

Student Finance - Independent Students/Estrangement

What is an independent student?

The criteria for a student to be considered independent (i.e. parental household income is not included in Student Finance's assessment) can be any one of the following:

- you care for a person under the age of 18 on the first day of the academic year you're applying for student finance
- you're 25 or over on the first day of the academic year you're applying for student finance
- you've been married or in a civil partnership before the start of the academic year (even if you're now divorced or separated)
- you have no living parents
- you've supported yourself for at least three years before the start of your course
- your parents can't be traced, or it's not practical or possible to contact them
- your parents live outside the EU and an income assessment would put them in jeopardy, or it's not reasonably practical for them to send funds to the UK to help support you
- you've not communicated with your parents for one year before the start of the academic year that you're applying for student finance, or you can demonstrate you're permanently estranged from your parents
- you've been in care for any three month period ending on or after the date you turned 16, and before the first day of the first academic year of your course

What does this mean for me?

If classed as an independent student, you would receive funding based on your household income (which may well be £0 if you are not working) and therefore may find that you are also eligible to receive the bursary funding from the University in addition to Student Finance. Further information can be found at:

www.studentsupport.manchester.ac.uk/finances/funding-opportunities/all/bursaries-and-scholarships/

How do I apply for independent student status?

When you apply for Student Finance, you will be asked to indicate if you identify with any of the above criteria. You will then be asked for evidence to confirm your circumstances. Depending on your circumstances, you might need to send Student Finance England:

- your marriage or civil partnership certificate
- photocopies of your P60s, or a letter from your employer(s)
- a letter from your local Jobcentre Plus office

- a letter from your local council or care authority
- your child's birth certificate
- If applying as estranged, you will need third party evidence from an independent person of good standing in the community' who knows the details of your estrangement from your parent(s)- more info below

Applying as an independent student on the basis of estrangement

Student Finance England, Wales and Northern Ireland require supporting statements from trusted independent parties as evidence to confirm your position. They ask for independent verification of your position to prevent students who do have a supportive family from fraudulently claiming more money than they are entitled.

Student Finance requests that you submit as many supporting statements as is possible to help build a picture of your family estrangement and/or independent life.

The application

You will need to complete a [specific form](#) to apply as an estranged student. This includes a section where a third party will provide evidence of your estrangement. Once completed, this can be uploaded to your Student Finance portal, alongside any other supporting statements.

Student Finance need to be satisfied that on the balance of probability, any estrangement is currently perceived as an irreconcilable situation. This does not mean that the situation may never change. Just that at this point in time it is believed to be irreconcilable.

Evidence could include (where applicable):

- A letter from a member of staff at your school or college which explains that he/she knew about the difficult relationship whilst you were at school and your subsequent estrangement.
- A letter from your doctor explaining that you have consistently and historically reported difficulties associated with your estrangement.
- A letter from a social worker or local authority that shows they were aware of your difficult situation and/or they allocated you a child protection order.
- A letter from a counsellor or an organisation such as Stand Alone, National Association of People Abused in Childhood or Karma Nirvana that can vouch for the fact you have been seeking support for your estrangement or

disownment.

- A letter from a housing support worker that may have helped you find accommodation after you left home. A letter from a member of the clergy, a rabbi or imam that explains that they were aware of the difficulties in your family and your subsequent estrangement.
- A statement of incident from the police that shows any call-outs, arrests or cautions involved in the case

You could also send:

- A forced marriage or FGM order
- Any court order that shows you have legally tried to distance your biological or adoptive parents through fear of harm or intimidation.

You are **never expected** to use:

- Any statements that would compromise your personal safety. For example, if there is a risk that the person providing the supporting statement might tell your family where you live, which may then lead to physical violence or forced marriage.
- Any statements whereby the process of attaining the statement would present significant harm to your emotional wellbeing. For example, if you have a history of depression, anxiety or other mental health difficulties and the process of finding evidence would trigger a significant trauma or a psychotic episode.
- You will never be expected to directly explain the circumstances that led to the estrangement in any supporting statement. It will be helpful for the Student Finance operative to know about your situation however, this is not a mandatory requirement in England or Wales.

While the following evidence may be useful to support your case, Student Finance will not accept these on their own when making a decision:

- A letter from other members of your family, a family friend or romantic partner on its own. However, you could send this as secondary supporting evidence together with other letters to provide more details around your circumstances.
- A letter from an independent person that states you have simply told this person about your circumstances recently.
- A letter from anyone that has not known you for a substantial period of time. For example, statements from your university student support officer won't be valid as evidence in the first year of your course.
- A letter from your parents that declares the estrangement. This would be considered a communication within the last 12 months, and is not valid to verify your estrangement.

Tips

Always ask for your supporting statements on headed paper where possible, and they should show a telephone number for the Student Finance operative to reach them if they have further questions.

If you feel comfortable enough, do explain your family

situation in your own words and make a timeline of key events. This may help Student Finance to identify the right supporting statements which you can provide to clarify your situation.

Will I need to prove my estrangement every year?

Student Finance usually request that estranged students provide evidence of their circumstances each time they apply for Student Finance. However this is often just a case of writing a letter to confirm that your situation remains the same and you have not had contact with your parents since you last applied for Student Finance. The [named contacts for estranged students](#) at the university can help with this. In cases where there has been a serious family breakdown, involving violence or other serious trauma you would usually not be required to resubmit evidence in subsequent years of the course.

My parents are refusing to provide their financial income details, can I apply to be classed as an independent student?

Student Finance will not accept this as grounds to assess you as an independent student. Furthermore, you would not qualify as being estranged simply because you don't live with your family or even because you may have a difficult relationship with them.

Useful Links

Estranged student support at the university
<https://www.studentsupport.manchester.ac.uk/tailored-support/estrangedstudents/>

Standalone Guide for Estranged students (source of much of the information found in this document):

<http://standalone.org.uk/guides/student-guide/>
Student Finance

www.gov.uk/contact-student-finance-england

Student Finance Zone (Student Room)

www.thestudentroom.co.uk/content.php?r=5659-Student-Finance

If you have a query which is not answered here, please contact independentstudents@manchester.ac.uk

Please note that the information in this guide is intended for Students applying for finance through the Student Finance England system, if you have applied for funding through the Welsh, Irish, Scottish or EU systems the regulations may differ.

We have made every effort to ensure that the information contained in this leaflet is accurate however, we cannot be held responsible for any omissions or errors.