



The Advice Centre Confidentiality Policy

Definitions

The Advice Centre The service is provided to clients by the Union Adviser and the Membership Services Manager.

Clients All prospective, existing and former students of Imperial College London.

Statement

"Imperial College Union is committed to providing a confidential advice service to its clients. Imperial College Union believes that principles of confidentiality must be integrated throughout all aspects of services and management. The Advice Centre clients deserve the right to confidentiality in order to protect their interests and to maintain the integrity of the Advice Centre."

Confidentiality

By confidentiality Imperial College Union means that:

No information regarding a client shall be given either directly or indirectly to any third party external to the Advice Centre without the clients' written or verbal consent.

Imperial College Union recognises that all of its members should be able to access the Advice Centre in confidence. In addition, Imperial College Union recognises that no person external to the service should be made aware that a client has accessed the Advice Centre without the client's prior expressed consent.

The Operations Manager, Membership Services Manager and President may be included in the Advice Centre team with regard to decisions of breaching confidentiality. The Deputy President (Education) and Deputy President (Welfare) are also included within this policy as the Union Adviser often interacts with the holders of these positions*.

*The role of the Deputy President (Education) and Deputy President (Welfare) in the work of the Advice Centre is set down in Appendix 1.

Express consent to contact third parties

Where the Advice Centre has agreed with a client that a third party will need to be contacted, the client is asked to sign a Form of Authority prior to third party contact being made.

This action will be recorded on the client's case sheet and the Form of Authority will be retained with this case sheet.

If a client has e-mailed the Advice Centre it is assumed that they have consented to be contacted via e-mail.

When contacting a client by phone, the Union Adviser will not make reference to the reason for the call and will not identify himself or herself as an adviser until they are confident they are speaking to the client.

Reception

Reception staff have a particular responsibility to uphold a student's confidentiality and as such this policy covers all reception staff.

There are likely to be instances when staff members on duty at the Reception desk become party to confidential information about clients for example when referring students to the Advice Centre, making appointments for the Union Adviser and giving primary advice in the form of handing out leaflets etc.

Reception staff must not discuss confidential matters with anyone beyond those referenced in this policy, and any discussions should not take place where they can be overheard, for example in the open plan Student Activities Centre.

When faced with a difficult situation Reception staff should not take the responsibility for breaching confidentiality. The matter should be referred to the Union Adviser. If he/she is not available, the matter should be referred to the Membership Services Manager. An example might be an anxious parent wanting to contact their son/daughter urgently who they believe has used the Advice Centre.

Breaches of confidentiality

In the case of an emergency the Union Adviser has the right to take immediate action and call security. An example may be when the Union Adviser is threatened with violence.

Fraud

If the Union Adviser has identified that a client has made a fraudulent claim, the client will be advised that the Advice Centre will no longer assist them in that particular area. The client will also be advised that the Advice Centre will not disclose their particulars to any external party. An example might be a fraudulent claim of welfare benefits or to the Hardship Fund.

Case Sheets

It is the responsibility of the Advice Centre to ensure that a case sheet is kept for every client and that all case sheets are held securely and locked away when the Advice Centre is unattended.

On request and once their identity has been confirmed, clients will be given a copy of their case sheet.

Generally only the Union Adviser will have access to the case sheets. In some circumstances the Deputy President (Education), Deputy President (Welfare) or Membership Services Manager will be consulted on individual cases.

Case sheets will be kept for seven years; after this time, they will be shredded.

Statistical recording

The Advice Centre is committed to anonymous statistical recording to enable monitoring of take up and to identify trends and policy issues that arise.

Representation and Welfare Board
25th March 2010



Ensuring the effectiveness of the confidentiality policy

All clients and members of staff have access to this Confidentiality Policy. New staff members associated with the Advice Centre will be introduced to the policy and during their induction training.

Appendix 1 – The role of the Deputy President (Education) and Deputy President (Welfare) in the work of the Advice Centre

Two Deputy Presidents assume responsibility for all Education and Welfare provision at Imperial College Union.

The Union Adviser liaises regularly with both Deputy Presidents to ensure quality of service and provision but to also to assist in solving cases raised by clients.

The Union Adviser assists both Deputy Presidents in keeping them up to date with national student issues, with social policy and with statistics from The Advice Centre.

The Deputy Presidents aid the work of the Advice Centre by raising issues to the College which may affect students, this is done through advocacy, representation and lobbying.

When the Union Adviser is not available both Deputy Presidents also act as contact points for clients of the Advice Centre. If the issue falls under their remit and expertise they can also act upon the enquiry.