

STUDENT ADVICE

Estrangement

Full-time students 2020/21

What is family estrangement?

Family estrangement generally means physical and emotional distancing between family members. Estrangement occurs when no emotional support or parental guidance is provided, and the relationship breaks down. You may no longer have a relationship with your parents, have very limited communication with your family occasionally or have no communication at all. This is known as family estrangement.

Some parts of Student Finance England funding (SFE) i.e. part of the Maintenance Loan, are income assessed based your parent's income if you are under the age of 25. This means that you are considered a dependent student and you must provide evidence of your parent's income. However, if you are estranged from your parents, there is an exception to this rule, and your Student Finance can be assessed against your own income as an independent student, which normally means that you would get the maximum amount of maintenance loan.

How can estrangement happen?

Estrangement can take many forms and be for many different reasons; often resulting in the relationship being irreconcilable where the parent and child stop communication. Estrangement might be from just one member of the family, but can often mean estrangement from the entire family, or even the entire community. This can cause a number of very difficult feelings, which may feel difficult to manage and affect your well-being.

How can I apply to be assessed as an independent student due to estrangement?

If you are claiming independent status on the basis of estrangement, SFE consider you as being estranged if you can demonstrate that you are 'irreconcilably estranged' from your parents on or before the 1st day of the academic year for which you are applying for funding.

And/or

you have had no contact with your parents for a period of one year on or before the 1st day of the academic year for which you are applying for student funding



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Student Advice, 35 Marylebone Road NW1 5LS
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Or

you can demonstrate in another way that you are irreconcilably estranged from your parents. This means that for the short to medium term you don't see that you will be able to resume your relationship with your parents. It's more about the likelihood of the situation being irreconcilable than the actual period of estrangement.

However, if you become estranged during an academic year it is still possible for SFE to accept you have become estranged. Contact Student Advice to discuss your circumstances if this happens.

Please bear in mind that if you normally live with one parent only and you become estranged from that parent, SFE will expect you to also have no contact with your other parent in order to be assessed as an independent student and they will require evidence of this.

The Student Finance England Process of Applying as an Estranged Student

- Student applies for funding and indicates estrangement
- Estrangement declaration form available on student's account to download and complete
- Student passes estrangement declaration form to a third party to complete
- Third party completes form and returns it to the student
- Student sends form to Student Finance England and case is passed to the independent team – you can also upload your scanned form to your SFE online account via the Digital Upload section
- Independent team review form and if acceptable re-assess the student's application
- If form is not acceptable an email will be sent to the student detailing why and if applicable, requesting further evidence
- A revised notification letter is then automatically sent, and a manual letter issued to confirm that estrangement has been awarded

In place of the estrangement declaration form, Student Finance England can also accept a letter from an independent third party confirming:

- Their relationship to the student and the length of time they have known the student
- The reasons for estrangement from both parents and when this occurred



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- Current contact levels and if reconciliation is likely with both parents

If you do not have third party evidence of your estrangement, a case worker / telephone appointment route may be offered by SFE.

Once you have been assessed as estranged by SFE, you will receive an email confirming you have been awarded independent status on the grounds of estrangement. The email should have an attachment PDF letter confirming your status and you can also present this letter when you apply for the university Estranged Students Bursary. Keep your letter somewhere safe.

* Please note – if you would like a copy of the SFE Declaration of Estrangement form, you can also email us requesting this studentadvice@westminster.ac.uk

What evidence should I give to SFE?

SFE will require confirmation of the estrangement from a professional person outside your family who knows about your circumstances, for example a Teacher or Social Worker, Doctor, Counsellor, Housing Support Worker, Police or Student Welfare/Adviser at College/School. Student Finance England need to build a picture of your family estrangement. They can either complete the Estrangement Declaration Form or provide a letter.

However, often students who are estranged from their parents have not had any contact with a professional person in relation to the estrangement, so it can be very difficult to get such a letter. You can also submit alternative documents such as a Court Order, forced marriage or FGM order

Students sometimes ask someone who knows their situation and is not a member of the family to provide a letter although this is often less effective than the supporting letter from a professional person.

The supporting document should be on headed paper, if possible and the person must normally have historic knowledge of your situation as well as being able to verify that you have not had any contact with your parents for a substantial period, or they should be able to confirm details of any recent estrangement. You should not be expected to provide any statement that would compromise your



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personal safety or in doing so if it would present significant harm to your emotional wellbeing. Student Finance England assessors will look at cases on an individual basis.

If you have difficulty in providing robust evidence as described above, SFE can contact you directly to discuss and help you to review other possibilities. If you are contacted by SFE, you will be given a named Estrangement Assessor who will be a consistent point of contact. If no or minimal evidence of estrangement can be sourced, a telephone review will be arranged at a convenient time to enable SFE to make their assessment.

What information should I include on my SFE Estrangement Declaration Form?

You will need to explain the nature of your individual estrangement on this form. This does not mean that you are saying you will never be able to resume your relationship with your parents, it is just saying that you don't currently have contact with them, and don't expect to for the foreseeable future. SFE will not show this form to your parents.

You should mention on your form the circumstances that led to the estrangement, when this happened, how it happened i.e. did you move out and if so where did you go etc. Mention 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) and why you feel that the situation is now irreconcilable.

If you find this process difficult, a Student Adviser can offer help and guidance with doing this.

Am I required to prove my estrangement every year?

Students who have a telephone review to confirm their estrangement (i.e. who were unable to provide full third-party evidence) will be contacted in the following academic year to seek any updated evidence. If this is the case and you are unable to provide further evidence of estrangement in the subsequent academic year of your course, you will be contacted again to confirm your circumstances through another telephone review.

Other students who can provide evidence, will be asked to complete a Declaration of Estrangement form each academic year and have this signed by a professional who can confirm continued estrangement.



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SFE Confirmation Letter of Estrangement

You should automatically receive an email attached letter confirming estrangement from SFE. You can also request a letter confirming that you have been assessed as independent on the grounds of being estranged by ringing SFE on 0300 100 0607. SFE staff will then refer your query to the Independent team in order to process your letter within a few days. When received, you can use this letter as evidence of estrangement when applying for the university Estranged Students Bursary.

What should I do if my Student Finance application has been refused?

Please contact Student Advice as soon as possible. An Adviser can help you appeal against the decision or request a reassessment. You may be required to submit further, more detailed evidence.

Is there any financial support for estranged students from the University of Westminster?

The University of Westminster is committed to supporting estranged students and recognises that the transition to university and becoming a student can be challenging, especially as an estranged student. Consequently, if you are identified by SFE as being estranged, you may be eligible for the university Estranged Students Bursary of £1,000 each academic year. You can apply **after you have enrolled** on your course. You must provide SFE evidence that you have been assessed as estranged – an SFE letter or email confirmation of this is acceptable.

If you think you may be eligible, please contact the university Student Funding team for an application form E: studentfunding@westminster.ac.uk T: 020 3506 6989

What other help and support is available from the university?

The University of Westminster recognises that the transition to university and becoming a student can also be an exciting prospect but may sometimes be challenging for young people studying without the support and approval of a family network.

You can read about detailed support offered by the university here;

www.westminster.ac.uk/study/current-students/support-and-facilities/student-advice/support-for-estranged-students



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Westminster Living Expenses Support Scheme (LESS)

The university offers additional support to students who are experiencing financial hardship through the Westminster Living Expenses Support Scheme. This is a non-repayable grant and applications are means tested. Estranged students are given priority when applying to this fund.

You can read about detailed support offered by the university here;

www.westminster.ac.uk/study/prospective-students/fees-and-funding/undergraduate-student-funding/living-expenses-support-scheme-less

Money management

Making ends meet on a limited budget is a challenging task. Spending plans are a useful way of making sure that you budget carefully and don't overspend. The Advice Service has a Financial Capability Adviser, Laura Wood who can help you create a spending plan which can be used to balance your incoming funds with your outgoing costs. Budgeting can help you ensure that you have enough money left over to pay rent, fuel bills and food costs. Completing a budgeting plan is a useful way of managing your finances and can help save money.

Please contact: Laura Wood, Financial Capability Adviser

E: studentadvice@westminster.ac.uk T: 020 7911 5000 Ext 66080

Unite Foundation Accommodation Scholarship - The University of Westminster has a partnership with the Unite Foundation. Each year, Unite offers a number of full accommodation scholarships for Care leavers and Estranged students to the value of approximately £13,000 in order to live in Unite Hall accommodation. The deadline for applying is the end of May 2020 for the academic year 20/21.

However, the scholarship cycle for 2021/22 is currently suspended while the Unite Foundation currently responds and absorbs the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on their scholarship students and university partners. You can keep up to date with information here;

<https://www.unitefoundation.co.uk/>



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Career and Employability Service

The University Careers team is here to help you find the right job, choose a fruitful career or enhance your employability while at the University of Westminster. They provide help with searching for vacancies, drafting job applications, preparing for interviews and finding volunteering opportunities. They also offer advice and guidance in relation to choosing a career path, finding job opportunities, writing CVs, completing application forms, preparing for interviews and preparing for psychometric testing.

The Career and Employability Service also offers a valuable Mentoring programme. A mentor facilitates personal and professional growth in an individual by sharing the knowledge and insights that have been learned through the years. Simply put, mentors are people who help others to succeed. Our schemes are designed to widen the aspirations and enhance the personal effectiveness of students. With the help of mentors as role models, students can build a solid foundation of skills from which to launch a variety of successful careers.

Priority is given to Care Leavers and you find out more about this and other Careers issues by contacting Edmund Lewis, Careers Consultant
E: E.Lewis@westminster.ac.uk T: 020 7911 5184

Student Accommodation

The university student accommodation office can offer priority Hall accommodation for estranged students which can be all year round and for the duration of your course.

Please contact E: studentaccommodation@westminster.ac.uk T: 020 7911 5817

The Academic Learning Development Centre

Aims to support you in your learning and academic development. Their role is to help you reach your academic potential. The centre offers one-to-one academic skills tutorials and workshops in a number of areas, like essay writing, presentations and critical thinking.

You can read about detailed support offered by the university here;

www.westminster.ac.uk/study/current-students/support-and-facilities/academic-learning-development



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Free Interview Clothes

If you are attending job interviews, you may be aware that appropriate interview clothes are essential but can be costly. The university has collaborated with several organisations who provide free interview clothes and aim to empower clients to achieve economic independence by providing a

network of support, professional attire and the development tools to help clients thrive in work and in life. You will need to provide evidence of your interview in order to be referred.

If you would like a referral to one of these organisations, please contact: Anne McGrath
E: studentadvice@westminster.ac.uk T: 020 7911 5000 Ext 66080

The organisations we collaborate with are;

Smart Works (for women) www.smartworks.org.uk

Suited & Booted (for men) www.suitedbootedcentre.org.uk

Student Advice Service

For information and assistance with applying for Student Finance as an independent student on the basis of estrangement and information about the university Estranged Students Bursary of £1,000 p.a. Please contact: E: studentadvice@westminster.ac.uk T: 020 7911 5000 Ext 66080

Student Funding Department

For information and application forms for the university Estranged Students Bursary of £1,000 p.a and the university Living Expenses Support Scheme (LESS) which is a Hardship Fund. You may be eligible to apply for both funds.

Please contact: E: studentfunding@westminster.ac.uk T: 020 3506 6989

Counselling Service

For personal and emotional support in order to help you deal with the difficulties that estrangement can cause, you may find it helpful to talk confidentially to the university Counselling Service.

Please contact: E: counselling@westminster.ac.uk T: 020 7911 5000 Ext 6689



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Standalone

Standalone is a charity that supports people of any age who are estranged from their family. They can offer guidance and support around issues such as finding accommodation and applying for Student Finance as an independent student.

Standalone run meet-up groups, therapeutic groups and a mentor programme to connect people for ongoing emotional support. They also have an online support group for students where you can meet others in the same situation and talk about your experience of student life without a family network.

You can join this group via their website www.standalone.org.uk

Note

Please keep in mind that you cannot claim independent status just because you don't get on with your parents or have had a disagreement with them or because you don't live with them, or because your parents don't want to give details of their income to SFE, or they refuse to provide financial support to you. You must be estranged in accordance with the guidelines above.



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External Funding - Grants (these don't need to be repaid)

Some organisations help young people in need by awarding grants. Read websites carefully for full eligibility details before applying. Usually, grants are made if you have tried all other options.

Buttle UK

Awards grants of up to £2,000 to estranged young people aged 16-20 for support with education, employment and training, setting up home, and improving emotional and physical wellbeing.

Applications should be made by statutory or voluntary organisations on your behalf.

www.buttleUK.org

Lawrence Atwell's Charity

Awards grants of £100-£1,500 to young people aged 16-26 to help with training courses, including buying equipment, living expenses during the course and fees for tuition, enrolment or exams.

www.theskinnerscompany.org.uk/grants-and-trusts/atwell

The Prince's Trust

Awards grants for young people aged 17-25, working fewer than 16 hours, or in education for fewer than 14 hours per week, to help with getting into work, education or training; loans are also on offer to help you start a business.

www.princes-trust.org.uk

Turn2Us

Is a grant search tool. Enter your postcode for info on grants you could apply for.

www.turn2us.org.uk

Family Action Educational Grants

www.family-action.org.uk/what-we-do/grants/educational-grants/

The Mary Trevelyan Hardship Fund

<https://ish.org.uk/students/mary-trevelyan-hardship-fund>

Struggling to pay utility bills?

Some major providers have debt relief funds. See which ones, and how to apply at

<http://www.charisgrants.com/>

Student Advice also has a book 'The Guide to Educational Grants' and you are welcome to book an appointment to look through this.

July2020/AMG



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