

advice(su) Service Level Policy

Definitions

Union Advice Service	the unit which provides information, advice, support, representation,
Department Staff	the Head of Advice, the Advice Workers, and support staff
advice(su)	the Advice Service offered
Client	any UEA student or UEASU staff member using the Union Advice Service
Conflict of interest	refers to a situation where two or more individuals on different sides of the same case seek support from the Union Advice Service
Officer	Sabbatical Officers
Chief of Staff	the senior employee of the Union of UEA Students
Management Committee	the Management Committee of the Union of UEA Students

Mission

The Union Advice Service is committed to helping students make the most of their time at University. We do this by supporting them in managing the challenges that being a student brings.

Our service is independent, fully confidential, non-judgmental and open to all UEA students.

We will ensure that all clients are provided with the highest standard of service possible, regardless of race, sex, sexuality, gender, age or belief, pregnancy/maternity and trade union membership.

We aim to empower clients to obtain all the services and rights to which they are entitled. We will do this by providing accurate and relevant information which enables them to make informed decisions and by offering support, advocacy and representation, as appropriate.

We welcome comments on how we can better meet students' support and development needs and strive to continually improve our service.

Our Services

We will:

- Provide a welcoming, courteous and non-judgmental service to all clients.
- Offer general advice in good faith based on the information clients/service users give us. It is the responsibility of clients/service users to provide us with the relevant information, and to take their own decisions based on that advice.
- Respond to clients' needs in a prompt, efficient and patient manner.
- Behave politely and respectfully to all clients and publicise our expectation that all clients behave in the same manner towards staff and to each other.
- Empower staff, clients to report behaviour which contravenes the Equal Opportunities Policy to the Head of Advice.

In extreme cases where clients are persistently abusive and disruptive, empower staff to refer them to the Head of Advice, and where this is not possible, to politely ask them to return at another time. All such occurrences should be reported to the Head of Advice (See service withdrawal.)

Develop personal links with other services on and off campus. With the approval of the client, make referrals to other services to ensure that clients have access to the best possible support.

Advice Work Policy and Procedure

We aim to:

Respond to non-confidential enquiries at the front desk, either verbally or by supplying information sheets/leaflets, on matters including:

- advice(su)'s policies and procedures.
- University and other external services.
- University policy - including the funds for which students may apply and how funds can be accessed.
- Alternative sources of support and information.

Refer clients who raise an issue which affects a group of students, locally or nationally, to the appropriate Officer and provide support for that Officer as required.

Offer appointments during Monday to Friday, staffing levels permitting. Where appropriate provide out-of-office hours appointments on request according to the availability of Advice Workers. Appointments may be face to face, via Skype, telephone or email.

Offer clients an appointment with an Advice Worker as soon as possible and within one week of their initial request, at the latest, wherever practicable.

Where appropriate refer clients to a solicitor or other specialist source of advice, and if so advise them to check what the cost of advice will be and/or whether any free legal help will be available. Where a client opts to instruct outside advisers we will hand over, on their written instruction, copies of any documents we hold relevant to a case to the new advisers and we will not normally continue to advise the client.

At the end of each appointment note the options presented to the client and record the agreed action to be taken by both the staff and by the client on the database case notes.

Only record information which is of direct relevance to the case and maintain records in accordance with the advice(su) **Privacy Policy**

Confidentiality Policy

We will:

Not disclose to any agency or individual outside of advice(su) that we have had, or are in contact with, a client, unless the express consent of the client has been given, or in the circumstances outlined below.

Maintain confidentiality within advice(su) team regarding clients' enquiries, only discussing them with other staff when absolutely necessary. Should it become necessary for staff to discuss client's cases, for example in order to ensure appropriate support, this will take place in a closed and private area and not in the reception area

Only disclose information relating to a client without their consent where there is:

1. A legal requirement to do so for example a court order, or a police request backed by a warrant.
2. In extreme circumstances where there are indications that the client poses a serious danger to themselves or to others.

In such circumstances, where a breach of confidence may be necessary advice workers will adopt the following procedure:

- Consult the Head of Advice, or in their absence the Director of Advocacy. Where available, discuss with the relevant Union Officer and agree an approach. Inform all advice(su) staff and if agreed, the UEA Student Support Service .
- Where practicable and lawful, inform the client of any action to be taken.

Only contact clients in response to a direct request from them and not in response to requests from any other individual, regardless of that person's relationship to the client unless the request is for mediation, in which case to ensure all parties are aware there is no obligation to attend.

On written request and following production of proof of identity (UEA Registration card, driving licence, passport, or birth-certificate) provide clients with copies of any correspondence produced in relation to their case, complying with the General Data Protection Regulation (Regulation (EC) 2016/679 (GDPR) and any national implementing laws, regulations and secondary legislation, as amended or updated from time to time, in the UK and then any successor legislation to the GDPR or the Data Protection Act

Maintain manual and electronic client records in accordance with the advice(su) **Privacy policy**

Act in accordance with the Social Security Administration (Fraud) Act 1997 which states that Advice Workers must not knowingly assist in any way with a fraudulent claim. Advice Workers must:

- Explain the legal implications and possible consequences of any fraudulent act and record that they would be obliged to pass on this information.
- Make it clear to the client that they have a duty to disclose their change in circumstances to any agency from which they are receiving benefit.
- If the client wishes to continue to use advice(su) service but is unwilling to give notification of the change in circumstances to the appropriate agency, consult the Head of Advice, or in their absence the Director of Advocacy regarding the possibility of ceasing to advise or assist the client with that particular claim. In these circumstances, Advice Workers can continue to support clients on any benefits they can legitimately claim or on any other matter.
- As appropriate, advise clients that it is an offence for anyone to aid, abet, counsel or procure the commission of an offence, and that whilst staff are not bound by law to report the crime and so can assure them of confidentiality, staff cannot discuss the matter further and clients wishing to do so should seek the advice of a solicitor. Clients should also be advised that staff may later be summoned as a witness if the matter goes to court. Reference to the disclosure of any criminal activity should not be recorded on the client's file without the client's permission.
- If given advance notice of a police visit to advice(su) ensure that all workers and clients are informed and so have the option to leave. Inform the Police Officers of the Unit's confidentiality policy and of our understanding that under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act, the Police do not have right of entry into the office unless they have a warrant

Conflict of Interest

If an Advice Worker becomes aware there may be a conflict of interest ensure that clients are advised as soon as possible of the Union's policy on conflict of interest.

Wherever possible we will ensure that a different advisor sees the second party to give an initial interview. After that the second party may be signposted to other services, e.g. Citizens Advice Bureau, solicitor, Shelter.

Where two or more clients seek advice separately from advice(su) regarding the actions of the other and this is known to the department, ensure the second of the students seeking advice sees an alternative advisor and advise the Head of Advice in all cases of conflict of interest. In this case involved parties may infer, but will not be informed directly, that this is a result of conflict of interest.

We will ensure that case work is reviewed at least fortnightly by the Advice Workers and that there is a periodic review by the Head of Advice, following up any areas of uncertainty, to ensure that the highest standard of advice has been provided.

Equal Opportunities

advice(su) is committed to ensuring all clients and service users are provided with the highest standard of service possible, regardless of race, sex, sexuality, age, belief or other difference.

We aim to ensure that our services are fully accessible to all members of the UEA student population and to provide them with an independent, confidential and non-judgmental service. Equally, we expect the users of this service to observe our Equal Opportunities Policy and to treat staff and other service users in a respectful manner. Where service users do not comply with the Equal Opportunities Policy we will politely inform them that their behaviour contravenes our policy and that if it persists we may feel it necessary to refer them elsewhere for support.

We offer drop-in services and provide support over the telephone and by e-mail as well as in person. As part of the Union of UEA Students, advice(su)'s structures and procedures are overseen by Student Officers and members of the Advice and Housing Direction and Oversight Board, who are elected yearly by the student body to represent student interests. Through their direction and input, and our own monitoring mechanisms, we aim to ensure that we respond to students' needs. All advice(su) staff, regardless of status or length of time with the Unit, will be given a copy of this and all of advice(su)'s policies, provided with training in their operation and be expected to comply with their content and spirit.

Confidentiality Statement

We offer a fully-independent confidential service and will not share any information a client gives us with any other organisation or individual without their express permission. Clients will only be asked to disclose non-confidential information in the initial interview at the reception desk and may choose to do this in privacy if they prefer.

We are committed to providing a high quality, confidential advice service to our clients and believe that the principles of confidentiality must be integrated into all aspects of the service from the advice itself, our dealings with other agencies, and to the storage of records. We recognise clients' right to confidentiality, both to protect their interests and to safe-guard the service. All advice(su) staff, regardless of status or length of time with advice(su), will be given a copy of this and all of the Unit's policies provided with training in their operation and expected to comply with their content and spirit.

Data Protection and security

Please see the **Privacy Policy**

Withdrawal of service policy

We aim to provide free, confidential advice to all UEA students, but there are exceptional circumstances where we may have to withdraw our services or refuse to provide a service. This decision will never be taken lightly and will always be taken in consultation with the Head of Advice and/or the Union Senior Management Team after informing the student that withdrawal/refusal of service is being considered.

This policy is intended to promote the efficient and fair operation of advice(su) and to protect the safety and wellbeing of advice(su) staff.

advice(su) may refuse/withdraw service if a student:

- uses or threatens to use violence or other aggressive or inappropriate behaviour towards a member of advice(su) staff
- seeks support for fraud or other illegal conduct
- knowingly provides misleading information to advice (su)staff
- after warning, persistently behaves in a way inconsistent with the Unions' Equal Opportunities policy
- after warning, persistently fails to keep appointments or to provide information needed to progress the student's case
- makes excessive or unreasonable demands on the service, for example insisting on continuing with a course of action which has no reasonable prospect of a successful outcome, repeatedly returns for advice on the same matter, or requests assistance beyond the expertise of staff, for example legal representation
- is receiving advice from another advice agency or is taking legal advice

Service may also be refused if there is a conflict of interest (see conflict of interest, above)

If a decision is made to withdraw or refuse service, we will:

- Notify the student in writing of the decision; and
- Where possible provide details of an appropriate alternative source of advice and assistance

Complaints Procedure

If you feel that we are not meeting the standards set out in this Service Level Policy, you may make a complaint via the UEASU Complaints procedure

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