



Support for students who are care experienced or estranged from their parents

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. In these pages, you'll find details of the support our university offers to care experienced and estranged students, designed to make the transition to higher education more manageable.

You can find information on the support that the University of Wolverhampton provides to care experienced and estranged students at: **wlv.ac.uk/care**

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- Care Leaver Covenant
- Estranged students
- Accommodation
- Financial support
- Mental health and wellbeing support
- Information, advice and guidance





Care experienced

A care experienced person 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

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.

Become is a charity which provides support for people who are leaving care. You can find more information at becomecharity.org.uk

Applying for student finance

When you apply for your student finance you will need to tick the box ☒ indicating that you are care-experienced and provide a letter from your local authority confirming your status. This will ensure that you receive the maximum support you are entitled to. More information on how to complete your SFE form can be found at:

www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/media/1897/sfe_important-_information_for_students_who_qualify-as_care_leavers_o.pdf.

The student finance application normally opens in March and if you need any help with this process then you can contact the Gateway Team by emailing:

gateway@wlv.ac.uk or by phoning: **01902 321 032**. More details on support offered by The Gateway can be found at: **wlv.ac.uk/gateway**



Important Information

SFE regulations state the following:

In determining if a student will qualify as care experienced, SFE will ask that the student provides a letter from the relevant local authority or their case or social worker which confirms the following:

- the student was looked after by the local authority
- the dates that the student was/is in care
- the student has not returned to the care of their parent(s) prior to the first day of the first academic year of their course

A student will only be required to prove their care experienced status once.

You can find helpful information, including how to complete your SFE form at: practitioners.slc.co.uk under the 'products' section then click on 'Care Leavers FAQs'.

Students who are 25 or over at the start of their course are automatically classed as independent and so don't need to provide evidence that they were in care.

More information that may be helpful to you can also be found at: www.ucas.com/undergraduate/applying-university/individual-needs/ucas-undergraduate-care-experienced-students

www.nnecl.org

www.careleavers.com



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. Unlike care leavers, estranged young people therefore do not have support from a local authority. Students who are 25 or over at the start of their course are automatically classed as independent.

Applying for student finance

if you claimed benefits such as Income Support or Universal Credit when you were under 18, a letter from the Job Centre or screenshot of your UC account showing that you received benefits because of your situation.

Examples of proof you could send 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, 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 will need to prove that the lack of contact with your parents is permanent. The Student Loans Company 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.

If you are unable to find third-party support, our dedicated team, No Lone Wolves, will meet with you to discuss the support options they can provide to support your third-party application.

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. NNECL the National Network for the Education of Care Leavers have extended their support and guidance to include estranged students. You can find more information at nnecl.org/pages/estranged-students

You can find helpful information, including how to complete your SFE form at: practitioners.slc.co.uk under the 'products' section then click on '**Estranged Students FAQs**'.

UCAS also have useful information for estranged students.

Visit: **ucas.com** then search 'estranged'.



Key challenges for care experienced and estranged students

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

**Mental Health
and Wellbeing**

Finance

Accommodation

More information on support available for these three 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 care experienced 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 (halls of residence)

Many universities prioritise care experienced and estranged students and offer guaranteed university accommodation for all three or four years of your course. At the University of Wolverhampton, it is also possible to request accommodation for 52 weeks to ensure you have somewhere to live in the summer if you need it.

wlv.ac.uk/accommodation

Renting privately

You do not have to live in university accommodation and 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 some useful information on your rights and what to expect under the 'housing' section at: **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**

City of Wolverhampton Council also has information and advice about local private sector rent at: **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 of local people offering a room at: **homestay.com/united-kingdom**



Financial support

Government funding

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

Wales (SFW): **studentfinancewales.co.uk**

Northern Ireland (SFNI): **studentfinancenir.co.uk**

Scotland (SAAS): **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 experienced 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.

Funding from universities

The University of Wolverhampton offers an Access Bursary and other support for students who are care experienced 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 if you need it. You can find more information on the additional support offered by the University of Wolverhampton at: **wlv.ac.uk/care**

Disabled Student Allowance (DSA)

Students with physical or other disabilities can access additional support from their university. You can also apply to Student Finance England for the Disabled Students' Allowance for help towards additional costs. More information can be found at: gov.uk/disabled-students-allowance-dsa. You will 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 PIP or DLA 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.

For help and advice on applying for support at the University of Wolverhampton if you have additional needs go to **wlv.ac.uk/student-life**



Mental health and wellbeing: university support

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**





Student Space

Student Space is a new online hub from Student Minds to support students.

studentspace.org.uk

Care experienced and Estranged student support- We have a dedicated team at the University of Wolverhampton who support care-experienced and estranged students. From the very beginning of your journey with us, through to graduation and beyond, the team is here to ensure you feel fully supported and prepared for your next chapter.

They are available to help with any concerns or worries you may have, and will guide you through your university experience—reducing barriers and helping you navigate student life with confidence.

We also work closely with local authorities to make sure there are no delays in arrangements between you and your supporting authority, ensuring a smooth and coordinated experience throughout your time with us. Please do feel free to contact **nolonewolves@wlv.ac.uk** if you have any questions this can be at any stage of your journey including before you join us!

You can find more details on all the support available at **wlv.ac.uk/care**.

Student Life

The Student Life Team at the University of Wolverhampton support students with accessibility, disability and inclusion; mental health and wellbeing; safeguarding; support to study and student money.

You can find more information at:
wlv.ac.uk/studentlife

It is important to include information on any mental or physical disability or long-term health condition on your UCAS form so that you receive the support you are entitled to.

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** with any questions you have.

More information on the service provided can be found at: **wlv.ac.uk/gateway**

Visit: **gov.uk/studentfinance** for information and eligibility criteria for all government grants and loans and how to apply for them.

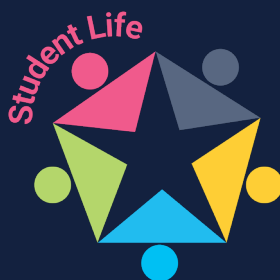


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