scholarship – Join the RESIG and request support  
[refugee-education.org](http://refugee-education.org)
- Reviewing current scholarship arrangements. Share, inform and update relevant agencies
  - ✉ RCOA: [admin@refugeecouncil.org.au](mailto:admin@refugeecouncil.org.au)  
Deakin CREATE: [deakincreate@deakin.edu.au](mailto:deakincreate@deakin.edu.au)  
RESIG: [contact@refugee-education.org](mailto:contact@refugee-education.org)
- Reassess application and selection processes
- Reassess how you are currently promoting scholarships
- Consider what training you may need to implement for staff – Academic and Professional
- Compile a list of local support agencies. A good place to start is at the Refugee Council of Australian website for services in your state.  
[refugeecouncil.org.au/services](http://refugeecouncil.org.au/services)
- Strategise and document about how you can best engage your SfrB at your institution
- Finally, it is important that your institution collect reliable and up to date data on SfrB enrollments, retention rate and scholarship numbers

# Appendix 1: check list for work and study for different types of visas

Visa type	Study rights	Eligible for HECS_HELP	Eligible for CSP	Work rights
<b>BVA (Subclass 010)</b>	Yes – subject to geographic limitation	No	No	Yes – subject to restriction
<b>BVB (Subclass 020)</b>	Yes – subject to geographic restriction	No	No	Yes – subject to restriction
<b>BVC (Subclass 030)</b>	Yes – unless otherwise stipulated or policy change	No	No	Yes – unless otherwise stipulated or policy change
<b>BVD (Subclass 040)</b>	Yes – unless otherwise stipulated or policy change	No	No	Yes – unless otherwise stipulated or policy change
<b>BVE (Subclass 050 &amp; Subclass 051)</b>	Yes – unless otherwise stipulated or policy change	No	No	Yes – unless otherwise stipulated
<b>Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) (Subclass 785)</b>	Yes	No	No	Yes
<b>Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV) (Subclass 790)</b>	Yes	No	No	Yes
<b>Protection visa (Subclass 866)</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Refugee visa (Subclass 200)</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>In-country special humanitarian programme visa (Subclass 201)</b>	Yes	Yes*	Yes	Yes
<b>Global special humanitarian programme visa (Subclass 202)</b>	Yes	Yes*	Yes	Yes
<b>Emergency rescue visa (Subclass 203)</b>	Yes	Yes*	Yes	Yes

\* Subject to visa residency requirements

Note: The contents of this publication, current at the date of publication set out above, are for reference purposes only. They do not constitute legal advice and should not be relied upon as such. Specific legal advice about your specific circumstances should always be sought separately before taking any action based on this publication. We also suggest users refer to the Australian Department of Home Affairs Visa listing website: [immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/visas/getting-a-visa/visa-listing](https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/visas/getting-a-visa/visa-listing)

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## Where to go to get further information and support

Centre for Refugee Employment, Advocacy, Training and Education (Deakin CREATE)

[deakincreate.org.au](https://deakincreate.org.au)

Prof Alex Newman

[a.newman@deakin.edu.au](mailto:a.newman@deakin.edu.au)

Dr Karen Dunwoodie

[k.dunwoodie@deakin.edu.au](mailto:k.dunwoodie@deakin.edu.au)

Refugee Council of Australia

[refugeecouncil.org.au](https://refugeecouncil.org.au)

RESIG (Refugee Education Special Interest Group)

[refugee-education.org](https://refugee-education.org)

Hope Co-op: SfRB consulting service

[hopecoop.org.au](https://hopecoop.org.au)

Australian Department of Home Affairs Visa Entitlement Verification Online (VEVO)

[immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/visas/already-have-a-visa/check-visa-details-and-conditions/check-conditions-online](https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/visas/already-have-a-visa/check-visa-details-and-conditions/check-conditions-online)

My Skills website is the national directory of vocational education and training (VET) organisations and courses:

[myskills.gov.au](https://myskills.gov.au)

TAFE Directory Australia

[tda.edu.au/tda-networks/higher-education/australian-tafe-higher-education-provider-network](https://tda.edu.au/tda-networks/higher-education/australian-tafe-higher-education-provider-network)

Universities Australia

[universitiesaustralia.edu.au/our-universities/university-profiles](https://universitiesaustralia.edu.au/our-universities/university-profiles)

For a list of scholarships available for SfRB please refer to the following websites:

[refugeecouncil.org.au](https://refugeecouncil.org.au)

[refugee-education.org](https://refugee-education.org)

[deakincreate.org.au](https://deakincreate.org.au)



[deakincreate.org.au](https://deakincreate.org.au)

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