

University of Essex Care Experienced Graduation Assistance Fund 2025-26

The University of Essex is offering 25 awards to support Care Experienced graduates with the cost of gown hire and a photo package for their Graduation ceremony. Please note that this is not a monetary award.

If you apply for this fund, you must still [book your place through the Graduation Booking system](#) but please do not purchase a gown while your application is being processed. A gown will be reserved for you by the Graduation and Awards Team when you submit your application and will be reserved until you receive an outcome.

Terms and Conditions

Eligibility

To be eligible for the Care Experienced Graduation Assistance Fund, you will need to meet the following eligibility criteria:

- You **must** be a current or former University of Essex student eligible to attend a Graduation ceremony in July 2026.
 - You have been assessed as a Home fee-paying student and are ordinarily resident in the UK (overseas fee-paying students are not eligible)
 - You are undertaking undergraduate or postgraduate study
 - You are under the age of 25 at the start of your final year of study.

AND

- You have been in UK local authority care at any point in your life, for any period of time. This includes: Care leavers
- You have been ‘looked after’ for at least 13 weeks by a UK local authority at some point since you were 14 years old, and were in care on or after your 16th birthday; Other care experienced
- You spent time in UK local authority care (e.g. foster care or children’s home).
- You were privately fostered.
- You were ‘looked after at home’ under a supervision order.
- You were in kinship foster care (where a friend or family member becomes the foster carer). Kinship care through a formal arrangement, recognised by a Local Authority, and could be prior to a Special Guardianship Order.

***What is “Ordinary Residence”?**

For the purposes of assessing eligibility for the bursary, you must have been ordinarily resident in the UK, for the three-year period prior to commencing your course. Ordinarily resident means that you must have been habitually, normally and lawfully, residing in the UK, from choice, for the specified period. For example, the three-year period for courses starting in October 2023 is calculated as 1 September 2020 to 1 September 2023. Temporary absences during this three-year period may be permitted at the discretion of the relevant University officer. Students may be asked to provide documentary evidence to determine ordinary residence, and an assessment of whether a student meets the ordinary residence criteria will be made by the Funding Team, and their decision will be final.

Students who are not eligible

The following students are NOT eligible for this scholarship regardless of meeting the above criteria:

- Students who do not fulfil the definitions and eligibility given above.
- Students who are studying through a University of Essex Partner (e.g. Kaplan, University of Essex Online, Tavistock, etc).
- Students whose course is sponsored by an employer.
- Students who are on a distance learning programme. Students on Higher/Degree Apprenticeship courses.

Evidence

To support your application, you **MUST** provide evidence that you were in local authority care prior to starting your course.

Care leaver:

A Care leaver is defined as a person who, as a result of an order of a competent court, was in care for at least 3 months up to or after their 16th birthday and has not since been returned to the care of their parents.

Evidence would normally be a letter from your Personal Adviser/After Care Social Worker, other forms of evidence may be accepted.

Care-experienced student

You will need to provide a letter on headed paper from the local authority where you spent time in care or with another official organisation that dealt with your care at the time it took place. This letter needs to confirm that you have spent time in care and ideally what type of care this was, see options under the eligibility section.

How to apply

The deadline to apply for the fund is Friday 19th June 2026.

To apply for the Care Experienced Graduation Assistance Fund, you will need to do the following:

1. Ensure that you meet the eligibility criteria above
2. Carefully read these Terms and Conditions
3. Click [this link](#) to access the fund. You will need to register for the Blackbullion online money management website if you do not already have an account, using your external email address
4. Click the 'Funds' tab and select 'Care Experienced Graduation Assistance Fund' or use the search facility to find the fund
5. Follow the instructions to complete the application form, upload the required evidence and submit your application

Note: your application will not be assessed until you submit a full and complete application form, which includes all necessary evidence to complete an assessment.

Application and assessment process

The Care Experienced Graduation Assistance Fund is discretionary, with a limited amount of Graduation packs available.

Applications are assessed on a case-by-case basis.

We aim to complete the assessment and provide an outcome of a **full** and **complete** application and evidence within **3 weeks**. If you are required to provide further evidence as part of your application, the 3 weeks will only start from the point we have received **all** necessary evidence.

Delivery arrangements

- If eligible, you will be granted a photo package and a gown free of charge on the day of your ceremony.

Appeals

If you are dissatisfied with the decision of the outcome of your application, you can appeal within 10 working days of your outcome email from Blackbullion. Appeals should be sent to the [Funding Team](#).

Your appeal will be considered at the discretion of the Funding Manager or their nominee.

Resolution of disputes

Acceptance of the Graduation Assistance Fund constitutes acceptance of these terms and conditions. Registered students should contact the [Funding Team](#) in the first instance for guidance regarding this award. In cases not covered by the above terms and conditions, or where a student claims exceptional circumstances, or disputes a decision not to make payments due under this scheme, final appeals on decisions regarding eligibility must be made via the [Student Complaints process](#). The Academic Registrar or their nominee will review the case and their decision will be final.

NOTE: These terms and conditions apply to the Care Experienced Graduation Assistance Fund awarded to students for the academic year 2025-26. The University of Essex reserves the right to update these terms and conditions as necessary.