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University Principals
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By Email.

2 November 2022

Dear Colleagues

I am writing with regards to the independent research that the Scottish Government commissioned on the experiences of estranged students in Further and Higher Education in Scotland.

I am pleased to confirm that ScotCen Social Research were awarded the contract to take forward the research in March of this year, after a necessary pause to focus our resource on the response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The research concluded in August and the research findings, as well as an associated literature review, were published online by the Scottish Government on Tuesday 1st November. Both publications are available at the links below:

Research report / findings: [Research to understand the experiences of estranged students in Further \(FE\) and Higher Education \(HE\) in Scotland - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/research-to-understand-the-experiences-of-estranged-students-in-further-and-higher-education-in-scotland/pages/1-2.aspx)

Literature review: [The Experiences of Estranged Students In Further \(FE\) and Higher Education \(HE\): a review of the literature - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/the-experiences-of-estranged-students-in-further-and-higher-education-he-a-review-of-the-literature/pages/1-2.aspx)

The research highlighted that being estranged impacted on students' experiences of Further and Higher Education in Scotland in many ways. The most prominent concerns were related to student finance and accommodation. Now that the research is published, I will take time to consider these findings.

The research also highlighted that these concerns were closely followed by the adverse impact of estrangement on the student's experiences of college and university. A number of suggested improvements were proposed by students and stakeholders participating in this research. I am writing to you today, as the Principal of your institution, to encourage you to consider the suggestions proposed, and make improvements, where possible, to support this vulnerable group of students.

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A key ask from the research was to raise awareness of estrangement within institutions at all stages of a student's educational journey, and to offer support for students to declare their estrangement at the earliest opportunity they can. I recognise that the first step in achieving this is to have a clear and consistent definition of estrangement that is adopted across Government and I am pleased to confirm that the Scottish Government, the Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS) and the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) have agreed and will adopt the following definition:

An estranged person is someone who no longer has contact with their parents or legal guardians, due to a permanent breakdown in their relationship (isolated instances of contact will be considered on a case by case basis).

I would ask that you, your institution and your partners consider adopting the same definition to ensure consistency for estranged students studying in Scotland.

To further improve awareness, I have asked SAAS to have regular, more proactive promotion of the support available to estranged students and this will include improvements to the application process.

I would ask the same of your institution in terms of proactive and regular promotion of the support available to estranged students and to consider the suggestions from the research, which include:

- named contacts in colleges and universities for estranged students;
- dedicated webpages for estranged students on college and university websites which provide clear and accessible information on the types and range of support available; and
- clear and coherent guidance which outlines the range of ways in which discretionary funding can, and is being used, by colleges and universities.

I hope you will join me in making improvements, where possible, to help estranged students studying in Scotland, and I am of course happy to discuss this with you if you would find that useful.



Jamie Hepburn

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