



# UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

StandAlone  
34a York Way  
London  
N1 9AB

21 March 2018

Dear StandAlone,

## **Re: StandAlone Pledge for Estranged Students at the University of Leeds**

This letter sets out the University of Leeds's commitment to the StandAlone pledge and providing for the needs of estranged students studying without the support of a family network.

The University of Leeds believes that all students should have the opportunity to realise their potential, regardless of their background. We actively engage with schools, partner institutions and community groups to help support people from a range of backgrounds and all ages gain access to higher education. The Access to Leeds scheme has helped more than 4,000 students from disadvantaged backgrounds study at the University, and we continue to support these students throughout their course via the Plus Programme, providing opportunities to develop new skills, develop networks with potential employers and gain a taste of the world of work or further study.

The University of Leeds recognises the particular challenges faced by estranged students studying without the support of a family network. We already have in place a named contact for estranged students who provides one-to-one guidance. Developing our pledge has presented an opportunity to audit the wide-ranging support already available for estranged students, as well as identifying areas for further development. The University of Leeds therefore pledges to offer support in the following areas:

### **Finance**

Estranged students with low household income are eligible for Leeds Financial Support which can be received as cash bursary, or as a discount on fees or university accommodation and are a target group for scholarships (currently up to £2000 a year for three years). Estranged students are actively encouraged to apply for scholarships and receive weighted scores in the selection criteria.

During the course of their studies they can also apply to the Access to Learning Fund, the criteria for which are being reviewed to ensure that all estranged students are eligible to apply for support for the summer vacation.

### **Accommodation**

The University has developed a package of support for students that mirrors that currently offered for Care Leavers. This includes:

- a guaranteed place in University-owned accommodation
- the offer of 365-day accommodation
- a waiver of the upfront security deposit for University-owned accommodation

### **Mental Health and Wellbeing**

The Student Counselling and Wellbeing Service are a multi-professional team of counsellors, mental health advisors and wellbeing practitioners who offer a range of support services including: single session consultation appointments, mental health and wellbeing support, face-to-face and online counselling,

groups and workshops, meditation, and a range of self-help resources including Big White Wall and downloadable MP3s. As a team we have extensive experience of the issues and difficulties that students can face while studying. Students can complete an online self-referral form available 24 hours a day to make an appointment. For further information see: <http://students.leeds.ac.uk/info/100001/counselling>.

The University also runs activities for students staying in Leeds over Christmas and outside of term time, including estranged students.

The Leeds University Union are facilitating the development of a student-led focus group or support network for estranged students to ensure there is a forum for their voices to be heard and needs understood.

### **Outreach and Transition**

Estranged students is a criterion for eligibility to the Access to Leeds scheme (applicants must meet two criteria; others include low household income, being from a low participation neighbourhood, or having to attend a local university: [www.leeds.ac.uk/projectleeds/info/128005/applying/33/alternative\\_admissions/2](http://www.leeds.ac.uk/projectleeds/info/128005/applying/33/alternative_admissions/2)). Those who complete the Access to Leeds programme (an online module developing both study skills and subject skills) and receive an offer of a place on their chosen course of study will be eligible for an Access to Leeds offer, typically two grades below the standard entry requirement for the course.

Outreach resources are being reviewed to recognise the circumstances of estranged young people and communicate the support available to both potential students and their teachers. The Lifelong Learning Centre also undertakes outreach activities with a wide range of external organisations including hostels and homeless charities, which offers further means of reaching those living without the support of their families.

During their course, estranged students are eligible for the Plus Programme, which offers ongoing support to students from underrepresented groups. This programme provides academic workshops, skills development opportunities and social activities, as well as working with departments and support services to help students access all the opportunities available to them. Plus Programme students can also take part in a peer mentoring scheme, where second year students mentor groups of first year students for their first semester at University, providing additional support and advice on settling into life at Leeds, and creating the opportunity for friendships to form.

One-on-one support is also available both prior to entry and while on course via the university's named contact for estranged students, Lisa Firth, as well as the advice team in Help and Support at Leeds University Union.

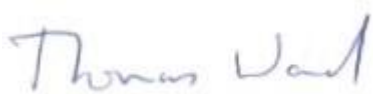
### **Communication and Raising Awareness**

A dedicated webpage is being developed to communicate more clearly the range of support available to estranged students. Leeds University Union are planning an awareness raising week to increase understanding of the issue among students.

To ensure that academic and outreach staff are aware of the needs of estranged students and the support available, lunchtime briefings and talks to staff networks will be held and reports will be written for internal e-newsletters. Staff in the Student Counselling and Wellbeing Service and the advice team in Leeds University Union will also be made aware of the support available from other departments.

The University of Leeds welcomes the opportunity that this pledge offers to ensure that estranged students are fully supported during their studies and looks forward to working with the StandAlone.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Tom Ward  
Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Student Education