



STUDENTS' UNION

Students' Union Advice

Terms of Service

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2. Definitions

This document outlines what students can expect from Students' Union Advice and what Students' Union Advice expect from students using the service. Throughout this document, the term:

- 'Staff' refers to staff members of the Students' Union who are providing academic advice and/or support to students.
- 'Student' describes those who Students' Union Advice is advising and/or providing support to.
- 'Students' Union Advice' is the Students' Union service that provides academic advice to students.
- 'Students' Union' is the operating name of the Aberdeen University Students' Association.
- 'University' refers to the University of Aberdeen.

3. Purpose of Students' Union Advice

Students' Union Advice provides a safe space that is helpful, inclusive, and student-focused. Students' Union Advice offers free, confidential and impartial academic advice about the specific University processes, policies and procedures detailed in section 3.

Students' Union Advice provides advice and support to all current University students. Additionally, Students' Union Advice advises former students if they are involved in procedures initiated during their time as a student. In certain circumstances, Students' Union Advice provides advice to offer-holders who are being considered under University procedures prior to their enrolment.

Students' Union Advice is part of the Students' Union and therefore is independent from the University and all other organisations. Although Students' Union Advice is part of the Students' Union, advice and support provided is impartial.

Students' Union Advice cannot represent students in proceedings within the Students' Union.

4. Services Offered

Students' Union Advice primarily focuses on providing advice and support to students who are undergoing specific University processes or facing particular academic challenges. These include, but are not limited to:

- **Appeals:** Helping students navigate the formal appeal process when contesting academic decisions (e.g. exam results or student progress decisions).
- **Complaints:** Helping students with the University's Complaints Handling Process (e.g. dissatisfaction with course content or a service/support offered by the University).
- **Misconduct (Academic and Non-Academic):** Advising students who are facing allegations of misconduct, whether it's related to academic misconduct (e.g., plagiarism or exam cheating) or non-academic misconduct (e.g., behaviour in halls of residence/on campus or behaviour towards other students/staff).
- **Fitness to Practise:** Providing support to students who are enrolled in professional programmes (such as medicine or teaching) and are facing fitness-to-practise proceedings, which assess whether a student's conduct and/or academic performance is in line with professional standards.

In situations where Students' Union Advice is unable to provide the service required, students are signposted to other services or organisations both within the University and external from it. This includes services that provide:

- Academic skills development.
- Budgeting or financial advice.
- Counselling.
- Employees and employer disputes.
- Housing support.
- Immigration or visa advice.
- Legal advice or legal advocacy.
- Wellbeing support; etc.

Availability of Services

The capacity of Students' Union Advice can be influenced by external factors, which can occasionally impact the support to students or the availability of support. In addition, several factors are used by staff to prioritise students where availability is stretched. During periods of high demand, staff response times may be impacted and alternate appointment times offered to students.

Where a student's support may be impacted, Students' Union Advice communicate promptly with the student to outline the impact and signpost to other services that can assist.

5. Student Responsibilities

The aim of Students' Union Advice is to support students in the best way possible. To achieve this, students need to:

- Provide complete and timely information, including updates or changes to their case as they arise. If students do not share the full details of the case or withhold relevant information, the best advice cannot be provided.
- Complete the Student Information Form prior to an appointment.
- Arrive on time for all appointments. If a student misses three consecutive appointments, service may be limited, refused or withdrawn.
- Treat staff with respect. This includes refraining from violence, intimidation, abuse, and inappropriate comments/behaviours. Where staff believe that a student is engaging in any of these behaviours service may be limited, refused or withdrawn. Where relevant, staff will report such behaviours through the most appropriate channel.

6. Staff Responsibilities

The aim of Students' Union Advice is to support students in the best way possible. To achieve this, staff:

- Aim to respond to student correspondence within two working days and to have staff available to attend meetings between the student and the University. If this is not possible, due to staff availability or other unforeseen factors, the student is informed as soon as possible and provided with information about alternative support options.
- Maintain confidentiality of students where possible. For more details, including exceptions, see section 7.
- Empower students to make their own decisions and ensure students are in control of their own cases. Staff do not decide actions for students or usually complete paperwork for them.
- Reserve the right to clarify any misrepresentations made by students to third parties where appropriate.
- Stay up to date with local and national issues impacting students, including attending relevant trainings.
- Be identifiable to students by wearing their lanyard and ID card whilst in the office.
- Take a zero-tolerance approach to rude, inappropriate or disrespectful behaviour. If a student or member of the public engages in this behaviour, Students' Union Advice may limit, refuse or withdraw service. Where relevant, staff will report such behaviours through the most appropriate channel.

7. Conflicts of Interest

No staff can knowingly support or advise both parties in a dispute or other conflict of interest e.g. where students have been accused of colluding with each other. If a conflict arises between two or more students, it is the responsibility of the staff member to approach one student, whilst the other student(s) is referred to either another staff member or signposted to an appropriate alternative service.

A situation may arise where a staff member is aware of a student on a personal level. In these cases, either the staff member or the student can request that another staff member takes the lead on the case.

Students' Union Advice cannot advise or represent anyone with a complaint about Students' Union and/or its staff, or in a Students' Union disciplinary procedure. A student in this situation is provided with the information on the complaints process and advised of an alternative source of support where possible.

Where an outcome of the Students' Union complaint or disciplinary procedure is to refer the student to the University for further investigation, the student is welcome to seek support from Students' Union Advice. In this scenario, Students' Union Advice can support and advise the student involved in the process without bias towards the Students' Union investigation.

8. Confidentiality

Confidentiality

Students' Union Advice shares personal information between staff to ensure that advice and support is consistent and comprehensive. However, no personal information is given out directly or indirectly to any organisation or individual outside of Students' Union without the student's clear consent. This includes contacting or providing information to other University services, parents/guardians, course coordinator/personal tutors or any authority.

Students may withdraw consent for information sharing at any time by notifying Students' Union Advice in writing. Upon withdrawal, Students' Union Advice promptly updates records and ceases sharing the personal information.

Anonymous Students

In situations where a student would like to not be identified by the University, Students' Union Advice is still able to provide advice and support. Students' Union Advice takes

every reasonable step to respect the student's desire to remain anonymous. However, there may be limitations to the level of service and/or the advice that can be provided.

Exceptions to the Confidentially Policy

There are exceptional circumstances in which Students' Union Advice make disclosures to organisations or individuals outside of the Students' Union with or without the student's consent.

These include:

- Safeguarding concerns, such as staff feeling a student is at risk of harming themselves or others.
- Staff has received information that may help prevent acts of terrorism or apprehend a terrorist.
- Where there is a court order requiring disclosure.

For other potential criminal offences there is no duty of disclosure, however it is an offence to aid or encourage a crime.

If it is necessary to disclose student information to an outside body, including to the University, then a specific and limited disclosure may take place. Where possible, the disclosure is discussed with the student and the student is usually told when the disclosure will take place.

If a disclosure without the student's consent is necessary, staff discuss the issue with a member of Students' Union Senior Management Team.

All details of the disclosure shall be recorded appropriately.

Any potential breach of confidentiality is not discussed with any Elected Student Officer.

9. When Service May Be Withdrawn

Students' Union Advice reserves the right to limit, refuse or withdraw service from a student. The following are examples of why this may occur:

- A student has deliberately lied on material issues.
- A student becomes aggressive or acts inappropriately towards staff.
- A student attempts to involve staff in illegal activities.
- A student persistently and without good cause fails to attend meetings or otherwise wastes staff time.
- A conflict of interest arises.
- A student is being advised on the same issue by another organisation and this is proving counterproductive.
- A student becomes overly demanding and insistent.

Please note that this is not an exhaustive list.

Any decision to limit, refuse or withdraw service to a student is discussed with a member of the Students' Union Senior Management Team. When withdrawing service from a student, the student is provided with an explanation for the decision and is signposted to other relevant support organisations/services.

10. Data Management

Students' Union Advice is fully committed to data protection laws, including the Data Protection Act 1998, UK GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) and Data Protection Act 2018. Students' Union Advice uses an electronic casework system where data is held within the UK.

To provide the best service, it is necessary to collect and use information about students who interact with Students' Union Advice. Anonymised statistical data is distributed to the Students' Union Senior Management Team, the Elected Student Officers and other relevant bodies and committees within the Students' Union and University.

Subject Access Requests

Students with open cases may ask for access to their records at any time. This is provided upon receipt of a written request.

Should a student whose case is closed wish for a copy of their record, they should submit a Subject Access Request. Please include proof of identity and sufficient information to identify the relevant record.

11. Students' Union Policies

Students' Union Advice follows all relevant Students' Union policies on matters such as health and safety.

Equality and Diversity

Students' Union Advice follows the Students' Union Equality and Diversity Policy. Students' Union Advice strives to ensure all students and members of the public have equitable access to the appropriate services.

Health and Safety

Students' Union Advice adheres to the relevant Students' Union health and safety policies.

Privacy Policy

For full details of how Students' Union Advice processes data please refer to the Students' Union Privacy Policy.

12. Feedback and Complaints

Feedback

Students' Union Advice welcomes and considers all feedback. Staff aim to send all students a link to an online survey, which is an anonymous method for students to provide feedback. Anyone wishing to provide in-person feedback is welcome to do so. Feedback can also be provided to: ausaadvic@abdn.ac.uk.

Complaints

Complaints regarding Students' Union Advice follow the Students' Union [External Complaints Procedures](#). Complaints should be made by emailing: SUcomplaints@abdn.ac.uk.