

# Myths vs Reality

## Care-Experienced & Estranged Students

### Why This Matters

Assumptions shape systems. If we get the story wrong about care-experienced and estranged students, we risk designing support that misses the mark.

This document challenges some of the most common myths in order to ensure you and your university don't fall into the trap of building systems based on misconceptions.

### Myth 1: "These students just need financial support"

**Reality:** Financial support really matters, but it's not the whole picture.

Students may also lack:



A safe or stable place to live



Trusted adults for advice



Practical support (like moving or setting up a home)



Emotional connection and reassurance

Financial pressures can make it harder to access these; hours in paid work are hours not spent building relationships and connections



Money matters, but it's not the only factor; it's about stability and support systems.



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## Myth 2: “They’re independent, so they’ll be fine”

Reality: Many students are highly independent, but often out of necessity.

That independence can come with:

⚠️ Severe pressure and responsibility

🧠 Critical stress levels

🚧 Barriers to accessing help



Independence doesn't remove need, it often masks it.

## Myth 3: “They can just go home in the holidays”

Reality: For these students, there often is no safe home to return to.

This creates:

✗ Summer and holiday housing gaps

💰 Extra financial pressure

⚠️ Risk of homelessness



Universities are often designed around a “home” assumption and not everyone has one.

## Myth 4: “We already support care leavers – that covers it”

Reality: In England and Wales, “care leaver” is a narrow legal definition.

But:

Many students are care-experienced without meeting that definition

Some institutions are expanding support to be more inclusive

Estranged students may face similar challenges but fall outside care categories



Who gets support depends on how the system defines eligibility.

## Myth 5: “Estrangement is rare”

Reality: Estrangement is becoming more visible and better understood.



Universities are identifying more estranged students



Awareness across the sector is growing



Scotland and Wales are tracking this more consistently than England



This isn't a new issue; it's one we're finally seeing more clearly.

## Myth 6: “Students will ask for help if they need it”

Reality: Many students don't come forward.

Barriers include:



Stigma, fear of judgement or failure



Complex evidence requirements (especially for estrangement)



Not knowing what support exists



Low trust in systems



Support that insists on students asking misses too many.

## Myth 7: “These issues only affect a small group”

Reality: While numbers may be smaller, the impact is disproportionate.

Improving accommodation systems for these students:



Strengthens retention and student success for a high-risk student group



Improves housing inclusion for all students



Ensures support can be accessed routinely



This isn't niche, it's about fairness and system design

## Myth 8: “Estrangement is straightforward”

Reality: Estrangement is often:

Complex

Personal

Changeable over time



It doesn't always fit neatly into policies or evidence forms, but the impact on students is still real.

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## Important Reminder

The care-experienced and estranged student population has high representation of other minority characteristics including:

Global majority ethnicity

Gender expression

LGBTQ+

Disability, neuro diversity, or long-term health conditions



Students may be navigating multiple layers of challenge at once.

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## What This Means for SU Officers

Challenging myths helps you push for better systems. Ask:

? What assumptions are built into our university's policies?

? Who might be excluded by those assumptions?

? Are we waiting for students to reach crisis before pro-actively offering support?

And importantly:



Spot where policy doesn't match lived experience



Advocate for proactive, inclusive support



Use student voices to challenge misconceptions



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## Key Takeaway

Sometimes the biggest barrier within a university isn't just policy, it's misunderstanding.



When we challenge myths, we can build systems that work for students.