LTSU Students’ Union Advice Centre Handbook

Last Reviewed: October 2018
Next Review: October 2019

Introduction

This document provides general guidelines about the policies, procedures and working practices of Leeds Trinity Students’ Union Advice Centre which is a key component of our SU Advice Service. The intention is that these are clear and transparent to employees and officers of Leeds Trinity Students’ Union and its student members, so that the service is delivered in a manner consistent with accepted professional standards. This document reflects our commitment to ensuring accessibility, support and excellence in service provision.

Reviewing the Advice Manual

A review of the entire Advice Centre handbook will be completed annually. After consultation with Sabbatical Officers and the General Manager, each policy within the manual will be reviewed and where necessary, updated. Ultimate responsibility for these updates rests with the Student Adviser. The General Manager referencing the Union Scheme of Delegation will decide whether the updated handbook is required to go to the Board of Trustees for approval.

Service Description & Client Group

Leeds Trinity Students’ Union Advice Centre is a free, independent and confidential service available to all Leeds Trinity Students. We will also provide support to perspective and former students if their enquiry related to their time as a student at the University.

We are student-focused and our primary objective is to ensure the student voice is heard, respected and acted upon through the provision of effective advice, information, advocacy and representation. The level of service provided is generalist however; we do have areas that are particularly strong due to staff skills and experience or service demand. Out service focus is on:

- Mental Health
- Academic Support
- General Wellbeing
- Housing Advice
- Financial Issues
- Transport
- Personal Misconduct

Where a case is beyond our scope of capacity we will signpost or refer clients to an appropriate organisation.

Leeds Trinity University Client Group

We recognise that students at the University are drawn from all sections of the community, including:

- Traditional students aged 18-21
- Students with disabilities and health issues
- Mature students
- Students with dependent children
- Students from ethnic minorities
- Students from differing cultural backgrounds
- International students
- Commuting students
- First in the family to go to University

We recognise that our client group has specific advice needs, including:
- With the University (academic, disciplinary, complaints etc.)
- With issues associated with renting property in the private-rented sector.
- With both mental and physical health

The advice needs of Leeds Trinity students are such that the service needs to be broadly based, in order to deal with a very wide range of enquiries.

Service Hours
The Advice Centre is based in Students' Union building on Leeds Trinity University campus.

The service is open for drop in's and appointments (which can be booked online through our website) on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday of each week with times displayed clearly by the Advice Centre and on the Union Website. Subject to staff holidays, the service is open throughout the year except for Bank Holidays and for a two-week period over Christmas. If for any reason, the Students' Union Advice Centre cannot open, as much prior notice will be provided as possible.

An Adviser provides support to students on an appointment basis, although they may be able to see clients on a drop-in basis if their diaries/workload allow. The Adviser should be prepared to see students in crisis as necessary. Crises is defined as a time of danger or imminent threat to students' mental or physical safety e.g. someone at imminent risk of homeless, harm to self or others or impending urgent deadlines.

The Adviser can also receive enquiries by e-mail, through the online booking appointment system which asks for a description of the reason for the visit, letter or telephone. Letters, e-mails and telephone messages will be dealt with as promptly as possible.

Management Structure
The Student Adviser, in liaison with the General Manager (line manager), is responsible for service planning and development in line with the Students' Union strategy. The Student Adviser, in line with Students' Union policies, is responsible for the recruitment, induction, and supervision and management of staff, for identifying training needs and ensuring these needs are met.
The Students' Union currently employs a Student Adviser who runs the Union Advice Centre in our SU Advice Service.

Affiliations
The Advice Centre is a member of Advice UK. It will regularly review affiliations to ensure these are appropriate.

Insurance
The Advice Service is covered by the Students' Union Professional Indemnity Insurance which is currently provided by Endsleigh Insurance.

Service Ethos

If the query does not fall within one of our subject areas, we will endeavour to find out information or as appropriate signpost or refer to an appropriate agency. Queries will be dealt with in an impartial way. We are here to help - not to judge. Wherever possible the Student Adviser will offer clients several options and always encourage them to retain control of their affairs.

The Student Adviser will keep up to date and act within current legislation. They will also act promptly on any agreed course of action within the constraints of their workload.

Equal Opportunities
Leeds Trinity SU Advice Centre is actively committed to a policy of equality of opportunity, in its activities, in employment practice and in the service provision for our members.

Leeds Trinity SU Advice Centre will not discriminate on grounds of sex, marital status, race ethnicity, colour, nationality, disability, trade union activity, sexual orientation, age, language, gender identity, family responsibility, socio-economic background, HIV/AIDS Status, religious or political belief. This list in not exhaustive. The full Union Equal Opportunities policy which the Advice centre adheres to can be found at www.ltsu.co.uk/furtherinformation

The Advice Process

Drop Ins
We encourage all students to feel able to visit SU Advice when the need arises regardless of whether an appointment booking has been made, without a need for personal details to be taken and a space to obtain support confidentially. A service user should be confident that they can access a service anonymously within the confines of the legal obligations of the service.

For Drop Ins usage data will be tracked but we will not track individuals or information that would identify an individual. This supports us in understanding utilisation of the service and stock management of certain items for specific services.

Casework Form/Data Protection Consent
When a client presents at the centre they will be asked to complete a casework form which is uploaded onto their case file. This form will also be required for Data Protection purposes.

Case Recording

All case files (i.e. any booked appointment requiring continued and complex work) must be accurate and up to date and it must be clear what stage the case is at and what action is being taken/required. These are recorded through Advice Pro which is a nationally recognised system for appropriate Advice case management work. This system is secure and GDPR compliant. Outlines below is the procedure or writing up the case file notes of each client that each Adviser should follow:

1. Clients must fill in a data consent form.
2. All data must then be added to a new electronic case file. It is the responsibility of the individual Adviser to make sure all key information is recorded accurately.
3. Where a client has previously visited the Advice Centre a new 'case file' should be created although not all details need to be re-inputted however previous information including contact details must be verified.
4. The file noted must then be entered and an appointment summary email confirming all advice given must be sent at that earliest opportunity.
5. Maintaining a logical order on the case file and regular contact with the client is essential.
6. Once a file is due to be close an outcome must be recorded in the 'case outcome' section and a closure email sent. An email including a link to an evaluation survey must be sent prior to closing the file.

Cases will be deemed to have closed when there is no more work to be carried out, the case has been referred to another service, access to the service has been withdrawn (see Withdrawal of Service), no response has been received after four weeks and despite reasonable attempts to make contact or all possible options have been explored and nothing more can be reasonably done.

Case Management and Storage

All case files shall be free to be viewed by clients (provided this does not comprise another person).

Where a caseload becomes unmanageable the General Manager should be informed immediately (if urgent) or during the next one-to-one meeting.

Cases are stored using an online case management system. Any paperwork relating to a case scanned and uploaded onto the case file without delay.

Written Confirmation

Written Confirmation of the advice given is an integral part of the advice process. The client has a right to consider their advice at their leisure and may not be able to retain complex advice during the interview. From the Adviser's point of view it confirms the advice given and acts as a defence against claims of inadequate advice.

Where action is to be taken, the confirmation should include the intended course of action and any timescale. Any changes to the proposed course of action should be confirmed in writing.

Key Dates

Key dates are deadlines which may be observed by the Advice Centre in the progression of a case. This may be the date of hearing or the expiry of an appeal deadline. The Adviser needs to familiarise themselves with all potential key dates. Key dates and the implications of missing them must be communicated to the client in the interview,, recorded on their electronic case file and confirmed in writing.

Keeping Clients Informed
It is the responsibility of the Adviser to ensure that the client is kept informed of the progress on their case if casework is undertaken. The client should be informed of a timescale and if this overrides the adviser should inform the client promptly of any delays.
Advisers should review cases at regular intervals and ask clients for regular updates.
Where a matter is resolved, the client should be informed of the decisions and any implications that may follow. If the client is satisfied with the outcome then the Adviser will close the file accordingly, record the outcome and send a closure email.

Confidentiality
The Advice Centre is committed to confidentiality and has a strict policy found in the appendix of this manual. The policy covers both the conduct of case interviews and the recording of the information. Failure to adhere to this policy can be considered as a disciplinary matter. Our Confidentially Policy (Appendix 1) goes into further details of our approach to this.

Conflict of Interest
An Adviser cannot knowingly advise both parties in a dispute that is likely to result in a conflict of interest which could jeopardise confidentiality and the best interest of the clients.

The client will be advised that should the other party come in to see the same Adviser they will be signposted where possible to an alternative source of advice such as the University Support Services. This ensures confidentiality of both parties are maintained.

In order to refer the second party to a different Adviser, it will be necessary to identify that the first party has sought advice about the same matter. However, no details of their enquiry of further visits will be given to the second party at any stage, or vice versa, unless authorised by the party receiving advice.

Limits of the Service
The ability to be aware of one's own limitations is integral to a quality advice service. Where an Adviser recognises that a case may be beyond their current experience or workload they must make the client aware and seek advice from the General Manager.

Where the enquiry cannot be dealt with internally the client will either be signposted or referred.

Withdrawal of Service
The most common example of when we would withdraw service, are situations where it is apparent all possible options have been explored and nothing more can be reasonably done. If, subsequently the student needs advice on a new issues or a change of circumstances present the service would be offered in full. Other examples when access to the service may be withdrawn temporarily or permanently include:

- If by advising a client the Union would be putting itself in a position where it is 'conflicted' because of an ongoing complaint investigations by the Union.
- If a client uses violent, abusive or threatening behaviour against staff.
- If a client chooses to no longer access the service by repeatedly failing to attend appointments, ignoring advice or continuing to pursue a course of actions against the advice of Advisers.
- If a client is thought to have deliberately misled or provided inaccurate information.
- If a client is thought to require excessive, long-term or continuing support and this would have a detrimental effect on other clients.
- If a client requests for collusion with fraud or illegal activity.

If any of the above cases occur, the Adviser will write to the student to inform them that they are withdrawing their service with immediate effect. However, on occasion the Adviser may decide to issue a formal warning to the student if the Adviser feels that the situation can rectified.

File Reviews

File reviews will be carried out at the discretion of the General Manager. This will include during term time the review of at least one case per month. If there are any issues arising from this, they will be noted on the file review page and discussed with the Adviser to ensure they are resolved.

Commitment to Quality

Accurate Resources

All Advice Centre Staff should check information and publication dates of materials at least once a semester and remove from display any which are no longer accurate. Advice and support for marketing should be obtained from the Nominated Deputy to ensure there is a consistent design standard. Whereas updated version is available these should be ordered promptly.

Complaints

Leeds Trinity SU is committed to the provision of quality services and operates a comprehensive complaints procedure. All complaints, and their resolution, are recorded centrally. More information about the Complaints Procedure can be found on the Students' Union website at www.ltsu.co.uk/furtherinformation.

On a day-to-day basis expressions of dissatisfaction with the Advice Centre should be referred to the Student Adviser who shall attempt to resolve the matter informally. Should this not resolve the matter then the Union complaints procedure should be followed.

Quality Feedback

We are committed to continuingly learning from our members and responding to their changing needs. Therefore, we will conduct evaluation surveys with our clients to allow them to feedback on their experiences of using the service and its impact.

Social Policy

During term time the Student Adviser will co-ordinate a monthly meeting of the Sabbatical Officers, General Manager and University Advisors mapping out key themes around student lives that are being encountered in advice sessions and interactions that sabbatical officers have had with students. The purpose of this is to have a clear picture of the issues facing students and ensuring we offer the relevant support, advocacy and briefings to officers to campaign on wellbeing issues.

Annual Report

The Advice Centre will include will also publish and share with our stakeholders' content in the LTSU Annual Report. This ensures that we are being transparent and effectively communicating key service statistics, successes and developments.

Appendix 1: **Leeds Trinity SU Advice Centre - Confidentiality Policy**

Managing the Confidentiality Policy

Leeds Trinity Students' Union Advice Centre is committed to providing a confidential service to its clients. Data for the Union is held on a day to day basis by the Student Adviser with the General Manager auditing quality of files. Sometimes our audit will involve another Adviser from another Student Union auditing files. In this instance names on file will be anonymised.

This policy as part of the Advice Centre handbook will be reviewed annually and any amendments agreed by the Sabbatical Officers and General Manager. Copies will be available on request. The Student Adviser will be responsible for ensuring the current policy is held on the shared drive and for the deletion of previous copies.

Conduct of the Advice Process

Neither the Student Adviser or General Manager will confirm a client's attendance to the service without their expressed consent to do so.

Clients will be offered a confidential interview space, if necessary by the provision of an alternative appointment time.

Relevant Union employees may discuss cases between themselves but will ensure that no discussion which could identify clients of the service take place outside of the service or its staff. All statistical recording shall be anonymous.

Case files including case notes, copies of correspondence and calculation sheets will be held in lockable filing cabinets and password protected computer drives.

Documentation will be kept in a secure archive for a maximum of six years after which time it will be destroyed using appropriate confidential waste procedures.

Staff will clarify with clients their preferences in terms of contact and will record on the case file where clients have indicated that certain forms of contact are insecure or unacceptable.

When leaving voice messages for clients, staff will not identify themselves as working for the advice service.

Where clients requesting that no contact be made within certain parties this will be recorded and adhered to.

Breaching Confidentiality

The Advice Centre understands confidentiality to mean that no information regarding a client shall be given directly or indirectly to a third party without the client's expressed consent except in the following cases:

1. Conflict of Interest

Where the Advice Centre identifies a potential conflict of interest which necessitates informing one party that we are supporting another party. In these circumstances the compromised party will be informed of the breach and no further action will disclosed.

2. Where required to by Act of Parliament.
3. Where required to by order of a Court of Law.

There is no duty in English Law to disclose a crime to the police. However, there are two exceptions:

- **Terrorism.** The legislation regarding terrorist activities is constantly changing and being updated by Government. The Terrorism Act 2000, The Anti-Terrorism Crime and Security Act 2001(ATCSA), Terrorism Act 2006 and Counter Terrorism Act 2008 and other more recent legislation have made it a criminal offence not to inform on others where you suspect them of being involved in an act of terrorism.
- **Drug Trafficking.** The Drug Trafficking Act 1994 makes it a criminal offence not to report to the police suspicion or knowledge of drug money laundering gained during the course of contact with a client.

4. **Child Protection Legislation.** The Children's Act 1989 and the Protection of Children Act 1999 are just two of the relevant pieces of legislation regarding the protection of children. We may come across these issues in a number of ways:

- You may suspect that a child is in need or being abused
- A child may reveal to you that they have been abused by somebody
- An adult client may reveal an incident of abuse about a child.

We view protection of the child as paramount in such circumstances, so if we come across one of the above situations above, we will follow the steps below with regard to breaching confidentiality. Any information about child abuse will be discussed with the General Manager before informing the relevant authorities.

5. When there is a **risk of harm**. Is there is a possibility that a client may harm themselves or others, confidentiality may be breached. For example:

    a. If there is an imminent risk of harm to somebody we may call University Security, the Ambulance Service and/or the police. We will inform the client that we are doing this if appropriate (however, if we feel that this would be unsafe we can decide not to inform the client.)
    b. It may be appropriate for us to contact a member of University support staff, Social Services or a doctor. We would generally only do this with the client's consent (however, if we feel asking for the client's consent would be unsafe we may decide to contact other without consent.)

6. We may need to breach client confidentiality if they display violent or other unacceptable behaviour.

Providing information to the policy or other body in relation to a **criminal investigation**. An Adviser will not reveal information to the police, unless asked to provide a witness statement or receive a summons. If asked to discuss a client with the Police, we will immediately report this to the General Manager. We will inform a client of we are approached for information about them.

Where an Adviser believes that there may be a need to breach confidentiality deliberately they should inform the client then raise the matter with the Advice Centre Coordinator. In their absence, the matter should be raised with the General Manager.

The Advice Centre Coordinator will explore the issues with the Adviser and decide on whether confidentiality should be breached. A written record of the discussion and decision will be placed on the case file.

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Where the decision is to breach confidentiality, a full briefing will be referred to the General Manager. Where the General Manager has been involved in the earlier decision they will seek advice from an External Trustee. The General Manager / External Trustee decision will be final and a full written report will be added to the case file.

Awareness of Policy
All member of the Union Advice Centre will be made aware of this policy through their induction and training.

This policy will be displayed in our Advice Service and on the Students' Union website.

Appendix 2: File Review Checklist

Adviser:
Reviewed by:
Date of Review:
Client reference (and name where appropriate):

Compliance with office policies and procedures		
	Yes / No / N/A	**Comments**
Are client details recorded appropriately?		
Are case records in date order (most recent at top)?		
Do case records show (where applicable): Date Client attended Details off enquiry Advice given Action to be taken by Adviser Action to be taken by Client Date action taken		
Are case records/file: Tidy, Easy to follow, Legible		
Has conflict of interest been correctly identified? Deal with appropriately?		
Has the Data Consent form been collected?		
Are there copies of correspondence and other documents in the file?		
Has the Client been advised of action taken and have they been informed in writing where necessary?		
Are key dates recorded and observed?		
Review of Advice		
Has the right information been collected?		
Have problems affecting the client been correctly identified?		
Have the right options been identified?		
Is information and advice accurate and complete?		

Has the Adviser taken necessary action to help the client resolve the issue?		
Where relevant, has the client been assisted to gain access to other services?		
Is it clear what needs to happen next and who is responsible?		
Is quality of correspondence acceptable?		
Is signposting appropriate?		

Appendix 3 LTSU Casework Form

LTSU Advice Centre Casework Form

Leeds Trinity Students' Union

About you:

Forename(s):

Surname:

Student Number:

Address:

Telephone Number:

Email:

Course:

Year:

[ ] Full Time [ ] Part Time

School:

[ ] Arts and Communication
[ ] Social and Health Sciences
[ ] Institute of Childhood and Education

Academic Status:

[ ] Undergraduate [ ] Postgraduate

Fee Status:

[ ] UK
[ ] EU
[ ] Outside EU

Enquiry Type:

[ ] Hardship Fund
[ ] Independant Academic Advice
[ ] Complaint
[ ] Housing
[ ] Mental Health
[ ] Sexual Health
[ ] Other

Please note that when you contact us for advice, we will open a confidential case file for you, and record your personal information, details of your enquiry and any advice given. Information collected will be stored for statistical purposes only and will not identify you when compiling records. Your details will be recorded and stored securely, in line with the Data Protection Act 1998. We will hold your data for 3 years beyond graduation and you have a right to see the data we hold on you.

Anonymised statistical data may be used to monitor work undertaken by Leeds Trinity Students' Union, and may also be used by A.C.N (who host our AdvicePro software system).

By returning this completed form in person, or by email, you are giving consent for LTSU to record and store your personal information.

More information can be found at: www.ltsu.co.uk/privacy

You also give your permission for LTSU to liaise with departments within Leeds Trinity University with regards to your enquiry.

Signed ______________________________

Date ________________