

08 April 2019

Dear Professor Eastwood,

The Stand Alone Pledge to support estranged students – a public commitment

I am writing to you today to request a meeting to discuss with you how the University of Birmingham can take the Stand Alone Pledge to support estranged young people in higher education. I am doing so following the coverage of your university in The Times on Monday 8th April 2019.

Estranged students are young people studying without the support of a family network. Individuals in this position often have no contact at all with their family.

Forced marriage, LGBTQI+ rejection, and divorce and remarriage are key reasons why young people become estranged or are rejected by their family. Whatever their background, it is undoubted these students are some of the most vulnerable young people in our university communities.

Unlike care leavers, [our research in partnership with Student Finance England](#) in 2015 showed that there is a lack of any kind of social service intervention in roughly 60% of estranged student cases.

The Stand Alone Pledge aims to change outcomes for estranged students, facilitating the development of better services to support them with their unique struggles. This might be a bursary to prevent students falling into homelessness over summer – a time when many students are expected to go home - or it might be 365 day access to university accommodation, or better access to mental health services.

It also raises awareness of estrangement amongst staff and helps to promote support available to those students who may need it.

[SLC data](#) from 2017/18 identified over 50 officially recognised estranged students studying at the University of Birmingham that academic year. We know these numbers are likely to be higher as many estranged students remain hidden because they fall outside of the SLC processes to evidence estrangement. This number is one of the highest in all of the Russell Group universities.

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It is undoubted that students who are estranged from their family struggle with retention in Higher Education. 41% of students had considered withdrawing or suspending from their course due to money pressures, stress and mental health struggles, 14% actually had, which is a rate three times higher than the average.

[Our research](#) also found that over 30% of these students had registered homeless or had considered registering homeless before their course began and also struggle with homelessness once on course, especially during the summer vacation months.

Over the past year, we have referred individual estranged students who have sought advice from our charity to student services staff at the University of Birmingham, as they were unaware of support available to them and how to access it. We would like to support you to be more directly involved with your students, and to better communicate with your student community through the Stand Alone Pledge. We are of the mind that a University of your size should be able to do more than 'hope' to make a commitment to support these students.

I would be delighted to meet with you to discuss how the University of Birmingham can further develop support for estranged young people at key points across the student lifecycle and enhance the success and experience of its estranged students as part of its Stand Alone Pledge commitment.

Please don't hesitate to get in touch should you have any further questions.

Yours sincerely,

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