

# **Oxford SU Advice**

# **Confidentiality Policy**

We recognise confidentiality is key to the advice and support we provide. Any information you provide will be treated in confidence, with respect and in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). For more information on your data please see the SU Advice [Data Protection Policy](#). This Confidentiality Policy outlines Oxford SU Advice's responsibilities and practice in relation to confidentiality and data safeguarding.

## **1. Principles of Confidentiality**

1.1 Oxford SU Advice operates within a framework of confidentiality. We understand confidentiality to mean that no information regarding you or your case will be given to any other parties external to the Advice Team (as described below) without your consent.

1.2 Your privacy matters to us. You can feel confident reaching out for support, knowing that your use of our services will remain completely confidential unless there is a valid exemption (see 3.1). Anybody who makes an enquiry about you or your case will be directed to this confidentiality policy and requests for information will be declined.

1.3 We want you to feel secure when accessing our support. You will always be seen in a private space that ensures confidentiality is maintained.

## **2. Consent to disclose information**

2.1 Any information you provide will be treated in the strictest of confidence within the SU Advice Team and will not be disclosed to anyone else without your permission, with the exceptions listed in 3.1.

2.2 With relation to this policy the Advice Team is comprised of the CEO, Membership Services Manager, Advocacy Manager and Advisers and for safeguarding purposes only, the Safeguarding Officer.

2.3 Only members of the Advice Team will have access to our case records. Discussions about cases will be limited to members of the Advice Team and will only take place in a confidential environment such as a private office.

2.4 As part of our support for your case, it may be appropriate to discuss your case with relevant individuals within the Collegiate University, such as your College, Head of Department, or staff within University of Oxford Student Welfare and Support Services. We will always seek your express written permission before doing so, and no information will be shared if permission is not given.

2.5 We will copy you into all correspondence between Oxford SU Advice and your College or the University concerning your case and you will be party to all communication about your case. The same applies if we contact third parties (i.e. doctor or counsellor) on your behalf with your permission to discuss your case.

## **3. Exceptions to this Policy**

3.1 Maintaining your confidentiality is of the utmost importance to Oxford SU Advice, however there are exceptional circumstances in which we may be required to share your information without your permission. These are:

- Where there is good reason to believe you may cause serious harm to yourself or to others, and you are unwilling or unable to take appropriate action yourself
- Where there is an issue relating to safeguarding which includes any students who are under 18 and/or adults at risk
- Where we are required to do so by law
- Where a member of staff is required to appear in court as part of civil or criminal proceedings, then information may have to be disclosed that is relevant to the case

3.2 If an Adviser feels that information may need to be disclosed, they will discuss this immediately with the Advocacy Manager who will formally authorise the extension of confidentiality.

3.3 You will be informed that your information will be disclosed. Exemptions to this are where:

- There is a legal obligation or requirement preventing us from informing you
- There is good reason to believe that your mental state is such that informing you could be detrimental

3.4 Information will only be shared with those who need to know and limited to what they need to know to reasonably mitigate the risk of serious harm or its effects.

3.5 Where we have concerns that notifying the Collegiate University would have negative impacts for you, we may contact Student Welfare and Support Services to discuss your case anonymously and agree a suitable way forward.

## **4. Record-keeping**

4.1 It is necessary for members of the Advice Team to keep records of all cases so that we can give effective support and for insurance purposes.

4.2 Case files are stored via a secure, password-protected case management system.

4.3 Case records are also kept to measure the quality of the advice given, and a sample of cases are checked throughout the year as part of a file review process.

4.4 You have the right to request to see your case file. This is called a Subject Access Request. You need to do this in writing to the [subjectaccessrequests@oxfordsu.ox.ac.uk](mailto:subjectaccessrequests@oxfordsu.ox.ac.uk) and access to a file will normally take no more than 30 days. Case records are kept for six years from your last contact with us, after which they are automatically deleted.

## **5. Auditing and Training**

5.1 As part of our file review, we check to ensure the Confidentiality Policy has been followed correctly.

5.2 All Oxford SU Advice staff are trained on the Confidentiality Policy when they join Oxford SU Advice and a refresher training is provided annually.

## **6. Statistical Recording**

6.1 We are committed to accurate statistical recording, so that we understand how our service is used and can identify trends or policy issues. Statistics are monitored monthly and published in an annual report.

6.2 Any cases included in service publications will be fully anonymised and only used with a student's explicit consent.

6.3 The case management system is managed through AdviceUK and they will have access to headline statistics for monitoring purposes, however, are not able to view any individual student cases.

## **7. Conflicts of Interest**

7.1 Where a conflict of interest is identified, the Oxford SU Advice Team are responsible for taking appropriate action to manage this, which will always involve notifying you of the conflict.

7.2 In some cases, doing so may inadvertently draw attention to another student's use of the service. Advisers will endeavour to limit this risk by only disclosing that a conflict has been identified but will not share any information about the other partie(s) who have contacted the service.

7.3 Further information can be found within the [Conflict of Interest Policy](#).

## **8. Third Party and Safeguarding**

8.1 We cannot give advice to anyone other than directly to the individual concerned, except in exceptional circumstances (listed in 8.3). This is to ensure that we can maintain the quality and accuracy of the advice, and that the student remains in control of their situation.

8.2 This means we will not give advice to parents, guardians or partners of students. In such cases we will give information about the support we can offer to the individual and direct the third party to the relevant regulations and guidance.

8.3 In exceptional circumstances where a student does not have the ability or capacity to speak to us directly and advising a third party is essential to prevent harm, we may advise a third party. Special consideration will be made where a student is under 18 or an adult at risk, and the matter is a safeguarding issue where the student may be vulnerable to harm. In these cases, we would follow our Safeguarding Policy to determine our actions.