



STUDENT ADVICE CENTRE CODE OF PRACTICE

(for Student Advice staff & clients)

Introduction

This Code of Practice outlines what Student Advice aims to provide to clients and what, in return, is expected from users of the service. It also provides a framework for Student Advice to develop and improve the service in the light of experience. Student Advice staff can offer practical help and advice in a number of areas - it is not, however, a counselling service.

Mission Statement

"The Student Advice Centre aims to offer advice and information to all students of Nottingham Trent University. The advice we give is accurate, up to date, and comprehensive, enabling clients to make informed choices about their course of action. Our service is free, confidential, impartial, non-judgemental and accessible to all members of the University community."

Contacting Student Advice

We are open to answer enquiries between the following times :

Union Central Byron House, City : Drop-In : 11:00am – 4:00pm (Mon-Fri)
☎ (0115) 848 6200
(All year round)

Union Central D H Lawrence Clifton : Drop-In : 11am - 4pm (Mon-Fri)
☎ (0115) 848 1400
(Term time only)

Brackenhurst Campus Drop-In : 1:00pm – 4:00pm - One afternoon per week (Contact SAC at Byron House to confirm attendance)
(Term time only)

We operate a drop-in service between the above hours, when clients can see an adviser.

We can also be contacted between the hours of 9.30am-4.30pm by telephone (subject to availability), or by e-mail or letter.

Because of our caseload and involvement in other activities, time is needed for essential paperwork. For this reason we will adhere strictly to the above opening times, and ask clients to respect this.

We reserve the right to suspend the service in the interests of personal safety (for example, if the adviser present is alone and the surrounding offices are empty). We will advise all current students, recent ex-students and prospective students of The Nottingham Trent University, as appropriate.

We will represent current students of The Nottingham Trent University (if appropriate), but will not represent ex-students and prospective students unless their case relates to being a student at The Nottingham Trent University.

Time permitting; we will answer enquiries from University and Union staff and from students at other institutions. However, this is subject to our workload and we reserve the right to refuse assistance.

Principles of Advice Work

There are a number of fundamental principles at the core of the work of the Student Advice Centre:

Free

The advice and information is totally free of charge to all students.

Impartial

The advice is unbiased and not prejudiced towards or against any viewpoint. The views of the adviser will not affect the advice given, and every possible option available to a client will be explored, regardless of the adviser's own political, religious or cultural beliefs.

Independent

The advice is independent of any outside bodies or external bodies, including the University.

Non-judgemental

We are here to help and advise all clients faced with difficulties regardless of how those difficulties arose.

Empowerment

The role of advisers is to comprehensively explore all possible courses of action and potential consequences, to enable and empower the client to make an informed decision on how best to resolve their problem. The advice we give is, therefore, non-directive - allowing the clients to act for themselves. Clients always remain in control of their cases.

Confidentiality

All interviews will be held in a private room and anything a client says will be treated in strict confidence within Student Advice.

The fact that a client has contacted Student Advice will not be disclosed to any individual or organisation outside Student Advice, unless the client agrees. If it is necessary to discuss a client's case with an organisation or individual outside Student Advice, the adviser will first discuss this with the client and only pass on information with the client's prior consent.

A case record will be kept and stored within the secure computerised case track system and additional paperwork will be stored in within a locked filing cabinet in Student Advice Centre on the City Site. Access restricted to Student Advice staff only.

Anecdotal information for the purposes of campaigns or media interest will not be provided in a way that may identify individual clients - unless the client agrees, in writing, to this.

Confidentiality may be broken in certain circumstances:

- If a client is deemed to be a danger to themselves or others
- If we are legally bound to disclose information under the Prevention of Terrorism Act
- If we are subpoenaed to do so by the police.

Our legal duty to disclose information will first be checked with a solicitor. Further details are contained in our Confidentiality Policy.

Equality of Access

We offer a service to all our clients that will not discriminate on the grounds of ethnic group or nationality, sex, marital status, family commitments, disability, age, political or religious beliefs, because a person is HIV positive or because someone is lesbian, gay or bisexual. We are opposed to all forms of discrimination and are committed to ensuring that the service is equally available to all students of The Nottingham Trent University. All clients' problems will be treated in equal regard.

Working Methods

When advising, advisers will adhere to the following guidelines :

All problems will be treated equally and with respect and the interests of the client will always be foremost.

If the problem is a multiple one, the client and adviser will decide which to deal with first.

Advisers will remain sensitive to the cultural, religious and political background of the client.

Advisers will aim to find the relevant information to help the client, whilst the client is with the adviser.

Written information should be studied with the client and relevant notes or photocopies made for the client to take away.

Where a client's enquiry is particularly complex or the information they are seeking covers a number of subject areas, our understanding of their enquiry and the information given will be confirmed in writing to the clients notified address. This will be deemed as a client care letter and will be kept with the client's case sheet.

If no action is possible immediately, clients are empowered to return to SAC at a later date when it can be actioned.

Advisers should seek confirmation that a client has understood the presented information and provide clarification where necessary.

Advisers will check to ensure information is accurate and up to date.

If the information in question is complex and more time is needed, clients will be asked to return at a specified time, or given the option of having information posted to them.

Advisers will be open, friendly, professional and give clients their undivided attention and the necessary time to talk through their problems within the confines of their allocated time.

Casework

Remembering that Student Advice aim primarily to empower clients to help themselves, where an adviser deems it appropriate, they may take on a client's case if, in the opinion of both the adviser and client, it could be handled most effectively by Student Advice.

We will not take any action without first discussing it thoroughly with the client and gaining their consent. SAC does not take any legal action on behalf of client's e.g. County Court claims. In those circumstances clients will be offered a referral or signposting to an appropriate service provider. However, where appropriate we will assist clients to complete court forms and also accompany and represent clients in County Court subject to permission from the Court.

Case progress and any change in future action will not take place without the client visiting or contacting the Student Advice Centre.

Where a third party contacts Student Advice in relation to a client's case, for example to advise of a specific outcome, that information will be recorded on the client's case file and the client will be contacted to advise of this, normally by letter.

Clients will be advised of any potential costs from an opposing party that they may become liable for as a result of any action the client may take and this will be recorded on the clients case sheet. E.g. where a landlord defends a claim for a return of a security deposit.

The client will remain in control of their case at all times and will be kept fully informed of all developments, including being given copies of all letters in and out of Student Advice in connection with their case.

We expect to be kept informed of any developments the client becomes aware of.

Advisers will aim to deal promptly within the constraints of their workload.

Case sheets, Records and Statistics

During the course of an interview, especially if further casework or repeat visits are likely to be needed, the adviser may need to make notes and keep a record of events, advice given and action taken.

We will record this information with the client's knowledge and consent, and if a client specifically requests, we may file the information under 'anonymous'.

Information is initially recorded on a day sheet. If necessary, the adviser will make out a case sheet, which will contain details of each visit, all developments, copies of correspondence etc. These day sheets and case sheets are treated confidentially and are accessible only to Student Advice staff.

Case records remain the property of Student Advice - although clients may have access to see them or receive a copy on request.

Case records will be kept for a minimum of 6 years from the most recent entry on the sheet, and then destroyed.

We record each enquiry anonymously under subject classification so we can monitor our work and identify trends in certain areas - these statistics will be used in written reports on the work of Student Advice, and to fuel campaigns within the Union and nationwide. This will never be done in a way that individual clients could be identified.

What clients can expect from us

We will see all drop-in clients on the same day, if they call within our advertised opening hours. Clients should take a seat in the SAC waiting area where the first adviser available will meet them.

We will answer all telephone enquiries immediately, unless we are already advising. We will aim to return a client's call within 24 hours of us receiving their message. Where a telephone call is redirected to the Student Union switchboard, clients will be invited to leave their name and contact number and the first adviser available will return their call.

If we have promised to follow up something for a client then we will aim to act promptly on all agreed work, giving an indication when they can expect to hear from us or call back.

We will be open during our advertised opening hours and, if for any reason, we do have to close, clients will be advised as far in advance as possible, given a reason for closure and a precise indication when we will re-open.

We will aim to keep drop-in closure to an absolute minimum.

We will aim to answer queries as soon as possible, ideally when clients first make contact with us.

What Student Advice does not do

We do not attempt to get involved in counselling of clients, as we are not trained counsellors. If it becomes apparent during the course of an interview that a client wishes to be counselled, we will refer or signpost them to the appropriate counselling service.

We do not get involved in campaigning around student issues - although we may identify issues around which campaigns could be made. If this is the case, we will advise the Welfare and Campaigns Officer of the Student Union Executive Committee who will take up campaigns, as they deem appropriate.

We do not speak to the media. If the required information or interview is in connection with a matter we have knowledge of, we will brief the appropriate Executive Officer and channel our input through them.

We do not advise outside our field of competence, and will refer or signpost clients, when we deem it most appropriate, to those with greater knowledge and/or experience in a given field.

We will not represent students who have a dispute with other students of Nottingham Trent University. Advisers will offer impartial advice and information to the client but will not undertake any casework on their behalf. Students in this situation will also be advised that if the other party to a dispute visits the SAC, that student will be offered advice and information to the same level however confidentiality regarding either student's visit will not be broken. Further details are contained in our Referral and Signposting Policy.

We will not advise any client who is abusive, threatening or violent, or who uses language or behaviour in contravention with the Union's equal opportunities or harassment policies. If a client is found to be demonstrating these types of behaviour, the Senior Student Adviser will decide whether to completely withdraw the service from the offending client. Further details are contained in our Referral and Signposting Policy.

We will never misrepresent a client's circumstances or knowingly pass on false information. If information given by clients is found to be false, we may consider withdrawing the service. Similarly, we reserve the right to withdraw services from clients who decide on courses of action that involve deceit or may be illegal.

There may be times when a client's chosen course of action may not be in their best interests. In such circumstances, the adviser will discuss with the client whether it is appropriate for the adviser to act on behalf of the client. The client will, however, be offered information on how to pursue their chosen course of action by themselves.

We do not advise landlords who wish to take action against students - they will be signposted to an appropriate service provider.

We will not advise or represent a client on a matter where we are aware they are already being assisted by another agency on the same matter.

We do not give advice outside our place of work. We will not give clients our home address or telephone number, and if we see clients outside Student Advice, would ask

them to respect our privacy and call into the office during our opening hours for advice.

We do not see people outside of our drop-in hours, unless an appointment has been made.

We will not usually give clients an initial choice of seeing a specific adviser, unless:

- that adviser has seen the client before regarding the same matter and knows their situation
- a client has been referred to a particular adviser for specialist advice
- Student Advice Centre staff believe it would be in the student's best interests to see a particular adviser because of the adviser's knowledge and experience in a particular area of advice
- a client knows an adviser in a personal capacity and would prefer to see someone else.

We do not continue to advise a client where we have exhausted all practical avenues of enquiry.

Referrals and Signposting

Where the help or advice a client needs is beyond the expertise of Student Advice Centre staff, or where we have refused or withdrawn the service from a client for a specific reason, we will offer to refer or signpost the client to the most appropriate agency. There will be no obligation on the part of the client to accept that referral, but where they wish, we can facilitate this referral. Further details are contained in our Referral and Signposting Policy

What Student Advice expects from clients

We expect clients to keep us up-to-date with any developments that occur.

We expect clients to be honest with us - we rely on the accuracy and reliability of information given to us by clients. If a student is found to have deliberately misled us as to the true nature of a situation, we reserve the right to withdraw that service.

We expect clients to keep appointments made for them, and to inform SAC if they are unable to keep the appointment.

We expect clients to be polite and courteous to Student Advice Centre staff.

We expect clients to respect the guidelines outlined in this Code of Practice, and if they do not agree to them, to discuss this further with the Senior Student Adviser. If, after discussion, agreement cannot be met, it will be recommended that the client seek advice elsewhere.

Other areas of Student Advice responsibility

Administration of the Union's Short Term Loan Scheme, which offers small, short-term loans to students in financial difficulty if there is no other possible immediate assistance.

Mediation service, where requested by both parties to a dispute.

Complaints Procedure

If any client has a complaint about the services offered by Student Advice, they should follow the Student Advice Centre complaints procedure outlined in a document available from Student Advice. Leaflets and Complaints forms are available in the SAC waiting areas.

Feedback

Student Advice welcomes any feedback on the services we provide.

Accreditation

We are members of AdviceUK.

SAC staff are members of the National Association of Student Money Advisers (NASMA)

We are licensed by the Office of Fair Trading to provide money advice/debt counselling.

We are licensed to use the Citizens Advice Electronic Information System

Date Document reviewed **August 2010**

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