

## Advice SU – Code of Practice

### Our core principles

#### **Free**

Our service is free of charge. At no time will anybody be expected to pay for advice, representation or information.

#### **Confidential**

Advice SU is committed to providing a confidential service to students. No information regarding a student shall be given directly or indirectly to any third party, without that student's prior expressed consent to disclose such information \*.

\*There are a limited number of situations where it will be appropriate for Advice SU to pass on information without student consent. These are detailed later in this document.

#### **Impartial**

Advice SU advisers offer impartial advice and information. All options for resolving difficulties will be explored, i.e. the service will not be limited or influenced by political, religious or cultural factors.

#### **Non-judgmental**

Advice SU advisers will help and advise all students with difficulties, regardless of how those difficulties arose.

#### **Independent**

The advice given by advisers is independent of any outside influence or external body, including the University.

#### **Equal Opportunities**

Advice SU advisers seek to ensure equality of access to the service and will not discriminate, for example, on the grounds of colour, race, religion, nationality, marital status, gender, sexual orientation, disability or age. To this end we are fully committed to the University's policy regarding Equal Opportunities. Full details of this policy can be found on the University's website [www.qub.ac.uk](http://www.qub.ac.uk).

### Who can access our service?

- All full and part time students of Queen's University Belfast are entitled to access the full services of Advice SU.
- Prospective students of the University – at the discretion of Advice SU staff, advice and information on student funding, Social Security benefits, accommodation options, facilities and services that are available at the University.
- Former students – at the discretion of Advice SU staff, students who have graduated or withdrawn from the University *may* be assisted.

## **Other enquiries and empowerment**

As one of the primary aims of the service is to enable and empower students to act for themselves, third parties (such as parents/guardians of students) will be asked to encourage the students to contact Advice SU directly.

Advice SU is happy to signpost parents/guardians to other sources of information or to help them find publicly available regulations for Queen's and other organisations, although we will only discuss students' issues with the students themselves unless we have written permission from the student.

Parents/guardians may accompany the student into meetings with the adviser if the student wishes, on the understanding that they are present only to provide moral support. In this case, advisers will initially meet with the student alone before inviting the parent/guardian to join them. Parents/guardians may not attend meetings with advisers unless the student is present.

All other enquirers seeking advice for themselves, including University staff and members of the public, will be signposted or referred to the most appropriate Queen's service or department, local advice agency, such as the Citizens Advice or local solicitors.

## **Opening Hours & Appointments**

Advice SU is open for appointments during the following hours:

- Monday 9.30am – 4.30pm
- Tuesday 9.30am – 4.30pm
- Wednesday 9.30am – 4.30pm
- Thursday 9.30am – 1.00pm
- Friday 9.30am – 4.30pm

Advice SU operates three drop in sessions during these hours:

- Monday and Wednesday 2.00pm – 4.30pm
- Friday 9.30am – 12.00pm

During drop in sessions students can be seen without an appointment, with at least one adviser available during drop in times. Students are advised that this is a 'first come, first served' facility and they may need to wait to be seen.

Advice SU advisers recognise the demands of modern student life. We will endeavour to be as flexible as possible around making appointments for students. Appointments may be available outside the advertised opening hours where appropriate.

Any changes to the advertised opening hours and drop-in service will be communicated to students and staff.

## **Contacting Advice SU**

### **Clients can access our service in the following ways:**

- In person at our offices on the second floor of the Students' Union Building, University Road.
- By email – studentadvice@qub.ac.uk
- Via an enquiry form on our website, for example, <http://www.qubsu.org/AdviceSU/GeneralAdvice/>
- By telephone to individual advisers' numbers

## **Complaints Procedure**

Queen's Students' Union aims to provide a professional and helpful service to all our members, but if you feel that something has gone wrong, then students should utilise the Students' Union Complaints Procedure; details can be found on the Students' Union website, [www.qubsu.org](http://www.qubsu.org).

## **Case Recording**

Advice SU aims to provide a professional, high quality advice service for students. To help us provide this service, we need to ensure cases are recorded for statistical reasons as well as to provide a record of a students' case for continuity, should they seek further support from us.

Advice SU uses an electronic case management system called AdvicePro. This is a secure case management software solution provided by ACM Solutions in conjunction with AdviceUK. All the personal data, documents and case notes held on the system are only accessible to Advice SU advisers. See section on Confidentiality for exceptions to this.

We recognise that the nature and complexity of cases varies enormously, from straightforward, one-off enquiries to matters of substance having a significant impact on a student's rights and entitlements.

In all instances, advisers will create a case file on AdvicePro. With the student's full knowledge and consent, the adviser will keep a record of the enquiry, advice offered and action taken. These details along with the student's name, student number and other relevant information will be kept on the AdvicePro database.

The case file should provide a summary of the enquiry, advice given to the user and any action taken. It will also record necessary client information. Copies of correspondence (including emails) sent and received, and other relevant information, should be attached to the file.

Advisers will ensure that the advice given to clients is accurate and complete and that case recording procedures are being followed. Notes should be written in a way which allows other advisers to read the case file and learn what has taken place. This may be for the purposes of quality control or continuation of assistance on the same issue.

Advice SU will generate reports and statistics from all cases and enquiries Advice SU receives – these statistics will be used to report on our work and inform Queen's

Students' Union campaigns. Individual students and cases will not be able to be identified from these reports.

Students can request access to their personal case notes and other information held on them at any time.

### **Conflict of Interest**

#### 1) Students

If a student who has a dispute with another student approaches Advice SU, advisers will provide advice as normal, making it clear to the student that if the other party (or parties) visits Advice SU, they will be entitled to the same level of service. However, confidentiality about either student's visit will be adhered to.

If both parties in a dispute approach Advice SU, they will each work with a different adviser. The advisers concerned will not discuss the case with each other, but both may discuss the case with another adviser within Advice SU.

#### 2) Institution

In all cases, students will be given advice that is in their own best interest. Advisers will always act in the best interests of the student and maintain the autonomy of Advice SU.

#### 3) Students' Union

Advice SU advisers will not advise or represent students on Students' Union matters, due to conflict of interest.

### **Withdrawal of Service**

Advice SU staff will withdraw our service from a student in the following circumstances:

- Perceived or actual violent threats to staff
- Persistent abusive behaviour or language
- Deliberately misleading or providing inaccurate information as to the true nature of their situation
- Requesting that an adviser colludes with fraud or illegal activity or acts outside their remit

Advice SU staff may withdraw our service from a student in the following circumstances:

- Persistent failure to keep appointments or to inform staff if they are unable to keep appointments
- the client becomes overly demanding and insistent on being dealt with on their terms instead of those of the adviser
- Persistent failure to follow agreed courses of action
- Where we have exhausted all practical avenues of advice or there are no further options available
- For any other reason where it is warranted

## Signposting and Referrals

Where the help or advice the student needs is beyond the remit of Advice SU staff, or where we have refused or withdrawn our service from a student for a specific reason, we will offer to refer or signpost the student to the most appropriate agency.

There will be no obligation on the part of the student to agree to a referral taking place but, where they wish, we can facilitate this.

If Advice SU is signposting a student to another agency, information about the agency will be given to the student and the student will be advised to contact the agency themselves.

## Role of Sabbatical Officers in providing advice

The Queen's University of Belfast General Regulations for Undergraduate and Postgraduate students outline that advice and support to students is available from the Students' Union. This includes the right to be accompanied to meetings/hearings/panels etc by a Sabbatical Officer or a member of University staff.

### **Referrals between Advice SU and Sabbatical Officers**

It is acknowledged that Sabbatical Officers will be a point of contact for students with an advice query. It is also acknowledged that assisting individual students is an important function of a Sabbatical Officers role.

Advice SU, working within the ethos of a democratic organisation, aims to support Sabbatical Officers in this part of their role by operating under the following process:

- The process of referral between Sabbatical Officers and Advice SU will be clarified through sabbatical handover/induction and regular scheduled meetings with Advice SU staff.
- At all times the process of referral must operate in line with relevant Data Protection legislation. To this end before either an Advice SU adviser or an elected Sabbatical Officer makes a referral to the other team, they will obtain express written permission from the student to pass their details to the relevant individual within the team.
- Sabbatical Officers provide advice and guidance in line with their Code of Practice, **this is currently being finalised and will be added as an appendix to this document as soon as possible.**

## What Advice SU cannot do

- We do not provide counselling. The University has a professional counselling service available. Where it is identified that counselling may be appropriate we will refer or signpost the student to that counselling service.

- We do not advise outside of our field of competence and expertise, however we will refer or signpost students to advice providers where appropriate.
- We will never misrepresent a student's circumstances or knowingly pass on false information.
- We do not advise third parties who wish to take action against students, although we may advise a third party on their obligations and a student's rights.
- We will not advise or represent a student on a matter where we are aware they are already being assisted by another agency on the same matter.
- We do not normally provide advice outside of our place of work or outside of normal working hours.

### **Confidentiality**

At all times Advice SU will operate within the Queen's University of Belfast's Data Protection Policy, which can be found here

<http://www.qub.ac.uk/home/Discover/About-Queens/Leadership-and-structure/Registrars-Office/FileStore/Fileupload,732891,en.pdf>.

Advice SU is committed to providing a confidential service to all its users. Nothing a student tells us will be shared with any other department, organisation or individual outside Advice SU (including parents, guardians, other relatives, the University and housemates) without a student's express permission, unless:

- required to do so by law
- it is necessary to ensure service users and staff safety
- we believe there is the risk of serious harm to that student or others

### **Definition of confidentiality**

Advice SU understands confidentiality to mean that no information regarding a student shall be given directly or indirectly to any third party external to Advice SU, without that person's prior expressed consent to disclose such information.

Advice SU staff need to be able to discuss individual cases in a confidential space, and all Advice SU staff have access to written and electronic information about clients.

We recognise that students should have confidence when using Advice SU's services in a confidential manner. We will ensure all students are given confidential interview space and will ensure appropriate mechanisms are used and actions are taken to ensure no breach of confidentiality can occur inadvertently (e.g. ensuring case notes are not left on view, or information about individual students is not on computer screens when other people come into the interview room).

We will not confirm the student's presence in Advice SU or use of our service without the student's consent.