



ABERDEEN UNIVERSITY
STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION

AUSA

ADVICE

CODE OF

PRACTICE

Note: In this document clients shall refer to any student we are advising (including prospective students, students who have suspended their studies, students awaiting the results of an appeal and university alumni involved in procedures from their time as a student).

OUR GENERAL AIM AND PURPOSE

AUSA Advice offers impartial advice and information to all current University of Aberdeen students including distance, transnational and Erasmus students.

Additionally, we can advise prospective students and alumni (up to one year following graduation). AUSA Advice is a service operated by the Aberdeen University Students' Association (AUSA).

Our service is free, professional, independent, impartial and confidential. We aim to provide a safe space where respect and tolerance are key values.

This guide sets out what you can expect from AUSA Advice and what we expect from our users.

SERVICES OFFERED

AUSA Advice offers a wide range of advice including, but not limited to:

Welfare related issues – Sexual health, mental and physical health;

Academic issues – Appeals, complaints and misconduct cases;

Accommodation – Advice on looking for a flat and tenant rights;

Part-time Employment – Employee rights and advice on looking for a job.

In addition to advice we also offer the following services:

Telephone – There is a telephone for student use. The phone cannot be used for personal calls. Please see the phone guidelines for more information.

Condoms - We have a selection of free condoms displayed at reception, including regular, king size, trim and latex free. There is also lubricant, female condoms and sanitary products available.

AUSA Advice also maintains a listing of private rented accommodation and collaborates with the University Careers Service to advertise part-time and casual job vacancies to students.

Please note this list is not exhaustive. If AUSA Advice are unable to help or advise then we will do our best to signpost to the appropriate organisation.

SERVICES WE ARE UNABLE TO OFFER

AUSA Advice aims to provide the best advice and support, however we are unable to provide the following services:

Writing draft documents for a client;

Visa advice;

Legal advice or advocacy;

Emotional counselling;

Budgeting or financial advice;

Mediation between flatmates; tenant and landlord; employees and employers; etc.

Clients requiring support on any of these issues will be signposted to the appropriate organisation.

CUSTOMER SERVICE

AUSA has a customer service policy which must be adhered to by all AUSA Advice staff.

AUSA Advice staff should be recognisable while in the office by wearing their lanyard and ID card at all times.

AUSA Advice has a zero tolerance policy for rude or disrespectful behaviour. If a client or member of the public engages in this behaviour, AUSA Advice reserve the right to refuse service.

STAFF AND TRAINING

AUSA Advice advisers are professionals who undergo a wide range of training on general and specific areas. AUSA Advice is staffed by an Academic Rights Adviser and Wellbeing & Accommodation Adviser. Both advisers are overseen by the Representative Services Manager.

Staff working in AUSA Advice are trained in a variety of fields. They receive training on the following:

- Scottish Mental Health First Aid
- ASIST (Applied suicide intervention skills training)
- Shelter housing training (or similar)
- Sexual health Training
- Alcohol issues
- Third party reporting
- Gambling

INDEPENDENCE

AUSA Advice is part of Aberdeen University Students' Association and therefore is independent from the University of Aberdeen and all other organisations.

AUSA Advice staff cannot be independent of the Students' Association but will remain impartial and provide the best possible advice and information. We cannot however represent clients proceedings within AUSA.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

AUSA Advice follows the AUSA Equality and Diversity Policy, which can be found at Byelaw 19 [here](#). AUSA Advice strives to ensure that all students and members of the public have equal access to the appropriate services.

CLIENT RESPONSIBILITIES

Our aim is to support you in the best way possible. In order to achieve this we need you to:

Tell us all the facts. If you do not share the full details of your case or withhold relevant information, we cannot provide you with the best advice. Everything you tell us is kept confidential.

Inform us of any updates with your case or changes in your circumstances.

Arrive promptly and on time for any appointments.

Give us notice. It can take us up to two working days to respond to emails. We will do our best to ensure that an adviser is available to attend meetings with you, however in certain circumstances we may not be able to.

Treat our advisers with respect. Refrain from violence, intimidation and abuse. Any client who does not comply with these requirements may be at risk of being refused service.

CLIENT EMPOWERMENT

AUSA Advice will ensure that clients are in control of their own cases. AUSA Advice advisers will not make a decision for a client or complete any paperwork for them. The purpose of our service is to provide the best information and advice for clients to make their own decisions.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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

No adviser can knowingly support or advise both parties in a dispute or other conflict of interest. In the event that a conflict arises between two clients, it is the responsibility of the adviser to approach the first client, and the other client will be referred to another appropriate service.

A situation may arise where an adviser is aware of a client on a personal level. In these cases either the adviser or the client can request that another adviser takes the lead on the case.

ANONYMOUS CLIENTS

If confidentiality is a concern and a client wants to remain anonymous then AUSA Advice will work to provide the best advice possible - however this will put limits on the support we can provide.

WITHDRAWAL OF SERVICE

AUSA Advice reserves the right to limit or refuse service to a client for the following reasons:

A client has deliberately lied on material issues;

A client becomes aggressive towards an adviser;

A client attempts to involve an adviser in illegal activities;

A client persistently without good cause fails to attend meetings or otherwise wastes an adviser's time;

A conflict of interest arises;

A client is being advised on the same issue by another organisation and this is proving counterproductive;

A client becomes overly demanding and insistent.

This decision to withdraw service to a client will be discussed by the full advice team, including the Representative Services Manager.

If withdrawing service from a client, the adviser concerned should explain to the client why this happened and suggest an alternative course of action.

LIMITATIONS ON SERVICE

If AUSA Advice are experiencing an exceptionally high workload then we may not be able to assist you. If this is the case we will make you aware of alternative options.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

AUSA Advice adheres to the AUSA health and safety policy which can be found [here](#).

DATA MANAGEMENT

AUSA Advice is fully committed to compliance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998 and GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation). AUSA Advice will follow procedures which aim to ensure that all member of staff who have access to personal data are aware of their duties under the data protection act.

DATA COLLECTION

In order to operate efficiently and effectively AUSA Advice has to collect and use information about its clients. This personal information must be handled and dealt with correctly. Only data relevant to the operational work of the service will be collected.

AUSA Advice uses an electronic casework system provided by MSL on behalf of IIZUKA. When a student comes to AUSA Advice for an appointment or drops in they are asked to complete a signatory sheet which informs the client that their personal

data will be used in our system and provides AUSA Advice with permission do this. If a client contacts us over email then we seek this consent via a Microsoft form. All paper signatory sheets will be held in lockable filing cabinets. Where a client refuses to give consent, the information will be stored anonymously.

For full details of how AUSA Advice process your data please refer to the [AUSA Advice Privacy Policy](#).

CONFIDENTIALITY

Information relating to individual users of AUSA Advice will be recorded in our casework system, which is only accessible to the AUSA Advice staff. It is necessary for staff to share such information with each other in order to ensure that advice and information is consistent and comprehensive.

No personal information regarding an individual service user shall be given out directly or indirectly to any organisation or individual outside of AUSA Advice without the service user's clear consent.

AUSA Advice staff will not contact or provide information to parents/guardians, course coordinator/personal tutors or any authority without prior consent from the client. The client reserves the right to withdraw this consent at any time by informing us via phone, email or in person.

All staff are expected to ensure that no discussion relating to clients or their cases takes place outwith AUSA Advice.

Confidential meeting rooms are available for discussions between advisers and clients.

Clients are not required to disclose any details of their enquiry at the reception desk, although it is helpful for the receptionist to have some idea of the nature of the enquiry, so that an appointment can be made with the most appropriate adviser.

We ensure that all usernames/passwords are kept confidential and we do not access Student Case Manager out with working hours. If away from their desks advisers must ensure to lock their computer and divert the phone to voicemail.

Staff should not disclose any information about a client, or that they have used AUSA Advice, to other members of their household, without the client's expressed consent.

BREACHES OF CONFIDENTIALITY

There may be cases of exceptional circumstances in which an adviser feels they need to breach the usual confidentiality policy. These can include: an adviser feels a client is at risk of harming themselves or others; an adviser 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 provide assistance or encouragement with a crime.

If an adviser feels like confidentiality should be breached for one of the above reasons then the adviser must discuss the issue with the Representative Services Manager. If the manager feels it is necessary to disclose client information to an outside body then a specific and limited disclosure may take place. All details of the disclosure shall be recorded in the casework system. If the Representative Services Manager is not available then the adviser may seek authorisation from another member of the senior management team.

Any potential breach of confidentiality should not at this time be discussed with the Student President or any other student officer, in case they are subsequently involved with a complaint regarding the issue.

DATA STORAGE

All enquiries and cases will be recorded in our casework system provided by MSL .

We aim to maintain no paper records of clients or their cases. Any paper notes taken will be disposed of in the confidential waste bins. In the case of signed slips, these will be stored alphabetically in a lockable cabinet. No original documents will be retained unless absolutely necessary. Where possible a scan will be taken and uploaded to MSL casework manager.

AUSA Advice staff will ensure that case records or client information is kept out of sight of visitors.

Case information will normally only be taken out of AUSA Advice where it is necessary, for example when attending a meeting or hearing with a client. In these circumstances the adviser is responsible for the safekeeping and return of these documents.

STATISTICAL RECORDING AND SOCIAL POLICY

In order to ensure AUSA Advice provides the best service it is necessary to monitor the use of the service, in order to identify any policy issues or trends. The anonymised statistical data that is produced may be distributed to the senior management team, the Sabbatical Officers and any relevant body or committee.

DATA ACCESS REQUESTS

Clients with open cases may ask for access to their records at any time. This can be provided on request.

Clients with closed or archived files will need to complete a subject access request to gain access to their files. This must be made in writing and include sufficient information to identify the client and source the information. The laws allows AUSA Advice to charge an appropriate fee (up to a maximum of £10) but this shall be considered on a case by case basis.

A client making a data access request must receive a reply with 40 days as long as any necessary fee has been paid.

CLOSING AND ARCHIVING FILES

When closing electronic files, advisers are responsible for ensuring that any additional paper documents are put in the confidential waste to be destroyed.

MSL Case Manager has an archive setting where all clients whose cases and enquiries have had no activity for 5 years are archived and all identifying data is removed.

FEEDBACK

AUSA Advice welcomes any feedback from past clients. Upon closure of a case students shall be sent a link to our online survey. This link is also included in the AUSA Advice email signature and available on the website. All the feedback we receive is anonymous. Anyone wishing to provide in-person feedback is also welcome to do so. We will do our best to ensure all feedback is taken on board. Our online survey can be found [here](#).

Complaints regarding AUSA advice should follow the AUSA complaints policy. Complaints should be made by emailing ausacomplaints@abdn.ac.uk.