

ADVICE CENTRE CODE OF PRACTICE POLICY

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Executive summary:

This Code of Practice outlines the service that the Advice Centre aims to provide and what, in return, is expected from users of the service.

Policy:

A client of the Advice Centre can expect to be:

- Assisted with their issue or enquiry at the adviser's earliest opportunity. This may be by arranged appointment or straight away on a drop-in basis or by email, phone call, or Skype.
- Contacted within 24 hours during working days in term time if an enquiry is made when the Advice Centre is closed or the adviser is absent for any reason. During holiday periods we would aim to make contact within 24 hours during working days, but due to staff leave we cannot always guarantee this.
- Seen promptly and on-time for a prearranged appointment.
- Treated with respect and made to feel at ease at all times, no matter what the enquiry or issue.
- Given reasonable time to fully explore and explain the enquiry. An appointment will not normally be longer than an hour and if the Centre is busy it may be limited to 30 minutes. These timings are nominal and can be extended if necessary in more complex cases or a further appointment can be made.
- Advised and supported honestly and openly.
- Given independent and impartial advice.
- Seen by an adviser of their choice, where possible.
- Advised confidentially on their case, unless express permission is given to discuss the case with a third party. (See Confidentiality Policy).
- Referred to more specialist organisations if, in the opinion of the adviser, this service is needed or would be of benefit.

A client of the Advice Centre is expected to:

- Arrive promptly and on time for an appointment.
- Be honest throughout the interview, giving a full and accurate account of the issue.
- Bring any documentation related to the enquiry to any appointment.
- Treat the adviser and reception staff with respect, in conjunction with Bucks Students' Union's Equality and Diversity Policy.
- Inform the adviser if other agencies are being consulted in parallel to an enquiry at the Advice Centre - University support services or external welfare agencies, for example.

Feedback about the Advice Centre:

We welcome both positive and negative feedback about the service we provide. Feedback from members using the service enables us to improve the service where necessary or lets us know that what we are providing is what our members want. We invite all members who have had an advice session to complete a feedback survey and to place it in a survey box located in the Students' Union receptions. If any member, who has used the service, is unsatisfied with what has been provided we would encourage them to contact the Manager of the Advice Centre, or their line manager, the Membership Services Manager to discuss their complaint in the first instance. If the complaint is not then resolved, or if the member is uncomfortable in contacting us directly then the Students' Union Complaint Procedure should be used.

Withdrawal of Service:

The situations listed below are likely to lead to refusal or withdrawal of services. However, consideration will be given to situations not listed if it is thought that withdrawal of the services may be appropriate:

Member threatening or using violence:

If any Advice Centre staff have any concerns over the conduct of a service user in terms of violence, and communication skills fail to resolve the situation peacefully, or if a service user is being violent, the University's security staff will be contacted.

In discussions with others involved in the incident, the Advice Centre Manager in conjunction with the Membership Services Manager may decide to ban a user from the service. This decision will then be communicated to the user in writing.

Consistent breach of Equal Opportunities

The Advice Centre embraces the University's Equality and Diversity Policy. In accordance with this policy, if informal measures to deal with the situation do not rectify the behaviour of a service user, the Centre may refuse service in order to maintain an environment acceptable to other service users and staff.

In either of the above situations it will be at the Membership Services Manager's discretion, in consultation with the Chief Executive Officer and Vice President Education & Welfare, to initiate the Union's disciplinary procedure and/or the University's disciplinary procedure in relation to the incident.

Service users who repeatedly fail to turn up for booked appointments

In the event that a service user repeatedly fails to turn up for appointments they may be warned that if they continue to do this they will only be allowed to see an adviser on a drop-in basis.

Potential fraud and seeking support for illegal actions

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

If the member is unwilling to stop the fraudulent action, they must be notified that the Advice Centre will be unable to assist further in relation to that matter, and therefore lead to a withdrawal of service. This decision will be made in discussion with the Advice Centre Manager or by the Advice Centre Manager in discussion with the Membership Services Manager and will be clearly communicated to the member in writing.

Under the influence of drugs or alcohol

If a member appears to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol, to the extent that useful communication is difficult, they will be informed that to carry on with the appointment at this time is not appropriate and will be offered the opportunity to make an appointment for another time.