

CONFIDENTIALITY IN STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES:**SUMMARY OF CONFIDENTIALITY PROTOCOLS*****Principles and Guidelines***

The aims of these guidelines are:

- to commit to appropriate levels of confidentiality for a student support service
- to provide a source of information to users and potential users of our services

Within Student Services there are services which have additional guidelines and professional Codes of Practice and Ethics to protect clients. These include the Medical Centre, Counselling Service, Chaplaincy, Student Money Service and the Students' Union Academic & Welfare (AWARE) Centre

A. *Disclosing information concerning students*

1. It is not usual to discuss a student without the student's permission. However, there are circumstances in which we would need to vary this Confidentiality agreement:
 - i. If a member of Student Services staff may believe that a student will cause serious physical harm to others or to themselves. In these circumstances the member of staff would normally seek permission from the student to break confidentiality unless there are also good grounds for believing the student is no longer willing or able to take responsibility for his or her actions.
 - ii. Where possible this decision should only be made after consultation with the Head of Service or the Head of Student Services
 - iii. Any breaking of confidentiality will be minimised as far as reasonably possible. Information will be restricted to what is pertinent to the immediate situation and to those who can provide the help the student needs.
2. There is a legal duty to protect children from harm. Social Services guidelines state:

“ Anyone who has cause for concern that a child may be suffering or likely to suffer significant harm *must* refer the matter to the Social Services”.

 - i Harm may be physical, sexual or emotional abuse or neglect. If a student provides information that gives good grounds for believing a child will be harmed or will continue to be harmed we have a duty to protect the child.
 - ii If the student were not prepared to inform Social Services we would do so. We would also encourage the student to seek appropriate help.

B. *Protecting identities of students*

We aim to protect the identities of students using the Student Support Services and to protect information concerning individuals. This means we do not give names, addresses, or details of students to any outside agencies, persons or University Departments without the students' permission. To ensure maintenance of such confidentiality the following procedures are adopted:

1. An enquiry is made verbally, by letter, by email or by telephone about a student:
We will inform the enquirer that we do not give out information concerning service users.
2. An enquirer says s/he has the students' permission to enquire: *We will ask him/her to have the student verify this before we give information in consultation with the students.* 12
3. An enquirer may have a legitimate reason for requesting information e.g. concern about the safety of a student or another person, a criminal investigation etc: *In such cases everything reasonable must be done to check the authenticity of such a query (verify police identity by asking rank and number, telephone the appropriate station).*

4. An enquirer may claim to know that a student is seeing us: *We will not confirm or deny this and will explain this is our policy.*
5. A colleague may express concern about a student: *In such circumstances confidential advice about the specific issue can be given but the student not be named unless s/he has already given their prior permission. This ensures that confidentiality is not compromised and the colleague is provided with professional support and advice.*
6. A parent, relative or guardian may request information about a student: *We respect the adult status of students and do not give information unless the student has given their prior permission. This ensures that confidentiality is not compromised and the colleague is provided with professional support and advice.*
7. Student information is used by Student Services staff in reports, statistics, staff development and supervision: *Reports and statistics should not make individual students identifiable unless they have given prior permission. The presentation of "casework" in reports or training sessions should protect client identity. Any major detailed casework (e.g. case study for a training course or publication) should only be carried out with the clients' informed and expressed consent.*
8. E-mails should be headed "confidential" in the subject/header area: *Where possible a student should not be named in e-mail and circulation restricted only to individuals involved in resolving a particular problem.*
9. To e-mails should be added a "notice of confidentiality", for example:
" This transmission is intended for the named addressee only. It contains information which may be confidential and which may also be privileged. unless you are the named addressee (or authorised to receive it for the addressee) you may not copy or use it or disclose it to anyone else".
 Or *" Delete after reading".*
- 10 Reports and letters: *should be written with the students' permission. These should be headed "confidential" and addressed to named individuals.*

C. Students' Rights

1. All users of student services have the right of confidentiality as stated.
2. Discussion and clarification of this confidentiality policy will be welcomed by support staff.
3. Students have the right to raise any breaches of confidentiality with the appropriate service and with the Head of Student Services. See University Academic Procedures, Practices and Guidelines: *"Procedures for Student Complaints"*
4. Students may seek support and advice from the Students' Union should they wish to pursue a formal complaints procedure.