

CHRIST CHURCH
**STUDENTS'
UNION**



'to better student life and enrich students' experiences'

ADVICE CENTRE POLICY AND PROCEDURES

Officer Champions	President (Wellbeing) Students' Union President
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1. Introduction

- a. The Advice Centre at Christ Church Students' Union ('CCSU' or 'the Union') offers professional, free, confidential and impartial advice to students and as such is one of the most important and highly rated services we provide. The majority of the advice given is academic in nature, such as academic appeals, plagiarism panels and fitness to practise panels.
- b. As a Students' Union Advice Centre we offer advice in good faith, based on knowledge, experience and the best information available to us. Students who seek our help must take responsibility for their own decisions based on the advice we give.

2. The Relationship between the Advice Centre and its clients

- a. Clients should feel that their affairs are being dealt with promptly and in a competent manner - all contact with clients will be friendly and efficient.
- b. Each adviser will ensure that the advice they give to a client is impartial; free from all other influences, such as may arise from personal interests or external stakeholder pressure.
- c. A client's main point of contact with the Centre is the adviser with whom they have their initial interview; they will have primary responsibility for the case. There may be occasions when other members of Union staff provide assistance. Clients will always be assured that casework remains confidential to the Centre at all times.
- d. A client confides their private details to the Centre and in doing so, is confident that this trust will not be broken. Discretion will be used when papers are read outside the office and on no account will the papers be left unattended.

- e. It is acknowledged that an adviser is in a position to exert significant influence on a client when they are potentially vulnerable. Whilst it may be essential for an adviser to deal with an emergency in a swift and intelligent fashion, the client will always be made to feel empowered and in control of any decisions made.
- f. Advisers will aim to meet the following standards:
 - i. Reply to emails as soon as possible, and in any event within 3 working days; and
 - ii. Return telephone calls and voicemail messages within 2 working days.
- g. Where an adviser is on leave or sick, they will ensure that their out of office email signposts students to other sources of support such as CCCU Student Support, Health & Wellbeing, and where possible make arrangements for cover.

3. Casework

- a. Clients should make contact with the Advice Centre as soon as they are aware that they may require the advice and/or support of an adviser. If a client fails to make contact in good time before a scheduled panel meeting they may risk not having support and/or representation. If a client contacts the Advice Centre with less than 3 working days' notice of a scheduled panel date the adviser may inform that there is no provision to assist the student at that time. This does not restrict the adviser from further assistance after the panel date.
- b. Initial contact by the client may be made via the telephone, at an interview or by email. Regardless of how it is received, advisers should make case notes outlining their understanding of the situation. These should be verbally confirmed with the client and subsequent endorsement noted.
- c. At the first interview, the adviser should inform the client that:
 - i. They are primarily responsible for handling the case; there may currently be no others in the Centre whom the client can contact in the event of sickness or annual leave;
 - ii. What action will be taken to deal with the case in light of the advice given on the matter;
 - iii. What the next step is and what action (if any) the client has to take; and
 - iv. The timescale involved in the case, including when the next contact with the client is likely to be.
- d. Depending on the complexity of the case, the adviser may wish to confirm such things in writing via email. Updates with regard to changes in the actions planned, or the handling of a case, should be given to the client promptly. In this way, actions can be regularly reviewed with the client.
- e. At the conclusion of the case, the following steps should be taken:

- i. Confirm with the client the outcome and explain any further action they are required to take;
- ii. What, if anything, there remains to be done;
- iii. Return to the client any original documents and other property belonging to the client, save for photocopied items which, by agreement, will be stored by the Centre; and
- iv. Advise the client whether the matter should be reviewed in the future, and if so, when.

4. Follow Up Casework

- a. An adviser may become aware that additional work is required in a case. There may be many reasons why follow up casework is required. These may be:
 - i. Where third party contact is required;
 - ii. Further or additional research is required which cannot be undertaken or completed immediately in the presence of the client; and
 - iii. Further information or documentation is required from the client.
- b. The adviser will ensure that the client understands why the matter cannot be concluded and note:
 - i. Details of the further work required and the reasons for it;
 - ii. What action is to be taken and by whom; and
 - iii. The timescale agreed with the client.
- c. If further documentation or information is required from the client, without which further progress on the case cannot be made, the adviser will ensure the client fully understands the importance of providing the information and the consequences of not doing so.
- d. The adviser will ensure that the case file shows details of any third parties to be contacted and any other relevant information. The adviser will ensure that the client has consented to any third party contact.
- e. Where casework requires an adviser to attend a meeting with the client for support or representation the adviser would only attend meetings within the University. The adviser would not attend meetings outside of the University (for example; at a placement, hospital, school, or other professional environment). The Union's Advice Centre advisers work within current University policy and procedures framework and do not have expertise to work outside of this capacity. If a client asks for representation at a meeting outside of the University then the adviser will direct them to their professional trade union for support (for example; Unison, Unite, RCN, NASUWT, NUT, ATL, NEU).
- f. Once the follow up casework has been completed, the client will be notified. Any original documents or other property belonging to the client will be returned. Photocopies can be retained, by agreement with the client, in the client's file.

5. Casework Progression

- a. It is important that all clients are kept informed and updated about the progress of their case. The purpose of this procedure is to identify when and how an adviser should update a client on such progress.
- b. When an adviser has identified the need for follow up casework the client will have received details of the additional work required and has agreed a timescale with the adviser. It is important that the adviser complies with any agreed timescales and informs the client immediately if a situation occurs which will prevent this. The adviser will arrange a new time scale with the client and note details on the client's case file.
- c. If information from a third party is received, the client will be advised of this immediately. The adviser will determine the most appropriate method of contact, which preferably will be by email, telephone or further appointment.
- d. If the client is required to supply further information or documentation, the adviser may, if it is appropriate to do so, remind the client by email or telephone ensuring that the client fully understands the consequences of not providing the agreed paperwork.

6. Case Recording

- a. Case recording is a way of empowering a client. By keeping an ongoing, written record, issues and priorities can be discussed enabling the client to become an equal partner in the process. The Advice Centre records the details of each case for a number of reasons:
 - i. It enables an adviser to think clearly and logically about a case whilst also stating any advice given;
 - ii. It helps minimise misunderstandings and reduces uncertainty between adviser and client;
 - iii. It is a method of obtaining the required information with a view to giving appropriate advice and allows cases to be monitored or audited thoroughly; and
 - iv. It may also be the case that the information offered by a client changes, in which case the advice given may vary over time. Written records will be kept of any such changes.
- b. Casework records and notes may be kept in hand-written, physical form or digitally on emails, computer files (including recordings of virtual meetings) and a Casework Record Management (CRM) system, or a mixture of both. All client information will be kept in accordance with the Data Protection Act (2018).
- c. The style of casework recording will be clear, concise and contain all relevant factual information. The adviser should be sure to write in an objective fashion and refrain from making assumptions or writing in a subjective tone.

- d. All recording should be legible. It is accepted that advisers will use shorthand.
- e. If a third party is consulted, the adviser should cite the source of the information and note the name of the person dealt with. Any policies, literature or websites used should be referenced.

7. Referrals

- a. The purpose of this section is to set out the circumstances and manner in which a client may be referred in whole or in part either internally or externally and also the circumstances in which a client may be signposted to another agency.
- b. A referral is passing on all or part of an existing case on which the Advice Centre has already taken action.
- c. Signposting is when it is clear at the point of enquiry that the client needs to be directed to another agency for assistance. In addition, a new problem may be identified during the progress of a case when similar action is required.
- d. In all cases where advisers are referring a client to an alternative service provider, advisers will:
 - i. Explain to the client why there is a need for referral;
 - ii. Provide the client with details of the agency they are referring to;
 - iii. Discuss with the client the suitability of the agency receiving the referral with regard to the agency's expertise, experience, availability, location and any cost implications;
 - iv. Offer to make an appointment with the receiving organisation;
 - v. Obtain the client's consent before passing on any information held; and
 - vi. Request that the client returns to the Advice Centre if not satisfied with the service they receive from the referral agency.

8. Confidentiality

- a. The Advice Centre is committed to providing a confidential service to its clients and the principles of confidentiality will be integrated across all aspects of services and management. We further believe clients deserve the right to confidentiality to protect interests and safeguard its services.
- b. The Advice Centre understands confidentiality to mean that no information regarding a client shall be given directly or indirectly to any third party which is external to the Advice Centre, without the client's prior consent to disclose such information. All clients should be able to access its service in confidence and that no other person should know that they have used the service, except where there is a conflict of interest.
- c. The Advice Centre recognises that information may be indirectly given out through staff informally discussing cases. Other than in exceptional circumstances all staff

will ensure that no discussion relating to an individual user of the Advice Centre can take place outside of its premises, or a safe virtual meeting environment.

- d. The Advice Centre recognises that clients need to feel secure in using its services in a confidential manner. The Advice Centre will ensure that all clients are afforded confidential interview space, or a safe virtual meeting environment and that all possible mechanisms are used to avoid any unintentional breaches of confidentiality.
- e. In circumstances where one party to a dispute has consulted us and the other party then seeks our advice, the Centre may disclose that the original party has consulted the Centre previously. However, we will not disclose the nature of the advice given, and will refer the second party to an alternative service provider.
- f. Confidentiality will only be breached in special circumstances, i.e. where the Advice Centre has a legal obligation to do so. This will include circumstances where a client discloses information which leads Centre staff to believe that there is an imminent risk of harm to the client or to others. The Centre will normally seek advice before making a breach but this may not be possible in an emergency situation.
- g. It is necessary for the Union to hold and use personal information about clients. The Union shall ensure that all personal information that we hold and use will be treated in accordance with the Data Protection Act (2018) and the Data Protection Principles set down in the Act.

9. Conflict of Interests

- a. The Advice Centre is committed to offering the best service that is possible to its clients. All advice is free, confidential and impartial. To maintain impartiality the Advice Centre operates a Conflict of Interest Policy.
- b. The Advice Centre Policy is to not advise both parties to a dispute.
- c. In order to identify whether a conflict of interest has occurred, advisers will ask each client at the start of the interview, whether they feel that the other party to the dispute could have contacted the Advice Centre on this matter already. The adviser will ask for the name of the other party and check to see whether they have already consulted us for advice.
- d. Only the first client can be advised on a dispute with another student.
- e. The existing client must be informed that should the second party approach the Advice Centre, confidentiality will be broken. The second party will be informed that the other party is a client and that they therefore cannot be advised. No further details will be divulged.

- f. The second party will then be referred to an alternative internal/external agency for advice on the issue. They are still entitled to support from the Union and can be advised by the Advice Centre on other matters.
- g. The Advice Centre offers a specialist service to higher education students and recognises that in certain cases it will not be appropriate to refer one party to another agency, for example where the case involves academic appeals or disciplinary hearings.
- h. The prime reason for the existence of the Advice Centre is to provide advice and information to students, however, it is recognised that requests for advice are sometimes made by University or Union staff. Where the nature of the enquiry could potentially involve a student and a member of staff is seeking advice from the Advice Centre, the Advice Centre will refer the member of staff to another agency. The member of staff would be informed that a conflict of interest exists and that the Advice Centre must put the needs or potential needs of the student first.
- i. Should our advice be sought by a local landlord or letting agency, the caller will be informed that the Advice Centre exists to provide advice to the students, and that as it puts the needs of the students first, it is unable to assist with the query.
- j. The Advice Centre will not act on behalf of a client who is already consulting or instructing another agency on the same matter (for example a professional trade union or legal representation). Any exception to this rule may operate only with the consent of both agencies and where the liaison is beneficial to the client's interest.

10. Refusal or Unavailability of Support

- a. The Advice Centre exists to support students at Canterbury Christ Church University and will endeavour to support all students, however, there may be occasions when it is not possible to assist a student. This may be because:
 - i. There is a conflict of interest;
 - ii. The adviser feels uncomfortable or threatened;
 - iii. There is a conflict with other cases;
 - iv. An adviser is not available;
 - v. The client didn't contact the Advice Centre in sufficient time for a panel or hearing, or was unable to provide required information; or
 - vi. In other limited but reasonable circumstances.
- b. In all cases the student will be informed that there is no provision available to support them.
- c. In the event that there is a conflict with other cases that impacts on an adviser's ability to support a student, the adviser will be required to prioritise casework to ensure that their support goes to the student with the most urgent requirements. The Advice Centre will attempt to negotiate rearrangements if possible in order to enable the best support for a student in cases where there is a conflict with other cases.

- d. The Advice Centre has a commitment to current students who are clients of the Advice Centre. Therefore, to enable advisers to prioritise the needs of current students, when a client has reached the end of the University Internal Procedures the Advice Centre will signpost the client to the [Office of the Independent Adjudicator](#) and the client will be advised to contact the agency themselves.

11. Comments and Complaints

- a. The Advice Centre's culture is one of continuous improvement. It is recognised that an effective complaints procedure can be useful in identifying problems within the service and can be used in a constructive manner to improve.
- b. Any complaints should, in the first instance, try to be resolved informally via dialogue with the Advice and Projects Coordinator.
- c. If the complainant is still not satisfied they can pursue the matter further via the Union's Comments, Complaints, and Feedback Policy.