

Points of Action

1.If estranged students are to be asked to provide evidence of their estrangement to Student Finance England, the organisation should be aware of and take responsibility for the risks to the student's mental wellbeing that this process may pose. Stand Alone would suggest Student Finance England work with the charity and its partners to build more consistent, structured and reliable support for students during this process.

2.It is suggested that a dedicated Freephone helpline to support students whilst they search for evidence should be put in place; this helpline would offer thorough and consistent guidance on evidencing for estranged students and other relevant independent students as well as pastoral support. This should be manned by operatives that have a full understanding of the nuances of the processes of submitting evidence, and the delicate nature of familial dysfunction.

3.This would complement structured third party intervention for those students that feel the process of gathering evidence of their family estrangement would pose too large a risk to their mental/physical wellbeing and/or would be unlikely to find suitable evidence without a legal declaration. Students would receive an individual case worker and contact during the assessment stage of attaining estranged student status (ESS).

4.In view of this, better guidance and advice available online is recommended in the form of a dedicated microsite, as well as examples of evidence that have been accepted in previous cases where the situation was 'complicated'.

5.Stand Alone would re-iterate the NUS's 2012 suggestion in pursuing changes to regulations for the re-submission of evidence for each academic year.

6.Stand Alone suggests further research is needed to conclude on the relationship between the re-submission of evidence and retention rates of students estranged from their family.

7.If repeat evidence continues to be required, it is suggested that the guidelines and expectations for the nature and extent of further evidence should be clearly strategised and more adequately set out for the student at the beginning of the process of application.

8. An exploration of section 82 of current legislation, with the view to potential flexibility for students that are estranged from parents. This would mean a slightly higher maintenance grant for students that are estranged from parents to prevent homelessness over the summer months in the first and second years of study only.

9. Paying existing loans monthly over a 12 month period would help students manage their money more effectively, and would reduce the risk of homelessness during the summer months.

10. Stand Alone would strongly suggest a collaborative approach from the charity, universities and NUS to work together to prevent estranged students from risks of homelessness over summer. For example, brokering agreements with universities to donate accommodation during the summer period, as well as putting greater financial support in place in the form of discretionary bursaries and grants only for estranged students.

11. To work with the SFE customer insights department and generate a survey for all students that applied for independent status on the grounds of being estranged from parents.