**THE ADVICE CENTRE CONFIDENTIALITY POLICY**

The Advice Centre offers free, independent, impartial and confidential advice to all students at Imperial college on the following issues: academic, finance, housing

Confidentiality is key to the advice service and all information shared with the service will be treated in confidence and according to the Data Protection Act.

**ADVICE CENTRE STAFF**

The Advice service comprises of the Advice Services Manager , the Education and Welfare Manager and the Head of Student Voice and Communication.

The service is indirectly assisted by:

* the System’s coordinator, who provides technical support with the case management system
* the Union Receptionist who provide the first point of contact for students. They will answer calls and re direct them to the Advice centre, take student details when passing on a message and meet students when they visit the Advice centre to speak to an Adviser

Details of cases will not be discussed with the system’s coordinator and the Union Receptionist.

All staff involved with the advice service have been trained in the definition of confidentiality .

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

The Advice Centre operates within a framework of confidentiality.

Information disclosed by students to the Adviser will not be shared with anyone outside of the Adviser Centre.

Students will always be seen in a designated advice space and all case records will be stored in a confidential manner

Any discussion about cases within members of the advice team will take place in a confidential space.

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

**THIRD PARTIES**

From time to time parents or friends will get in touch wanting to discuss a student’s situation.

The Adviser will encourage the parent or friend to pass on the advice centre’s contact details to the student and ask them to get in touch directly. No details of cases will be disclosed.

Only very general information about procedures and regulations can be shared.

Third party requests for information about cases will be declined and the enquirer will be directed to the confidentiality policy.

**DISCLOSING INFORMATION**

Cases will be discussed among members of the Advice team but care will be taken so that no breach of confidentiality takes place.

From time to time it might be necessary to discuss cases with other members of the Union or of the college such as personal tutor, head of departments, the registry office or other support services. From time to time outside organisations might need to be contacted. If this needs arises permission will always be sought from the student **prior** to any information being disclosed.

**RECORD KEEPING**

It is necessary to keep a record of each case to ensure continuity in the advice provided and track the quality of the advice delivered.

Case records are stored on an online case management system and only the advice team will have access to the full details of the records.

Paper records will be kept to a minimum. If there is a need to store a paper copy of a document, this will be kept in a locked cabinet within the advice room.

The Advice Service is also supported by the Union Receptionists and the System Coordinator and they are fully aware of the confidentiality policy. They have limited access to the case management system for administrative purposes and will not be able to see the full details of the cases.

Students can request to see their record if they so wish and they should do so by submitting a request in writing to the Advice Services Manager. It can take up to 2 weeks to provide this.

All records will be kept for 6 years and then deleted or destroyed.

**STATISTICAL RECORDING**

The Advice Centre uses the data collected through case recording for statistical purposes. This enables to monitor the usage of the service and identify trends and policy issues that might arise. No clients will be identified in this process.

On occasions examples of cases will be used in reports or documents. These will be anonymised and care will be taken so that no student can be identified.

If a student does not wish for this to happen they need to make this clear to the adviser.

**BREACHES OF CONFIDENTIALITY**

There are some occasion where it is necessary to break confidentiality. This will happen when:

* there is good reason to believe a student may cause serious harm to themselves or others;
* there is good reason to believe the student is involved in an act of terrorism or drug trafficking;
* If we receive a court order requiring us to share information;
* If there is an issue relating to child protection.

If an adviser feels that one of these scenarios apply they will discuss the case with the Education and Welfare manager .

Written permission will be sought by the Head of Student Voice and Communication before information is disclosed.

It might be necessary to consult a specialist. In this case all cases will be anonymised.

The student will be informed that their confidentiality will be breached unless there is a risk to the safety of the student or others.

A breach of confidentiality might also occur unintentionally when there is a conflict of interest.

An Adviser cannot help students if they are involved in the same case. When this is identified the advised will need to disclose this to the students concerned. This might involuntarily identify other students who have accessed the service. Care will be taken to limit this happening but it might sometimes be unavoidable. Refer to the conflict of interest policy for more details.

**FRAUD**

If the Adviser has identified that a client has made a fraudulent claim the client may be advised at the discretion of the 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 to welfare benefits or to the hardship fund.

Written by: Angela Urasala

Date: 20/10/2015 To be reviewed: 20/10/2016