



**UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS**

StandAlone  
34a York Way  
London  
N1 9AB

12 March 2024

Dear StandAlone,

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

In light of the recent announcement of the closure of StandAlone, this letter sets out the University of Leeds' continued commitment to our StandAlone pledge. Not only will we continue to provide for the needs of estranged students studying without the support of a family network, but we will also continue to review and develop our offering.

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 to gain access to higher education.

The University of Leeds Plus Programme captures over 5,000 undergraduate and taught postgraduate students per year from the very start of their degree who are from widening participation and under-represented backgrounds. This includes students who come to Leeds via our contextual admissions schemes, students who are successful in receiving a means-tested scholarship, students who come from a neighbourhood of low participation at university, students who self-identify as care experienced and/or estranged, and more. The Plus Programme provides a holistic array of interventions, from providing funding to access professional development opportunities and to join clubs and societies at Leeds University Union, to events and activities that help students to develop friendships and networks, to projects and initiatives that help students to develop life skills and a sense of belonging at university.

The University of Leeds recognises the particular challenges faced by estranged students studying without the support of a family network, which include but are not limited to the following areas:

**Outreach and Transition**

For estranged students who have received an undergraduate offer to study at the University of Leeds, they can now apply to have up to £100 of their travel reimbursed for attendance at an Offer Holder Day: <https://www.leeds.ac.uk/undergraduate-offer/doc/travel-bursary>

Estrangement is a criterion for eligibility to the Access to Leeds scheme:

<https://www.leeds.ac.uk/access-to-leeds>

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. The university also work in partnership with other contextual outreach and admissions schemes, all of which include estrangement as one of their criteria for access.

Our Outreach teams and Go Higher West Yorkshire recognise the circumstances of estranged young people and communicate the support available to both potential students and their teachers. The Communities and Partnership Outreach team within the Lifelong Learning Centre also undertake 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.

Students who self-identify as estranged on UCAS, enter the university via a contextual outreach or admissions route such as Access to Leeds, or apply for a means-tested scholarship, are automatically included in the online transition and in-person welcome events run by the Plus Programme team, which are designed to ease students' transition into a university setting, build initial friendships and networks, develop skills for independent living and learning, and make the most of their Leeds degree from the outset. While estranged students are automatically enrolled onto the Plus Programme where possible, a self-referral route also allows students to self-declare their circumstances at any point during their Leeds degree.

Estranged students receive a welcome payment of £50 from the Plus Programme team at the beginning of their first year.

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. Estranged students have access to all this activity and are, where appropriate offered either priority or exclusive access.

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

## **Funding and Finance**

Undergraduate estranged students who are financially independent or have a household income below £42,875 are actively encouraged to apply for the undergraduate means-tested scholarship and receive weighted scores in the selection criteria. This scholarship is worth £3,000 for three years of their Leeds degree: <https://www.leeds.ac.uk/undergraduate-funding-university/doc/personal-circumstances-scholarships>

If any students don't receive the undergraduate means-tested scholarship, they will automatically be provided with the Leeds Bursary if they are deemed eligible, which is worth up to £2,000 per year of their degree: <https://www.leeds.ac.uk/undergraduate-funding-university/doc/leeds-bursary>

Regardless of whether they are in receipt of the scholarship or the bursary, undergraduate estranged students will receive an additional £2,000 per year, which was introduced in December 2023.

Estranged students studying Masters courses at the university are also encouraged to apply for the Leeds Masters Scholarship which is worth £7,000, and receive weighted scores in the selection criteria: <https://www.leeds.ac.uk/masters-funding-scholarships/doc/leeds-masters-scholarships>

Our named contact can also assist students in applying for estranged student status through Student Finance.

As members of the Plus Programme, estranged students can apply for up to £500 to put towards personal and professional development opportunities such as internships, job interviews and conferences. Furthermore, students are able to receive reimbursements for LUU society membership fees and associated costs.

Lastly, if any estranged students find themselves facing financial hardship, they can apply for emergency funding through the university's Financial Assistance Fund: <https://students.leeds.ac.uk/info/10231/university-financial-assistance-fund>

## **Accommodation**

The University has developed a package of support for undergraduate estranged students. This includes:

- a guaranteed place in University-owned accommodation (and estranged students are usually able to receive their first choice)
- the offer of 365-day accommodation
- a waiver of the upfront security deposit for University-owned accommodation
- The option to delay accommodation payments until the student has received the first instalment of their student loan

The Plus Programme team are currently working on a detailed accommodation resource for care experienced and estranged students, with a particular focus on securing private 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
- A range of online resources including TogetherAll

The Counselling and Wellbeing Service also offer bespoke wellbeing workshops for students on the Plus Programme.

As a team they 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 the Winter break and outside of term time, including estranged students.

## **Events and Networking**

Estranged students have access to year-round Plus Programme events and activities, including personal and professional development workshops, wellbeing events and social activities.

In addition, the Plus Programme run specific social activities for estranged and care experienced students, including free pub lunches and events for estranged student solidarity week.

## **Communication and Raising Awareness**

A dedicated webpage for estranged students can be found on the Plus Programme webpages, and there are plans to build upon the information available to estranged students, and to staff across the university who may be working with estranged students as part of their role:

[https://students.leeds.ac.uk/info/1000014/plus\\_programme/1129/estranged\\_students\\_no\\_parents\\_support](https://students.leeds.ac.uk/info/1000014/plus_programme/1129/estranged_students_no_parents_support)

Our dedicated contact for estranged and care experienced students provides introductory information sessions on estrangement for new members of staff in Educational Engagement.

Our partner organisation Go Higher West Yorkshire also offer a free online training course entitled 'Understanding and Supporting Care Experienced & Estranged Students':

<https://gohigherwestyorks.ac.uk/courses/understanding-and-supporting-care-experienced-estranged-students/>

There are also plans to build resources for prospective estranged students, which will require involvement from teams across the university such as Leeds University Union, the Funding team, the Accommodation Office, the Counselling & Wellbeing Service, the Lifelong Learning Centre, the Harassment & Misconduct team and the Careers Centre, which will form a working group to ensure the needs of estranged students are considered at every stage of the students' university career.

## **Student Voice and Evaluation**

The Plus Programme have recently launched the Student Involvement Project. As part of this project, we will be proactively seeking estranged student feedback on the experiences at Leeds, and using the student voice to colour our future plans for estranged student provision. We actively promote our Student Steering Group and Access and Success Advisor roles to students from estranged backgrounds in order to ensure we are fairly and accurately representing the breadth of the estranged student experience. We also aim to gather student feedback using surveys, focus groups and case studies, and implement tangible changes and improvements as a result of the feedback we receive.

## **Graduation and Careers**

For the past four years, the Plus Programme have provided estranged students with priority access to the upReach programme. This includes one to one support, access to exclusive opportunities and events, and links to employer partners. As a target group of students, our Careers Service also provide priority careers support to estranged students.

The University of Leeds are aware of the additional pressure on estranged students to secure further study or employment upon graduation. For this reason, we have introduced the 'Find your Future' package in collaboration with our Careers Service, which is available for all estranged students in their penultimate and final years of study. This scheme offers additional employability support for

care experienced and estranged students in their penultimate and final years of study. This scheme offers specialised group coaching, CV application and mock interview support, a drop-in offering at the Connections Hub run by the Employability and Progression Assistants and themed sessions on different topics related to employability. Estranged students are also given priority access to our 30 minute mentoring scheme, giving students the opportunity to meet with an alum working in an industry they're interested in, to help them ascertain their future careers goals.

Lastly, upon graduation, estranged students can apply for a reimbursement of up to £100 of graduation related costs including gown hire and graduation photographs.

The University of Leeds is dedicated to this pledge, and remains committed to ensuring that estranged students are fully supported during their studies with us.

Yours sincerely,

**Matt Dollery, Head of Student Success**

Educational Engagement  
University of Leeds

[Find out more about the Plus Programme](#)

[Find out more about Student Success](#)

