

## **Conflict of Interest Policy**

### **Aims of the service and purpose of policy**

The Students' Union (SUSU) Advice Centre aims to support all University of Southampton students on an equal and non-judgemental basis. We provide a free, confidential and impartial advice and information service. The following policy outlines how the service will address the situation when a conflict of interest may arise.

### **What is a 'Conflict of Interest'?**

A conflict of interest occurs where The Advice Centre may be unable to assist a student in an impartial and independent way.

A conflict of interest may arise in the following scenarios (not an exhaustive list):

1. When two or more students are in dispute (for example this may be when one student has made a complaint against another in relation to accommodation or a discipline matter, or they are involved in the same Academic Integrity breach);
2. When a student is making a complaint about a member of staff employed by SUSU;
3. When a student makes allegations about The Advice Centre staff;
4. If a student wishes to take a course of action which could be damaging to the services provided by The Advice Centre and/or SUSU;
5. If a student has a pre-existing personal connection with an Adviser.

### **Procedure in the case of a Conflict of Interest**

1. When two or more students are in dispute:

Students should inform The Advice Centre Reception if there are any other students involved in the case prior to an appointment being booked with an Adviser. Students should indicate whether they would prefer to discuss this in confidence rather than on reception.

The Advice Centre Reception will allocate students with different Advisers to ensure impartiality of advice. This will be arranged on a first come first served basis.

If more students approach The Advice Centre than there are available Advisers, any student who is not be able to be seen by an Adviser will be given information by Reception of other sources of support (this may include services outside of the University).

2. If a student approaches The Advice Centre to make a complaint about staff employed by SUSU:

The Advice Centre staff will explain the conflict of interest and that under these circumstances they would not be able to offer impartial advice or provide support to the student.

The student will be advised to contact the Head of Advice and Lettings in the first instance to explore the issues informally.

If the student remains dissatisfied, they will be referred to SUSU's Complaints Procedure. The procedure document can be found on [The Advice Centre webpage](#). The student may also be signposted to other sources of support (this may include services outside of the University).

3. When a student makes allegations about The Advice Centre staff:

The Advice Centre staff will explain the Conflict of Interest policy and that they would not be able to meet the student's best interests and provide an impartial service. The student will be informed that the member of staff will not be able to continue with the advice or service. The student will be referred to The Advice Centre Complaints policy if they are dissatisfied. The Advice Centre staff will then inform the Head of Advice and Lettings of the case.

4. If a student wishes to take a course of action which could be damaging to the services provided by The Advice Centre and/or the Students' Union:

The Advice Centre staff will explain the Conflict of Interest policy and refer the student to other sources of support.

In instances of ongoing cases the Student Adviser will explain the Conflict of Interest to the student, cease advising the student and refer them to external sources of information or support.

The Student Adviser will also report the case to the Head of Advice.

5. If a student has a pre-existing personal connection with an Adviser:

The Advice Centre will allocate the student with a different Adviser. Please refer to The Advice Centre Charter for our professional boundaries policy. The Charter can be found on [The Advice Centre webpage](#).

### **Disputing a 'Conflict of Interest' decision**

A student wanting to dispute a decision made in line with this policy will be referred to The Advice Centre Complaints procedure available in The Advice Centre on request or on [The Advice Centre webpage](#).

### **External support**

If The Advice Centre is unable to offer support due to a conflict of interest, you may wish to seek support elsewhere. The [SUSU website](#) has guidance as to where external support can be found but you can also contact the [Citizens Advice](#) who may be able to offer the support or guidance you require.