



Helping estranged students  
to overcome disadvantage



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# Developing support for estranged students in higher education

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We believe that students who are estranged from their families, who are studying without the support or approval of a family network, should not be held back from succeeding in Higher Education.

We know that the estranged students who reach your institutions often throw themselves wholeheartedly into studying. Many are determined that their lack of material and emotional support and/or approval from their family will not act as a disadvantage. Yet, despite being forcefully resilient internally, these students drop out of HE at a rate that is three times higher than the average student.

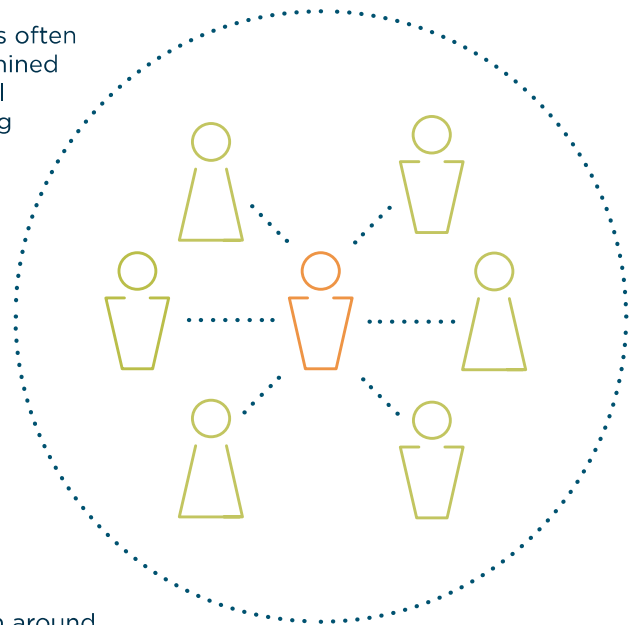
We want to help institutions to enable these brave young students to stay resilient.

Estranged young people are often from backgrounds of abuse or have substantially different ambitions, values and beliefs to their family of origin. Many have been rejected from changing family forms and new family structures which have sprung from divorce and remarriage. A proportion of these students are often distanced because they come out as LGBT or start transitioning to another gender. The commonality is that these students do not qualify for any kind of statutory support from their local authority.

Our research shows that many estranged students struggle to complete their course because of pressure and stress, most often around finance and accommodation.

Many institutions had not realised that, in addition to care leaver students, there are others that don't have a family home to go back to over the summer months. It is not always the case that when the academic work gets tough at university, a young person has the encouragement and emotional support of a family network to fall back on. Furthermore, the financial pressures mean estranged students are often making choices between working a shift and going to a lecture or seminar.

Pledging to Stand Alone would mean that you are publicly committing your institution to supporting students who are studying without the support or approval of a family network. A member of your institution's SMT (VC/PVC/Principal) starts the process by writing a one-page letter of commitment to Stand Alone.



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**There is no charge for an institution to take the pledge.**



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## What is the Pledge asking for?

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Over a two-year period, your institution would work towards creating the right environment and conditions for estranged students to stay resilient and thrive. There are a few minimum requirements for commitment to the Pledge:

- Your VC, Pro VC or Principal will write a short public letter of commitment to Stand Alone.
- Your VC, Pro VC or Principal will meet with a group of estranged students.
- The institution establishes a named contact for estranged students - if you don't already have one.
- The institution identifies the support for estranged students already in place across the four areas of the pledge: finance, accommodation, mental health & wellbeing and outreach & transition and how it wants to develop its offer of support.
- The institution will develop processes to identify students and monitor their progress.
- The institution ensures staff and students across departments and faculties are aware of the support available to estranged students.
- The institution commits to staff development around awareness of the barriers estranged students face.

We would encourage you, as a minimum, to identify one commitment in two pledge areas. You will then monitor your targets and their impact over the duration of the pledge. We aim not to be prescriptive and have given some suggestions of best practice in our four key areas – finance, accommodation, mental health and wellbeing, and outreach and transition. The commitment might be prioritising the group in an existing bursary pot, or working with your accommodation providers to provide solutions around deposits, or setting up a peer support group.

**See the next page for details of the four areas of support.**



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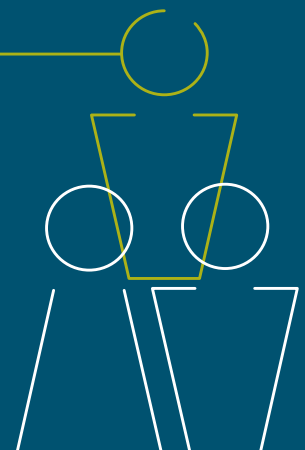
## What will we do for you?

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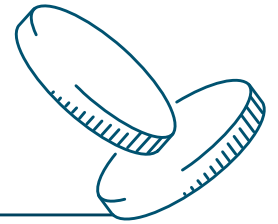
Over the course of the pledge, we will work with our partner institutions to publicly promote their practice, and celebrate their achievement in helping estranged students to remain in higher education. We will support HE staff through training and best practice conferences throughout the two years.

A group of best practice champions and estranged students will monitor your progress against your pledge ambitions. Our monitoring is not intrusive, and we will arrange a catch up with you after one year of the pledge being in place.

We will also give you our rather lovely logo to put in pride of place on emails and your website.



# Examples of best practice in supporting estranged students



## Finance

- Offer an estranged student bursary or specific financial support in line with the offer already available to other vulnerable groups such as care leavers.
- Establish estranged students as a priority group for discretionary funding.
- Include estranged students as a priority group in other finance-related support: e.g. study materials, living costs, course equipment and field trips, graduation costs, specialised budgeting workshops.
- Provide advice and support to estranged students on how to apply for funding available and associated benefits, to be delivered by a trained member of staff.

## Accommodation



- Provide 365 day access to accommodation - in particular to cover the holiday periods.
- Offer a bursary for summer accommodation.
- Prioritise accommodation for those who are homeless.
- Waive the need for large deposits and guarantors for halls of residence.
- Have support available to assist with deposits for private landlords.
- Work to develop links with accommodation providers who will be flexible about the need for a guarantor.

## Mental health and wellbeing



- Take the cap off counselling sessions for estranged students.
- Foster connections with external providers of low cost or free of charge counselling support.
- Set up peer support groups for students to meet others in the same position.
- Ensure staff in counselling and wellbeing services are aware of the support available from other departments to estranged students.
- Inform academic staff of the needs of estranged students and the support available from counselling and wellbeing services.

## Outreach and transition



- Tailor marketing and institutional literature to include messages that estranged students will find supportive.
- Foster links with local charities, foyer and homeless shelters to reach those living without support from their families
- Communicate the support available for estranged students in outreach work in schools and colleges and ensure information is easily accessible e.g. on the institution's website.



# FAQs

## What do I need to do to take the pledge?

There are some simple steps to taking the pledge. The first is to identify what you are already doing for estranged students. The second is to identify which are of support for the estranged students you are aiming to develop. The third is to find the approval of your VC, ProVC or principal who will write a public letter of commitment, showing that your institution is behind your plans.

## Do you need to have support in place in all four areas already before you can pledge?

No. The point of the pledge is to help you to develop support in areas you might not have thought about before.

You don't have to be developing something in all four areas, but we expect you to already have in place, or be developing support, in at least two of our pledge areas.

## How many students are at your institution?

You can find out by clicking on the interactive map on our pledge homepage. This will show you a list of numbers of estranged students in your institution and of those in your region.

[www.thestandalonepledge.org.uk](http://www.thestandalonepledge.org.uk)

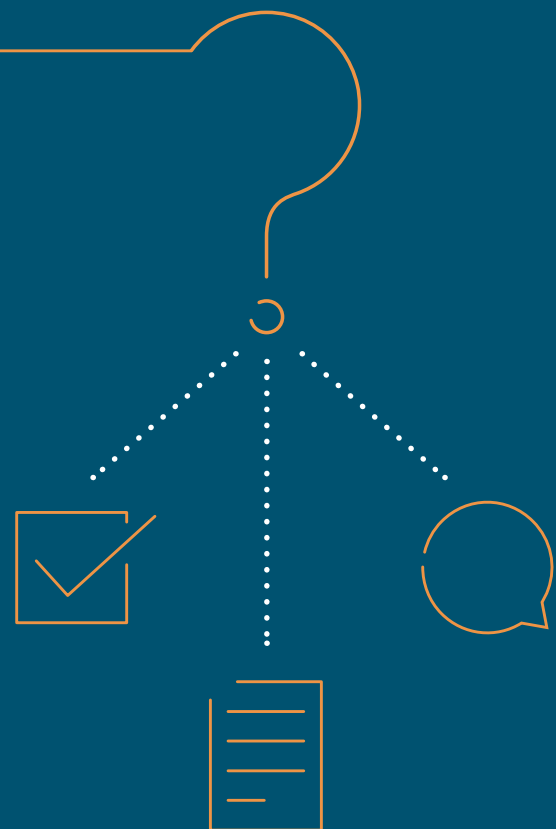
## Who can write the pledge letter?

The letter needs to come from your VC, ProVC or Principal.

It's common practice for engaged individuals within an institution to champion the taking of the pledge, but the letter needs to be signed by your VC, Pro VC or Principal.

## How much does it cost?

There is no charge to take the pledge. However there is a cost associated with attending our professional development conferences should you wish to learn more about our research and supporting estranged students.



## How is the pledge monitored?

We will ask you for a brief annual update on your progress towards your goals via an online form. This will be monitored and overseen by a group of champion professionals who work in all four of the pledge areas as well as students.

## What kind of support can we provide to institutions?

We can help you to identify key areas of development via our best practice training conferences, or occasionally we can help individually in a phone call or meeting.

We can help you to shout about and promote your best practice and inspire others to follow in your footsteps. We write monthly articles.

## What kind of support can we provide to students?

We can provide information and advice to students around applying to Student Finance and we can sign-post to the help and support that is available in various institutions. It's with regret that we can't support students financially, give loans, or be a guarantor for accommodation.



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[www.thestandalonepledge.org.uk](http://www.thestandalonepledge.org.uk)

If you would like to find out more about the pledge  
please contact us on: [s.mueller@standalone.org.uk](mailto:s.mueller@standalone.org.uk)

