



UUSU

**ADVICE**

**BUREAU**

*Student Handbook*

## OVERVIEW

The primary goal of the Ulster University Students' Union (UUSU) Advice Bureau is to enhance the student experience by providing independent and impartial advice, guidance and support to our students that is free and confidential.

We aim to empower our students with practical and realistic solutions to all the issues presenting across the following areas:

- Appeals
- Student Complaints against UU
- Course issues
- Bullying & Harassment
- Student disciplinarys
- Housing problems

We also can provide general advice in several other areas or will know the correct

### WHAT WE CAN DO FOR YOU

- We can equip you with the correct information and make you aware of your rights
- We will take you through your options and provide insight into Ulster University processes
- We can help you draft content for emails, forms and letters
- We can help you prepare for meetings and panels and accompany you to these for support
- If we cannot help you, we will signpost you to the correct organisation or Ulster University department
- We aim to respond to your initial contact within 3 working days

### WHAT WE CANNOT DO FOR YOU

- We cannot write emails, letters or complete forms for you
- We cannot submit any forms for you
- When we attend a meeting or panel, we will provide moral support and prompt you to speak where we feel you have more evidence – however, we do not speak for you or present the case on your behalf
- Unfortunately, we cannot assist with complaints against UUSU as this is a conflict of interest
- If you are getting advice from another advice service or 3rd party, then we are unable to assist

We will not speak to parents, guardians, lecturers or other 3rd parties without your written consent, exceptions to this are noted later in this document organisation to signpost you to.

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## ACCESSING THE ADVICE BUREAU

The Advice Bureau is open to all students at Ulster University (UU) and those who have graduated less than 6 months, including:

- All current registered students at UU, including satellite campuses
- Prospective students with a conditional/ unconditional offer of a place at UU
- Recent graduates (within 6 months of graduation)
- Recent graduates with an ongoing case that originated prior to graduation
- Relatives, friends and academic staff seeking advice for a student who cannot attend in person (e.g. if they are in hospital). Written consent is required.
- Associate students
- Restrictions to the service include:
  - If the client is not a UU student or part of the groups listed above
  - Where a conflict of interest has been identified
  - If the level of assistance required is outside the remit of the service e.g. immigration or debt advice
  - If the level of support required is limiting time available for other students or is disempowering the student
  - If the student has made a complaint against the Advice Bureau and this is being investigated.

Ways of contacting the Advice Bureau are outlined on the UUSU social media channels and website where we have a [contact form](#). If you attend a UUSU office in person, where available you will be directed to an adviser. Advisers aim to respond to a student's initial contact within 3 days, in extenuating circumstances such as staff illness or leave this may be longer but we will endeavour to inform you of timescales.

The hours of the Advice Bureau are:

**9am-4.30pm Monday-Thursday and 9am-3.30pm on Fridays.**

Advice sessions will be carried out in the Advice Bureau offices, or private meeting rooms.

If the student prefers or suggests an informal setting such as on-site coffee shop, this can be facilitated. Students will be able to access advice and support via face to face sessions, telephone, email and with the possibility of facilitating drop in's as demand and diary's permit.

We cannot accommodate home visits, where you are unable to come onto campus we will facilitate phone calls or live video chats, whichever is most accessible. When contacting us you may state your preferred contact method. When contacting you via phone our advisers will not identify as calling from The Advice Bureau.

## DISABILITY

We will look at ways of removing barriers that restrict access to our services for disabled people and you will not be asked to produce any evidence to access reasonable adjustments. When you first contact us please let us know if you have any reasonable adjustments so that we can give you the best service.

## CASE MANAGEMENT

We take notes on your case during every interaction we have with you. Case notes are essential as they enable the service to keep an accurate record of the advice provided, ensuring a level of continuity should you return to the service or another adviser can pick up on your case in the event of staff illness.

Case notes, copies of correspondence and other documentation relating to your case will be held in lockable cupboards or password protected computer drives. Any paper documentation relating to your case will be digitised and disposed of as soon as possible using appropriate confidential waste procedures in line with Data Protection legislation

All case notes will be stored using a case recording software programme called Advice Pro. Your data is securely stored in the UK within a secure operations centre compliant with Information Security Code of Practice ISO27001, and automatically backed up daily. Your digitised notes will be kept in a secure archive for a maximum of seven years after which it will be automatically archived removing all personally identifiable information.

You can request to see your case file at any time by emailing your adviser and we will provide this within ten working days, if it may take longer, we will let you know and advise on the timescale.

## ENSURING QUALITY

The Advice Bureau team carry out case review meetings approximately every 6 weeks, these are anonymised presentations of student cases and issues that allow us to spot trends and share knowledge.

In line with Advice NI guidance our advisers aim to undergo 18 hours of CPD each year, this includes formal training, internal training, shadowing and self-study. Each April, ten cases for each adviser are randomly selected for audit and feedback given, in some instances a further five cases may be audited in June to track development and ensure a quality advice service.

## CASE RECORDING

Quality case recording is vital as it allows The Advice Bureau to maintain quality standards. A good case record should;

- Diagnose the issue facing the student and outline a clear record including relevant background information, advice provided, and action planned/ taken
- Contain evidence of information collection and any relevant materials stored in the case notes
- Identify all options, consequences and limitations and present these to the student and be mindful of deadlines
- In some instances, should the case not fall within an adviser's expertise a referral or signposting is clearly recorded and to a quality, not for profit agency
- Ideally any research and advice given should be directly linked to policy documents, legislation or online authorities thereby demonstrating quality for reviews and audits
- Detail on support/ action agreed, who these were assigned to and by when

## WHAT NEEDS TO BE RECORDED

- Evidence that the adviser has explored all relevant aspects of the enquiry, and how these will be addressed, including if secondary issues need to be discussed at a further interview
- The background to the enquiry and the client's goals/personal circumstances which may influence the case, or the advice given
- Evidence of any research undertaken
- Relevant information, references and/or links
- Notes of the options discussed; any limitations and consequences, what rights and responsibilities the student has and potential outcomes
- Support or actions agreed and who these are assigned to and by when
- Details of any deadlines and how these were discussed with the client
- Details of any signposting or referral
- Consent form and authority to act form

## FEEDBACK

We value student feedback and seek to maintain a user centred approach to our work. We welcome any comments on ways to improve and seek feedback once per semester.

Feedback is anonymous and helps us address any reoccurring problems and for students to suggest improvements.

However, we encourage students to raise any concerns they have with their adviser as soon as possible so that we can act to resolve them.

Where a student feels conflicted to raise a concern with the Advice Bureau their can channel their concern through UUSU's complaints procedure.

## BREAKING CONFIDENTIALITY

There are instances where it can be helpful to disclose your details to a third party, such as Student Wellbeing in UU. We will need your written consent which we will get by filling out a consent form or by you writing us an email.

We will record you giving this consent on our case management system-Advice Pro. There are some occasions where we need to break confidentiality without consent.

- If we think you may be a risk to yourself or other people
- If you disclose information relating to a child or vulnerable adult who may be at risk of harm
- If we are required to by law
- If you make a complaint about a student and that student sees the same adviser, the adviser will have to declare a conflict of interest and reassign the second student's case. This will inadvertently let the student know you have already sought our advice

If an adviser feels it necessary to break confidentiality without consent they should advise The Advice Manager or Membership Director.

If you disclose your circumstances to a Student Officer who refers you to The Advice Bureau the adviser may speak with them to learn more about your case.

## DATA

The Advice Bureau is an independent, free and confidential service. We process student data for our own records. Processing data includes: collecting, recording, storing, analysing etc.

It is stored electronically, externally to UUSU and the UU servers with the exception of email communications.

We collect data about you in two ways, either directly from you or from a person/ third party you have given consent to share information with us for example your tutor or a member of student services staff in order to resolve your case.

## WE USE YOUR DATA FOR TWO PURPOSES.

1. To help you with your case/problem, from the GDPR legislation the legal basis we must collect your data is called a legitimate interest (Article 6 GDPR). This means that you would reasonably expect us to process your data when you ask for advice. For example, it would be impossible to help you with a complaint or appeal if you didn't provide your name or what course you were on. We also keep data should a student raise a complaint; the case notes allow us to determine if the advice was correct or if there was a failure in the service.
2. We use your data for monitoring purposes and to identify trends that informs our policy and campaigns work. For example, if we see multiple issues arising from the same School we may act to stop reoccurring problems.

Advice Pro is a highly trusted case management system within the advice sector that we use to manage student enquiries and cases, it is fully GDPR compliant.

Advice Pro have clear statements on their commitment to the security and protection of your data, and their factsheet can be viewed [here](#).

## WITHDRAWAL AND LIMITING OF SERVICE

We will take reasonable steps to avoid withdrawing or limiting the service from students. If we need to limit the service of The Advice Bureau then we will explain this to you in writing. Unfortunately, there are instances where we may need to withdraw the service.

Below is a list of circumstances which is not exhaustive

- If you are disrespectful or violent to any UUSU staff member
- If you are already getting advice on the same matter from a 3rd party
- If you ask us to lie
- If you have exhausted all options which we advise on
- If you continuously breach any agreements with your adviser
- If you continuously miss appointments without providing notice or good reasons
- if there is a conflict of interest
- If you breach our policies
- If you commit and are charged with a criminal offence around which advice is being given, however this will be viewed on a case by case basis.

A decision to withdraw the service will be made by the Advice Manager, if you wish to appeal see the UUSU complaints procedure.

## COMPLAINTS PROCESS

At the Advice Bureau, we pride ourselves in providing an exceptional service. However, there are times and situations where we may have fallen short of your expectations.

If you have a complaint about the Advice Bureau please utilise the Students' Union complaints procedure [here](#).

## ACCESS TO ADVICE BUREAU DURING COMPLAINT

In most cases you can still access the service whilst your complaint is being resolved, however we may need to make necessary adjustments, such as seeing a different adviser or receiving advice by e-mail instead of in person.

If we are unable to continue advising you, we can signpost you to an alternative advice agency.

## YOUR ADVICE BUREAU TEAM



### BELFAST & JORDANSTOWN

**Danielle Black**

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### MAGEE & COLERAINE

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**HERE TO ADVISE  
AND REPRESENT YOU!**

[www.uusu.org/advice](http://www.uusu.org/advice)