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OLIVE 2023: SUPPORTING PEOPLE FROM REFUGEE BACKGROUNDS INTO HIGHER EDUCATION

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OLive 2023: Supporting people from refugee backgrounds into Higher Education

Summary

Only 5% of refugees worldwide access higher education (HE). UNHCR has set an HE '15% by 2030' participation target for refugees. HE improves refugees' employment and wellbeing, promotes inclusion, and strengthens UK productivity. And refugees themselves frequently have strong educational aspirations and backgrounds.

Yet refugees face multiple economic, social, cultural and linguistic barriers to accessing HE. These problems include HE preparation, which is often of small capacity and restricted scope, although research indicates it has considerable educational and psychosocial benefits.

The Open Learning Initiative, or OLive, aimed to address this problem in England in 2023 by supporting people from refugee backgrounds who want to go to university. This year, OLive delivered a 12-week online programme across England. The programme was organised collaboratively between Refugee Education UK (REUK) and the University of Bristol (UoB), with support from colleagues in University College London (UCL), Bloomsbury and University of East London Doctoral Training Programme, and Manchester University. This programme was funded by the National Lottery.

What is Olive?

OLive is a 12-week programme supporting people from refugee backgrounds who want to go to university. It operates online across England, with in-person hub meetings in Bristol, London and Manchester. OLive is free, open to all, holistic, and refugee-centred. It offers online classes in Academic English and IELTS; Paths to HE, Education, Training and Employment; Digital Skills; and Creative Writing. OLive also provides a catch-up YouTube channel, one-to-one tutoring to help with university and scholarship applications, and individual and group follow-up with all students. It offers between-programme advice, online classes and discussion and tutorial support, and 'outreach' short courses. It is well-integrated with refugee-sector NGOs, and relevant local authority, Further Education (FE) and Higher Education provision.

OLive 2023 has:

- Provided an online certificated higher education preparation programme and full follow-up support for 80 asylum-seeker and refugee students across England (increased from the predicted 50), 30 of whom have submitted or are submitting university applications

- Generated self-reported gains for students in: academic and general English skills, knowledge of UK HE, digital competencies, confidence in creative skills, learning, and learning community
- Supported students who could not attend classes with 'catch-up' videos and other materials
- Held in-person 'hub' meetings - with funded travel - for students in Bristol, London and Manchester
- Organised a mini-OLive autumn 2023 programme for prior students and 70 students awaiting the next full programme. This programme provided intensive academic English and HE orientation classes, academic English seminars, .and 1-to-1 tutorials.
- Piloted a certificated outreach course in local NGOs and hotels for 20 people.
- Involved undergraduates, graduates and university staff, often from refugee or migrant backgrounds themselves, as tutors and researchers, thus developing expertise among emerging professionals in the migration and related social policy and education fields
- Collaborated with national and local NGOs, universities, colleges and local authorities to reach interested students and to integrate educational and other service provision.
- Provided guidance to other HE and FE institutions, and statutory and voluntary sector stakeholders, on refugee HE preparation
- Initiated and coordinated OLive students', teachers' and staff's contributions to exhibitions, conferences, and publications, including an upcoming OLive poetry collection and a short film.

Sketches from OLive

Aicha (all names are pseudonyms) is a doctor and bioscientist from Syria; she is also an asylum-seeker living in London. She has applied to local universities for relevant Masters and has at the same time applied for Sanctuary Scholarships. She has attended all the core OLive classes, has received feedback on all her applications from OLive tutors, and has accessed the OLive Academic English/IELTS catch-up videos. She has also been referred by OLive to RefuAid for advice on medical requalifying in the UK. OLive follow-up will help us track how Aicha's extensive applications are working out for this highly-qualified asylum-seeker transferring to the UK HE system.

Zack has lived in the South-West for 15 years, having originally come to the UK from Somalia. As he is working, he has relied on the OLive catch-up videos. He has applied to an Arts and Social Sciences Foundation programme, and discussed his applications with his OLive tutors. If the Foundation programme does not work out, he will look at taking a college Access to Social Sciences course, before starting a Politics degree. OLive follow-up will help us find out the results of Zack's current applications, how far he has gone in pursuing his earlier plans, and what support he has and might need for that.

OLive's future goals:

- To expand the numbers of students OLive supports, by running two or more fully registered and evaluated cohorts a year
- To increase the number of in-person hubs to include the Midlands, and to provide more in-person meetings with more structure.
- To provide more tutor training, and paid tutor-organiser roles as well as placement student support.
- To establish a stakeholder advisory group.
- To supply a paid administrator role.
- To develop the role of OLive alumnae/l as tutors.
- To formalise our links with organisations that help refugees to transfer professional qualifications.
- To consider providing more academic English teaching.
- To create links between OLive and the OfS/Research England programme 'Social Transformation and Advocacy through Research' (STAR), designed to tackle inequalities that people from racially minoritised groups face in their research careers, including within the third sector
- To provide formal refugee HE information sessions online and in-person for education and refugee-sector workers.
- To encourage complementary university provision of free academic English and UK HE orientation sessions for refugees
- To formalise inter-programme provision
- To expand our provision of outreach pre-programmes
- To make more links with hotels and other facilities that newly house asylum-seekers

OLive students' feedback

"I would just like to say OLive is my guide and all teachers, tutors, leaders of this programme are my heroes".

"I want to use this opportunity to thank OLive organisers, tutors, etc. for all their effort for me to go to university, it's a dream come true".

"The teachers are committed, respectful, explaining in detail, and they know what we need without asking them".

"They chase up students for learning, support students for requirements – help students to make a new life in the UK".

OLive 2023: Supporting people from refugee backgrounds into Higher Education

1. Refugees and Higher Education

Among refugees and asylum-seekers, 5% - two-thirds men - access higher education (HE). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has set a target of 15% of refugees to be participating in HE by 2030 (UNHCR, 2019). Conflict, including in Ukraine; persecution, as in Hong Kong; and climate change are increasing refugee numbers. These factors, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic's and the cost of living crisis's intensification of inequalities (IEP,2020; IFS,2021), challenge UNHCR's 15% target.

HE helps rebuild refugees' lives, improves wellbeing, delivers better-paid, professional work, promotes inclusion, and strengthens productivity (Baker et al., 2018; Halkic and Arnold, 2019; UNHCR, 2019). Refugees frequently have strong educational aspirations and backgrounds, including prior university study, and are often highly-skilled. However, they face multiple and daunting economic, socio-cultural, institutional and linguistic barriers to accessing HE (Baker et al., 2018; Lambrechts, 2020; Lounasmaa et al., 2022; McAllister et al., 2021).

The problems include HE preparation, which is often of small capacity and restricted scope. Yet research suggests such preparation has considerable educational and psychosocial benefits (Gruttner et al., 2018; Zlatkin-Troitschanskaia et al., 2018). The Open Learning Initiative, or OLive, which supports people from refugee backgrounds who want to go to university, aims to address this problem in the UK.

2. The UK HE refugee and asylum-seeker situation: barriers and possibilities

UK asylum applications have increased steeply since 2019, and there are now 138,000 asylum claims awaiting decision, 80,000 for over a year ([UK Government, 2023](#)). UNHCR indicates that, as of November 2022, there were 231,597 refugees in the UK ([UNHCR, no date](#)). In total, people who came to the UK as refugees constitute around 0.6% of the population ([Migration Observatory, 2022](#)). The UK Government (2019) calls for dedicated, long-term, holistic refugee-sector interventions. Its 'levelling up' agenda includes training for high-waged, knowledge-economy work. Refugee HE, and preparation for it, can make a valuable contribution to these goals.

Presently, 84% of refugees report lack of academic-level English skills, but many are university-ready in other academic respects. Of those from Syria, for instance, 40% already have degrees (Breaking Barriers, 2022). A significant percentage started or were planning to start HE, having finished high school, before they left their home countries. These groups – possibly half the total – are particularly likely to pursue university education. However, lack

of familiarity with UK HE, as well as with English, difficulties with transferring qualifications, conflicting economic and social commitments, and asylum-seekers' difficult living situations, inability to work, liability for international university fees and lack of government loan entitlement, mean that a relatively small fraction of refugees and asylum-seekers enter HE soon after arrival.

This delay can create difficulties for skills maintenance, later returns to learning, and/or progress to high-skilled and well-paid employment. One OLIve student, for instance, was an experienced digital professional with skills in short UK supply. They were trying to keep those skills updated, gain sufficient English for a Masters, and compete for the proportionally very small number of scholarships available for the increasing numbers of asylum-seekers, while living in an isolated hotel in the North West with £9 a week for non-essential costs such as travel to college and to libraries with computers.

Refugees may also lack support for accessing HE later on, once they are established in the UK. Another OLIve student, in the South West, had planned to go to university before being forced to leave their country. After five years in the UK, they felt that they and their family were financially and socially stable enough for them to access HE. Still, transferring their prior English, Maths and other qualifications to allow Foundation or Access course entry, as well as working out how to sustain family in the UK and back home while in full-time education, was very challenging.

Universities, colleges and statutory and voluntary sector organisations also face barriers in supporting people from refugee backgrounds towards HE. They cannot address difficulties that emerge from national or local government policy. They may also lack the up-to-date information and training that would best enable them to help refugees and asylum-seekers access university. They are in addition severely resource-constrained in the amount of academic English and UCAS preparation, and scholarships and bursaries, that they can provide.

Nevertheless, these organisations make very significant contributions to many refugees' progression to HE. Refugee-focused NGOs and resettlement teams direct interested service users to specialist NGOs such as Refugee Education UK, Student Action for Refugees (STAR) and RefuAid. Those specialist NGOs provide information and support resources for universities and colleges, and for prospective students. Universities and FE college access programmes also support refugees' moves into HE. Local universities have links with access courses, and provide sanctuary scholarships and other university of sanctuary schemes, academic English training, foundation years, and outreach projects which explain UK HE and encourage refugees to access it.

However, it seems there may still be gaps in refugees' HE preparation that could usefully be addressed. For instance, the amount and scope of academic English preparation and guidance into UK HE is limited. These gaps were apparent through the high levels of student demand for the course and through specific student suggestions when we opened up the OLLive programme nationally in 2023.

3. OLLive as part of the solution

Between 2016 and 2022 UK OLLive supported around 350 students from refugee backgrounds towards HE as part of a Europe-wide (Hungary, Austria, Germany, Greece, UK) scheme funded by Erasmus+ and then by Open Society Foundations (Lounasmaa et al., 2022). From 2023, OLLive has been funded by the National Lottery and has been based at REUK and the University of Bristol, with extensive tutorial and research support from many UoB, University of London and University of Manchester students and staff. OLLive is a well-known university preparation programme, both nationally and internationally. In 2021 OLLive was shortlisted for the *Times Higher Ed* International award. Our short-course predecessor to OLLive won the *Guardian* 2017 Widening Participation award.

OLLive is:

- A free 12-week programme, open to all people from refugee backgrounds interested in pursuing higher education and at an intermediate or advanced English level
- A welcoming and holistic course, centred on refugees' strengths
- A provider of classes in Academic English and IELTS; Paths to HE, Education, Training and Employment; Digital Skills; and Creative Writing.

In 2023, OLLive provided:

- An expanded, England-wide, online version of our earlier programme, capped at 80 allow one-to-one personal tutor support and to foster a welcoming and personal atmosphere in online classes, and supported by Bristol University.
- Through its direct partnership with a national NGO with related interests, Refugee Education UK (REUK), an opportunity to reach students in different areas of the country and to cross-refer students directly for requirements that either REUK or OLLive could help meet
- Courses on three days a week, to allow for attendance at some classes even for students with clashing commitments
- Regular follow-up with students about how the programme was going to counter the retention difficulties of online learning, and to help keep all students within the OLLive learning community
- Regular emails to students from teachers with materials from prior classes; emails to remind them of the classes and their subject, with video links; emails about other relevant events and opportunities

- 'Catch-up' videos of Academic English and Paths to University classes available on a dedicated YouTube channel
- Digital support if required
- In-person 'hub' meetings for students in or near London, Bristol and Manchester, with travel funding
- A certificate of completion for students who engaged substantially with online classes, catch-up material, and/or tutorials, from REUK and University of Bristol
- References, if required, from OLLive tutors and teachers
- Follow-up tutorial and information support after the programme
- Increased emphasis on pathways that may include university later, or not at all, and on planning next steps with teachers and tutors
- A later mini-OLLive programme for previous students and 70 students awaiting a new programme, providing briefer courses, academic seminars, and tutoring
- Short-course outreach to another 20 students in NGOs and hotels
- Increased student referrals to, and programme interaction with, relevant refugee NGOs and other services
- Opportunities for OLLive students to be involved in presentations, publications and research
- 12 volunteer tutors, who were undergraduate and graduate students and university staff from UoB and University of London, who were inducted and DBS checked
- 10 subject-specialist UoB university staff tutors, to support specific issues that students encountered
- Opportunities for OLLive teachers and tutors to be involved, like students, in presentations, research and writing, and the OLLive short film
- Information on and support for refugee HE access, provided to statutory and voluntary sector organisations, universities and colleges

***Farah** is a qualified architect living in London and, through her OLLive referral, is working with RefuAid to plan her requalification, as well as potentially registering for a conversion year at a local university. She has been to most of the online OLLive classes and has particularly enjoyed Creative Writing. She is working with OLLive on improving her English so that she can take the IELTS test.*

4. OLLive 2023: Our students

We recruited for OLLive from late 2022 onwards through FE colleges, universities, national and local NGOs, and local authority services. We closed recruitment when it reached 80 students – well above our original target of 50 students – because of high demand and better-than-expected availability of qualified and committed tutors.

At its start, OLIVE 2023 students comprised 50% asylum-seeker and 50% refugee **status**. Given the recently much-increased number of asylum-seekers – many of them HE-interested and qualified, who have no access to HE government funds, cannot all receive Sanctuary Scholarships, and have no guaranteed place of residence or time till Home Office decision on their claim – asylum-seekers' strong access to and use of the programme was encouraging.

Students were 42% women and 58% men, combatting the gender imbalance among refugees seeking HE. Most students were aged 25-24 (37%), with 33% of students in the 35-44 age bracket and 18% in the 18-24. This pattern corroborates many universities' placing their 'refugee' focus within 'mature student' provision, and also indicates the importance of HE preparation for refugees who have been in the UK five or more years, since it skews older than those arriving in the UK.

Students with locations in and near London made up 29%, students in and near Bristol another 29%, and 5% each Manchester, Birmingham and nearby. 12% of students were in other locations, and 20% were unknown/not given (some students moved during the programme). These locations largely reflected the locations of student-recruiting teachers, tutors and organisers.

Students spoke 37 previous languages, with more than five students listing each of Arabic, Somali, Pashtu, French, Urdu and Dari. Around half had one previous language, and 36% had two or three. English levels were self-reported according to varying scales. 53/70 of those who responded indicated intermediate or advanced English, which is suggested as appropriate in OLIVE recruitment publicity.

19.5% of students indicated postgraduate, 17% undergraduate and 6.5% Access study aspirations. (The 55% who did not respond may indicate uncertainties about UK and comparable home country university levels). Desired subjects of study were STEM (29 out of 64 responses), especially engineering; Health Sciences (19/64); Social Sciences (14/64) and Arts and Humanities (12/64).

Hopes for OLIVE were predominantly English and writing skills improvement (25/67) and help with getting into or preparing for university (14/67). Gaining knowledge, skills and confidence (12/67), specific help with qualifications (9/67), and employment (6/67) were also frequently mentioned.

Of the almost 50% of students who reported prior study outside UK (again, there may have been uncertainties here limiting responses), half had undergraduate, 10% postgraduate, 30% high/secondary school and 10% no educational experience.

Predicted problems at the start of the programme were childcare and other family issues, internet issues, lack of study space, and work responsibilities, which received a total of 29 mentions. Six students also mentioned issues related to mental and physical health.

Additional issues were mentioned by 18 students, evenly distributed between wanting to improve English, wanting scholarship support, and wanting education and employment support.

Behrooz is a cyber-security professional from Iran. He has been living in a hotel in the Midlands for nearly a year and is now applying for Masters programmes, though unfortunately none close to him are suitable for him. He has attended all the OLIve classes, has come to in-person meetings, and has used OLIve-REUK's free Duolingo test access. OLIve tutors have been giving feedback on his university and Sanctuary Scholarship applications.

5. How the OLIve 2023 programme delivered on its objectives

The following reflections on how OLIve 2023 delivered for student needs use information from: a) two small mid-term focus groups with a total of 5 students; b) an anonymous post-programme survey, completed by 16 students; c) student feedback on the course during the graduation ceremony; d) post-programme interviews with two students; e) records of class attendance and engagement and; f) other student reflections.

a. Attendance and retention

50/80 students engaged consistently with the programme through registered attendance, online catch-up, and/or engagement with tutors, and therefore gained an OLIve completion certificate. Of the 16 survey respondents, who seemed among the most engaged, 9/16 said they attended classes most weeks and the remaining 7, 'some' or 'a few' of the weeks.

During the programme, two students reported that they had to leave for health reasons and two because of needing to pursue other priorities such as work, other education, family issues and their asylum cases. Other students were at times not attending owing to similar issues, but were retained in the programme. Tutor follow-up during the programme was crucial to retaining this primarily online cohort.

b. Progress to university and other plans

At least fifteen OLIve students applied to university courses and approximately the same number are applying in the next academic year. Around 30 students had clear pre-requisites to complete that would take them 1-2 more years before applying. OLIve students from previous years have also had good record of progressing to HE, not always immediately; students in this cohort may benefit from more consistent follow-up support. OLIve is also accessible for such students because it operates outside the national 'timetable' for HE

applications and acceptances. Refugee and asylum-seeker timelines – for instance, of resettlement, and of Home Office-mandated moves from place to place – do not align with that timetable.

Students' long-term planning is key to OLIVE's work. Recognising that moving ahead in education is a continuing process, OLIVE works with students to plan next steps towards their longer-term goals, acknowledges students may decide these goals do not at present include university. Student responses to tutor follow-up on their plans this year have often praised the ongoing availability of the OLIVE team for university queries after the programme and in the future (see also the follow-up programme section below).

c. A welcoming, holistic and refugee-centred environment

It is challenging to deliver welcoming, holistic, refugee-centred teaching and learning online. However, student responses suggested the wraparound efforts of teachers and tutors, in classes, by email, and in-person, achieved this objective for many. Survey respondents noted the supportive nature of the course, mentioning the 'support', 'encouragement', 'commitment' and 'respect' they felt, and that those running the course had a good understanding of student problems. One respondent noted that 'The team know what they are doing.'

Feedback on all the classes was overwhelmingly positive, with students praising the teachers, the class contents, and the skills they had gained. Teachers were said to be 'professional' but also 'friendly'. During the graduation feedback session, one student said teachers always took time to explain things clearly and 'make sure we learn as if we are in the classroom'. Another noted that OLIVE teachers knew 'how to make the sessions useful and joyful', and a third that they 'really appreciate the opportunity, the love, the caring, the concern that the teachers have for each student'. The benefit of the community feeling between students was also noted, with students during the graduation saying things such as, 'This is a good group and I hope we will stay connected in the future', 'Thank you for your friendship [...] for all the students I met during this course'.

OLIVE students in previous years have noted the programme's very positive influence on self-esteem – perhaps implied here in the remarks on teachers' support of student learning. In 2023, however, they particularly pointed to the strength of the UK-based but multinational OLIVE community, something of broader significance for refugees inclusion and progress within the UK.

Students also mentioned that simply having the opportunity to learn was a benefit, a basic gain that is often not factored into the benefits of programmes like OLIVE.

d. The Academic English/IELTS class

A key OLIve provision is the Academic English/IELTS training, using innovative methods to allow an online class to operate at different English levels, providing one-to-one advice, and leaving legacy videos students can return to. Survey responses about this class suggested it was 'very useful', and one student said they had 'Improved my understanding... and how to elaborate ideas'. General English improvements were also noted. In interviews, one student said the class 'really really helps us to... improve our speaking, writing and listening, every aspect of English'. During graduation, students similarly noted general English gains: 'I made lots of improvements, particularly in writing'.

e. The Paths to University, Education, Training and Employment class

Familiarisation with the UK university system, and advice on applications, particularly UCAS personal statements and Sanctuary Scholarship applications, is a key aim of this class, which also provides videos for revisiting and one-to-one advice. In addition, the class integrates information about training and employment, rather than elevating university at the expense of other kinds of learning or work.

Feedback indicated the class gave students useful practical skills: knowledge on personal statements, job applications, university processes, career options and CVs. Survey respondents said, 'I learned so many things about ways to live in the UK' and 'It was amazing'. In an interview, a student highlighted this class's usefulness, saying it had given him the skills to search online for colleges, apprenticeships and other opportunities. During graduation, one student noted the class had taught them many things they hadn't learnt at college, such as how to write job applications and personal statements. Students also used the class to develop earlier presentations for participation at an international OLIve conference. The class was crucial for students' future planning and post-OLive development.

f. The Digital Skills class

This class guides students through academically required digital skills but also provides a much wider understanding of the digital world. In addition, it provides opportunities to develop IT literacy which many students from low and middle-income countries have not previously had. Students in the survey valued learning about the policy dimensions of technology and connectivity, said this was 'my best teacher ever', and especially noted that opportunities to develop and display presentation skills – at graduation, at the in-person meetings, and at the international OLIve conference – had been good practice for future education and employment.

We had not predicted that gaining knowledge of an online learning environment would itself be highlighted as positive. However, during graduation, one student said, 'The most important part, for me, it was the first time I participated in a virtual environment... [I had]

lots of interactions with classmates, although we haven't seen each other'. Another commented: 'I learnt so many things. This was the first course I've ever done online'.

***Amina**, a North African asylum seeker, is a young mother living with her small daughter in the South-West; she has been studying English with a refugee NGO. Her spoken English is excellent, but she has done little English writing and has no UK-recognised qualifications. She has been taking all the OLIVE classes, has come to the in-person meetings, and will contribute to the graduation presentations and the creative writing book. Next year, she is aiming to study English and Maths GCSE while applying for a STEM Foundation, for which she will also need a Sanctuary Scholarship. If that doesn't work out, she will take an Access to IT course at college before an IT degree. OLIVE follow-up will allow us to check out with Amina how her plans for 2023-4 have firmed up and what further support in her initial steps towards HE she may need.*

g. The Creative Writing class

The Creative Writing class, taught by two teachers in sections focusing first on prose, then on poetry, was a new experience for many students, who quickly saw how it could be both another valuable way of contributing to their English skills, and a forum for their creativity where their English – their grammar, vocabulary and style - would not be judged. In survey feedback students said, 'it was perfect', it led to 'understanding a different approach to writing', and that there was 'nothing to improve on'. At graduation, one student highlighted Creative Writing as something they had always wanted to do in the past but had previously been unable to. Some students described this class as a kind of 'home' for them, online.

The class teachers have planned a publication which will bring together work from this class with that of some prior students, and some students from our pilot outreach short course (see below).

h. The 'catch-up' OLIVE YouTube channel

Twenty-four OLIVE students subscribed to this channel, with others watching on a non-subscription basis. Few used it weekly; it was deployed to fill e-attendance gaps. 14/16 survey respondents said they found the catch-up videos very useful. In interviews, a participant highlighted that online classes would often clash with other commitments (e.g. other English classes, appointments), and the catch-up meant they could listen at a more convenient time.

i. OLIVE tutors

Student feedback suggesting they liked the individual attention and possibility of one-to-one feedback that tutors offered. Feedback on university and scholarship applications was taken up by most of the 15 applying students. More generally, tutors' input seemed key in keeping students engaged with the programme. 15/16 survey respondents said the tutors were very helpful, with the remaining respondent saying they were quite helpful. Most respondents

thought tutor help was all that it could have been. One commented, 'They supported me more than I expected'.

j. In-person 'hub' meetings

7/16 survey respondents said they found the in-person meetings very useful, with the same number saying they didn't attend. One person – who may not have attended – said they found them not very useful. The meetings have different focuses from the classes, addressing some academic English and 'pathways' issues, but not IELTS, and providing in-person learning communities. This complementarity may not work for and may not be relevant for all students.

One interview participant said they were unable to attend in-person meetings as they lived in a different city and it was too far to travel. The current in-person hubs only provide partial coverage for refugees in England.

k. Follow-up

OLive follow-up within the programme through teacher, tutor and administrator emails was seen positively; one survey respondent said, 'You always know what we need before we ask you'. All the survey respondents said they found the emailed materials very useful. 2 respondents said the amount of material was good, whilst 1 said there was too much material. One interviewee highlighted that the emailed links and material after classes felt very well-organised, whilst at graduation a student noted, 'If we didn't have chance to take part in the classes, we've been following from the emails'.

Post-programme follow-up had not started at graduation. However, students have continued responding to follow-up emails and around 10 have ongoing relations with tutors to develop their applications and other future plans. In general, around 50% of OLive alumnae/I keep in touch, returning as mentors, attending programme events, and/or continuing to seek HE advice.

l. Referrals and links

OLive students are students first but bring many non-educational needs to the programme. Partnership with REUK helped OLive provide more holistic help – for instance, through its links with Duolingo English learning. OLive referrals also gained from the programme's new direct links with for example RefuAid, ReConnect in London, Liverpool University's academic English training, Bristol university gym and Bristol rowing club.

m. Future plans and support

When asked about their plans for the future, the majority (13/16) of survey respondents said they are planning on applying to university, 12/16 to continue improving their English and 5/16 to look for employment. This pattern suggests clear roles for ongoing OLive

support. Indeed, when asked what support they would like from OLLive in the future, the most popular survey responses were:

- Ongoing email/online advice on education (12/16)
- Ongoing email/online support with university applications/scholarships (11/16)
- Online English conversation practice (10/16)
- Online seminars on academic topics (9/16)
- Another OLLive course 9/16)

These responses were backed up by one interview participant who said they were continuing to improve their English and would then be applying for university. Students' highlighting of OLLive's value as a supportive learning community (see above) also suggest the potential importance of continuing support.

***Marjan** is an aspiring dentist from Afghanistan who started her training before leaving her country; she will need to re-start a dentistry degree. Marjan lives in Manchester. She has been using OLLive to improve her English and with the tutors, has planned to take an Access to Medicine course before trying to enter a university Medical School. She has also registered for the Medical School open days after OLLive forwarded her the relevant links.*

n. Suggestions for improvement

The most common suggestion for improvement was provision of full in-person face-to-face study (3 respondents in the survey, one interviewee). An interview participant said they thought in-person teaching would be 'more effective', as it pushes students to work harder.

Other suggestions included:

- Making the duration of the course longer
- Providing information on the contents of the course before it begins
- Arranging direct access to university, employment or scholarships
- Including a class on maths
- Providing funding to reward excellent students
- Providing laptops to students
- English class: including more grammar lessons, having more than one class a week
- Pathways class: providing more direct links to universities
- Digital skills class: in-person classes, better tailored for students without prior knowledge; longer classes; covering topical subjects such as AI
- Creative writing: longer classes with one teacher throughout the programme
- Increased frequency, locations that are easier to get to, and more class interaction during in-person meetings.

o. Mini-OLLive inter-programme provision

For the first time, OLLive has developed and is implementing a consistent inter-programme strategy which provides resources for alumnae/i, and makes these resources available for

people contacting OLIve but not immediately able to join as students. The resources consist of i) English learning materials, including those from OLIve catch-up channel ii) materials on accessing university, including those from REUK and from OLIve iii) ongoing tutorial support, and iv) an online programme from September 2023 that will include talks from university Widening Participation, Scholarship, and International Department teams, talks from relevant NGOs, and academic English practice through short research seminars with tutors.

p. OLIve outreach

In response to some Bristol refugee NGOs' enquiries about short courses, OLIve piloted a University of Bristol-approved and certificated course, Life Stories, run at the Bristol Hospitality Network and the Holiday Inn Filton. The course was open to all educational backgrounds and English levels and involved reading, discussion, writing and photography. Around 20 students took part; 10 have received certificates and will contribute to a Bristol Hospitality Network exhibition of their work. Some of this work will also be included in an upcoming OLIve writing collection.

6. Plans for the future of OLIve

Plans for the future of OLIve include:

- To expand the numbers of students OLIve supports by running two or more cohorts a year, alongside inter-programme information and support, and outreach courses
- To increase the number of in-person hubs, to include the Midlands, and to provide more in-person meetings with more structure
- To provide more tutor training, and paid tutor-organiser roles
- To develop placement students' roles within OLIve
- To establish a stakeholder advisory group including representatives of refugee NGOs, FE and HE, people from refugee backgrounds involved in education, and OLIve alumnae/i
- To supply a paid administrator role to coordinate provision throughout the year
- To develop the role of OLIve alumnae/i as tutors
- To formalise our links with organisations that help refugees to transfer professional qualifications, and that provide other relevant services such as digital skills training
- To consider providing more academic English teaching in OLIve courses
- To create links between OLIve and the OfS/Research England programme Social Transformation and Advocacy through Research (STAR), designed to tackle inequalities that people from racially minoritised groups face in their research careers, including within the third sector
- To provide formal refugee HE information sessions online and in-person for education and refugee-sector workers

- To encourage and develop links with complementary university provision of free academic English and UK HE orientation sessions for refugees to which OLIVE can usefully refer students
- To formalise inter-programme provision with a regular schedule
- To expand our provision of outreach pre-programmes, linked to OLIVE and other preparation programmes
- To make more links with hotels and other facilities that newly house asylum-seekers; to involve residents in courses online as well as in-person.

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