

Guiding Principles of Our Service

The Advice Centre offers all members of Union Southampton free, confidential and independent advice. We have 4 advisers all of whom are extensively trained and experienced. We aim to support students to make their own informed choices about problems, and to do this in a friendly and professional environment.

What you can expect from us:

- Free, confidential, impartial advice
- A non-judgmental approach
- Politeness and respect from all staff
- Fairness and equal treatment for all students

What we cannot do:

- Make decisions for you
- Tell you what you should do
- Give you legal advice
- Give you immigration advice
- Continue to work with you if you are aggressive, abusive, display inappropriate behaviour or appear to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

What we expect from you:

- To arrive on time for your appointment or tell us in advance if you cannot attend.
- To be honest when you tell us about your issue and make sure you tell us everything that is relevant.
- To treat all our staff with respect and politeness.
- To bring us all relevant documentation and to make sure you read any resources or other information that we have asked you to read before your appointment

Working Procedure

We ask students to turn up on time for appointments and to let us know if they cannot attend. We offer 1 hour appointments with advisers. These will generally consist of 45 minutes' student meeting time and 15 minutes' writing-up time for the advisers. Students who arrive more than 20 minutes late will only be seen at the discretion of an adviser and may instead be offered the next available appointment.

We also offer drop-in sessions on Wednesday afternoon between 1pm and 5pm (with the last student seen at 4:30pm). These are general information sessions that last around 15 minutes

Reception response times

We aim to respond to emails within 24 hours. If you call us between 9am and 5pm (Monday – Friday), we try to answer your call immediately or, if you leave a message, to call you back the same day. There may be times when we are very busy, which may mean we take longer to reply to emails or answer the phone.

Please note that on Wednesday afternoons, when we run a drop-in service, it is very unlikely we will be able to answer the phone or reply to emails.

Impartiality and independence

The Advice Centre is part of Union Southampton and therefore independent of the University of Southampton. Staff working at the Advice Centre are Union employees and therefore cannot be independent of the Union. Furthermore, staff at the Advice Centre cannot support students with possible complaints against the Union or its staff.

Confidentiality

The Advice Centre service is confidential. Advisers may discuss cases with each other or the Advice and Representation Manager where appropriate, but we will not discuss any students outside the service unless we have permission from you to do. If we need to talk to anyone outside the Advice Centre, we will explain this to you and ask you to sign a form or send us an email giving us permission to do so.

If parents or other family members contact us, we will not discuss your case with them, or tell them whether you have visited us unless there are exceptional circumstances **and** you have given us permission to do so.

We hold information electronically in a secure database, which is only accessible to Advice and Representation staff. When we have paperwork as part of a case, we hold it in a locked filing cabinet.

All staff in the Advice Centre have signed a confidentiality agreement.

We will only break confidentiality without your consent if we judge that there is a serious risk of harm to yourself or others. In this case advisers will discuss the situation with the Advice and Representation Manager who is responsible for taking the decision.

Conflict of interest

If both parties in a dispute approach the Advice Centre, 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 the Advice and Representation Manager.

Please make us aware of any potential conflict of interest, so we can make appropriate arrangements when booking appointments.

Withdrawal of service/change of adviser

Occasionally, we may feel it necessary to change the adviser you are seeing, to limit or to withdraw access to the Advice Centre. This decision will only be taken after careful consideration and we will explain the reasons to you. The following circumstances could lead to this decision (NB this list is not exhaustive):

- If you threaten or use violence, or if you are otherwise aggressive or abusive to staff.
- If you are or appear to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- If we identify a conflict of interest (for example if you are involved in a dispute and we are already working with the other party, or if you wish to complain about a member of Union staff.)
- If you ask us to collude in illegal or fraudulent behaviour or to act in a way that is inconsistent with the University regulations.
- If your actions are consistently against the advice you have received in the Advice Centre. In this situation, we will discuss with you whether you feel it is beneficial to continue seeing an adviser.
- If you knowingly provide misleading information
- If you consistently don't turn up for appointments
- If we feel you are making inappropriate or excessive use of Advice Centre resources. We have limited resources and aim to allow as many students as possible to have appointments with advisers. If we feel that you are consistently asking staff to undertake actions that you could undertake yourself, or if we feel that your support needs are more appropriate to another service (eg a legal service, or counselling), we may withdraw access to the Advice Centre.
- We may sometimes decide you should see an adviser with another adviser present. This will usually be when there has been a lack of clarity about what happened in your previous appointment or for safeguarding reasons.
- You will normally be allocated the first available adviser, unless you are seeing an adviser as part of an ongoing issue.

- If you have a preference for a male/female adviser please tell reception and we will do our best to accommodate this. Please note that it may not always be possible, though.
- You may also request a different adviser if you have specific reasons for doing so and you should explain these to reception when you make your appointment. Such a request will not be unreasonably withheld but you cannot change adviser just because the advice you were given was not what you hoped to hear. If you were dissatisfied with the adviser you saw, you should discuss this with the Advice & Representation Manager (sonia.cottrell@soton.ac.uk).

Professional boundaries

Students must understand that their relationship with Advice Centre staff is a professional one and they should not expect to have social contact with staff.

Parents/Carers/Other Third Parties

Our aim is to empower students by supporting them to make decisions and take control of their own issues. We are happy to signpost parents to other sources of information or to help them find publicly available University of Southampton regulations, but we will only discuss students' issues with the students themselves unless we have written permission from students.

Parents 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 to join them. Parents may not attend meetings with advisers unless the student is present.

Union Southampton is a membership organisation, therefore we are unable to provide advice to individuals who are not our members.