



Strictly Embargoed: 11th December 2018

The University of Oxford and The University of Cambridge commit to supporting students without relationships with their family

Pledge letters from The University of Oxford and The University of Cambridge to the charity [Stand Alone](#) show a commitment to improving the student experience for those who study without family support.

[Recent research has shown that 86% of students rely on parental and familial support during their time at University.](#) However, around 9,000 UK students have no contact or relationship with their families, leaving them financially, materially and emotionally vulnerable during their studies. Accounts of student life show that estranged students often become homeless over summer and stay in student accommodation alone over the Christmas holiday period. Such students may be up to three times more likely to drop out of university.

Estranged students are commonly LGBT+ students who were rejected by family after coming out, children of immigrant families who reject practices such as forced marriage or FGM, or children who are distanced after divorce and remarriage. There are also a proportion of estranged students who have been disowned for pursuing education against the wishes of their family or extended family network.

The UK's top two research universities have today joined others in pledging to create additional institutional support for those students who may be struggling because their families aren't behind them.

Commitments include:

- **The University of Oxford have committed to creating a bespoke non-repayable bursary of up to £7,200 pa to help estranged students meet the costs of living. Vacation accommodation will be provided, and where possible students will be offered housing with others who live in Oxford over the holidays. Estranged students will have unlimited access to counseling resources, giving them an additional source of emotional support.**
- **The University of Cambridge have committed to giving estranged young people a non-repayable enhanced bursary to assist with financial struggles, and will ensure estranged young people are housed over the holiday period. Further changes will follow after a full audit of their provision.**

Professor Martin Williams, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education at The University of Oxford said:

“The University of Oxford is committed to ensuring equality and diversity in its student population. Recent research and awareness raising in the HE sector has led us to recognise that not all students will be studying with the support and approval of their family network. This can lead to significant barriers for students, who lack family capital. As well as improving support and access to it, we will work with Stand Alone to train welfare staff in colleges and others in key roles to understand the issues faced by estranged students, and how we can best support them.”

Professor Graham Virgo, Senior Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) at The University of Cambridge said:

“The University of Cambridge understands that students studying without the support of their family may experience additional challenges. We are committed to helping estranged students meet their full potential at Cambridge by providing a comprehensive package of support. We will also aim to raise awareness among staff and students at Cambridge of estranged students, the barriers they face and the support available to them.”

Becca Bland, Chief Executive of Stand Alone:

“Students are often assumed by default to have family support, and there is often an inbuilt structural need for students to fall back on the resources that family may supply, such as housing over the summer period and a place to celebrate Christmas. Recent reports have indicated that living costs for students are spiralling, and without family behind you, making university work financially is a huge challenge. We’re so pleased that two of the UK’s top research universities have recognised the barriers that students who are estranged from family may face in this sense, and we hope this pledge will help more young adults at these institutions feel confident in coming forward to access the help and support which may level the playing field for them.”

Notes for editors:

Stand Alone offers innovative advice and support services for people experiencing family estrangement, helping people of all ages who become estranged or disowned from their family or key family member. Stand Alone has a particular focus on students aged 18-25 who have no connection or relationship to their family, and are campaigning for greater support in this area.

www.thestandalonepledge.org.uk

Pledge letters can be found:

The University of Oxford: <https://bit.ly/2C0Dkdm>

The University of Cambridge: <https://bit.ly/2L575fM>

Research:

Information about the importance of family support can be found in ‘Family Matters’ report from Sheffield Hallam University:

<https://www.standalone.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/FamilyMatters.-Final.pdf>

More info:

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