

**Unite Foundation
Scholarship – HEI Grants
2026/27 & 2027/28 +**

**This guidance provides important information.
Please read before filling out an expression of
interest form.**

Guidance and Information

1 What are the Unite Foundation Scholarship HEI Grants?

The Unite Foundation Scholarship has operated since 2012/13 and gives care leaver/experienced and estranged students a free ensuite student bedroom in a purpose-built halls of residence for a maximum of 3 years of university life. No rent, no bills; 365 days a year for up to 3 years of eligible study.

The HEI Grants now enable Higher Education Institutions (HEI) to deliver Unite Foundation Scholarships utilising their own halls of residence. The Unite Foundation Grants will meet 75% of contracted cost, with the HEI grantee contributing 25%.

2 About the Unite Foundation

The Unite Foundation is a charitable incorporated organisation, registered with the Charity Commission in England and Wales and the Scottish Charity Regulator. We offer a unique accommodation scholarship for care leaver/experienced and estranged young people at university. [Independent analysis undertaken by JISC](#) in 2022 examined 10 years of Unite Foundation accommodation support for estranged and care leaver students. The report indicated the statistically significant positive impact that the scholarship has on progression, completion and grade outcomes.

The Foundation itself was established in 2012 by Unite Students, a developer and manager of student accommodation. Unite Students remains the principal donor and makes an annual donation to the Unite Foundation to support scholarships, student community and advocacy work. Donations of over £18 million have been received since inception.

3 What constitutes a Unite Foundation Scholarship

Unite Foundation Scholarships provide free full year accommodation for a maximum of three years of undergraduate study. This is an **accommodation scholarship**, not a cash award, and is delivered *only* through designated halls of residence that meet the Foundation's requirements.

To date, 883 young people have been awarded a Unite Foundation scholarship with 452 having already graduated. In 2026/27 a further 70 scholarship places will be available through our national network of partnership universities. The expectation is that a minimum of 70 new will be made every new academic year.

Alongside the security of a safe and stable home at university, the scholarship provides a coherent and holistic wellbeing and welfare response, delivered through appropriately staffed accommodation settings.

NOTE: The scholarship cannot be applied to privately rented accommodation or houseshares; if a student chooses to move off campus into private housing, the scholarship is placed in abeyance until they return to designated halls in a future eligible year.

4 Why has the charity developed the HEI grants now?

The Unite Foundation continually seeks to develop the scholarships, both as a reflection of continual learning, and to widen awareness of accommodation as a proven progression and retention tool for care experienced and estranged students.

In 2017, the Unite Foundation expanded its university partner network three-fold through an open call, whilst moving to a process of direct application by students. This resulted in a significant leap in student awareness and applications. In 2023, the charity undertook the first of two pilots by open call, to test grant funding in HEI-owned halls. These pilots involved 9 universities and 42 scholarship awards alongside scholarships awarded with existing HEI partners. Whilst further analysis will be required as student outcomes are long-term, pilot learning clearly indicated outcomes comparative to current scholarships in both progression and welfare response. It also demonstrated appetite by universities to host scholarship students and to receive funding into the university sector.

This 2026 open call for 2027/28 academic year onwards will enable a wider range of universities (and therefore also their students) to receive this important scholarship support. The 'rolling submission' mechanism recognises the lead times that HEIs may need to confirm requisite strategic and resource intent; it also ensures the charity flexibility to respond to new learning or strategic emphasis.

5 Which universities are part of the 2026/27 HEI Grant network?

During 2024/25, the Unite Foundation engaged with all existing HEI members of what was a fixed partner network. The following partners will be taking up the grants in 2026/27 and will also be guaranteed participation in the 2027/28 cycle.

- + Bath Spa University
- + Edinburgh Napier University
- + Queen Mary University of London
- + University of Bristol
- + University of the West of England

6A What students are eligible for a Unite Foundation scholarship?

The scholarships are for undergraduate study only. We do not provide scholarships for postgraduate courses, foundation years, second undergraduate degrees or second attempts at a first degree.

The Unite Foundation adopts the same definitions around care and estrangement that the different national governments use so that we can understand and communicate our impact in the same policy contexts.

- + **Care Experienced (Scotland)** – The Scottish authorities define a care experienced student as being aged 16 years or over and having, at any time in their lives, been looked after by a Local Authority. To evidence this status students must share their SAAS award letter confirming Care Experience Students Bursary or alternatively provide a Local Authority letter. The Local Authority letter must explicitly state ‘care experienced’ OR ‘looked after’ OR ‘care leaver’.
- + **Statutory Care Leaver (NI, Wales, England)** – Care Leaver is a legal status that can begin at age 16 and lasts until 25 if in Higher Education. There are several different categories of Care Leaver but all legal definitions are eligible for the Unite Foundation Scholarship Scheme. To evidence this status, students must share a Local Authority letter on headed paper confirming being statutory care leaver; ideally stating which category i.e. Relevant, Former Relevant, Eligible or Qualifying. Alternatively, students can provide a copy of their most recent national (Student Finance England, Student Finance Wales or Student Finance Northern Ireland) student finance award confirming that they are in receipt of funds specifically for care leavers.
- + **Estranged from family** – Student Finance (Student Finance England, Student Finance Northern Ireland, Student Finance Wales) or Student Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS), considers a young person an independent student on the basis of being estranged from parents if they are permanently not in contact. This could be biological parents, adoptive parents, or only living parent. The student is asked to share the evidence of an award (or application for an award) as evidence of their estranged status. Please note, students who are independent due to self-funding, bereavement or marriage for example are not considered estranged.
- + **Additional eligibility criteria** – In addition to care or estranged status, applicants must also meet **all** of the following criteria:
 - Aged 25 or under on 1st September of the application year
 - Undertaking first attempt at, and only, course of undergraduate study and
 - NOT undertaking Foundation or Masters level study
 - Studying at, or holding a firm choice offer from the **Unite Foundation partner university** and
 - UK home fee status student, i.e. not an international student and

- In receipt of, or applying for, tuition fee and maintenance loans via Student Finance reflecting care leaver/care experienced/estranged student status for the **full duration of your course** (or NHS funding).

6B Eligible Years of Study and Use of Three-Year Scholarship Entitlement:

The Unite Foundation Scholarship provides up to three years of free accommodation during a student's undergraduate programme. Students may choose which three eligible years they wish to use, subject to the following rules:

- **Eligible undergraduate years:**
The scholarship can be used for any three years of eligible undergraduate study.
- **Foundation years:**
Foundation years are not eligible for scholarship support. Students on integrated programmes that begin with a foundation year may apply from Year 1 of the undergraduate degree onwards.
- **Four and five year undergraduate degrees (including Scottish programmes):**
Students may choose any three eligible years of their programme, excluding foundation years or any integrated Masters component.
- **Six year programmes with a foundation year (e.g. Gateway or extended professional routes):**
The foundation year is not eligible. Students may use the scholarship for any three eligible years from Year 1 onwards.
- **Repeat/resit years:**
Repeat or resit years are not covered by the scholarship. Students must self-fund accommodation in these years, after which the scholarship may resume for remaining eligible years.
- **Placement or study abroad years:**
Placement years are normally not funded, as students typically live away from university accommodation.
If, however, the placement is located close enough for the student to remain in their designated hall, the student may elect to use the scholarship for that year as one of their three eligible years.

This framework ensures that students on a wide range of degree structures—three year, four year, Scottish degrees, and integrated programmes—can benefit consistently from the scholarship.

7 How many scholarships are awarded each year?

In 2026/27 there are 70 Unite Foundation Scholarships available and there will be similar in 2027/28. (In the 2025/26 cycle the Foundation received 406 eligible applications therefore, just under 17% of eligible applications were successful.) An application therefore represents a chance, but not a guarantee, of a scholarship.

8 How are the Unite Foundation scholarships administered?

The Unite Foundation hosts an online platform to enable students to apply directly for a scholarship and the application window is open from January to June each cycle. Applications are simple and require only content relevant to the eligibility and selection processes.

Throughout the application process, the university partner can see and review student details via a protected and secure online portal. Universities are not expected to pre-identify specific students; applications are made centrally by students through the Unite Foundation platform. It is the role of the partner to validate factual elements like date of birth, course of study etc whilst the Unite Foundation takes ownership of checking eligibility status. For incoming students this process enables the university to reach out and deliver a strong onboarding experience for both eligible and ineligible students.

9 How are the scholarship awards decided?

The Unite Foundation Scholarship Scheme is sadly not able to provide awards for every eligible young person and applies scheme priorities to decide how awards are allocated each year. These priorities are to:

- + balance scholarships between estranged and care leaver/experienced students
- + reflect a range of academic ability and course choice
- + balance scholarships throughout the partner university network.

This means that an eligible application offers only a *chance* and not a *guarantee* of a scholarship award. No single scheme priority carries greater weight than another and applicants cannot influence the outcome of the award in any way. If an eligible application is unsuccessful initially, students are placed on a reserve list and can go through the adjustment and clearing process.

The selection of awards is conducted blind by the Unite Foundation team to a set of balanced criteria; the Foundation also takes ownership of all post-selection communication to all eligible applicants.

10 Reserve list, adjustment and clearing process

Scholarships made vacant for any reason will then be made available for students in the 'reserve' list category from the same city. Where multiple candidates exist, the Unite Foundation will select replacement scholarship students.

If no suitable candidates exist to fill vacant scholarship places in a specific location, other university partners will be contacted to explore increasing their overall scholarship populations from their 'reserve' list.

11 What are the terms of the scholarship for the student?

On being awarded a scholarship each student signs the terms of their award (via DocuSign). See the appendix below for detail on both the benefits and responsibilities for a student.

12 What expectations are there of the grantee HEI?

As with any widening participation or inclusion measures, the university would be expected to promote the scholarship as well as support existing students and applicants to navigate the application process. Annual reporting of academic progress is central to the purpose of the scholarships, and Grantees should also expect to periodically discuss with the Foundation other measures related to creating a '#HomeAtUniversity' for care experienced and estranged students. Partnership will require active engagement from operational, philanthropy and executive leadership contacts in the grantee HEI.

The Foundation requires that scholarship accommodation is located within a **staffed environment** where a direct wellbeing and welfare interface is available to students in their home setting. Staffing must be provided by **University employed personnel**, not third party suppliers, security only models, or campuswide services accessed by self-referral. Arrangements relying solely on these models are unlikely to meet the intention of the scholarship.

Accommodation used to deliver the scholarship must be single occupancy, ensuite rooms within HEI owned or agreed halls. Institutions may identify up to two example buildings at expression of interest stage, and may set defined boundaries of choice to ensure comparable pricing across rooms offered.

Early arrival for scholarship students may be offered **subject to availability**. While encouraged where it can support student need, early entry is not a required or guaranteed element of the grant.

Institutions may set **defined boundaries of room choice** to ensure broadly comparable pricing across scholarship rooms, while still allowing reasonable student choice within those limits.

Any UK HEI may apply to deliver scholarships in their own halls of residence. Institutions without their own halls may still apply where suitable Unite Students accommodation is located nearby and can be used to house scholarship students.

13 Timeline of grant application process

The timeline and important dates for the 2027/28 application process:

February – April 2026	Information and discussion phase
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4 th & 25 th March	Information webinars and template contracts shared
4 th March	2027/28 – 2029/30 bid and expression portal open
15th May	Deadline for 2027/28 bids
June	Selection of 27/28 grantees & initiation for 28/29/30
June – October 2026	27/28 Contract finalising

NOTE: Institutions may reapply in future cycles, even if previously unsuccessful.

FAQ's

Related to Accommodation:

Q: Would accommodation be eligible if halls staff are provided by a third party, if support services are available elsewhere on campus, or if buildings only have 24/7 security but no onsite wellbeing focused staff?

A: In most cases, no. For accommodation to be eligible, the Foundation expects a *staffed environment* in which scholarship students have a **direct wellbeing and welfare interface within their home setting**, rather than relying solely on campuswide support services accessed by self-referral. Arrangements where halls are operated entirely by third party staff, where support services are located elsewhere on campus, or where buildings only have security presence, typically do **not** meet this requirement. If your model differs or you believe your staffing structure may still meet the intention of the scholarship, please get in touch for a detailed discussion.

Q: Is the grant paid to the student or to the university? Is the 75% funding a contribution toward accommodation costs per student, or a set lump sum?

A: Grants are paid **annually to the university**, not to students. The funding represents a **75% contribution to the contracted cost of the accommodation** allocated to scholarship students, with the university contributing the remaining 25%.

Q: We have several buildings that we could identify or make available – would you prefer just one?

A: The expression of interest form asks for **up to two buildings** as examples of relevant halls. These examples help the Foundation understand the type of accommodation you intend to use. You may have a wider range of eligible buildings in practice, but only two are needed at the initial stage.

Related to Application:

Q: If one to four scholarship students are likely to be selected at our institution, should we plan to make an equivalent number of en-suite rooms available?

A: Yes. Once the final number of scholarships for your institution is confirmed during the contracting stage, your accommodation team will need to ringfence the corresponding number of en-suite rooms for scholarship students.

Q: Do you ask for evidence of estranged or care leaver status – and if so, what is required?

A: Yes. All applicants must provide evidence of their estranged or care leaver status as part of the scholarship application. This evidence is uploaded by the student and reviewed by the Unite Foundation.

Q: The cost share is a 75:25 split between the Unite Foundation and partner institutions. Would you consider a 50:50 split to increase the number of awards available?

A: We are not exploring alternative percentage splits at this time. The current 75:25 model is designed to encourage participation from a wide range of HEIs, including those with more constrained resources. We believe this approach widens accessibility to the scholarship and supports a diverse network of institutional partners.

Q: How quickly are applications processed, and when do students find out if they have been successful?

A: The scholarship application window opens in **January**, and awards are made in **June** following the completion of eligibility checks and the selection process. Clearing and adjustment then continue until the **end of August** to fill any vacancies that arise. Applicants are reminded to secure affordable accommodation independently, as submitting an application does not guarantee an award. The full timeline for grant awards is outlined in the accompanying slides and guidance materials.

Q: Is the 15 month lead time an issue if rents are not formally agreed until 10–11 months before the start of the tenancy?

A: No. The Expression of Interest portal is designed to capture information for up to **three cycles in advance**, and we understand that a degree of flexibility is required. We ask universities to provide any **known costs** along with an **estimated year-o-n-year inflation percentage** where final rents are not yet confirmed.

Q: What kind of evaluation of the programme is expected or provided?

A: The Unite Foundation conducts ongoing evaluation of the scholarship by tracking **progression, completion, and degree attainment** outcomes, comparing these with those of non-care leaver and non-estranged students. This analysis helps us understand the impact of the scholarship and supports continuous improvement of the programme. HEIs may also be asked to contribute relevant academic progress data as part of this evaluation process.

Related to Scholarship:

Q: We typically allocate students to accommodation late in the cycle, after A level results are released (August/September). Is this compatible with the scholarship scheme?

A: In most cases, no. The Unite Foundation scholarship application window closes well before this point, and awards are made in June, with clearing and adjustment continuing only until late August. Institutions that allocate accommodation exclusively after A-level results are therefore unlikely to be able to participate in the scheme. However, if your allocation timelines are flexible or can be adapted, please contact us for a 1:1 discussion to explore whether participation may still be possible.

Q: Is the scholarship available to international students as well as home students?

A: No. The scholarship is only available to students with **UK home fee status**; international students are not eligible.

Q: What happens if a student is awarded a scholarship but then leaves the accommodation?

A: If a scholarship student leaves their accommodation, the room should ideally be made available for re-sale in order to conserve charitable funds. Where this is not possible, the room cost is met as per the agreed contract.

Q: If a student has received the scholarship for a first undergraduate degree, can they apply again if they start another undergraduate course or a postgraduate course?

A: No. The scholarship is only available for a student's **first undergraduate programme**. It cannot be awarded for a second undergraduate degree or for any postgraduate study.

Q: Would students with January entry points be eligible?

A: January entry is not typical within the scholarship model, but eligibility may be possible where the scholarship and university application cycles align. Institutions with January start programmes are encouraged to contact the Unite Foundation for a 1:1 discussion to explore feasibility.

Q: What happens if a student's circumstances change during the grant period – for example, if they are no longer estranged?

A: The Unite Foundation does not reassess or monitor estrangement circumstances once a scholarship has been awarded. If a student has been granted estranged status by Student Finance, we accept this for the **full duration of their scholarship**, recognising that family relationships can be fluid and that reconciliation may not be stable, long term or supportive. The student remains eligible for their scholarship entitlement regardless of subsequent changes in personal circumstances.

Appendix – Student terms

Benefits of the Unite Foundation Scholarship

- + If awarded a scholarship, and on becoming a Unite Foundation Scholarship Student, you will be entitled to up to a maximum three years of free accommodation in a designated halls property.
- + The standard of free accommodation is a single occupancy, en-suite, bedroom in a purpose built student flat with a communal fitted kitchen; the flat will be shared with a mixture of other students most likely at the same university. There may be an opportunity to 'upgrade' your room but be aware that this will likely require you to make a contribution.
- + Tenancy contracts include all utilities, have wi-fi throughout and are served by maintenance and on-site support teams. Many buildings have other facilities like a laundry, fortnightly cleaning and bike storage. Flats are furnished and the buildings have areas suitable for both study and leisure.
- + For each year that you take up the free accommodation offer, your accommodation will be available for the full calendar year; 365 or 366 days on leap years. Occasionally you might need to move flats temporarily to allow for maintenance and redecorating etc.
- + You will not require a rent guarantor or an advance deposit.
- + Once you become a Scholarship Student you can choose annually if you would like to take up the free accommodation offer. Your award entitles you to up to three years accommodation. These do not need to be consecutive but you do need to remain eligible each year. Years of study that are **excluded** from support are:
 - Foundation year
 - years involving study credits toward a Masters whether that be post graduate or integrated with a Bachelors
 - resit years
 - repeat years arising as a result of changing courses
 - years in which you are aged 26 or older on 1st September
- + If you get a job in a different city during the holidays or as a placement you can apply for free housing in an alternative property – subject to availability – in your employer location.

Miscellaneous support:

Where appropriate the Unite Foundation will make available opportunities or benefits provided by our donors and supporters. This may include products, activities or other items geared toward making the most of your university experience.

Responsibilities of Foundation Scholarship Students

Administration

- + Each year that you take the benefit of free accommodation you must sign the normal rental agreement for your room and abide by the standard terms and conditions of the tenancy. Breaking the tenancy agreement will most likely result in loss of your scholarship.
- + You consent to data sharing once you join the scholarship ([read our Privacy Policy here](#)) and must ensure that the Unite Foundation team and your university always have up to date mobile and email contact details for you.
- + The Unite Foundation uses DocuSign. This is a service for digital signature of documents that many of you will already be familiar with. We will be using DocuSign to record that you have read our privacy policy ([linked here](#)) which explains how and when we share your information with other people. Your signature will also confirm you have read, understood and accept the terms of the scholarship award in the event of you being selected. You, the Unite Foundation and your university will receive a copy of this document for future reference. If the privacy policy or terms of scholarship are updated you will be notified.
- + You must respond to deadlines that you'll be given for annual room bookings.
- + Any refunds or credit occurring on a tenancy account will remain the property of the Unite Foundation or your university.

University experience

- + You should stay in regular touch with your university named contact; – they are a brilliant source of information and support for all your academic, social and financial questions whilst at university. The Unite Foundation University Partners can also manage queries about your scholarship.
- + You should respond to termly communications from the Foundation. These will be a mix of meeting the Unite Foundation team, small surveys, a competition or two and chances to take part in Unite Foundation activities like media or events. You can also get in touch with us for any questions related to the scholarship.

Scholarship evaluation

- + As a registered charity we are continuously seeking to improve the way that we work so as to have a better impact on care leaver and estranged young students. In addition to tracking student outcomes nationally, each year we will conduct a survey that collects numeric and

qualitative data. Fill this in and should be completely honest so that the feedback can lead to improvements. We hope to keep in touch with you for up to two years after you graduate. Your feedback and progress can help improve the Unite Foundation scholarships and is invaluable to our development as a charity.