

RefugEAP Programme Impact Report

Oct 2022 – March 2025



What is RefugEAP?



RefugEAP is a free online pre-university academic English skills programme for refugee-background students across the UK, developed and run by Aleks Palanac at the University of Leicester's Sanctuary Seekers' Unit and Deirdre McKenna at the University of Leeds' Language Centre, and kindly supported by a dedicated team of volunteer tutors and a number of partner organisations

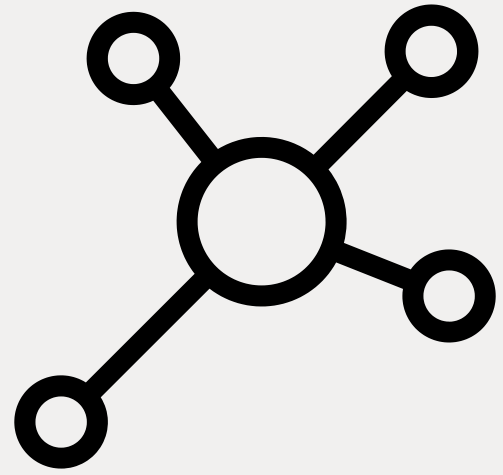
It is for students who need to improve their academic English skills to help them access a degree programme at university, but perhaps have not been able to access a formal pre-sessional English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programme yet

RefugEAP is a unique programme which has been developed to meet this need, providing refugee-background students with an opportunity to continue to develop their academic English skills in a supportive, trauma-informed way while they are waiting for more formal opportunities to become available

Find out more about
RefugEAP here
(scan or click)



How is the programme structured?



Module 1

Structure

- Part-time, online pre-sessional style course (11 weeks incl. induction week)
- 2 x 90 minute taught sessions per week
- Asynchronous independent study (3+ hrs per week)
- 3 x tutorials per module

Themes

- UN Sustainable Development Goals
- (adapted from Develop EAP)
- Personal study goal development (to develop reflexivity and learner autonomy)

Assessment

- Weekly formative assessments
- Group Essay (critically analysing SDGs) 50%
- Individual presentation (study goal progress) 50%

Outcome:

- Certificate of completion (dependent on attendance and engagement)
- Opportunity to continue on to Module 2
- Opportunity to receive reference to support university applications

Module 2

Structure

- 8-10 week programme of optional sessions
- 1:1 academic personal tutoring (5-10 tutorials)
- IELTS preparation workshops and practice exams
- EAP writing sessions
- Guidance on applying to university
- Communication skills workshops

Aims

- Develop students' personal goals via Personal Development Plan
- Opportunity to prepare for IELTS exam (if relevant to needs), funded by Breaking Barriers

Find out more about the course design here (scan or click)

Module 1 syllabus design



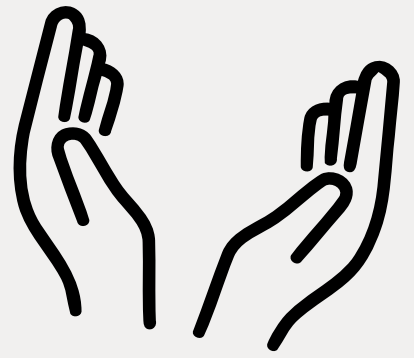
Guiding principles



Trauma-informed approach



What does each partner university provide?



Workload allocation for Course Co-Director (Aleks Palanac) and Programme Administrator (Julie Umarova)

Hosting and updating RefugEAP web pages - www.le.ac.uk/sanctuary/initiatives/refugeap

Providing shared MS Teams space for collaborative working



Workload allocation for Course Co-Director (Deirdre McKenna)

Hosting RefugEAP Programme's email inbox - refugeap@leeds.ac.uk

Hosting RefugEAP as an official programme, giving students and tutors access to email, online platforms, Office 365, University Library, Support Services, etc



15% BY 2030 REFUGEE HIGHER EDUCATION

Universities  of Sanctuary



Running RefugEAP as a joint initiative between our two universities helps us meet our respective universities' commitments to the Universities of Sanctuary scheme (especially the guiding principle of 'Share', which emphasises the importance of sharing resources and expertise in pursuit of a common aim). It also contributes to UN Sustainable Development Goal 4: Quality Education, and the UNHCR's 15by30 pledge to increase the percentage of refugee-background students across the world with access to HE to 15% by 2030

Where are RefugEAP students from?



127

students from
Oct 2022
to March 2025

29

different
countries

3

different
continents

Country of origin	Number of students
Afghanistan	26
Ukraine	20
Iran	17
Syria	10
Yemen	7
Sudan	6
Turkey	5
Egypt	4

Top 8 countries of origin of
RefugEAP students from Oct
2022 to March 2025

Other countries / regions that
RefugEAP students have come
from (to date)

Pakistan Bangladesh
Libya HongKong
Nigeria Tigrinya Ethiopia
China Saudi Arabia Tunisia
Russia Iraq Algeria
IvoryCoast Malawi India
Cameroon Vietnam DRC
Chad

RefugEAP student progression

81

students successfully completed Module 1

69

students went on to complete the optional Module 2

27

students have so far received university offers

7

students have so far received university scholarships

41

students have so far moved on to further preparation or requalification pathways

Student soundbites

It [RefugEAP] introduced me to a new world that I was not familiar with before....What academic English is? Like what to expect of the university ... it gives you chance to have the atmosphere of academic life

I struggled with social isolation and had very few opportunities for meaningful social interaction... However, by taking part in the course, I was able to address social isolation and improve my overall well-being


...one of the positive effect[s] [of this programme] is on my mental health. It helps me to overcome stress and anxiety of fearing of your future. It also give[s] me a lot of energy to hope for my future education plan in the UK



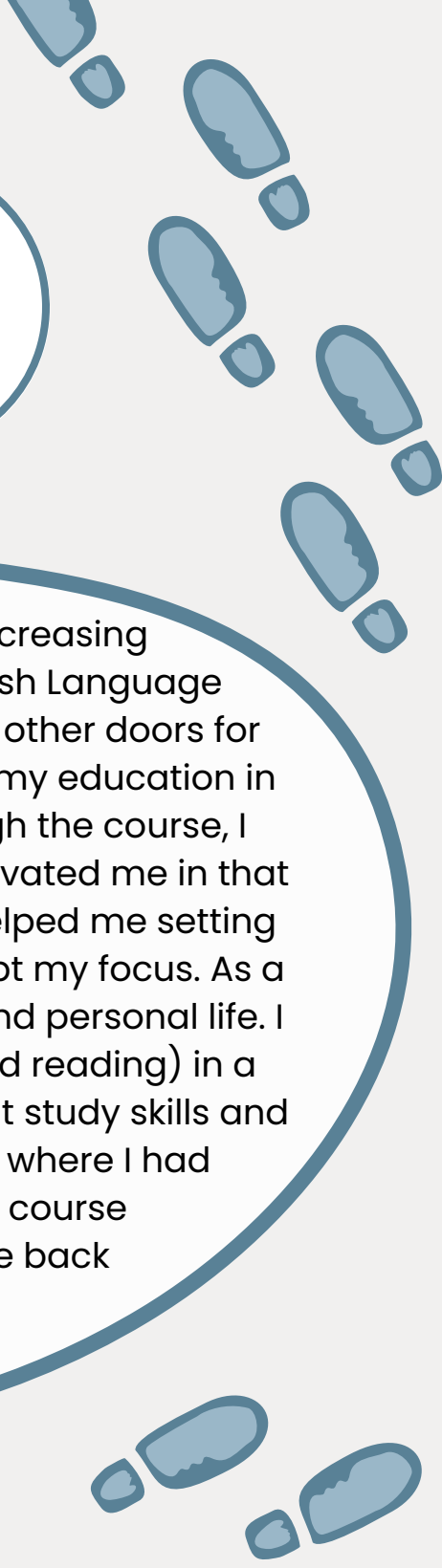
Hear from L, a female student from Afghanistan. Following the RefugEAP Programme, we helped her to secure a fee waiver for a 5-week pre-session at a UK university. She is currently working towards Master's degree in Law

The RefugEAP Programme was a great stepping stone on my journey to postgraduate study in the UK. It not only strengthened my academic English but also helped me build confidence in engaging with university-style learning. The support I received through RefugEAP played a key role in preparing me for the pre-session course and eventually pursuing my LLM

Hear from Farshad, an Iranian student who completed the programme in 2023 and was subsequently awarded a scholarship to study on a Master's programme in Civil Engineering at Swansea University



RefugEAP supported me like a family during a challenging period in my life. They assessed and improved my level of English and guided me towards my goal of continuing my education at university to pursue a Master's degree in Civil Engineering. As part of their support, they also provided me with a reference letter, which was essential for my university application. Beyond education, RefugEAP played a crucial role in helping me secure my immigration status, which made it possible for me to move forward with my plans. Throughout this journey, I made friends and established valuable connections who continued to support me even during my course, offering advice in many areas, including my academic writing. Overall, I might not have been able to achieve any of this without their help



Hear from Ulriche, a Cameroonian student who completed the programme in 2023 and was subsequently awarded a scholarship to study on a Master's programme in Project Planning & Management at the University of Bradford

The RefugEAP course helped me in term of increasing my confidence and independence of using English Language particularly in academic field. It has opened many other doors for opportunity and gave me hope about the future of my education in the UK which I am really proud to continue. Through the course, I established contact with others students which motivated me in that journey. Support from tutors was incredible. They helped me setting personal goals and working toward it, which had kept my focus. As a result, the impact has been seen in my academic and personal life. I developed my skills (listening, speaking, writing and reading) in a very short period of time, I improved my independent study skills and I had that sense of not feeling alone in a country where I had limited ties. Overall, I received a lot from the course and I hope I will be able in the future to give back what I received by supporting other people in need

Watch a video testimonial of RefugEAP student Iuliia from Ukraine, who completed RefugEAP and then went on to receive a scholarship to study on an MA in Illustration at the University of Plymouth



RefugEAP's Partners and Donors



RefugEAP can only run through the generous support of its network of partner organisations/projects and dedicated volunteer tutors. Here are some of the many ways in which they have supported our students to date



RefuAid
Hope. Resilience. Unity

The wonderful team at RefuAid, which subsequently moved over to Breaking Barriers, has been referring students into the programme, and providing invaluable wrap-around support to them, including: a dedicated case worker, covering exam fees for those students ready to take tests such as IELTS, offering further progression advice and guidance once students complete the RefugEAP Programme. This has enabled RefugEAP students to receive more holistic and person-centred support than would otherwise be possible

80

students received wrap-around support from RefuAid / Breaking Barriers

screen share

Donate a device to Screen Share UK here (scan or click)



26

students received a refurbished laptop/PC from Screen Share

A significant proportion of RefugEAP students do not have access to a laptop or PC, which would make it extremely difficult for them to access and engage with this online programme. We therefore partnered with the innovative charity Screen Share UK, which provides refurbished devices to refugee-background students wishing to access educational opportunities in the UK. Thanks to Screen Share's generous support, 26 students have received a refurbished device to date, thus enabling them to join and benefit from the programme

Many RefugEAP students struggle to access a reliable internet connection, which is particularly important during live lessons. For this reason, we partnered with the Good Things Foundation and joined their National Databank, through which we periodically request data sim cards which we then allocate to any RefugEAP student who needs one

75

free data SIM cards were donated to RefugEAP students by the Good Things Foundation's National Databank

135

prospective RefugEAP Programme students completed a Password English Language test

Many refugee-background students struggle to demonstrate their English language level, as exam fees for widely accepted proficiency tests such as IELTS are often prohibitive. The team at Password English Language Testing kindly donated free test codes to us for their Password Knowledge Test, which enabled us to determine which applicants were at a suitable level to join the programme



password



WORDWISE
Confident communication
for new beginnings

Keen to support our students with intercultural communication and related soft skills which are often omitted from mainstream general and academic English provision, for our fourth cohort of RefugEAP we partnered with WordWise, who ran a series of Communications Skills Workshops for Displaced People, to support students in moving into educational and employment contexts

12

students attended Communication Skills sessions run by WordWise

50

students received online access to Oxford University Press' Oxford EAP coursebooks

OUP kindly donated a number of free access codes for their Oxford EAP coursebooks, which benefited 50 students in their tutor-supported self-study on Module 2 of the programme



OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

RefugEAP's Volunteer Tutors



41

tutors have to date completed our trauma training and joined our dedicated team of volunteers

Hear from some of our tutors

Volunteer
Frances Acton

... permission / freedom to be flexible and to support students when they are struggling - this is generally not possible on other EAP courses I've taught on where the rules and expectations are very rigid and tutors are not always able to 'make allowances' for students who are clearly struggling (attendance requirements / submission deadlines etc.)

Volunteer
Charlotte Morriss

I'm a much better practitioner using [Trauma-Informed Pedagogy]. It was also very inspiring working with like-minded colleagues too... It was very rewarding seeing the progress the students have made, and it makes me hopeful that these students may go on to provide (much-needed) diverse perspectives in HE or how we see HE

Self-access
trauma-informed
ESOL training



What our students say about
their tutors

I can't express enough how grateful I am for the incredible support I received during the programme. A big thanks to everyone involved in RefugEAP for their dedicated efforts in making higher education accessible to individuals with refugee backgrounds like myself. This is a shining example of social justice in action

I feel so much a sincere will to help... every teacher here was interested to invest in us and to help us...you cannot calculate this, but you can feel... that you are important and people care

Impact Case Study



For the first two iterations of the RefugEAP Programme, we conducted a Scholarship of Teaching and Learning case study using an action research approach to course development and evaluation, drawing from qualitative data from students, tutors, and course designers, to evaluate the course, inform changes and assess impact. We wrote this up into a journal article, which can be accessed here:

McKenna, D. and Palanac, A. (2025) 'RefugEAP Case Study: Developing and Critically Evaluating a Free, Online Trauma-Informed English for Academic Purposes (EAP) Programme for Refugee-Background Students', *Journal of Interactive Media in Education*, 2025(1), p. 6. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5334/jime.894>



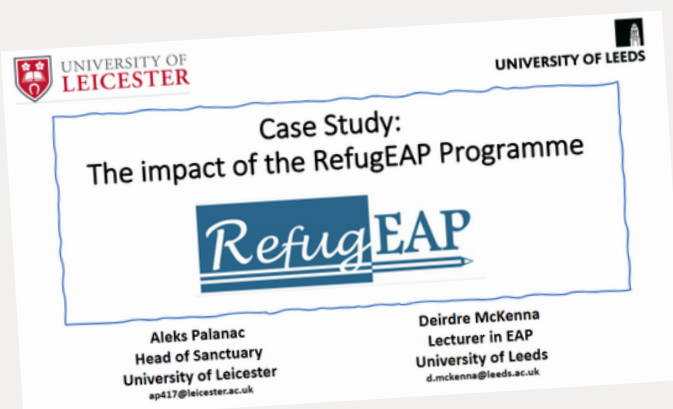
Main findings

1 – Perceived effectiveness of RefugEAP – students overwhelmingly reported finding the programme a very useful and accessible introduction to academic language, skills and expectations in the UK context, in contrast to what regular ESOL courses offer. They appreciated the focus on future study goals and applying to university, and some students reported that setting and making progress towards these goals benefited their mental health by decreasing anxiety about their future and giving them a sense of hope



2 – Student independence and decision making – when more autonomy and choice were initially offered within the flipped learning approach adopted, many students struggled with the independent study tasks, which is in line with previous studies of trauma survivors (e.g. Horsman, 2004). When we outlined and explained expectations more overtly, provided more guidance, structure and ‘scaffolding’ at the beginning of the programme, and gradually reduced this as the course progressed, the students were able to engage much more effectively and meaningfully, building confidence and skills more incrementally

3 – Relationships and support – supportive relationships, both with tutors and also between peers, served as a key factor in helping students feel a sense of belonging and community, and helped a number of students continue on the programme when they had been struggling. Particularly notable was the trauma-informed approach which was embedded throughout all aspects of the programme, including in the warm and supportive communications sent out by the programme administrator, Julie., in line with the concept of ‘warm support’ put forward by Baker et al (2018).



Access a presentation of our findings here (scan or click)



Ways to support RefugEAP

Become an **associate organisation** to receive updates about application windows, to refer students onto the programme and to consider RefugEAP students for places on your programmes (e.g. IELTS, pre-sessionals, degree-level programmes). For example, EAP centres may wish to pledge 1-2 places per year on pre-sessionals. Sign up via this form



Become an official **partner organisation** if you are able to contribute time, funds or resources to the running of the programme – email us at refugeap@leeds.ac.uk

Join our team of **volunteer tutors**. Access role description here



Donate to our RefugEAP Programme fundraiser, to enable us to continue operating sustainably



Donate your devices (laptops, smartphones and tablets) to our charity partner, Screen Share. They repair, refurbish, and redistribute disused tech to refugees across the UK, equipping them with both the tools and the digital skills to use it! To learn more about tech donation for businesses, please contact alessandra@screen-share.co.uk

Useful links

Find out more about the RefugEAP Programme on our web pages for students, organisations and volunteers



You can contact our team (Deirdre McKenna, Aleks Palanac and Julie Umarova) by email

refugeap@leeds.ac.uk

Follow our updates on Blue Sky Social



@refugeap.bsky.social

Watch our presentations, a video testimonial from a RefugEAP Programme student, and a British Council Teaching English podcast episode which features RefugEAP via our YouTube playlist



Access the full journal article - RefugEAP Case Study: Developing and Critically Evaluating a Free, Online Trauma-Informed English for Academic Purposes (EAP) Programme for Refugee-Background Students



Access the free, self-access trauma training materials that RefugEAP's volunteer tutors complete when joining the programme



Explore the website of our sister initiative, the RefugEAP Network, which contains resources and guidance to encourage more universities to develop EAP opportunities for refugees across the UK and beyond (including the Pal-EAP scheme for displaced Palestinian students and academics)

