



OLive volunteer tutor, Holly Rooke, talks about her experience of tutoring on the programme.

Five years after my undergraduate degree at Bristol I returned to the university to study for an MSc in public policy. Accessing higher education is not easy for everyone in the UK, and I felt incredibly lucky to be able to start studying again at a time that suited me. So, when one of my lecturers said they were looking for volunteers for a project to support refugees and asylum seekers into higher education it seemed like a great opportunity to help others experience the benefits of university as I was.

Globally only [6% of refugees](#) have access to higher education, and the percentage for women is lower again. OLive (the Open Learning Initiative) is a project in the UK that aims to counter some of the many barriers – economic, linguistic, cultural and social – that refugees and asylum seekers face when trying to access university. OLive is a primarily online, completely free, holistic and flexible preparation course that gives people the skills and knowledge they need to support them on their education journey.

As a volunteer tutor my role is primarily to offer feedback on course and scholarship applications, as well as answer queries people may have about the university process. Unfamiliarity with the UK education system is a huge issue for many of the people on the OLive course (I think we all remember how confusing UCAS can be!) and providing a small amount of additional support with applications can really make a difference to the outcome.

As well as supporting with applications I was able to help out at several in-person meetings in Bristol, which included information sessions from the university, a creative writing workshop, and a small graduation ceremony to celebrate the achievements of those who had completed the course.

I've been a volunteer with OLive for over two years now and in that time have met some amazing people, students and soon-to-be students, from a range of backgrounds and with a range of skills, and I've learnt a huge amount from everyone I've supported. Many of the people I've worked with have extensive professional experience, and often degrees from their home country. Though navigating a range of complex barriers, their genuine enthusiasm and commitment to education is truly inspiring. I'm now in the early stages of a PhD, and that enthusiasm and commitment is something I often think about – the perfect motivation boost to tackle another day in the library!