

Support for student asylum seekers at Strathclyde

Louise Martin
Widening Access

A photograph of a diverse group of graduates in blue gowns and caps, celebrating with their arms raised and caps tossed into the air against a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds. The scene is filled with joy and accomplishment.

WIDENING ACCESS at the University of Strathclyde

The Widening Access Team mission: to increase opportunities and remove barriers to study and success for those from widening access backgrounds

A place of useful learning

- Widening Participation is core of Strathclyde's mission and identity
- We are committed to providing access from the widest possible range of backgrounds, to improving retention and ensuring success.

A distinctive approach

- At Strathclyde widening participation encompasses all aspects of under-representation, with the aim of removing obstacles and encouraging achievement by making HE attainable for all sections of society
- Carers; estranged students; asylum seekers & refugees; adult returners; mature students; FE entrants; those from under-represented groups
- Activities take place across the institution, in every Faculty and throughout Professional Services

Our learner journey model

Activities shaped around four key stages

- **Getting ready** : - e.g. Award winning Glasgow Children's University
- **Getting in**: e.g. Contextual Admissions (lower entry requirements)
- **Staying in**: e.g. Strathclyde Cares mentor programme, financial help, Study Skills
- **Getting on**: e.g. Internships, Careers Service

Asylum seeker scholarship

- Developed alongside Strathclyde Students Association, Scottish Refugee Council and Carnegie Trust
- Help asylum seekers overcome barriers to HE
- Open to prospective UG and taught PG students
- Meets costs of tuition fees plus essential study-related expenditure

Scholarship eligibility

- Conditional and unconditional offer holders
- Have submitted (or are dependent of someone who has) an application to the Home Office for recognition as refugee and awaiting decision,
or
- Have been offered leave to remain in UK and have not become eligible for support from funding bodies in Scotland, England, Nr Ireland or Wales

Mentor programme

- Running since 2015
- Originally supporting care experienced students
- Student asylum seekers integrated in 2016
- Supported 28 student asylum seekers to date
- Instrumental to many students' progression and retention

Student asylum seekers

- Possible family separation/isolation
- May have experienced trauma
- Cultural change
- Financial hardship
- Lack of support network

Why staff volunteer to mentor

- Opportunity to change a young person's life
- Aid transition to University and enhance student experience
- Support vulnerable young person in breaking down barriers to successful study/employability
- Staff development

How does it work?

- One to one mentoring.
- Undertaken in mentor's own time or as arranged with line manager
- Fortnightly meetings or as agreed between mentor and mentee – via Zoom for time being
- When back on campus can meet around University campus (University cafés/office)

Role of a mentor

- Allow mentee to realise potential and support their progression
- Source of guidance and advice.
- ‘Go to’ person
- Signpost support services (study skills, counselling)

Role of a mentor

- Role model -sharing experience
- Stable source of support
- Someone they can rely on
- Friendly face as they transition to University and progress through studies

Mentoring aims

- Build a good relationship and trust with mentee
- Encourage and support mentee through studies
- Assist mentee in working towards goals
- Help mentee to reach full potential

Safety and common sense

- Based on trust and mutual respect
- Professional relationship
- Contact via mentoring sessions (Zoom), and work email only (not mobiles or social media)
- Mentors do not share their address or personal phone number with their mentee

Confidentiality

Mentoring is a confidential activity and details should not be discussed with colleagues, friends or family.

If, however, mentors are concerned about their mentee's wellbeing, they must speak to the Widening Access Team

Reporting and recording

- Monthly email to Louise to provide update on progress and any support required
- Widening Access team contact
louise.martin.100@strath.ac.uk

Feedback from students

“I want to say that having a mentor was a great help for me both psychologically and informationally. I felt secure that I knew someone was there for me, if I had any concerns. Having a mentor is very helpful, especially for first year international students and asylum seekers, as this is when you have a lot of questions and assume they might be too trivial or you simply do not want to sound ‘stupid’. But my mentor helped me to open up and encouraged me ask as many questions as I could. So in a way this helps us build more confidence.”

- Student asylum seeker, LLB Law

“I want to thank you for the mentor you provided for me. My mentor makes me feel comfortable with the course. Initially when I started the course I was confused, but now my mentor has put me in the right direction on how to access the library, track my grade, search for readings, and how to do a presentation on zoom. In light of the above I appreciate the effort of my mentor so much.”

- Student asylum seeker, LLM Human Rights Law

"Having a mentor is good because university can be daunting and knowing there is someone that will help where and when they can with any struggles you are having makes your life a lot easier. Sometimes the benefit just lies in the knowledge that someone cares about you and how you get on."

- 4th year student asylum seeker, MEng Chemical Engineering

“I am enjoying the mentoring program, it gives me a sense of security knowing there is someone I can go to for help. My mentor has been really helpful with issues in and out of uni. I believe she is a good match for me because she understands me and has knowledge to help me through my issues. She is also fun to be around.”

- 3rd year student asylum seeker, BA Hons Humanities and Social Sciences

<https://www.strath.ac.uk/studywithus/scholarships/asylumseekersscholarship/>

`louise.martin.100@strath.ac.uk`



University of
Strathclyde
Glasgow