

Accountability

Students that are estranged from their parents do not have support over the summer months, which lead to a very real risk of homelessness over this period. As such, they do not have a home to go to as other students might and there's no extra provision or local authority care for estranged students as there would be for care leavers in certain circumstances.

Our focus groups of beneficiaries repeatedly raised the concern that they had to work full time during term, often in two jobs, to earn enough money to pay upfront for accommodation over the long summer break.

All of our focus group participants felt this damaged their academic progress and put them under considerable mental strain in comparison to other students.

Furthermore, young adults in this position find it difficult to reach out to others and are often mistrusting. This has an impact on their abilities to ask friends and others for accommodation and/or explain their situation. Many said that they found it difficult to find accommodation that started in the summer months, and would not be able to afford to pay for the entire house over these months if so.

The clinical board said:

'The stress of potentially being homeless is likely to have a detrimental impact. Sofa surfing is a form of homelessness which although 'hidden' is known to have a negative impact on physical and mental health. These processes are likely to have a detrimental impact on the individual's academic achievements (if working). Not only will they have less time to concentrate on their studies at a crucial time (during the exam period) but stress, anxiety and depression are known to negatively impact academic performance through impacting on concentration, sleep, memory processes.'

'Any additional support that could be offered to estranged students in the summer months could not only support and empower the individual to complete their studies in a more healthy manner, but would also highlight to them they are deserving of a level of support that they may never have experienced and could very much need.'

Victoria said:

'I found myself living in a squat over the summer, and it was a matter of existence and survival. In many senses I was nomadic. The pressure of working so many jobs to afford those months in other academic years was immense and very frustrating.'

Jessica said:

‘The process of not having a home over summer felt very humiliating and I didn’t want people to see me in the way they had to. I had no choice really as I didn’t have money and so I didn’t have options. The re-submission of my evidence didn’t help me in this stage at all, everything felt uncertain.’

This issue is likely to become much more amplified with the onset of new regulations that indicate a scaling down of access to learning funds and discretionary loans.