

UCAS FAIR ACCESS SNAPSHOT:

STUDENTS ESTRANGED FROM THEIR PARENTS

UCAS



INTRODUCTION

In 2023, UCAS introduced seven new questions into the application enabling students to flag a wider range of circumstances and support needs, including: students estranged from their parents, those with parenting or caring responsibilities, students from UK Armed Forces families, UK Armed Forces Service leavers and veterans, refugees and asylum seekers, and students in receipt of free school meals.

This new data not only helps higher education (HE) providers connect students to the right support, it also gives the sector valuable insight into students about which we have previously had little information.

These Fair Access Snapshots offer an at-a-glance overview of this new data. This first Snapshot focuses on applicants making choices in the 2023 cycle who shared they were estranged from their parents.



OVERALL 2023 UCAS APPLICANT DATA

599,930

UK applicants

482,895

UK accepted
applicants

35.8%

UK entry rate

APPLICANTS ESTRANGED FROM THEIR PARENTS

16,430

UK applicants

11,295

UK accepted
applicants

2.3%

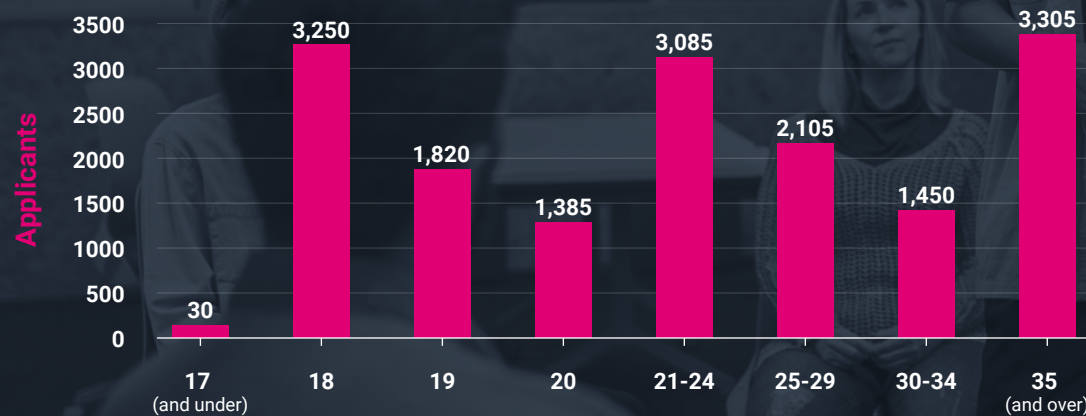
Proportion of
UK accepted
applicants



BREAKDOWN BY UK DOMICILE

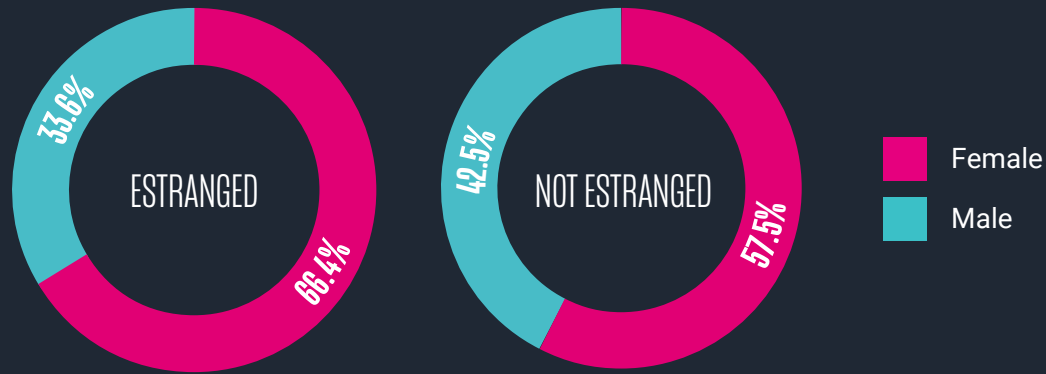
Estranged students	Applicants	Accepted applicants
England	13,750	9,490
Northern Ireland	330	210
Scotland	1,625	1,075
Wales	720	515
Overall	16,430	11,295

INTERSECTIONALITY: AGE



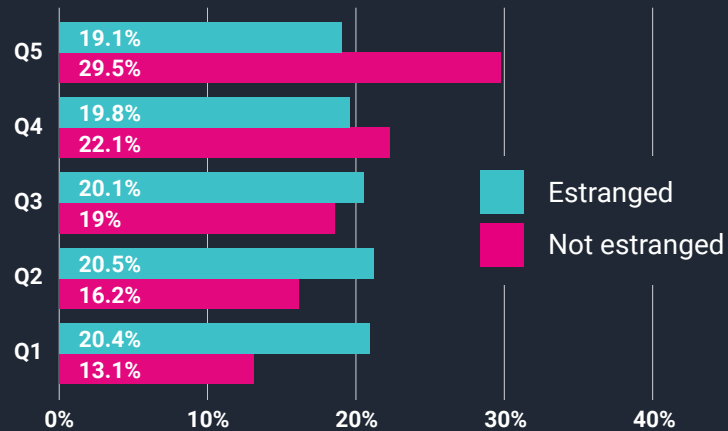
While a significant number of applicants aged 25 and over (41.8%) share that they are estranged from their parents, HE providers offering bursaries and accommodation typically only support those aged 25 and under. UCAS will monitor this and review whether the application question needs refinement.

INTERSECTIONALITY: GENDER



The gender imbalance seen in UK applicants overall is amplified for those estranged from their parents. Young men who have disengaged from HE due to their circumstances may require additional support to consider this as a viable pathway.

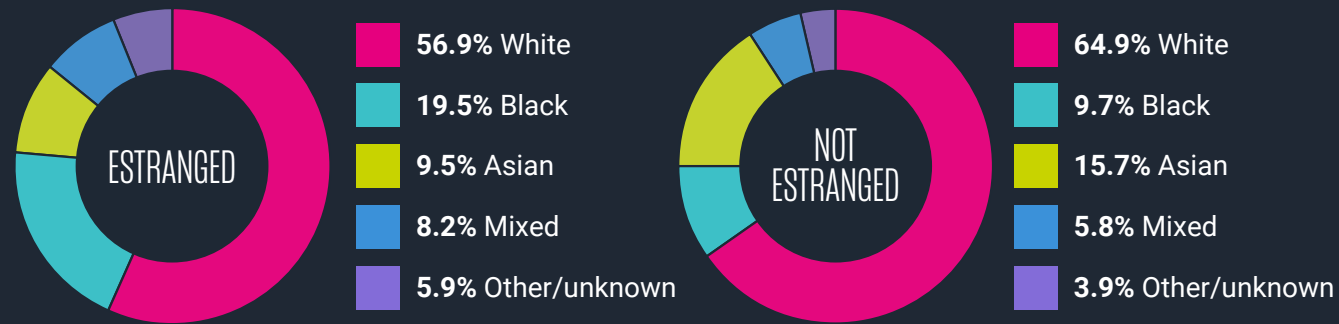
INTERSECTIONALITY: SOCIO-ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE



There is a clear over-representation of students estranged from their parents in the lower POLAR4 quintiles across the UK. We might assume that the lack of parental support eclipses the financial impact felt across different socio-economic backgrounds, but more research is needed to form a clearer understanding.

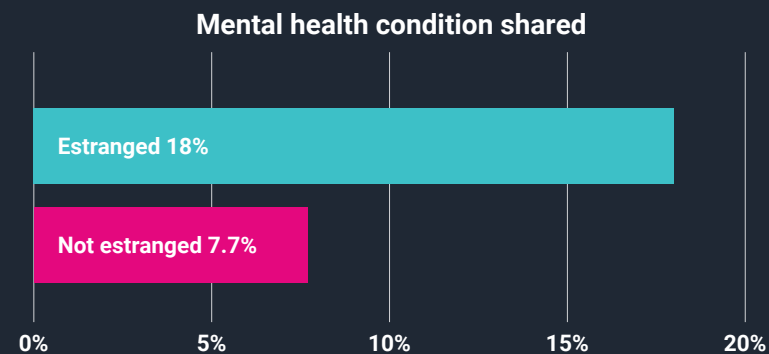


INTERSECTIONALITY: ETHNICITY



Students estranged from their parents are more likely to be from a minority ethnic group. While **Stand Alone research** finds a higher number of Black African and Black Caribbean students estranged from their parents, geography plays an important role – further data and research is needed to understand this picture better.

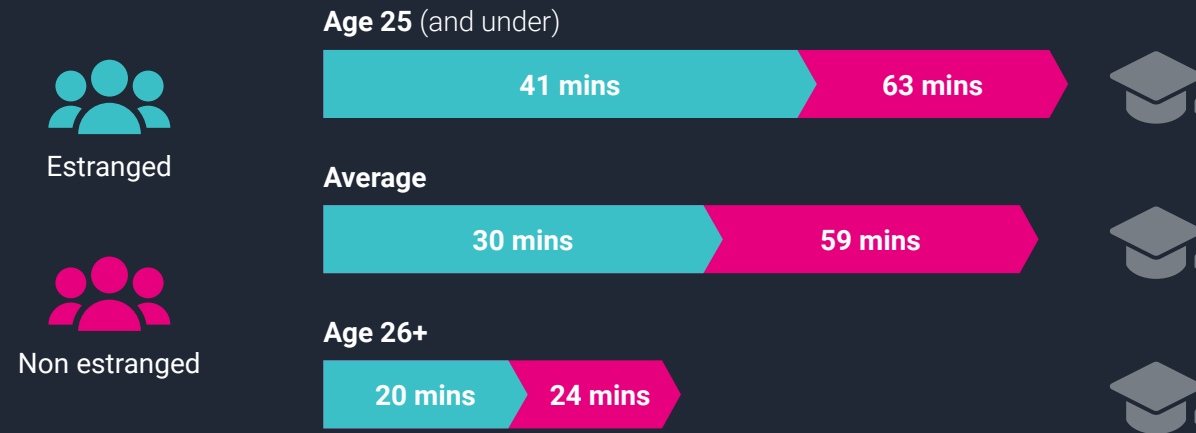
INTERSECTIONALITY: MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS



The higher prevalence of students sharing a mental health condition if they are estranged from their parents underlines the importance of ensuring they receive information about managing their mental health and wellbeing at university, and how to access support services.



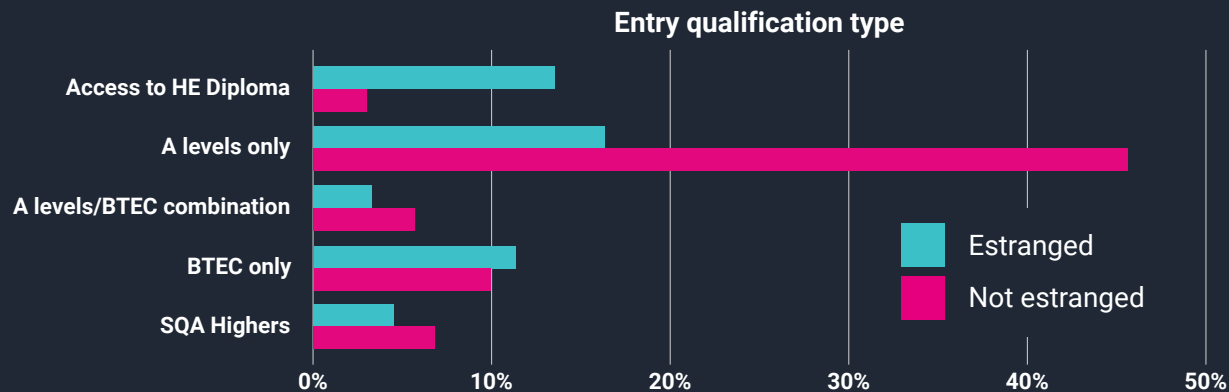
STUDENTS EXPERIENCING ESTRANGEMENT TEND TO APPLY MORE LOCALLY



UCAS data shows younger students who are estranged from their parents are more likely to apply and be accepted at HE providers located closer to their local area. However, Stand Alone's experience is that these students are more likely to move further away. Potentially, applicants may have already moved, or may be restricted by housing arrangements – more data and analysis is needed to understand what is driving this disparity.



STUDENTS ESTRANGED FROM THEIR PARENTS ARE MORE LIKELY TO ENTER HE WITH VOCATIONAL OR TECHNICAL QUALIFICATIONS



Unstable family circumstances may impact post-16 choices and attainment. Students estranged from their parents are much less likely to enter HE with A levels only, and more likely to hold vocational or technical qualifications, or the Access to HE Diploma. Similarly, Scottish applicants are more likely to hold only SQA Highers, however **alternative pathways** in Scotland are different to those elsewhere in the UK, so not directly comparable.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES



Health & Social Care



Nursing & Midwifery



Allied Health

Students who are estranged from their parents are more likely to apply to subjects related to health and social care – similar to the courses preferred by **care-experienced students**. This preference may be related to their tendency to take post-16 vocational and technical qualification choices.



A COMMENT FROM STAND ALONE

This Snapshot is the first ever insight into the characteristics of estranged applicants, providing the sector with important high-level data about this cohort. I am very grateful to have been able to view the draft version of Snapshot in April, before the closure of Stand Alone. The data outlined here makes it clear that there is an acute need for more research into this group of vulnerable students in order to fully understand their needs and support them effectively.

Notably, the data for this first cycle shows a significant number (41.8%) of estranged applicants aged 25 and over. We need to consider whether younger applicants, who seem to be under-represented here, are not 'ticking the box' – perhaps because they're not yet estranged, or unfamiliar with the terminology, or perhaps not receiving the right advice when applying. This may lead to younger people who are entitled to institutional support being missed, with older students who may believe they can access support finding they are not eligible.

This Snapshot raises highlights the need for more sector data and further investigation into estranged students' characteristics. My experience of working with younger estranged students (aged 17-20 years) does not fully match what the UCAS data is showing, and we should consider the age distribution as we interpret other intersectionality datasets.

Crucial to this data and its use is our understanding that estrangement is not a fixed personal characteristic – unlike, for example, having been in care. Students can become estranged at different stages in their lives, including during their HE journey. So, while the UCAS data provides a vital insight, institutions cannot fully rely on it for a complete picture of who their own estranged students are – they will need to supplement it with their own institutional data, collected at enrolment and at multiple points throughout the academic year.

SUSAN MUELLER,
DIRECTOR HIGHER EDUCATION AND PROJECTS,
STAND ALONE

StandAlone 



CONCLUDING COMMENT FROM UCAS

It is positive to see over 16,000 applicants feeling comfortable to share information about their estrangement on the UCAS application in this first cycle. This is a strong indication that the messages around sharing individual needs are reaching students as we continue to work towards a culture of positive disclosure.

We want all applicants to holistically research the right options for them, understand the benefits of sharing their support needs, and feel confident they will get the support they need to succeed in their application and on their course – and beyond.

THE UCAS FAIR ACCESS PROGRAMME

The **Fair Access Programme** aims to add further value to the sector's efforts to widen access and participation. UCAS' data and insights are central to our understanding of how different under-represented and disadvantaged groups progress to HE – and the barriers and challenges they face along the way. This new data will help us to extend our understanding of these groups, identify hidden challenges, and work with the sector to improve their experiences and outcomes.

As highlighted by Stand Alone, there is a clear need for more sector research and analysis if we are to understand the particular needs and challenges of those experiencing estrangement. We have also noted the unexpectedly high number of estranged applicants aged 26 and over, mindful of the age limit for support, and will work with the sector to explore if refinements to the current question are needed.

Sadly, Stand Alone ceased operations at the end of April 2024 but UCAS is committed to 'taking the baton' to continue their legacy in supporting applicants who are estranged from their parents, and to work with the sector to identify and remove barriers.

This year, we launch the Outreach Connection Service which will help connect students to the diversity of outreach opportunities offered by HE providers and third-sector organisations. Initially, this will be available via the Adviser Hub where teachers can filter the opportunities to find what is best for their students; we are already working on making the service available directly to students. Outreach providers can **register their interest** in the OCS now.



UCAS RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS ESTRANGED FROM THEIR PARENTS

Find targeted information and advice for under-represented students on ucas.com:

- ▶ **Student-facing information and advice** – for students estranged from their parents, including financial guidance, application support, information about accommodation, and making a UCAS application.
- ▶ **Applying to HE with individual needs** – information and advice for a range of circumstances and support needs
- ▶ **Mental health and wellbeing support** – information and advice for all students
- ▶ **Teacher and adviser toolkit** – how to support students estranged from their parents from research through to transition
- ▶ **All teacher and adviser toolkits** – for supporting under-represented students from a variety of backgrounds
- ▶ **Good practice briefing for HE providers** – implementing support for students estranged from their parents following the introduction of the new estrangement question

ⁱ POLAR is a measurement which classifies areas across the UK into five groups according to their level of 18 year old participation in HE. Each group represents around 20% of young people and is ranked from quintile 1 (areas with the lowest participation rates, considered the most disadvantaged) to quintile 5 (highest participation rates, most advantaged).

ⁱⁱ Calculated using the home postcode of the applicant and the main site of the provider at which they are accepted.

