

## The Advice Centre Charter

We aim to support students to make their own informed choices about problems in a friendly and professional environment.

We act independently from the University of Southampton.

### Who we are

We are a team of trained and experienced members of staff. The Advice Centre is managed by the Head of Advice and Lettings and is made up of a team of advisers and reception staff.

### Who the service is for?

The University of Southampton Students' Union (SUSU) is a membership organisation; therefore, we are unable to advise individuals who are not our members. All University of Southampton students are automatically members of SUSU.

### What we do

The Advice Centre offers all members of SUSU free, confidential and independent advice on practical matters. We provide information, advice and support on a range of matters. Academic, housing and finance matters are our main areas of advice.

Rather than make decisions for our clients we provide advice and information to allow them to make decisions for themselves

### How we do it

#### 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
- Signposting to additional services where required

#### What we cannot do:

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

### **What we request 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 share all relevant documentation with us and to ensure you read information that we have asked you to read prior to your appointment or to let us know in advance if this is not possible
- To proactively engage with the appointment and keep them informed of any changes

### **Impartiality and independence**

The Advice Centre is part of SUSU and therefore independent of the University of Southampton. Staff working at The Advice Centre are employees of SUSU and therefore cannot be independent of the organisation and its processes. As a result, Advice Centre staff cannot support students with possible complaints relating to SUSU or SUSU staff.

### **Conflict of interest**

If multiple parties in a dispute approach The Advice Centre each will be allocated a different Adviser (within the resources of the service). The Advisers concerned will not discuss the case with each other but may discuss the case with the Head of Advice and Lettings. Further details on the Conflict of Interest policy can be found here: [Link to conflict of interest policy.](#)

### **Confidentiality**

We hold information electronically in a secure database, separate from The University of Southampton, which is only accessible to authorised SUSU staff. The service provided by The Advice Centre is confidential. Advisers may discuss cases within the team where appropriate. We will not discuss any students, or student cases, outside of the department unless we have permission from the student concerned. Ordinarily, should we need to contact 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. The exceptions to this are outlined in the section Breach of confidentiality.

### **Parents, guardians and carers (PGC)**

If parents, guardians, 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. If PGC's which to attend your appointment with you, we will first speak to the client without the PGC present to establish that the client is requesting this and are not being coerced. If the client wishes us to speak to a PGC without the client present, we will need written confirmation from the clients account that it is okay to do so. Any email exchanges will be sent to the client rather than any PGC.

### **Breach of confidentiality**

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

We will only break confidentiality without your consent if we have concerns that you or someone else may be at risk of harm or where not doing so would break the law. This will be done in consultation with a senior staff member

In exceptional circumstances it may also be necessary to break confidentiality if you are enrolled on a course that can lead to a professionally recognised qualification and we have concerns about you or your behaviour. Specifically, if we believe that there would be a likelihood of real risk to you or the public if that information was not disclosed. Our concerns will be shared with the Head of Advice and Lettings who may deem it necessary to contact relevant staff within the faculty.

## **Working Procedure for advice provision**

The Advice Centre is open Monday – Friday, 9am –5pm.

A client can access the service by:

- Email: [advice@susu.org](mailto:advice@susu.org)
- Telephone: 02380 59 2085
- Coming in person to The Advice Centre upstairs in building 40 on Highfield Campus.

We offer a mixture of in person, Microsoft Teams, telephone and email advice. If you would like to book an appointment, you can do so using any of the means above. If you wish to receive your advice via a different means of communication, you can discuss this with reception or your adviser.

We ask students to turn up on time for appointments and to let us know if they cannot attend. 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.

Please note that the above is our 'normal' working procedure and may change based on exceptional events or situations. We will endeavour to keep you updated of changes to this procedure through social media (Facebook – SUSU Advice Centre) and through the [SUSU website](#).

## **Reception response times**

We aim to respond to emails within 48 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.

## **Restriction and Withdrawal of service**

Occasionally, it may be necessary to change the adviser you are seeing, for two advisers to be present or to limit /withdraw access to The Advice Centre.

This decision will only be taken after careful consideration, and we will outline the reasons.

The following circumstances that could lead to this decision include (NB this list is not exhaustive):

- If you threaten or use violence, or if you are otherwise aggressive or abusive to staff
- You are in breach of the SUSU Rule Book
- 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 you are being advised by third party, e.g., lawyer and we believe providing advice may be counterproductive or have an impact on the service resources
- 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. (Please note that before restriction or withdrawal from the service, the Head of Advice and Lettings will contact you to see if there are changes that could be made to the delivery of the service to help overcome any boundaries you may be experiencing.)
- If we feel you are making inappropriate or excessive use of Advice Centre resources

### **Adviser/ case allocation**

- You will normally be allocated the first available Adviser (unless you are seeing an Adviser as part of an ongoing case )
- If you have a preference for a male/female Adviser please tell reception and we will do our best to accommodate this.
- We may sometimes decide you should see an Adviser with another Adviser present
- 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 (requests will not be unreasonably withheld)
- If you were dissatisfied with the advice you have been given you can contact the Head of Advice and Lettings ([sam@susu.org](mailto:sam@susu.org)) or refer to our complaints procedure: [Link to complaints procedure](#)

### **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 them.

### **Recording appointments**

Clients may not record appointments without adviser consent. Clients can request an email at the end of the appointment which details the issues discussed.

### **Feedback**

We want to make sure students are happy with the service we provide and welcome your feedback. Upon registration, we ask clients for some information regarding their knowledge and understanding of a process. We then collect this data again at the end of their meeting with an adviser. Our goal is to understand the impact and whether there are ways we can improve the service.

We believe all feedback about the service allows us to continually develop and improve the service we offer. If there are any aspects of our service you would like to comment on, or you are dissatisfied with the service you receive, you can send your feedback directly to the Head of Advice and Lettings ([sam@susu.org](mailto:sam@susu.org)).

### **Complaints**

If you wish to make a complaint about the service you have received, please refer to our [Complaints policy](#)

### **Key dates**

**The following dates are for the academic year 2023 to 2024.**

Semesters

Semester 1: Monday 25 September 2023 to Saturday 27 January 2024

Semester 2: Monday 29 January 2024 to Saturday 15 June 2024

Term dates

Welcome week: Monday 25 September 2023 to Sunday 1 October 2023

Autumn: Monday 2 October 2023 to Saturday 16 December 2023

Spring: Monday 8 January 2024 to Saturday 23 March 2024

Summer: Monday 22 April 2024 to Saturday 15 June 2024

Student vacation dates

Christmas: Sunday 17 December 2023 to Sunday 7 January 2024

Easter: Sunday 24 March 2024 to Sunday 21 April 2024

University closed

Closure day: Friday 22 December 2023

Public holiday: Monday 25 December 2023

Public holiday: Tuesday 26 December 2023

Closure day: Wednesday 27 December 2023

Closure day: Thursday 28 December 2023

Closure day: Friday 29 December 2023

Public holiday: Monday 1 January 2024

Public holiday: Friday 29 March 2024

Public holiday: Monday 1 April 2024

Closure day: Tuesday 2 April 2024

Closure day: Wednesday 3 April 2024

Public holiday: Monday 6 May 2024

Public holiday: Monday 27 May 2024

Public holiday: Monday 26 August 2024

The Advice Centre will be closed on weekends, bank holidays and University closure periods.