

## 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 register 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).

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 information 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](#).