

Estranged students

Introduction

A student is [considered independent](#) if before or during university they become irreconcilably estranged from both their biological or adoptive parents, or only living parent. If a student is considered independent their parental household income is not included in the financial assessment undertaken by the Student Loans Company (SLC) which means that they are likely to be eligible for the maximum maintenance loan.

[Reasons behind family alienation](#) commonly include abuse, in particular [emotional abuse](#), [honour based violence](#), [forced marriage](#) or family rejection of [LGBTQ+](#) children. When coming to university, estranged students are likely to face particular challenges, such as coping with no family support, struggling financially or having difficulties finding flexible year-round accommodation. [Christmas](#) and the summer holidays can be particularly difficult times, both financially and emotionally. Furthermore, providing proof of estrangement can be a long and difficult process.

The University of Manchester is committed to widening participation and aims to support estranged students throughout their studies. Since UCAS is not going to have the option to indicate estrangement until 2021, the University is currently unaware of which students are estranged. Therefore, if a student chooses to disclose this information to you it is key to signpost them to the resources available to them. Please see the following to find out more about financial, housing, emotional and academic support offered at the University. It may also be useful to encourage students to use the other resources that the University offers.

Furthermore, if they are facing difficulties, students should be encouraged to contact their school-specific [student support contact](#) and make them aware of their circumstances as well as the [charity StandAlone](#) which offers a variety of resources for estranged students.

Challenges experienced by estranged students

When coming to university, estranged students are likely to face a number of [particular challenges](#) - both financially and emotionally - due to the lack of a family support system which most other students have. Research has shown that [14% of estranged students drop out](#) of university before finishing their course, which is a three times higher rate than that of the average student.

Financial difficulties are one of the reasons underlying the relatively low retention of estranged students. Although the University and the Student Loans Company (SLC) offer financial support, estranged students have to stretch their annual budget so that it covers the summer months since they normally lack a family home to return to. [Over 30% of estranged students registered as homeless](#) before the start of their course and many struggle with homelessness over summer during their time at university. Therefore, careful [budgeting](#) is essential. This is a skill most students have to learn when coming to university (although often with support from family to do so). However, for estranged students it can be particularly challenging given they suddenly have to handle large amounts of money transferred to them at the beginning of term. |

In order to be considered independent (i.e. the student's parental income is not included in the financial assessment undertaken by SLC), students have to provide proof that they are irreconcilably estranged from both their biological or adoptive parents, or only living parent. Providing proof of estrangement can be an emotionally as well as practically challenging process. Estrangement is only [considered irreconcilable](#) if there has been no communication between the student and her/his parents over a 12 month period. Furthermore, if a student becomes estranged during the course of the academic year it is very difficult to change the household income and be reassessed by the SLC.

In addition to the difficulties in affording all-year-round accommodation comes the struggle of finding accommodation. While most students rely on their family to act as guarantor or provide money for a deposit, estranged students usually do not have this option.

These complications, as well as the unsettling conditions experienced throughout childhood and/or puberty, can deteriorate the mental health and wellbeing of estranged students and have a significant impact on their academic performance as well as personal development. [Christmas holidays](#), for instance, can be an emotionally trying period for those who do not have a family to celebrate with and may be feeling alone in their halls of residence.

Finally, even though estranged people who made it to university are clearly very academically capable, a troubled childhood/puberty means that their schooling may have been discontinuous, at various schools or interrupted throughout. Therefore, it may be helpful to engage with the academic support provided at university as much as possible.

Unfortunately, [28% of estranged students](#) feel uncomfortable in seeking support within their institution because of the social stigma often associated with estrangement. Therefore, if a student chooses to disclose their situation to you it is pivotal that you signpost them to the resources available and encourage them to make full use of the support.

The University offers a range of resources to provide tailored advice to students, support them financially as well as academically and increase their mental health and their overall wellbeing.

Providing proof of estrangement

In order to be considered independent by the Student Loans Company (SLC) and, therefore, assessed based on their own household income rather than their parents', students have to provide proof that they are irreconcilably estranged from their family. This can be a long and emotionally trying process. The assessment can take up to six weeks to be processed and require students to submit evidence that might be distressing to gather.

The [following guide](#) outlines the documents required by Student Finance as evidence of estrangement. Students are required to submit at least one supporting statement form an independent person with good standing within the community who has known the students for a substantial period (e.g. a member of staff at school, a social worker, a doctor etc.).

Evidence of estrangement has normally to be submitted each academic year and students should be encouraged to contact their school-specific [student support contact](#) who can guide them through the process as well as the [charity StandAlone](#) which offers a variety of resources to help.

Widening participation at The University of Manchester

Given the unusually [low retention](#) rates of estranged students, the University aims to support them as much as possible in their journey to and through higher education to ensure that they can learn and thrive regardless of their background. The University of Manchester is committed to [widening participation](#) by organising outreach events, supporting current students and offering [contextual admissions](#).

If a student chooses to disclose their situation to you it is pivotal that you signpost them to the resources available and encourage them to make full use of the support. If they are facing difficulties, students should also be encouraged to contact their school-specific [student support contact](#) and make them aware of their circumstances. The student support contact is responsible for student wellbeing and can help with all non-academic queries.

In the meantime, in order to best support the student, you can familiarise yourself with the challenges faced by estranged students and the financial, housing, emotional, academic and other resources available to them.

Support provided by the University

Financial support

Within the University

Student Finance: After proving proof of their estrangement, estranged students are considered as independent by the Student Loans Company (SLC) which means that their parental household income is not included in their financial assessment. Therefore, funding is provided based on the student's household income (which may be £0 if they are not working). Estranged students can be eligible for the maximum tuition fee loan (£9,250 for the academic year 2019/2020) and the maximum maintenance loan (£8,944 for the academic year 2019/2020) from the SLC. Further information can be found at: <https://www.manchester.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/student-finance/> These loans have to be paid back after graduation. Please see <https://www.gov.uk/repaying-your-student-loan/how-you-repay> for further information on the terms and conditions. N.B.: This is not the case for students on NHS courses that started prior to 2017.

Providing proof of estrangement can be an emotionally as well as practically challenging process. Organisations such as [StandAlone provide excellent guidance](#). Please also see the following [factsheet](#) which outlines the process of providing proof of estrangement.

The Manchester Bursary: Estranged students will almost certainly be eligible for The Manchester Bursary of up to £2,000 (assuming low household income) for the duration of their course. This bursary is awarded by the University and does not have to be paid back. Since the Student Loans Company (SLC) shares the information regarding household income with the University, students do not have to apply for the bursary and will automatically be contacted if eligible. N.B.: Students on NHS courses that started prior to 2017 are not eligible.

Facing a crisis? Living Cost Support Fund: Estranged students are one of the priority groups for the University's Living Cost Support Fund and, therefore, if they experience any financial difficulties as a result of an unexpected event, they can make an application to the University's Living Cost Support Fund: <http://www.studentsupport.manchester.ac.uk/finances/funding-opportunities/all/living-cost-support-fund/> The Students' Union also offers [short term loans of £100](#) and has a [team of advisors](#) (including a qualified debt counsellor) that can help.

Erasmus, Study Abroad or Work Placements: The University awards bursaries of up to £2,000 to students studying abroad or going on placement. For further information visit: <https://www.manchester.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/student-finance/2019/uk/university-support/>

Budgeting: The University has a useful [website](#) which offers advice on how to make the most of your money. The University's Students' Union has a [team of advisors](#) which can offer support in regards to financial matters.

Manchester Master's Bursary: Although not part of the bursary criteria, estranged students may be eligible for a £3,000 Master's bursary that the University offers. When applying students are encouraged to provide as much detail as possible on how the Manchester Master's Bursary would support them in their studies. This bursary is only available for postgraduate taught Master's degrees. Further information can be found at: <https://www.manchester.ac.uk/study/masters/funding/uk-eu-student-advice/masters-bursary/>

Subject specific awards: The University offers [subject-specific awards](#) that range from £1,000 to £10,000 per year. Most of these awards are aimed at overseas students. However, some are open to everyone who demonstrates academic excellence. For help with award applications students can contact the [Careers Service](#).

Other resources

Turn2us Search for Grants: This [website](#) allows students to find grants offered by local charities that can help paying for books, course materials, clothes etc.

Buttle UK: [Buttle UK](#) is a charity that provides grants of up to £2,000 to under 21-year-olds facing financial difficulties. Grants can help towards buying equipment for studies (including computers), interview clothes, travel costs, accommodation, emotional as well as physical wellbeing (by financing e.g. counselling, gym memberships etc.).

N.B.: If estranged students are struggling with providing proof of estrangement or suffering emotional distress due to the process, you should advise them to [contact StandAlone](#) and [Coram Voice](#). StandAlone is a charity that support and provides advice to estranged people. Coram Voice run a National Advocacy and Advice service for young people (call 0808 800 5792 Mon-Fri 9:30am-6pm and Saturday 10am-4pm).

Accommodation

The University's Accommodation Office can provide a flexible, up to 52 week accommodation contract in University halls although this will not necessarily be at the same hall of residence for the full year as not all halls are open/available over the summer vacation. Whilst this is not guaranteed to estranged students, it will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Students should be encouraged to and supported in contacting the [Accommodation Office](#) to make them aware of their situation. Living in University halls has the advantage that no guarantor is required. Furthermore, in the case of estranged students, university accommodation may be lenient in regards to the deposit to be paid up front. However, this is not guaranteed and is assessed on a case-to-case basis.

Please see the following website for further information on housing support:

<http://www.studentsupport.manchester.ac.uk/taking-care/imworriedabout/accommodation/>

Please see the following website for further information on University's halls of residence:

<http://www.accommodation.manchester.ac.uk/ouraccommodation/>

Manchester Student Homes: Students that want to move out of university accommodation should be advised to use the [Manchester Student Homes website](#) to look for alternative accommodation since it only advertises university approved accommodation and accredited landlords. Furthermore, they may help students to find accommodation that does not require a guarantor. For more information please see:

https://www.manchesterstudenthomes.com/Pages/International_Friendly_Standard

Mental health and wellbeing

Counselling Service: The [Counselling Service](#) is based on campus (Crawford House) and offers online self-help resources, workshops and same-day meetings with a qualified University counsellor.

St Peter's House Church and Chaplaincy: If students want to speak to a counsellor promptly and were unable to get a same-day appointment with the Counselling Service they can ask to talk to a counsellor at [St Peter's House](#). Although St Peter's House formally is a Church and Chaplaincy, its counselling service is secular.

ResLife (for students living in University halls): ResLife Officers and Advisors provide support and guidance to students living in University accommodation. [ResLife Advisors](#) usually live on site and are available 24/7. They can be a useful first point of contact to turn to for advice and help.

Manchester Nightline: This is a confidential listening service offered to students by students. It is available 8pm-8am during term time. The number can be found on the back of student ID cards.

Student Minds: Student Minds is a student mental health charity which [offers workshops and student support groups](#).

Kwan Wai (Chinese Mental health Service): [Kwan Wai](#) offers one-to-one counselling in Mandarin and drop-in/support service. One of the main aims of the service is to challenge discrimination and social exclusion faced by Chinese people with mental health problems.

Zion Centre: The Zion Centre is a community centre based in Hulme (Manchester) offering a range of [self-help groups and mental health support](#).

Self-Help Services: [Self-Help Services](#) is a mental health charity that 'helps people to help themselves' through one-to-one support and wellbeing workshops. They provide a range of support for people with common mental health issues such as anxiety, depression and panic attacks.

42nd Street: [42nd Street](#) offers one-to-one counselling and therapy to young people aged between 11 and 25.

Crisis Point: [Crisis Point](#) is a mental health crisis centre that aims to support people through crisis – often preventing need to admit to hospital. People are able to stay at the centre for up to 10 days and can attend up to 6 one-to-one counselling sessions over a two week period.

Samaritans: [Samaritans](#) is a charity aimed at providing emotional support to anyone in emotional distress.

Academic support

PASS/Peer Mentoring: Every undergraduate course at The University of Manchester has a course-specific [Peer Support](#) scheme. These schemes run regular study sessions facilitated by higher year students (PASS Leaders or Peer Mentors) and are a safe space to ask questions, discuss academic content as well as socialize and meet course-mates. Study sessions are designed to be complementary to lecture content and consolidate knowledge. In addition to providing academic advice, PASS Leaders and Peer Mentors can also be a useful point of reference for getting general advice on settling into university life.

My Learning Essentials (MLE) Workshops: The University of Manchester Library offers a range of [online resources and workshops](#) aimed at improving academic skills useful across disciplines, such as reference management, literature searching, data handling, critical reading etc.

Gold Mentoring Programme: [Manchester Gold Mentoring](#) gives students the opportunity to choose a mentor and be in contact with them over a six-month period. Mentors can provide insight into different career paths, opportunities to network and advice on CVs and applications.

Disability Advisory and Support Service (DASS): [DASS supports](#) a variety of students and aims at making higher education accessible and inclusive for disabled students.

Mitigating Circumstances: Students can apply for [mitigating circumstances](#) for exams or assignments if their performance has been affected by their personal circumstances. This has to be done within a specific time frame after the due date. People at the [support office](#) within each school can provide help with the application process.

Other resources

Additional support

Students' Union: The Students' Union is independent of the University and is run by students, for students. It provides a physical space and variety of resources, activities and societies so that students can make the most of university life. Further information can be accessed at: <https://manchesterstudentsunion.com/> The Students' Union can also provide advice on [finances](#), [housing](#), [academia](#) and [wellbeing](#).

Employability

Careers Service: The University's [Careers Service](#) is based in the Atrium (University Place) and offers advice on CVs, applications, job opportunities, interviews etc. [One-to-one appointments](#) can also be booked and are tailored to the school the student is part of. [The Careerslink](#) is a particularly useful resource provided by the Careers Service which advertises vacancies and events available to University of Manchester students and graduates. All the resources provided by the Careers Service are available to students for two years after graduation.

Student Ambassadors: [Student Ambassadors](#) work on a variety of outreach events and activities designed to enthuse and motivate prospective pre- and post-16 students about Higher Education, and promote the University as a place to study. It's a great way to meet new people, gain work experience and earn some money. There are widening participation events where the presence of Student Ambassadors who are estranged is highly valued.

Global Graduates: [The Manchester Global Graduates Programme](#) gives students the opportunity to spend one week meeting with alumni in one of the University's host cities (which include New York and Singapore). Priority is given to students in receipt of The Manchester Bursary and the trip is fully funded.

Wellbeing

When it comes to wellbeing, a small action can make a big difference. The University of Manchester's six ways to wellbeing (<http://www.studentsupport.manchester.ac.uk/taking-care/wellbeing/six-ways-to-wellbeing/>) will help you make positive changes to keep feeling good and living well.

Sporticipate: Sporticipate offers many different [sports and activities](#) that are free and on campus. All classes are inclusive and beginners are always welcome. Sporticipate offers a nice opportunity to keep healthy and socialise.

Volunteering and Community Engagement: This service provides volunteering opportunities to suit all interests and schedules. It's a great way to develop new friendships and skills: <http://www.volunteers.manchester.ac.uk/volunteer-community-engagement/>

Wellbeing Champions: [Wellbeing Champions](#) actively promote [the Six Ways to Wellbeing](#) across campus. Becoming a Wellbeing Champion is an exciting opportunity to meet people, learn how to take care of yourself and boost your CV by making a difference.

Exciting opportunities and events

International Society: The University's [International Society](#) offers trips around the UK, language classes and a wide range of cultural events and opportunities to meet and mingle with other students. It also organises a variety of events during the festive season for students celebrating Christmas in Manchester.