

# Positive Impact?



**What factors affect access, retention  
and graduate outcomes for university  
students with a background of care or  
family estrangement?**

A report to the Unite Foundation by:

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# Positive Impact?

What factors affect access, retention and graduate outcomes for university students with a background of care or family estrangement?

By bringing together the available data on outcomes, as well as highlighting where crucial measurement is missing, **Positive Impact?** will help us all to understand where support is most effective in helping young people launch onto the life path of their choice.

Eluned Parrott,  
Unite Foundation Director

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# Foreword



## What is the value of a university education?

At the Unite Foundation, we believe that higher education transforms lives. Over the past decade, we've invested nearly £10million of charitable funding into the HE sector through research and scholarships for care leavers and estranged students; providing them with a stable home for success.

Our scholars tell us that a Unite Foundation scholarship has a hugely positive impact on their lives, and our own data suggests that our scholars have 'near normal' continuation rates from year 1 to year 2 of their degrees. We must not imagine, however, that the education – and the life chances – of these young people is the sole responsibility of our universities or the third sector. As a decent society we can all play a positive role. Adverse childhood experience simply must not be allowed to determine the path ahead for a young person.

Awareness of the challenges that care leavers and estranged students face in going to university is growing, but a lack of firm data on the interventions that really make a difference still persists. By bringing together the available data on outcomes, as well as highlighting where crucial measurement is missing, **Positive Impact?** will help us all to understand where support is most effective in helping young people launch onto the life path of their choice.

As a decent society we can all play a positive role. Adverse childhood experience simply must not be allowed to determine the path ahead for a young person.

### So what have we learned from this research?

#### University is transformative

- Care leavers who complete their university courses really can transcend their backgrounds and do at least as well in their future careers as other students – but too many care leavers and estranged students leave university early.

#### Bureaucracy is a barrier

- Students have to reveal their personal situation again and again to access the support and help they're entitled to, and this impacts on their mental health and wellbeing.

#### Support needs unity of purpose

- Too many young people are passed from pillar to post to get the help they need; they need a single point of contact to act as a mentor and guide.

#### There's still too much we just don't know

- Government and the sector don't collect some fundamental information, such as the number of young people who are estranged from their families or the impact of bursaries on young people, so good evidence for what really works is impossible to find.

I would like to extend my thanks to the Consortium partners for their efforts bringing together such a comprehensive piece of work, for giving voice to our young people and for highlighting that there is still much to be done.

**Eluned Parrott, Unite Foundation Director**

# 1. The research

In 2005 the 'By Degrees' project<sup>i</sup> threw a harsh spotlight on the significant under-representation of young people with a care background<sup>1</sup> in higher education (HE)<sup>2</sup>. Since then participation rates have slowly risen, although the percentage of care experienced students participating in HE remains hampered by the overlapping issues of conflicting definitions and incomplete data<sup>ii</sup>. When background factors are taken into account, however, care leavers remain 11 percent less likely to attend higher education compared to the general population of young people, and are 38 percent more likely to withdraw from their studies, even when entry qualifications and other background variables are taken into account<sup>iii</sup>.

Despite progress made across the sector, it is clear that care experienced students still find it significantly more difficult than their peers to access higher education, or to remain on course once there.

Although evidence of the experiences of estranged students is only slowly emerging<sup>iv</sup>, the absence until now<sup>v</sup> of a 'tick box' identification of estrangement on the UCAS<sup>vi</sup> form, as well as the lateness in which students may declare their estrangement to their institution<sup>3</sup>, means that significantly less is known about their access, retention or progression rates.

1 See Appendix 1: Definitions and profiles

2 See Annex 1: Literature Review

3 Ibid.



In order to better understand the experiences of both groups, therefore, the Unite Foundation<sup>vii</sup> commissioned research to: synthesise what is known about the outcomes of care experienced and estranged students; evidence the causes of differential outcomes (access, retention success and progression); and make recommendations designed to enhance practice.

Whilst the focus of the research is on the experiences of students in England and Scotland, as this is where the Unite Foundation currently operates in partnership with Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), it is anticipated that the recommendations will be of use across the sector, both in the UK and more broadly.

#### The research set out to answer two questions:

**What factors affect access, retention and graduate outcomes for students with a background of care or family estrangement?**

**What practical recommendations would support positive outcomes for this group?**

A mixed methods approach was adopted to gather the perspectives of students and other stakeholders, in order to draw out differences, complexities and intricacies of their experiences, and develop guidance for the sector. The seven stages of the research methodology<sup>4</sup> comprised:

1. A short literature review to look at existing evidence.
2. Secondary data analysis of Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data in relation to care experienced and care leaver students with a specific focus on progression into employment (as this has not been explored before).

3. A three-step Delphi survey to key stakeholders exploring what institutions consider to be the reasons for differential outcomes and how these might be addressed.
4. A series of inductive focus groups and interviews with students to explore their experiences of accessing higher education and their on-course experiences.
5. Institutional case study interviews with staff to determine specific ways in which the sector is seeking to redress inequalities.
6. A one day Summit for stakeholders to explore the findings and discuss recommendations.
7. Further interviews with students to discuss the findings and recommendations.

Ethical approval was granted by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee at Sheffield Hallam University.

We would like to express our thanks to all those who participated in the research, particularly those students who have given up their time to contribute.

Of note, throughout the report we have used care experienced to cover both care experienced and care leaver students unless there is a distinction between their experiences in which case we have disaggregated<sup>5</sup>.

We also recognise that the students interviewed for this research were all either currently studying in higher education, had just completed their final year, or had been offered a place to study. As a result they are a particular cohort of those who have been successful in making the transition in to HE. Despite this they had experienced multiple barriers, or had to overcome a range of concerns, in making this transition, and continue to face a range of barriers throughout their student journey.

Finally, none of the images used in this report are of students who contributed to the research. The quotes used are, however, the voices of students we interviewed.

**Table 1: Summary of Data Collected**

Data Collection Method	Number of students	Number of staff
Delphi Survey		69
Focus Groups (Inductive)	21	
Interviews (Inductive)	20	
Case Study interviews		29
Summit contributors	6	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>128</b>

4 See Appendix 2: Methodology

5 See Appendix 1: Definitions and profiles

## 2.1 The differential outcomes of care experienced and estranged students

The following section covers the key findings from the data, an indication of ‘what works’<sup>6</sup>, as well as recommendations for policy and practice.

### 2.1.1 Care experienced students

*Our analysis<sup>7</sup> of a HESA data set of 242,895<sup>viii</sup> full-time UK students who graduated in 2017 from UK undergraduate courses evidences that:*

Compared to other graduates, care experienced students are notably more likely to be women, older, disabled, from minority ethnic communities and holding a nationality other than British. They also have lower status entry qualifications and are more likely to be graduating from a sub-degree programme and to be at an institution that is not within the Russell Group<sup>x</sup>. This is consistent with previous studies<sup>x</sup>.

Care experienced students are more likely to have lower and non-traditional entry qualifications and to have entered their last course from a sub-degree course (e.g. a foundation degree or diploma). They are notably under-represented in natural sciences, mathematics/engineering/construction, languages/history/philosophy, but over-represented in social sciences, computer science/technology, law/business/communications, and creative arts.

Many of these features (such as entry qualifications, disability, age) are associated with educational disadvantage, either before or during higher education. Indeed, this was reflected in their degree classifications, with somewhat fewer care experienced graduates receiving a first or upper second class degree than other graduates across all types of entry qualification; nevertheless, even among those with the weakest entry qualifications, over 50% did achieve this.

The analysis of data from the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education survey on outcomes six months after graduation, revealed a general picture where the outcomes for care experienced graduates were broadly similar, on average, to other graduates. This is particularly surprising given the disadvantages outlined above. In other words, care experienced graduates did notably better than might have been predicted on the basis of their higher education qualifications, where they did their degree, and their demographic profile.

Nevertheless, the outcomes for care experienced degree graduates were somewhat less positive than the general population. They were around 1.25 times more likely to be unemployed (5.5%, compared to 4.4% for other graduates) and, among those in full-time work, 70.7% were in professional roles compared to 77.0% for other graduates. They were also slightly more likely to report having taken a job that did not require a higher education

qualification and to have taken their job to earn a living and/or pay off debts. However, salary levels were very similar.

Care experienced degree graduates were notably more likely than other graduates to be working in public administration, social work and residential care, reflecting in part their over-representation in social science programmes in higher education and the interest of many in pursuing careers which relate to their childhood experiences.

### 2.1.2 Estranged students

*The recognition of students as being estranged (as opposed to independent adults who are those students aged 25 or older) is a relatively new one, with much of the pressure to recognise estranged students as a discrete group the result of lobbying by the Stand Alone Charity<sup>xi</sup> and the Unite Foundation amongst others.*

As a result, clarity around the participation rates of estranged students has been more difficult to determine as the categorisation of estrangement has, historically, only been captured when students apply for a student loan or apply for financial support within their own HEI<sup>xii</sup>.

A Freedom of Information request to the Student Loans Company by the BBC<sup>xiii</sup>, reported in December 2019, found 7,566 students in England, 341 in Wales and 121 in Northern Ireland are classed as estranged this academic year. The Student Awards Agency for Scotland said it had 145 such students.

Participation rates are made even more unclear, however, in that some estranged students may also have experience of the care system (although they do not meet the statutory definition of a care leaver), whilst other students may be estranged but are either unable, or choose not, to evidence this for funding purposes.

For estranged students, there is also no comprehensive data to date in relation to retention rates.

<sup>6</sup> Although as noted in this report the evidence base for ‘what works’ is not robust.

<sup>7</sup> See Annex 2: HESA Analysis



## 2.2 Transitions in and out of higher education

*Due to the challenges faced by some care experienced or estranged students, entry to higher education as a mature student may be preferable to entry as a school/sixth form college leaver. However the 'cut off' of funding for those aged over 25 (26 in Scotland) means that such decisions often exclude these students from being recognised as a specific target group, and/or prevents them from subsequently accessing institutional or local authority support.*

Moreover, whilst HEIs provide a broad range of information about opportunities for progression into higher education, some care experienced and estranged students struggle to obtain individual specialist advice, or are caught between inconsistent advice, gained from multiple sources.

In addition, access to higher education remains a particular challenge for estranged students who may not be aware of their right to estrange themselves, confused as to what might pass as estrangement, or unclear about their rights to either funding or institutional support. Moreover, many estranged students still find it difficult to gain estranged status even when making a formal application, with the Student Loans Company strictly enforcing the 12 month 'no contact' requirement and using any form of limited contact in that time as cause for invalidating the claim for estrangement.

The fear of being homeless during vacations, concerns over access to mental health support, and/or fear of debt or poverty continue to affect choices about what and where to study. The practicalities of managing the transition to higher education also remain a concern for many students who have little or no familial support.

For care experienced students the Propel website<sup>8</sup> outlines the support available from HEIs; for estranged students the key source of information is the Stand Alone website<sup>9</sup>; in addition HEIs have their own webpages outlining the support they offer. However many of the students interviewed had not known about the support that might be available until they were on course suggesting that more still needs to be done to raise awareness.

There was a strong institutional perception that once students had found who the 'right' person was to talk to, or that person had

contacted them, HEIs had a wide range of strategies in place to manage the transition in to higher education. However, many students continue to struggle throughout their studies and/or consider withdrawing early.

Reasons for considering withdrawing include, but are not limited to: accommodation issues; financial difficulties; and the loss of personal support networks. However, these do not exist in isolation; accommodation, financial, and support issues are often interconnected, and the emotional consequences of dealing with these can lead students to experience isolation, or impact on their mental health. The absence of family relationships specifically were acutely felt by students when assumptions were made by others, or when they witnessed the support their friends received from their parents.

Support received by care experienced and estranged students also came from their peers, such as lending money, offering temporary accommodation, and providing emotional support. Indeed for some students formal support was only received when they had reached crisis point and were considering withdrawing from their studies. This is in part, again, due to students not being aware of what institutional support is available.

A particular concern, however, is that the majority of institutions do not offer financial support to estranged students equal to that offered to care leavers; this means that they can often only obtain financial support through hardship grants at a point of crisis.

Many students reported feelings of difference or that they did not feel like they fitted in. These feelings may be compounded by the processes of seeking support, whilst a lack of financial support can lead some students to feel a sense of shame, particularly when they have to ask for help.

For other students the university culture can alienate them, either because of the 'party culture', because they were, or felt, older than their peers, or because poverty inhibited them from becoming fully involved in social activities.

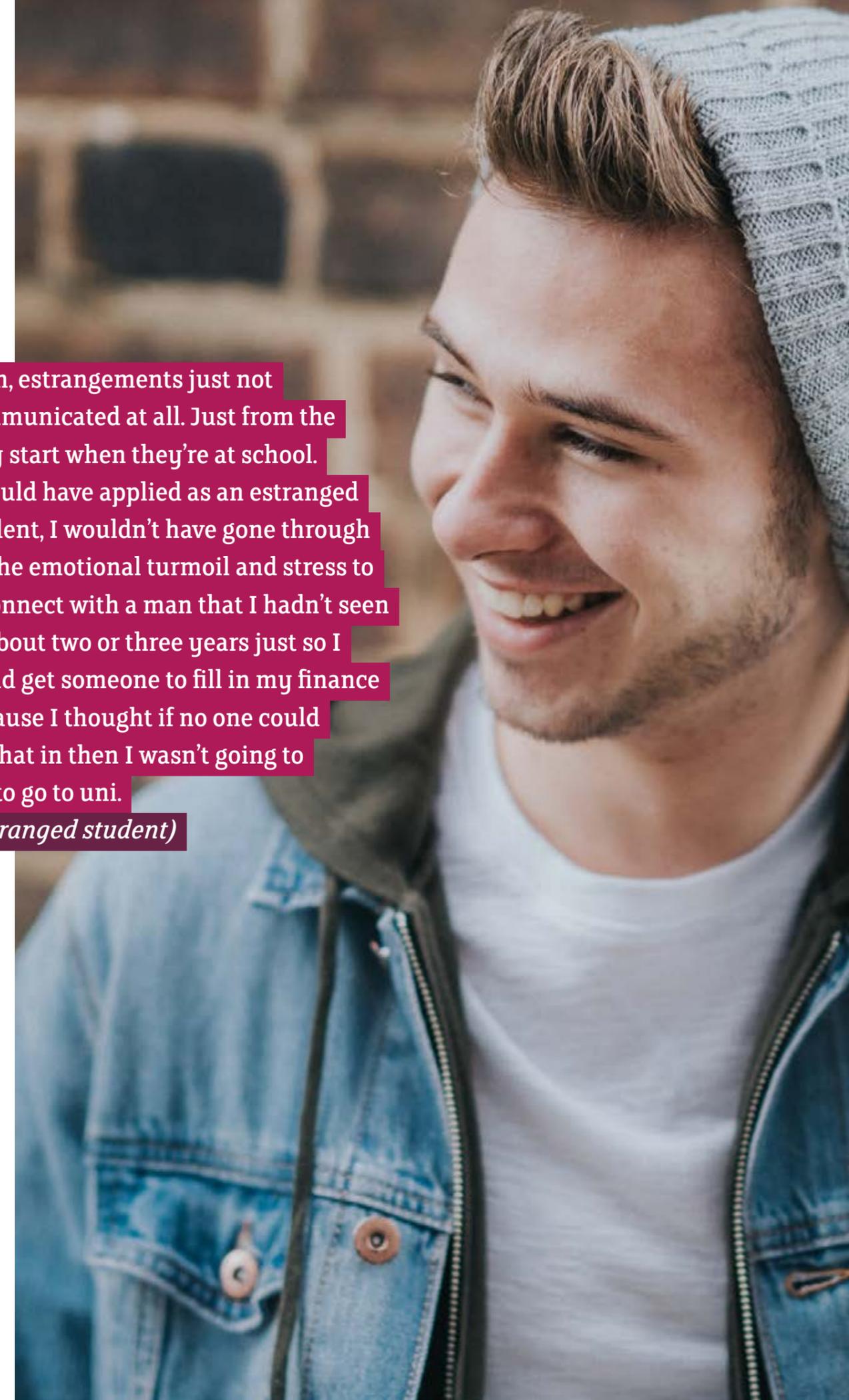
Finally, although HEIs have mechanisms in place to support the transition into and through higher education, there is insufficient support for students transitioning out of higher education, and many students are fearful of unemployment, homelessness, and poverty post-graduation. The lack of transition bursaries, subsidised summer accommodation following graduation, bursaries for postgraduate studies, or focused internships can

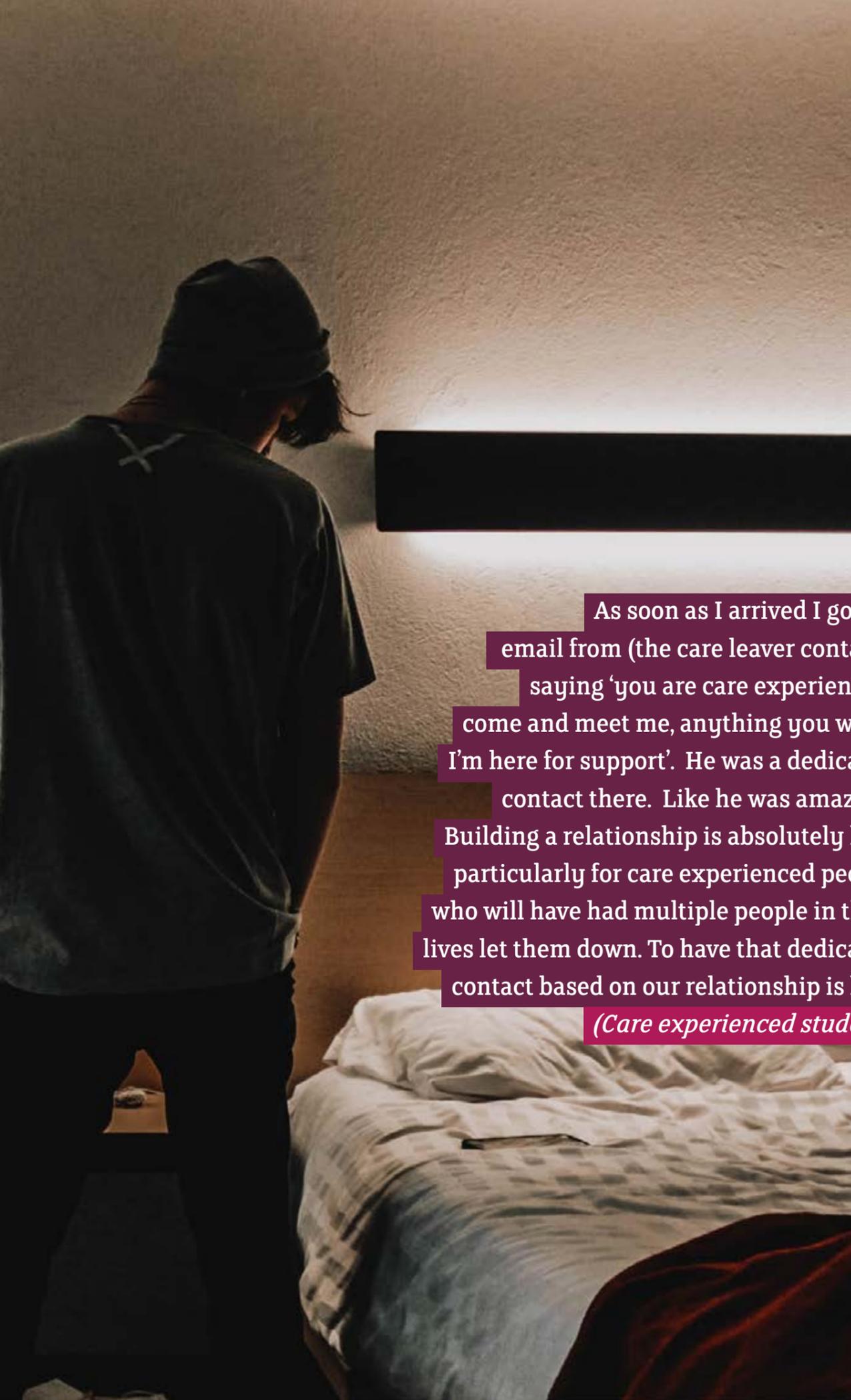
Yeah, estrangements just not communicated at all. Just from the very start when they're at school. I would have applied as an estranged student, I wouldn't have gone through all the emotional turmoil and stress to reconnect with a man that I hadn't seen in about two or three years just so I could get someone to fill in my finance because I thought if no one could fill that in then I wasn't going to get to go to uni.

*(Estranged student)*

<sup>8</sup> <https://propel.org.uk/UK/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.standalone.org.uk/students/supportatyouruniversity/>





As soon as I arrived I got an email from (the care leaver contact), saying 'you are care experienced, come and meet me, anything you want, I'm here for support'. He was a dedicated contact there. Like he was amazing. Building a relationship is absolutely key, particularly for care experienced people who will have had multiple people in their lives let them down. To have that dedicated contact based on our relationship is key.  
(Care experienced student)

affect students' views of their futures and create high levels of anxiety well before their final year of study. This is particularly so for estranged students for whom there is no statutory obligation to provide support, but is also a concern for care experienced students, particularly those who have moved 'out of area'.

### 2.2.1 What works?

- Institutions which are expansive in their classification of 'care leaver' or 'estranged student' are able to use their financial support in more targeted ways. This ensures that a broader range of support is available to a wider number of students.
- Access to a consistent, named, knowledgeable, 'single point of contact' who will advocate on behalf of students both internally and externally, is considered by students as essential in meeting their support needs throughout their studies.
- Support which is holistic, relational, and characterised by knowledge of the support needs of care experienced/estranged students is regarded by students as crucial to enabling their on-going retention and success.
- Support strategies which take a student lifecycle approach allow for support to be consistent from pre to post-entry, minimise students' fears about their future, and enable the transition in to postgraduate employment or further study.
- Extending personal support networks by facilitating relationships within the institution to create 'safety nets' can help to reduce the negative emotional impact of relationship breakdown. However, some students are reluctant to engage in such initiatives as they do not want their university experiences to be defined by their estrangement or experience in care. Establishing a care experienced/estranged student union rep may allow their experiences to be represented in other ways.

### 2.2.2 Recommendations

- The Department of Education to put out a call for evidence in an attempt to determine the number of estranged young people known to local education authorities in an attempt to determine how many young people might be the subsequent focus of targeted support.
- The devolved Governments of the four nations to work together to align definitions to avert confusion for students, as well as produce better guidance.
- HEIs to develop support drawing on a flexible approach to meeting needs and not a binary classification of students. In addition, support to be based on actual need rather than providing substantial support to some students but leaving others under-supported despite similar needs. This requires developing a more nuanced understanding of individual needs.
- The Office for Students, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, the Scottish Funding Council, and the Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland to ensure that information on 'estrangement' is pushed through to schools and colleges (for example through the National Collaborative Outreach Programme Networks in England), so that young people, supported by their teachers, are better informed about whether a) this applies to them and b) what support HEIs can offer prior to them applying. This should be further facilitated through HEIs' access and outreach departments.
- HEIs to develop 'student lifecycle' approaches to support; this includes proactively and regularly providing information and guidance on careers, lifetime careers support for care experienced/estranged students, and providing final year bursaries to ensure students are not disadvantaged in applying for jobs and transitioning into work. Since transitions into and from higher education are both critical, this should involve reaching back towards transition into higher education, as well as forwards to the transition from higher education into careers.
- HEIs to set up and facilitate alumni networks for care experienced and estranged students; this may include the development of regional networks of alumni support.
- HEIs to develop bursaries for postgraduate study for care experienced/estranged students.

## 2.3 Institutional support for care experienced and estranged students

*Institutional evidence suggests that HEIs already have multiple interventions in place to support students' academic, social or pastoral support needs, and that awareness of students' needs, as well as efforts to ameliorate these, has grown over time. However, there is variation across the sector in relation to the amount of support available to students, although this is partially due to differences in the devolved policy landscapes across the UK.*

Institutional concerns were raised about the complexity of determining who care experienced and estranged students are both pre-entry and once on course. HEIs recognised that students may either not know how to disclose or do not wish to, but there were concerns that estranged students in particular were at risk of missing out on support. The use of a 'tick box' to self-disclose family estrangement on UCAS forms in the future should enable estranged students to be more readily identifiable. However this is dependent on whether students understand what estrangement means, choose to self-disclose and tick the box. It is therefore important that this does not replace ongoing institutional awareness-raising, as it is known that many students disclose themselves as estranged once on course.

Financial support is available across the sector to those who are known to have a background of care or estrangement. However, the level of support remains inconsistent, and not all students are aware of the support they will receive until they are on course, if at all. In part, this is because HEIs may be using different criteria to determine who is able to access support and at what level; however students report that there is also a lack of transparency in some areas, or a lack of clarity about entitlement.

Despite improvements across the sector, support for care experienced and/or estranged students remains unequal with some students receiving significant levels of support and others, particularly those who fall just under a threshold or outside of a rigid binary definition,<sup>10</sup> receiving no support despite having very similar needs. A needs based process for identifying support must, however, ensure that students are sensitively supported when disclosing why such support might be necessary.

During the first part of my degree I wasn't known by any of the support services. Even though I'd been assessed as estranged, nobody had contacted me or emailed me or sent me anything in terms of any kind of support. So I got involved with (the Diversity Officer) in 2017 when I became homeless, and accessed that Hardship Fund and it was from there where the kind of awareness and support kind of improved.

*(Estranged student)*

In addition, evidence from students suggests that much institutional support is (or may appear to be) offered on a piecemeal basis, and by multiple stakeholders within an institution. Moreover, from the student perspective, the delivery of support can appear characterised by fragmentation, high levels of bureaucracy, and/or a lack of transparency about what support is available, when, and to whom. For these reasons some students struggle to get the support they are, or could be, entitled to whilst the process of seeking and gaining support can have a significant impact on their well-being.

In order to try and manage support effectively, the majority of institutions have staff designated as named contacts for care experienced and, to a lesser extent, estranged students. These named contacts frequently advocate hard for individual students (both within institutions and externally), and are highly valued and appreciated by students. Indeed for some students they have made the difference between withdrawal and persistence.



<sup>10</sup> of 'care leaver', 'care experienced' or 'estranged'

I feel like knowing that someone else has gone through the system, been there, done that, has had the social worker visits, knowing that there are other people that you can talk to, even just peers rather than a professional, I think that's what's important. I don't want it to be called a 'support group' because you might not need support, you might just need a friend rather than a focused group with a label.

*(Care experienced student)*

However, a 'single point of contact' can be a potential risk as it may appear to other staff that they are therefore alleviated of responsibility for supporting care experienced or estranged students. HEIs need to ensure that all staff are well-informed so that students do not miss out on receiving support.

### 2.3.1 What works?

- Receiving strong support and commitment from senior leaders and developing an ethos of shared responsibility is an imperative. However there is variation across the sector with only a number of HEIs, primarily those in Scotland, establishing the concept of 'collective responsibility' of all staff members in helping care experienced and estranged students.
- Other examples of good practice include widespread training and awareness-raising initiatives, for example on-line awareness raising modules, or 'listen and learn' sessions with feedback from students used to inform materials for staff training purposes.
- Enabling care experienced and estranged students to input into the design and delivery of services, such as student ambassador roles, can ensure HEIs meet the actual and not the assumed needs of students.

### 2.3.2 Recommendations

- HEIs to work with key support organisations such as the Become charity and Stand Alone to ensure institutional information on the support available to care experienced/estranged students is readily available, and actively promote this information to students and other key stakeholders.
- HEIs to appoint a named contact to support care experienced and estranged students, regardless of age, from pre-registration to post-graduation. HEIs to ensure that these details are widely publicised.
- HEIs to provide academic mentoring for care leavers and estranged students as they are likely to have experienced a fragmented educational career and may benefit from such support. Where such mentoring is provided to all students, mentors should have an awareness of who their care leaver and estranged students are and an understanding of their potential needs and how to support them.
- In addition, care leaver and estranged students are to regularly be made aware of academic support services in HEIs, potentially via their named contact, making these services more visible to such students.
- Local Authority leaving care teams to increase the transparency and awareness of entitlements for care leavers, such as holiday pay during the summer vacation, and weekly living allowances, through their 'local offer'.
- The Office for Students, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, the Scottish Funding Council, and the Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland to assist HEIs in developing robust targeting and evaluation mechanisms for providing bursaries as well as other financial, welfare and academic support activity to students.
- The Office for Students, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, the Scottish Funding Council, and the Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland to ensure that impact monitoring is reported against actions taken in access and participation plans.
- The Office for Students to actively encourage HEIs to adopt the 'quality mark' for supporting care experienced students being developed by the National Network for the Education of Care Leavers. The devolved nations to review and consider possibilities for similar 'kite-marks' to be developed.

## 2.4 Support across the student lifecycle

*All of the HE institutions who participated in this research have mechanisms in place, at least to some extent, to facilitate care experienced and estranged students' access to support and services. Additional resources are being added as HEIs build up a sense of students' complex and on-going support needs.*

Initiatives designed to facilitate access, especially for care leavers, are now relatively long-standing; work to enable equitable retention and success are gaining in traction. However, pre and post-entry support is almost exclusively focused on those under 25, and largely on those 21 and under which lacks recognition of the longer trajectory into and out of HE of those with experience of estrangement or the care system. Moreover, financial support is either lacking for postgraduate study and largely ends at the point of graduation from undergraduate programmes.

Institutional support is frequently offered by a range of teams from across a HEI. Whilst this enables a level of specialism, it can also cause issues with understanding of a student's holistic needs, inhibit proactive approaches, prevent continuity of care, and require students to explain their circumstances to multiple stakeholders. Moreover, students may find out about support late in the student lifecycle, or once need has either passed or they reach crisis point.

In addition, whilst there is significant institutional support focused on meeting students' financial, accommodation, health or emotional support needs, specific support designed to meet students' academic needs is less obviously available.

Moreover, evidence from students suggests that they are having to work hard to find out where and how elements of support are available and/or may be missing out on support; they may have to repeat evidence of their circumstances to multiple individuals; they find the process of gaining support to be highly bureaucratic; and/or they may be dealing with people with a lack of knowledge about their specific support needs.

### 2.4.1 What works?

- HEIs which organise all, or the majority of, their student support under a single institutional lead, and which offer support across the whole student lifecycle, are regarded by students as more effective in both anticipating and delivering support.
- Trained and skilled personal tutors who have an appreciation of the experiences and needs of care experienced and/or estranged students are highly valued and well regarded by those students who have them, and are credited with enabling them to succeed academically.
- Providing targeted financial support (such as bursaries) which specifically focuses on the development of employability skills is also highly valued.

### 2.4.2 Recommendations

- Third sector organisations to work together to develop a set of training materials for schools, FE and HE staff (and other key stakeholders) which can help increase awareness of the needs and challenges experienced by care experienced and estranged students.
- HEIs to ensure that all staff are given baseline training to ensure that they have sufficient awareness of the support needs of care experienced/estranged students, in order to reduce the potential of them being seen as either 'deficit' or as 'somebody else's problem'.
- HEIs to extend funding for outreach work to focus specifically on adult learners, recognising the longer trajectories in to HE of care experienced or estranged students. This requires intensive work with adult learners over the long term, enabling the building of trust with key stakeholders such as adult education centres, refugee support organisations or organisations helping adults transition into work or study.
- The devolved Governments of the four nations to ensure that estranged students have similar financial support to care leavers, including funding to cover housing costs during the summer vacation.
- In addition, the Governments of Scotland, England and Northern Ireland to consider mirroring Wales in providing maintenance grants for both care leavers and estranged students.

Summer last year was quite hard because they gave me the discretionary fund in the first semester of first year because I literally had no money. They couldn't award me a second time with it during the summer, so I just had to work really hard. I was quite lucky because my work gave me hours, they gave me 40 hours a week, so I was actually able to pay for my rent and all the other bills that I had to pay over summer. So over summer they didn't really help.

*(Estranged student)*

It's definitely a matter of awareness. If you say to people – if you make it clear to people when you're applying through UCAS or whatever, look if you have experienced any of these different things, and here is clearly what we think these different things are, then you can say you're care experienced and we can access all these benefits.

*(Care experienced student)*

## 2.5 Financial struggles

*HEIs offer a range of financial support packages to care experienced and estranged students. In addition to specific outreach activities, they may fund bursaries and scholarships, offer discounted accommodation, and/or fund one-off activities or resources such as those related to graduation (such as for photographs or gown hire). A number of HEIs also fund social events or activities and it is clear that HEIs are working to be responsive to students' needs.*

However, whilst financial support packages are available across the HE sector, the amount they offer is variable. The value of most internal bursaries were between £1,000 to £1,500 per academic year; however, a number of HEIs (frequently but not exclusively those with the lowest numbers of care experienced students) offer very generous bursaries – up to £8,000 – and there were examples of institutions having more than one bursary available for care experienced students. In addition, some students were being supported to apply for additional support available externally through charitable trusts, often worth considerably more than internal bursaries.

However, across the HEIs there were fewer examples of designated funding for estranged students, who were perceived to be more reliant on discretionary and hardship funding, most notably during the summer period. Indeed a small number of HEIs identified care experienced students aged above 25, who are not eligible for financial aid, as a sub-group of students where there are gaps in terms of support.

There is a lack of consistency in awareness of institutional bursary provision. Some students had easily accessed bursaries, or had been sent information about them unprompted, whilst others had not been told that they existed. In particular, a gap in information and signposting seemed to exist between academic course tutors and student support.

A further concern is that some HEIs are using very rigid, or even incorrect, definitions of care leaver, care experienced or estranged status. This means that there are students with equal needs, but who do not meet a classification or threshold, who are not receiving financial support. In addition, not all students are aware of their institutional entitlements, or fall outside of a rigid classification of care experienced or estranged (or their classification might not be well understood such as 'kinship care' or Special Guardianship Orders) which means their financial needs are not well supported.

Despite improvements across the sector, it is not uncommon for care experienced and/or estranged students to report that they are living at a level of poverty and hardship or working long hours to support themselves. This means that many students are unable to afford items that they need, such as prescriptions for medication, basic sustenance, and items for their course such as computers or sports equipment. They were also inhibited in how often they could socialise with their peers as a result of financial restrictions.

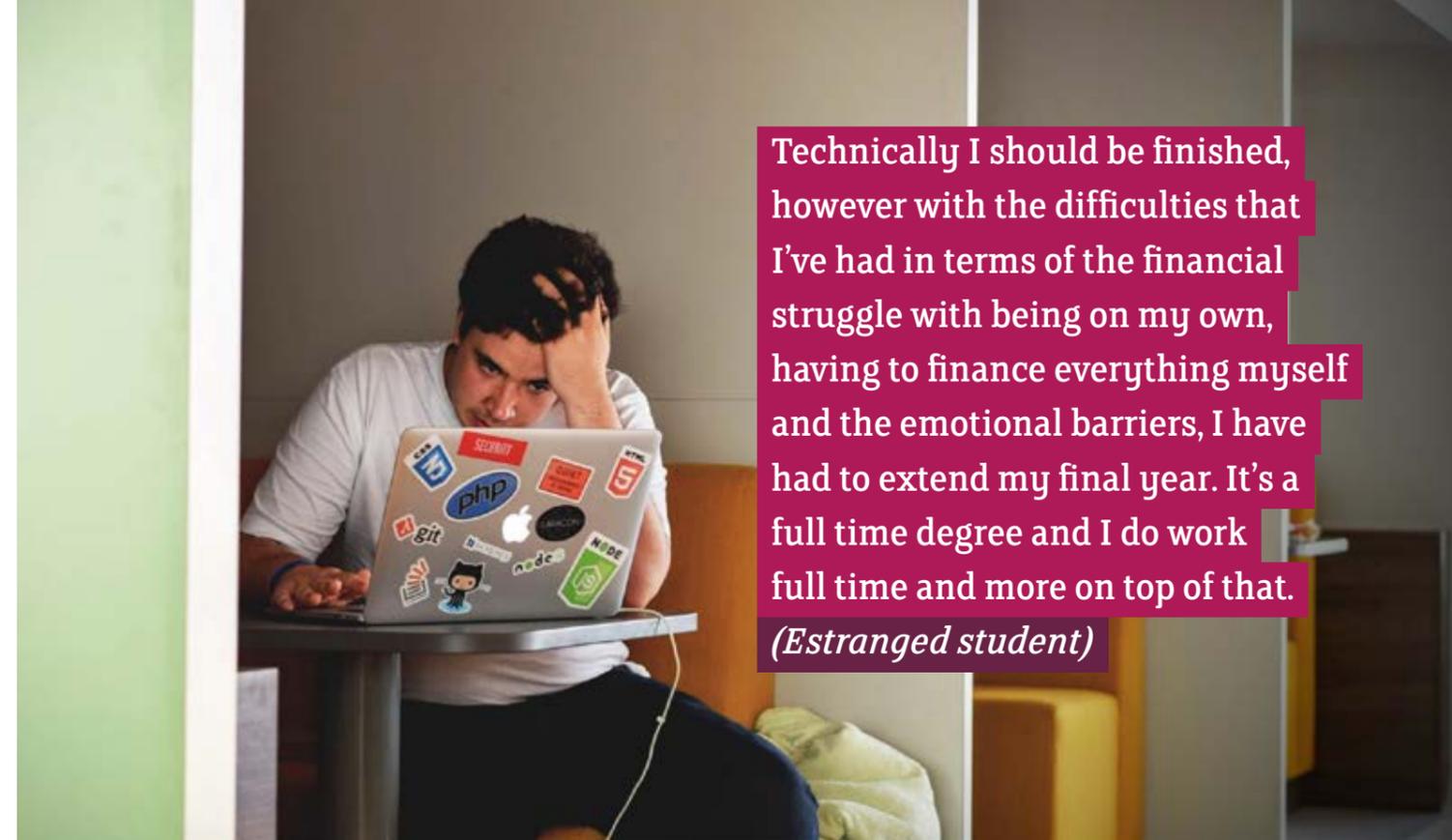
Moreover, for some students, disclosing to their peers why they did not have the funds to meet basic living costs caused a level of shame or fear of stigma. This was also the case for some students when seeking financial support from their institution, especially when they were 'interrogated' about their personal circumstances.

As a result of their financial struggles many students are also working long hours, and experiencing stress and anxiety in their attempts to survive and balance work and academic life. This results in some students falling behind academically, including having to repeat years. Others are borrowing money from friends, taking out high interest 'pay day' loans, or getting into high levels of debt.

The rationale for how and why HEIs offer their financial support packages is, however, not always clear; there appears little evaluation of the impact of financial support mechanisms on student access and, in particular, retention and success. Moreover, in general, bursaries or other financial support is being provided without criteria around where it should be spent. This limits both an institutional and a sector-wide understanding of 'what works'.

Care leaver and care experienced students were more satisfied with the services and support that they accessed from their HEI, if they had chosen to access services at all<sup>11</sup>. However, they frequently mentioned difficulties with their local authority to receive their statutory entitlements. This partially depended on students' social workers and/or personal advisers and on the varied offers of local authorities. A lack of student awareness as to whether their circumstances fit with definitions of care experience, was a further contributory factor.

Overall, delays and inconsistencies in statutory student financial support were considered to have an impact on retention. It is important to emphasise, however, that financial difficulties alone were not cited as a reason for considering withdrawing from HE; rather, it was the emotional impact of experiencing isolation as a result of financial hardship that had an effect.



**Technically I should be finished, however with the difficulties that I've had in terms of the financial struggle with being on my own, having to finance everything myself and the emotional barriers, I have had to extend my final year. It's a full time degree and I do work full time and more on top of that.**  
*(Estranged student)*

### 2.5.1 What works?

- HEIs who relax their support age limits<sup>12</sup>, and award support based on need, are more likely to open up access to HE for a wider group of care experienced and estranged students.
- Making definitions of 'estranged' and 'care experienced' visible to enable students to recognise that they are entitled to support, including in post-16 institutions, so that students are aware of this prior to applying to HE, speeds up access to support.
- Ensuring that there is a comprehensive programme of awareness-raising to ensure all staff can signpost students, means that fewer students are likely to fall through the net.
- HEIs who have structured their bursary schemes, to ensure that care experienced or estranged students receive at least some of the payments towards the end of the academic year, are able to more successfully facilitate students' transition to work or further study.

### 2.5.2 Recommendations

- The Governments of England, Wales and Northern Ireland to make their care experienced support package available to over 26s to match that now offered in Scotland.
- Local authorities to equally, and fully, provide their statutory obligations to students both pre-entry and whilst on course.
- HEIs to make all their financial support packages available in a transparent manner to prospective students, whilst single point of contact support staff should routinely check students are receiving all the support they are entitled to.
- HEIs to also take a more expansive approach to classifications of care and estrangement, so that students in hardship are able to gain financial support.
- HEIs to determine what disadvantage institutional bursaries or other financial support is designed to address and more closely target support at identified, and not assumed, need. This will better enable them to evaluate impact and so more likely ameliorate actual and not assumed disadvantage.

**The uni website says there's the care leavers bursary which is £2,000 but you have to apply through your local council. I wasn't actually entitled technically because I wasn't a care leaver on my 16th birthday. I've been in care practically in and out my whole life but because of the legal clauses I wasn't entitled to anything so it made it very hard for me.**  
*(Care experienced student)*

<sup>11</sup> Some care experienced (and estranged) students chose not to disclose their status for reasons of shame or stigma.



I would be there for 52 weeks pretty much, so the key contact would check up on me whenever and invite me in for a brew and all that kind of stuff. Because you've got to think that you pretty much are isolated, aren't you, like you can't go home, no social workers are coming to see you and stuff, so she would do stuff like that. I know it's only little stuff, but it means a lot.

*(Care experienced student)*

## 2.6 Accommodation concerns

*Most HEIs have now opened up their institutionally-owned halls of residence to those needing 52-weeks a year accommodation, with others supporting students to access accommodation out of term<sup>xv</sup>.*

In addition, the Unite Foundation scholarships, run in partnership with 27 universities<sup>xvi</sup>, include free university accommodation, whilst a small number of HEIs now operate a rent guarantor scheme. There are also a number of national rent guarantor schemes<sup>xvii</sup>.

Despite improvements across the sector, however, it is not uncommon for care experienced and, in particular, estranged students to be living in fragile, insecure or temporary accommodation.

A number of concerns were raised by students including:

- Being allocated places in halls of residence that were beyond their means.
- A lack of consideration of personal experiences, such as a history of parental drug or alcohol use, when being placed in accommodation.
- The prohibitive cost of deposits or paying rent in advance particularly if using private providers (which may be cheaper than university accommodation).
- Issues with affording rent over the summer months particularly when students move into year-round accommodation.
- Institutional support with accommodation only being offered after a crisis point had been reached.
- Having to have to leave halls of residence almost as soon as a course ends.

Care experienced and care leaver students receiving support from their local authority were less likely to experience such issues as they may be automatically awarded a place in halls of residence for their first year, have their own accommodation prior to starting in HE, or have accommodation provided by the council.

For other students, including estranged students disclosing post-entry, or those who had been in care but were not categorised as a 'care leaver', financial concerns and poverty were driving accommodation choices, resulting in some students living in temporary or unstable accommodation, engaging in illegal subletting 'couch surfing' and/or experiencing homelessness over the summer vacation. Other students were being forced to

I actually became really good friends with one of my flatmates and when she used to do her food shop she used to buy me food as well and I never asked her to, she just did it off her own back and she was like, well, 'if I was in your position I'd like someone to try and help me a little bit'.

*(Estranged student)*

endure living situations which posed threats to their safety and well-being.

As a result, for these students, their university experiences were marked by threats, or fears of, homelessness which, in turn, had an impact on their mental health as well as their financial stability.

### 2.6.1 What works?

- Enabling students to disclose particular needs and to have priority when choosing halls of residence reduces the likelihood of them having to move out or drop out of their studies.
- Institutional schemes which provide students with access to financial support, to pay deposits or pay rent in advance to private landlords, enables students to make housing choices equitable to their peers across the lifetime of their studies.

### 2.6.2 Recommendations

- HEIs to extend 52-week accommodation for care experienced or estranged students in their final year so that they are supported in making the transition into employment or further study.

## 2.7 Mental health and wellbeing

*HEIs are offering an increasing range of mental health and disability support to those who self-refer or who are referred by staff. However, there is growing pressure on HEIs to offer more, or longer-lasting support, with staff commenting that services were thinly stretched or that they did not have sufficient resources in place to provide long term therapeutic support. Moreover, as recent research<sup>xviii</sup> by the former MP Sir Norman Lamb has highlighted, a quarter of HEIs are not able to provide a figure for a specific mental health budget, and three quarters are unable to say how long students have to wait to see a counsellor.*

Concerns about, and access to, mental health support affect students across the student lifecycle. For some students, the fear that studying in HE might worsen their existing mental health, or that on-course mental health support may be insufficient, were factors in deciding where to study, if at all<sup>12</sup>. There was also recognition by staff that studying in HE can exacerbate mental health issues, that students' wellbeing must be prioritised, and that for some students, suspending their study was the most appropriate option.

Whilst institutions signpost students to relevant support services (such as counselling), and seek to make these visible through advertising, it is recognised that not all students access support which is available, or that all staff are sufficiently aware of the support they should signpost students to.

Therefore, whilst some students were keen to highlight the support they had been given, for others access to mental health support in particular was considered to be insufficient or inadequate. This was particularly so for those care experienced or estranged students who have long-term entrenched health needs arising from their experiences of the care system or estrangement prior to accessing higher education.

**I spent the summer of the first year, after the first year, in a state of sort of homelessness. I'm going to call it 'couch surfing' more than homelessness. But I moved five times in the one month. Trying to carry around so much stuff five times, it's not really suitable or manageable. By the end of that summer I was horribly depressed, I didn't have that much stuff.**

*(Care experienced student)*

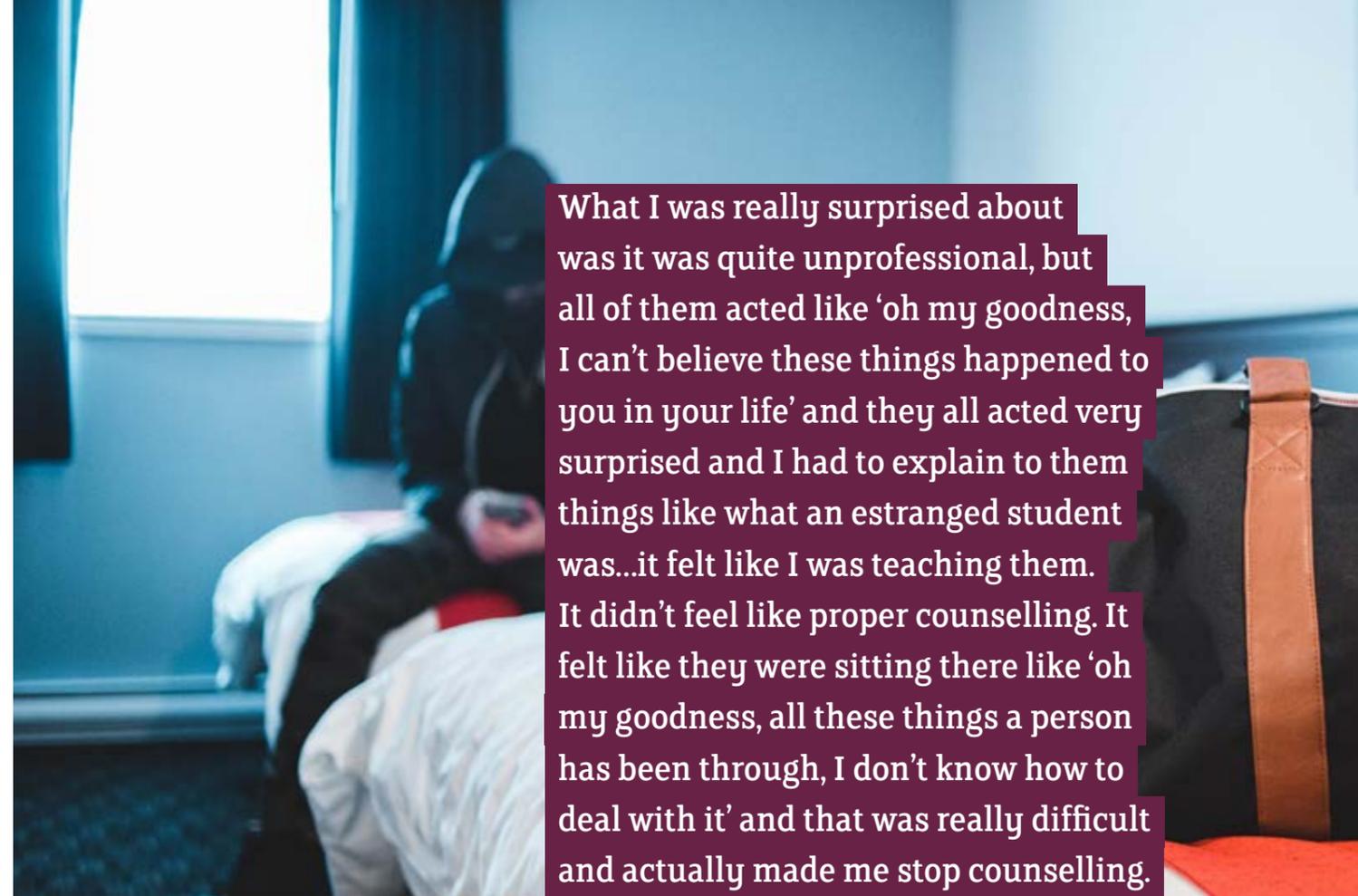
Concerns across the student data in relation to mental health support included:

- Struggles to identify what support might be available and how to access it, with non-specialist staff (such as tutors) not always aware of what options are available and how to refer students.
- The fact that mental health support is frequently offered only at the point of crisis.
- That demand for support is insufficient, with long waiting times and/or the number of sessions offered being inadequate to deal with mental health needs which may be both longstanding and substantial (e.g. post-traumatic stress disorder).
- That they are being required to disclose in detail to gatekeepers, or have to repeat histories on more than one occasion.
- That some staff, including counsellors, may have little understanding of what it may mean to be estranged or care experienced.

In short, although the pressure points which can affect students' mental wellbeing, both in general and for estranged or care experienced students in particular, are well-known and largely understood by HEIs, they are not consistently being used to frame longitudinal approaches to support.

A further concern was that when students reach the limit of support sessions available from their HEI, they may be referred for external support. However, due to reductions in the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) or the NHS adult mental health services provision, waiting lists for external support can be even more significant. Moreover, the burden of having to revisit past trauma each time they have to make a new referral can be traumatic in itself and/or prevent students disclosing. They may therefore not access that support which is available.

As a result, a lack of support for mental health, or the exacerbation of mental health needs, can have an impact on students' social and academic experiences and thus their retention and success.



**What I was really surprised about was it was quite unprofessional, but all of them acted like 'oh my goodness, I can't believe these things happened to you in your life' and they all acted very surprised and I had to explain to them things like what an estranged student was...it felt like I was teaching them. It didn't feel like proper counselling. It felt like they were sitting there like 'oh my goodness, all these things a person has been through, I don't know how to deal with it' and that was really difficult and actually made me stop counselling.**

*(Estranged student)*

### 2.7.1 What works?

- A rigorous, proactive approach to predicting and supporting students' mental health needs is likely to have more long-term efficacy than support offered at crisis point.
- Having a triaging system to provide priority access to students who are 'in crisis' allows those in greatest need to access services quickly.
- Support which is characterised by empathetic, long-term continuity of care, and is undertaken within the HEI, is likely to be more effective than other forms of support, and is trusted and valued by students.
- Managing students' expectations, having clear 'service provider' agreements for students, and enabling them to build up other forms of support using, for example, the 'Five Ways to Well-being'<sup>13</sup> are also important in enabling students to feel effectively supported.
- Peer support schemes provide students with a network to ask questions, share experiences and, in some cases, to meet on an informal basis.
- Small-scale interventions, however, such as being sent a Christmas card, or receiving a text on their birthday, can have a significant impact on whether and how students feel valued and supported by their HEI, and were frequently referred to by students.

### 2.7.2 Recommendations

- The Office for Students to require HEIs to make explicit how long waiting lists are (e.g. to be seen by a member of the HEI's well-being/mental health support team, or for counselling or other therapeutic support) and set minimum standards for mental health support, provision and timeliness to be provided by HEIs.
- The Office for Students to bring together organisations such as Universities UK, Student Minds, and representatives from the NHS to explore how the sector is supporting students in relation to mental health, as well as the issues that undermine wellbeing and mental health (such as financial advice and academic support).
- Universities UK to support HEIs to develop 'anticipatory' frameworks for student mental health support, characterised by long-term support, consistency, and continuity of care, including the integration of regular 'touch points'.

<sup>12</sup> It is important to note, however, that for other students, studying in HE offers an opportunity to 'move on'

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.mind.org.uk/media/4220803/five-ways-to-wellbeing-poster.pdf>

# Appendix 1

## Definitions and profiles

### Children in care, care leavers and care experienced students

In England, 'Children in care' are those young people up to the age of 16 for whom a local authority (or Health and Social Care Trust) has the obligation to provide for their care. An 'Eligible child' is a young person aged 16 or 17 who has been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and who is still being looked after. In Scotland the term 'looked after children' is also used.

Children in care may be in residential accommodation or in the care of foster parents. Young people may also be in Kinship care, when they are looked after by their extended family or close friends<sup>14</sup> or, in Scotland, looked after at home under a supervision requirement order. At the age of 16 or above (in England) or 18 (in Scotland) a young person may leave care and so become a 'care leaver'<sup>15</sup>. A 'Relevant child' refers to a young person aged 16 or 17 who has been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 but who has now left care.

A 'Qualifying child' is a young person who left care but did not fulfil the 13 week criteria. Other young people (or adults) may be defined as 'care experienced' in that they have been in care at some point but have left care before the age of 16.

Harrison (2019) provided the first attempt at a statistical profile for English care experienced students based on HESA data for the 2016/17 academic year. Further analysis has been undertaken for this report. Both sets of analyses indicate that care experienced students are, in general, slightly more likely to be studying part-time than the general population and to be women. They were substantially more likely to be mature students, to live in their own home, to identify as disabled, to be a non-UK national and to enter with qualifications other than A-Levels. They were also less likely to attend an elite university, even once qualifications were taken into account. Finally, they were more likely to be studying social sciences and creative arts and less likely to be pursuing courses in science, engineering, languages or the humanities. A subgroup analysis of care leavers suggested that they generally had a similar profile to the wider care experienced group, but that were even more likely to be older, a non-UK national and have lower status entry qualifications.

From the opposite perspective, Harrison (2017) examined which care leavers were disproportionately likely to participate in higher education. Using a logistic regression model, he found that the strongest determinant was, unsurprisingly, attainment at 16. However, once this was controlled for, care leavers who were women and those from a minority ethnic community were significantly more likely to access higher education, while those with special educational needs and those from neighbourhoods with less of a tradition of making use of higher education, were less likely to do so, all else being equal.

<sup>14</sup> Of note, non-looked after children may also live in an informal Kinship care arrangement

<sup>15</sup> Of note, if a young person were to leave care and return home to live with their birth family they **may** no longer be classified a 'care leaver'

### Estranged students

Estranged students are now recognised as students who are studying in further or higher education without familial, primarily parental, support and who may, or may not, have been recognised as independent adults for student funding purposes. The Office for Students, for example, considers that 'In higher education, the term 'estranged' applies to students who are aged 18 to 24 and are not communicating with either of their living biological parents' (OfS, 2019); whilst the Student Loans Company (SLC) notes that 'to be considered irreconcilably estranged from your parents, you won't have had any written or verbal contact with either parent and this is unlikely to change. Usually, for a period of at least twelve months, but we will consider all cases' (Student Finance England, no date). This means that most estranged students entering higher education at 18 will have become estranged from their parents prior to becoming an adult themselves.

The Oxford University Students Union (Macdonald, 2018, p.5) goes further, however, defining estranged students as:

**Young people studying without the support and/or approval of a family network. They lack a sustained or prolonged communicative relationship (either emotionally, financially and/or physically) with either of their living biological parents and often their wider family networks as well.**

Across all these definitions of estrangement, however, estranged status refers only to those students who are aged 18–24.

Although around 1 in 5 estranged students have been in care, they do not fit the statutory definition of a care leaver (Bland, 2015).

The most recent data from the Student Loans Company (see Table 1, provided by the SLC for this report) show that roughly two thirds of students who are classed as estranged are female, with the majority aged 19–24 – this may be indicative of the

time taken to gain estranged student status and/or the longer trajectory into higher education.

In their survey of 584 students who were classified as 'estranged from parents' by the SLC, Stand Alone (Bland, 2015) also found that 61% of respondents were aged between 18 and 21 years; the majority (94%) were from England; and just under three quarters were female. Whilst research by Blake (2015) found that of the 807 individuals who responded to her survey into estrangement in adulthood, 89% were female, suggesting that women are more likely to be, or report being, estranged than men. However this may be reflective of self-selection in choosing to participate and not representative of actual demographics of this group.

Analysis by Bland and Shaw (2015) highlighted that estranged students are significantly less likely to be studying in Russell group/higher tariff universities than in the newer 'post-92' universities.

Factors that contribute to family estrangement are wide-ranging and diverse but may include (amongst others): abuse; a family member choosing one relationship over another; feelings of lack of love or support; and/or having different values to other family members (Blake, 2017), with one of the main characteristics of estranged students being an unstable family background with 'abuse, and particularly emotional abuse, [are] the key causes of family alienation, alongside clashes of values and mismatched expectations about family roles' (Bland and Shaw, 2015, p. 5). It is perhaps unsurprising therefore that family estrangement may be more common amongst Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT+) communities (Blake, 2017; ECU, 2009). It is also important to note that although international students do not appear in the SLC data there is a level of estrangement amongst international students which warrants recognition – either because they may also declare as LGBTQ, cultural differences, or because of a clash of values (Stevenson and Bland, 2017).

**Table 1: Student Loans Company: number of estranged students in HE in England, Wales and Northern Ireland<sup>16</sup>**

Age at Start of Academic Year	2015-16 <sup>17</sup>			2016-17			2017-18		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
18 or under	271	531	802	263	497	760	343	632	975
19 to 21	1,910	3,238	5,148	1,996	3,319	5,315	2,099	3,431	5,530
22 to 24	1,224	1,502	2,726	1,153	1,420	2,573	1,185	1,586	2,771
25 <sup>18</sup> to 30	31	26	57	38	28	66	22	21	43
31 or over		* <sup>19</sup>	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,436</b>	<b>5,308</b>	<b>8,744</b>	<b>3,455</b>	<b>5,273</b>	<b>8,728</b>	<b>3,651</b>	<b>5,678</b>	<b>9,329</b>

<sup>16</sup> Results are based on applications that have been approved for payment

<sup>17</sup> Academic years effective as at 02/09, i.e. late in year

<sup>18</sup> Those over age 25 would have been treated as independent students in any case but they have ticked the box on the application form

<sup>19</sup> Values below twenty have been marked with an asterisk

# Appendix 2

## Methodology

### 1 Literature review

A short review of policy and academic and grey literature informed the subsequent Delphi study and inductive focus groups questions.

### 2 Secondary data analysis of Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data

This data was provided on request for the purposes of this research and was subject to multi-level logistic binary regression to compare outcomes while taking into account background variables (e.g. gender, qualifications), also providing a comparison to other disadvantaged student groups. An extended profile of estranged students, for whom fewer data are available, was requested from the SLC (Student Loans Company) and SAAS (Student Awards Agency for Scotland). The SLC provided data on the number of estranged students by age and gender. SAAS did not feel in a position to provide data as it only had one full year of complete data at the point of request, having not had a formal means of recording whether a student was estranged until the academic year 2018–2019.

### 3 A three-step Delphi method

This approach was used to establish a level of consensus about the key causes of differential outcomes for care experienced and estranged students and identify possible solutions to existing structural barriers. The first two iterations of the Delphi survey helped refine and triangulate the findings from six other stages of the research, while the final round provided an opportunity to test the project's findings and recommendations. Using established networks and organisational contacts, a snowball method was used to recruit respondents for round 1 of the survey. Respondents from round 1 were invited to complete round 2 and 3 of the survey. Delegates from the summit event held in June 2019 were also invited to complete round 3 of the survey. There was a total of 69 respondents to all three rounds (round 1 = n33, round 2 = n20 and round 3 = n16).

**In round 1**, respondents were asked to give their opinions by ranking 28 statements about challenges faced by care experienced and estranged students in accessing, participating, and succeeding in higher education and graduate outcomes. Participants were also asked to leave qualitative comments based on their own experiences and knowledge.

**In round 2**, respondents were asked to rank 18 statements in order of significance. The statements for round 2 drew on the responses from round 1 and emerging themes from the inductive focus groups.

**In round 3**, respondents were asked to comment on key findings and recommendations drawn from the first two rounds of the Delphi and other six research stages.

### 4 Inductive focus groups and interviews with students

These were primarily over the phone with a small number undertaken online and sought to understand students' broader conceptualisations of what they perceive to be the barriers to effective access to, retention and success in, and progression from HE. The focus groups were facilitated by the members of the project team in partnership with estranged/care experienced students who were fully trained by the project researchers.

### 5 Six institutional case studies

To explore whether there was a disconnect between the espoused practices of HEIs and the experiences of care experienced and estranged students. These were purposefully selected to represent different types and sizes of institutions. The case study data was collected through interviews with key strategic and operational stakeholders, conducted during one day institutional visits. The case study institutions have been anonymised in the report.

### 6 A Stakeholder Summit

This one-day event presented interim findings to stakeholder participants from higher and further education settings, community organisations, local authority departments, and students in order to provide additional rigorous refinement of the findings, as well as gaining further research data. Findings and draft recommendations were discussed in small groups and field notes were taken. In addition, a Respondents' Jury, comprised of care experienced and estranged students, listened throughout the day and provided personal insights on the resonance of the discussions.

### 7 Discussions with students: to test out emerging theory and recommendations

The research utilised a general inductive, grounded theory, approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) which allowed research findings to emerge, reflecting the concerns of participants. An analytical framework was used to manage, organise and summarise the data and build theory from the first stages of the research and was developed to explore how findings from the deductive focus groups added to or undermined the earlier findings.

Ethical approval was granted by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee at Sheffield Hallam University. This included, as example: the oversight of data requests, GDPR stipulations and data sharing agreements across research sites within the project team; informed consent and opportunities for withdrawal for all points of data collection (including the Stakeholder Summit); and the parameters of anonymity and confidentiality for all participants.

There are a number of limitations, and subsequent mitigations, which should be noted. Securing student engagement from April – July was challenging and this has had an impact on the overall sample size. In addition, as only a small percentage of the student body are care experienced and estranged, an effective system of access, predominantly through known gatekeepers (for example the Unite Foundation and Unite Scholars), was necessary to secure student engagement. This purposive sample approach has enabled student voices to appear heavily in this research, but they appear with minor caution regarding potential skew and bias. Case study institutions were also sampled purposively and the same caution is applied. These limitations in trustworthiness and authenticity (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) are countered by the triangulation of multiple data sources, research methods and instruments, participant types, research team members, and the use of deductive testing for the refinement of emerging findings.

## Endnotes

- i. Jackson, S., S. Ajayi, and M. Quigley (2005), *Going to university from care*, London: Institute of Education
- ii. Harrison, 2019
- iii. Harrison, 2017
- iv. See work by Bland, for example, in Annex 1: Literature Review
- v. This will be introduced for UCAS Undergraduate and Postgraduate applications from 2020, for 2021 entry
- vi. UCAS is the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service whose main role is to operate the application process for UK universities
- vii. The Unite Foundation is a charitable trust founded in 2012 by the student accommodation provider Unite Students, whose aim is to provide 'a safe and secure home for care leavers and estranged young people' through the provision of free university accommodation, as well as a cost-of-living scholarship to those young people who might not, for financial reasons, be able to take up a place at university.
- viii. This excludes those for whom care status is not known. The full data set includes 332,180 students although in keeping with the anonymisation protocols required by the Higher Education Statistics Agency, all people counts in this report are rounded to the nearest five
- ix. The Russell Group is an association of 24 research-intensive UK universities
- x. Harrison, 2019
- xi. [www.standalone.org.uk](http://www.standalone.org.uk)
- xii. To support the identification of students who are estranged from their families, UCAS is now introducing a question for UCAS Undergraduate and Postgraduate applications from 2020, for 2021 entry which will ask the question 'Would you consider yourself estranged from your family (i.e. not supported by your family)?'
- xiii. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-50747583>
- xiv. Care leaver and care experienced students are more likely to be mature students however financial support is only offered until 25 (England; 26 for care leavers in Scotland)
- xv. <https://propel.org.uk/uk/support/accommodation/> for institutional information on what HEIs provide.
- xvi. <http://www.unitefoundation.co.uk/university-partners/>
- xvii. <https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/housing-how-to-university-guarantors-scheme>
- xviii. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-49689893> for example news on this project



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# Sheffield Hallam University

*Positive Impact? What factors affect access, retention and graduate outcomes for university students with a background of care or family estrangement?*

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