

## **Advice & Support Centre Code of Practice and Procedures**

### **Aims of the Advice & Support Centre**

The Advice & Support Centre is a free, impartial advice and information centre, which aims to deal with both welfare and academic related issues that effect any student who is a member of the University of Bath Students' Union. The centre specifically aims to provide the following standards of service –

1. To provide a service, which is accessible to the full range of the student body.
2. To provide an up to date, relevant and accurate information service in an impartial and non-judgmental manner.
3. To maintain consistent practices when dealing with students and to ensure prompt follow up of any enquiry.
4. To provide a seamless service as far as possible when referring students to other organizations, acting as a central point of return for further support if required.
5. To treat all enquiries in confidence in line with the centre's confidentiality policy.
6. To empower students to remain in control of their own situation by exploring the various courses of action and potential consequences with them in order to help them to make informed decisions.
7. To monitor student satisfaction of the centre and to have a clearly stated complaints policy in place.
- 8 To have clearly defined and stated roles and responsibilities for the Staff, Students' Union Officers, Student Staff and Student Volunteers working in the Advice & Support Centre.
- 9 To ensure that the Students' Union Equal Opportunities policies and practices are adhered to at all times.
- 10 To maintain a commitment to continuous review and improvement of the quality of service provided.

### **Members of the Advice & Support team:**

In this document where staff members are referred to this includes the elected Students' Union Officers associated with the Advice & Support Centre i.e.; Community Officer, Advice & Community Manager, Advice & Support Advisor/Coordinator, and any student volunteers or student staff who work in the centre.

## **Code of Practice**

### Confidentiality Policy

**Anything you say to a member of the Advice & Support Centre will be kept confidential within the centre unless it is felt there is a serious risk to you or another person.**

- ◆ Members of the Advice & Support Centre may discuss cases between themselves if advice or information is needed.
- ◆ If you agree, relevant information may be shared with University staff or other people.
- ◆ Records outlining your enquiry will be kept and stored confidentially. Records are stored confidentially and securely on a centralized, secure web based application called Advice Pro. They will be used for the purpose of continuity in your case. The information will also be used for statistical purposes and service development. Your information may be reviewed for the purpose of auditing procedures and quality of advice, but any staff contracted to the Advice & Support Centre to do this shall maintain confidentiality.
- ◆ If a conflict of interest arises between students, who have both sought advice from the Advice & Support Centre over the same issue, both parties will always be informed that a conflict of interest has arisen. In these situations both parties can seek advice and information from the Advice & Support Centre although different Sabbatical Officers and Advisors would represent them. (See conflict of interest policy for further detail on this.)

### **Procedures:**

#### Contact between staff and students

1. All staff should establish immediately if a student would like to speak in private. If this is the case then they should explain as soon as possible to the client that any conversation will be treated in the strictest of confidence, but relevant information will be shared with other parties if there is felt to be a serious risk to the student or another person.
2. All staff will explain, where written records are kept, the intention of records and rights of access that the student has.

#### Record keeping

1. The Advice & Support Centre staff will keep statistical information on all students who approach the centre by means of email, phone contact or in person. This will not identify individual students. All statistical information will be produced in anonymous form and will be used to keep our resources and information relevant and up to date. This will also provide a checking mechanism for reviewing whether we are catering for the full diversity of the student population.
2. Where a student approaches with an in depth academic or welfare query a confidential case file should be started. The Advice & Support Centre uses a centralized secure web based application called AdvicePro. This system is independent from any University ICT systems and can only be accessed by the Advice & Support Centre staff.
3. The details of the confidentiality policy, right of access to the information and data protection act in relation to the storage of the information should be explained to the student. The staff member will ensure that the record sheet is signed to show agreement of information storage. If a student wishes for no written records to be kept then it must be explained that although this is possible it may well damage the quality of service provided. Any paper files will be stored in a dedicated locked cabinet.
4. Where the written records are kept they should always be filed away in the dedicated locked filing cabinet. The Advice & Support Centre will follow the University of Bath's guidelines on Data Protection which can be found at: <http://www.bath.ac.uk/data-protection/#Guide>
5. When telephoning a client clear permission to leave messages on answer machines or with individuals should be previously sought. Where permission has not been sought messages should not be left.
6. When post or email is sent out to students related to a confidential query, prior permission must be agreed to send out information and marked clearly Private and Confidential.
7. The records will be stored in a secured archive for 6 years from the last contact date. After this period the information will be shredded.

#### Breaking confidentiality

1. Where staff receive information which leads them to believe that an individual is a danger to themselves or another person, then they should discuss this with the

Advice and Community Manager or the Deputy Chief Exec. If agreed at this point then the confidence may be breached. The student will be informed that confidentiality will be broken unless a student's mental state is such that informing them could be detrimental. In exceptional circumstances the Advisor may break confidentiality without consultation.

2. Where it is established that a student is under the age of 18, permission to discuss information with parents or guardians should be sought where possible. However the parents' right for information about their child will be respected and parents kept informed of any advice given where practical. Students who are over 18 have a right to confidentiality from their parents/ guardians therefore the staff member will have to get express permission from a student to discuss issues with parents/guardians.
3. Where a conflict of interest arises the confidentiality of who is using the service will need to be breached to inform the parties that the other has approached, however all other information will remain confidential.

#### Disclosure of a crime

Staff should always make students aware of what the confidentiality policy is and when it will be broken before students discuss the nature of a confidential query.

Where staff become aware that a user may be breaking the law they must inform the student that they could be breaking the law. It should be explained to the student that the advisor can not be seen to encourage or assist in a crime and therefore they should seek advice from a solicitor before disclosing further details to the staff member.

#### Conflict of Interest Policy

**The Advice & Support Centre aims to maintain confidentiality and an impartial, non-judgmental stance when dealing with any student. Where it comes to light that we are dealing with students who may be opposing each other it is important that these standards are maintained for the individuals concerned.**

- ◆ It is necessary that where connecting parties of students approach the Advice & Support Centre to represent them, e.g. when one student is making a complaint about another student, that both parties are informed of the others contact. This is to ensure that the SU Advice & Support Centre is open and transparent about the support it is providing.
- ◆ Separate staff and SU Officers will deal with each student. If representation is required, cases shall not be discussed between these staff members once a

conflict of interest has been established in order to maintain confidence in the Advice & Support Centre.

### **Procedures**

1. Where staff suspect that a conflict of interest could potentially arise then they should discuss this with key members of staff e.g.: the Advice and Community Manager, Advice and Support Coordinator or the Advice and Support Advisor.
2. Where possible, the member of staff who initially dealt with the enquiry will remain the key contact for that student.
3. If the centre is subsequently contacted by the 2<sup>nd</sup> party, and if the person receiving the enquiry had dealt with the initial student, they must explain that they are dealing with the other party and give the student the option to see another member of staff, or where appropriate be referred to an outside agency. At this point there should be no further discussion of the cases between advisors.
4. In order to maintain confidence in confidentiality both students' should be made aware that the other student has approached the Advice & Support Centre for advice and the maintenance of confidentiality reiterated to both students. Either student is free to discontinue using our service at this point and seek other assistance where it is available.

### Complaints policy

**The Advice & Support Centre staff are committed to providing a professional service to a high standard, however, if a student has a complaint about the service they receive in the centre, they can email or make an appointment with the Advice and Community Manager to discuss the situation. If the complaint is about the Advice and Community Manager, they should speak to the Students' Union Deputy Chief Exec.**

### **Procedure:**

1. Where possible the complaint should be resolved at a local level by the Advice and Community Manager, unless the complaint is directed at them.
2. Where a complaint can not be brought to a satisfactory conclusion at a local level this issue will be referred to the SU Deputy Chief Exec. Staff employed by the University are subject to the grievance and disciplinary procedures laid down by the University.

3. Where the complaint is against an elected officer the issue shall be referred directly to the Students' Union President.

Access to service policy

**The Advice & Support Centre is committed to providing a service, which is accessible to the full range of the student body. All students can expect to be treated with equal regard receiving the same standard of service based on our procedural guidelines. We will actively track the usage of the centre and canvas opinion from the student body about the accessibility of the Advice & Support Centre.**

- ◆ All staff shall adhere to the Students' Union Equality of Opportunity and Safe Space policy. We are opposed to all forms of discrimination and guarantee that all students will be treated with equal regard.
- ◆ As far as possible confidential record files will contain information relating to nationality, ethnic origin, age and sex in order to monitor the range of students accessing the centre. This information will remain anonymous and will only be used to monitor and improve service access of the centre.
- ◆ An annual survey will be conducted for all students at the University of Bath to gain feedback on the access to service. This will be anonymous and will be used with the specific intention of improvement of service.
- ◆ The Advice & Support Centre will actively promote and publicize the centre and its services to student body, throughout the University of Bath on an ongoing basis.

**Procedure:**

1. All staff will adhere to the Equal Opportunities and Safe Space policy in their daily working practices.
2. Staff shall answer queries promptly and keep students informed of progress of their enquiry.
3. All staff shall adhere to the policies and procedures laid down by the Advice & Support Centre and that are specified in their job description and/ or operational handbook, which specifies the level of service they are required to provide to each student.
4. The Advice and Community Manager will ensure that an in depth survey of student satisfaction shall be carried out a minimum of once a year. Feedback from all students will also be sought through the University Student satisfaction survey,

which includes a section on the Advice & Support Centre. This information will be used to form part of the development plan for the.

### Commitment to Quality Policy

**Advice & Support Centre staff are committed to providing the students with a professional, high standard, quality confidential service which is impartial.**

- ◆ Students can expect to be treated with respect and courtesy.
- ◆ Students can expect that their queries will be dealt with confidentially (in line with confidentiality policy).
- ◆ Students can expect members of staff to provide up to date, accurate, information, in an impartial and non-judgmental manner.
- ◆ Where a member of staff is not able to answer a query then students can expect to be informed of the boundaries of knowledge and referred to another member of staff or appropriate support agency.
- ◆ The Students' Union is an Investor in People (IIP) accredited organization and is committed to continued staff development to provide the best standards of service possible.
- ◆ Students can expect that the services provided by the Advice & Support Centre are monitored and evaluated to ensure a commitment to continuous improvement and relevance to the student body.

### **Procedures:**

#### Ensuring quality of Advice

1. All staff shall adhere to the policies and procedures laid out in this document. This document shall be reviewed every academic year in order to update and maintain relevance.
2. Staff will be sensitive to the cultural, political and religious background of a student and will allow the student to formulate solutions based on the full range of options and outcomes that have been discussed with them.
3. The annual survey and any complaints shall form an integral part of development plans for the centre.
4. Development plan performance indicators and budgets will be set annually and reviewed regularly through the year at team meetings.
5. Each staff member will take responsibility for the follow up or hand-over of a students case and will complete any necessary records required according to the student's situation, (as detailed in the Confidential Record keeping section.)
6. Staff members will only give advice and information based on their experience, training and level of competence. Anything beyond this should be referred to

another advisor or appropriate organization. The nature and level of service a student can expect from a new organization should be explained as far as possible, including any possible charges which may be associated with that organization.

7. The Advice & Support Centre confidential case files will be audited on an annual basis. This process will aim to ensure that procedures have been followed as described in this document and that appropriate advice has been given. Results shall be fed back to staff as part of appraisal (unless there is a need for immediate remedial action).

#### Effective signposting and referral of students

1. A student referred to either an internal or external organisation will be given any relevant information that is held about that organization and an appointment made and recorded for the student, or details for making an appointment given to the student.
2. Records of any referrals made internally or externally are to be recorded with student's case files.
3. Where a student is referred to an organisation and the staff member is still involved in the case, then the staff member will inform the student that they will continue to track and advocate for that student. Where the advisor is not able to advise the student further, referring them on, it should be made clear to the student that they are able to return at any time for further support in the future, or if they are not satisfied in any way with the referred agency.
4. All students will be given the opportunity to feed back on how they have found other services in the Advice & Support Centre online survey.
5. Advice & Support Centre staff will liaise with internal referral organisations through meetings with the University Student Services to look at common themes of advice and to share good practice. All internal support services subscribe to University policy on Equality of Opportunity and Confidentiality.
6. All external organisations will be drawn from reputable sources i.e.: from the legal services group, registered Charities, local council, or police lead initiatives, National Health run organisations, professional bodies. As far as possible Advice & Support Centre staff will establish working relationships with the organisations through liaison.

#### Ensuring up to date information and resources

1. The Advice & Support Centre will maintain affiliations and subscriptions with professional bodies and organisations who are relevant to the centre to keep up to date with relevant client information and resources.
2. The Advice & Support Centre staff, in particular the Advice and Support Coordinator and the Advice and Support Advisor, will network with relevant organisations to obtain up to date expert advice and information for students.

3. The information the Advice & Support Centre holds will be reviewed annually in terms of the nature of the information and how up to date it is by the Advice and Support Coordinator and the Advice and Support Advisor. Both of these individuals will also update information on an ongoing basis as required.
4. The Advice & Support Centre will review information on their webpages on an annual basis to ensure that information and links to other organizations are relevant and up to date.
5. As part of the feedback and the statistical information collected, the Advice and Community manager will plan what new information/resources should be sourced and relevant training to be given.

#### Ensuring staff are equipped to provide a professional service

1. It is the responsibility of the Advice and Community Manager to identify training needs for staff in the centre.
2. Staff members will receive regular supervision with their line managers and will have the opportunity to identify with their line manager training requirements, problems, queries and areas for development. Through supervision, staff will also have the opportunity to feedback any concerns or queries they have. Student Staff will have regular training and reviews of progress.
3. Each member of staff will have an up to date job description and a clear view of the structure and responsibilities of other members of staff including the reporting structure.

#### Ensuring the effectiveness of the Policy and Procedures

The policy and procedures will be reviewed and updated on an annual basis, unless otherwise required by the Advice and Community Manager. Date of amendments will be recorded and kept with this document.

Policy last reviewed: January 2018