



Universities of Sanctuary Ireland (UoSI) GCR Report 2021

The network of Universities of Sanctuary in Ireland comprises the following eight HEIs: AIT, DCU, MU, NUIG, TCD, UCC, UCD. To receive the designation of UoS, they commit to creating and sustaining a culture of welcome for those in refugee(-like) situations, underpinned by the following three sanctuary principles: 1) Learning what it means to seek sanctuary; 2) taking positive action; and 3) sharing good practice within and beyond the institution. The scholarship programme is one of the key actions undertaken by the UoSI consortium, which commenced its practice in 2017. The following chart outlines the scholarship offerings made to date, both those that were pledged as well as those awarded, in so doing, supporting UNHCR efforts to increase access to HE.

Universities of Sanctuary Ireland (UoSI) scholarship programme

Scholarship type	Pledged 20/21	Awarded 20/21	Pledged 21/22	Total awarded 2017-2021
Access	36	38	38	211
UG	52	52	47	143
PG	8	10	13	24
Diplomas	3	2	2	9
Online	5	5	5	45
Total	104	107	105	432

Scholarship support varies widely among HEIs:

- All HEIs give a fee waiver
- most HEIs provide a laptop if required
- Financial scholarships vary from €1,000 to €3,000
- Travel subsidies and/or lunch vouchers provided by some HEIs instead of a financial scholarship

Additional Sanctuary supports

In addition to the valuable scholarship offerings, HEIs in the UoSI consortium offer a range of awareness raising, integration and advocacy initiatives, including: sanctuary-related keynote lectures, webinars and conferences; research publications and participatory research projects; academics informing national policy; Scholars at Risk sponsorship programmes; student-run refugee weeks; pre-entry supports, including information sessions and one-to-one

mentoring; arts-based integration projects; language supports; homework clubs; on-line learning hubs; and Christmas parties. UoS programmes are coordinated through dedicated committees that include key stakeholders, including senior management, administrative and academic staff, members of the refugee community and external bodies such as NGOs, city councils, etc. Sanctuary students who are served deportation orders during the course of their studies, are generally given solidarity support by relevant Students' Unions and their members, and in many instances have thwarted such orders, at least for the duration of their studies.

Challenges encountered

1. Sectoral

- Sanctuary students may be relocated to Direct Provision/emergency accommodation units in different parts of the country at the behest of relevant government bodies during the course of their studies, and it is difficult to arrange transfers to suitable accommodation adjacent to the HEI
- Criteria pertaining to State supports change every year
- The fee status is set at international (rather than EU) rate, which means that access to HE is prohibitive for those not able to avail of state supports or sanctuary scholarships
- Communicating sanctuary scholarship offerings can be difficult, especially as each HEI has its own unique set of offerings and application deadlines, making it a challenge to navigate, especially for those new to the country/system
- Postgraduate employment pathways and opportunities are not clearly marked or supported
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2. Individual

- Mental health issues due to liminal, precarious state of existence while awaiting status adjudication
- Campus culture can be divisive and exclusive, with some sanctuary students reporting loneliness and alienation

- Some students report being hungry while in college in cases where scholarship supports are not sufficient to cater to their diverse needs, particularly if they are accommodated in centres with rigid mealtimes which clash with study timetables
- Many students report difficulties accessing wifi in their accommodation centres
- Crowded accommodation is not conducive to quiet study periods, especially when preparing for exams

Sustainability of UoSI endeavours

- UoS principles and practices are being increasingly embedded and mainstreamed in existing academic structures, including Widening Participation, EDI policies and student supports. HEIs are, at the same time, mindful of the need to address unique sanctuary-related needs and challenges
- Vibrant supportive UoSI network sharing best practice, discussing challenges, and preparing advocacy campaigns
- Re-accreditation process in place, whereby HEIs must re-commit every three years with a revised (and enhanced) set of strategic goals
- The Irish government has recently been taking positive steps to improve conditions for those in refugee(-like) situations, including widening the student grant scheme to accommodate those who, for example, have been in the protection system for 3+ years and wish to pursue a course of studies at HE. There is also the political will to end the Direct Provision system, which has caused such hardship for those who have had no choice but to experience it; there is a need, however, for pressure to continue to be applied by advocacy groups, including UoSI, to hold the government to account so that they follow through on their commitment.