



## Students' Unions' Advice Service

### Code of Practice

*“Free, confidential, independent and non-directive advice, information and representation.”*

The Students' Unions' Advice Service is provided by Cambridge University Students' Union (CUSU) and the Graduate Union (GU). Staff members provide a professional support, advice and information service to all students at the University of Cambridge, including former or prospective students if their situation relates to their time as a student at the University. This Code of Practice outlines what our core values are and how students can use the Service.

#### Free

*The Students' Unions' Advice Service is offered free of charge to all students of the University of Cambridge. At no time will students have to pay for the information, assistance or representation they receive from the Service.*

#### Confidential

*The Students' Unions' Advice Service is a confidential service for all students. All information which students share with us will be treated as confidential within the Service. Whilst a staff member may share information about a case with other staff members within the Students' Unions' Advice Service, this information will not be shared with any third party individuals outside the Service without the student's full, informed consent. The majority of face-to-face meetings will be conducted in our private advice areas and we will try to ensure that no breaches of confidentiality can occur inadvertently. We will not confirm that any student has visited the Service or used the Service without the student's consent. Our full confidentiality policy can be found on our website.*

#### Non-Directive

*The Students' Unions' Advice Service provides non-directive support to all students. All decisions about the best way forward for a student will be made by the student themselves, not the staff member. The role of the staff member is to comprehensively explore all possible options, courses of action and potential consequences, to enable the student to make an informed decision for themselves.*

Staff members may, at the student's request, represent students at University or college meetings or hearings. Before these meetings take place, the staff member will discuss and agree with the student what role they will play at this meeting (though the staff member will still, in all cases, adhere to the core values of the Service).

## **Impartial**

*The Students' Unions' Advice Service provides impartial support to all students. All available options will be explored with the student – our support will not be prejudiced towards or against any viewpoint, and will not be limited by political, religious, cultural or any other form of bias.*

## **Independent**

*The Students' Unions' Advice Service provides independent support to all students. The information and advice we offer to students is not influenced by any outside body, including the University or any of the colleges. The support and assistance we provide is also independent of CUSU's and the GU's political and campaigning work on student issues, though staff members may identify trends and issues to either organisation around which campaigns could be made.*

## **Non-Judgemental**

*The Students' Unions' Advice Service provides non-judgemental support to all students. We will assist and advise all students, regardless of how their situation arose. We will not make judgements about any situation.*

## **Competence**

*The Students' Unions' Advice Service will not provide information, support or assistance outside its field of competence. The Students' Unions' Advice Service aims to provide a one-stop service, but will refer or signpost a student to a more specialised source of advice and information, when appropriate. For example, staff members are not counsellors; if that is what a student requires, the University Counselling Service could be suggested to them as a more appropriate source of assistance.*

## **Equality of Access**

The Students' Unions' Advice Service seeks to provide equality of access to all students. In line with our equal opportunities policy, we will not discriminate on (for example, but not limited

to) the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, ethnicity, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation.

## **Contacting the Students' Unions' Advice Service**

Students may telephone, email, write to or visit the Students' Unions' Advice Service in person. The Students' Unions' Advice Service is located on the upper ground floor, 17 Mill Lane, CB2 1RX. Contact details can be found on the Students' Unions' Advice Service website at [www.studentadvice.cam.ac.uk](http://www.studentadvice.cam.ac.uk). Outside of the drop-in sessions, students should arrange appointments with us. Drop-in sessions take place on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 12pm-2pm. The Students' Unions' Advice Service is open Monday to Friday, between 9am and 5pm.

The Advice Service endeavours to acknowledge all email enquiries and phone calls within 1-2 working days of receiving them.

## **Case Records**

Staff members will keep an electronic record of events, advice offered and action taken. The student will also be asked to complete a registration form. These details, along with the student's name, college, faculty and other relevant information, will be kept on our confidential case management system and any accompanying paperwork will be locked away in our filing cabinet. If the student wishes to, they can also complete a monitoring form which includes sensitive personal data such as date of birth, gender and ethnicity and this will be recorded in the confidential case management system.

Records will be treated confidentially, and will only be accessible to staff members in the Students' Unions' Advice Service and the student (if the student requests access to them - complying with GDPR and Data Protection Act 1998 legislation). We retain this information for six academic years beyond the end of the academic year of your last involvement with the Service.

We will generate reports and statistics from all cases and enquiries the Students' Unions' Advice Service receives – these statistics will be used in written reports on the work of the Service, for research purposes and to identify trends and patterns that may contribute to the Unions' mission to improve the student experience at the University of Cambridge. Individual students and cases will not be able to be identified from these reports.

For more details about the personal information we collect on our service-users and how we process this information, please read the SUAS Privacy Notice which is available on our website.

## Student Disputes

If a student who has a dispute with another student approaches the Service, we will provide information, support and representation as normal, making it clear to the student that if the other party (or parties) visit the Students' Unions' Advice Service, they will be entitled to the same level of service. However, confidentiality about either student's visit will not be broken.

In cases where two staff members are representing opposing sides of a dispute, **the normal Students' Unions' Advice Service confidentiality policy will still apply**; information about one student will not be shared with the other student. Where possible communication between the two staff members regarding these cases will be limited, and staff members representing opposing sides will share information about each student mainly with a staff member who is not supporting either student. Given the sensitivity of this issue, it will be important to make sure that students involved in disputes with other students fully understand the confidentiality policy, and the non-judgemental, impartial service that the staff members will provide.

## Withdrawal of Service

Staff members are expected to be supportive, professional and non-directive in all their dealings with service users who come to the Students' Unions' Advice Service, and every effort will be made to continue to support any service user who comes to the Service.

However, the Students' Unions' Advice Service may withdraw the service if a service user:

- uses aggressive or inappropriate verbal or written language towards a staff member
- uses or threatens to use violence or other aggressive or inappropriate behaviour towards a staff member
- seeks support for fraud or other illegal conduct
- knowingly provides misleading information to a staff member or fails to provide information needed to progress the service user's case
- after warning, persistently fails to keep appointments
- makes excessive or unreasonable demands on the Service, for example requesting priority over other service users, insisting on continuing with a course of action which has no reasonable prospect of a successful outcome, repeatedly returns for advice on the same matter, or requests assistance beyond the expertise of staff, for example legal representation.
- after having agreed an action plan with a staff member insists on a course of action outside of what was agreed, and the staff member deems this course of action to be detrimental to the service user's case or to the reputation of the Service.
- is receiving advice from another advice agency or is taking legal advice

If the Students' Unions' Advice Service feels that a service user's behaviour is inappropriate, where possible the service user will be given a written warning that the service may be withdrawn from them should they continue to act in this way.

If a final decision is made to withdraw or refuse service, we will:

- Notify the service user in writing of the decision and the reason(s) why; and
- Where possible provide details of an appropriate alternative source of advice and assistance

## Feedback and Complaints

The Students' Unions' Advice Service welcomes all feedback on the service we provide and with your permission, we may email you an anonymous on-line feedback form shortly after your initial experience with the Service, and an anonymous on-line impact form a few months after you have been supported by the Service.

Our aim is to provide a high standard of service to all service users – if we fail to do this, **we want to know about it**. This enables us to resolve any specific problems, but also to learn for the future, and prevent it happening again. You can find details of our complaints procedure on the Students' Unions' Advice Service's website.

## Review

This Code of Practice is reviewed annually and was last reviewed in May 2018.