

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Transitioning out of Higher Education:

Barriers and Challenges For Students
Estranged From their Families



**Basic stability was
just as important as
succeeding in my
career, and arguably
just as difficult and
elusive at times!**





A lot of my friends were able to move back home when they graduated and could save money/take their time finding a good job and preparing for it. I knew I needed a job within a week of graduation or I was screwed, and even then I bought a tent with the full intention of living in it for at least the first month of my employment because my housing situation was so dire.



I'm more focused on surviving after graduation than graduating... I spend more time worrying about it than focusing on my uni work. I have lost sleep and the situation has been a massive source of stress.



Foreword

For many years, government and university resources have been focussed on improving access to university for disadvantaged students. Whole departments are dedicated to bringing in students from non-traditional backgrounds, ensuring university offers them the conditions needed to survive and thrive.

This has enabled more disadvantaged students to walk through the doors of our universities, and supportive measures put in place have enabled more students to overcome the structural barriers that may have once prevented them from succeeding in Higher Education (HE).

Estranged students are one of these disadvantaged groups, who are studying without the support of their parents or a

corporate parent. They may have been missed by the care system, or the care system didn't have a remit to intervene. We commonly work with LGBT+ students who have been rejected by family, abuse survivors, students who have been rejected by new step-parents after re-marriage or those who have different morals, values and beliefs to their immigrant parents. All have no entitlement to corporate parenting of any kind from a local authority or other agency.

Over the years we have worked in the HE sector, we too have focussed on access and retention and raising awareness at institutional and governmental level about systemic deference to family capital in university policies. We have presented research on summertime homelessness, difficulties in proving estrangement to access statutory finance, guarantors and students living in routine poverty, forced to make the choice between a shift at work and a lecture.

As a result of The Stand Alone Pledge, senior leaders at half of UK universities have committed to developing supportive policies that enable estranged students to overcome the isolation and structural inequity that lacking a relationship with family can bring. This has involved investment from universities of millions of pounds in targeted bursaries for estranged students and more flexible policies around tenancies, deposits and guarantors. Broadly speaking, half of HE institutions have put in writing that they understand that students without family or a corporate parent behind them may face a challenging experience in their community.

Since this work started, we have been aware that transitioning out of university presented a challenge for estranged students. These concerns were not simply that they didn't have the familial leg up in terms of connections and networks in the workplace (although this was mentioned). It was rather that they struggled with material barriers to accessing a graduate job, in the same way as they struggled with the material barriers to entry for university.

We heard from students on our panels stuck in their student halls in final year, unable to leave without a deposit for their next house. We heard from those who had successfully found entry-level jobs in their field, but who didn't have the means to move, find a house and wait two months for their first pay packet. For many, graduation spelled another period of homelessness, and they clung to sometimes numerous jobs that prevented them from rough sleeping.

This report is very simple in its undertaking, and it brings together the voices of these young people and around eighty others from our community of students and graduates who are estranged from their family. It is intended as a report to amplify this issue, and as the beginning of a cycle of research that we hope can expand the scope and meaning of transitional support for students who lack family.

If we're to use higher education as a lever for social mobility, or as a tool to create higher earning graduates, it's crucial that students aren't left at a material cliff edge at the end of their degree, back to square one, unable to focus, and at risk. I am confident that if we focus on strong collaborations between employers, the government and universities, we can help these students to succeed, and not only in higher education but as thriving members of our communities.

It seems we are currently missing this conversion as a society. If we're to invest heavily in disadvantaged groups at university level, and transition them into our institutions, on the premise that their prospects will be brighter on graduation, and our society will be enriched in the process, then we mustn't overlook the complexities that they face when leaving. It's all a piece of the same jigsaw that is moving up and beyond an unfortunate and traumatic start in life.



Dr Becca Bland,
Chief Executive,
Stand Alone Charity

Executive Summary

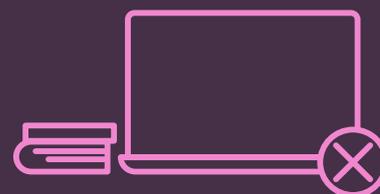
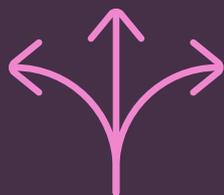
In graduation and in the transition in to employment or further study, students estranged from their families experienced an upheaval from the relative safety of Higher Education. Immediately upon graduating, estranged students had to balance meeting their own basic financial and housing needs while securing employment, with comparatively little support from universities, employers or government.

Students acknowledged that comparatively speaking, their peers with parental support were at an advantage in terms of the breathing space they could afford to find the right graduate employment or further study opportunity. The material capital of a family home was seen as advantageous, as estranged students saw their peers accepting lower paid or unpaid opportunities and utilising it rent-free.



The need to find secure employment was a frequent theme in the estranged graduates' transitions, and some discussed being unable to pursue their career aspirations, missing out on postgraduate study or internships in order to secure work. This meant they were unable to explore different opportunities or feel able to wait for the 'right' job opportunity, which aligned with their aspirations. The fear or reality of homelessness was often mentioned as a driver to find any form of financial security.

Some estranged students said they were reluctant to inform an employer/potential employer of their family situation over concerns over not being offered employment or finding a lack of understanding. However, respondents suggested they felt they had some small advantage compared to their peers, and highlighted characteristics such as their work ethic, independence, resilience and empathy for others. The legacy of the emotional toil of emotional trauma and estrangement was also present – students held a sense of needing to succeed to prove their families wrong.



Students pursuing further study were often concerned about the financial implications and costs of postgraduate life and also felt confused and misinformed about the funding available to them. Many struggled on low paid studentships without any additional support from their institution and could not afford to relocate when offered a place on prestigious postgraduate study programmes.

The financial and emotional struggles of estranged students when transitioning out of HE appeared under-acknowledged by HE institutions and employers. While estranged students had often accessed institutional careers support, employability skills, financial guidance and counselling, many found it difficult that they were unable to access these resources after graduation.



Preliminary recommendations

For the Office for Students, HEFCW and Scottish Funding Council:

These bodies should more formally expand definitions of transition to include the transition out of university, obligating institutions to report on supportive measures in their access and participation plans, fee and access plans, and outreach agreements for disadvantaged students.

For Universities and University Departments

Universities could take measures to improve the support that they offer students when they graduate, to include:

- + Bursary instalments paid around the point of graduation to aid relocation and housing costs.
- + The extension of university accommodation over the summer period of the graduating year or heavily discounted summer housing in the two months following graduation.
- + Working collaboratively with local authorities to put housing in place for those at risk of homelessness.
- + A support group to help estranged students to build social connections & develop key coping skills and generate mental health strategies during the graduating period.
- + Clear communication of support offered by staff to students studying without a family network, and consultation with students in this position early in year 3 to make a graduation plan.

Universities should offer postgraduates the same supportive structures as undergraduate students, particularly those on low salaried PhD studentships.

Universities should offer transitional accommodation over the summer months for those relocating to start postgraduate education.

For Employers

Employers should offer better support with relocation costs and offer loans, much like travel season-ticket loans that could act as deposits for private rented accommodation.

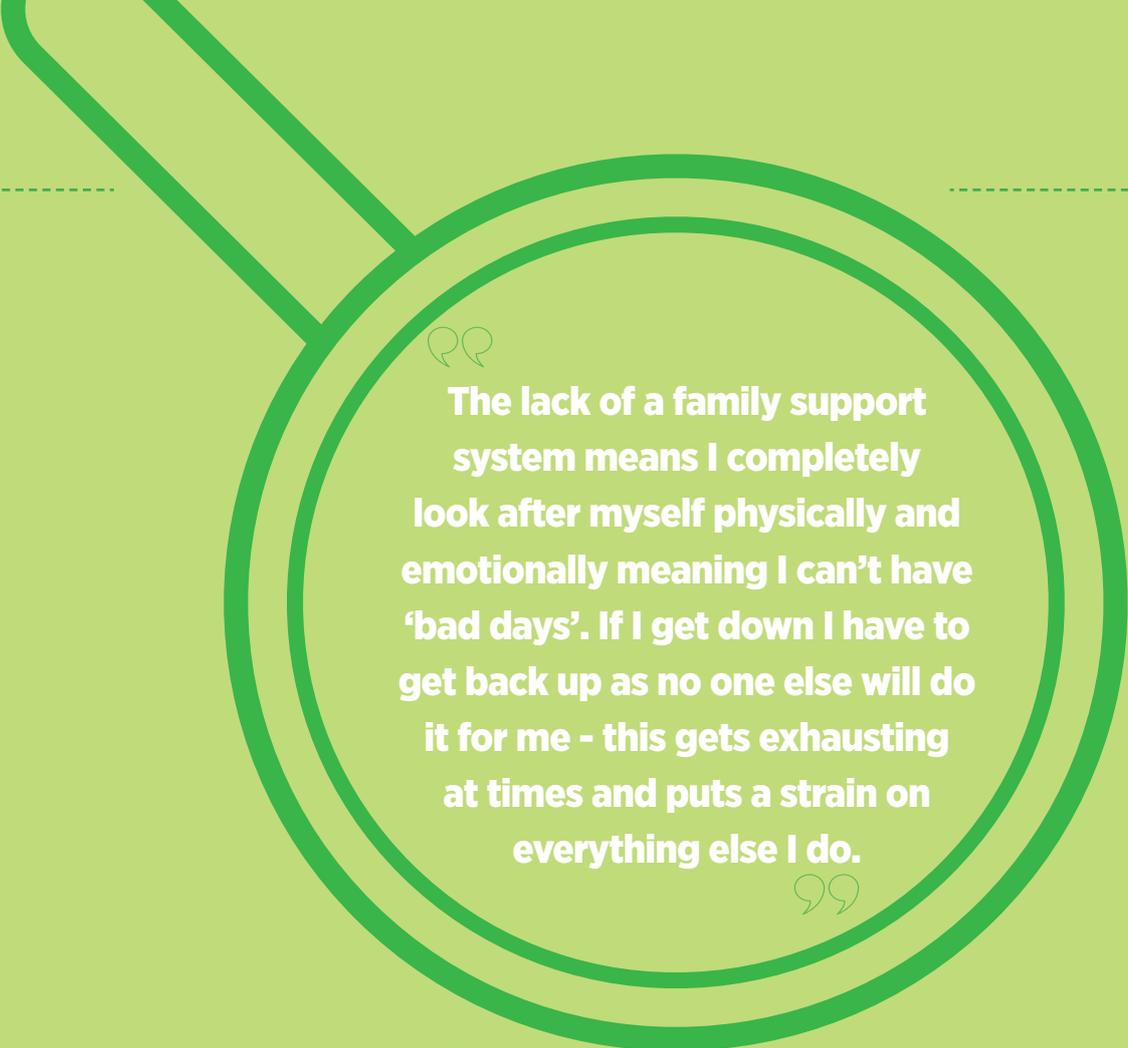
Employers should apply a degree of flexibility in the first months of work if students are unable to relocate before the payment of their first salary.

Employers should commit to offering new starters their salary after their first month of work or providing a discreet fund to loan a comparable amount to those who need to draw a salary after their first month of work.

For Further Research

Researchers should pursue further qualitative and long-term longitudinal research on the impact of a lack of family support on graduation transitions and employment experiences.

Researchers should consider quantitative research into the longer-term graduate outcomes of estranged students, including HESA data to be collected from 2020.



““
The lack of a family support system means I completely look after myself physically and emotionally meaning I can't have 'bad days'. If I get down I have to get back up as no one else will do it for me - this gets exhausting at times and puts a strain on everything else I do.
””

The study

This study uses the data of eighty-five students, drawn from an online survey conducted by Stand Alone.

The survey invited those who were estranged from their family to answer key questions around their experiences of graduating and moving into working life or further study. It was also open to those who were either graduating in the 18/19 academic year or would be graduating in the 19/20 academic year. It was disseminated through the charity's university contacts and via the charity's social media channels.

The main aspects of the questionnaire offered the opportunity for respondents to provide open text answers to a series of questions.

Table 1 displays some of the characteristics of the survey sample.

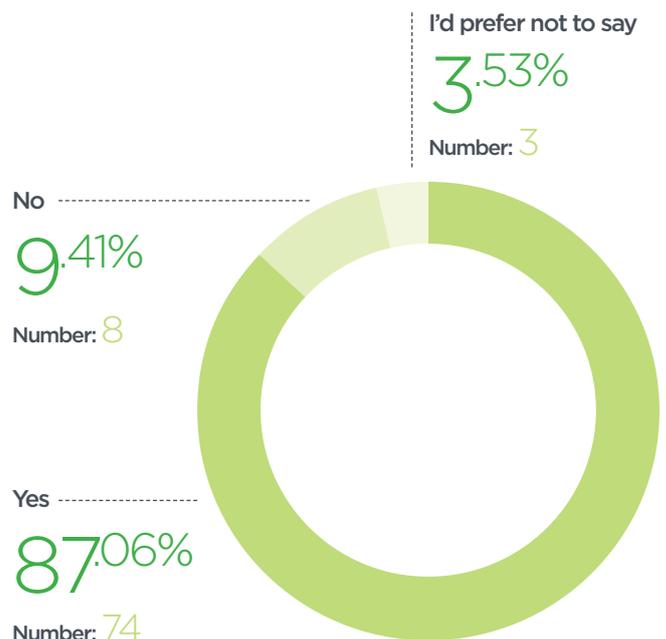
Table 1: characteristics of the sample	%	NUMBER
EXPECTED GRADUATION		
I will graduate next year (2020) or beyond	48.2%	41
I am graduating this year (2019)	32.9%	28
I graduated last year (2018)	5.9%	5
I graduated 2-5 years ago (2014-2017)	4.7%	4
I graduated over five years ago	8.2%	7
LEVEL OF STUDY		
Undergraduate studies	85.9%	73
HNC, HND or other college higher education course	1.2%	1
Postgraduate studies	10.6%	9
Doctoral studies	2.4%	2
COUNTRY OF STUDY		
England	88.2%	75
Scotland	8.2%	7
Wales	3.5%	3
Northern Ireland	0.0%	0
CARE LEAVER		
Left care after the age of 16	11.8%	10
Left care before the age of 16	3.5%	3
Not been part of the care system	81.2%	69
I'd prefer not to say	3.5%	3

Most respondents were yet to graduate (81.2%), had studied at an undergraduate level (85.9%) and had studied/were currently studying in England (88.2%).

Few identified themselves as being a care leaver (15.9%), but most had studied without the emotional or practical support of their parents or a key family member (87.0%) (Chart 2).

Chart 2:

Do/did you study without the emotional and/or practical support of your parents or key family member?



Graduate aspirations, anxieties and needs

Respondents who were yet to graduate held a range of graduation career ambitions. Around a quarter aspired to work in education, health or care-related fields, a further quarter aspired towards a professional career such as law or engineering; just under a sixth aspired towards further study and a small number sought to work as creatives or entrepreneurs. The remaining quarter were unsure about their future aspirations, wanted to travel or seek some kind of career with financial stability. The respondents yet to graduate fell into two camps – those who had a future plan and those who did not. Those who had a plan were generally positive about being able to achieve their aspirations.

For those students whose future planning was absent, many suggested they felt unable to focus on job applications or career planning due to the pressure of completing their academic studies. For others, the burden of completing their courses without the financial or emotional support of family had been difficult and had impacted their mental health.

Those who had already graduated suggested some struggle in their graduate transitions and reflected on financial difficulties and periods of unemployment. The need to find secure employment was a frequent theme in the estranged graduates' transitions, and some discussed being unable to pursue their career aspirations, missing out on postgraduate study or internships in order to secure employment. A minority of graduates had experienced positive transitions, and one reflected on the support, particularly secure accommodation, provided by their employers.



I was unable to take on internships as I had to work several part-time jobs to financially support myself. In such a competitive industry, I was not able to pursue writing as I took the first job that would mean I could survive in London.

EST30 - Graduated over five years old

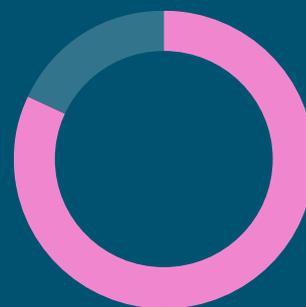
I feel that the emotional hardships faced throughout my life leave a gap in a vision for the future. Moving forward throughout life is more about wondering where you're going to live and what will happen to you so I have no idea what I want to do as I have spent more time qualming about other things to even have time to consider this thoroughly. I only enrolled onto my MA as I could not comprehend what life would be like out of this structure left to navigate the world as an individual with few support networks.

EST41 - Graduating in 2020



Most of the students had attended or were planning to attend their graduation ceremony

81.4%

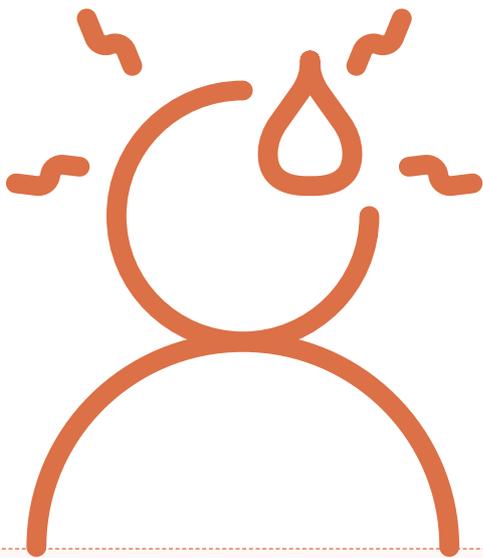


Those who had decided not to attend suggested it would be too difficult to attend an event designed to celebrate achievements with family. A small yet much-appreciated gesture was that some institutions had offered to cover the cost of attending graduations.

Transition concerns overall

For those who were yet to graduate, worry, stress and anxiety about graduating were recurrent themes.

These concerns impacted on the estranged students' ability to concentrate on being a student. Some students reflected on feeling demotivated, isolated and being incapable of graduating or reaching their potential.



I don't have a home to go back to, and as the course was so full-on I wasn't able to hold down a job in order to save money for after my student finance runs out...I'm more focused on surviving after graduation than graduating... I spend more time worrying about it than focusing on work. I have lost sleep and the situation has been a massive source of stress.

Student graduating in 2019

Very demotivating. It has impacted my mental health a great deal and so I am unable to reach my full potential.

Student graduating in 2020 or beyond

It is always a worry that plays in the back of your head and can be extremely isolating as it is not something that my friends and peers worry about.

Student graduating in 2020 or beyond

The precarity of their financial situation was a concern. Students were concerned about having enough money for a rental deposit, their rent and their basic needs and this was coupled with the worry of being made homeless:



Fears of affording housing when I graduate, I'll no longer have student finance and therefore cannot afford the rent on my private rented apartment. I'll need to be working full time and have a sufficient income before graduation.

Student graduating in 2020 or beyond

Many estranged students had created financial security through paid work during their studies – both to help fund their studies and to provide themselves with a financial safety net for after graduation. However, for some the focus on paid work had affected their studies.



I have worked during most of my degree in order to save money for when I leave university, but the time spent working has affected my grades.

Student graduating in 2020 or beyond

For those who had already graduated, there had been an upheaval from the comfort and relative safety of higher education. Many explained that it had posed immediate challenges through the loss of accommodation and the security of the structure of the university. Immediately upon graduating, estranged students had to balance meeting their own basic financial and housing needs while securing employment:

“Having a home or a roof over my head, no doubt. Basic stability was just as important as succeeding in my career, and arguably just as difficult and elusive at times!”

Student who graduated over five years ago

“Where would I live? How would I support myself? How would I get a job I enjoy?”

Student who graduated 2-5 years ago

“Surviving. Making rent. Having somewhere to live and not spiralling back into homelessness. Just being okay when I didn’t have loans and grants to help me. Worrying about debt and finding a job.”

Student who graduated over five years ago

Navigating this transition alone and without family support was challenging; there was no safety net, savings had diminished, many were concerned about day-to-day living, and having the funds to be able to attend job interviews. Furthermore, many recognised their disadvantage in lacking the family networks to help find job opportunities:

“I was concerned about what would happen if my savings ran out before my employment began. I was also concerned about loneliness, lacking networks for “bolstering” work experience (many friends worked in their parent’s/family businesses for a few months after graduating). I also worried about being an imposition on my friends/partner (who I was looking to for meals/sofa surfing when I was in difficulties).”

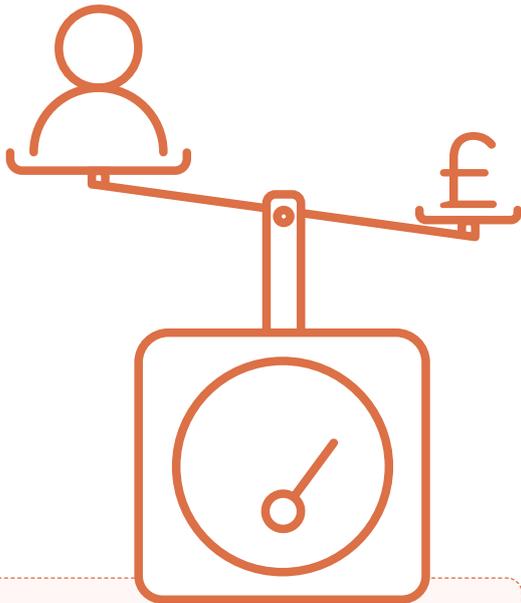
Student who graduated in 2018



Transition into employment

For some estranged students, making the first transition into graduate employment was challenging.

Their concerns included how to behave in the workplace, an absence of a support network to turn to, and feeling isolated away from the higher education environment.



Not knowing how to act in a workplace environment (dressing/talking/sharing) and managing my finances in the most responsible way. Being lonely outside the uni bubble.

Student who graduated in 2018

I think more careers resources should focus on **HAVING the job as well as getting the job, especially when it comes to things like social capital.**

Student who graduated in 2018



Several estranged students highlighted their family estrangement had led to a lack of self-confidence and doubt in their ability to be successful. Many suggested they would benefit from tailored support for finding and applying for jobs, gaining work experience, skill-building activities and accessing internships.



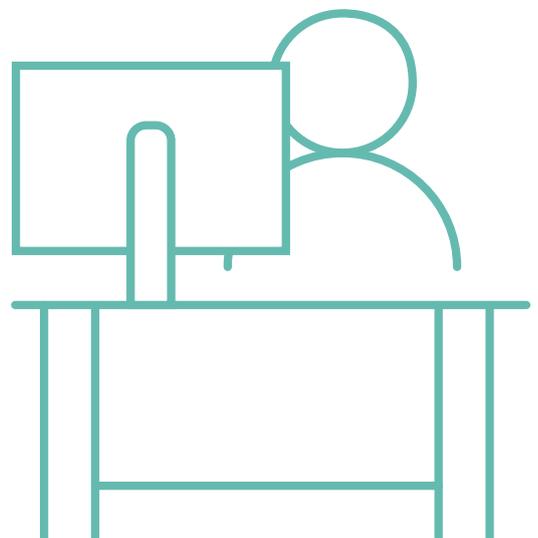
Tailored careers advice provisioned by the university where students are specifically allocated an expert with care leavers/estranged students. Do they understand the intricacies of the anxieties we face when thinking about our time after university?

Student who will graduate in 2020 or beyond



While respondents suggested higher education institutions could offer more support during the transition, there were mixed responses regarding what employers could offer. Some estranged students said they were reluctant to inform an employer/potential employer of their situation over concerns over not being offered employment or finding a lack of understanding.

That said, several respondents cited positive support from their employer/potential employers, including support with accommodation, making role adjustments and flexible working. Some estranged students felt that employers could provide better support through relocation grants, dedicated HR support, help with travel costs and new starter packages, such as paying professional registrations and referrals for accommodation.



Transition into further study

A high proportion of estranged students were considering or had progressed to further study. Finances were the key concern with this group of students.

More specifically, worries over student debt, a lack of clarity regarding postgraduate funding, and combining study with paid employment were discussed. Some suggested that entering the workplace immediately after graduation would better enable them to gain the financial security that they needed, rather than pursuing educational goals.



“Money is a big one (course fees but also house deposits, the costs of relocating); I’m constantly having to work to make ends meet so I can’t really study for a Masters like I wanted to.”

Student who graduated 2-5 years ago

I wanted to do a masters but financially I could not afford it and I don’t feel the support at my university is as good as it could be for helping me as an estranged student. The workload for a masters would be much more and I would struggle managing it alongside my part time role.

Student who will graduate in 2020 or beyond

Respondents who had already progressed to postgraduate study described on-going financial struggles, with one student having been made homeless during their studies:

“I was very lucky that my MA was fully funded, but it was fully funded at a sub-breadline level and I became homeless during the course as no landlord would rent to me on such a low bursary.”

Student who graduated in 2018

There were also emotional aspects to pursuing or not pursuing postgraduate study. One participant discussed their regret in not accepting an undergraduate place at a prestigious university and others felt they would have to moderate their aspirations due to housing and relocation issues:

“I wasn’t able to take risks and apply for places far away/more aspirational institutions because I couldn’t rely on family to “pick up the slack” if I needed to move to another city.”

Student who graduated in 2018



Support in transition

Overall, the financial and emotional struggles of estranged graduates appeared under-acknowledged by higher education institutions.

While estranged students had often accessed institutional careers support, employability skills, financial guidance and counselling, many found it difficult that they were unable to access these resources after graduation:



“ Once I leave university, I think a safety net disappears and that is quite scary. If I ever run into unexpected financial problems, I won't have parents/my university to help me.

Student who will graduate in 2019

Estranged graduates suggested specialist guidance would have helped them make a more positive transition and suggested tailored support to explore career opportunities, to secure accommodation and help with personal finances:

“ I needed some 1:1 help to guide me to reach my aspirations and help me see that they were possible. I needed help with practical things such as getting a job, finding a place to live.

Student who graduated 2-5 years ago

I would have liked to have spoken to someone who was specialised in this area to help me discuss my financial situation and my housing options.

Student who graduated 2-5 years ago

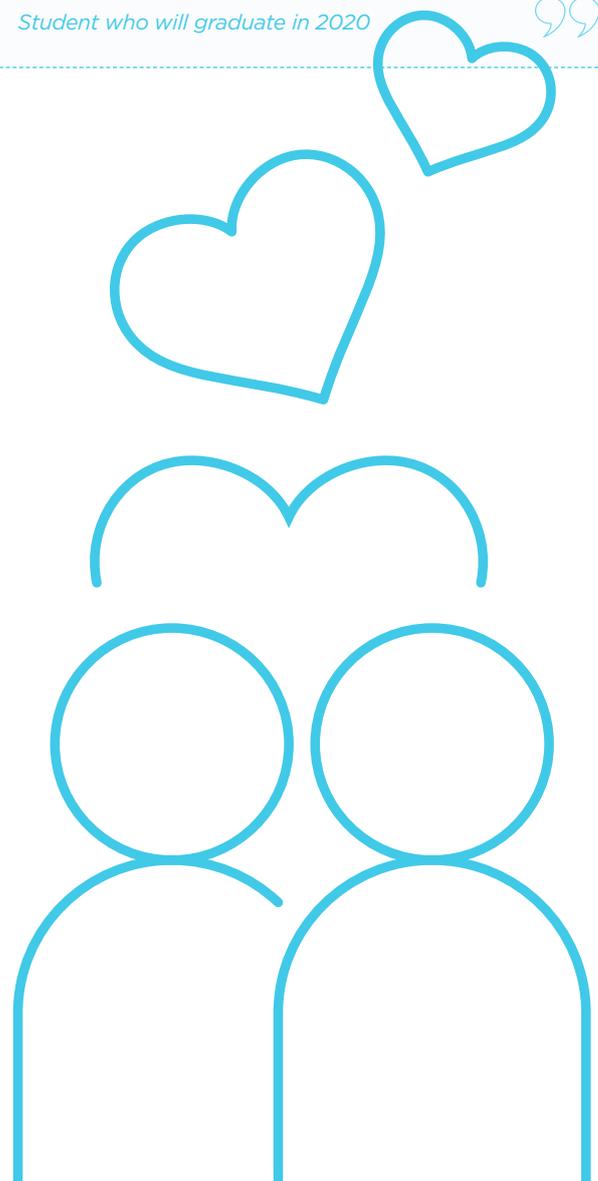
Similar suggestions were posed by students yet to graduate; with some suggesting institutions could play a 'corporate parenting' role and offer personal and emotional support to estranged students to cope during an unsettling and unstable period:

“ Perhaps if the University would continue acting as a corporate parent and do things that most parents will do for other graduates. Help look for accommodation, act as a guarantor, provide a moving grant.

Student who will graduate in 2020

I would appreciate more financial support and also just somebody checking I'll be alright.

Student who will graduate in 2020



There was a degree of uncertainty around support for further study for estranged students. Some estranged students had received additional financial support for on-going study including discounts on tuition fees, care leaver bursaries and scholarships. One higher education institution, which provides support for estranged students, facilitated contact with the student's postgraduate institution to explore the support available during their continuing studies. However, others recounted poor experiences with postgraduate funding, which they saw as more locally determined and therefore seen as liable to change. One student described being enticed into PhD study with a scholarship only for this to be withdrawn. This led to them self-funded and being unable to access other sources of financial support:

It ended up being self-funded. My university offered scholarships to students who got a first. I got a first and applied. The uni then took away the scholarship offer as an across the board strategy to save money I expect... I was too stressed to think of alternate plans of action. So I applied to do the PhD part time... There was no estrangement support for postgrads. As I self-funded student I was also expected to pay my own conference costs and travel costs (unlike scholarship students)... I still wonder now why I did the PhD.

Student who graduated 2-5 years ago



Good Practice

There was evidence of pockets of good practice including financial, emotional and practical transition support from institutions.

Such packages consisted of access to year-round accommodation, deposit waivers, graduation bursary, additional financial support, university-based placements and work opportunities and guidance from specialist teams. This support was highly valued and had enabled the students to focus on their final year of study knowing that they had a safety net and a team to speak with regarding any personal, emotional or financial concerns.

The [...] team, as well as the Money Advisors and Disability Support team have been invaluable. They have always been there to help me when I have needed to drop in. The [...] graduation bursary will also help me to transition into accommodation ahead of my postgraduate diploma starting.

Student graduating in 2019

[...] are paying me a £1000 graduation bursary and paying for my gown hire and photos, so it gives me time to adapt to life after University and not worry about falling behind with rent.

Student graduating in 2019

While the above support packages may be good practice for other institutions, even a small amount of financial support made a significant difference around transition.

Because of my financial struggles the university has rewarded me some additional funding which I am saving to use after university. The University could do little else, and I appreciate the support they have provided for me so far.

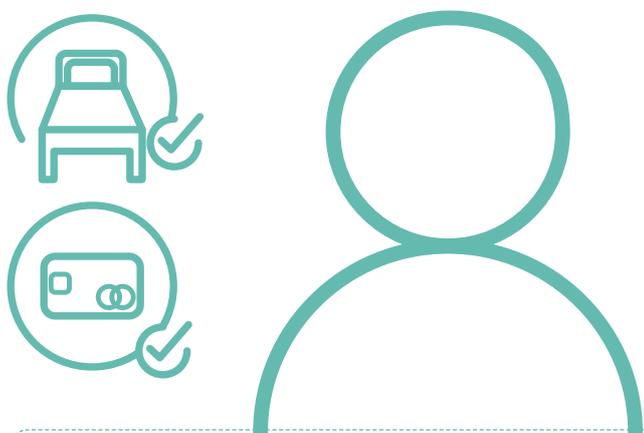
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Student graduating in 2019

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Student who graduated 2-5 years ago

In summary, there were examples of good practice regarding support for transition:

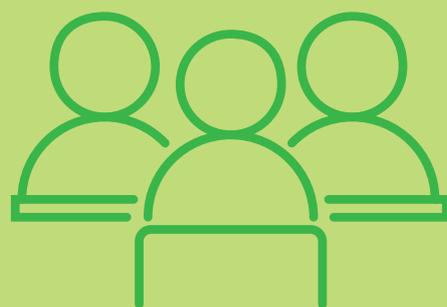
Accommodation support



- Access to university accommodation
- Rent guarantors
- Storage for belongings
- Guaranteed temporary/short-term university housing

- A grace period for continued access to university support
- University-based placements and work opportunities
- Career coaches
- Counselling
- Staff training on student estrangement
- Corporate parent/emotional support
- Guidance on postgraduate study
- Peer mentoring/support
- On-going institutional access to journals

General transition support



- Estranged Student Bursary
- Graduate bursary
- Financial/funding advice

Financial help

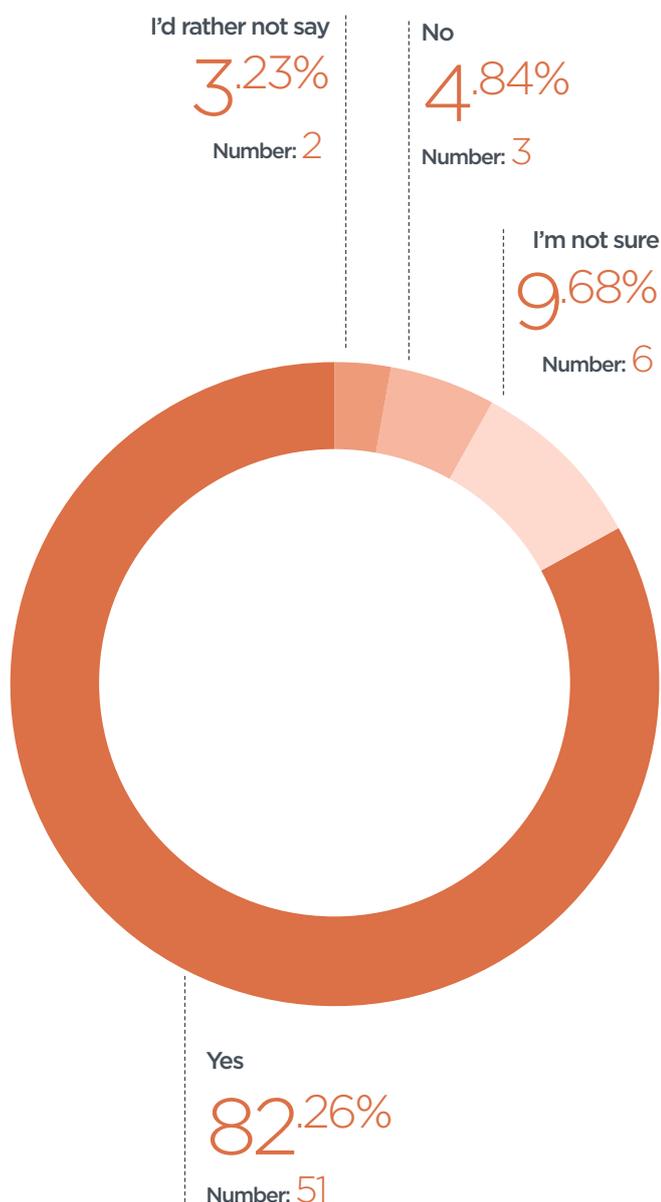


Does family make a difference?

Respondents were asked whether they felt advantaged and/or disadvantaged in making the transition out of higher education in comparison to students with closer parental or family relationships (Table 5). The majority (82.26%) felt their lack of parental/family relations had impacted in some way.

Chart 2:

Advantage and/or disadvantaged in comparison to students with closer parental or family relationships



Several respondents suggested they felt had some small advantage compared to other students and highlighted characteristics such as their work ethic, independence, resilience and empathy for others. The legacy of the emotional toil of family estrangement was also present in these discourses – a sense of needing to prove their families wrong but also, for several, a strong faith in their moral direction:

I feel like I am a stronger more individual character because I have had to stand on my own two feet for a long time, I have always worked to get what I want, and it shows with my personality and work ethic.

Student graduating in 2020 or beyond

Advantage being blooming resilient and know I can cope with virtually anything... I'm proud of my morals, I don't think I would be so moral focused without my experiences.

Student who graduated 2-5 years ago

Despite these positive reflections, it is essential to remember that these are borne from coping with adverse and possibly traumatic experiences. The counter aspect is the significant load of transitioning from higher education without parental or family support which are encompassed by four interconnected themes of mental health, financial stress, absence of support and the lack of time or space to consider their career options:

Emotional and broader mental health issues

More than one in three respondents felt their emotional or mental health disadvantaged them. For some this manifested itself through a lack of confidence and self-esteem.

While others suggested the absence of a close network to turn to led to an emotional disconnection from not having anyone close to share life's challenges with:

 I have nobody to talk to about my concerns, general stress and support around my studies.

Student graduating in 2020 or beyond

None of my family-supported peers seem to understand that my precarity is much more precarious than theirs, which exacerbates an already very difficult sense of loneliness and displacement.

Student who graduated in 2018



For a small number estrangement had a significant and on-going effect on their mental health, sometimes related to stress and anxiety:

 Students with family networks have a sense of security, stability, and belonging which estranged students lack, and this lack has a massive effect on my ability to function day-to-day

Student who graduated in 2018

I also feel that the trauma, especially because the issues are on-going and current, has put me at a disadvantage because I live it and breathe it every day. It's always at the back of your mind, and if you have a bad day, it can be difficult to get any work done.

Student graduating in 2019



Financial stress and the absence of a safety net

Most frequently, financial stress stemmed from an absence of safety net, which they felt had blighted their higher education and transition experience. The students felt pressure to make firm career decisions rather than travel or take risks in exploring different career opportunities and of having a high level of responsibility for themselves.

 Not having family to 'catch you' has also meant I will take less risks and still can be quite a serious stressed person... I regret that I couldn't do that. It has taken any being 'care free' away from me.

Student graduating in 2019



Absence of support and encouragement

The absence of a support network of parents and family was also felt in terms of navigating the complexity of graduate jobs and opportunities and in not having anyone to share their success.

 The lack of a family support system means I completely look after myself physically and emotionally meaning I can't have 'bad days', if I get down I have to get back up as no one else will do it for me - this gets exhausting at times and puts a strain on everything else I do.

Student graduating in 2020 or beyond

It's hard making decisions about your future without anyone supportive to speak to about them. If I have concerns about finances or practicalities I don't really have anyone to go to.

Student graduating in 2019

This is especially hard in terms of achievements as you have no one to celebrate these with besides your friends. It is extremely isolating as you are made to feel very different to others around you who do have parental support.

Student graduating in 2020 or beyond



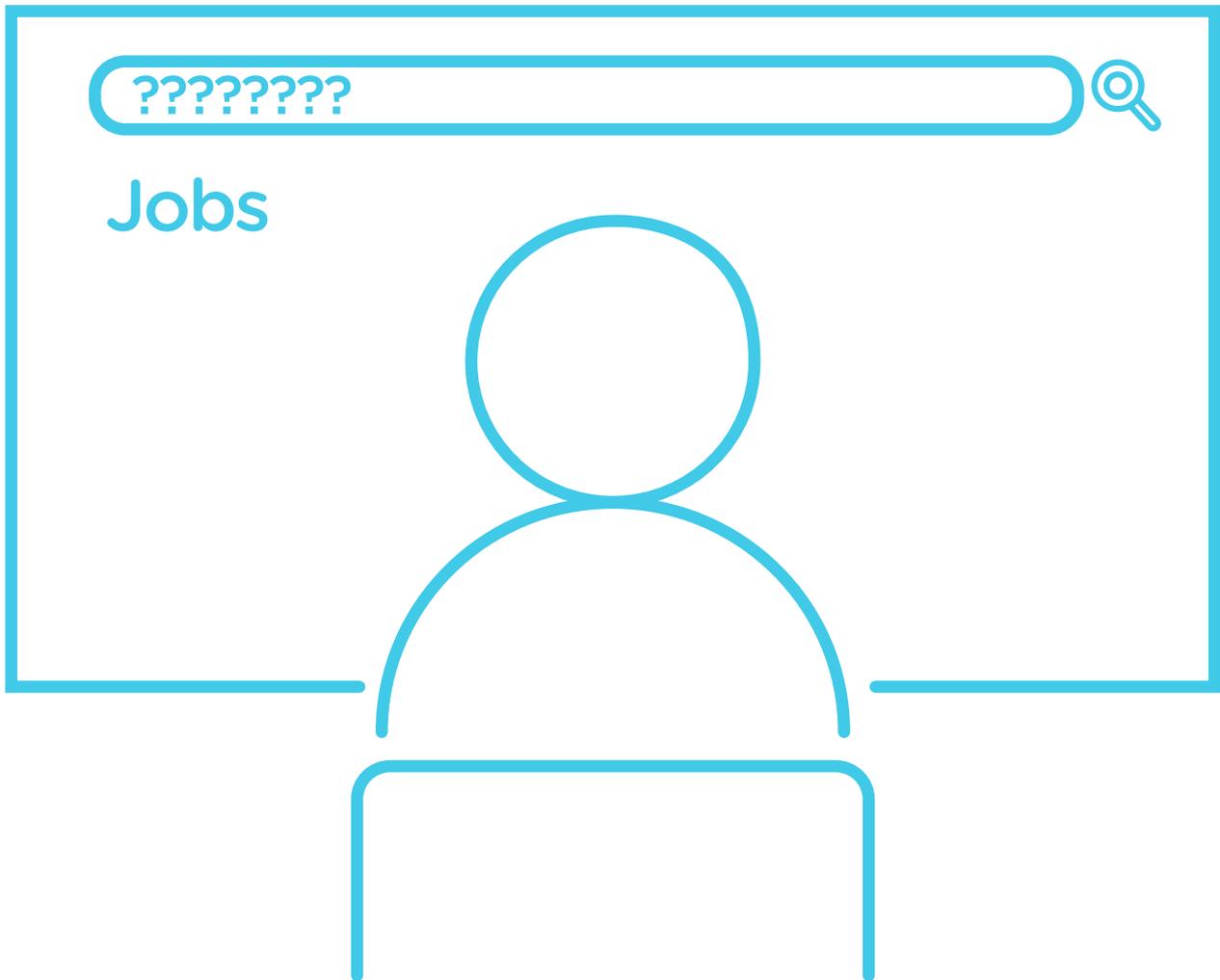
Time and space to consider career options

The final theme is the lack of time or space to consider their graduate career options. The estranged graduates felt a priority to secure employment immediately upon graduation and this meant they were unable to explore different opportunities or feel able to wait for the 'right' job opportunity:



A lot of my friends were able to move back home when they graduated and could save money/take their time finding a good job and preparing for it whereas I knew I needed a job within a week of graduation or I was screwed, and even then I bought a tent with the full intention of living in it for at least the first month of my employment because my housing situation was so dire.

Student who graduated 2-5 years ago



Care Leavers

Within the sample, eight respondents identified themselves as care leavers. Three had left care before the age of 16 and five after the age of 16. One had graduated two to five years previously, two were due to graduate in 2019 and five in 2020 or later. Seven had studied at an undergraduate level and one at a postgraduate level. One had studied with the emotional support of family but the remainder without.

Their aspirations for graduation were similar to the broader estranged students and seven of the eight respondents outlined plans to help them achieve their goals. These often involved discourses of studying hard, achieving a 'good' degree, applying for graduate schemes, utilising work experience and networks, and making the most of opportunities. The only care leaver to have graduated had a poor transition from higher education "I was alone and didn't know where to start. I ended up unemployed for about a year."

Similar to the broader estranged group, having somewhere to live after graduation was a repeated concern as was losing the perceived safety and security that higher education and social services had offered.



Sustaining myself financially and finding housing concerns me. Once I leave university I think a safety net disappears and that is quite scary. If I ever run into unexpected financial problems I won't have parents / my university to help me.

Care Leaver graduating in 2019

This had both a positive and negative impact:



I think I feel and have always felt a bigger pressure that students who are not estranged to have a life plan in place and to succeed academically because I just know I don't have a safety net. I feel like I'm the only person responsible for myself. This is motivating sometimes - it motivates me to work hard but it's also quite emotional and scary too.

Care Leaver graduating in 2019

In terms of support from higher education to help the care leavers move on after graduation, there was a strong sense that these respondents would benefit from personalised individual support for their graduate transitions.

I needed some 1:1 help to guide me to reach my aspirations and help me see that they were possible. I needed help with practical things such as getting a job, finding a place to live.

Care Leaver who graduated 2-5 years ago

Perhaps if the University would continue acting as a corporate parent and do things that most parents will do for other graduates. Help look for accommodation, act as a guarantor, provide a moving grant.

Care Leaver graduating in 2020

Regarding support once in employment themes from the care leaver respondents were broadly similar to those suggested by others but two respondents reflected on keeping their situation hidden from employers and being concerned about the stigma and **“penalised for being a care leaver”**. All but one care leaver felt they were disadvantaged in their transition from higher education and presented this in terms of loneliness and the lack of a safety net:

 **I feel like I have additional stressors when it comes to finances, and a constant feel of being alone in it.**

Care Leaver graduating in 2020 or beyond

A lot of graduates I know are able to concentrate on finishing their degree first and hunt for jobs after they finish because they're able to move back into their parents' home. For me, I don't have that safety net. I have to make sure I have an income and a place to live as soon as I graduate. I am responsible for my safety and nobody else. That is quite daunting.

Care Leaver graduating in 2019



That said, there were also positive narratives from care leavers regarding their independence and skills for a successful transition into employment. One care leaver recognised how the support from their foster carers coupled with financial support from social services and their university had enabled them to have a positive higher education experience, which would support their move into employment:



 **I have been extremely lucky as I have the support of a wide foster family network... This has provided me with the basis of motivation and engagement when it comes to my studies. Stress with bills and finances has been minimised due to support from both social services and [university].**



Care Leaver graduating in 2019

