

ADVICE CENTRE CONFIDENTIALITY POLICY

December 2022


BUCKS
STUDENTS' UNION

Advice Centre Confidentiality Policy

Executive summary:

The Advice Centre understands confidentiality to mean that no information regarding a member using the service shall be given directly to any third party, who is external to the Advice Centre team, without the member's prior expressed consent to disclose such information. (See below for exceptions to this policy.)

The team consists of all advisers and all reception/staff working for the Advice Centre. The line manager of the Advice Centre Manager, the Deputy CEO or the CEO or the Human Resources Manager of the Students' Union, maybe consulted about particular cases where this is deemed necessary for the safety of the service and wider community and would be bound by the confidentiality policy when this occurs.

For operational reasons other staff in the Students' Union are required to book appointments for members to see advisers and therefore have access to adviser's diaries. In these cases the staff involved will be bound by this confidentiality policy. However these staff members will have no access to the case records.

Policy:

Exceptions to this policy:

Circumstances where confidentiality may be breached, in exception to this policy, include:

- There is the perception of a serious risk of self harm or harm to others
- There is a conflict of interest which necessitates an adviser informing one client that they can no longer act on their behalf and referring them to another adviser. By its very nature, this will draw attention to the fact that they are acting for the other party - see Conflict of Interest Policy
- Where not to do so would break the law
- Where the safety of children or vulnerable adults is at risk.

If an adviser feels that they may need to breach confidentiality (except in a Conflict of Interest) they must discuss the case with the Advice Centre Manager prior to any breach and where appropriate the member affected would be informed prior to any breach. The Advice Centre Manager, or in the absence of the Advice Centre Manager any of the advisers, may consult with the Student Unions' Deputy CEO in such cases.

Case records:

Case notes and any other recorded information will be kept secure and accessible only to the Advice Centre team except in the case of an external audit.

External Auditing:

In the interest of providing a safe and professional service case records may be accessed for monitoring and auditing purposes by a designated external auditor who will be bound by this confidentiality policy. Any external auditor used would not be employed by the University.

Access to Records:

Members who have used the service have the right of access to their own case records. The Advice Centre reserves the right to satisfy ourselves as to the enquirer's identity. Requests for copies of a member's own case records needs to be made in writing to the Advice Centre Manager. Providing a copy of the case records may take up to two weeks. Case records will be kept for six years after which they will be destroyed.

Statistical recording:

The Advice Centre is committed to effective statistical recording of service users to enable us to monitor take-up of service and to identify trends, areas of concern and any policy issues arising. It is the Advice Centre Manager's responsibility to ensure all statistical records given to third parties, shall be produced in anonymous form, so that individuals cannot be identified from them.

The Advice Centre Manager will monitor this policy to ensure it meets statutory and legal requirements including the Data Protection Act, Children's Act and Prevention of Terrorism Act.

Emails:

The Advice Centre makes every effort to ensure the security of emails on our system and will treat all email addresses and email correspondence with members as confidential unless consent to share has been obtained. Unfortunately no data transmission over the internet can be guaranteed to be secure so the Advice Centre cannot guarantee the confidentiality of emails in transmission.

Members send emails to the Advice Centre's generic email address **suadvice@bucks.ac.uk**. This mailbox is only accessible by the Advice Centre team.

The Advice Centre team will also correspond with members who have approached us for advice using their work email address. Private email addresses will never be given out or used when communicating with members.

Advisers and reception staff will ensure that the confidentiality of emails received and sent is maintained by ensuring no one outside the team can view or have access to their emails. Computers and laptops will be locked when unattended in accessible areas.

All emails sent will include the following disclaimer "Disclaimer: The contents of this email may contain confidential information. If you are not the intended recipient, dissemination or copying of this email is strictly prohibited. If you have received this email in error, please notify the sender immediately and delete the email from your system. Where the content of this email is personal or not connected with our business, Bucks Students' Union accepts no responsibility or liability for such content."

Telephone and online appointments:

The Advice Centre will treat all telephone numbers and online IDs as confidential unless consent to share has been obtained. All telephone interviews and online appointments will be conducted in private offices where they cannot be overheard. The Advice Centre will not make recordings of any telephone or online calls or allow other people to "listen in", without asking the member's permission.

When contacting members by telephone the Advice Centre team will confirm who they are speaking to before releasing any personal or sensitive information. If there is any doubt about the identity of the person answering we may ask for identifying information i.e. student ID number.

When making outgoing calls from the Advice Centre phones the call appears to come from the University's main phone number. If anyone other than the person being called answers we will not identify that we are calling from the Advice Centre or why we are calling. If we are asked who is calling we will identify ourselves by name and that we are calling from the University.