

# Supporting Care Experienced and Estranged Students

A guide for students applying to University



## Have you been in care, or are you estranged from your parents?

If you're considering university study and are care experienced, or don't have support from your parents due to a breakdown in your relationship (also known as being 'estranged'), you will find everything you need to know here.

This booklet has been written to help you navigate your way round the processes to ensure that you can receive all the funding and other support that you are entitled to. This information will help you to overcome financial and other barriers that you may think will stop you from attending university.

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## Care leavers

A care leaver is someone who has previously lived with foster parents, in a children's home, orphanage, or sheltered accommodation. The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 defines a care leaver as someone who has been in the care of the local authority.

The University of Wolverhampton is delighted to be a founder member of the National Network for the Education of Care Leavers (NNECL). Visit: [nnecl.org](http://nnecl.org)

The NNECL aims to transform the progression of young people in or leaving care into and through further and higher education, by championing the continuous improvement of local practice, multi-agency partnerships and national collaboration.

The Care Leavers' Association offers a range of support for care leavers. Visit: [careleavers.com](http://careleavers.com)



## The Care Leaver Covenant

The Covenant is a promise made by private, public or voluntary organisations to provide support for care leavers aged 16-25 to help them to live independently.

In July 2016, the Government published 'Keep on Caring' to support young people from care to independence. A key policy commitment in the paper is a strategic pledge to introduce a Care Leaver Covenant.

You can find out more about what the Covenant could mean for you at:  
**[mycovenant.org.uk](http://mycovenant.org.uk)**





When you apply for your student finance you will need to tick the box indicating that you are a care leaver and provide a letter from your local authority confirming your status. This will ensure that you receive the maximum support you are entitled to.

You can find lots of helpful information, including how to complete your SFE form at: [practitioners.sl.cco.uk](http://practitioners.sl.cco.uk) under the 'Products' section.

Student finance application normally opens in March and if you need any help with this process then you can contact the Gateway team.



## Estranged students

The term 'estranged' applies to young people who are under 25 and have limited or no communication with either of their parents due to an irreconcilable breakdown in the relationship with them. Estranged students may have been in local authority care at some stage of their lives but do not fall within the definition of a statutory care leaver i.e a care leaver is someone who has been in the care of the local authority for a period of 13 weeks or more spanning their 16th birthday. Unlike care leavers, estranged young people therefore do not have support from a local authority.

If you want to claim independent status because you're estranged from your parents, you must provide confirmation from a professional person, outside your family, who knows about your circumstances.

### Examples of proof you could send us are:

- a letter from your social worker (if you have one)
- if you claimed Income Support when you were under 18, a letter from your local Jobcentre Plus office showing that you got benefits because of your situation
- if your relationship with your parents broke down while you were at school or college, a letter from an advice worker or personal tutor or teacher confirming your circumstances
- a letter from your doctor if you visited them because of problems relating to the breakdown of your relationship with your parents.

You'll need to prove that the lack of contact with your parents is permanent. We would normally expect you to have had no contact with your parents for at least 12 months, although this may not apply in exceptional circumstances.

You can't claim independent status just because you don't get on with your parents or because you don't live with them, or simply because your parents don't want to give details of their income or refuse to provide financial support to you.



For students who do not have a family support network, who are 18 to 24 and have no communicative relationship with either living biological parent, or often their wider family, coming to university can be a huge life choice change. We are here to help and support your university career from pre-entry all the way through to graduation.

**Stand Alone** is a charity that supports people who are estranged from their families and can provide advice and support.

They also offer support groups across the country that provide a non-judgemental space where you can share thoughts and experiences with others in a similar position together.

The University of Wolverhampton is proud to have signed the Standalone pledge in 2016 and to be recognised for its ongoing support for estranged students in the Stand Alone Pledge Awards, visit: [thestandalonepledge.org.uk](http://thestandalonepledge.org.uk)



Visit: [standalone.org.uk](http://standalone.org.uk)

You can find lots of helpful information, including how to complete you SFE form at: [practitioners.slc.co.uk](http://practitioners.slc.co.uk) under the 'Products' section.

## Key challenges for care leavers and estranged students

Research highlights **three** key areas where care leavers and estranged students may need support while studying in higher education:



More information on support available for these areas and more can be found in the remainder of this guide.



## Important: Sharing your information



While you may be concerned about sharing details of your status with a university, please be reassured that it will only be used in a positive way for your benefit. UCAS have included a box to tick on the application form if you are a care leaver or estranged.

This will then be shared with your universities so that they can consider your achievements in context and can contact you to let you know of any additional support you can access. It is important to tick the relevant box on the UCAS form so that you can receive all the help you need.





## Accommodation

### University accommodation

Many universities prioritise care leavers and estranged students and offer guaranteed university accommodation (halls of residence) for all three or four years of your course. It is also often possible to request accommodation for a year-round contract (52 weeks) to ensure you have somewhere to live in the summer.

### Renting privately

You do not have to live in university accommodation (halls of residence) and so may choose to stay where you are, or to rent privately. The council and other organisations can help you to find somewhere suitable.

Citizens Advice has useful information on your rights and what to expect under their 'housing' section at: **[citizensadvice.org.uk](https://citizensadvice.org.uk)**

University Students' Unions will also have good links with local housing providers and so can signpost you to accommodation off campus.

Use the 'help and advice' tab at: **[wolvesunion.org](https://wolvesunion.org)**

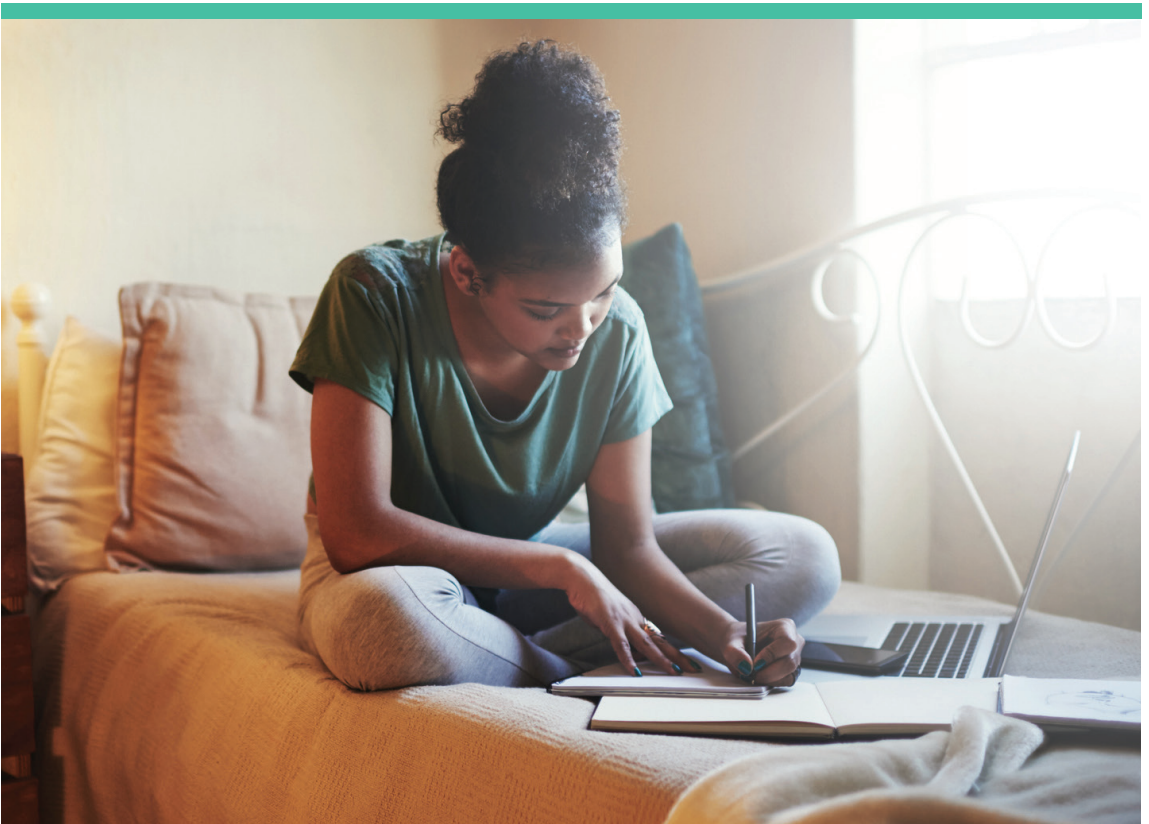
City of Wolverhampton Council also has advice and guidance about local private sector rent at: **[rentwithconfidence.org.uk](https://rentwithconfidence.org.uk)**



Some landlords offer a room in their own home to students. This is often called "Home Stay" or "Lodgings" you can find a list local people offering a room at:

**[homestay.com/united-kingdom](https://www.homestay.com/united-kingdom)**

**The Unite Foundation** offers care leavers and estranged students a Unite Foundation scholarship for accommodation with bills covered for up to three years of study. It also has a dedicated and safe online space (This Is Us community) for estranged and care-experienced students and graduates in the UK to connect, share info, arrange meet-ups and more! It's free, national, and open to all ages and years of study. Visit: **[thisisusatuni.org](https://thisisusatuni.org)**



## Financial support

### Government funding

The main funding for students who live in England is from Student Finance England (SFE). Visit: [gov.uk/student-finance](https://www.gov.uk/student-finance)

For more information on funding availability and how to apply if you live in Wales, Northern Ireland or Scotland go to:

Wales: [studentfinancewales.co.uk](https://www.studentfinancewales.co.uk)

Northern Ireland: [studentfinancenir.co.uk](https://www.studentfinancenir.co.uk)

Scotland: [saas.gov.uk](https://www.saas.gov.uk)

You will be able to apply for a loan to pay for the cost of your University fees as well as support towards your living costs. More detail on the exact amount of funding available depends on your individual circumstances and which country you live in.

In order to access the maximum support you will need to provide evidence of your care leaver or estranged status.

### Funding from the local authority

Under The Children Act 1989 (Higher Education Bursary) (England) Regulations 2009 all former relevant care leavers attending university are to be provided with a higher education bursary to the value of £2,000 over the life of the course they are attending. Each local authority will provide a different package of support so you will need to check with them exactly what you will receive.

### Funding from universities


Most universities offer bursaries and other support for students who are care leavers or estranged from their parents. This money is in addition to funding from the Government and the local authority. Additional support offered may include ongoing advice and guidance throughout the student journey and services such as access to a mentor and the right to accommodation for 52-weeks-a-year if you need it. You can find more information on the additional support offered by the University of Wolverhampton at: [wlv.ac.uk/care](https://www.wlv.ac.uk/care)

## Disabled Student Allowance (DSA)

Students with physical or other disabilities can apply to Student Finance England for the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) for help towards additional costs. You may be required to do a needs assessment to establish what support you need. After the assessment, you'll get a report listing equipment and other support you can get for your course. If you are currently claiming Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independence Payment (PIP) then you may be able to continue claiming this as a student. Check with the Benefits Agency to ensure you don't lose out on support.

The University's Student Support and Wellbeing Team can answer any questions you have. You can also find out what sort of support is available, and some useful FAQs from applicants on our website, visit:

**[wlv.ac.uk/spldapp](http://wlv.ac.uk/spldapp)**

Find out more at: 

**[gov.uk/disabled-students-allowance-dsa](http://gov.uk/disabled-students-allowance-dsa)**



**[ucas.com/student-finance-england/  
disabled-students-allowance](http://ucas.com/student-finance-england/disabled-students-allowance)**



### Support from charities

**Buttle UK** is a charity dedicated to helping children and young people in crisis, including those in financial hardship and dealing with multiple challenges. Applications must be made by your support worker. Find out more at: [buttleuk.org](http://buttleuk.org)

### Financial support from the University of Wolverhampton

If you are applying to study at the University of Wolverhampton and are either a care leaver or estranged from your parents then you can apply for an Access Bursary Visit: [wlv.ac.uk/access](http://wlv.ac.uk/access)

If you have declared on your UCAS form that you are care experienced then you will receive an email from us before you start asking you to supply evidence so that you can access the support. If you have not declared this on your UCAS form then there is a registration and consent form at: [wlv.ac.uk/care](http://wlv.ac.uk/care) that you can complete.





## Mental health and wellbeing

It's important to know what mental health and wellbeing support is available to you during your studies – and how to access it.

Most universities will have a wellbeing support or mental health service – check their websites to find out what is available. This would usually be your first place to get information about what's available at your university – from general wellbeing support to help with a specific mental health condition or difficulty.

Information available on the support from the University of Wolverhampton can be found at: [wlv.ac.uk/MHW](http://wlv.ac.uk/MHW)

### UCAS

UCAS has a wide range of information about student life, including accommodation and health and wellbeing under the 'undergraduate' section of its website.

Visit: [ucas.com/undergraduate](http://ucas.com/undergraduate)  
and: [ucas.com/estranged-students](http://ucas.com/estranged-students)

### Brightside

Brightside connects young people facing barriers with inspiring mentors. Find out more at: [brightside.org.uk](http://brightside.org.uk); [www.careleavers.com](http://www.careleavers.com).

### Student Space

Student Space is a new online hub from Student Minds to support students.  
Visit: [studentspace.org.uk](http://studentspace.org.uk)



## Information, advice and guidance

### The Gateway

If you have any further questions or would like to make an appointment with an Education Guidance Advisor then you can contact the Gateway team.

We can provide advice and guidance on studying at the University of Wolverhampton as well as information on the funding you are likely to receive based on your personal circumstances.

Call: 01902 321 032 or email: [gateway@wlv.ac.uk](mailto:gateway@wlv.ac.uk) with any questions you have. More information on the services provided can be found at: [wlv.ac.uk/gateway](http://wlv.ac.uk/gateway)

Visit: [gov.uk/studentfinance](http://gov.uk/studentfinance) for information and eligibility criteria for all government grants and loans and how to apply for them.

You can also get advice about entering higher education at: [aspiretohe.co.uk/students](http://aspiretohe.co.uk/students)



[wlv.ac.uk/gateway](http://wlv.ac.uk/gateway)

The Gateway at The George, Wulfruna Street,  
Wolverhampton, WV1 1LY

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