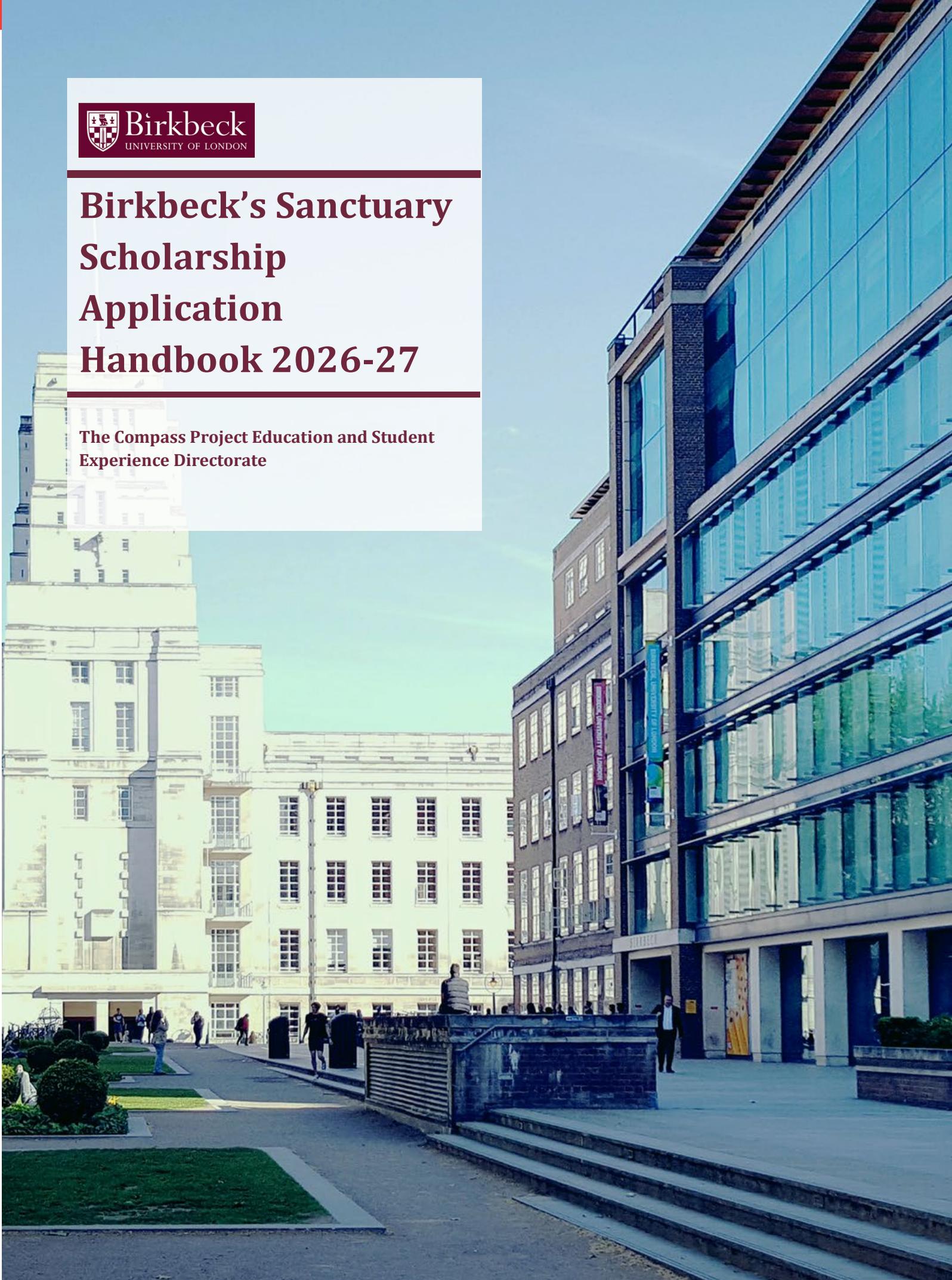




Birkbeck's Sanctuary Scholarship Application Handbook 2026-27

The Compass Project Education and Student
Experience Directorate



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Birkbeck's Sanctuary Scholarships 2026-27

This is a guide for prospective students who wish to study at Birkbeck, University of London through the Compass Project's Sanctuary Scholarship. Please ensure you have read the guidance in its entirety before submitting an online application form.

What is the Sanctuary Scholarship at Birkbeck?

Via a programme called the Compass Project, Birkbeck offers students from a forced migrant background, who are not eligible for student finance, the chance to access a sanctuary scholarship to study a university-level programme at Birkbeck.

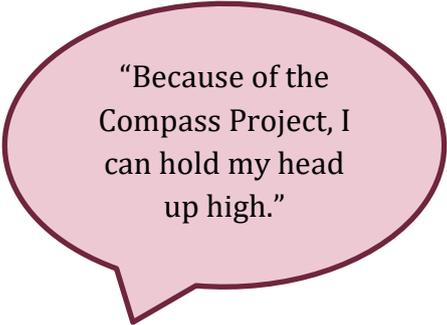
A forced migrant is an individual who is compelled to leave their home or country due to conflict, persecution, natural disasters, or other threats to their life, safety, or livelihood.

Birkbeck is committed to supporting those who have taken a less traditional route into higher education. Our Sanctuary Scholarship is focused on helping those who may face difficulty in accessing other educational opportunities due to lack of previous academic documentation, or for those who have been out of education for a long period of time.

Successful applicants will receive:

- a **full tuition fee waiver** for relevant courses
- additional financial support to cover costs such as **transport, childcare and books**
- A place on a pre-sessional academic English course
- A dedicated staff member for support as well as an academic mentor.

Watch our [video](#) to find out more about The Compass Project Activities at Birkbeck.



“Because of the Compass Project, I can hold my head up high.”

The scholarships



What does the scholarship include?

Tuition fees

Successful applicants will be given a tuition fee waiver for an appropriate course. Please note that you will only be sponsored to study the course you have stated in the scholarship application.

Bursary

Successful applicants to the scholarship will receive a £3000 bursary per year of study that should be spent on the cost of travel to classes, books and other study materials.

Students will receive the bursary award as either cash instalments or through shopping and travel vouchers depending on their needs and immigration status.

Academic and other support at Birkbeck

Successful applicants will also receive additional support around navigating university. Every student is paired with an Academic Mentor and is invited to

attend academic workshops throughout the year as well as a pre-sessional academic English course before commencing their studies.

What course can I study?

We offer scholarships for the following types of degree programmes:

- Foundation Year (120 credits)
- Certificate of Higher Education (up to 120 credits)
- Graduate Certificate (between 60-120 credits)
- Part-time Undergraduate degree course (to be taken over 4 years)
- Part-time Postgraduate degree course (to be taken over 2 years)

Please note:

- You can only apply for a degree programme that starts in October 2026.
- We do not support applicants to shared programmes with other institutions.
- If you are unsure what programme you would like to study, we encourage you to get in touch with the department directly.

Who is eligible?

If you are unsure as to whether you meet the eligibility criteria or if anything requires clarification, please contact us.

The Sanctuary Scholarship at Birkbeck offers opportunities to those who would not otherwise be able to access university level education elsewhere. As a result, we prioritise applicants who meet the following criteria:

- Those who have not previously studied a degree at a UK institution (at any level).
- Those who have been out of formal education for more than 5 years.

Immigration status

You are invited to apply for the programme if you are a **Forced Migrant** and someone who **cannot access Student Finance Loans**. You will need to provide

documentation to confirm your immigration status in the UK. Status' will usually be one of the following:

1. Asylum Seeker

- You have made a claim for asylum in the UK and not yet had a decision (asylum seekers).
- Or you are currently appealing an asylum decision and can evidence making a fresh claim.
- Or you have made a claim under Article 8 of the European Convention of Human Rights and not yet had a decision.

2. Discretionary/limited leave to remain

- You have been granted temporary status as a result of an asylum claim or an Article 8 of the European Convention of Human Rights claim.

3. Other

- You are the spouse/civil partner of a person meeting these criteria (must have been the spouse or civil partner of the applicant on the date of asylum application).
- Or you are the child of a person meeting these criteria (must have been under 18 years old and the child of the applicant or their spouse/civil partner at the time of asylum application).

4. Refugee or Humanitarian Protection

- If you have Refugee or Humanitarian Protection, do not hold a UK degree and are not entitled to student finance, you may be eligible to apply for this scholarship.
- If you have refugee status or humanitarian protection status and are entitled to government funded student finance, you will not be eligible for the scholarship. You can check if you are eligible on the [UKCISA website](#). If you would like support with this, please email us. If you are not eligible, you will have to evidence this.

Other

In addition to the above, you must also meet all of the following criteria:

- You must be resident in the UK.
- You must be ineligible to receive student finance ([find out more about eligibility requirements for student finance here](#)).
- You will need to demonstrate a good level of English Language skills (spoken and written). This is assessed via the application process, and you may be asked to participate in an informal assessment if necessary.
- As we are unable to offer accommodation or additional travel assistance, you will need to live in London or within a commutable distance of central London.

How do I apply?

If you are eligible to apply for the scholarship, please ensure that you have read the following guidelines on how to submit a full and complete application. If you do not complete all the necessary steps, your application will not be considered.

Step one: Discover Birkbeck

Before applying for the scholarship, it is important that you have had the opportunity to get to know Birkbeck as well as exploring which course is right for you. You can attend open days and join in events throughout the year.

There is also a great series of videos that will guide you through making a decision, to applying for your course of choice. [Remember to watch these videos online.](#)

You can also arrange to meet a staff member from the Compass Team for an advice session or attend our applicant events.

Step two: Apply for your course

When you are ready to apply to your course, you will need to create an account and apply to the relevant course via the Birkbeck website.

1. Find the [course online](#) and follow the instructions on 'how to apply'
2. Write a Personal Statement if required by the course programme

3. Apply directly to the course when you are ready

All the eligible courses under this scholarship require you to make an application via the Birkbeck website. However, if you are applying for a degree course with a foundation year, you may need to apply via a platform called UCAS.

[Read more about support with your UCAS application.](#)

For support with writing a personal statement, consider using Birkbeck's [Personal Statement Checker](#).

Please note, you may be required to add an academic referee to the course application. If you are unable to provide an academic referee, please contact us.

Step three: Scholarship application

Once you have completed the previous steps, you may apply for the Compass Project online. You will need to:

1. Ask someone to be your referee.
2. Complete an online application form

Selecting a referee

You will need to provide a reference from someone who knows you and who is able to comment on your suitability for study. Examples of possible referees are educators (e.g., schoolteachers, ESOL instructors, college instructors), lawyers, social workers, NGO workers, or local authority officers.

Please make sure that you have asked the permission of your referee before submitting their details on your application form. We require your referees:

- Full name
- Name of the organisation they work for and the address
- Role in the organisation
- Telephone number
- Email address

We will only contact your referee after applications have closed and only if you are shortlisted for the scholarship.

Online application form

The online application form is divided into several sections including:

- Personal information
- Educational history
- Intended course details
- Immigration status and funding eligibility
- Referee details
- Supporting questions (series of 4 questions that focus on your reasons for study and applying to the scholarship)

[ACCESS THE ONLINE APPLICATION FORM](#)

The application form will go live at 9am on 13 April 2026.

We advise that you prepare your answers to the questions that make up your supporting statement on a Word document, then copy them into the application text boxes when you are ready to complete the form.

Below are the 4 questions which you will find under 'Section 9: Supporting Questions' on the application form. **Please note that each question requires a response of between 150-250 words:**

1. Why do you want to study at university?
2. How have you engaged with learning in order to prepare for university this year?
3. Why do you think Birkbeck is the right place for you? How have you engaged with Birkbeck ahead of making a decision to apply here?
4. How will you benefit from this scholarship programme and the support that is offered at Birkbeck?

When can I apply?

- Applications will open 9am on 13 April 2026

- Applications will close at 5pm on 15 May 2026
- Applicants should expect a confirmation email upon submission (and get in touch if they do not receive one)
- Applicants are informed of the scholarship decision by the end of June.

Get in touch

If you require any support with your application, please [contact us by email](#) and we will aim to reply within five working days.