

Students Claiming Estrangement

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Some students, who are *under* 25 years old, may be classed as ‘**independent**’ for student funding purposes. This means that they do not have to provide their parents’ (or guardians’) financial information in order to be means-tested (based on household income) for their student funding.

We have a separate leaflet ([*‘Students Claiming Independent Status’*](#)) which outlines all the options in order for a student to be given independent status.

One of the ways a student can be counted as independent is if they no longer have any contact with their family at all. This leaflet aims to provide you with information on ‘**estrangement**’; how to claim it and how it can impact your student funding.

What is ‘estrangement’?

Estrangement, in terms of Student finance, means being ‘**irreconcilably estranged**’ from your parents. Basically, you have no contact whatsoever with them and are highly unlikely to.

The first thing your student finance body will consider is how much contact the student has with their parents and, in particular, has there been any communication during the year before the start of the relevant academic year. In most cases, they would expect no contact at all between the student and their parents.

In some exceptional cases, they will accept a student as ‘estranged’ even though there has been *some* ‘contact’ in the year before the start of the course. This ‘contact’ is likely to be very limited and only for a specific purpose for example, a student could prove that they have never had contact with their father and their mother was sectioned under the Mental Health Act three years ago.

In this scenario there is still some contact between the student and the mother, but your student finance body would be likely to accept that the student should be classed as independent, provided the correct evidence was supplied.

What will not be accepted as estrangement by SFE?

- Student ‘doesn’t get on’ with parents
- Student has had a disagreement with parents
- Student has chosen to live apart from parents
- Parent (and/or parent’s partner) refuses* to provide financial information needed to carry out means testing
- Parent does not provide financial support to student

Some or all of these factors are likely to be present in any case of estrangement that the student finance body accepts but they are not necessarily enough to convince them that it is genuine irreconcilable estrangement.

**if parents refuse to provide information, the student finance body may accept the student as independent (not estranged) in some exceptional cases but this would require sufficient proof as to why they won’t help e.g. an abusive relationship; evidence will be needed as below.*

How do I prove I am estranged?

We would advise you discuss your circumstances with a Student Funding Adviser first. They can help you present your case to your student finance body. Your student finance body will use its discretion to decide on a case-by-case basis. It is advisable to provide a letter from yourself to explain your family situation plus supporting evidence from an independent person (n.b. *not* family or friends). They may ask you to complete a [‘declaration of estrangement’ form](#) as well. This will appear on your ‘to do list’ on your online account. The following evidence may be accepted:

- A letter from a professional to confirm the circumstances. The letter must be written by a working professional, such as a doctor, teacher, social worker, student support worker or student adviser. It won’t be accepted if they use vague language e.g. *‘I don’t think that there’s been any contact and I don’t think the situation will improve.’*

It would be more appropriate for them to say, *'I can confirm that there has been no contact for at least a year and reconciliation is very unlikely'*.

The declaration form will ask them:

- ✓ What their relationship is to you
 - ✓ their profession
 - ✓ the length of time they have known you
 - ✓ the reasons for your estrangement from your parents
 - ✓ if reconciliation is likely / unlikely
 - ✓ the date
 - ✓ your Customer Reference Number and name
- If needed, you could provide your student finance body a benefits letter such as Income Support or Universal Credit or Tax Credit Award Notices or bank statements showing that somebody other than your parent, was claiming benefits (such as Child Benefit, Child Tax Credit or Universal Credit) for you.
 - Make sure that your Customer Reference Number is on every document you send and make sure that you keep a spare copy in case the original goes missing. Always pay the correct postage otherwise it may not get there!

What will happen if my estrangement is accepted?

You will receive your full funding entitlement for the academic year, which means you will get the maximum Maintenance Loan.

You may also qualify for the University Bursary, but these are limited in number and other eligibility criteria apply.

<https://bit.ly/2LGKpSA>

Solent's 'Estranged student bursary'

Students who are recognised as 'irreconcilably estranged' by their student finance body can also apply to the university's 'Estranged

Student Bursary' each academic year. This is a non-repayable bursary of **£1,500** awarded to students who continue to be estranged from their parents, whilst they are studying at university.

Please contact the Student Funding Team on how to apply for this bursary. We will provide you with an application form and once completed (and you have provided the necessary evidence), you will be assessed for the bursary. If successful, you will receive the bursary in instalments over the academic year, providing you remain on and demonstrate an acceptable level of engagement with your course.

Further information on these bursaries and other funding available is in our '*Solent's Grants, Bursaries and Scholarships*' leaflet.

What will happen if my estrangement is not accepted?

If Student Finance refuse to accept the evidence you send them, in the first instance we recommend contacting the Student Funding Team to discuss your situation. If it's appropriate, we can help you to send further information to your student finance body or appeal the decision if we think you have a valid case.

Make sure you keep all your paperwork/correspondence relating to your estrangement and the letters that your student finance body have sent you as it may be useful to refer to.

You will still be entitled to a full Tuition Fee Loan to cover the cost of the fees but you will only be entitled to the non-means tested (minimum) Maintenance Loan - assuming you meet the standard eligibility criteria (www.gov.uk/student-finance/who-qualifies).

What about the following years of study?

All students have to re-apply for funding each year. Student Finance *may* ask you to provide evidence **every year of study** to confirm your circumstances haven't changed and you are still estranged.

When you've completed your online application form, if Student Finance require evidence again, they will ask you for it.

If you have any problems proving your estrangement, seek advice from the Student Funding Team at Solent University.

Can other relatives provide financial information to means-test my application?

Unfortunately, your student finance body will only accept financial paperwork from parents (and your parent's partner if applicable) if you're not accepted as estranged. Only in very rare cases do they accept evidence from guardians.

Where can I get further advice on estrangement?

- **Student Funding Team**

- ✓ Visit: Student Hub, RM050
- ✓ Tel: 023 8201 5200
- ✓ Email: student.funding@solent.ac.uk
- ✓ Online: <https://bit.ly/3fexrJU>

- **Standalone**

An organisation committed to supporting people who are estranged from their family. Part of their website is specifically for students in higher education and provides information on proving your estrangement.

- ✓ Online: <https://www.standalone.org.uk/students/>

STUDENT FINANCE BODIES:

- **Student Finance England (SFE),**
www.gov.uk/studentfinance
Tel: **0300 100 0607**

Address any correspondence to:
Student Finance England
PO Box 210
Darlington
DL1 9HJ

- **Scotland (SAAS),**
www.saas.gov.uk/,
Tel: 0300 555 0505
- **Student Finance Wales (SFW),**
www.studentfinancewales.co.uk/,
Tel: **0300 200 4050**
- **Student Finance N. Ireland (SFNi),**
www.studentfinancenir.co.uk/,
Tel: **0300 100 0077**

When posting anything to your student finance body, it is advisable to send it by special or recorded delivery.