

Astrophoria Foundation Year Guidance: Promoting positive outcomes for Care Experienced and Estranged Students

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Role	Astrophoria Foundation Year Welfare Lead
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1. Aim

Within the Astrophoria Foundation Year, we are committed to ensuring that students who have experience of being in care have a successful and enjoyable time studying with us. This guidance sets out the support that is available for Care Experienced and Estranged Students to promote positive outcomes.

2. Definitions

The Astrophoria Foundation Year will use the definitions from NNECL (2023)¹ as working definitions for the following terms:

- 'Care Experienced' - This term refers to anyone who has been, or is currently, in care. This care may have been provided in many different settings, including living with foster carers; living in a residential children's home; being looked after at home under a supervision order; living with friends or relatives in kinship care.
- 'Estranged' - Estranged students are those aged 18 to 24 who are not communicating with either of their parents due to an irreconcilable breakdown in the relationship with them. Estranged students often also lack the support of their wider family. Individuals may be estranged and are living independently before entering higher education or may become estranged during their studies.

Please note that students who are care experienced may also be estranged from their parents.

- Care leavers – the definitions and terminology varies across the four countries of the UK. The most relevant information can be found here:
 - England - <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/35/notes/division/2>
 - Scotland - <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1995/36/introduction>, <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2004/03/19113/34719>, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2015/62/introduction/made> and <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2015/156/introduction/made>.
 - Wales - <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/35/notes/division/2> and sections 105-115 of this document: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2014/4/contents>

¹ <https://www.nnecl.org/>

- Northern Ireland - <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1995/755/contents>, <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2002/11/contents> and <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/2005/221/contents/made>

3. What students should do if they are unsure whether they meet the definitions

Before applying, students who are unsure if they meet the definition for care experienced and/or estranged student, are advised to contact the Welfare Lead (welfare@foundation.ox.ac.uk) to arrange a confidential discussion.

During the application process, typically, students will have disclosed their care experience and/or estrangement in their UCAS application and/or FYAAQ as part of the application process and will have provided verification.

If circumstances change, or if a student is later unsure if they meet the definitions for care experienced and/or estranged student, individuals are advised to contact the Welfare Lead (welfare@foundationyear.ox.ac.uk) to arrange a confidential discussion. Care experienced students disclosing for the first time will be expected to provide a letter from their Local Council or Care Authority confirming their care experienced status. Estranged students will be expected to supply a referee who is willing to confirm their estrangement. While this evidence is being sought, care experienced/ estranged students will be expected to access financial support through the usual Foundation Year student support grants which are outlined on the [Financial Support webpages](#).

4. University Support available for students

There is support available from the University to support students who are Care Experienced and/or Estranged.

(a) Care Experienced Students

- The University of Oxford states on its website that it is “committed to supporting students from a care background to ensure that they receive the help they need in order to have a successful university experience”. Further details can be found here: <https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/welfare/furtherstudentsupport>
- Care experienced student bursary: A non-repayable care experienced student bursary of up to £3,000 per year is available to UK undergraduates, Graduate-Entry Medicine students and PGCE students to help towards financial shortfalls relating to circumstances. New applications must be from those who were under 25 on the first day of their course.
More information can be found here: <https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/fees-funding/assistance/oxford/ceesb>
- Information about support available for applications can be found here: <https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/applying-to-oxford/care-experienced-students>

(b) Estranged Students

- The University of Oxford is committed to supporting students who are studying without the support and approval of their families. Further details of support

available can be found here: <https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/welfare/estranged-students>

- The University of Oxford has also signed the Stand Alone Pledge, which can be found here: <http://www.thestandalonepledge.org.uk/champion-institutions/23-south/133-university-of-oxford>
- The University of Oxford offers an Estranged student bursary, which is a non-repayable estranged student bursary of up to £3,000 per year is available to UK undergraduates, Graduate-Entry Medicine students and PGCE students who are studying without the support of their family, to help towards financial shortfalls relating to circumstances. New applications must be from those who were under 25 on the first day of their course.
More information can be found here: <https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/fees-funding/assistance/oxford/ceesb>
- For confidential advice about the support available for estranged students, please contact the co-director for Student Welfare and Support Services on director.swss@admin.ox.ac.uk.

5. College Support

All colleges have a range of support available for students who are care experienced and/or estranged. Information can be found on their college websites.

It is through colleges that all students access Chaplaincy support and welfare systems.

Student Peer Supporters are available in colleges and departments to talk informally about anything that is concerning a student. Peer Supporters are carefully selected and trained and receive support and supervision from the University Counselling Service.

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6. Support available from the Astrophoria Foundation Year

Students who are care experienced and/or estranged from their families will be eligible to receive all the support that all foundation year students receive, including the non-refundable bursary of £6,042 (2025/26 rate) for living costs and an additional bursary to cover accommodation costs during term time of the Foundation Year.

In addition to this support, from September 2023, the following support is available to all care experienced and/or estranged students.

Timeframe	Outline of support
Before students apply	<p>If prospective applicants want to contact the Welfare Lead to ask any questions they may have at any stage, including when considering if the Astrophoria Foundation Year is the right place for them to come and study, they should email welfare@foundationyear.ox.ac.uk. They are also able to approach the admissions@foundationyear.ox.ac.uk email address for more general queries.</p> <p>Care experienced and estranged prospective applicants are encouraged to visit the University of Oxford on one of the University's Open Days. A financial contribution towards the cost of travel incurred to access the Open Day will be provided by the Foundation Year Programme. The Foundation Year Welfare Lead would be pleased to arrange a meeting with students during the Open Day to discuss any questions the applicants may have. Students wishing to access the financial support or to arrange to meet the welfare lead should contact welfare@foundationyear.ox.ac.uk.</p> <p>If prospective applicants are unable to attend the open day, we are happy to organise telephone or teams calls between members of the Astrophoria Foundation Year Programme Team with care experienced and/or estranged students. We hope this will allow students to ask any questions they may have and to build a relationship with members of the AFY Programme Team. To request this, please contact welfare@foundationyear.ox.ac.uk.</p>
When a student applies	<p>UCAS provides information and support to students who are care experienced and/or estranged wishing to apply for university. More information for care experienced students: https://www.ucas.com/undergraduate/applying-university/individual-needs/ucas-undergraduate-care-experienced-students</p> <p>More information for estranged students: https://www.ucas.com/estranged-students</p> <p>To ensure that we can identify students and provide students with support, we encourage students to tick the relevant boxes on the UCAS application to let us know that the students has been in care and/or are estranged from their parents. This will allow us to get in contact with them. This information is treated in the strictest of confidence and applications will not be disadvantaged in any way.</p>

During the interview process	Students will be contacted by the Welfare Lead as soon as possible once they have applied and been invited to interview (NB – as long as the student has indicated on their application that they are care experienced or estranged). The welfare lead will continue to provide consistent support throughout the interview process.
Once a student has received an offer	<p>Once the student has received and accepted their offer for admission, an offer of a virtual or face to face meeting to address any questions/concerns before starting the course will be made. Depending on timing, this could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A tour of the relevant department • A tour of one of our colleges • A chance to meet face to face the Welfare Lead and any other key members of staff (potentially including some of the Course Team) • A chance to answer any questions that students may have about their course, accommodation, student finance etc <p>This is booked by emailing welfare@foundationyear.ox.ac.uk.</p> <p>The Welfare Lead will help the student get all the support they are entitled to before they start, providing regular information, advice and signposting, when and where appropriate.</p>
During the foundation year	<p>All students will be invited to an orientation week (in MT W-1). Those who are care experienced and/or estranged will be offered regular check ins during the week, including the offer of 1:1 sessions with the welfare lead as appropriate.</p> <p>As part of the orientation week, students will be introduced to the Students' Union (SU) and will find out about all the SU societies and upcoming events. The welfare lead will ensure that care experienced and/or estranged students know their time slot to go to the Freshers' fair and make arrangements to support them in accessing the quiet hour if that is more appropriate.</p> <p>The Welfare Lead will meet with care experienced and/or estranged students regularly throughout the foundation year for 1:1 meetings. The Welfare Lead has links with multiple outside agencies and will signpost students to relevant agencies for additional support where appropriate.</p> <p>Signposting to financial support: Through the Welfare Lead, conversations to signpost and support applications to financial support mechanisms will occur, such as possible bursaries from Local Authorities, as well as support from within the colleges and University.</p> <p>The Welfare Lead will support the student to arrange a 1:1 careers interview during their foundation year. This will include the opportunity to discuss vacation employment as appropriate.</p>

	<p>Colleges and the University of Oxford will be encouraged to provide information about any temporary vacation jobs to care experienced students who are staying in Oxford over the vacations giving them early notice to be able to apply. Where opportunities are shared with the Welfare Lead, these will be shared with any care experienced and/or estranged students.</p>
	<p>Mentoring – we aim to provide a personal mentor with either experience of navigating or helping young people navigate higher education from a care experienced background. It is intended to approach the Rees Centre for provision of these mentors.</p>
	<p>Mental Health Support – With consent, students would be supported with referrals by the Welfare Lead to University’s student counselling service as appropriate. For care-experienced and/or estranged students, if the support required goes beyond the standard 6 sessions provided by SWSS, there is a commitment to assess if there is a need to continue with that support on a case-by-case basis. Consideration will also be made whether the mental health support can comfortably sit within a higher education service setting or should be NHS based. Where additional referrals need to be completed to access NHS services, the Welfare Lead will support as appropriate.</p>
	<p>Full-time undergraduate students are able to apply to Student Finance for a tuition fee loan to cover the costs of study and a maintenance loan for general living costs. Support will be provided by the Welfare Lead for any student who needs support during this application process.</p>
	<p>Employability – As part of our commitment to care experienced and/or estranged students, we guaranteed an interview any care experienced and/or estranged students who express an interest in becoming a Foundation Year ambassador</p>
<p>During vacations in the foundation year</p>	<p>The University of Oxford commits to supporting care experienced and estranged students to have assistance in securing 365-day accommodation. In the Astrophoria Foundation Year, care experienced students will have their college accommodation funded whilst on their foundation year, for those who require it. It would be anticipated that this would start no earlier than –1st Week Michaelmas Term in the year the student starts the Foundation Year. Colleges will be asked if vacation accommodation for care experienced students could be charged at term time rate rather than vacation rate.</p> <p>Where a student suspends, their access to college facilities will not be available during the period of their suspension, and therefore care experienced and/or students will not be provided with college accommodation during this time period. Care experienced and/or suspended students would be entitled to access some financial support, as outlined within those processes, and could use this towards incurred accommodation costs.</p>

	Hardship funding is available that can be accessed for financial support during the vacations, if necessary, by care experienced and/or estranged students.
	The ideal scenario for housing is that care-experienced students are not required to move rooms during vacation periods. If unavoidable, the Welfare Lead will help to source support to move their belongings and to check they are settled in.
For those students who do not continue to undergraduate degree	It is also suggested that college accommodation is available in the summer holiday following the Astrophoria Foundation Year including for those students who do not secure or choose not to continue to an undergraduate place at the University of Oxford.
During the undergraduate years	Ongoing welfare support is offered during Michaelmas Term of the Undergraduate Year for any care experienced and/or estranged students who request it. It can continue on a longer basis as needed with the permission of the relevant participating college.

We understand that care leavers, out of necessity and experience of being let down, have often learnt to be very self-reliant. We know that trust needs to be earned by staff and will take time to develop – therefore any offers of support will not be one time offers, they will be left open / revisited during the Foundation Year.

7. Commitments of support yet to be established

In establishing a new programme, some elements of support are not yet fully established. Below are the commitments to be developed.

- It is intended to establish a network of peers that care experienced students can join and be part of. It is also intended to establish a network of Foundation Year students and former students more broadly to provide a network of support for the cohort while on the Foundation Year and beyond. Care experienced and/or estranged students would be invited to join and be part of both networks if they would like to.

8. Information about key staff and useful contacts

Role	Current Post Holder	Contact details
The Astrophoria Foundation Year Welfare Lead	Cat Purtell	welfare@foundationyear.ox.ac.uk
Co Directors of Student Welfare and Support Services	Kathy Noren/Jane Harris	director.swss@admin.ox.ac.uk

9. Relevant external sources of support

Buttle UK	Buttle UK is a charity dedicated to helping children and young people in the UK who have experienced crisis, living in financial hardship and dealing with multiple challenging social issues.	www.buttleuk.org
Become	For 30 years, Become have stood shoulder to shoulder with children in care and young care leavers, helping them get the support they need.	www.becomecharity.org.uk
The Care Leavers' Foundation	The Care Leavers' Foundation provides much needed help to care leavers.	www.thecareleaversfoundation.org
The Sutton Trust	The Sutton Trust champions social mobility through programmes, research and policy influence.	www.suttontrust.com
The Care Leavers Association	The Care Leavers Association provide advice, guidance and support so that care leavers may fulfil their potential as individuals and members of society and that their conditions of life may be improved.	www.careleavers.com
Isabel's Voice	Isabel's Voice aims to promote social inclusion for the public benefit by preventing young people in local authority care from becoming socially excluded, by ensuring they have access to services that will assist them to integrate into society.	www.isabelsvoice.org.uk
NNECL	The National Network for the Education of Care Leavers (NNECL) mission is to support, connect and empower professionals working with care-experienced people in different sectors, with the goal of enabling more care experienced people to access and progress successfully through further and higher education.	www.nnecl.org