

UCAS FAIR ACCESS SNAPSHOT:

DISPLACED STUDENTS

UCAS



INTRODUCTION

In 2023, UCAS introduced seven new questions into the application enabling students to flag a wider range of circumstances and support needs, including: students estranged from their parents, those with parenting or caring responsibilities, students from UK Armed Forces families, UK Armed Forces Service leavers and veterans, refugees and asylum seekers, and students in receipt of free school meals. This new data not only helps higher education (HE) providers connect students to the right support, but also provides the sector with valuable insight into groups of students about whom we have previously had minimal information.

These Fair Access Snapshots offer an at-a-glance overview of this new data. Here, we focus on the 2023 applicants who shared that they were refugees, asylum seekers or had an insecure immigration status (e.g. limited or discretionary leave to remain). This is the seventh and final Fair Access Snapshot in the [2023 series](#).



OVERALL 2023 UCAS APPLICANT DATA

599,930

UK applicants

482,895

UK accepted applicants

35.8%

of UK 18 year olds accepted

UK APPLICANTS FROM DISPLACED BACKGROUNDS

11,095

displaced applicants

7,300

accepted displaced applicants

4,850

with refugee or humanitarian protection (HP) status

830

currently seeking asylum

5,415

with an insecure immigration status

3,380

with refugee or humanitarian protection status

440

currently seeking asylum

3,480

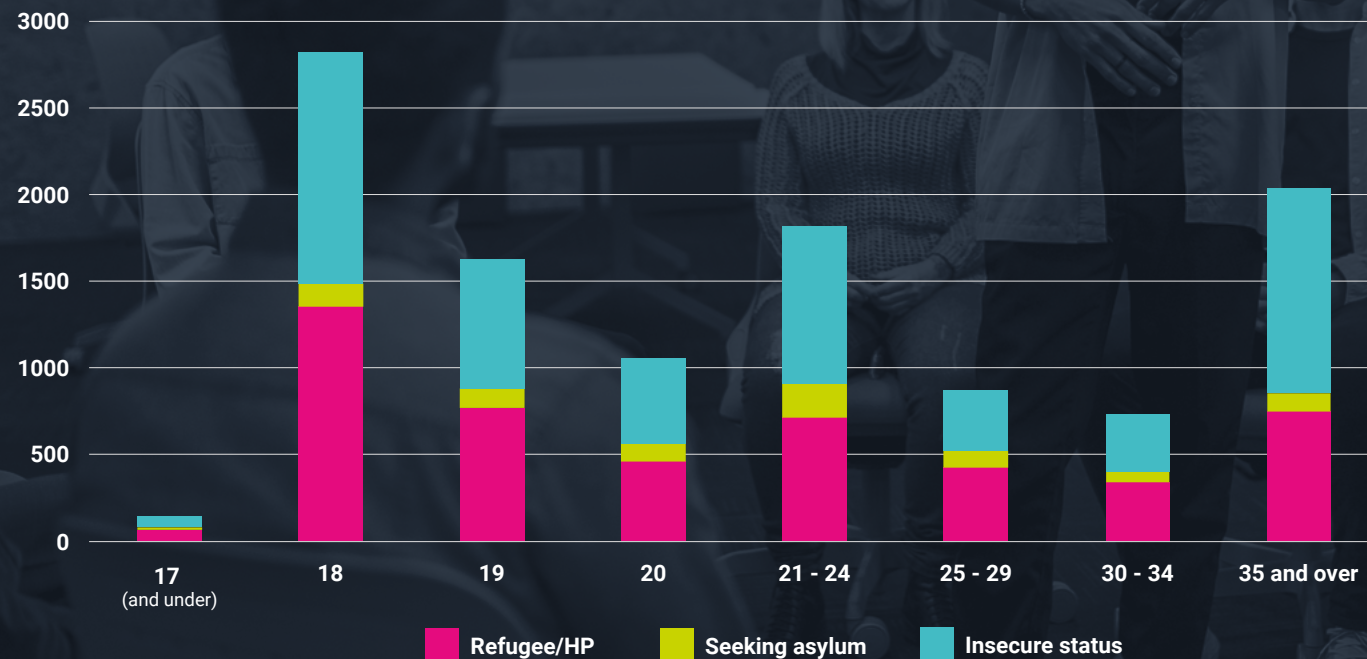
with an insecure immigration status



BREAKDOWN BY UK DOMICILE

| | Applicants | | | Accepted applicants | | |
|------------------|------------|----------------|-----------------|---------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| | Refugee/HP | Seeking asylum | Insecure status | Refugee/HP | Seeking asylum | Insecure status |
| England | 4,050 | 705 | 4,840 | 2,845 | 385 | 3115 |
| Northern Ireland | 75 | 15 | 50 | 50 | 5 | 30 |
| Scotland | 550 | 75 | 395 | 365 | 40 | 245 |
| Wales | 175 | 35 | 125 | 120 | 15 | 90 |

INTERSECTIONALITY: AGE



Applicants from displaced backgrounds are most likely to apply to HE at age 18, likely with the support of their school or college and alongside their peers. We see a slight increase common across all statuses at 21-24, and again for those aged 30+. Further research is needed to understand the drivers behind these patterns but it may relate to the age at which someone arrives in the UK, their experience of applying for asylum, or even their employment and skills requirements (e.g. reskilling or because they are unable to provide evidence of qualifications and training taken in their home country).

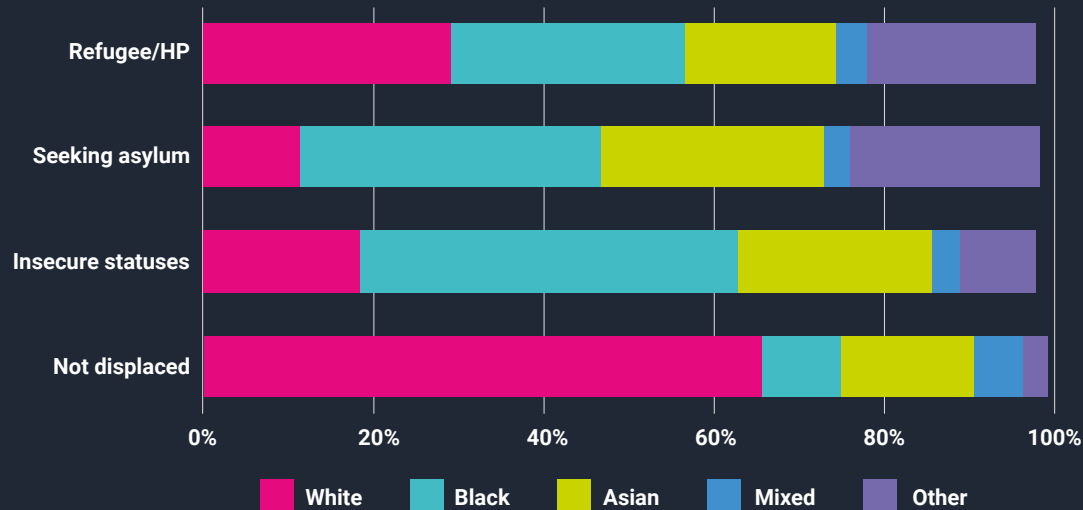
INTERSECTIONALITY: GENDER



The gender divide for refugee and asylum seeker applicants is narrower than for non-displaced applicants (M:F ratio 49:51 compared to 42:58). However, the gap is wider for those with an insecure status.

Female
Male

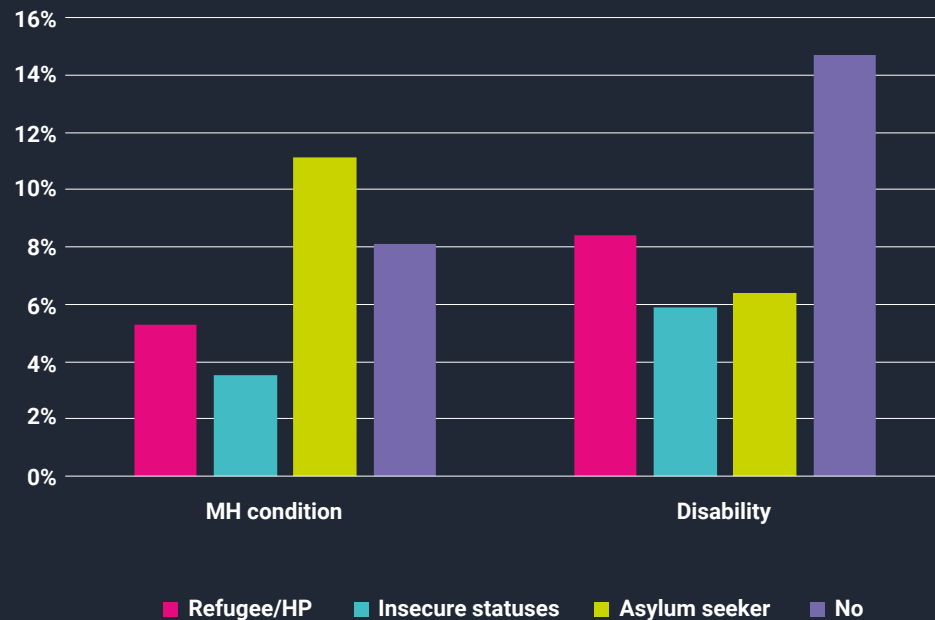
INTERSECTIONALITY: ETHNICITY



Unsurprisingly, applicants from displaced backgrounds are more ethnically diverse than UK applicants overall, with a significantly higher number of applicants in the Black ethnic group. This data is likely to vary depending on political stability and global conflicts and more research would be needed to map any future changes in this data.



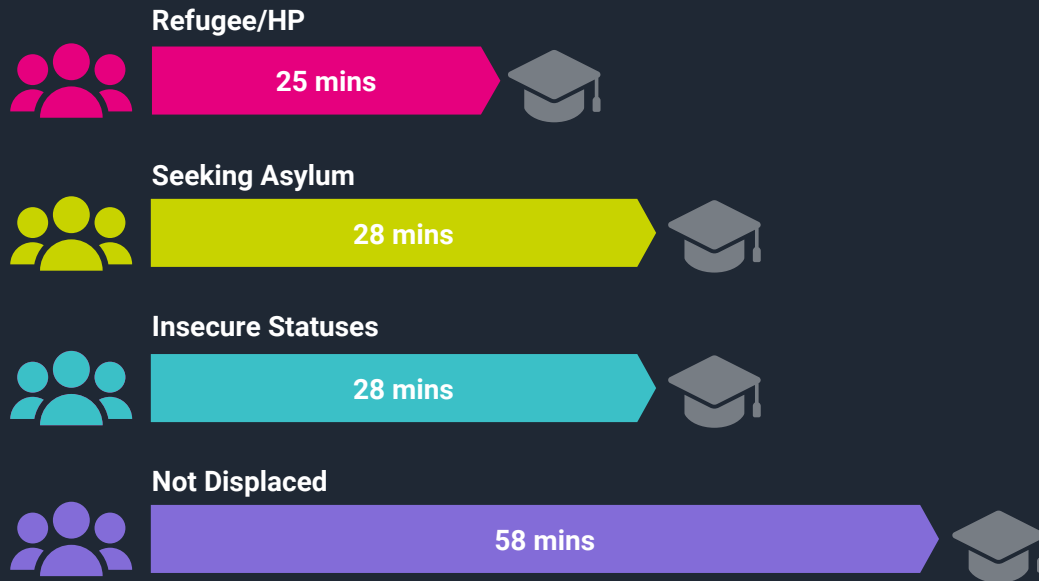
INTERSECTIONALITY: DISABILITY AND MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS



Applicants from refugee and insecure immigration statuses are less likely to share a mental health condition than non-displaced applicants, but those seeking asylum are more likely to share. This may be due to ongoing stress and anxiety around their asylum application, finances, and accommodation arrangements but also a reflection of traumatic experiences (as covered in this [Mental Health Foundation report](#)). However, this is likely to be an under-representation of the actual number of displaced applicants with mental health conditions – as is the number sharing a disability. [UCAS research](#) indicates that international students are much less likely to share a disability or mental health condition. This is likely due to stigma, a lack of diagnosis, and misconceptions around how this data may be used.



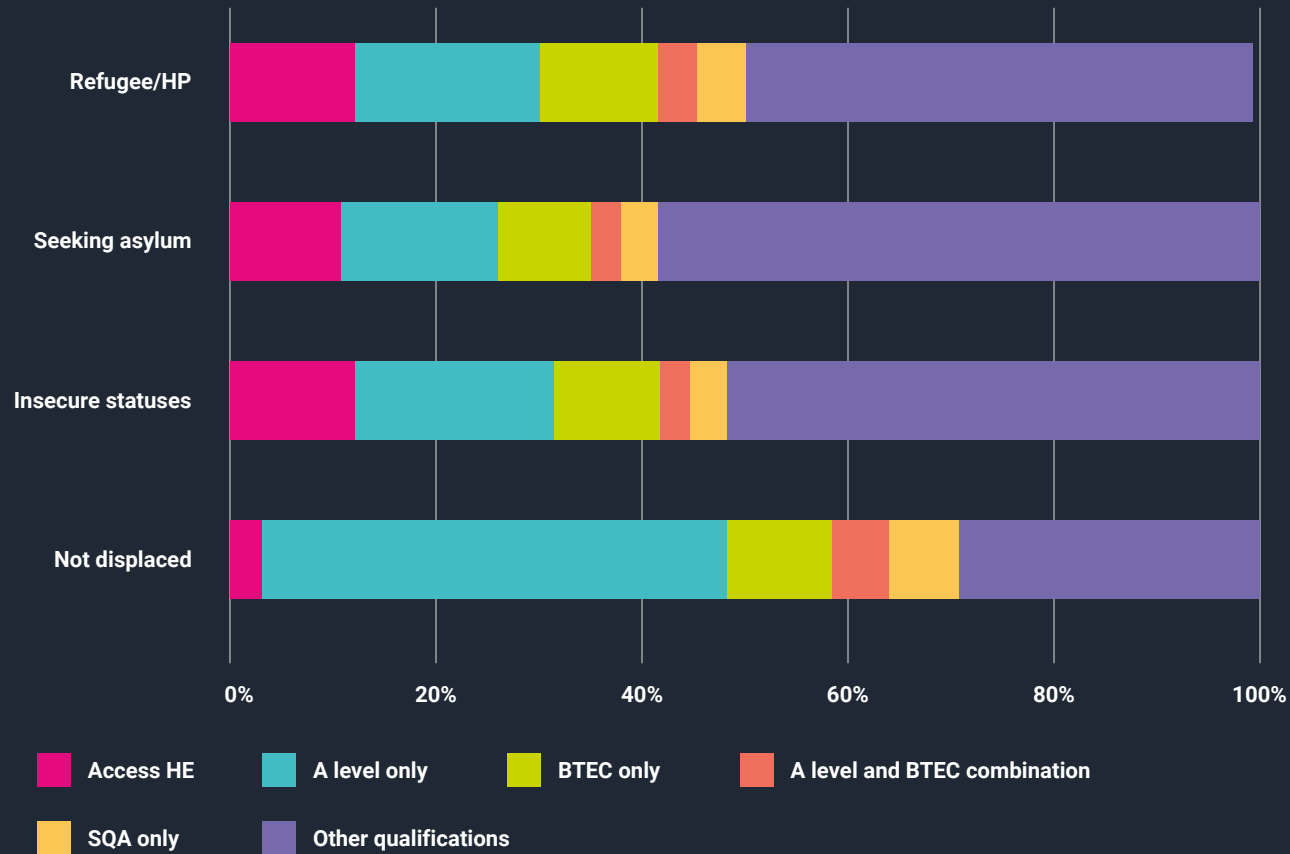
APPLICANTS FROM ALL DISPLACED BACKGROUNDS TEND TO APPLY LOCALLY



On average, displaced students travel half the distance to study than non-displaced students, potentially due to the number of mature applicants, family commitments, accommodation, and established support networks.



ENTRY QUALIFICATIONS

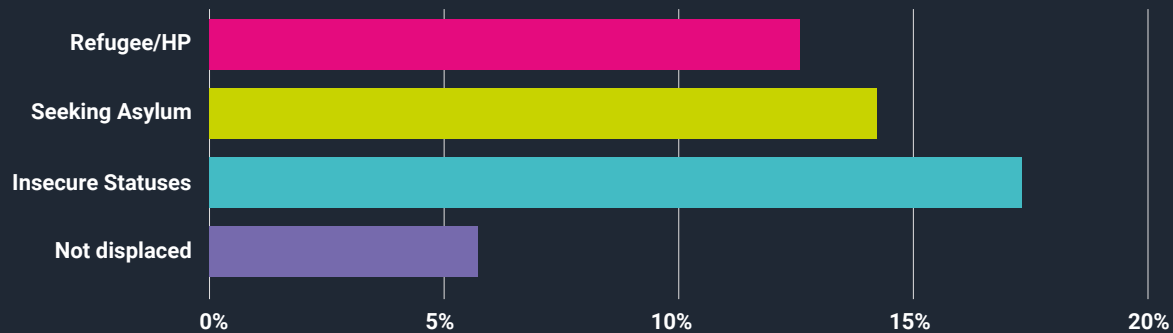


Displaced applicants are much more likely to apply with the Access to HE Diploma, which may be an essential pathway for those who have experienced disruption to education in their home country, or unable to provide evidence of acquired qualifications. Unsurprisingly, they are much more likely to apply with 'other' qualifications rather than standard UK qualifications.



APPLICANTS FROM DISPLACED BACKGROUNDS ARE MUCH MORE LIKELY TO HAVE CARING RESPONSIBILITIES

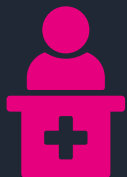
All statuses are more likely to also share a caring responsibility than non-displaced applicants. It is important for us to consider these additional considerations when advising these applicants, to ensure they can access the full range of support to help them succeed.



SUBJECTS AND COURSES



Nursing & Midwifery



Pharmacology, Toxicology and Pharmacy

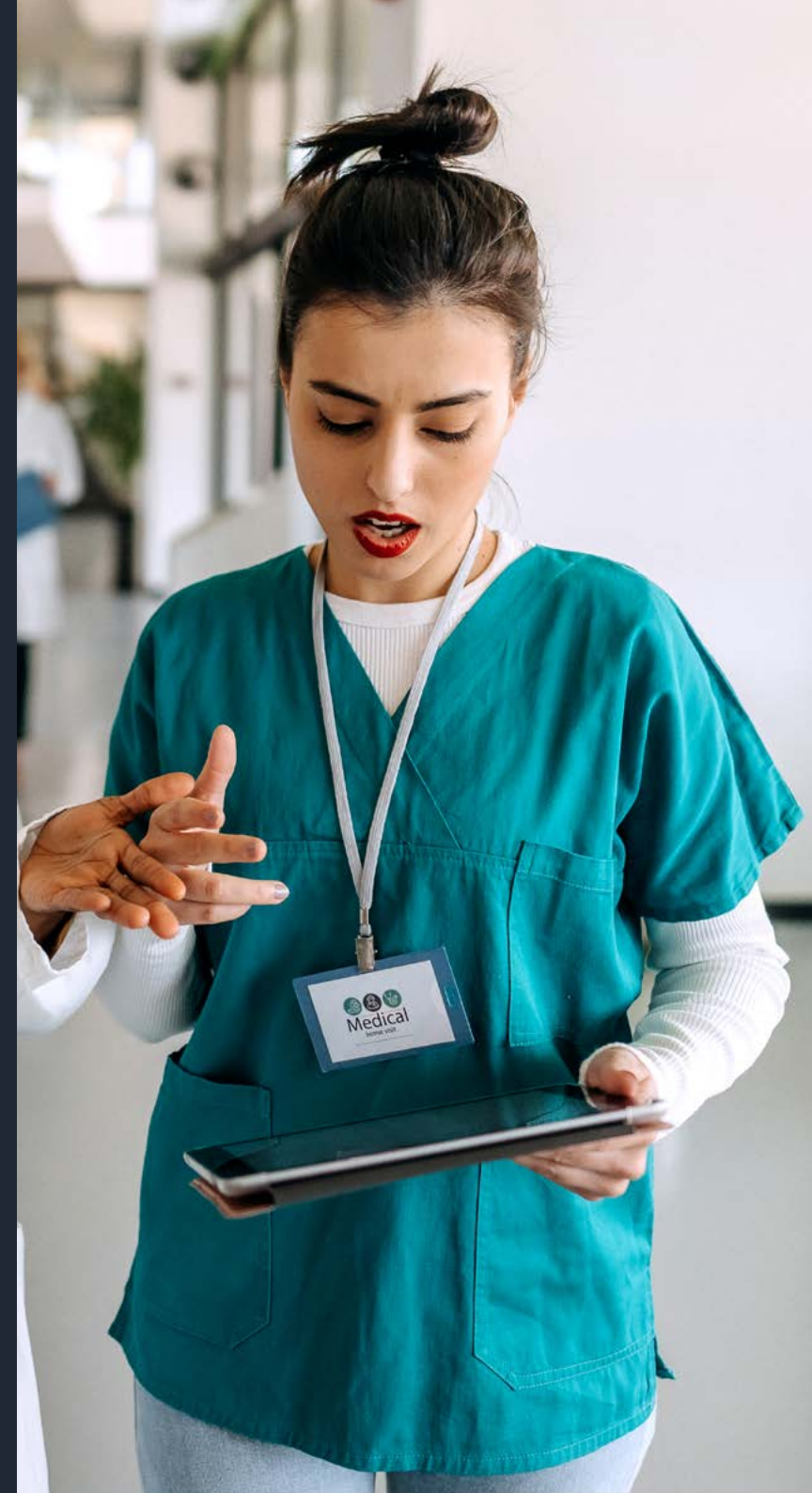


Computing
(Refugee, HP and those seeking asylum)



Health & Social Care
(Insecure statuses)

Applicants from displaced backgrounds have a clear preference for courses that lead to identified career paths. Health-related courses are popular across all three statuses, and computing courses are often chosen by those with refugee/HP status and asylum seeker applicants.



EXPERT COMMENT

It is well documented that HE can have a positive and protective impact for refugee and asylum-seeking young people, opening horizons, and allowing them to build more hopeful futures. We see this every day among the alumni of our Access to Higher Education programme at Refugee Education UK. We also see how an insecure immigration status regularly has a detrimental impact on educational progression, and can ultimately limit or completely exclude displaced students from applying to, accessing, and thriving at university. Over the last decade, we have gained valuable qualitative insights into the complex and persistent barriers that students face when attempting to apply for, and access, HE.

However, quantifying this cohort of students has remained a challenge for the sector. There has been a paucity of accurate data on the numbers of displaced applicants, where they are located in the UK, what universities and courses they apply to, and whether or not they are offered places. This critical first insight from UCAS provides much needed high-level data to address this gap.

The data has revealed some positive surprises. The gender parity in applications from refugee and asylum-seeking candidates immediately stands out. It also confirms our organisational experience that displaced students tend to apply to universities that are located close to 'home'.

The data also provides a quantitative illustration of the barriers that displaced people face to access HE. There is, for example, much to be done to understand why the acceptance rate for asylum seeking students is lower

than those with refugee status (53% accepted compared to 69.7%). The limited number of funding opportunities (typically scholarships) available for asylum seekers, is likely to be a key reason for the lower entry rate, with applicants potentially withdrawing their applications or declining places as a result of their inability to secure funding.

Our experience of working with these students also leads us to suspect that the data still under-counts in some areas, most notably in the overall number of displaced students applying to university. Individuals from forced migration backgrounds can be reluctant to self-disclose their immigration status for fear that it will negatively impact their application. Our front-facing work also suggests that mature students are under-represented – we typically find that those seeking guidance university applications are aged 24-30.

It will be immensely helpful to use this first year of UCAS data as a baseline from which to observe trends going forward. At Refugee Education UK, we exist to equip young refugees and asylum seekers to build more hopeful futures through education – and we are excited to see how this data will help drive change towards more inclusive and welcoming HE policies across the UK.

Dan Webb, Higher Education Lead Practitioner

Refugee Education UK (REUK)

September 2024



CONCLUDING COMMENT FROM UCAS

More than 11,000 applicants felt comfortable enough to share information about their immigration status in this first cycle. This is a strong indication that the messages around sharing individual needs are reaching students as we continue to work towards a culture of positive disclosure. We want all applicants to holistically research the right options for them, understand the benefits of sharing their individual circumstances, and feel confident they will get the support they need.

Displaced students of differing immigration statuses are grouped together, but we are mindful that these statuses can lead to very different experiences of HE – particularly around access. We should also be aware of the myriad other characteristics and experiences with which they apply to ensure they get the right support; for example, the over-representation of displaced applicants with caring responsibilities – and the potential under-reporting of mental health conditions and disability. More work needs to be done to break down stigma, reassure applicants about how this information is only used positively, and identify where a disability, learning difference or mental health condition that has been masked (e.g. due to acquiring a new language or adapting to a culture) can be supported.

THE UCAS FAIR ACCESS PROGRAMME

The **Fair Access Programme** aims to add further value to the sector's efforts to widen access and participation. UCAS' data and insights are central to our understanding of how different under-represented and disadvantaged groups progress to HE – and the barriers and challenges they face along the way. This new data will help us to extend our understanding of these groups, identify hidden challenges, and work with the sector to improve their experiences and outcomes.

We recently launched the Outreach Connection Service which will help link students to the diversity of outreach opportunities offered by HE providers and third-sector organisations. Initially, this will be available via the Adviser Hub where teachers can filter the opportunities to find what is best for their students. However, we are already working on making the service available directly to students for a future cycle. Outreach providers can **register their interest** in the OCS now.



UCAS RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS FROM DISPLACED BACKGROUNDS

Find targeted information and advice for under-represented students on ucas.com:

- ▶ **Student-facing information and advice** – for students from displaced backgrounds, including information about student finance, support in HE, and signposting supporting organisations for expert advice
- ▶ **Applying to HE with individual needs** – information and advice for a range of circumstances and support needs
- ▶ **Mental health and wellbeing support** – information and advice for all students
- ▶ **Teacher and adviser toolkit** – how to support displaced students from research through to transition
- ▶ **All teacher and adviser toolkits** – for supporting under-represented students from a variety of backgrounds
- ▶ **Good practice briefing for HE providers** – implementing support for displaced students following the introduction of the new displacement question

