**Help & Advice Service**

**Confidentiality and Data management policy**

**Purpose and intent**

Worcester Students’ Union Help & Advice Service is committed to providing a confidential service to all students regardless of ethnicity, religion, gender, disability, or sexual orientation. Confidentiality means protecting the personal information of individuals and not sharing student information directly or indirectly with a third party. We believe the principles of confidentiality must be integrated across all aspects of the services and management.

There are rare occasions where a breach of confidentiality may be deemed necessary, and these are detailed in this policy. If a decision is made to breach confidentiality, the client will be informed before any action is taken by the Help & Advice service unless in exceptional circumstances where it is deemed unavoidable to ensure someone’s imminent safety.

**Confidentiality during the enquiry and booking process.**

Students requesting an appointment with an advisor complete an enquiry form and submit compulsory personal data including:

* Name
* Student number
* Address
* Telephone number
* Email address
* Study details (Full time or Part time, School or college of study, Level of study)
* Any reasonable adjustments
* Home or international student status
* Whether a student is over 18

Advisors require this information to verify the client is a registered student at the university and ensure the service meets their accessibility needs. Advisors will only respond to student enquiries with an offer of booking from University of Worcester student email addresses to ensure correspondence remains within a secure network.

Once submitted, the enquiry form will be sent to all Students’ Union (SU) advisors and their manager. On receipt of the enquiry, the above information will be logged on Advice Pro, our secure case management system and on the Help & Advice Service’s password protected contact spreadsheet. The Help & Advice Service have a password that is shared only between advisors and their line manager. The password is secure and is reviewed periodically or if there is reason to regenerate the password sooner (such as if an advisor no longer works for the organisation or there is notice of a security concern). The information will not be accessed by any other party and emails are password protected and confidentiality screens for PCs are in place. Once the information has been logged on both the contact sheet and Advice Pro, the enquiry email is permanently deleted on all devices.

**Confidentiality during appointments**

Appointments are normally held in our accessible and confidential advice room within the Students’ Union building on St John’s Campus or at City Campus Charles Hastings building. At the start of the appointment, the advisor will briefly outline the student union’s confidentiality policy to make sure students have understood the core principles of confidentiality. This information will also be displayed clearly throughout the duration of the appointment.

To encourage students to talk freely and to maintain the integrity of a private space, the Students’ Union do not allow video or audio recording of advice appointments. Students can take notes during their appointment.

**Confidentiality following appointments, case notes and data storage.**

Following an appointment, the student will receive an email from their advisor with a summary of the options available to them; this will be sent from and to university email addresses only, via the secure network. The outcome email sent to the student (along with any other email correspondence) will also be logged on Advice Pro and any notable outcomes from the case that are shared with the advisor. For example, if an appeal was upheld, or what remedial action was taken following a complaint. The Students’ Union Help & Advice Service log as many case outcomes as possible as this allows us to review the impact of our service and understand how students move through university processes. Once logged on Advice Pro, all emails will be permanently deleted. The Help & Advice Service use only secure electronic systems such as Advice Pro, to store client data

Student data may appear on printed documents in the following situations:

1. If a student requests a printed version of their follow-up advice for accessibility reasons.
2. If a student prefers to complete a paper version of the enquiry form for accessibility reasons.
3. If a staff member supports a student at an academic misconduct hearing and completes the 'Supporting Students at Academic Integrity Meetings' document, used to record adherence to policy.

In the latter two instances, the completed form is immediately scanned, emailed to suadvice@worc.ac.uk, and disposed of in the confidential waste bin.

Client cases will be deemed closed when:

* The client and advisor agree the case has run its course and no further support is required.
* The matter has been referred to another agency.
* There has been no contact from the student regarding the case for a period of 1 month.

Advisors will also send students a link to a short, optional questionnaire within the post-appointment summary email. This feedback is anonymised on return to the Students’ Union Help & Advice Service and will be used to monitor and improve service efficacy. In line with the Students’ Union Record of Data Processing and Retention Schedule, the files will be stored for six years after the close of that academic year.

**Escalations and Supervision**

SU advisors and the Help & Advice line manager meet weekly for Supervision. During this time, details of case escalations will be discussed but no personal information pertaining to the identity of the student(s) will be disclosed. Discussing case escalations allows the Students’ Union to provide the most appropriate, thorough, and accurate advice and ensures that if an allocated advisor is not on site, another advisor is able to support the student at short notice. Cases involving allegations of sexual misconduct, abuse, neglect, harassment, discrimination, bullying and students under the age of 18 will **always** be discussed at Supervision due to the sensitive nature of these types of cases, however, the name of the student will be omitted.

**Reporting (Social Policy)**

On a monthly, bi-annually, and annual basis, the Help & Advice Service provides intelligence to various individuals in elected and non-elected posts within the Students’ Union and the University of Worcester. No personal details that could be used to identify the student will be shared, nor any details of the case. Anonymised reporting highlights the dominant case themes for a particular period. For example, this month saw an increase in students visiting the service for referrals for academic misconduct. This information, along with the identity of those contacting the Service (such as disability and gender) helps the Students’ Union to ensure that all students with protected characteristics are supported and represented and allows the Service to initiate campaigns (part of our ‘Social Policy’) that provide support and guidance for reoccurring or escalating student issues and concerns.

Student data will not be shared outside of the organisation unless there are serious concerns about a substantial risk of harm, abuse and/or neglect (Details can be found under the subheading, ‘Breaching Confidentiality’). The Help & Advice Service may use some anonymised information from case themes to construct case studies for publication on the SU Website.

**Conflict of interest**

A conflict of interest (COI) is a situation in which a person or organization is involved in multiple interests, financial or otherwise, and serving one interest could involve working against another.

In the context of the support offered by the Help & Advice Service, a conflict of interest could include but is not limited to;

* Clients who conflict with the Worcester Students’ Union
* Clients who are making a complaint about a Students’ Union Advisor
* Clients who are involved with a dispute with another student who is also receiving support from the Students’ Union.

Where a conflict of interest is identified, SU advisors are responsible for taking appropriate action to manage this. Options for managing a conflict of interest might include but are not limited to;

* An alternative Worcester SU advisor will support the student.
* An alternative advisor from another university with which the university of Worcester has an agreement of reciprocity. Permission will be sought from the client before any information about the student or case is shared and this will be recorded on Advice Pro, our secure case note software.
* An alternative member of staff from the SU.
* Signposting to an alternative and external service.

**Breaching confidentiality**

On rare occasions and in serious cases, the Students’ Union reserves the right to breach confidentiality. If a decision is made to breach confidentiality, a SU advisor, or a member of staff at the Students’ Union will notify the student concerned **before** the breach is made. The client will be told why and how the breach of confidentiality will be enacted.

Breaches of confidentiality are rare and can be in response to;

* Someone, including the student, is at risk of significant harm and/or abuse and/or neglect.
* Someone, including the student, has committed or plans to commit a criminal act.
* An identified conflict of interest.
* An act of Parliament or Court of Law.

If a disclosure is made by a client that leads to alarm or concern regarding the above, we would refuse to provide further advice about this matter and the appointment will be brought to an end. We would, however, briefly discuss next steps and signpost to alternate appropriate agencies. Every deliberate breach of confidentiality must be first discussed with the WSU senior management at the earliest opportunity.

The WSU senior manager in question will explore the issues with the advisor and decide if confidentiality should be breached. A written record of the discussion and decision will be placed on the client’s case file. The senior manager in question, will contact the Chief Executive and brief them on the case, ensuring they do not break confidentiality in doing so. The senior manager will seek authorisation of the Chief Executive. If the authorisation is given, a full report of the case should be recorded, and any agreed actions undertaken. If the Chief Executive does not agree, this is the final decision of the Help & Advice Service. Where the Chief Executive has been involved in the earlier decision, they will seek advice of an external trustee.

**Data Protection Privacy Statement**

Worcester Students’ Union takes its responsibility to data protection very seriously. When you contact the Help & Advice Service, you are agreeing that we can create a case file using the information you have provided. If you do not want to give us your personal information, we will discuss your concerns and you will still be able to access the service, but this might prevent us from providing the best and most appropriate advice.

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| **Client rights under GDPR in the context of the Help & Advice Service**  *The right to be informed*  Our confidentiality policy and privacy notice explain how we obtain, store, use and dispose of client data. Clients are asked to consent that they have read the confidentiality policy and associated documents before submission of an enquiry form. An accessible copy of these documents is available upon request and our confidentiality statement is always displayed in our advice room.  *The right of access and data portability*  A client can request a free copy of their case record, known as a ‘Subject Access Request’ from the Help & Advice service at any time and without providing a reason. The Help & Advice Service will provide these documents within 1 month of a request being made. If you would like to make a ‘Subject Access Request’, you can either complete the form, or request verbally, or in writing. Students will need to provide evidence of their identity (photographic ID such as a University of Worcester ID card, Driving Licence, or Passport) before the information is released. The Students’ Union will make data available to clients in an accessible format if requested.  *The right to rectification*  If a client is concerned about the accuracy of the information or the way in which their case is portrayed within case notes held by the Help & Advice Service, they should contact the Students’ Union Welcome Desk and speak with an advisor to discuss concerns and plan for any reasonable alterations. Amendments will be made within one month of agreement.  *The right to erasure*  Any student can request the Help & Advice Service erase their data from Advice Pro and the Contact Sheet by completing the Data Erasure Request Form, or by contacting the Students’ Union Welcome Desk and making a request verbally, or in writing. Student requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Please note that in some instances, we are required to keep case notes for a period of 6 years for the purposes of defending court action. Student records older than 6 years will be deleted safely and securely according to GDPR guidelines.  *The right to restrict processing*  A client can request for the Help & Advice Service to cease processing their data by completing a Data Restriction and Objection Form. The Students’ Union will respond to each request within one month of a completed form being submitted.  *The right to object*  The Help & Advice Service will never use a client’s data for marketing purposes.  *Rights in relation to automated decision making and profiling*  The Help & Advice Service will never use automated decision making or profiling. |

**Ordering Help and Advice Products**

The Students’ Union often provides resources to students, for example, through the Safe Sex Express and Period dignity campaigns. Students can order products by completing an online enquiry form and will be asked to enter some personal details, such as name, address, and email. This allows students to receive deliveries of products and for us to ensure we are accessible to our diverse student body. Students can also request and collect some products anonymously by visiting Welcome Desk.

Enquiry forms will only be accepted from University of Worcester student accounts and submitted to Welcome Desk and the Help & Advice team via a secure network. Welcome Desk staff will package the items and store them in a safe and private space at the Students’ Union. Orders for delivery will be placed face down for privacy and packages are never left unattended. Students collecting their items will be asked to confirm their order number to keep their name confidential. If a student does not have an order number available, staff will ask the student to confirm their initials. We do not log student names or addresses and all emails are permanently deleted. The only information kept by the SU order service is, as part of Safe Sex Express, how many students ordered what products. This is necessary to proving a service demand and securing future supplies.

**Referrals to external services**

The Help & Advice service often refer students to external support providers. Students will be told what details will be shared, with who as well as how and why they are necessary for the referral. Student details will only be shared with external services with the student’s explicit, verbal consent and it is the responsibility of the student to contact any external support provider to find out how student data is processed following the referral.

**Who should I contact if I have concerns about confidentiality?**

If you have any questions or concerns about confidentiality within the Help and Advice Service, please contact [SUadvice@worc.ac.uk](mailto:SUadvice@worc.ac.uk).

If you have any questions or concerns about data protection, please contact [SUdataprotection@worc.ac.uk](mailto:SUdataprotection@worc.ac.uk)

More information can also be found on our website in our [Student Data Privacy Notice.](https://www.worcsu.com/pageassets/yourunion/gdpr/WSU-Student-Data-Privacy-Notice-2020-FINAL(1).pdf)

**Application of policy and review**

While this policy is scheduled for annual review, it remains a working and responsive document and as such, significant incidents could initiate an earlier review if deemed necessary by the Chief Executive.

Each member of staff, including student staff at the Students’ Union will always have access to this policy and receive annual training to keep their knowledge and skills up to date. A copy of this policy is available in an accessible format upon request at the Students’ Union Welcome Desk.

*This policy was adopted August 2018*

*Reviewed v2.1 May 2021*

*Reviewed v2.2 August 2023*

*Reviewed v2.3 March 2024*

*Reviewed v. 2.4 March 2025*

Person responsible for review: Director of Representation and Membership Services