

# Students' Union Advice Centre Handbook

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## Introduction

This document provides general guidelines about the policies, procedures and working practices of Wrexham Glyndwr Students' Union Advice Centre. The intention is that these are clear and transparent to employees and officers of Wrexham Glyndwr Students' Union and its student members, so that the service is delivered in a manner consistent with accepted professional standards. This document reflects our commitment to ensuring accessibility, support and excellence in service provision.

## Reviewing the Advice Manual

A review of the entire Advice Centre handbook will be completed annually. After consultation with Sabbatical Officers and the Chief Executive Officer, each policy within the manual will be reviewed and where necessary, updated. Ultimate responsibility for these updates rests with the Advice Centre Manager.

## Service Description & Client Group

Wrexham Glyndwr SU Advice Centre is a free, independent and confidential service available to all Wrexham Glyndwr University Students. We will also provide support to perspective and former students if their enquiry relates to their time as a student at the University.

We are student-focused and our primary objective is to ensure the student voice is heard, respected and acted upon through the provision of effective advice, information, advocacy and representation. The level of service provided is generalist however; we do have areas that are particularly strong due to staff skills and experience or service demand. Our service focus is on academic advice but we also have specialisms in housing and welfare benefits.

Where a case is beyond our scope or capacity we will endeavour to signpost or refer clients to an appropriate organisation.

## Wrexham Glyndwr University Client Group

We recognise that students at the University are drawn from all sections of the community, including:

- Traditional students aged 18 – 21
- Students with disabilities and health issues
- Mature students
- Students with dependent children
- Students from ethnic minorities
- International students.

We recognise that our client group has specific advice needs, including:

- Issues with the University (academic, disciplinary, complaints etc.)
- Issues associated with renting property in the private-rented sector.

The advice needs of Wrexham Glyndwr students are such that the service needs to be broadly based, in order to deal with a very wide range of enquiries.

## Service Hours

The Advice Centre is based in the Students' Union building on the Wrexham Glyndwr University campus.

Our opening times are Monday – Friday, 9am -4pm. The service is open throughout the year except for Bank Holidays and for a two/three week period over Christmas. If for any reason, the Students' Union Advice Centre cannot open, as much prior notice will be provided as possible.

Advisors support students on an appointment basis, although they may be able to see clients on a drop-in basis if their diaries/workload allow. Advisors should be prepared to see students in crisis as necessary. Crisis is defined as a time of danger or imminent threat to a students' mental or physical safety e.g. someone at imminent risk of homelessness, harm to self or others or impending urgent deadlines.

Advisors can also receive enquiries by e-mail, letters or telephone. Letters, e-mails and telephone messages will be dealt with as promptly as possible.

## Management Structure

The Advice Centre Manager, in liaison with the Chief Executive Officer (line manager), is responsible for departmental planning and development in line with the Students' Union strategy. The Advice Centre Manager, in line with Students' Union policies, is responsible for the recruitment, induction, and supervision and management of staff, for identifying training needs and ensuring these needs are met.

The Students' Union currently employs two members of staff in the Students' Union Advice Centre.

- 1 full time Advice Centre Manager / Advisor
- 1 part time Advisor.

## Affiliations

The Advice Centre affiliates with:

- Advice UK, the umbrella body for UK Advice Services.
- National Union of Students' (NUS)
- Advice Community of Students' Union (ACSU)

## Insurance

The Advice Service is covered by the Students' Union Professional Indemnity Insurance which is currently provided by Endsleigh Insurance.

## Service Ethos

If the query does not fall within one of our subject areas, we will endeavour to find out information or as appropriate signpost or refer to an appropriate agency. Queries will be dealt with in an impartial way. We are here to help – not to judge. Wherever possible Advisors will offer clients several options and always encourage them to retain control of their affairs.

Advisors will keep up to date and act within current legislation. They will also act promptly on any agreed course of action within the constraints of their workload.

## Equal Opportunities

Wrexham Glyndwr SU Advice Centre is actively committed to a policy of equality of opportunity, in its activities, in employment practice and in the service provision for our members.

Wrexham Glyndwr SU Advice Centre will not discriminate on grounds of sex, marital status, race ethnicity, colour, nationality, disability, trade union activity, sexual orientation, age, language, gender identity, family responsibility, socio-economic background, HIV/AIDS Status, religious or political belief. This list is not exhaustive.

## Staff

### Induction of new staff

All new Advisors are subject to a six-month probation period, during which time their work is subject to a greater period of supervision. A new Advisor will initially shadow interviews with other Advisors before taking on clients themselves.

### One-to-Ones

Staff should have one-to-one meetings once a month. Regular exchange of views, opinions and experience is vital and time will be set aside for such meetings. The meetings will be informal and allow for open discussion. Any action points will be written up and held on file. (see Supervision Agreement – Appendix 2)

Staff will have a six-monthly review. These are an opportunity for the staff member and Advice Centre Manager to review achievements, progress, identify concerns, set future goals, and to prepare a training plan for the next twelve months. Action points will be agreed, written up and regularly reviewed in one-to-ones.

## The Advice Process

### Casework Form/Data Protection Consent

When a client presents at the centre they will be asked to complete a casework form which is uploaded onto their case file. This form will also be required for Data Protection purposes.

## Case Recording

All case files must be accurate and up to date and it must be clear what stage the case is at and what action is being taken/required. Outlined below is the procedure for writing up the case file notes of each client that each adviser should follow:

1. Clients must fill out a casework form.
2. All data completed on the casework form must then be added to a new electronic case file. It is the responsibility of the individual Advisor to make sure all key information is recorded accurately.
3. Where a client has previously visited the Advice Centre a new 'case file' should be created although not all details need to be re-inputted however previous information including contact details must be verified.
4. The file notes must then be entered and an appointment summary email confirming all advice given must be sent at that earliest opportunity.
5. Maintaining a logical order on the case file is essential.
6. Once a file is due to be closed an outcome must be recorded in the 'case outcome' section and a closure email sent to the client.

Cases will be deemed to have closed when there is no more work to be carried out, the case has been referred to another service, access to the service has been withdrawn (see Withdrawal of Service), no response has been received after four weeks and despite reasonable attempts to make contact or all possible options have been explored and nothing more can be reasonably done.

## Case Management and Storage

All case files shall be free to be viewed by clients (provided this does not compromise another person) Advisors therefore should ensure they are managing their case files appropriately and always refrain from making judgemental comments on case files.

Where a caseload becomes unmanageable the Advice Centre Manager should be informed immediately (if urgent) or during the next one-to-one meeting.

Cases are stored using an online case management system called Advicepro. Each adviser has their own login and password. Any paperwork relating to a case scanned and uploaded onto the casefile without delay.

## Written Confirmation

Written Confirmation of the advice given is an integral part of the advice process. The client has a right to consider their advice at their leisure and may not be able to retain complex advice during the interview.

Where action is to be taken, the confirmation should include the intended course of action and any timescale. Any changes to the proposed course of action should be confirmed in writing.

## Key Dates

Key dates are deadlines which may be observed by the Advice Centre in the progression of a case. This may be the date of hearing or the expiry of an appeal deadline. Advisors need to familiarise themselves with all potential key dates. Key dates and the implications of missing them must be communicated to the client in the interview, recorded on their electronic case file and confirmed in writing.

## Keeping Clients Informed

It is the responsibility of the Advisor to ensure that the client is kept informed of the progress on their case if casework is undertaken. The client should be informed of a timescale and if this overruns the adviser should inform the client promptly of any delays.

Advisers should review cases at regular intervals and ask clients for regular updates.

Where a matter is resolved, the client should be informed of the decision and any implications that may follow. If the client is satisfied with the outcome then the Advisor will close the file accordingly, record the outcome and send a closure email.

## Confidentiality

The Advice Centre is committed to confidentiality and has a strict policy found in the appendix of this manual. The policy covers both the conduct of case interviews and the recording of the information. Failure to adhere to this policy can be considered as a disciplinary matter.

## Conflict of Interest

Advisors cannot knowingly advise both parties in a dispute that is likely to result in a conflict of interest which could jeopardise confidentiality and the best interests of the clients.

The client will be advised that should the other party come in to see the same Advisor, they will be referred to another Advisor but a 'wall' protecting the respective confidentiality of both clients will be put up between the different advisers. In practice, this means the two Advisers will not discuss the case and they will not access records of each other's client.

In order to refer the second party to a different Advisor, it will be necessary to identify that the first party has sought advice about the same matter. However, no details of their enquiry or further visits will be given to the second party at any stage, or vice versa, unless authorised by either party.

## Limits of the service

Advice Centre staff are not legally trained. The ability to be aware of one's own limitations is integral to a quality advice service. Where an Advisor recognises that a case may be beyond their current experience or workload they must make the client aware and seek advice from the Advice Centre Manager.

Where the enquiry cannot be dealt with internally the client will either be signposted or referred.

## Withdrawal of Service

The most common example of when we would withdraw service, are situations where it is apparent all possible options have been explored and nothing more can be reasonably done. If, subsequently the student needs advice on a new issue or a change of circumstances present the service would be offered in full. Other examples when access to the service may be withdrawn temporarily or permanently include:

- If by advising a client the Union would be putting itself in a position where it is 'conflicted' because of an ongoing complaint investigations by the Union.
- If a client uses violent, abusive or threatening behaviour against staff.
- If a client chooses to no longer access the service by repeatedly failing to attend appointments, ignoring advice or continuing to pursue a course of actions against the advice of Advisors.
- If a client is thought to have deliberately misled or provided inaccurate information.
- If a client is thought to require excessive, long-term or continuing support and their requests for support would have a detrimental effect on the Advice Centre and the service it provides to other clients.
- If a client requests for collusion with fraud or illegal activity.

If any of the above cases occur, the Advisor will write to the student to inform them that they are withdrawing their service with immediate effect. However on occasion the Advisor may decide to issue a formal warning to the student if the Advisor feels that the situation can be rectified.

## File Reviews

All Advisors will have at least two randomly chosen files checked once every month. If there are any issues arising from this, they will be noted on the file review page and discussed with the Advisor. If these persist then the manager should discuss in a one-to-one with the Advisor to clarify if they have understood the nature of the problem. Further shadowing of the Advisor should be considered along with closer monitoring of their case files until the manager is assured of their competence to take on further responsibilities.

## Commitment to Quality

### Accurate Resources

All Advice Centre Staff should check information and publication dates of materials at least once a semester and remove from display any which are no longer accurate. Where an updated version is available these should be ordered promptly.

### Complaints

Wrexham Glyndwr SU is committed to the provision of quality services and operates a comprehensive complaints procedure. All complaints, and their resolution, are recorded centrally. More information about the Complaints Process can be found on the Students' Union website.



On a day-to-day basis expressions of dissatisfaction with the Advice Centre should be referred to the Advice Centre Manager who shall attempt to resolve the matter informally.

### Quality Feedback

We are committed to continually learning from our members and responding to their changing needs. Therefore, we will conduct evaluation surveys with our clients to allow them to feedback on their experiences of using the service and its impact.

### Annual Report

We will also publish and share with our stakeholders an annual report to ensure that we are being transparent and effectively communicating key service statistics, successes and developments.

### Wrexham Glyndwr SU Advice Centre – Confidentiality Policy

#### Managing the Confidentiality Policy

Wrexham Glyndwr Students' Union (WGSU) Advice Centre is committed to providing a confidential service to its clients.

This policy will be reviewed annually and any amendments agreed by the Sabbatical Officers and Chief Executive Officer. Copies will be available on request. The Advice Centre Manager will be responsible for ensuring the current policy is held on the shared drive and for the destruction of previous copies.

#### Conduct of the Advice Process

Advice Centre employees will not confirm a client's attendance to the service without their expressed consent to do so.

Clients will be offered a confidential interview space, if necessary by the provision of an alternative appointment time.

Advice Centre employees may discuss cases between themselves but will ensure that no discussions which could identify clients of the service take place outside of the service or its staff. All statistical recording shall be anonymous.

Case files including case notes, copies of correspondence and calculation sheets will be held in lockable filing cabinets or password protected computer drives.

Documentation will be kept in a secure archive for a maximum of six years after which time it will be destroyed using appropriate confidential waste procedures.

Staff will clarify with clients their preferences in terms of contact and will record on the case file where clients have indicated that certain forms of contact are insecure or unacceptable.

When leaving voice messages for clients, staff will not identify themselves as working for an advice service.

Where clients request that no contact be made with certain parties this will be recorded and adhered to.

#### Breaching Confidentiality

The Advice Centre understands confidentiality to mean that no information regarding a client shall be given directly or indirectly to a third party without the client's expressed consent except in the following cases:

1. Conflict of Interest

Where the Advice Centre identifies a potential conflict of interest which necessitates informing one party that we are supporting another party. In these circumstances the compromised party will be informed of the breach and no further action will be disclosed.

2. Where required to by Act of Parliament
3. Where required to by order of a Court of Law

There is no duty in English Law to disclose a crime to the police. However there are two exceptions:

- **Terrorism.** The legislation regarding terrorist activities is constantly changing and being updated by Government. The Terrorism Act 2000, The Anti-Terrorism Crime and Security Act 2001(ATCSA), Terrorism Act 2006 and Counter Terrorism Act 2008 and other more recent legislation have made it a criminal offence not to inform on others where you suspect them of being involved in an act of terrorism.
  - **Drug Trafficking.** The Drug Trafficking Act 1994 makes it a criminal offence not to report to the police suspicion or knowledge of drug money laundering gained during the course of contact with a client.
4. **Child Protection Legislation.** The Children's Act 1989 and the Protection of Children Act 1999 are just two of the relevant pieces of legislation regarding the protection of children. We may come across these issues in a number of ways:
    - You may suspect that a child is in need or being abused
    - A child may reveal to you that they have been abused by somebody
    - An adult client may reveal an incident of abuse about a child

We view protection of the child as paramount in such circumstances, so if we come across one of the situations above, we will follow the steps below with regard to breaching confidentiality. Any information about child abuse will be discussed with the Advice Centre Coordinator before informing the relevant authorities.

5. When there is a **risk of harm**. If there is a possibility that a client may harm themselves or others, confidentiality may be breached. For example:
  - a. If there is an imminent risk of harm to somebody we may call University Security, the Ambulance Service and/or the police. We will inform the client that we are doing this if appropriate (however, if we feel that this would be unsafe we can decide not to inform the client.)
  - b. It may be appropriate for us to contact a member of University support staff, Social Services or a doctor. We would generally only do this with the client's consent (however, if we feel asking for the client's consent would be unsafe we may decide to contact others without consent.)
6. We may need to breach client confidentiality if they display violent or other unacceptable behaviour.

Providing information to the police or other body in relation to a **criminal investigation**. An Advisor will not reveal information to the police, unless asked to provide a witness statement or receive a summons. If asked to discuss a client with the Police, we will immediately report this to the Chief Executive Officer. We will inform a client if we are approached for information about them.

Where an Advisor believes that there may be a need to breach confidentiality deliberately they should inform the client then raise the matter with the Advice Centre Manager. In their absence, the matter should be raised with the Chief Executive Officer.

The Advice Centre Manager will explore the issues with the Advisor and decide on whether confidentiality should be breached. A written record of the discussion and decision will be placed on the case file.

Where the decision is to breach confidentiality, a full briefing will be referred to the Chief Executive Officer. Where the Chief Executive Officer has been involved in the earlier decision they will seek advice from an External Trustee. The elected officer's decision will be final and a full written report will be added to the case file.

### **Awareness of Policy**

All members of staff at WGSU Advice Centre will be made aware of this policy through their induction and training.

All Union employees or sabbatical officers who may encounter confidential information will be required to sign a copy of the policy. This policy will be displayed in all Advice Service staff offices and on the Students' Union website.

### **Signed Declaration**

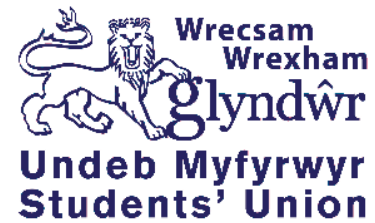
I acknowledge receipt of the confidentiality policy and agree to abide by its terms.

Signed..... Printed Name.....

Date.....

This policy was adopted: September 2017

Reviewed: August 2019



### **Supervision Agreement**

Supervisee:

Supervisor:

This agreement has been drawn up to provide guidance for supervision between the above mentioned two people. It should be retained within the individual's supervision file for reference. The agreement should be drawn up at the beginning of the supervisory relationship, either at the commencement of employment or on transfer.

### **Confidentiality**

Supervision is a confidential process. Discussions will be respected and will only be shared with others by mutual agreement. However in certain circumstances information may be disclosed without this consent e.g. where there is a clear responsibility to share information which outweighs the confidentiality of the supervisory relationship. Issues that come into this category are ones that affect the management and dynamics of the team, those that may be of a disciplinary, capability, grievance or sickness nature, or issues relating to quality assurance of work. A new line manager taking on supervisory responsibilities will have access to supervision notes completed with the relevant supervisees before their time.

### **Arrangements agreed for supervision**

Frequency: Every four weeks.

Duration: One hour.

Location: Advice Centre Office or mutually agreed place.

Recording of supervision: Paper written notes.

Third Party:

1. At the time of signing the supervision contract both supervisor and supervisee will identify a member of staff that both would trust as facilitator/mediator in case of differences during the course of supervision.
2. This person would be known as the 3rd party.
3. The role of the 3rd party is to support either party to raise issues they are unable to, to facilitate or mediate when the differences are irreconcilable and to advise when parties cannot agree on a course of action.
4. Both the supervisor and the supervisee can call upon the 3rd party.

Agreed Third Party:

What is expected of the supervisee?

- To prepare for each session.
- Talk openly and be receptive to feedback.
- Commitment to supervision process.

What is expected of the supervisor?

- To prepare for each session.
- Support.
- Workload management.
- Commitment to supervision process.
- Constructive comments and encouragement.

### **Agenda**

Agenda items can be added at the start of every formal supervision session. It is expected that both supervisor and supervisee bring items for the agenda. It may be necessary to prioritise these but only by mutual agreement.

Standing issues that are to be dealt with in every supervision session are:

#### **1. Notes and Action points from last session**

This is an opportunity to look over the previous notes and see whether actions have been accomplished and what progress has been made.

#### **2. Wellbeing Check in**

This provides an opportunity to identify issues relating to personal well-being can affect staff within the work environment and to support the staff member as appropriate.

#### **3. Quantitative monitoring.**

Consider the work you do and the deadlines you have to meet and see if these are being met.

#### **4. Workload Management / Stress**

Managing anxiety in the supervision process is an important part of the supervisor's role. The nature of work carried out within a Students' Union Advice Centre can be both demanding and at times stressful. Support will be provided around the management of individual workloads, including the use of time management skills.

#### **5. Learning, Training and Development**

This is an opportunity to discuss any feedback from training or development that has taken place and the identification of further opportunities as appropriate and as may be identified in Supervision.

#### **6. Dynamics in the team**

Any specific concerns or issues relating to individual or team relationships can be raised by either the supervisee or supervisor within this section.

#### **7. Other specific issues**

To be added by both the supervisor and supervisee on a session by session basis, by mutual consent.

Signed: ..... (Supervisee)

Signed: ..... (Supervisor)

Date: .....