

Participant Information Sheet

Project title: Exploring the experiences of estranged students in higher education: a longitudinal study

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You are invited to take part in a study that I am conducting as part of my PhD at Durham University. This study has been funded by the UKRI (Economic and Social Research Council, NINEDTP Studentship). It is a collaborative project with Stand Alone, a UK charity who supports people estranged from their families.

This study has received ethical approval from the School of Education Ethics Committee of Durham University.

Before you decide whether to agree to take part it is important for you to understand the purpose of the research and what is involved as a participant. Please read the following information carefully. Please get in contact if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. The rights and responsibilities of anyone taking part in Durham University research are set out in our 'Participants Charter':

<https://www.dur.ac.uk/research.innovation/governance/ethics/considerations/people/charter/>

What is the purpose of the study?

The aim of this study is to explore undergraduate estranged students' academic and personal experiences of higher education. The study will take place from November 2020 until September 2021, and the study is interested in capturing how estranged students experience higher education across an academic year and its vacations. It aims to gather a deeper understanding of estranged students' experiences across the year to inform university and national policy to support students without family support.

Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been invited because you are an undergraduate student who studies at a university in England and are not in your first or final year of studies. You also self-identify as having little or no contact or support from your family ('estranged'). I am interested in learning more about your experiences of university so far and for the rest of this academic year.

Do I have to take part?

Your participation is voluntary, and you do not have to agree to take part. If you do agree to take part, you can withdraw at any time without giving a reason. You are also able to withdraw temporarily from the study at any point, and re-return later in the study if you wish.

Your rights in relation to withdrawing any data that is identifiable to you are explained in the accompanying Privacy Notice.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you agree to take part in the study, you will be invited to participate in different online activities from the point of recruitment until September 2021.

You will first be asked to take part in an online briefing interview (either via Zoom, Skype, or Microsoft Teams). In this interview, you will be asked some questions about yourself and your studies, and to reflect on your university experiences so far. The interview also acts as an opportunity for you to ask questions about the study, and to introduce you to the diary platform that will be used throughout the study. The interview will last about 1 hour.

The study will then take place across four waves which you will be invited to participate in. These waves take place during the 2020/21 academic year and its vacation periods:

- Wave 1: November 2020 – January 2021
- Wave 2: February 2021 – April 2021
- Wave 3: May 2021 – June 2021
- Wave 4: July 2021 – September 2021

In each wave, you will be invited to write short diary entries about your recent university experiences. You can write as many entries as you would like, but at least once per month. These will be submitted via an online diary platform, which you will be introduced to in the briefing interview. While there will be some guiding questions, you are able to write about any aspect of your university experience that you feel comfortable sharing.

At the end of each wave, you will be invited to participate in an online interview (either via an online call using Teams or a different platform, or an email conversation). In these interviews, we will discuss your diary entries written in this wave and ask further questions about your university experiences. These interviews will last around 1 hour. You can omit any questions that you do not wish to answer, or end the interview early, without giving a reason.

Overall, full participation in the study would involve participating in 5 interviews and writing at least 9 diary entries across a 10-month timeline.

You will receive a thank-you payment of a £20 voucher for each wave you participate in. This will be paid to you after the interview has taken place.

Are there any potential risks involved?

You are free to decide whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without negative consequences.

It is possible that talking about and reflecting on your university experiences may involve encountering difficult topics and experiencing negative emotions and feelings. These may include, but are not exclusive to, your financial situation, unwanted family contact, accommodation issues and homelessness, mental health concerns, and stigmatisation within your university.

If you experience distress during any of the research activities, you are free to stop and not complete it, without negative consequence. You are able to complete your diary entries and interviews in a space and time that you are comfortable with, and you are able to omit answers to any questions without giving reason. You are also free to withdraw from the study, either temporarily or fully, without negative consequence.

After each interview, and any time on request, you will be provided with relevant resources to support avenues locally and nationally.

Your voice and experiences are valued. Your participation in this study provides greater understanding of estranged students' experiences and helps to make positive change in universities for current and future estranged students.

Will my data be kept confidential?

All information obtained during the study will be kept confidential. If the data is published it will be entirely anonymous and will not be identifiable as yours. Full details are included in the accompanying Privacy Notice.

What will happen to the results of the project?

The researcher expects to publish findings in academic journal articles and conference presentations. Any published work will be shared with you, and you will be kept informed about any emerging outputs. No personal data will be shared, however anonymised (i.e. not identifiable data) may be used in publications, reports, presentations, web pages, and other research outputs.

Durham University is committed to sharing the results of its world-class research for public benefit. As part of this commitment the University has established an online repository for all Durham University Higher Degree theses which provides access to the full text of freely available theses. The study in which you are invited to participate will be written up as a thesis. On successful submission of the thesis, it will be deposited both in print and online in the University archives, to facilitate its use in future research. The thesis will be published open access.

All research data and records needed to validate the research findings will be stored for 10 years after the end of the project.

Who do I contact if I have any questions or concerns about this study?

If you have any further questions or concerns about this study, please speak to the researcher or their supervisor. If you remain unhappy or wish to make a formal complaint, please submit a complaint via the University's [Complaints Process](#).

Thank you for reading this information and considering taking part in this study.