

The Advice Centre Confidentiality Policy

The Advice Centre

The Advice Centre offers free, professional and impartial advice and representation to members of Imperial College Union on a range of issues.

Advice Centre Staff

This service is provided to clients by the Union Adviser, with the support of the Education & Welfare Manager. The Advice Centre is also indirectly supported by the Deputy President (Education), Deputy President (Welfare), Union Receptionist(s) and Systems Coordinator. All staff holding these positions are trained in the definition and importance of confidentiality and are covered by this Policy.*

Clients

Members of Imperial College Union who are currently registered for study at Imperial College London can access the Advice Centre. At the discretion of the Union Adviser and Education & Welfare Manager, the Advice Centre will also accept prospective, lapsed and recent students of Imperial College London as clients.

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 respected throughout all aspects of services and management. Clients of the Advice Centre have the right to confidentiality in order to protect their interests, and to maintain the integrity of the Advice Centre.”

Confidentiality

Imperial College Union understands confidentiality to mean the following:

No information that might lead to the identification of an Advice Centre client shall be given either directly or indirectly to any third party external to the Advice Centre staff as set out above, without the clients' prior expressed written or verbal consent. Information shall only be disseminated within the Advice Centre staff team when strictly necessary and usually with the expressed consent of the client.

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.

Breaking confidentiality

The Advice Centre staff may break confidentiality only in situations where they believe a student will cause harm to themselves or to others. In these circumstances, they will attempt to seek permission from the student before informing the necessary authorities in College and elsewhere.

The Managing Director, Membership Services Manager and President may be included in the Advice Centre staff with regard to decisions of breaking confidentiality.

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 and the Form of Authority will be retained alongside the other details of the case. .

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.

All Reception staff will receive confidentiality training as part of their induction process.

Fraud

If the Union Adviser has identified that a client has made a fraudulent claim the client may be advised, at the discretion of the Union Adviser, that the Advice Centre will no longer assist them in that particular area. The client may 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 Notes

It is the responsibility of the Advice Centre to ensure that case notes are kept for every client and that all case notes and related documents are held securely. Paper documents will be stored securely, and online notes and files will be kept in a secure, encrypted database. The Systems Coordinator will be briefed on the importance of confidentiality and will uphold the principle of confidentiality when maintaining this database.

Clients have the right to request copies of any paper or online notes, regarding them and their case, held by the Advice Centre.

Case notes will be kept for seven years, after which they will be shredded or deleted.

Statistical recording

The Advice Centre is committed to anonymous statistical recording to enable monitoring of usage and to identify trends and policy issues that arise. Confidentiality will be maintained to ensure that no client of the Advice Centre can be identified from the results of this recording.

Ensuring confidentiality policy effectiveness

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 during their induction training.