

UNIVERSITY OF EXETER STUDENTS' GUILD

WELCOME TO ADVICE AT EXETER STUDENTS' GUILD.

We offer a free, independent and confidential advice service for University of Exeter students based in Devon. Our trained advisers specialise in University processes – supporting students to understand how the University works and to exercise their rights within this environment. Our advisers are accredited by the National Association of Student Money Advisers (NASMA), or they are working towards that accreditation. We are members of Advice UK, the largest network of independent advice services in the UK.

HOW WE HELP STUDENTS

We are happy to support students on any matter where they require advice. Sometimes we do this by providing information and advice, sometimes we provide detailed casework support. On other occasions, we help students to access specialist services or information relevant to their circumstances. We exist to empower students and we will always provide an honest, non-judgmental service.

Our key areas of expertise include:

- **Academic matters** such as appeals, academic misconduct processes, disciplinary processes; other University of Exeter regulatory processes; and other situations where students may be in conflict with the University;
- **Complaints processes** and alternative dispute resolution on matters relating to students' experience at the University of Exeter;
- **Housing and accommodation matters** such as tenancy deposit schemes, disputes with landlords or lettings agents, and homelessness;
- **Finance matters** including tuition fees, Student Finance eligibility, University bursaries and scholarships, and support for students in financial hardship;
- **Welfare support**, helping students to access the information and services they need to stay safe and manage their physical and mental health and wellbeing.

Areas where we are unable to provide advice and will instead signpost students include:

- Counselling support and other wellbeing support which is best provided by qualified practitioners;
- Immigration advice and support;
- Legal matters or requests for legal advice.

Students wishing to access our advice service should email advice@exeterguild.com.

We aim to respond to all emails within five working days and, where possible, we will respond more quickly than this. When there is a high demand on the service this unfortunately may be longer. Many students will receive advice and information by email; we can also offer teams video calls where this would be helpful to students.

Our team of advisers are currently working from home, supporting students through these unusual and difficult times. We will review face to face meetings later in the year.

SERVICE AGREEMENT

We provide a free, independent and confidential service to University of Exeter students. The Students' Guild is a distinct organisation, independent of the University, and our advice service exists to provide support and guidance to students when they need it. This can relate to anything affecting their time at University.

In order to assist, we provide impartial advice, support and representation, as is appropriate to the nature of each case. We can only normally support current students, prospective students, or those who have been a student within the past twelve months.

As a student and service user, you can expect:

- To be treated with respect and consideration.
- To be provided with advice in reasonable time. We always aim to respond to queries or emails within five working days and we normally send a follow-up email after each conversation we have with you.

- To receive advice in a suitable format. If you have specific access needs please let us know and we will take reasonable actions to meet these.
- To be informed of any conversation we have with University staff or other third parties regarding your case. We will only normally speak to third parties if you have given your explicit consent to this.
- To be provided with details of options for further advice and support, if we are unable to provide this in your case.

We expect you:

- To be proactive in managing your case. We can offer you advice, but you will be responsible for acting on it. For example, we would expect you to draft any documents for submission to the University.
- To treat all staff with respect and consideration at all times.
- To contact us as soon as you can, avoiding last minute requests unless you weren't able to raise these at an earlier point.
- To provide us with full and accurate information.
- To arrive promptly for any appointments and give as much notice as possible if you are unable to attend.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Our advice service operates on a confidential basis. Nothing a student tells our advisers as a client of the Students' Guild advice service will be shared with any third party organisation or individual, unless we are given specific consent or we are obliged to inform someone. We believe that service users deserve the right to confidentiality to protect their interests.

Our definition of confidentiality

We understand confidentiality to mean that we will not share any identifiable information regarding a case or service user with any other organisation or individual, without that service user's expressed consent. This applies in all circumstances, except those where we are obliged to disclose information.

Other than in those exceptional circumstances, only members of staff at Exeter Students' Guild may receive details of cases or service users without first obtaining consent. For most students accessing our service, information will be reviewed by our Student Advisors, Widening Participation specialist and Student Advice Manager, who are the staff who usually provide support to students seeking advice. Information may also be made available to members of our Senior Leadership Team, including our elected officers, as well as those Students' Guild employees and contractors responsible for maintaining our IT systems.

We will conduct any appointments in a confidential environment unless agreed otherwise.

Breaches of confidentiality

We may need to breach confidentiality in certain exceptional situations, in particular if we feel that someone is at serious risk of harming themselves or others, or we are obliged by law to share information. Any such breach of confidentiality will be treated seriously and will first be discussed with the Head of Student Engagement, or their delegate. It is only in situations where breaching confidentiality is agreed to be the only or best option that this will be done. If we do consider it necessary to breach confidentiality we may, for example, contact the University's Security team, staff within its Welfare team, or the Police.

Where we need to breach confidentiality, we will inform the relevant service user that we have taken such a decision, unless we consider that such a notification may cause an additional risk of harm to that student or to others.

Consent to share information

We will not share information or discuss cases with anyone outside our service without explicit written consent, or in the exceptional circumstances documented above.

We may ask for consent to discuss cases with University or external staff, where this is appropriate, and service users may choose to give or withhold such consent. We will always inform service users when we have discussed their case.

In some circumstances, we may also refer service users to other advice or support services and share details of their case, including contact details. We will always request consent before sharing details in this way.

Appointment of delegates

Occasionally, service users may choose to appoint a delegate to handle their case, e.g. a parent, guardian, partner or friend. If a service user wishes to appoint a delegate, they must provide written consent for us to liaise with this person and to share information regarding their case. We normally require this to come from the student's University of Exeter email address.

Service users may revoke this delegation arrangement by emailing us at any time to request that information is no longer shared.

Requests from third parties

Where we receive requests for information or advice from parents, guardians, friends or other third parties, we are unable to discuss the specifics of the student's situation but, subject to capacity, we will provide general information relating to the processes or areas of advice which they are seeking to discuss.

In such circumstances, we may contact the student concerned and inform them that we have contacted about their circumstances, inviting them to respond to us if they wish to receive advice or nominate a delegate to act on their behalf.

Provision of information by third parties

On occasion, third parties may approach our staff and seek to provide them with information on a service user's case. We will normally refuse to accept such information unless we have the service user's written consent to discuss their case or receive information from these third parties. If information is disclosed to us in breach of this policy, we will contact the service user to inform them of the information we have received and will request their permission to retain the information on their case file.

In exceptional circumstances where we have reason to believe there may be a risk of harm to the service user concerned, to our staff, or to others, we will accept the provision of third party information. If possible, the service user will be notified of this information and any decision to withhold such information will be made only after consultation with the Director of Membership Engagement or their delegate, taking into account any potential risk to Students' Union staff, volunteers and any third parties.

Case recording and reporting

The advice service records its enquiries and interactions with service users. This enables us to provide effective support, monitor use of the service and identify any common issues on which we may wish to lobby for change. We also report on the cases we support, but this is always presented in an anonymous form so that individuals' personal details cannot be recognised. This reporting includes both aggregate data (quantitative information) and anonymised case studies (qualitative information).

Storage of records

Where we have paper-based case records, we will ordinarily digitise and shred these materials. If it is necessary to retain hard copies, all case records will be stored in a locked room. Otherwise records are stored securely on our electronic systems (Freshdesk and Izuka Case Manager). Records of cases will be destroyed six years after the date on which the case is closed.

Telephone / online calls

In some instances it may be helpful to provide advice or arrange appointments via telephone or online video calling facilities. When we call service users, we will arrange a confidential space from which we can make the call, and we will make no reference to who is calling until we are assured that we are speaking directly to the correct person. Our advisers are not able to accept inbound phone calls.

We do not record video or telephone calls and we would not permit service users to record any such calls with us, without prior agreement.

WITHDRAWAL AND LIMITATION OF SERVICE

Wherever necessary, our advisers will explain the nature of support that they can provide on your case.

From time to time, it may be necessary for us to impose some restrictions upon service (for instance, refusing to provide any advice until a particular form has been drafted). Where this is necessary, our advisers will clearly state the nature of the support that can be provided to you.

Whilst we are committed to providing the best possible service to our students, there may be some occasions where we must withdraw or impose specific restrictions upon access to our advice. The circumstances in which this may be necessary include, but are not limited, to the following:

- Threatening, violent or abusive behaviour
- Excessive or inappropriate demands on service staff
- Receipt of advice from multiple services on the same matter
- Repeatedly missing agreed appointments
- Circumstances in which our adviser(s) may have a conflict of interest in providing advice

This is not an exhaustive list and in other exceptional circumstances it may be necessary to withdraw or limit service. In all instances the process outlined below will be followed.

The process for withdrawing service

Please note that wherever this process refers to a specific staff member, they may delegate this responsibility to another member of the Students' Guild management team.

1. Concerns will be raised with the Student Advice Manager at the earliest possible opportunity. They will review the information available to them regarding the case and make a decision whether to further act on any concerns;
2. If it is agreed that concerns should be acted upon, a staff member from the Advice Service will consult the Head of Student Engagement;
3. The Head of student Engagement will make a decision on whether to withdraw, refuse or impose specific conditions upon service, in consultation with the Student Advice Manager and, if appropriate, any elected Full-Time Officers. Their decision is final. In cases involving significant concerns about the behaviour of a student, consideration will also be given to whether access to wider Students' Union services may be restricted or withdrawn.

4. The student concerned will be informed in writing (usually by email) of the decision to withdraw, refuse or impose conditions upon service, with an explanation as to why this decision has been made. Where possible, details of other advice providers and services will be included in this letter. The student will be provided with details of the Students' Guild's complaints procedure.
5. Records of this decision, including all correspondence with the student, will be retained within case records until they are destroyed (usually six years after a case file is closed).

Any withdrawal or limitation of service, or significant concern regarding the behaviour of a student seeking advice, will be reported to Student Advice Manager and may be recorded on the service user's case file.

In instances where the reasons for withdrawal of service suggest that a student may pose a risk to staff of the Students' Union, University or a third party, the Head of Student Engagement may inform relevant third parties – for instance, Exeter University's security team, its Student Cases team, the relevant Safeguarding Board, or the Police.

DATA PROTECTION

In order to understand and support students, the advice service will request some data about each service user and their course of study. The Data Protection Act (1998 and 2018) and General Data Protection Regulation (2016) require us to inform service users about the exact data we hold and how they can access this.

Types of data

When service users register with our service, they will be asked for information about their case and they may also be asked to provide contact details. At any appointment, our staff will take notes to enable us to understand and support the case.

Personal data

The data we request includes course and contact details. These details allow us to identify and contact service users for the duration of their course. Any case information will be held securely until its eventual disposal six years after the case is closed. Records containing confidential information will be disposed of securely.

Sensitive personal data

We may ask service users to provide us with some demographic or other personal details when registering with our service. We may use this data in reports and case studies but service users will not be named or otherwise identifiable in these documents. Service users will never be required to provide any such information in order to access our advice.

Other sources of data

- Letters and documents: we may retain letters and other documents related to a case, where service users have shared them with us or we have received them through people whom they have consented for us to contact. These will be kept in a locked room or stored securely on our electronic case management software, depending on their format. Wherever possible, relevant information will be digitised and hard copies returned to the service user or shredded. Files containing sensitive information or third-party details will only be retained where, in the opinion of our advisers, having access to these documents is essential in enabling us to provide effective confidential advice to that student.
- E-mails: we will store any case-related e-mails from service users or people they have consented for us to contact on our electronic case management systems.
- Online case management system: we use a confidential case management system, Iizuka Case Manager, which gives us access to some personal data which is obtained from the University's student information system, in line with the data sharing agreement between Exeter Students' Guild and the University of Exeter.

Access to data

Access to information about cases is limited to members of staff directly connected with the advice service. We will not share information about cases with anyone else without the service user's permission. We may discuss cases with relevant University staff or external services if service users have given us specific permission to do so, or in exceptional circumstances where we identify a need to breach confidentiality (see *Confidentiality*, above). We may also present cases anonymously, as case studies. In this instance we will ensure that the service users concerned are not identifiable from the information we present.

Accessing records

We are happy to share with any service user the information our advice service has relating to them and their case. Information can be requested informally by emailing us at advice@exeterguild.com

Information about making a formal subject access request can be found here [Subject Access Request](#)

FEEDBACK AND COMPLAINTS ABOUT THE ADVICE SERVICE

We welcome feedback from students and we are keen to hear about your experiences, views and ideas. When tickets are closed we will send a link for students to be able to provide anonymous feedback. We also would welcome emails our Student Advice Manager, vics.brown@exeterguild.com if you would like to share any feedback with us.

Complaints regarding the advice service should follow the Students' Guild's complaints policy. In this first instance issues can be raised informally with the Student Advice Manager vics.brown@exeterguild.com. If the complaint relates to the Student Advice Manager it can be sent instead to the Head of Student Engagement, thomas.barrass@exeterguild.com.

The complaints policy can be found online at [Guild Complaints](#).