

**Imperial College Union
Advice Service
Conflict of Interest Policy**

Free | Confidential | Independent | Impartial | Informative

1. Introduction

1.1 This policy aims to identify conflicts of interest and give guidance on the way that these should be managed by the Imperial College Union (ICU) Advice Service.

1.2 A conflict of interest takes place when the advice delivered cannot be impartial or when an Advice Caseworker feels they might be perceived as not giving impartial advice.

1.3 An Advice Caseworker will raise a potential conflict of interest as soon as the problem is identified. If in doubt, this should be discussed with the Advice Manager and/or Representation and Advice Manager.

1.4 There are three main scenarios that can take place.

1.5 A conflict of interest may occur:

- I. When one student has already approached ICU Advice service and another student who is involved in the dispute or case then approaches ICU Advice service
- II. When a student is a friend or acquaintance of an Advice Caseworker working in ICU Advice service
- III. Where a student has a complaint about ICU or is involved in an ICU Disciplinary process
- IV. The staff member handling the case is involved in some other area of the union that puts them in a conflict with the student's issue.

2. Action to be taken

2.1 As soon as the Advice Caseworker is aware of a potential conflict of interest, they should disclose this to the student.

2.2 Issue I: a student has already approached ICU Advice Service and another student who is involved in the dispute or case subsequently approaches ICU Advice Service

If a student has asked for advice and subsequently (an)other student(s) who is/are in dispute with the first student approaches ICU Advice Service for advice, the service reserves the right to disclose the initial contact but not the nature of the advice given. No one Advice Caseworker will be able to represent more than one student in a dispute and every effort will be made to secure representation for the second student by referring them to another Advice Caseworker.

If there are not enough Advice Caseworkers, students will be given information and directed to alternative sources of support. Student officers and/or volunteers will not act as Caseworkers.

The Caseworker should ensure that the student is aware that they will receive equal representation and guidance and seek to refer them to another Advice Caseworker. The Caseworker should contact their colleague and arrange for them to contact the student as soon as possible. To ensure confidentiality and impartiality no information other than contact details should be revealed when a conflict of interest referral is made between Advice Caseworkers.

Wherever possible, two Advice Caseworkers managing the cases where a conflict of interest is present should not be supervised by the same manager in this event the Representation and Advice Manager will act as Manager for the Caseworker.

2.3 Issue II: a student is a friend or acquaintance of an Advice Caseworker working in ICU Advice Service

The Caseworker should show the student the Conflict of Interest Policy and explain that it may not be appropriate for them to receive advice from the Caseworker. Subsequently, the Caseworker should ask for written consent to continue the process. If the student does provide consent, the Caseworker should refer them to another member of the Service.

If the student is a friend or acquaintance of multiple Caseworkers, the Advice Caseworker initially allocated to the student should take the action stated above and then to refer them to another appropriate local service.

This process also applies to incoming or outgoing/former sabbatical officers of ICU.

2.4 Issue III: Where a student has a complaint about ICU or is involved in an ICU Disciplinary process

ICU Advice Service is a free, confidential, independent, and non-judgemental service. To minimise potential conflicts of interest relating to complaints either A), B) or C) should be followed below:

- A. If the student has a complaint about ICU, provided the complaint is not about ICU Advice Service, the Advice Caseworker can proceed with supporting the student to submit a complaint. The Caseworker should discuss the case with the Advice Manager and should not enter conversations with the ICU staff member investigating the complaint without the student's express consent as with any other case.
- B. If the student has a complaint about ICU Advice Service staff, the ICU Advice Service complaints procedure should be followed. The student's case should be transferred to another Advice Caseworker not involved in the complaint should they wish to continue to access the service. The case can also be transferred to the ICU Advice Manager; however, they should then hand investigation of the complaint over to the Representation and Advice Manager.
- C. If the student has a complaint about ICU Advice staff and B above is not possible (i.e. because the student does not wish to continue to accessing ICU Advice Service or if all ICU Advice Service staff are involved in substance or unsatisfactory outcome of the complaint in some way) the Advice Manager and the Representation and Advice Manager should discuss possible referral or support options with the Director of Membership Services.

To minimise potential conflicts of interest relating to students in ICU disciplinary processes either A or B should be followed below:

- A. Provided the student's disciplinary does not relate to their actions towards ICU Advice Service staff and that service has not been withdrawn, the student can be represented as they would in any disciplinary case involving the University. The Advice Caseworker should discuss the case with the Advice Manager and should not enter conversations with the ICU staff member/s investigating the alleged misconduct, or any member of a disciplinary panel, without the student's express consent.

B. If the student's disciplinary relates in any way to their actions towards ICU Advice Service staff, the Advice Manager should review whether service has been withdrawn in this case. If it has, then the student is not entitled to representation and should be informed as such. If service has not been withdrawn, the Advice Manager and the Representation and Advice Manager should discuss a possible referral or support options with the Director of Membership Services.

2.5 Issue IV: I. The staff member handling the case is involved in some other area of the union that puts them in a conflict with the student's issue

The staff member will approach their line manager for guidance on the best way forward in the situation. This may result in the student being allocated a new Caseworker, or for the student to be signposted to another service.

2.6 In all cases, the student(s) should be given a copy of the ICU Advice Standards Statement and assured that the ICU Advice Service policy to provide free, confidential, independent, and impartial advice will not be compromised.

3. Reviewing the Conflict of Interest Policy

3.1 This policy will be reviewed by the Deputy President Welfare, the Advice Manager and the Representation and Advice Manager every two years unless a notable change occurs within that period.