

Advice Service Standards, policies and procedures

[Service standards](#)

[Confidentiality policy and procedure](#)

[Refusal and withdrawal of service policy and procedure](#)

[Conflict of interest policy and procedure](#)

Service standards

Statement of intent

The Advice Service aims to provide a free, confidential and impartial student-centred service to all students who are members of the Students' Union, in a non-judgmental and anti-discriminatory way. By providing impartial information, advice, support and representation on a range of university-related issues, we aim to enable students to address their own issues and pursue their full potential whilst at London Metropolitan University.

You can expect to be

- Assisted and advised at the earliest opportunity upon first contact and no later than 3 working days
- Treated considerately and with respect at all times by professional and experienced staff
- Contacted as soon as is reasonably possible if there has been a development with your case
- Told about further specialist help and where it can be obtained, when necessary

We expect you to

- Contact the Advice Service as soon as you think that you need help
- Arrive promptly for your appointment (students more than 15 minutes late for an appointment may have to make another appointment).
- Be considerate and honest, providing full and accurate information pertaining to your case
- Comply fully with the Students' Union's **Equality and Diversity Policy** and these Service Standards - any student who does not do so, or who uses threatening/abusive language or behaviour, will be challenged and may be asked to leave

Ensuring the effectiveness of the standards

All staff within the Advice Service will receive a copy of these standards and it will be fully explained to them as part of their induction. Any breach of the standards by staff will be treated as a disciplinary matter. The standards will also be publicly visible on LMSU's website.

Updated July 2021

Confidentiality policy and procedure

Confidentiality statement

The London Metropolitan Students' Union Advice Service is committed to providing a confidential service to its students. The following statement will be displayed in an appropriate visible place:

'The Advice Service offers a confidential service - neither the fact that you have made contact with us nor any identifying details about your case will be shared with any other organisation or individual outside of the service without your express permission unless there is a cause for concern involving a child, young person or adult at risk that falls within LMSU's safeguarding policy and procedure'

Definition of confidentiality

The Advice Service understands confidentiality to mean that no identifying information regarding a student shall be given directly or indirectly to any organisation or individual external to the service, without that student's expressed consent to disclose such information. The only exception to this is where there is a cause for concern involving a child, young person or adult at risk that falls within **LMSU's safeguarding policy and procedure**.

Where issues affecting individual students have the potential to affect other students on a wider scale the issue itself will be highlighted to the Director of Membership so that it can inform the collective representation work of the elected officers. No identifying information about the individual student will be disclosed when highlighting issues to others within the Students' Union without that student's express consent to disclose such information.

We recognise that information may be indirectly given out through staff or officers discussing students. All staff and officers are therefore prohibited from discussing an individual user of the service outside of the Advice Service.

Confidentiality of emails

The following statement will be added to the email signature of all advice service staff:

'The confidentiality of our emails and any attachments cannot be guaranteed. They are intended solely for the addressee. Access to emails by any one else is unauthorised. If you are not the intended recipient, any disclosure copying, distribution or any action taken, or omitted to be taken, in reliance on it is prohibited and may be unlawful. If you receive an email from us in error, please immediately notify theadviceservice.su@londonmet.ac.uk

Please note: information relevant to students' cases will be held confidentially on our case management system where appropriate. If you do not want information to be held, please contact theadviceservice.su@londonmet.ac.uk immediately.'

Statistical recording

The Advice Service is committed to effective statistical recording of students to enable us to monitor take-up of the service and to identify relevant policy issues. It is the Advice Service Manager's responsibility to ensure that all statistical records given to third parties (such as other members of the University, outside related organisations) shall be produced in anonymous form, so students cannot be recognised.

Case records

It is the Advice Service Manager's responsibility to ensure all case records are kept securely. All case records are kept on a secure electronic casework management system, which is password protected. Any paperwork relating to students is disposed of using a confidential waste disposal service.

The Advice Service keeps case files for 6 years after they are closed. These closed case files are kept securely and only Advice Service staff have access to them. After 6 years these case files are deleted from the case management system. Any related paperwork is disposed of through a confidential waste disposal service.

Expressed consent to give information

Where an adviser agrees to take any action on behalf of a student, the student must give their express consent for them to do so. A record of this authorisation will be held on the client's file.

If it is felt necessary we will check with clients if it is acceptable to contact them at home or work in relation to their case. We will make no reference to the organisation when making telephone contact with clients.

Breaches of confidentiality

We recognise that occasions may arise where advisers feel they need to breach confidentiality. An example of such an occasion would be where there is a cause for concern involving a child, young person or adult at risk that falls within **LMSU's safeguarding policy and procedure**. We also recognise, however, that any breach of confidentiality may damage the reputation of our service and therefore has to be treated with the most serious of approaches.

Procedure

When an adviser feels confidentiality should be breached the following steps must be taken:

1. The adviser should raise the matter immediately with the Director of Membership, or the CEO in their absence
2. The adviser must discuss with the Director of Membership the issues involved in the case and explain why they feel confidentiality should be breached and what would be achieved by breaching confidentiality

3. The Director of Membership is responsible for discussing with the adviser what options are available in each set of circumstances
4. The Director of Membership is responsible for making a decision on whether confidentiality should be breached
5. Records must be kept in the casefile detailing the reasons for the decision reached and any actions undertaken as a result
6. Where appropriate, the procedures for reporting and recording a safeguarding concern should also be followed in line with LMSU's **Safeguarding policy and procedure**

Where there is a concern that there is an imminent risk of danger or harm, the Adviser will contact the emergency services by calling 999 and/or University security teams on 3333 before informing the Director of membership or the CEO and recording details in line with LMSU's safeguarding policy and procedure

A student is fully entitled to complain about a decision to breach their confidentiality using the Students' Union's complaints procedure.

Legislative framework

The Advice Service will regularly monitor this policy to ensure it meets statutory and legal requirements including the Children's Act 1989, the Care Act 2014, the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Terrorism Act 2000.

Ensuring the effectiveness of the policy

All staff within the Advice Service and the full-time elected officers will receive a copy of this policy and procedure and it will be fully explained to them as part of their induction. Any breach of the policy will be treated as a disciplinary matter. The policy and procedure will also be publicly visible on LMSU's website.

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Refusal and withdrawal of service policy and procedure

Whilst the Advice Service remains committed to its aim of providing a service to all members of the Students' Union, there may be occasions where after careful consideration, services are refused or withdrawn for individual users. This policy outlines the circumstances in which this may be appropriate, and details the procedure which should be followed.

Circumstances which can lead to refusal or withdrawal of service

- a. Student threatening or using violence
- b. Breach of LMSU's **Equality and Diversity Policy** by student
- c. Potential fraud and seeking support for illegal actions
- d. Loss of confidence
- e. **Conflict of interest**
- f. Inappropriate or excessive use of resources

This list is intended to serve as a guide for both students and staff within the Advice Service. However, if an instance occurs that is outside these guidelines which indicates that it is not in either party's interest for the relationship to continue, the Advice Service Manager reserves the right to refuse service after careful consideration of the situation. In all cases the student is entitled to appeal the decision via the Students' Union's Complaints Procedure.

Procedure

Where advice service staff have concerns regarding a student in relation to the policy, the details of this should be discussed in the first instance with the Advice Service Manager. In addition the following action should be taken in relation to specific points:

a) Students threatening or using violence.

If any staff member, elected officer, volunteer or student within the Students' Union has any concerns over the conduct of a student in terms of violence, and communication skills fail to resolve the situation peacefully, or if a student is being violent, the University's security staff will be contacted.

In discussions with others involved in the incident, the Advice Service Manager may decide to ban a student from the service. This decision must be taken in consultation with the Director of Membership and will then be communicated to the student in writing. It will be at the Advice Service Manager's discretion, in consultation with the Director of Membership, to initiate the **Union's Code of Conduct procedure**, and/or the [University's Student Conduct Procedure](#) in relation to the incident.

b) Breach of the Students' Union's **Equality and Diversity Policy**

The Advice Service embraces the Students' Union **Equality and Diversity Policy**. In accordance with this policy, if informal measures to deal with the situation do not rectify the behaviour of a student, the Advice Service Manager, in consultation with the Director of Membership, may refuse service in order to maintain an environment acceptable to other students and staff.

It will be at the Advice Service Manager's discretion, in consultation with the Director of Membership, to initiate the Union's [Code of Conduct procedure](#), and/or the [University's Student Conduct Procedure](#) in relation to the incident.

c) Potential fraud and seeking support for illegal actions

The Advice Service cannot knowingly assist users with fraudulent claims or assist a student where it is known that the student is misrepresenting their situation or acting in an illegal manner. If a student admits, or it becomes apparent, that this is the case the adviser dealing with that student must clearly state their belief that the situation may be fraudulent and the consequences or legal implications of that action. The adviser should also explain that the student should either disclose their change of circumstance, or take appropriate action to cease the fraudulent action.

If the student is unwilling to stop the fraudulent action, they must be notified that the Advice Service will be unable to assist further in relation to that matter, and therefore there will be a withdrawal of service. This decision will be made by the Advice Service Manager, in consultation with the Director of Membership, and will be clearly communicated to the student in writing.

d) Loss of confidence

Where a student's actions are consistently contrary to those advised by an adviser, or where the student consistently fails to keep appointments, the adviser should discuss this matter with the Advice Service Manager. Where appropriate, the Advice Service Manager will communicate the possibility that if the student continues with their actions, that withdrawal of service may occur.

This also applies where the student's actions have a serious effect on the reputation and standing of the Advice Service in relation to either internal or external groups and organisations.

Where a loss of confidence has occurred, the Advice Service Manager, in consultation with the Director of Membership, may withdraw service. This decision will be clearly communicated to the student in writing.

e) Conflict of interest - see [Conflict of interest policy and procedure](#)

f) Inappropriate or excessive use of resources.

The Advice Service has limited resources and aims to provide equal service to all student's. It aims to empower students to resolve issues themselves where possible. Resources in terms of staff time and expertise are not unlimited. Therefore the following actions may lead to withdrawal of service:

- Demands that staff undertake actions which they deem the student to be able to take themselves
- Requests for assistance that exceeds the expertise of staff, for example legal representation
- Long term support demands that require substantial staff time which then have a detrimental effect on the ability to provide an acceptable level of service to other students.

Standard actions

In all circumstances where refusal or withdrawal of service applies the following should occur:

1. The decision must be taken by the Advice Service Manager, in consultation with the Director of Membership, whose decision is final
2. The student should be informed in writing of the decision and an explanation provided as to why it has occurred
3. The student should be provided with details of other advice providers
4. The Union's Chief Executive will be notified of the decision
5. Records must be kept in the casefile detailing specific advice and decisions communicated to the student
6. The Students' Union's Complaints Procedure should be offered if the student wishes to challenge the decision

Ensuring the effectiveness of the policy

All staff within the Advice Service will receive a copy of this policy and procedure and it will be fully explained to them as part of their induction. Any breach of the policy will be treated as a disciplinary matter. The policy and procedure will also be publicly visible on LMSU's website.

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Conflict of interest policy and procedure

The Advice Service aims to support all members of the Students' Union on an equal, impartial basis. Every effort is made to provide full access to the service. There are certain circumstances where the Advice Service may withdraw/refuse access. One of these is where a conflict of interest is identified. The others are detailed in the Refusal and Withdrawal of Service Policy.

Circumstances which can lead to a conflict of interest

A conflict of interest may arise for two reasons:

1. A student approaches the Advice Service regarding a matter, which the Advice Service Manager believes the service cannot deal with in an impartial manner. For example, the student may be complaining about a member of staff who works closely with the Advice Service, or wish to undertake a course of action that would be damaging to the services provided by the Students' Union.

The Advice Service makes every effort to remain impartial in all matters but in these circumstances it should explain to the student that there could be a perceived conflict of interest and give them the option of alternative and appropriate support.

2. Students sometimes approach the Advice Service regarding disputes with other students

In these circumstances, where the conflict has arisen from a case involving multiple students who are seeking support from the advice Service, it will be arranged, where possible, for each student to be allocated to different advisers in the team. The advisers will not discuss the details of their students' case with other advisers in the Advice Service. Steps will also be taken to restrict access to case notes. If it is not possible to allocate an adviser to each student involved in the dispute the Advice Service Manager, in consultation with the Director of Membership, will explain to the student that due to a conflict of interest the advice service is unable to provide support in their case and provide them with information about alternative and appropriate support.

The Advice Service staff members will be introduced to it via induction and training.

Ensuring the effectiveness of the policy

All staff within the Advice Service will receive a copy of this policy and it will be fully explained to them as part of their induction. Any breach of the policy will be treated as a disciplinary matter. The policy will also be publicly visible on LMSU's website and should be made available to all students involved in a conflict of interest.