

Guide to scholarships for Palestinian students

Introduction

One of the practical ways for UCU to offer solidarity with the Palestinian people is to help support Palestinian students attend university or college, either in the UK or in the West Bank or Gaza. This guide summarises the main types of financial support that are available from UK-based institutions and charities.

1. UK-based scholarships

University-based schemes

Over the past few years a number of UK university-based charities have been established to help support the maintenance and travel expenses of Palestinian students studying at Masters' level in the UK. In general, the arrangement is that the UK university provides tuition fee scholarships or fee waivers to each of the students selected by the charity, while the charity supports maintenance and travel costs through membership subscriptions, voluntary contributions and fund-raising events.

For example, this is the situation at St Andrew's University with STEPS (St Andrews Education for Palestinian Students) <http://www.stepspalestine.org.uk/steps.php> and the longstanding scheme at Durham University with the Durham Palestine Education Trust <https://www.dur.ac.uk/durham.palestine/aboutus/>

In some HEIs, the scholarships cover both fee waivers and maintenance support. For example, this is the case with Goldsmiths' Humanitarian scholarships:

<http://www.gold.ac.uk/international/financial-info/international-scholarships/goldsmiths-humanitarian-scholarship/>

A small number of UK scholarship schemes are targeted at specific groups of students. For example, the Oxford Brookes Gaza Scholarship Scheme (supported since 2009 by the Asfari Foundation rather than a local charity) supports one Gazan student each year at graduate level to undertake a course of study leading to the award of an Oxford Brookes Masters' degree. See <http://www.britishcouncil.ps/en/study-uk/scholarship/gaza-oxford-brookes> for further details.

Scottish Universities Supporting Palestinian Students (SUSPS)

More recently, an important new initiative has been established in Scotland. In 2014 UCU Scotland (alongside the STUC and NUS Scotland) lent its support to the creation of SUSPS – Scottish Universities Supporting Palestinian Students – a charity which sought to raise funds to cover travel and living costs for Palestinian students while encouraging Scottish universities to provide fee waivers to postgraduate taught programmes.

The first institution to offer a place was Queen Margaret University in Edinburgh, and in March 2015 Enas Saber arrived to commence her studies in International Health. Enas attended the UCU Congress in Glasgow and a short video of her case was shown at Congress: <https://ucuscotland.wordpress.com/2015/06/04/scottish-universities-supporting-palestinian-students/>

Since then UCU Scotland have written to all Principals to formally request that their university approves one or more PGT fee waivers to provide places via SUSPS (as with other scholarship schemes listed above, the charity will provide all living and travel expenses as well as assisting in recruiting candidates).

SUSPS have also written to UCU branches in Scotland requesting donations to their fundraising appeal. SUSPS would like to raise sufficient funds to ensure a Palestinian student can be enrolled during the 2017-18 academic year.

Amongst the various Palestine education initiatives, SUSPS is unique in being a trade union-led one. For further details of SUSPS, see:

<https://www.facebook.com/ScottishUnisSupportPalestine/>

2. Palestine-based scholarships

Because of the high costs associated with studying in the UK (as well as difficulties in securing visas), a number of charities have opted to provide financial support for Palestinian students to study in the West Bank and Gaza. A couple of these are listed below.

Friends of Birzeit University

A long established initiative is run by the Friends of Birzeit University (FoBZU). This UK-based charity supports the right to education and its role in the wider development of Palestinian society. As part of its work, FoBZU provides support for Palestinian students to access higher education courses across the West Bank and Gaza (not simply at Birzeit University in Ramallah). FoBZU fully funds a number of Palestinian students a year in all subjects (apart from medical-related courses) and in line with Palestinian educational priorities, postgraduate education is of growing importance to their scholarship programme.

The cost of sponsoring a student is approximately £2000 a year, although the figure is generally lower in Gaza (where the fees are cheaper than in the West Bank).

Details of the FobZU scholarship scheme and how to donate are available here:

<http://www.fobzu.org/donate-fobzu/donate-online-or-post>

Sheffield Palestine Women's Scholarship Fund

The Sheffield Palestine Women's Scholarship Fund has - for the past decade - supported women into education in Gaza. In particular, the group raises funds for scholarships to pay the university fees of Palestinian women into higher education in the Gaza Strip. In 2015-16 the group supported 43 Palestinian women and is currently supporting 41 students in 2016-17.

The Scholarship Fund is managed in Sheffield by a small coalition of women working in partnership with the Sheffield Palestine Solidarity Campaign, and in Gaza by a panel drawn from the Board of Directors of the Red Crescent Society and the Union of Health Work Committees.

You can contact the Scholarship Fund on sheffieldpwsf@yahoo.co.uk or by writing to SPWSF, 124 Cliffe Road, Sheffield S8 9DN.

Conclusion

This guide has sought to identify a number of scholarship schemes that are available to support Palestinian students to study in the UK or Palestine. In line with UCU Congress policy, we hope that UCU branches will consider ways in which they can **'promote and extend these important scholarship initiatives'**. If you are aware of any other schemes (for example, at your own institution or other initiatives), please can you contact Rob Copeland, UCU policy officer rcopeland@ucu.org.uk with further details.

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