

January 2019, re-issued 9 March 2021

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

Dear Sir / Madam,

I am writing this letter to indicate the commitment of the University of Aberdeen to the Stand Alone Pledge.

The University has a commitment that reaches back to our foundation in 1495 to ensure we are open to all. We have always been keen to encourage students from the widest possible range of backgrounds to participate in University studies, and we appreciate that not all students have the same educational opportunities.

The University has a history of successfully supporting under-represented and vulnerable groups, specifically students who have experience of care, student carers and estranged students.

The University recognises the additional barriers and pressures which are faced by applicants and students who are estranged from their families. As such the University offers a range of support mechanism for this group. We are determined to help break down the barriers that often prevent this group from gaining a place at the University and then successfully completing their studies.

Please find enclosed a brief outline of the support that is currently on offer to estranged students and our aims for the next two years. Note that this letter was re-issued in March 2021 with some changes. The 2 year plan from 2019 has not been updated. The University will continue to update details of the support is provides via the Stand Alone website.

Our dedicated member of staff, who is taking a lead in developing support for estranged applicants and students at the University, is Mr Chris Sojka, Widening Participation Officer. Please see below for contact details.

I am pleased to support the Stand Alone Pledge and look forward to working with your organisation in order to improve the experiences and outcomes of our students

Yours sincerely,



Professor George Boyne MA, MLitt, PhD, AcSS



Outline of the support that is currently offered to Estranged Students and Applicants by the University of Aberdeen:

The University currently covers a range of support mechanisms to applicants and students who are estranged from their families. The types of support on offer fall into the following categories: Contextualised Admissions, Financial Support and Advice, Academic Support, Wellbeing and Mental Health Support and Widening Access Outreach.

Contextualised Admissions:

The University recognises the barriers which Estranged young people can face when trying to gain a place on one of our degree programmes. Estranged applicants, in light of our contextualised admissions policy, may benefit from a contextualised or reduced offer of entry.

Estranged Students may also benefit from an opportunity to take part in the University's Summer School for Access programme. This six week programme gives students an opportunity to experience life as a University of Aberdeen student and to improve their entry qualifications.

Financial Support and Advice:

The University's Student Support and Advice Office can provide Estranged Students with financial support and advice.

Estranged Students can also apply for one of the University's Entrance Scholarships. These range in value from £1500 - £3000 per year of study. Over the past couple of years a number of Estranged Students have benefited by receiving these funds.

Academic Support:

Each student at the University is assigned a personal tutor. This is an academic member of staff who can help the students, throughout the duration of their studies, with a variety of issues

Estranged Students can also access the University's Student Learning Service. This service can help the students to improve and develop their academic skills.

Wellbeing and Mental Health Support:

The University's Student Support and Advice Service can help Estranged Students with a range of wellbeing and social issues.

The University offers a dedicated counselling service for its student population. The University also has a Mental Health Advisor who can offer support to Estranged Students.

Widening Access Outreach:

The University's Widening Access Unit offers outreach support to applicants who have either self-identified or have been referred to them as being estranged. The types of outreach support on offer include (but are not limited to): help with the process of applying, advice regarding personal statements and organising campus visits.

The University of Aberdeen's aims for the next two years:

The University's overall aims for the next two years are to see improvements in the access rates for estranged students and their outcomes. More specifically we are going to take forward the following activities and developments:

- **Improved Identification of Estranged Students:** Identifying students who are estranged from their families can be quite difficult. Many students, who could benefit from a variety of support mechanism, miss out because the University is unaware of their status. The University will add a question on to its e-registration forms regarding estrangement. The University will also seek to better identify estranged applicants during the application stage via their UCAS personal and reference statements.
- **Foster links with local agencies and bodies that support Estranged young people:** The University works quite closely with schools, local authorities and other education providers in the local area to better support groups like care experienced students. The University will seek to foster similar links and partnerships in order to help local estranged applicants and students.
- **Improved engagement with our local population of Estranged students:** The University will seek to establish a group or network of local estranged students who can help to advise the institution and its practitioners on how best to support this vulnerable groups.

- **Awareness raising of this issue with the University's staff body:** The University, as part of its continuous CPD efforts, will raise awareness of Estranged Students and the issues that they face with its entire staff body.

For more information please contact Mr Chris Sojka, Widening Participation Officer, Tel: 01224 273107,
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