



The Rights Stuff

Students don't know their rights – but a new duty on universities is coming. Rights promotion, the duty, and how SUs make themselves central to delivering it.

**Deadline
bunching**

**Feedback
late**

**Lack of
availability of
placements**

**Group
assessment
unfair**

**Lack of
diversity
of food on
campus**

**Mental
health**

**Housemate
issues**

**Black
mould
and mice**

**Lack of
support on
placement**

**Inflexible
timetables**

**Lack of
disability
support**

**Buses
always full
or late**

**Cost of
living**

**Optional
modules
cancelled**

Snog

Help them cope

Marry

Eradicate the issue

Avoid

Warn them

Cost of living:

Hardship funds

Free breakfasts

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Free breakfasts

Deadline/exam bunching:

Chillout tent

Pop up revision spaces

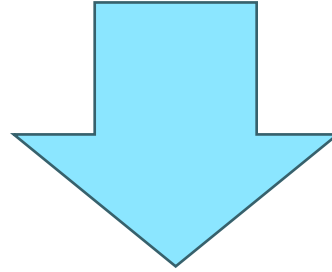
Snog Help them cope	Marry Eradicate the issue	Avoid Warn them
Cost of living: Hardship funds Free breakfasts		Cost of living: Warn them about costs with accurate information Decent budgeting support
Deadline/exam bunching: Chillout tent Pop up revision spaces		

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Cost of living: Hardship funds Free breakfasts	Cost of living: Loan students more money Take active steps to reduce student costs	Cost of living: Warn them about costs with accurate information Decent budgeting support
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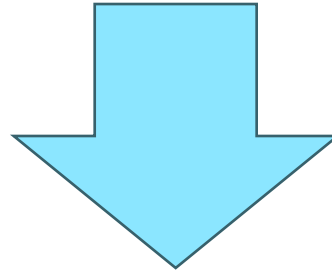
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Deadline/exam bunching: Chillout tent Pop up revision spaces	Deadline/exam bunching: Don't over-use exams Don't bunch their deadlines up	Deadline/exam bunching: Nudge progress on revision and continuous assessment all year

Students experience problems



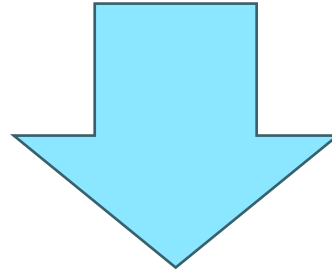
Students take part in SU research

Students choose their representatives



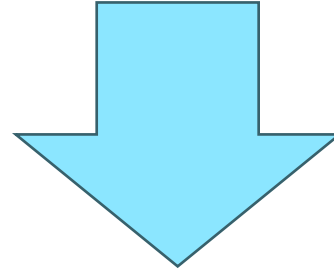
SU uses access and evidence to persuade university to change

SU uses campaigns to cause prioritization of its issues

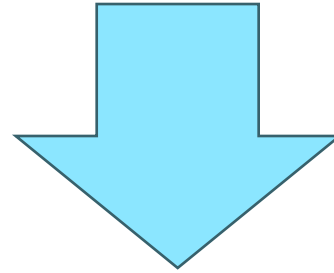


Fewer students experience fewer problems and when they do they're not as problematic

Students experience problems

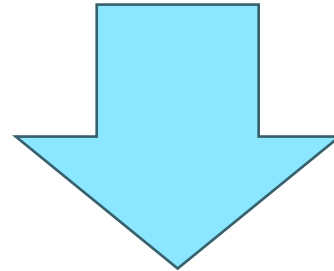


Students get advice



Problem gets solved

Problem not solved



Data on the above used to reduce or minimize problems in the future



Pairs: voice, rights or both?

Six things students say – on the next slide. In pairs, label each one: voice, rights, both – or urgent referral. And name the first document you'd want to see.

The frame – four tests for a possible rights issue: a PROMISE, a POLICY, a PROCESS or a PROTECTED baseline

Six things students say

LABEL EACH ONE

1 – “We want more guest speakers than the course has ever offered.”

2 – “The handbook promises three diss supervision meetings; Most students had 1 or 2.”

3 – “The faculty wants to remove the right to anonymous marking.”

4 – “Students say their placements feel unsafe.”

5 – “Three disabled students can’t access a mandatory trip – most of the cohort is happy.”

6 – “Thirty students on my module have all lost the same scheduled teaching.”





The sort, sorted

THE LABELS, ONE TO THREE & FOUR TO SIX

1 Voice – wanting more than was promised. Representation extends the baseline – there's nothing here to enforce.

2 Rights – a promise in the handbook, unmet. First document: the handbook – then the supervision log and the emails.

3 Both – defending an existing entitlement – a rights frame powering a campaign.

4 Urgent referral – safety tonight beats classification.

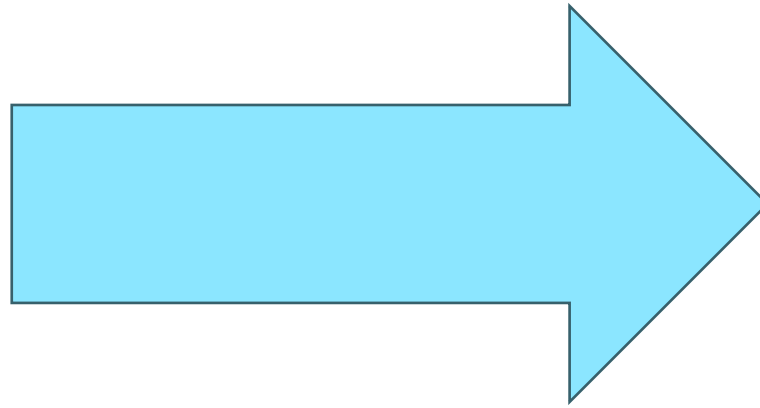
5 Rights – an equality issue – and no majority test. A right can protect three students against a happy cohort.

6 Rights, together – a possible group complaint – start gathering the shared evidence now, before the label is even settled.

An academic appeal

I had a mental health problem
I had a car crash
I suffered a family loss
My car broke down

That's why I did badly
Can I have another try please



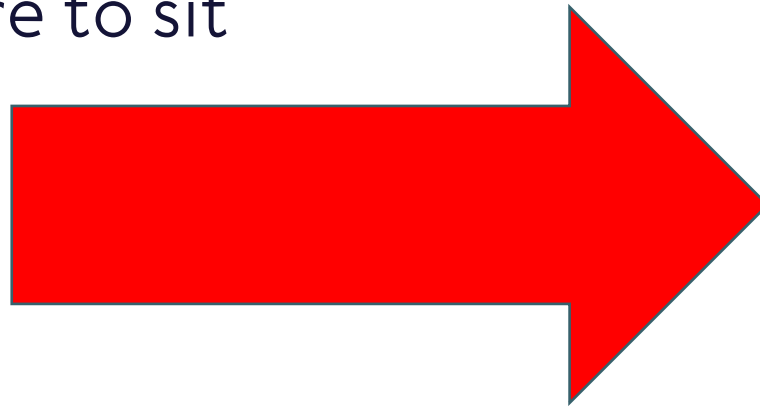
Another academic appeal

The library had no resources
My diss supervisor was never
available

There was never anywhere to sit
on campus

The teaching was awful

That's why I did badly
Can I have another try please



Another academic appeal

Capturing and sharing learning from complaints and academic appeals

Complaints and academic appeals are a valuable source of feedback and learning. They can help providers to find ways to improve their services and academic decision making. It is good practice for providers to record all complaints and academic appeals at the formal and review stages as a minimum so that the information can be used for analysis and for management and governance reporting. It's also important to capture learning from complaints and appeals, including from concerns that are resolved at the early resolution stage.

- Does the university learn from failed appeals?
- Do students create/emphasize/exaggerate personal issues to get mit circs?





Help at the wrong end of the timeline



The appeal

After the student has failed – when the rights moment was months earlier



The extension request

After the deadline has passed – when before it, it was just a form



The deposit dispute

After the tenancy has ended – when the evidence was a photo in September



The reasonable adjustment

After the assessment – when the entitlement existed all year



The disciplinary appeal

After the misconduct finding – when the hearing was the moment that mattered

By the time a student arrives at the advice service, the rights moment has often passed.

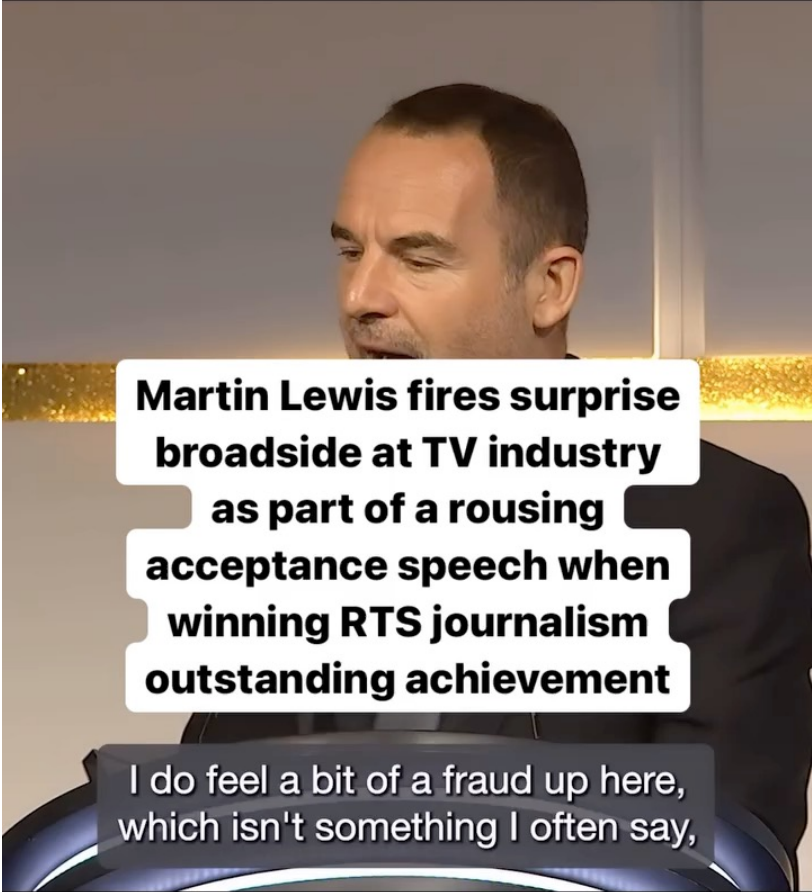


The long read

• This article is more than 5 years old

The Money Saving Expert: how Martin Lewis became the most trusted man in Britain

Illustration: ITV/Bratislav Milenkovic

A man with short dark hair and a beard, wearing a dark suit, is speaking at a podium. The background is a light-colored wall with a horizontal gold-colored decorative band. The text is overlaid on the image in white boxes with black text.

**Martin Lewis fires surprise
broadside at TV industry
as part of a rousing
acceptance speech when
winning RTS journalism
outstanding achievement**

I do feel a bit of a fraud up here,
which isn't something I often say,



Pairs: the lag

Think of the last issue where you thought “if only they’d come to us in October.” Tell the person next to you: when did the problem actually start – and when did they arrive?

The frame – **TRIGGER**: when the problem began, not when it was noticed. **ARRIVAL**: when they reached the service. The **GAP** is the lag – and every week of it made the fix dearer.



Why they don't act: six barriers

WHAT THE LITERATURE SAYS & WHAT THE OFS RESEARCH ADDS

Opportunity cost – “I’ve got nine months. I haven’t got a month to argue.”

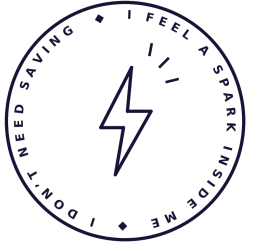
Conflict aversion – “I don’t want a row with the person marking me.”

Confidence and capital – “I wouldn’t know how to put it.”

Fear of retribution – “They could take it out on me”

Ignorance of rights – “I didn’t know that was a thing you could ask for.”

Futility, the top barrier – “they wouldn’t actually change anything anyway.” Cited by 36 per cent: doubt that complaining changes anything.



What students told OfS

50%

can describe their rights

8%

have heard of the OIA

76%

say promises weren't
fully met

42%

would look to their SU

Public First polled 2,001 students for OfS. Half can't describe their rights, most don't know an external route exists – and the top barrier to complaining, at 36 per cent, is doubt that it would make any difference. Only 42 per cent would look to their SU for rights information – behind the university's own website.

IN THEIR WORDS



This isn't apathy – it's an accurate reading of power

These students have cost-benefit analysed complaining – and got the right answer. The literature calls the rare exceptions nudniks: the few who act anyway, and change things for everyone.

So the job isn't persuading students to care more. It's changing the maths that makes passivity rational – cut the cost, cut the risk, show that acting works. And grow some nudniks.

“It would just be a long, drawn-out process and they could just probably argue that your experience was your experience.”

“Because it's external to the university, I'd feel a little bit like a snitch.”

OfS / Public First focus groups.



Pairs: barrier surgery

Take the six barriers. Two questions: what does your union already do that lowers it – and what's one thing the union could do?

The six – 1 Opportunity cost · 2 Conflict aversion · 3 Confidence and capital ·
4 Fear of retribution · 5 Ignorance of rights · 6 Futility perception



The cheap end of barrier surgery

CUT THE COST AND THE FEAR

Opportunity cost – templates, pre-filled forms, ten-minute triage, deadline nudges pushed to students.

Conflict aversion – a process, not a fight – collective submissions, or the SU submits on the student's behalf.

Retribution – negotiate an anti-detriment commitment with the university – then publicise it hard.

BUILD KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEF

Confidence – scripts, worked examples, “here’s what another student wrote”, accompaniment.

Ignorance – promote rights relentlessly – reps trained on entitlements, pre-arrival comms.

Futility – the cheapest fix of the six: publish the wins. Show what changed and who changed it.

THE OBJECTION

But what if?



“

If we tell students to do this themselves, they'll get it wrong. The wrong ground, in writing, before the deadline we could have used – and we'll be unpicking it in June.

ANSWER TWO



The stakes gradient

REVERSIBLE · UPSTREAM · PROMOTE AT SCALE

Asking whether an extension exists. Keeping evidence. Raising an issue in writing early. Requesting an adjustment. Querying a charge.

Almost nothing can go wrong

IRREVERSIBLE · ONE-SHOT · KEEP EXPERT

Grounds of appeal. Misconduct responses. Fitness to practise. OIA submissions. Here DIY is genuinely dangerous and expertise is essential.

A student who asks in October costs ten minutes. The same student in June costs an appeal.

Doing the first column properly protects capacity for the second – it's not a threat to it.

The rights map



Living

Housing, work, money

Renters' Rights Act exit and deposit rights, guarantors, employment rights, placement conditions, hidden costs.

Learning

The academic core

Extensions, fit to sit, reasonable adjustments and competence standards, appeals, misconduct, industrial action.

Paying

Contract and consumer

Consumer protection, the student contract, fee increases, course change and closure, protection plans.

Backstop

Implied and regulatory

OIA Good Practice Framework, OfS B conditions, quality review expectations – rights nobody promotes.

Discover

Discover

Establish

Enforce

Discover

Establish

Extend

Enforce

Discover

Establish

Extend

Enforce

Discover

Defend

Establish

Extend

Enforce

Discover

Defend

Establish

Promote

SIX THINGS YOU CAN DO WITH A RIGHT



Most services do one of them well

Enforce · the advice service's home turf

Casework, appeals, representation, done well, at volume

Defend · patchy

The vacant four

Discover, establish, extend, promote

It's not that enforcement matters less. It's that the other five verbs are what stop enforcement being the only designed moment. Promotion – telling students what they're entitled to, constantly, in every channel – is the biggest prize.

The timing diagnostic



Trigger

When did the problem actually start? Not when it was noticed – when it began.

Window

When could it last have been cheaply fixed – the form, the email, the conversation?

Arrival

When did the student reach you – and how much of the fix had already expired?



What would have had to be true?



Didn't know

They didn't know it existed – tell them earlier: promotion, pre-arrival comms, reps trained on entitlements



Too hard

They knew, but it was too hard – make it easier: templates, triage, kill the friction



Scared

They knew, but were scared – make it safe: anti-detriment commitment, anonymous routes, SU as buffer



Pointless

They knew, but thought it pointless – make it work, and show that it worked. Publish the wins



Nothing to use

There was nothing to use – get the right: establishment, powered by your casework evidence



Pairs: the ask

Pick one issue. Which of the five diagnoses is it? Now write one sentence: the thing you'd ask your senior team for – and what it would change.

The five – they didn't know · it was too hard · they were scared · they thought it pointless · there was nothing to use.



C6 lands this autumn – get in early

OfS consulted on Condition C6 – a duty to treat students fairly – until 9 July. Decisions land this autumn. The duty bites immediately; publication duties follow three months later.

As drafted, it answers “half of students can’t describe their rights” with a webpage – published by the institution the rights are against.

Potential asks

Active rights education – at induction, not a webpage – delivered with the SU

The E6 precedent – for free speech, OfS already requires induction training

Resourced and reported – modestly funded, Polish-style, reportable each year

Casework intelligence – your advice data as the fairness evidence base



So we built something

knowyourstudentrights.com



WONKHE
SUs

Something has gone wrong. Here is what you can do about it.

Tell us what's happening. We'll show you the rights you can rely on, how strong each one is, how far each one actually gets you, and the practical steps to act on it.

🔍 Search by keyword - try "deposit", "evicted", "marks"

OR PICK A TOPIC



Before I start

Offers withdrawn, courses cancelled, deposits, visa sponsorship (CAS).



My course and teaching

Changes, strikes, quality, placements



My results and conduct

Appeals, misconduct, complaints



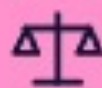
My money

Tuition fees, student finance, council tax



Where I live

Deposits, repairs, leaving, eviction, rent – halls, private student blocks and private renting



Being treated fairly

Discrimination, harassment, disability support



My job

Pay, hours, deductions, employment rights



My visa and immigration

Student visa, work, the Graduate Route

You don't have to work this out on your own

Your students' union usually runs a free, confidential advice service that is independent of your university. They will also know things this site cannot: how your institution's own regulations work, which office actually decides, what its deadlines are, and how similar cases there have gone.

[Find your SU advice service >](#)

ABOUT THIS SITE

Who writes this, and how the ratings work

Know Your Student Rights has been built by the team at Wonkhe SUs. Every right on the site is traced to a law, a regulator's condition, a published decision or a code of practice, and rated on two axes – how

Example from England. The accommodation Code is the same wherever your provider is a member – check the register first.

GETTING THINGS FIXED

the weekly en-suite premium

A student paying extra for an en-suite got that money back while the shower was broken

A student complained under the accommodation Code that his landlord was taking weeks to repair his shower. He had first reported it several weeks before complaining, and he was paying extra rent each week for the use of the en-suite shower room.

What changed. The landlord explained the repair needed a specialist part and that plumbers had let them down. They agreed to refund the additional rent the student had been paying each week for the en-suite. The shower was fixed and the student

MY COURSE AND TEACHING

Your course should have sufficient physical, digital and human resources

Comes up when: I'm not happy with my course – teaching, assessment or organisation

SEE WHAT YOU CAN DO >



My issue isn't here

If your situation isn't covered by any of the topics above, tell us about it. We'll consider adding it to the next version of the tool.

[>](mailto:SUS@WONKHE.COM)

It is information, not legal advice, and it describes the general position rather than your own case.

[READ ABOUT THE TOOL »](#)

WONKHE ANALYSIS

How the UK compares on student rights

The European Students' Union says students are owed a set of things by law. We scored every country in Europe against its Charter, provision by provision, and put them in a table.

[SEE THE LEAGUE TABLE »](#)

premium for something specific – an en-suite, a studio, a parking space – and it does not work, that premium is the number to ask for back. It is easier to evidence than general inconvenience.

RESOLVED UNDER THE CODE · OCTOBER 2017 · THE
ACCOMMODATION CODE COMPLAINTS PROCESS ·
READ THE DECISION (UNIPOL CODE COMPLAINT CASE
STUDY) »

(1 OF 64)

and we will fix things. This box sends your message and the page name to us by email: please don't include names, health details or anything about a live case – describe the page, not your situation.

What went wrong, or what could be clearer? Include the page name or topic if you can.

[SEND FEEDBACK](#)

Sends to sws@wonkhe.com

FROM WONKHE

What universities and SUs are talking about

FEES AND FUNDING
17 AUG 2026

The low-income parents funding the franchised recruitment market

JIM DICKINSON



AI
17 AUG 2026

Students don't develop skills by accident – it takes work to make graduate attributes real

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ACCESS & WP
14 AUG 2026

Some private schools are more equal than others

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Beta release. This is information, not legal advice. Always get advice when you can, and if you know others facing your issue, try to raise it as a group.

[About KYSR – what, who and why »](#) [For parents and family »](#) [What changed, and when »](#) [Your privacy »](#)

WONKHE
SUI

What it is



4

nations, all complete

8

topics, 54 problems

177

rights

1,500

pages, one per situation

A student picks their nation, a topic – before I start, my course, my results, my money, where I live, treated fairly, my job, my visa – and the thing that's gone wrong. Every page: your position, the route, what to ask for, where to get help.

Every page answers four questions



Position

Where you stand

A plain-English statement of the right – with an honesty badge: is this settled law, or a strong pattern nobody has adjudicated yet?

Route

Who can order what

Ombudsman, tribunal, scheme, regulator or court – and the honest ceiling of each. A route that can't deliver money says so.

Ask

What to ask for

Ordered by what the OIA actually awards – distress payments lead, “overturn the decision” doesn't. 217 case summaries behind it.

Help

Where to get help

Every page hands off to the student's own SU advice service – 148 in the directory. The tool creates informed clients, not DIY appellants.

THE DESIGN PRINCIPLE

It would rather undersell than overclaim



WHAT IT TELLS STUDENTS

Two honesty axes on every right: the strength of the claim, and the strength of the redress – separately. A right can be hard law with no route capable of enforcing it, and the page says so.

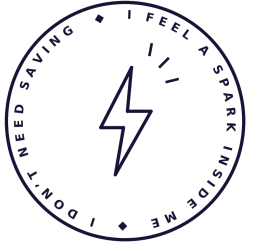
“The Consumer Rights Act says so” and “it has been held to say so about a university” are different claims. The badge answers the second.

Overclaiming is how rights promotion usually goes wrong – and it’s the fastest way to lose this room’s trust. So honesty is enforced by the machine, not the author.

WHAT IT REFUSES TO DO

Promise money on a route that can’t deliver it. Show a right in a nation it doesn’t reach. Cite a case without linking the judgment. Name a provider in a vignette.

Each of those is a build failure, not a style preference – the generator refuses to ship the page.



Built like evidence, not like content

WHERE IT COMES FROM

Written once, emitted everywhere – 177 rights power 273 problem clusters and ~1,500 pages. Fix a record once, every page updates.

49 source statements – every right traces to a published corpus statement, and every page links its sources.

63 real outcomes – vignettes from eight adjudication bodies – OIA, SPSO, NIPSO, QAA, OfS, Code tribunals, the courts – so students see what winning looks like.

HOW IT STAYS HONEST

External legal review – a desk review of 24 records; every finding actioned, and two new build rails so the same faults can't recur.

A verification loop – researcher briefs, a monitoring diary for law that's about to move, a public change log.

A sign-off queue – every record carries its own review block; the build strips it from students and compiles it for lawyers.

Not just a website



Train

The rep training pack

Five modules with exercises – voice v rights (the one you did earlier), discover the right, take action, the barriers, establish and defend – plus worksheets and four-nation safety rules.

Speak student

The scenario bank

Thirty anonymised composites built from real student language online – so training and search work in the words students actually use, not the words policies use.

Prove it works

The case banks

Twelve official ombuds outcomes and six international mechanisms – the anti-futility evidence – plus an honest four-nation note on what the research does and doesn't show.

Land it

SU guide and pilot kit

A rights-agenda guide with a 90-day implementation plan, and a pilot and evaluation toolkit with rubrics and go/no-go criteria – promotion without measurement is a poster.

WHAT WE NEED FROM THIS ROOM

Adviser and rep mode – help us build it

The student tool answers “what do I do this week?” on purpose. You may need the opposite: when a university asks “how do you know that?”, the answer has to be better than a link to a student-facing website.

Adviser mode will expose what every record already carries – the reasoning, the sources, the ratings, what changed and when. It’s a promise page today, not a product.



Four asks

Kick the tyres – your nation’s pages, against your own casework

Tell us the gaps – your caseload shows what’s missing or wrong

Shape adviser mode – what would help in an appointment? sus@wonkhe.com

Put it upstream – induction, pre-arrival, rep training

The rights moment has usually passed.

By the time a student reaches advice, the cheap fix has expired. The question for you isn't how to handle more cases better – it's who owns the six months before they come in.