

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 are irreconcilably estranged from both of your biological or adoptive parents, or only living parent. You are eligible to be considered for independence on the basis of being estranged from your parents if you have not had verbal or written contact with both of your biological, adoptive parents or your only living parent for a significant period of time and your estrangement is irreconcilable. Independent status would not usually be granted if you have had a recent serious disagreement with your parents.*
- *If you have supported yourself financially for a total of 3 years prior to the start of your course, you can apply to be assessed as an independent student on the grounds of self support. These months do not have to be consecutive, but you must show you have been earning a sufficient amount to be financially independent.*
- *If you have been in local authority care for three months after your sixteenth birthday, and are irreconcilably estranged from your parents, you are entitled to be considered as a care leaver and awarded independent status.*
- *You don't know the location of your parents, or they are in a country outside of the European Community where it is considered dangerous for you to contact them.*
- *Your parent has a significant mental health problem or health issue that would make it impractical or dangerous for you to contact them.*
- *You are 25 years old on the first day of the academic year (1st September).*
- *You are currently married or in a civil partnership or have been married or in a civil partnership in the past but are now separated.*
- *You have a child under 18 or dependent.*
- *Both of your biological or adoptive parents are deceased.*

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?

You can contact the relevant Student Finance team at estranged@slc.co.uk, you will then need to complete a [specific form](#) or write a cover letter to Student Finance outlining the following details (where applicable):

- *What circumstances led up to the estrangement (often someone's relationship with their parents is difficult for some time before they actually stop having any contact, so you could try and describe this, if it applies to you)*
- *When the situation happened*
- *A brief overview of what the situation is and the reasons for this*
- *How did it happen e.g. did your parents ask you to move out, or did you decide to move out; did you stay with a friend or another family member, or did you start renting your own accommodation, etc)*
- *What has happened to you since then – such as who you have lived with and who has been supporting you?*
- *If you have claimed benefits in your own right under the age of 18 you should include evidence of this.*
- *If you have been living in a Foyer or other supported housing scheme you should include evidence of this.*
- *What is your situation now (e.g. do you have any contact with your parents at all, if so how often and by what means – phone/email/in person)*
- *Why you feel that for now the situation is irreconcilable (e.g. what is it that means you believe that you cannot resume your relationship with your parents in the foreseeable future)*

You should also submit supporting evidence which could include:

- *Financial evidence of self-support (i.e. pay slips)*
- *A letter from your Local Authority regarding your Care Leaver status*
- *Birth/death/marriage certificates*

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.

To be assessed as being estranged from your parents by Student Finance you should also include the following evidence (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 he/she was 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 or a letter from anyone that has not known you for a substantial period of time. For example, statements from your University Student Support Officer/Academic Advisor 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 him/her if they have further questions. Send everything via Recorded Delivery and keep copies of any documents you send.

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. 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

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 studentsupport@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.