



UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM

# Sanctuary Scholarships

An update on the impact of your support

2025/26

Thank you for supporting students through the Sanctuary Scholarships programme at the University of Birmingham. The combined challenges of the rapidly changing shape of higher education in the UK and migration policy means we must remain agile in response to fluctuating demand. The need for scholarships like these continues to grow and, as such, our commitment to remaining a University of Sanctuary is strong and enduring.

As a University of Sanctuary, Birmingham is part of a national network of university staff, lecturers, academics and students working to make higher education institutions places of safety, solidarity and empowerment for people seeking sanctuary. Our Sanctuary Scholarships programme forms a key part of this.

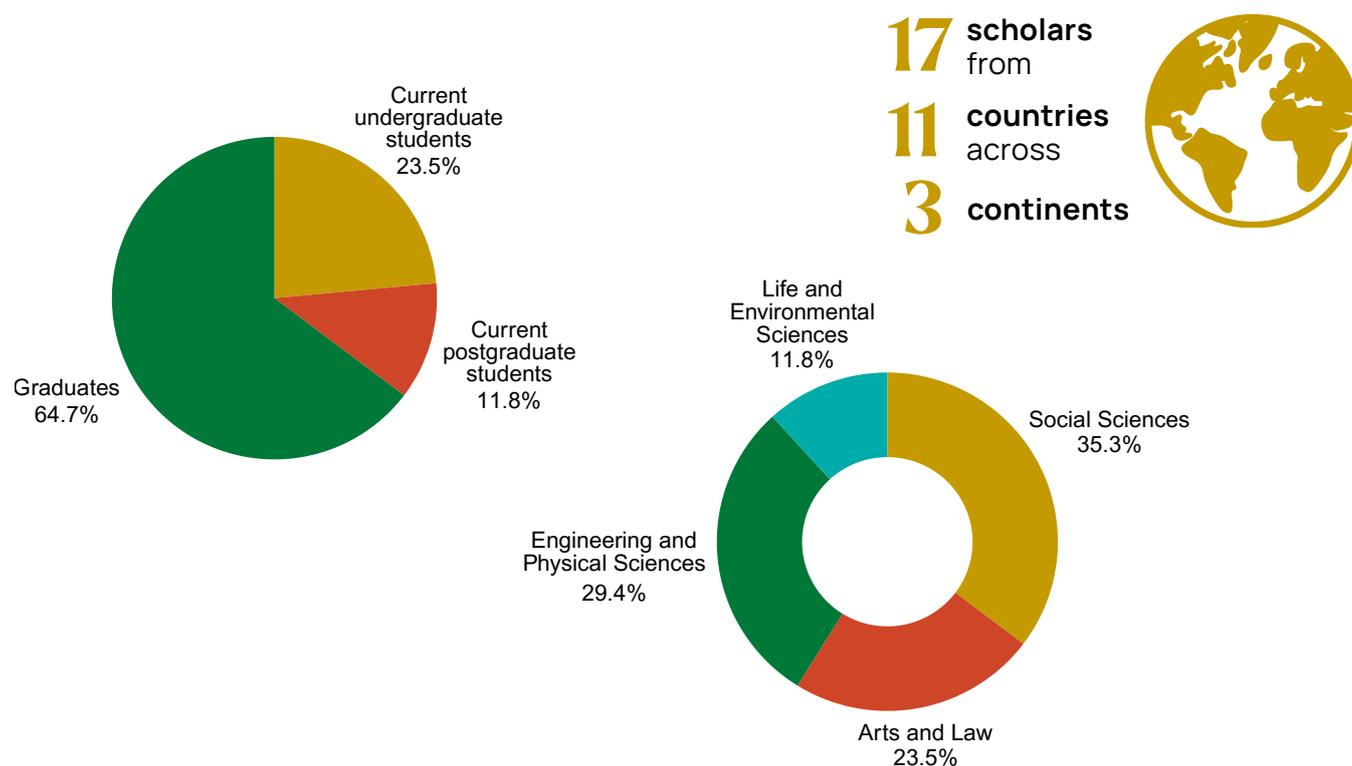
The University continues to offer up to five Sanctuary Scholarships per year for students from anywhere in the world, living in the UK. Alongside the financial support through the Scholarship, the additional support they receive when they are here allows them to make the most of their time at Birmingham, focus on their studies and feel a part of the community. In addition to a welcome pack, which includes a laptop, the package of support includes tailored study support, tutoring and mentoring, as well as internship and event opportunities.

In the last two years we have increased our commitment, and we are supporting more Scholars from parts of the world that have been affected by conflict and uncertainty. This includes students from Ukraine and Palestine, regions where higher education stopped completely.

The Scholars who have been through the programme and have graduated describe their time at Birmingham as being transformative – both in helping with their academic and professional aims and in instilling a sense of confidence during difficult times.

## The Sanctuary Scholars you are supporting

Since September 2022, there has been a total of 17 Sanctuary Scholars, who have come from 11 countries across three continents. Six of these Scholars are still studying with us this academic year, including three who started here in September 2025.



Cohort	Course	Nationality	Status
2022/23	Advanced Engineering Management	Yemen	Graduated in 2023
2022/23	Applied Linguistics with TESOL	Russia	Graduated in 2023
2022/23	Law	Namibia	Graduated in 2025
2022/23	Law with Criminology	Eswatini	Graduated in 2025
2022/23	Politics and International Relations (transferred from Engineering with Foundation Year)	Yemen	Second year student
2023/24	International Development	Sierra Leone	Graduated in 2024
2023/24	Advanced Engineering Management	Zimbabwe	Graduated in 2024
2023/24	Molecular Biotechnology	Nigeria	Graduated in 2024
2023/24	Law	Zimbabwe	Third year student
2023/24	Public and Environmental Health	Namibia	Graduated in 2024
2024/25	Mechanical Engineering	Egypt	Second year student
2024/25	Global Energy Technology	Sudan	Graduated in 2025
2024/25	International Relations	Yemen	Graduated in 2025
2024/25	Development Policy and Politics	Afghanistan	Graduated in 2025
2025/26	Politics and Social Policy	Kenya	First year student
2025/26	Business Analytics	Egypt	Master's student
2025/26	Advanced Mechanical Engineering	Egypt	Master's student

## Application numbers

There were 83 applicants in total during the 2025/26 application process. Last year there were 79 applications and in 2022/23 there were 59, which means demand continues to increase. The top subjects for applicants remain similar to that of last year, with Engineering still being the most popular subject, alongside subjects such as Politics and Social Policy.

The Scholarship application is open for 2026/27 entry. So far there have been 55 applicants, with 23 having met eligibility requirements. The University is encouraging applications through information webinars and by contacting schools and refugee centres directly. Despite high application numbers from talented prospective students, due to the inherently turbulent environment the applicants are in, the University plans to interview more people and create a bigger reserve list in case offer holders can no longer join.

# How you are helping current students

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Thanks to your support, we are currently supporting six Sanctuary Scholars. Three of them share how Birmingham is helping them achieve their ambitions.



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I applied to the University of Birmingham because it is one of the top 10 universities in the UK for my area of interest. The course also has modules that are more relevant for vehicle engineering and more hands-on work, as well as the option to do internships on campus. I am looking forward to being able to apply concepts into designs and eventually into prototypes. I am hoping this will eventually lead me to employment in vehicle engineering or motorsport.

Aside from academics, during my time here I am looking forward to creating lasting friendships, and also utilising the facilities that the University has to offer like the gym, sauna and swimming pool. Already, I have found the campus to be very beautiful and full of people from all backgrounds, making it a friendly and welcoming community.

The Sanctuary programme has meant I am surrounded by staff who are always happy to help. More generally, the Scholarship has enabled me to focus solely on studying while still feeling supported financially.

## **Advanced Mechanical Engineering Master's student**



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The Sanctuary Scholarship has been very important for me. It was the only option for funding to help me achieve my academic dreams. As an asylum seeker, I cannot qualify for student finance or other funding and I am not allowed to work.

I applied to study at the University of Birmingham due to its excellent reputation of providing high quality education and supporting students from diverse backgrounds. I chose to study Politics and Social Policy to have a theoretical understanding of policy formation so that I may be able to advocate for fairer policies for all. I am looking forward to growing academically and being able to rebuild my future. Studying will give me the knowledge and confidence for serving my community better. I intend to use the knowledge and skills that I will gain to support others, especially those who are marginalised, and advocate for inclusive policies.

My favourite thing about studying is the supportive learning atmosphere. I also appreciate living in a close proximity to campus, as this makes attending and participating in academic activities easier.

## **Virginia, first year Politics and Social Policy student**



The University of Birmingham is one of the highest-ranking universities for engineering in the country, so it was a very easy choice to make. I have always been passionate about engineering and problem solving which is why I went with Mechanical Engineering. Moreover, I really enjoy living in Birmingham as there is always something to do or somewhere to go and I feel like I am part of a community here.

I am having the time of my life at the University. I have made friends for life, met my girlfriend, had new experiences, played sports and joined Tiverton gym as well. The University of Birmingham well and truly changed my life and I am eternally grateful.

I am extremely privileged to have the Sanctuary Scholarship as it means I don't have to worry about money whilst at university. This means I can dedicate all my time towards my studies and enjoying my time here.

After I finish my degree, I hope to work in a Formula 1 team as a Mechanical Engineer. I am a very competitive person, and I am extremely passionate about cars, so working in a very competitive, innovative industry like Formula 1 is my dream.

**Ammar, second year Mechanical Engineering student**



# Life after Birmingham

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Since the beginning of the programme, 11 Sanctuary Scholars have graduated, plus two Article 26 Scholars (the forerunner to Sanctuary Scholarships). Two of our graduate scholars share their reflections of their time at Birmingham and what they have gone on to achieve.



Despite Birmingham's high ranking in the UK, one of the main reasons I applied was the availability of the Sanctuary Scholarship. At the time of my application, my immigration status meant I could not access student loans or work full time, making higher education extremely difficult financially. Finding a scholarship that could fully cover the costs of study was essential and Birmingham's Sanctuary Scholarship was among the most generous and supportive schemes available in the UK.

My time at the University was transformative. I see myself as a completely different person now compared to before I began my studies. One of the highlights was the professional English course, where I spent my first month exploring the campus and building strong friendships. I also volunteered as a Student Representative and worked as a Postgraduate Ambassador, assisting visitors during open days. These roles helped me gain confidence and develop valuable communication skills. I especially enjoyed seminar discussions, attending social and academic events and connecting with like-minded students interested in policy, conferences and civic engagement.

The Sanctuary programme team were incredibly responsive and kind throughout my studies. The scholarship allowed me to study with complete peace of mind, as it covered all essential costs. I am profoundly grateful for this support. It enabled me to have one of the best academic and personal growth experiences of my life. During one of the darkest periods of my journey, this scholarship felt like a light that made everything possible.

One of my favourite aspects of living and studying in Birmingham was its diversity. I was able to connect with people from many backgrounds, including friends from my home country, which helped whenever I felt lonely. Above all, the campus was my favourite place and remains one of the most special environments I have studied in.

Since graduating, I have established Novar Network, a youth-focused policy organisation. I am currently working on building and expanding it. The job market has been challenging, but the initial response to our work has been encouraging and I remain hopeful about the organisation's growth. I have also applied to several PhD programmes and am waiting for outcomes. My overall experience at Birmingham gave me confidence, perspective and valuable networking opportunities. These experiences have played a crucial role in shaping my ambitions and helping me pursue my long-term goals.



**Rafiq (MSc Development Policy and Politics, 2025)**



I'd visited on an open day and immediately felt that Birmingham was the right fit. I studied Engineering Management because it built on my industrial engineering background and combined technical and business skills in a way that prepares you for real-world challenges.

At first, I kept to myself at Birmingham. That changed when a lecturer encouraged me to stand as Course Representative. Listening to classmates, working with staff and seeing ideas turn into action made me feel part of something bigger. I enjoyed that sense of teamwork and purpose, it gave each day meaning. Through mentoring, I learned how to lead with patience and confidence. I especially enjoyed graduation week, when I worked as an usher and saw the pride on everyone's faces. Moments like that reminded me of why community matters and why I was proud to belong here.

Before starting at Birmingham, I was living in Home Office accommodation, which was often unstable. Some of my housemates were moved several times and I knew accepting the Sanctuary Scholarship meant giving up that support, including housing and a weekly allowance. It was frightening at first, but the Scholarship gave me something I had never had before – stability. It covered my living costs and provided me with a laptop, which helped me study effectively and apply for new opportunities, even after the programme. More than financial help, it gave me a sense of belonging. The events organised for Scholars and the team's continued support made me feel seen and valued. The scholarship allowed me to focus on building my future, not just surviving the present. By the time I finished my degree, I had been granted Leave to Remain, and I could see how much this support had changed the direction of my life. It gave me both the confidence and the foundation to start again.

Since graduating from Birmingham, I went on to complete an MPhil in Engineering for Sustainable Development at the University of Cambridge. My research focused on how early-stage ventures can design technologies that balance environmental responsibility with commercial viability. The foundation I gained at Birmingham, especially in Engineering Management, helped me develop the systems thinking and leadership skills I now use every day. It also gave me the confidence to keep learning and adapting.

I'm currently looking for a role where I can apply these skills to real-world sustainability challenges, particularly in engineering, infrastructure or innovation. I want to work with organisations that value purpose-driven design and inclusive development. The support I received as a Sanctuary Scholar continues to motivate me to use what I've learned to create opportunities for others.

My favourite part of studying at Birmingham was how supportive and inclusive the community felt. The Guild's events and diverse campus helped me settle in, but the turning point came when I decided to focus on my wellbeing. I joined the University gym as a way to regain stability and discipline. That small step changed everything. As I became healthier and more confident, I could focus better in class, take on leadership roles and enjoy my studies more. The support from staff and other students carried me through to graduation. The experience taught me that wellbeing and education are deeply connected. Rebuilding myself gave me the strength to succeed academically and the confidence to plan a meaningful future.

I'm deeply grateful for the support that made my education at Birmingham possible. The Sanctuary Scholarship didn't just fund my studies, it gave me stability, belonging and the chance to rebuild my life with purpose. Every step since, from completing my degree to pursuing further study and now seeking meaningful work, has grown from that foundation. What stays with me the most is how the scholarship gave me more than an education, it restored my sense of possibility. It showed me that with the right support, anyone can rebuild, learn and create change for others.

**Graduate, (MSc Advanced Engineering Management (Operations Management), 2025)**

# Supporting students in regions of conflict

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The University of Birmingham is deeply committed to widening access to higher education for students across the globe. As a proud University of Sanctuary, we are dedicated to supporting individuals whose educational opportunities have been disrupted by conflict and global instability. In recent years, this has included providing targeted support to students from Ukraine and Palestine, where ongoing crises caused higher education to be stopped completely. We believe that everyone deserves the chance to learn, grow and shape their future through education.

## Ukrainian students

We currently support three undergraduate students from Ukraine – all of whom are set to graduate this summer. Their paths to higher education were disrupted by the war in Ukraine, yet they arrived at Birmingham determined to pursue their ambitions. Now, as they approach the end of their studies, they are about to step into a future filled with possibility. Below, you can read one student's inspiring experience at Birmingham.



Back in February 2022, I was forced to leave my home due to the war in Ukraine. It was a challenging time for me, something that might be difficult to imagine: moving to a new country with a single bag in my hand, not knowing what tomorrow would bring, with a head full of constant worries about my family back home – something that feels like a bad dream today.

The role of the University cannot be undermined, especially in the uncertain times we are living in. Education plays a fundamental role in our unequal societies by opening doors of opportunity, not only for academic, but also for personal growth. The financial assistance provided by the University helped me successfully study my course, enabled me to envision a brighter future, equipped me with a progressive set of skills and core knowledge, and gave me confidence in building a new life in a highly competitive world.

I made lots of friends and met brilliant people along the way who supported me in every aspect of my journey, whether they were students, friends or staff. University became something more than just 'a university' for me; it was my new, safe home. A home where I was welcomed and given a chance to grow into who I am now. This University will forever be cherished in my heart as the one that lent me a hand in the very extreme situation I was placed in. This has inspired me to help others by volunteering.

As the war drags on and more conflicts around the world grow, it is important to keep this invaluable chance in place for people who were once like me. There are no words that can describe how grateful I am for the opportunities I was given.

**Daniel, final year Business Management student**

## Palestinian students

In Palestine, many higher education institutions have been destroyed, with some only now beginning the long process of rebuilding. Four students from Palestine, one undergraduate and three postgraduates, joined the University during the conflict and are currently receiving support. We are immensely proud of the Palestinian Sanctuary Scholars who have already completed their studies, including three who graduated with Distinction and one with a Merit. Their achievements stand as a powerful testament to their resilience and determination. We are delighted to welcome four new Palestinian scholars in the coming academic year and to continue supporting their journeys toward a brighter future.



Haya graduated in December 2025. She is now working as a teacher in the West Bank, Palestine



I chose to study at the University of Birmingham because of its strong academic reputation and the applied nature of its engineering programmes. Geotechnical engineering in particular stood out to me for its direct relevance to real-world infrastructure projects.

Since beginning my studies, I have most looked forward to the challenging and intensive nature of the course. The technical depth of the modules and the emphasis on practical problem-solving have been the highlights of my academic experience so far. After completing my degree, I hope to apply for an MBA and then return to industry, where I plan to work in cost control and geotechnical engineering on major infrastructure projects. My goal is to contribute to sustainable, resilient developments that have a positive long-term impact.

The Sanctuary Scholarship has made an enormous difference to my time at the University. By reducing financial pressure, it has allowed me to fully focus on my studies and make the most of the academic and professional opportunities available to me. One of my favourite things about living and studying at Birmingham has been the supportive academic environment and the diversity of the city. It is a vibrant, student-friendly place that has helped me feel welcomed and part of a wider community.

### Shawkat, current Engineering student



# Thank you

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I am so pleased and proud of the work that we do as a University of Sanctuary to support students whose lives are changed for the better through our investment and with the generous support of our donors. In the last two years we have increased our commitment and, as a result, increased the number of Sanctuary Scholars we are supporting from parts of the world that have been affected by devastating war and uncertainty. I often say to my colleagues and friends that while we cannot help everyone, every student we support makes a difference.

I meet all of our Sanctuary Scholars – some of them at the airport as they arrive in the UK on evacuation flights funded by the University and our donor community. I also make a point of meeting them regularly, and attending their graduation ceremonies where, so often, they celebrate their achievement without their families – something which so many of us take



for granted. Some keep in touch once they leave. They are so grateful for the opportunity they have been given, and they are all so determined to give something back.

It is a privilege to be involved in this work, which would not be possible without the generosity and compassion of our friends and donors. Thank you for your kindness.

**Jon Elsmore, Director of Student Affairs**



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