

# Union Advice

## Service Policy Handbook

### 2019/20

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# Policy and Procedure Updates

## 1.0 Policy Statement

- 1.1 Unlike most City Students' Union policies, in order to comply with the Advice Quality Standard Framework (G2.2) a review of each policy will be completed annually to ensure they are still suitable for the service and service-user needs. The SU Advice Manager will be responsible for completing the annual policy review.
- 1.2 Each policy within the Union Advice Manual will be reviewed and updated where necessary.
- 1.3 The Union Advice team will be informed of any changes during team meetings or by e-mail. The minutes from Advice Team meetings will be kept within a shared folder for advisers to refer to at their convenience.
- 1.4 As standard within the Students' Union, each policy will state:
  - Which body approved the policy
  - The date of approval
  - The date of implementation
  - The date of the next review
  - Who is responsible for implementation of the policy
  - Who is responsible for interpretation of the policy
- 1.5 A Union Advice Manual comprising all Union Advice-specific policies will be collated annually. The manual will be hosted and visible on the SU website, and will be circulated among the Union Advice team.
- 1.6 The manual will include a tracker stating the date that each policy or procedure is due for review.
- 1.6 For cases opened under the previous year's Union Advice Manual, case-specific policy and guidance from that year's Manual will apply until the case is closed.

# Service Standards and User Agreement

This Service Standards and User Agreement will define what you (the service user) can expect from our service, as well as what we (the service) will expect from you as a service user.

By completing a Case Form you agree to abide by the Service Standards and User Agreement as outlined below.

## Service limitations

The Union Advice service will be available to current City, University of London (the University) students, who are members of City, University of London Students' Union (the Union).

If you have:

- withdrawn from your studies;
- been withdrawn;
- graduated;
- been expelled;
- or have chosen to terminate your membership of the Union;

then Union Advice will continue to offer you services up to **12 months** from the date that you ceased to be a Union member. This period will not be extended or negotiated.

Union Advice will not provide advice to students who study at the University's partner institutions unless such students are members of the City, University of London Students' Union.

## What you can expect from us and our obligations

### 1. Data Protection

Union Advice will abide by the Union's [Data Protection Policy](#) and [Privacy Policy](#).

These outline your rights under the General Data Protection Regulations 2018.

### 2. Authority to Act

Union Advice will aim to empower students to act on their own cases. However, sometimes Union Advice may agree with you to act on your behalf.

By signing this agreement you agree that your Adviser may, from time to time, discuss your case with members of University or Union staff or other authorised third parties. As far as possible, all discussion will be agreed with you ahead of time.

You also agree that in some situations your Adviser may act on your behalf. As far as possible, any action on your behalf will be agreed with you ahead of time. Such action may include but will not be limited to:

- Communicating with University members of staff;
- Negotiating and advocating for you in University meetings and panels;
- Submitting forms;
- Submitting evidence;
- Requesting information relevant to your case from the University.

When Union Advice or its Advisers act on your behalf, they will maintain a policy of confidentiality (detailed below).

### **3. Representation and Advocacy**

Union Advice and its Advisers may represent and advocate for students at meetings and panels held under the Appeals against Assessment Board Decisions policy, the Academic Misconduct Regulations, Complaints Procedure, Student Disciplinary Procedure, as well as some other informal and conciliatory meetings within the University.

Such representation will be subject to the availability of an Adviser, and at least 48 hours' notice will normally be required in order to allow time for the Adviser to familiarise themselves with the case.

Union Advice may not be able provide representation in every case, based on the complexity of the case or caseload burden, even with 48 hours' notice. In such circumstances, Union Advice will work with you to try to have your meeting postponed or rearranged, or we will provide you with advice so you feel confident in attending alone or with a friend.

### **4. Confidentiality**

Union Advice will strictly adhere to our [Confidentiality Policy](#).

All information that students share with Union Advice will be treated with the strictest confidence.

An Adviser may share information with another Adviser within Union Advice but will not share any information with a third party outside the Union Advice without your full consent.

All face-to-face appointments will be conducted in a dedicated private space and any e-mail correspondence will be accessible to authorised Union staff only.

The Union Advice Confidentiality Policy recognises that occasions may arise where Advisers feel they need to breach confidentiality. Union Advice will recognise that any breach of confidentiality may damage the reputation of the service and will therefore treat any decision to breach with utmost seriousness.

Circumstances where an Adviser may feel they need to breach confidentiality may include:

- Situations involving a high risk of serious actual/potential self-harm or harm to others.

- Conflicts of interest which necessitate an Adviser informing one or more client(s) that they cannot provide advice services or that they can no longer act on the clients' behalf. By their very nature, such conflicts will draw attention to the fact that Advisers are acting for the other parties and/or that other parties have sought advice from the service.
- Violations of the law, or situations wherein not to breach confidentiality would break the law; for example, under the Prevention of Terrorism Act 1989, it would be an offence to fail to give information which would help to prevent acts of terrorism or apprehend a terrorist.

Breaches of confidentiality are covered in more detail in our [Confidentiality Policy](#).

### **5. A free service**

Union Advice will provide a free service to all members of City, University of London Students' Union.

### **6. An independent service**

The Union is its own charitable organisation and all advice offered from Union Advice will be independent of all external or third parties including City, University of London.

### **7. An impartial service**

Our Advisors will be independent but impartial. Union Advice will not operate a service that is unnecessarily adversarial with the University.

Union Advice will give impartial advice to students. We will explore all options for the resolution of your case with you, while ensuring any consequences of your available options are explained without prejudicing you to a particular viewpoint.

Union Advice will strictly advise on University policy. Union Advice will advise on the point of view of the University as an institution and its policies alongside exploring your options and your point of view.

### **8. An empowering service**

Union Advice attempt to empower students to make their own decisions about the best way forward through any given advice.

Union Advice will support and empower you to take control of your situation. We prefer support you to take necessary actions yourself and will not normally act on your behalf.

### **9. A non-judgemental service**

Union Advice will assist and advise all students and consider all cases regardless of their current situation or how it arose. We will not pass judgement.

We will not ask questions or ask for information unless we feel it is relevant to the case.

## **10. Equality and Respect**

Union Advice will provide equal access to all students and not discriminate against a service user on any grounds, compliant with the Union's [Equality and Diversity Policy](#).

## **11. An honest service**

Advisers will provide honest advice and guidance on academic issues and university procedures based on experience and knowledge of the regulations.

Advisers will not guarantee any outcomes for a given case. We will not unduly speculate or base advice pertinent to a given case on speculation.

We will only provide guidance and advice based on criteria and rules set out in the policy of City, University of London.

Advisers will not provide any advice on issues outside their field of competence. If an adviser cannot give advice on any issue then they may refer the student to another source of assistance.

## **12. A responsive service**

Union Advice will aim to respond to emails within three working days and will let you know if we expect to take longer to provide you with a response.

Union Advice will aim to provide you with written notes within three working days of any appointment outlining the details of the meeting as well as what advice was offered.

The first working day will be counted as the day *after* the appointment is held or the Case Form/email is received by Union Advice.

## **What We Expect from You**

### **1. Commitment**

Union Advice will expect you to arrive for any appointments in good time. Appointments will run for a maximum 45 minute duration.

Failure to arrive within 10 minutes of the appointment time will result in the loss of the appointment and you may not be seen for a full week after dependent upon appointment availability.

For the avoidance of doubt: Union Advice will cancel any appointment if you arrive any later than ten minutes after the appointed time agreed for the meeting.

Union Advice will expect you to notify us if you know you will be unable to attend or are going to be late. Where you are likely to be more than 10 minutes late we will not be able to hold the appointment or wait for you; it is likely you will be advised to rebook.

Union Advice may discontinue, limit, or otherwise restrict face-to-face advice if you miss three or more appointments.

You will be expected to bring any documents, e-mails, letters, and other materials that are relevant to your case as the details in these items may be central to the advice we provide.

Union Advice will expect students to carry out any course of action agreed between them and an Adviser. Failure to carry out agreed actions or to present relevant documents and information may considerably delay any further action in the case and may be seen as placing excessive demands on Union Advice resources. Such failure may lead to the withdrawal of service as noted in our Case Closure Policy (3.1).

## **2. Responsibility**

Union Advice will encourage you to take responsibility for your studies and your case. This means we will expect you to write your own statements and correspondence and speak for yourself in meetings and hearings.

The ultimate responsibility for the progress of any case will rest with you.

Union Advice will expect you to submit forms and take necessary action on your case within set time limits as per University policy or agreement with your Adviser. You will ensure that you follow advice provided in a timely way.

Union Advice will make sure you feel confident to act on your case by providing you with guidance, support and feedback at every step.

## **3. Honesty**

Union Advice will expect you to provide honest and accurate information pertinent to your case. In order for us to provide accurate and relevant advice, we will request you provide all of the facts and information surrounding your circumstances. We appreciate that your circumstances may include sensitive information. Such information will remain confidential.

Failure to disclose all relevant information in good time may affect the outcome of your case.

As per our Case Closure policy (3.1), if we find that a student deliberately withholds information material to their case or lies on issues material to the case we may withdraw service from you.

## **4. Communication**

The University and other third parties may communicate with you directly. Union Advice will expect you to keep us informed of any pertinent communications from the University or other third parties throughout the duration of your case.

## **5. Respect**

We ask that you be patient when corresponding with your adviser, who will be managing a high number of other urgent cases alongside yours. If you are waiting for an email response or call back, please bear this in mind and allow your adviser reasonable time to respond.

We will expect all students to treat our staff with respect. You will be expected to adhere to all relevant University policies around conduct when using our service.



Failure to behave in a respectful manner may result in a withdrawal of service as per our Case Closure Policy (3.1).

## **Feedback and Complaints**

We will look to improve Union Advice and will welcome feedback from students. Students may write to us to let us know how we can improve our service or may fill in our online survey here: <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/FGQLRTE>

You can find details of our complaints procedure in the Bye Laws of our Constitution which can be accessed on our website.

# Union Advice Confidentiality Policy

## 1.0 Policy Statement

- 1.1 City, University of London Students' Union Advice service (Union Advice) is committed to providing a confidential advice service and believes our members deserve the right to confidentiality; to protect their interests and to safeguard our services.
- 1.2 Union Advice recognises that confidentiality is essential in any situation where personal information and problems are being shared; without this, individuals will not feel safe to talk or share their problems and experiences with their Adviser.
- 1.3 Union Advice operates independently from City, University of London and any other external organisation.
- 1.4 Student details will not be released to any member of staff outside of the Union Advice or to any other organisation or individual without the client's expressed permission.
- 1.5 Union Advice understands confidentiality to mean that no information regarding a student shall be given directly or indirectly to any third parties outside the service without the student's consent.
- 1.6 No details will be given to the University that would enable any student to be identified without their consent.
- 1.7 All students should be able to access our service confident that no other person will know that they have used our services. Union Advice will not confirm the student's presence in the service without obtaining the client's consent.
- 1.8 Union Advice recognises that students need to feel secure when accessing our services. We will ensure that all students are seen in an appropriate and private interview space.
- 1.9 Our policy will be stated to any third party enquirer and requests for information will be declined.

## 2.0 Legislation

- 2.1 Union Advice will monitor this policy to ensure that it meets statutory and legal requirements including the General Data Protection Regulations 2018 and Anti-Terrorism and Security Act 2001.

## 3.0 Confidentiality in case recording

- 3.1 Advisers will record information that is relevant to the students' case and information collected for diversity and statistical purposes.
- 3.2 Students' can choose to remain anonymous and they should discuss this with the adviser during their first meeting. The adviser should advise the student whether maintaining anonymity will affect the level of advice the Advice Service is able to

provide. If a student wishes to remain anonymous, the adviser will record their case under forename and replace the surname with "Anonymous". The client will be given the case reference number so their case file can be accessed in the future.

- 3.3 The adviser will ensure any paper documentation is kept in lockable cabinets unless being used and should be destroyed once it is digitised. No confidential information should be kept on desks either in Advice rooms or on permanent work stations. Keys to lockable cabinets should be kept on the cabinet owner's person or out of public view.
- 3.4 Advisers will log off the computerised Case Management System when not in use. The login details of the case management system will not be shared with anyone.
- 3.5 Computers should be locked when advisers are not at their workstation.

#### **4.0 Confidentiality and sharing information**

- 4.1 Advisers will ensure that actions involving **any** third party are agreed and the student has completed or signed the Case Form. The adviser will tick the Case Form box on AdvicePro to indicate a Case Form has been signed. Case Forms are logged against each client case file in AdvicePro.
- 4.2 Union Advice will not share any information with departments within City, University of London Students' Union unless given permission to do so by the student. For example, if a student raises an issue with an elected Officer and they then referred the student to the advice service we will not provide the Officer with updates on the case unless if the student requested that we do so.
- 4.3 In the case of students who have been removed from their course, Union Advice has an obligation to let University Security know that the student in question has an appointment with the the service and so will be on campus at those pre-arranged times. Union Advice will not do this without consent, so if consent is not given the student may be restricted to phone and email advice only. Union Advice will not breach confidentiality by telling Security any more about the appointment than the times.
- 4.4 Staff working within Union Advice will adopt the practice of challenging any information not treated as confidential and will encourage all connected institutions and individuals to do the same.
- 4.5 Students will be asked (on the Case Form / during the appointment) for permission for us to leave a message on their mobile / home telephone. If somebody was to answer the phone who was not the student we would not make them aware of where we are calling from, we would state that we would call back another time.
- 4.6 All details of expressed consent should be recorded on the case record in AdvicePro.
- 4.7 The client has the right to withdraw consent to share at any time, and will need to do so in writing.

## **5.0 Access to information**

- 5.1 Student information (held on the AdvicePro case management system and in paper form where applicable) should only be accessed by staff within Union Advice. However, client information and case records may be accessed and audited for quality assurance purposes by a person/organisation appointed by City, University of London Students' Union.
- 5.2 Further rights with regard to accessing information can be found in the [Privacy Policy](#) and [Data Protection Policy](#).

## **6.0 Recording statistics and monitoring information**

- 6.1 Statistics may be compiled for research, service development and reporting purposes.
- 6.2 Union Advice is committed to effective statistical recording of services provided to enable us to monitor take up of service by specific groups and to identify any recurring welfare and academic-related issues.
- 6.3 It is the SU Advice Manager's responsibility to ensure all statistical records given to third parties, including the University, are produced in an anonymous form and all identifying student details will be withheld.
- 6.4 To help improve the work we do and to meet the requirements for membership to our membership organisations, we may share statistical data and monitoring information with selected external agencies, such as, but not limited to City, University of London, the National Union of Students (NUS), and AdviceUK. All statistical records are produced in an anonymous form where clients cannot be identified.

## **7.0 Breaches of confidentiality**

- 7.1 Union Advice recognises that occasions may arise where Adviser's assess that they need to breach confidentiality, any breach of confidentiality will considered with great care and the following procedure must be followed:

- 7.2 Circumstances where an Adviser may assess that they need to breach confidentiality, in exception to this policy, include:
- Where the Adviser assesses that there is an issue of serious current/potential harm, self-harm or harm to others or a situation of child abuse.
  - There is a conflict of interest which necessitates an Adviser informing one or more client(s) that they cannot provide advice services or that they can no longer act on their behalf. By its very nature, this will draw attention to the fact that they are acting for the other party and/or the other party has already sought advice.
  - Where not to do so would break the law; for example under the POCA Laws regarding Money Laundering or the Anti-Terrorism Crime and Security Act 2001 it is an offence to fail to give information which may help to prevent acts of terrorism or apprehend a terrorist.
- 7.3 Where an Adviser feels that there is an issue of serious current/potential harm, self-harm or harm to others, or a situation of child abuse, the [Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy and Procedure](#) should be followed.
- 7.4 In all circumstances where an Adviser feels confidentiality should be breached the following steps must be taken:
- The Adviser should raise the matter immediately with the SU Advice Manager or an appropriate member of the senior management team if they are not available. In the case that the SU Advice Manager is required to break confidentiality, they should discuss with their line manager. If they are not available they would follow the same process with the Chief Executive.
  - The Adviser should discuss the issues involved in the case and explain why they feel confidentiality should be breached and what would be achieved by breaching confidentiality. The line manager is responsible for discussing the options available. This discussion should be recorded in the case notes.
- 7.5 The line manager or appropriate member of the senior management team is responsible for making a decision on whether confidentiality should be breached.
- 7.6 The line manager responsible for making the decision to breach confidentiality is responsible for ensuring all activities are undertaken or that the Safeguarding Policy and Procedure is followed.
- 7.7 If the line manager, does not agree to breach confidentiality, the advisor or SU Advice Manager can raise their concerns to the Chief Executive. The Chief Executives decision is the final decision of the organisation.
- 7.8 No Adviser should be solely responsible for making the decision to breach confidentiality and before any breach occurs, agreement must be sought.
- 8.0 **Unauthorised breaches of confidentiality**

- 8.1 If an Adviser or the SU Advice Manager discovers an unauthorised breach of confidentiality they should notify the SU Advice Manager or an appropriate member of the senior management team and the Chief Executive.
- 8.2 Even if the breach is accidental for e.g email being sent to incorrect address this should be raised in order for the managers to look at how the situation arose and how to avoid it happening again.
- 8.3 Managers would need to discuss potential consequences of such breach. Repetition of such breaches will be discussed with the adviser and may lead to an investigation being carried out under the disciplinary procedure if further instances were to occur.
- 8.4 If in the event that confidentiality was breached intentionally or maliciously disciplinary action will be taken.
- 8.5 If a complaint was made against the service regarding breach of confidentiality, Union Advice would not be able to advise the student due to a conflict of interest.
- 8.6 **Ensuring effectiveness of the policy**
- 8.7 The following staff will be provided with copies of the policy:
- Existing and new members of staff working in Union Advice
  - Staff supporting the work of the Advice team
  - Chief Executive
  - Senior Leadership Team
- 8.8 Training will be given on the policy and procedures to new staff as part of an induction to the organisation or on-going training reviews when necessary.
- 8.9 Union Advice and staff working for City, University of London Students' Union who support the work of the Union Advice, such as the reception team are party to our Confidentiality Policy.
- 8.10 The policy and procedures will be reviewed every three years.

# Union Advice Conflict of Interest Policy

## 1.0 What is a conflict of interest (COI)?

1.1 A conflict of interest will satisfy the following criteria:

- A particular reason makes it impossible for Union Advice to give independent and impartial advice to a student or;
- Union Advice is *perceived* as not being able to give independent and impartial advice to a student.

1.2 It will be considered a conflict of interest due to the non-impartiality of advice given if an Advisor, Union Advice or City, University of London Students' Union (the Union) has a significant interest in the outcome of the enquiry or case.

1.3 Advice will be impartial where there is no factor influencing the advice given to an individual student, other than the student's best interests.

## 2.0 Identification of Conflict of Interest

2.1 Union Advice will endeavour to identify conflicts of interest as soon as possible in the life of any given case. Upon identification of a conflict, Union Advice will inform students of any conflict of interest and advise students of alternative channels of assistance without delay. Students will be empowered to seek advice from alternative channels as soon as possible in order to avoid jeopardising the outcome of any given case in the event of a conflict.

2.2 The identification of conflicts will ensure that:

- The advice offered by the service is seen to be independent and impartial.
- Union Advice and the Union as a whole is protected from allegations of bias, prejudice, external influence and partiality.
- Union Advice maintains the confidence of current and potential students as well as other stakeholders within and without the Union.
- Union Advice's duty of confidentiality is maintained.

2.3 As conflicts of interest will not always be easily identifiable, Advisors will exercise the utmost caution and alertness to potential conflicts in the initial triage of any case or enquiry.

2.4 Where more than one party in a case may seek the services of Union Advice, Advisors will be alert to the chance that and query whether the enquiring party feels that other parties will seek the services of Union Advice, which would constitute a conflict of interest.

2.5 Advisors will not disclose confidential information pertaining to students, employees, or members of Union Advice (Union Advice's confidentiality policy makes explicit Union Advice's stance on confidential information).

2.6 Union Advice and its Advisors will always consider closely whether a conflict of interest applies in the following cases:

1. Union Advice is approached by two or more students either separately or together about the same matter. This could be, for example, co-tenants or two members of the same family.
2. Union Advice is made aware of a case which involves a relative of a staff member of City Students' Union, which would make it impossible for an Advisor to act or be seen to act impartially.
3. Union Advice is brought a case which involves a student member of the Trustee Board of the Students' Union (a Sabbatical Officer or Student Trustee).
4. A student presents false information to an Advisor or another member of staff.
5. Circumstances arise which make it possible for legal action to be brought against the Union.

### **3. Conflict of Interest Procedure**

3.1 When a student first contacts the service, the relevant Advisor will consider whether there will be a potential conflict of interest with another City student. The AdvicePro system runs a COI check which will automatically identify various similarities between cases such as surname, address, etc.

3.2 If Advisors are unsure whether a case constitutes a potential COI, they will seek immediate support from the SU Advice Manager.

3.3 Once a conflict has been identified, the Advisor will ensure that they do not inform any parties other than the client. The Advisor will also notify the client that they will not advise any other party/ies of the case.

- A record stating a COI has been identified will be made on the case file under 'social issues'.

3.4 Where Union Advice are already acting on behalf of a client and another person approaches the service who would create a conflict of interest as defined by this policy, the following action will be taken:

- The assigned Advisor will continue to act for the client who approached Union Advice first and for whom a case has been opened.



- Following discussion with the SU Advice Manager, the second student will be signposted to another Advisor or another Advice agency. The Advisors working for each student will exercise extreme caution in protecting their identities.
- Advisors will not read the case notes pertaining to other party/ies or discuss their cases with Advisors working with other interested parties. To do so will be treated as a disciplinary matter.

3.5 Notifying a student of a conflict of interest may inadvertently draw attention to another student's or students' use of the service. Advisors will only reveal that a conflict has been identified and will never share information about any other party/ies who may have contacted the service.

3.6 Where an Advisor is acting for more than one client and a conflict subsequently arises between the interests of these clients, the Advisor will discuss the situation with the SU Advice Manager who will consider the most appropriate action from among, but not limited to, the following:

- Cases in conflict will be referred to new Advisors at the discretion of the SU Advice Manager or be taken on by the SU Advice Manager themselves. Case details will not be discussed and other students' case notes will not be read by any new Advisors. The students will be informed that their cases will be treated independently and confidentially.
- One or both students will be advised to transfer to an alternative advice service.
- Union Advice will cease to act for all involved students without an onward referral or signpost.

#### **4. Conflict of Interest and student members of the Trustee Board**

4.1 This policy acknowledges the possibility of clients seeking advice who are both Trustees of the Students' Union Trustee Board and simultaneously students at City and therefore members of the Students' Union. Under the Articles of Association and Bye-Laws such individuals will be entitled to access Union Advice.

4.2 Individuals subject to this specific case will include:

1. Elected sabbatical officers
2. Student Trustees

4.3 The Trustee Board are the highest decision-making body of the Students' Union. For this reason these individuals' engagement with Union Advice, even with the best of intentions may lead to;

1. a risk of actual or perceived lack of impartiality when providing advice services to these members, and or;
2. a risk that there may be factors that may influence the advice, other than the students' best interests.

Utmost caution will be exercised in such cases due to the high risk of a conflict.

4.4 In a simple case such as one of extenuating circumstances Union Advice will consider there to be an acceptable level of risk of actual or perceived bias or influence to any advice given. Exercising caution and sensitive judgement in each case, advice will be provided to such members in simple cases.

4.5 In any more complex case, Advisors will consult with the SU Advice Manager or SU Deputy Chief Executive immediately and discuss the facts of the case. No advice will be provided until the status of any potential conflict has been determined. The situation will be explained to the student as soon as possible.

4.6 If an actual or potential conflict of interest is identified in line with this policy, the student will be informed and SU Advice Manager and/or the SU Deputy Chief Executive will endeavour to secure advice provision from another local Students' Union on the student's behalf.

## **5. Conflict of Interest and members of CUSU staff who are also City students.**

5.1 Members of CUSU staff who are also students currently studying at City will be subject to similar risks of conflicts of interest as Trustee students above.

5.2 In the case that a conflict arises in which a client is both a CUSU member of staff and a current student at City, Advisors will consult with the SU Advice Manager or SU Deputy Chief Executive immediately and discuss the facts of the case. No advice will be provided until the status of any potential conflict has been determined. The situation will be explained to the student as soon as possible.

5.3 If an actual or potential conflict of interest is identified in line with this policy, the student will be informed and SU Advice Manager and/or the SU Deputy Chief Executive will endeavour to secure advice provision from another local Students' Union on the student's behalf.

5.4 Some members of Union staff may choose to opt-out of CUSU membership. As per the Education Act 1994 these members of staff will still be entitled to Union Advice support.

## **6. Where the student presents false information to the Advisor or another member of staff**

6.1 Where an Advisor suspects a student of presenting false information the Advisor will speak with the SU Advice Manager or SU Deputy Chief Executive as soon as possible.

- Every effort will be made to confirm whether or not the information presented is false.
- Should the information be found to be false or prove likely to be false, the student will be informed that Union Advice will be unable to verify any information that is believed to be false to third parties (such as City).
- Whether or not the information proves false or likely to be false, the student will be advised of the consequences (including legal consequences if applicable) of relying on or using false information in their case.
- Advisors will ensure that all advice and information is recorded in writing and stored in AdvicePro.
- As per our Service Standards, advice provision may be withdrawn if the student persists in relying on and presenting suspected false information.

6.2 The following applies where there is/could be legal action against the Union (CUSU):

Where it is established by an Advisor that:

- the student intends to bring legal action against CUSU, or;
- raises the possibility of doing so, or;
- where reasonably an Advisor believes a case could lead to legal action against CUSU

the Advisor will immediately cease the provision of advice and explain the conflict of interest established as per this policy.

6.3 The Advisor will bring the matter to the attention of the SU Advice Manager and SU Deputy Chief Executive.

## 7. Key Information for Advisors

- When an Advisor is made aware of a conflict of interest they will explain the situation to any parties they can no longer advise. Every effort will be made to avoid breaching confidentiality.
- Should a conflict arise during an appointment, the Advisor will bring the current session to a close by advising the student that they have become aware of a conflict of interest and are no longer in a position best suited to be advising on the case.
- The Advisor will consult with the SU Advice Manager and inform the student of the channels through which they may receive ongoing

advice (by assignment to another Advisor or signposting to an external service provider).

- An Advisor is may continue to advise a student on matters where a conflict of interest does not exist.

# Case Closure Policy

## 1.0 Case Closure Policy

1.1 This policy will define the grounds for the closure of cases open to the Union Advice service.

1.2 Union Advice will maintain a list of open and closed cases as part of its service to promote efficiency and fulfil its objectives. This list will be used for statistical analysis in order to improve the Union Advice by managing its resources in response to demand and tracking trends in service usage.

## 2.0 When Will Cases / Enquiries Be Closed?

2.1 Union Advice will close a case in the following events:-

- The case is completed and no further action is required. If after the initial enquiry no casework is required, an email will be sent to you (the service user) which will state that no further action will be taken and the case will be closed. If casework is required, an email stating case closure will be sent to you once all casework is completed.
- The service user disengages with the service. A service user will be considered to have disengaged if a period of 4 weeks elapses without contact from them. An email will be sent to the service user informing them of case closure, but also noting that a case can be re-opened within 2 weeks from the date of closure if the service user still requires support.

2.2 Union Advice will be closed to service users on the last Friday of the month each month for the purpose of triaging cases for closure.

## 3.0 Withdrawal of service

3.1 Union Advice may withdraw its service from a service user, leading to case closure. We may withdraw service on particular cases, but not withdraw your ability to access the service entirely. We may also in some circumstances restrict access to certain kinds of advice, for example limited face-to-face advice or email advice. Union Advice may also withdraw its service entirely from a service user.

Withdrawal of service may apply in the following situations:

- A Conflict of Interest prejudices the Advisor or the service. In most cases of conflicts, Union Advice will offer the service user a new Advisor rather than withdrawing its service.
- A service user refuses to sign the Union Advice Service Standards and User Agreement.

- A service user deliberately withholds information material to their case, or lies on issues material to the case. This can compromise the reputation of the Adviser and/or the service.
- A service user exhibits continued offensive or insulting behaviour toward a member of Union staff or any other persons accessing the service, despite verbal or written warnings to desist. Instances may include behaviour where a student is rude or unpleasant or repeatedly uses inappropriate language.
- A service user attempts to involve an Adviser in immoral or illegal pursuits
- A service user makes excessive or inappropriate demands on Union Advice resources. Such cases which may lead to withdrawal or limitation of service may include:
  - Persistent failure, without good cause, to keep appointments.
  - Failure to take responsibility for actions arising out of their case, failure to act on advice given and/or demanding that Union Advice staff perform these actions on their behalf.
  - Demanding responses within an unreasonable timescale.
  - Insisting on speaking to a member of staff in inappropriate or impracticable circumstances.
  - Failure to engage in dialogue with Union Advice staff in a way which takes into account the limitations of Union Advice's remit and explanations of the limits of an Advisor's role.
  - Demanding excessive contact via phone call and/or email, particularly in the case that these do not heed advice already issued.
  - Persistent pursuit of already-closed cases.
  - The wasting of Advisers' time such as by continually seeking advice on a subject matter but failing to act on advice given.
- A service user is found to be seeking duplicate advice on the same matter by another agency or service, such as legal counsel.
- The level or type of service required is beyond the scope of the Union Advice. In this case Union Advice will normally refer you to a suitable alternative.
- A service user has made a serious complaint against the Union Advice which is currently under investigation.

**3.2** Where an Adviser believes that a restriction to or withdrawal from the service is necessary, this case will be discussed with the SU Advice Manager. If the

SU Advice Manager is advising on a case under consideration for restriction or withdrawal they will discuss the withdrawal of service with the Deputy Chief Executive.

- 3.3** Any service user from whom service is withdrawn will be notified in writing by the SU Advice Manager and be given the contact details of the Deputy Chief Executive if they wish to challenge this decision.
- 3.4** The Deputy Chief Executive will direct students to the Complaints Procedure if necessary.

# Case Allocation Policy

## 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 In order to ensure high quality advice is being given to students, the Advice Service has procedures in place to ensure that advisors work on cases appropriate for their abilities.

## 2.0 How students can access the Advice Service

- 2.1 Students can access the service by using the Union Advice Case Form online. Students may either request an appointment or email advice.
- 2.2 Students can book an appointment via our Reception either on the phone or in person. They will be asked to complete the Case Form to finalise the booking.
- 2.3 Students may be referred to Union Advice by University members of staff or other third parties, but students will always be asked to complete the Case Form, regardless of the source of referral.
- 2.4 Advice will not be provided without a valid Case Form. No matter how students are referred or access the service, a Case Form will always be completed and held on AdvicePro.
- 2.5 The Case Form requires basic details to be given such as name, student number, contact number, email address and the reason for appointment for e.g Complaint or Appeal.
- 2.6 The Case Form also asks for information about the case. This is in order to ensure that upon receipt the advisor has enough information relating to the student's situation in order to give accurate advice.

## 3.0 Procedures undertaken

- 3.1 The Union Advice mailbox and diary are regularly monitored by the SU Advice Manager. This is to ensure the advisor handling a case or meeting a student has the knowledge required in order to deal with the case.
- 3.3 The SU Advice Manager will monitor the reason for referral listed on the Case Form. A new or less experienced Advisor will not be assigned to advise on an area of advice they have yet to be trained on. Arrangements will be made by the SU Advice Manager for a more experienced advisor to take on complex cases. New advisors may job shadow case as part of their training.
- 3.4 When an Advisor takes on a new case from the mailbox, the Advisor will more-than-likely be the first to see the details of the case and therefore is advised to speak to the SU Advice Manager if they have any concerns about their ability to deal with the case.
- 3.5 Advisors being able to discuss cases with the rest of the team is often vital in order to progress a case and ensure the best outcome for the student. Advisors will exercise their best judgement and be mindful of the Conflict of Interest Policy to ensure they



do not discuss any cases with an advisor when they have a Conflict of Interest (see Conflict of Interest Policy).

- 3.6 Case content and referral reasons will vary according to the academic calendar across the year. The Union Advice team will discuss in advance how these peaks in certain kinds of cases will be managed and if any training will be required.
- 3.7 The Union Advice team will meet monthly to discuss complex cases. The SU Advice Manager will be continuously available for Advisors to ask any queries they may have about a case.
- 3.8 The Union Advice Supervision Policy outlines the importance of both supervision and file review to ensure high-quality advice is delivered consistently.

#### **4.0 Monitoring**

- 4.1 The SU Advice Manager will monitor the number of cases being assigned to each Advisor to manage demand and avoid Advisor burnout.
- 4.2 The SU Advice Manager will check the number of cases assigned to each Advisor at least once termly.
- 4.3 When considering the appropriate number of cases, the SU Advice Manager will divide the overall service caseload among the team by full time equivalent (FTE).
- 4.4 At present, the current expected number of cases per FTE are roughly:
  - Academic Advisor – 1 FTE – 43% of cases
  - Academic Advisor (Part-Time) – 0.6 FTE – 26% of cases
  - SU Advice Manager – 0.7 FTE – 30% of cases
- 4.5 Where an Advisor's caseload deviates by more than 5% over at least one term, the SU Advice Manager will take action to rebalance the workload among Advisors. This may require case transfers to take place.
- 4.6 The SU Advice Manager will also discuss caseload imbalances with Advisors during one-to-ones.

# Case Management Policy

## 1.0 Start of the case

- 1.1 From the outset of any case, advisors must be mindful of the Conflict of Interest Policy.
- 1.2 Students will have signed the Case Form and therefore agreed to our Service Standards, User Agreement and Privacy Policy.
- 1.3 Students will also be advised of our core values outlined in our Service Standards and User Agreement, i.e. that the service is confidential, impartial and free.
- 1.4 In the first email contact between Advisor and student where advice is given, whether before or after another appointment, students will be told how they can access their records and a link will be provided to the Privacy Policy
- 1.5 Advisors will ensure students are kept fully informed about the management of their case. This will include explaining any limits to the advice that can be given at the start of the case, or as soon as possible.
- 1.6 Where Union Advice's ability to act is limited because of resources / knowledge-base the advisor will explain the limits of the service and where possible signpost the student to a relevant alternative service or alternative methods of receiving advice.

## 2.0 Enquiry or case?

- 2.1 **An enquiry** is a matter that will be resolved quickly and usually within a single contact with the student. A record of advice given will be delivered in written form by email following contact. No further action will be required from the advisor and therefore the enquiry can be closed immediately in AdvicePro with the reason and Outcome recorded as "Advice Only".
- 2.2 A straightforward extenuating circumstances claim might serve as a typical example of an enquiry of this sort.
- 2.3 **A case** is a matter that requires more than one action by the advisor or student e.g Complaint, disciplinary matter, suitability procedure.
- 2.4 An enquiry may be upgraded to a case in the event a student returns to receive further advice regarding the same matter.

## 3.0 Future actions

- 3.1 Where action cannot be taken immediately on a case and some form of follow-up is required at a later date, this will be recorded on the case notes. If an advisor has agreed to take action on behalf of a student, this agreement, along with dates for completion, will be recorded as tasks in AdvicePro. Advisors will ensure work is completed according to agreed timescales.

3.2 Examples of follow-up action include:

- Chasing a response to an email sent to a third party.
- Researching into the client's query and contacting them with the findings.

3.3 When the follow-up action has been completed, this should be noted on the case file. This is normally achieved by marking the Task as "Completed" in AdvicePro.

3.4 If action cannot be taken immediately (e.g due to awaiting documents from the student), this will be made clear to the student and recorded within the case notes. Advice should be provided to the student as to how they can provide these documents to their Advisor, which could include:

- Handing in to Reception in a sealed envelope addressed to the advisor.
- Scanning the documents and emailing to the advisor.
- Sending directly through to the relevant department (this may be necessary in order to meet a key date).

#### **4.0 Informing students about the progress of their case**

4.1 An Advisor must inform the student of any progress with their case, or if the case has been completed.

4.2 Students will be informed that the expected mode of contact will be email in their initial appointment. If students were to prefer an alternative method of receiving communications and progress updates this would be considered for appropriateness by the advisor and, if agreed, noted on the case file.

4.3 Methods of updating a student:

- Email – Email sent to the student outlining the circumstances of the case, the advice given, and actions arising. All e-mails, including those with third-parties, will be filed in AdvicePro.
- Telephone calls – The advisor calls the student to deliver standard case information as above, then follows up with an email. A note will be added on AdvicePro stating the student was called and outlining the advice given. The email will be filed on AdvicePro.
- Appointment – The student may receive an update during an appointment. A record of the conversation will be recorded in AdvicePro and an email will be sent to the student confirming what was discussed, actions required etc.

4.4 An Advisor will inform students of progress within pre-agreed timescales. Timescales agreed may vary depending on the advisor's caseload and the demand on the service.

4.5 If the advisor wishes to make changes to proposed action already agreed with the student, they will contact the student to ensure that the revised action is acceptable.

#### **5.0 Transferring a case to another advisor**

- 5.1 A case may be transferred to another advisor in the following circumstances:
- The current advisor does not have the required knowledge to deal with the case.
  - The current advisor is not available (on annual leave, sickness).
  - The current advisor has a high caseload.
  - A conflict of interest has been identified.
  - A breakdown in relationship between the current advisor and the student occurs. Such cases should be discussed between the advisor and the Advice Service Manager or, if this circumstance arises with the Advice Service Manager, they would discuss with the Deputy Chief Executive.
- 5.2 The transfer can be administered on AdvicePro. However, this should be discussed with the advisor who is being allocated the case.

## **6.0 Confirming action in writing**

- 6.1 Case notes from an appointment will be sent to the student within three working days of meeting with the student.
- 6.2 Email advice will be provided within three working days of a Case Form being completed.
- 6.3 Generally, all correspondence with the student will be confirmed in writing.

## **7.0 Case records on Advice Pro**

- 7.1 A file will be created for every student the advisor provides advice to.
- 7.2 When writing up case notes, advisors will refer to the Case Recording Policy.
- 7.3 All cases will be recorded in AdvicePro as soon as possible after advice sessions, or within three working days. Copies of documents will be added to the case record in AdvicePro.

## **8.0 Obtaining the Student's Contact Details**

- 8.1 The student's name and contact details will be obtained when a case note is written – advisors will refer to File Review Checklist to ensure consistency.
- 8.2 However, advisors should be sensitive to the desire for privacy if there are indications that the student is reluctant to divulge their personal details.
- 8.3 It is essential to have a students' contact details if follow up work is being carried out. If the student is still reluctant to disclose personal information, the advisor should make a note in the casefile of the student's wishes and that the reasons for the requests were explained during the interview, but the option for anonymous recording is available to the client either in whole or in part.

# Urgent Cases Policy

## 1.0 Policy Statement

- 1.1 This policy will detail the Union Advice Service's position on the handling of cases requiring urgent attention. This policy will identify what is meant by an urgent case and the steps to be taken by the Advice Service in such an eventuality. The majority of Union Advice cases will not be considered urgent and may be acted upon within the normal timeframes and practice standards at Union Advice.

## 2.0 Definition of urgent

- 2.1 An urgent case will be defined by the following factors:

- How the student presents to Union Advice
- The seriousness of the matter at hand
- The proximity of deadlines, meetings or panels

- 2.2 A case will normally be considered urgent where;

- A student presents to Union Advice, Reception, a member of SU staff or an SU Officer in a distressed state. Distress may manifest as the student appearing unusually anxious, tearful, or otherwise agitated.
- The matter the student is seeking advice relates to the student having been;
  - Bullied
  - Harassed
  - Sexually harassed
  - Assaulted
  - Sexually assaulted
- The student has an imminent Fitness to Study, Disciplinary meeting or panel, or Fitness to Practice panel. "Imminent" will be defined as the panel or meeting taking place within the next five working days.

## 3.0 Addressing urgent cases

- 3.1 For most cases, Advisors will be able to use the above guidance to accurately identify urgent cases.
- 3.2 For the avoidance of doubt, the SU Advice Manager will ultimately determine whether a case will be considered urgent under this policy.
- 3.3 The Advisor and the SU Advice Manager will determine (based on 2.2 above) whether a student needs an immediate appointment or whether an appointment may be provided within 24 hours.

- 3.4 A student will be consulted before scheduling urgent appointments. Students may request for their appointment not to take place within an urgent timescale.
- 3.5 In all cases, a students with an urgent case will be provided with an appointment within 24 hours if they make an explicit request for one.

#### **4.0 Signposting, referral, and safeguarding**

- 4.1 Advisors will refer to the Signposting and Referral Procedure and assist students in accessing appropriate support services if required.
- 4.2 Advisors will refer to the Safeguarding Policy and determine whether or not the matter should be referred to the local Safeguarding Lead in the case of an urgent appointment.
- 4.3 Where an Advisor feels they may need to breach confidentiality, they will refer to the Union Advice Confidentiality Policy.

# Case Recording Policy

1.1 The purpose of case recording is to ensure that Union Advice provides a high-quality service.

1.2 Union Advice will keep well-organised and accurate records, stored in a centralised location (AdvicePro), accessible to all employees working in the service. This provision will ensure;

- Union Advice has full details of a student's situation easily accessible at all times in order to prevent students having to repeat details of their cases. This saves time and reduces student frustration and anxiety.
- Case notes will be shared with a student so they are not required to keep thorough notes from appointments and meetings themselves, allowing them to focus on the advice and actions provided.
- In the event that the Advisor assigned to a case is on annual leave, sick leave etc., another Advisor can clearly see the progress of the case to date and what actions still need to be completed.
- To provide clarity / evidence of discussions had with third parties if there is a dispute about the facts of case.
- To be used as part of the supervision process with Advisors to ensure that accurate records are being kept and to help identify any gaps in knowledge so that adequate training can be arranged.
- To demonstrate that organisational policies are being followed and that students are receiving a good service.
- As evidence when there has been a complaint made against the service.
- To identify conflicts of interest.
- To provide statistics to elected officers and key stakeholders on our service users and current key trends.

1.3 A casefile will record the following information:

- Confirmation that the student has signed and completed a Case Form and therefore agreed to our Privacy Notice, User Agreement and Service Standards.
- Students' personal details, name, address, e-mail address, telephone number. Our main method of contact is email, however, if this is not suitable to the student due to disability, we can agree an alternative method.
- Date case opened, lead advisor details and how the advice was delivered (In person, telephone, e-mail).
- Programme details, case topic and subject.

- Details of the case, for example: key information that explains the situation and what the student is seeking as an outcome.
- Advice given, actions taken already (where applicable), actions to be taken by the advisor and actions required by the student.
- All email correspondence with the student and third parties (logged individually and not as part of an email chain).
- Written notes from all telephone conversations with third parties.
- Notes taken from meetings with third parties.
- Details of any discussions with colleagues or SU Advice Manager on the case.
- Details of any signposting or referrals to external services.
- Relevant documents such as letters, sick certificates which have been scanned and filed.
- Key dates must be clearly recorded to ensure that a deadline is not overlooked (see Key Dates Policy)
- If a student has more than one enquiry this should be recorded as a separate case.
- Demographic information such as ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation.
- A reflection of the time taken on a task (appointment, email, phonecall).
- File review checklists (if reviewed)
- Audits recorded (if audited).
- When the case is closed, the email sent to a student notifying them of case closure and a recording of the date the case closed.
- The outcome of the case, or if no outcome is clear then a reflection on why the case was closed.
- How students found out about the service

1.3 After the initial contact with the student the details of the case, advice given and actions required (by adviser and student) are sent to the student within three working days.

1.4 The initial email will also refer again to the Union Advice Service Standards & User Agreement as well as our Privacy Notice. This gives the student a further opportunity to read these documents so they are fully aware of what we do with their data, how we protect it and how they can access it.

1.5 We link to our service standards so that from the outset students are clear about what they can expect from Union Advice and what is expected from them in order to progress their case effectively. We will also provide a link to our online survey welcoming feedback on the service they received



# Key Dates Policy

## 1.1 What are Key Dates?

- 1.1 Key dates are dates which will, from the outset of a case, determine when advice needs to be provided and what actions need to be taken in order to effectively address the needs of the client. Failure to act or provide advice in respect of a key date may jeopardise a student's case and lead to a claim of negligence against the Advice Service.
- 1.2 Key dates may include but are not limited to:-
- Deadline for submitting an appeal, complaint or extenuation claim.
  - Deadline for submitting a statement regarding Academic Misconduct.
  - Dates of meetings to be attended by the student and Advisor (if required).
  - Deadline for making a complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA).
- 1.3 The actions necessary to a case and the case's progression will be, at least to some extent, defined by the key dates to which the case is subject. Advisors will, as soon as is reasonably possible, make clear to clients what actions need to be completed in respect of key dates and their responsibilities in completing those actions.
- 1.3 In advising students, Advisors will endeavour to take into account the timeframes necessary to meet key dates, the resources of the service and the student, as well as the student's capacities and capabilities.
- 1.3 Key dates will be clearly and explicitly explained to students in writing. Key dates pertinent to a student's case will be listed on the email sent after the initial contact with the student. Details will be given of actions required by both the Advisor and the student. This list of actions will be used to track the progression of the case.
- 1.4 Key dates for each case will be recorded on Union Advice's case management system, AdvicePro. AdvicePro has functions for ensuring that key dates and actions are recorded and managed by both the Advisor and SU Advice Manager.
- 1.5 During the course of advice provision any new key dates will be recorded on the student's case file without delay.

## 2.0 What are the Tasks and Actions which might take place during a case?

- 2.1 Examples of tasks and actions are:-
- Advisor to email Programme Leader.
  - Advisor to read students' complaint and provide feedback.
  - Student to obtain medical evidence and submit this evidence to their Advisor.
  - Student to forward all correspondence relating to case to Advisor.
- 2.2 Advisors will record when a task or action has been completed and note the steps taken.
- 2.3 During the course of advice provision any new tasks will be recorded on the student's case file without delay.

### **3.0 Checking that action has been taken in regard to key dates and tasks**

- 3.1 The SU Advice Manager will be responsible for checking AdvicePro at the beginning of each working day. If key dates have not been actioned or tasks carried out, the SU Advice Manager will be responsible for ensuring that the required activity is completed.
- 3.2 The ability of individuals and the team to manage key dates and tasks effectively will be considered within the wider framework of appraisals with members of staff within Union Advice and the overall performance of the service.
- 3.3 If actions assigned to a student are not completed, the student will be contacted to pursue the action's progress. Cases in which clients repeatedly fail to complete actions in respect of key dates may be subject to a withdrawal of service (please see Case closure policy). The SU Advice Manager will be consulted before a withdrawal of service is decided upon.

# File Review Policy

## 1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of independent file review, along with supervision, is to ensure that Union Advice provides a high-quality service. The independent file review checks the quality of advice given to clients and ensures that Advisors are following relevant procedures correctly (e.g. Case Recording and file management).

## 2.0 Responsibilities

- 2.1 The SU Advice Manager will review the Advisors' files.
- 2.2 An Academic Advisor will check the SU Advice Manager's files.
- 2.3 The Deputy Chief Executive will receive all completed file reviews undertaken for the SU Advice Manager. If any concerns arise, the Deputy Chief Executive will raise these with the SU Advice Manager and may request to see the full case files in question.

## 3.0 Method

- 3.1 All case files will be reviewed using the File Review sheet (see Appendix 1).
- 3.2 Copies of completed File Review sheets will be kept in OneNote and will also be entered on to the relevant case files in AdvicePro. Advisors, the SU Advice Manager, and Deputy Chief Executive will have access to all File Review sheets for reference and records in a centralised location.
- 3.3 During review, case files will be selected at random using the AdvicePro Review function, subject to the need to achieve a cross-section of the different areas of Advisors' work.
- 3.4 New Advisors will have all emails and case notes checked for the first 3-4 weeks of their employment. Following this period, six files will be reviewed per month for the following two months.
- 3.5 The number and frequency of file reviews for other Advisors will be decided by their supervisor. For experienced advisors, a minimum of 3 case files will be reviewed each month.
- 3.6 In making a decision about the number and frequency of file reviews the supervisor will take into account the following:
- The experience and performance of each Advisor
  - The number and complexity of their case files

3.7 The supervisor will monitor the number/frequency of reviews to ensure they reflect the support needs of each Advisor and outcomes of previous reviews.

#### **4.0 Corrective action**

4.1 A corrective action will refer to an action taken to remedy an issue discovered during the course of a File Review. Issues may include common administrative errors to errors in the advice provided to a student.

4.2 Any corrective actions identified will be recorded on the File Review sheet with a deadline for action. Deadlines will reflect the severity of the issue in need of correction and the relative urgency of a given corrective action.

4.3 Advisors will be informed of any corrective actions applied to their File Reviews. Advisors will complete corrective actions according to the deadlines set. Each corrective action will be logged as a Task in AdvicePro. When completed, Advisors will mark the Task as "Complete". Tasks logged in AdvicePro will be monitored at the next supervision session to ensure corrective actions are being completed according to their deadlines.

#### **5.0 Feedback**

5.1 The supervisors and managers will discuss file review outcomes as a standing item on supervision agendas. Feedback from file review will also be given at annual appraisal.

5.2 The SU Advice Manager will act as supervisor/manager for Advisors. The Deputy Chief Executive will act as supervisor/manager to the SU Advice Manager.

#### **6.0 Monitoring**

6.1 The SU Advice Manager will review the central file review records annually to identify any emerging trends or needs for organisational improvement. Findings will be returned to the annual report.

#### **7.0 Independent Audit**

7.1 A sample of case files will be audited by an independent source at least once annually.

7.2 Audit may be completed by an appointed external auditor or another Students' Union Advice Service accredited to the AQS Standard in a reciprocal arrangement.

7.3 Following an audit, an audit report will be delivered to the SU Advice Manager. The Advice Manager will action any recommendations and prepare a copy of the report for the Board of Trustees

## Appendix 1.

### Case File Review Form

Date of Audit:

Advisor:

File Ref:		Yes/No NA	Comments
File Open / Closed?			
(E1.1)	Client made aware that file may be audited?		
Establishing facts and diagnosing the problem			
	Background and relevant facts of situation are recorded		
	Main or presenting problem is recorded in order for advice to be given		
	What the student wants to achieve is noted		
E1.4	Relevant key dates are identified and noted on the file?		
Advice			
	Available options have been explained		
E1.5	Advice has been provided and action taken is clear		
E1.4	Relevant key dates are identified and noted on the file		
E1.5	Multiple enquiries recorded separately?		

<b>Action or Support</b>			
	Action or support is sufficient to progress the case within any relevant time limits		
	It is clear who is going to take the action		
	Contact with third parties (by whatever means) recorded on the file?		
<b>Signposting and Referral</b>			
	Advisor has identified where they are unable to help and an appropriate alternative source of help is offered		
<i>(B1.3 / B1.4)</i>	Has the signposting/referral procedure been followed and a referral been centrally recorded?)		
<i>(B1.11 / F1.4)</i>	Cost implications (if any) of signposting/referral/opposing party discussed?		
	The student was given sufficient information to allow them to access the organisation		
<b>Advice Records and Case Management</b>			
	Records enable another Advisor to clearly follow and understand the facts of the case		
	Relevant personal and contact details recorded on the file? <i>(E1.5 Guidance)</i>		

	Client information sheet or database record fully completed? <i>(E1.5 Guidance)</i>		
	ID/Data Protection/Conflict of Interest /Equal Opportunities monitoring recorded on file?		
	Appropriate service standards/user agreement/complaints procedure shared?		
<b>F1</b>	Signed consent form/authority to act on client's behalf recorded on file (Case form)?		
	Client made aware of right to access file under General Data Protection Regulations 2018? <i>(E1.1 Guidance and E1.8)</i>		
	Advisor who dealt with enquiry clearly recorded? <i>(E1.5 Guidance)</i>		
	Is the date of each enquiry clearly recorded? <i>(E1.5 Guidance)</i>		
	Clear and orderly written case records? Is the status clear? <i>(E1.5 Guidance / E1.6)</i>		
	Has file been progressed in a timely manner?		
	Client information confirmed in writing as per procedures? <i>(F1.8)</i>		
	File indicates that where an outcome is known the client has been informed <i>(F1.7)</i>		
	If applicable, file distinguishable as 'closed'? <i>(E1.1 Guidance)</i>		
<b>Comments:</b>			

<b>Corrective Action Required:</b>			
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# Supervision Policy

## 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The SU Advice Manager holds ultimate responsibility for ensuring and maintaining the quality of the service provided by Union Advice.
- 1.2 The SU Advice Manager also holds chief responsibility for casework supervision within the Advice Service.

## 2.0 Responsibility of Supervision

- 2.1 The SU Advice Manager holds direct line management responsibility for the Advisors of Union Advice.
- 2.1 As of May 2019, our current SU Advice Manager is Luke Frost, working five days per week. Luke joined City Students' Union as SU Advice Manager in March 2019. Luke has worked in the SU advice sector since May 2013, joining the University of East London Students' Union (UELSU) Advice Service as an Academic Caseworker. In March 2015 Luke became Senior Academic Caseworker at UELSU and in August 2016 the Advice Services Manager. Luke has been supervising advisors for four years and has six years of advice experience.
- 2.2 Luke carries out file reviews and supervision for Christabel Carter (Academic Advisor) who is a permanent full-time Advisor and working five days per week, as well as Tim Robins (Academic Advisor) who is a permanent Advisor working three days per week (0.6 FTE). Christabel joined the service in March 2019. Tim joined the service in August 2019. Both Christabel and Tim are new to the advice sector.
- 2.3 Luke Frost will take on supervisory responsibilities for any further Advisors recruited to the Union Advice Service.
- 2.4 There are no staff members at City Students' Union with suitable experience or qualification to take on supervisory responsibility for the SU Advice Manager role. Therefore, an external supervisory arrangement will be maintained to ensure the SU Advice Manager receives adequate supervision.
- 2.5 All Advisors for Union Advice will be provided with in-house training for the major part of their duties. Advisors will lack key knowledge and experience in identified areas relative to their working patterns and the shifting needs of students and consequent demands on the Advice service across the course of an academic year, which will be addressed by their training and supervisory support.
- 2.6 The supervision and support system for Advisors is built around one-to-one sessions with each member of staff on a monthly basis.

### **3.0 What is discussed during a Supervision or one-to-one session?**

3.1 A supervisee can expect at least the following content to be discussed during any given supervision:

- File review
- Caseload (whether it is manageable or more support is needed)
- Case discussion (focusing on difficult cases)
- Training and development needs

3.2 Separate one-to-ones are also provided monthly. Separate one-to-one sessions will facilitate the discussion of any other issues that may be concerning the Advisor or if they wish to raise Health, Safety and work-life balance issues. For example, there may be personal issues that may be impacting on their work that they want to make their manager aware of.

3.3 All staff will have a one-to-one at least once per month.

### **4.0 Channels of Support**

4.1 As well as the structured supervision system as detailed above, the SU Advice Manager will be available to discuss difficult cases each day between 4-5pm, or if urgent (see Urgent Case Policy) and where the manager is not in an appointment, an Advisor may speak with the manager immediately.

4.2 In the absence of the SU Advice Manager, an Advisor may seek support from the SU Deputy Chief Executive or another member of the Senior Leadership Team.

4.3 Union Advice Team Meetings will be held once monthly and will discuss issues such as:

- The current work of the service
- Key events happening and our involvement within the Union
- Reviewing our action and project plans
- Updates from staff on any training they attended and useful information to share
- The training needs of the team
- Any changes to City policies and procedures
- Any changes in Union Advice policy and procedures
- Group discussions on re-occurring case themes and how to address them,
- Social policy issues and general issues influencing the work of Union Advice.

### **5.0 Levels of Supervision**

5.1 All new team members, including volunteers, will benefit from a higher level of supervision by default from the SU Advice Manager until such a time that the new advisor and supervisor agree that they are able to take on their own caseload.

5.2 During this initial phase, all work carried out by the new advisor or volunteer will be checked by the manager. The manager will also observe some of the interviews between the advisor/volunteer and their clients.

5.3 During this phase, the SU Advice Manager will check all an Advisor's email correspondence prior to its dispatch. An Advisor can expect this period to last for roughly one month but may be longer for volunteers. The length of time for which the SU Manager continues to closely check and directly supervise day-to-day work will be discussed between the Advisor and the SU Advice Manager.

**6.0 How much time spent each week on appointments/admin/research?**

6.1 All Advisors will be allocated set time each week to complete casework (including research) and update their knowledge.

6.2 A full-time Advisor may expect to be allocated approx. 10 hours per week outside of appointments. This allocation will ensure that staff have sufficient time away from client contact to carry out casework and prevent burn-out.

6.3 Additional time may be requested from the SU Advice Manager if an Advisor feels there is a need for more in-depth research on a given case or have undertaken a higher-than-usual caseload.

# Referral/Signposting Procedure

## 1.0 Policy Statement

- 1.1 To ensure students receive the advice they need at times they will be signposted / referred to University departments or to external agencies as necessary.

## 2.0 Definitions

### 2.1 Referral

- 2.1.1 Referrals are the process of contacting other agencies on a student's behalf to arrange advice and support for them that Union Advice cannot offer.
- 2.1.2 A referral will usually involve an advisor contacting organisations to arrange appointments and make any other necessary arrangements to ensure that the case continues smoothly.
- 2.1.3 The referral process will consider the ability of the student to access the service, and the requirements of the referral agency before referring on.
- 2.1.4 Union Advice may refer clients to external agencies (outside of internal City services) or internal agencies (within City) if necessary.
- 2.1.5 University services may refer to Union Advice. Union Advice will accept incoming referrals if the matter affecting the student is within the scope of our work.
- 2.1.6 Generally, University and external services (or academic staff) will signpost students to the Union Advice service and should be encouraged to tell students about our Case Form. University staff may refer students directly via email.
- 2.1.7 In our service, we would only refer to external services for housing advice. For housing advice we refer to the University of London Housing Service.
- 2.1.8 When referring we will prioritise services with AQS accreditation.
- 2.1.9 The advisor should seek advice from the SU Advice Manager to confirm that referring to external source would be in the best interest of the student.

### 2.2 Definition of Signposting

- 2.2.1 Signposting is the process of providing details of other more suitable agencies that can assist a student in the place of Union Advice. Signposting gives the student responsibility for contacting other organisations to help them resolve their problem.
- 2.2.2 The need for signposting will usually arise when an individual makes initial contact to Union Advice or our Reception desk, and provides information about the nature of their problem. Both the Union Advice mailbox and our Reception staff receive the majority of initial client contact with students, so are likely to signpost regularly.

- 2.2.3 Signposting may also be appropriate when an existing student presents with an additional issue that is outside the scope of Union Advice's work. Advisors are most likely to signpost at this stage.
- 2.2.4 If an advisor feels that the student would benefit from receiving help imminently on a matter outside of our subject area, the given advisor will make contact with the agency directly on the student's behalf to ensure that the student receives the advice or support that they need. This means that the matter is no longer signposting and becomes a referral.
- 2.2.5 This is also the case if the advice needed from another service is vital in order for the case to progress.

### **3.0 Complex cases**

- 3.1 Advisors are aware of their own individual competence and will seek guidance and support from their line manager if required.
- 3.2 As outlined above, the Advisor and SU Advice Manager would determine whether a referral or signposting is more appropriate.

### **4.0 Where the person contacting us is not a City student**

- 4.1 In order to receive advice, the person contacting us must be a current City, University of London student, or have graduated, withdrawn or been withdrawn within the last 12 months.
- 4.2 City works collaboratively with a number of partners who deliver programmes that are validated by City.
- 4.2 Students studying on programmes validated but not delivered by City are ineligible for advice. This is because they are not members of City Students' Union.
- 4.3 Students studying at partner institutions will be signposted their own Students' Union, if a Union with appropriate service provision exists and is available to them. If not, then the Advisor may make enquiries with Student & Academic Services to find out whether there is an appropriate referral to be made within the partner institution.

### **5.0 Relationship breakdown between the advisor and student**

- 5.1 A trusting relationship between an advisor and a student is very important to ensuring good progress is made with a case. Unfortunately, at times, this relationship can break down.
- 5.2 Efforts will be made by the advisor to overcome such barriers, however if the advisor feels that the case would be better handled by another advisor, they will discuss this with their line manager.

# Feedback Policy

## 1.0 Policy Statement

1.1 Union Advice is committed to providing a high-quality service to City, University of London students. We want to ensure that advice is easily accessible for all students and that they receive a high level of service when they engage with us. Union Advice will always be open to receiving feedback and using acting upon recommendations to improve.

## 2.0 Annual survey

2.1 At the end of each academic year, a survey will be sent to all service users that year. Feedback will be reviewed and analysed. The analysis of the survey as well as any points of learning will be incorporated into the Union Advice annual report.

2.2 As far as possible, the annual survey questions will be standardised to ensure that data is comparable across academic years.

2.3 Supplementary questions may be asked that go beyond measuring student satisfaction. These may include questions about service improvements, or City policy.

2.4 The survey will always include a variation of the following:-

- Method of advice received, if it was received in a timely manner, reason for contact.
- Monitoring the usefulness and impact of the advice received.
- Approach and service delivered by advisors.
- Overall satisfaction of the service.
- Demographics (in order for us to be able to recognise any student groups that may be under-represented).

2.5 A survey link will be sent to all students who have contacted the service in the given academic year.

2.6 The service may use some of its budget to hold a small prize draw to incentivise completion. In order to be entered into the draw the student will be required to enter their student number. It will be made clear that a student number is not linked to answers during the analysis to ensure all answers remain anonymous.

## 3.0 General satisfaction survey

3.1 A more general service-user-feedback survey will be included in a link at the bottom of every email sent to advisees.

3.2 Advisors will only mention this survey verbally during a meeting with a student in the case that dissatisfaction with the service is explicitly expressed.

3.3 Responses will be checked regularly, at least once per term by the SU Advice Manager.

- 3.4 Discussions regarding feedback obtained will be held at Team Meetings and planning meetings in order for us to consider any changes to our service.
- 3.5 Students will also be able to give feedback through the Union Advice Complaints Procedure.

# Third-Party Service Providers Policy

## 1.0 Purpose

1.1 In most cases, the services provided by Union Advice are delivered by Union Advice staff. Occasionally, Union Advice may require the use of external services to assist in progressing a case, e.g.

- An interpreter or signer to assist in communication with the client
- An independent expert (such as a solicitor or barrister)

1.2 Where the need for external services arises, Union Advice retains responsibility for the case. Union Advice will remain ultimately responsible for the case, regardless of the financial means by which third party services are engaged.

1.2 Union Advice does not currently use any provider which would necessitate students making a payment to engage their services. In the eventuality that a service is engaged which does necessitate student payment, the Advisor for the case will make clear and explicit to the student any costs which they will be expected to incur.

## 2.0 Using External Services

2.0 Should the need for external and third-party services arise, an Advisor will explain to the student why the service is required and check for any specific student needs.

2.1 Following consultation with the student, an Advisor will make contact with external services to establish whether their use is appropriate in a given case.

2.2 Where interpreters are required, Advisors will contact the City Disability Support Team and request the details of interpreters currently known to City. Advisors will contact interpreters directly to engage their services for meetings / panels etc.

2.3 Advisors will explore whether or not students in receipt of a DSA allowance will be able to make provision for external and third-party services as part of their DSA allowance. If not, Advisors will discuss payment for third-party services with the SU Advice Manager.

## 3.0 Choosing external service providers

3.1 External service providers will be chosen objectively and impartially based on the area of law/expertise involved, quality assurance accreditation, complexity of the issues, speed of response required and previous experience and reputation of the service.

3.2 Clients will be informed of the intentions to engage the services of external providers and included in the process of selecting and approaching such service providers prior to any instructions being given to an external professional. The client's wishes and preferences will be taken into account wherever possible (e.g. the preferred gender of an external interpreter).

3.3 To ensure that specialist support being provided to students with disabilities is to an acceptable level, the University generally only use suppliers that are DSA-QAG



registered under the Non-Medical Helpers Framework Document. For further information please follow the link <https://dsa-qag.org.uk/practitioner/nmh-providers>

- 3.4 It should be noted that the Non-Medical Helpers Framework Document auditing tool was set up by the Student Loans Company and the Department of Education to ensure that providers held appropriate qualifications in order to carry out the work they undertake.

#### **4.0 Monitoring**

- 4.1 Union Advice will monitor the performance of organisations and individuals with which it works on student cases. Advisors will inform the SU Advice Manager in the case of any problems with the service or the external service providers consulted.
- 4.2 Union Advice will cease any engagement with a particular individual or organisation if persistent problems are discovered. Union Advice staff will be informed of any cessations of engagement at Advice team meetings.