

DSU ADVICE FULL CODE OF PRACTICE



Introduction

This Code of Practice outlines what DSU Advice aims to provide to clients and what, in return, is expected from users of the service. DSU Advice staff offers practical help and advice in a number of areas

Mission Statement

“DSU Advice aims to offer advice and information to all prospective, current and recently graduated students of De Montfort University. The advice we give is accurate, up to date, and comprehensive, enabling clients to make informed choices about their course of action. When appropriate and needed, we will also take on casework for students in order to resolve queries in a more proactive way. Our service is free, confidential, impartial, non-judgemental and accessible to all members of the University community.”

Contacting DSU Advice

Our opening hours are as follows

Monday – Wednesday 9.30 – 3.45
Thursday 9.30 – 3.45 (Vacation) 6.30 (Term time)
Friday 1 – 3.45

We can be found on the 1st Floor of the Art Factory Building on Mill Lane.

We can also be contacted between the hours of 9.00am-4.30pm by telephone (subject to availability on 0116 257 6307), or by e-mail dsuadvice@dmu.ac.uk, or by letter.

We reserve the right to cancel your appointment at short notice, but will offer an alternative appointment slot.

Because of our caseload and involvement in other activities, time is needed for essential paperwork. For this reason we will adhere strictly to the above opening times, and ask clients to respect this.

We reserve the right to suspend the service in the interests of personal safety (for example, if the adviser present is alone and the surrounding offices are empty).

Where we have a conflict of interest concern we will refer to our conflict of interest policy.

Principles of Advice Work

There are a number of fundamental principles at the core of the work of the DSU Advice:

Free

The advice and information is totally free of charge to all students.

Impartial

The advice is unbiased and not prejudiced towards or against any viewpoint. The views of the adviser will not affect the advice given, and every possible option available to a client will be explored, regardless of the adviser's own political, religious or cultural beliefs.

Independent

The advice is independent of any outside bodies or external bodies, including the University.

Non-judgemental

We are here to help and advise all clients faced with difficulties regardless of how those difficulties arose.

Empowerment

The role of advisers is to comprehensively explore all possible courses of action and potential consequences, to enable and empower the client to make an informed decision on how best to resolve their problem. The advice we give is, therefore, non-directive - allowing the clients to act for themselves.

Confidentiality

All interviews will be held in a private room and anything a client says will be treated in strict confidence within Advice.

The fact that a client has contacted us will not be disclosed to any individual or organisation outside Advice unless the client agrees. If it is necessary to discuss a client's case with an organisation or individual outside Advice, the adviser will first discuss this with the client and only pass on information with the client's prior consent.

A case record will be opened and securely stored on our case recording system which can be accessed by the Advice staff only.

Anecdotal information for the purposes of campaigns or media interest will not be provided in a way that may identify individual clients - unless the client agrees, in writing, to this.

Any disclosure of confidential information will be undertaken within the established breach of confidentiality procedure. All referrals are made with the knowledge and consent of the client.

The only circumstances where a breach of confidentiality will be considered are:

- When not to do so would be breaking the law
- If a client is deemed to be a danger to themselves or others
- If we are legally bound to disclose information under the Prevention of Terrorism Act
- If we are subpoenaed to do so by the police.
- Where a child protection issue arises.

Further details are contained in our Confidentiality Policy.

Equality of Access

We offer a service to all our clients that will not discriminate on the grounds of ethnic group or nationality, sex, marital status, family commitments, disability, age, political or religious beliefs, because a person is HIV positive or on the basis of sexuality. We are opposed to all forms of discrimination and are committed to ensuring that the service is equally available to all our students. All clients' problems will be treated in equal regard.

Working Methods

When advising, advisers will adhere to the following guidelines :

All problems will be treated equally and with respect and the interests of the client will always be foremost.

Advisers will remain sensitive to the cultural, religious and political background of the client.

Advisers will aim to find the relevant information to help the client, whilst the client is with the adviser. However if this cannot be achieved, the relevant information will be provided as soon as is reasonably practical.

Advisers should seek confirmation that a client has understood the information given and provide clarification where necessary.

Advisers will check to ensure information is accurate and up to date.

If the information in question is complex and more time is needed, clients may be asked to return at a specified time, or given the option of having information emailed to them. Alternatively clients will be rung to discuss further information.

Advisers will be open, friendly, professional and give clients their undivided attention and the necessary time to talk through their problems within the confines of their allocated time.

Casework

Where an adviser deems it appropriate, they may take on a client's case if, in the opinion of both the adviser and client, it could be handled most effectively by DSU Advice.

We will not take any action without first discussing it thoroughly with the client and gaining their consent.

Where a third party contacts us in relation to a client's case, for example to advise of a specific outcome, that information will be recorded on the client's case file and the client will be contacted to advise of this, normally by email.

Clients will be advised of any potential costs from an opposing party that they may become liable for as a result of any action the client may take and this will be recorded on the client's case sheet. E.g. where a landlord defends a claim for a return of a tenancy deposit or in the case of a co-tenant dispute.

The client will be kept fully informed of all developments in connection with their case.

We expect to be kept informed of any developments the client becomes aware of.

Advisers will aim to deal promptly within the constraints of their workload.

Case Records

All students who receive advice from DSU Advice will be asked to complete a contact sheet. This contact sheet asks for all personal contact details and course details, a ethnicity section as well as a signed declaration section.

All advice given is recorded as well as all action taken, letters written, emails received and sent. We will also retain copies of all visa application documents as well as all relevant documents relating to client cases.

We will record all of this information with the client's knowledge and consent, and if a client specifically requests, we may file the information under 'anonymous'.

Case records remain the property of DSU Advice - although clients may have access to see the entry relating to their enquiry or can receive a copy of this entry on request.

Case records will be kept for a minimum of 6 years from the most recent entry on the system and then destroyed.

Data Protection Act

To comply with the law, information must be collected and used fairly, stored securely and not disclosed to any other person unlawfully. To do this, DSU Advice staff must comply with the Data Protection Principles, which are set out in the Data Protection Act 1988. All the information you supply will be used for the sole purpose of recording your enquiry unless you have given DSU Welfare specific signed consent to do otherwise. The information you give will be retained for the period of six years.

All clients have the right under the Data Protection Act to request a copy of the information held about them and their case by DSU Advice.

To request this information, all clients must make the request of either their adviser or Advice reception. Requests will then be brought to the attention of the Advice Manager who will arrange to release this information.

What clients can expect from us

A 30 mins appointment will be offered as standard to all students and students who have a pre-booked appointment should report to Advice reception on time for their appointment.

Telephone appointments slots are available for students who are not able to visit in person. Typically students in this category will be either overseas or not in Leicester any more. Clients can book a telephone appointment via our reception.

If we have promised to follow up something for a client then we will aim to act promptly on all agreed work, giving an indication of when they can expect to hear from us or call back.

We will be open during our advertised opening hours and, if for any reason, we do have to close, clients will be advised as far in advance as possible, given a reason for closure and a precise indication when we will re-open.

We will aim to answer queries as soon as possible, ideally when clients first make contact with us.

What DSU Advice does not do

We will not see students who arrive more than 10 minutes late for their appointment slot. This is because we do not consider that this gives enough time to be able to advise to the best of our ability solely due to the time constraints. There is also a high chance of the appointment overrunning and adversely affecting other students' appointments which is not fair to them.

We will not discuss existing student cases with other students or with students' parents without prior consent from our client.

Where at all possible, we encourage students to visit rather than discussing their issue with their parents. This is because parents are not always in possession of all the relevant facts needed to enable us to advise correctly. In addition, we are not able to proceed with any casework without the written consent of our client so will need to speak directly to the student concerned.

We do not counsel clients as we are not trained counsellors. If it becomes apparent during an interview that a client wishes to be counselled, we will signpost them to the University's counselling service. We will continue to offer legal and practical advice & support as per our remit.

We do not get involved in campaigning around student issues - although we may identify issues around which campaigns could be made. If this is the case, we will advise the Welfare and Campaigns Officer of the Student Union Executive Committee who will take up campaigns, as they deem appropriate.

We do not speak to the media. If the required information or interview is in connection with a matter we have knowledge of, we will brief the appropriate Executive Officer and channel our input through them.

We do not advise outside our field of competence, and will refer or signpost clients, when we deem it most appropriate, to those with greater knowledge and/or experience in a given field.

Notice of Behaviour

DSU Advice will not tolerate abusive or intimidating behaviour, whether verbal, written or physical. We reserve the right to withdraw our service if this occurs. Where necessary this information may be shared with DSU / DMU and any other relevant agencies.

We will never misrepresent a client's circumstances or knowingly pass on false information. If information given by clients is found to be false, we may consider withdrawing the service. Similarly, we reserve the right to withdraw services from clients who decide on courses of action that involve deceit or may be illegal.

There may be times when a client's chosen course of action may not be in their best interests. In such circumstances, the adviser will discuss with the client whether it is appropriate for the adviser to act on behalf of the client. The client will, however, be offered information on how to pursue their chosen course of action by themselves.

We do not advise landlords who wish to take action against students - they will be signposted to an appropriate service provider.

We will not advise or represent a client on a matter where we are aware they are already being assisted by another agency on the same matter.

We do not give advice outside our place of work. We will not give clients our home address or telephone number, and if we see clients outside of DSU, would ask them to respect our privacy and call into the office during our opening hours for advice.

We do not see people outside of our allocated appointment slots. The only expectation to this will be at the request of the adviser in order to further an existing case.

We will not usually give clients an initial choice of seeing a specific adviser, unless:

- that adviser has seen the client before regarding the same matter and knows their situation
- Advice staff believe it would be in the student's best interests to see a particular adviser because of the adviser's knowledge and experience in a particular area of advice
- a client knows an adviser in a personal capacity and would prefer to see someone else.

We do not allow students to change adviser when they have an existing case running; all our advisers have the same level of training and expertise and are able to handle all types of cases equally.

We do not continue to advise a client where we have exhausted all practical avenues of enquiry.

Referrals and Signposting

Where the help or advice a client needs is beyond our expertise, we will offer to refer or signpost the client to the most appropriate agency. There will be no obligation on the part of the client to accept that referral, but where they wish, we can facilitate this referral.

What DSU Advice expects from clients

We expect clients to keep us up-to-date with any developments that occur.

We expect clients to be honest with us - we rely on the accuracy and reliability of information given to us by clients. If a student is found to have deliberately misled us as to the true nature of a situation, we reserve the right to withdraw that service.

We expect clients to keep appointments made for them and to arrive on time and if at all possible to inform us if they are unable to keep the appointment.

Complaints Procedure

If any client has a complaint about the services provided by DSU Advice, they should follow the complaints procedure outlined in the code of practice leaflet available from our reception. The Complaints procedure can also be viewed on www.demontfortsu.com

Feedback

DSU Advice welcomes any feedback on the services we provide as it is recognised that without feedback from our clients, we cannot assess the quality of service we provide and take steps to improve.

We want to hear from our clients about their experience of dealing directly with us. We will contact you at the end of the academic year following your enquiry to gain your thoughts on the service you received and we would welcome your feedback.

Accreditation

We are members of AdviceUK, UKCISA and NHAS

We are licensed by the Financial Conduct Authority to provide money advice/debt counselling. We are licensed to use the Citizens Advice Electronic Information System