

A guide to Independent Student Status 2024-25



MAKE WAVES

Student Funding Team

Student Hub, The Spark

Tel:

023 8201 5200

Email:

student.funding@solent.ac.uk

Drop-in opening times:

10am – 4.00pm Monday to Thursday

10am – 3.30pm Friday

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What is an independent student?

The criteria for a student to be considered as independent and parental household income is not considered in the assessment by Government Student Finance (England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland) can be any one of the following:

- you care for a person under the age of 18 on the first day of the academic year you're applying for student finance.
- you're 25 or over on the first day of the academic year you're applying for student finance.
- you've been or are married or in a civil partnership before the start of the academic year (even if you're now divorced or separated).
- Both your parents are deceased.
- you've supported yourself financially for at least three years before the start of your course.
- your parents cannot be found, or it is not reasonably practical to get in touch with them.
- Your parents are living outside the European Union, and it would not be reasonably practical or possible for them to send you money or the assessment of their financial contribution would place them in jeopardy
- You are permanently estranged from (have no contact with) your parents and this will not change.
- At any point from the age of 16 to the start of your course you have not been under the legal care of your parent; and, for three months or more you have been in the custody of, in legal care of, or have been given accommodation by a local authority.

What does this mean for me?

If classed as an independent student, you would receive funding based on your household income and therefore if single, should receive the maximum maintenance loan. If you are living with a partner/spouse their income will be taken into consideration for any assessment.

How do I apply for independent student status?

When you apply for Government Student Finance, you will be asked to indicate if you identify with any of the independent status criteria. You will then be asked for evidence to confirm your circumstances. Depending on your circumstances, you might need to send Student Finance:

- your marriage or civil partnership certificate.
- wage slips, P60s, P45 or a letter from your employer(s).
- a letter from the Department for Work and Pensions/Local Jobcentre Plus office or a letter from your local council or care authority.
- evidence of a child/children for example birth certificate, child benefit.

- If applying as estranged, you will need third party evidence from an independent person of “good standing in the community” who knows the details of your estrangement from your parent(s) – for further information please see below.
- Complete the confirmation of estrangement form from SFE (please refer to our useful links).

Applying as an independent student based on permanent estrangement.

If you believe you are permanently estranged, please contact the Student Funding Team in the first instance to discuss this further. Student Finance England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland will require supporting statements from trusted independent parties as evidence to confirm your position.

Student Finance requests that you submit as many supporting statements as is possible to help build a picture of your family estrangement and/or independent life.

What if my parents are refusing to provide their financial income details or financially support me, can I apply to be classed as an independent student?

Student Finance will not accept this as grounds to assess you as an independent student. Furthermore, you would not qualify as being estranged simply because you don't live with your family or even because you may have a difficult relationship with them.

The application

You will need to complete a specific form to apply as an estranged student. This includes a section where a third party will provide evidence of your estrangement. Once completed, this can be uploaded to your Student Finance portal, alongside any other supporting statements. Student Finance need to be satisfied that on the balance of probability, any estrangement is currently perceived as an irreconcilable situation. This does not mean that the situation may never change. Just that, at this point in time, it is believed to be irreconcilable.

Evidence could include (where applicable):

- Discussing the circumstances of your estrangement with the Student Funding Team to establish if we are able to write a supporting letter.
- A letter from a member of staff at your school or college which explains that he/she knew about the difficult relationship whilst you were at school and your subsequent estrangement.
- A letter from your doctor explaining that you have consistently, and historically reported difficulties associated with your estrangement.
- A letter from a social worker or local authority that shows they were aware of your difficult situation and/or they allocated you a child protection order.
- A letter from a counsellor or an organisation such as Stand Alone, National Association of People Abused in Childhood or from the Karma Nirvana organisation

that can vouch for the fact you have been seeking support for your estrangement or disownment.

- A letter from a housing support worker that may have helped you find accommodation after you left home.
- A letter from a member of the clergy, a rabbi or imam that explains that they were aware of the difficulties in your family and your subsequent estrangement.
- A statement of incident from the police that shows any callouts, arrests or cautions involved in the case.
- A forced marriage or FGM order.
- Any court order that shows you have legally tried to distance your biological or adoptive parents through fear of harm or intimidation.

You are never expected to use any statements that would compromise your personal safety. For example, if there is a risk that the person providing the supporting statement might tell your family where you live, which may then lead to physical violence or forced marriage.

While the following evidence may be useful to support your case, Student Finance may not accept these on their own when making a decision:

- A letter from other members of your family, a family friend or romantic partner on its own. However, you could send this as secondary supporting evidence together with other letters to provide more details around your circumstances.
- A letter from your parents that declares the estrangement. This would be considered a communication within the last 12 months and is not valid to verify your estrangement.

Tips: Always ask for your supporting statements on headed paper where possible, and they should show a telephone number for the Student Finance operative to reach them if they have further questions. If you feel comfortable enough, do explain your family situation in your own words and make a timeline of key events. This may help Student Finance to identify the right supporting statements which you can provide to clarify your situation.

Will I need to prove my estrangement every year?

Student Finance usually request that estranged students provide evidence of their circumstances each time they apply for Student Finance. However, this is often just a case of writing a letter to confirm that your situation remains the same and you have not had contact with your parents since you last applied for Student Finance. The Student Funding Advisers may be able to assist with this. In cases where there has been a serious family breakdown, involving violence or other serious trauma you would usually not be required to resubmit evidence in subsequent years of the course and estrangement is granted for the duration of the course.

Additional university funding

Estrangement Bursary

If Student Finance, have awarded independent status as an estranged student, you are also eligible to receive the Estrangement Bursary of £1,500 from Solent University.

You will need to complete a short application form via the Gateway and upload the confirmation email/letter from Student finance confirming they have considered you as estranged.

Further information about this bursary can be found at this https://gateway.solent.ac.uk/urd/sits.urd/run/siw_lgn

Care Leavers Bursary

If you are care experienced you can apply for the Care Leavers Bursary of £1,500 through Gateway, you will need to upload evidence confirming you are care experienced through this application, this is usually from a local authority. Further information about this bursary can be found at this https://gateway.solent.ac.uk/urd/sits.urd/run/siw_lgn

Foyer/Supported Accommodation Bursary

If you have lived in Foyer/Supported Accommodation, you can apply to the Foyer/Supported Accommodation bursary of £1500, this application is on Gateway, and you will need to upload evidence of living in the supported accommodation. Further information about the Foyer/supported accommodation bursary can be found at this https://gateway.solent.ac.uk/urd/sits.urd/run/siw_lgn

Useful Links

- Rees foundation for care experienced at this [link](#)
- Karma Nirvana Organisation at this [link](#)
- National Association of People Abused in Childhood at this [link](#)
- Student Finance England Student Finance Zone (Student Room) at this [link](#)
- Information for estranged students (SFE) using this [link](#)

If you have a query which is not answered here, please contact by email student.funding@solent.ac.uk

Please note that the information in this guide is intended for Students applying for finance through the Student Finance England system, if you have applied for funding through the Welsh, Irish, Scottish or EU systems the regulations may differ. We have made every effort to ensure that the information contained in this leaflet is accurate however, we cannot be held responsible for any omissions or errors.