



Terms of Service

Highlands and Islands Students' Association - Advice Service

1. Introduction

The Highland and Islands Students' Association Advice Service (the Advice Service) offers advice and information to all current students at the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) and its Academic Partners – free, confidential and impartial advice.

The Advice Service provides advice on a wide range of issues including, but not limited to:

- **Academic Matters:** Academic appeals, complaints, academic misconduct, mitigating circumstances, fitness to practice and other academic matters.
- **Student Code of Conduct:** disciplinary proceedings and appeals.
- **Housing Matters:** University Accommodation Disciplinary proceedings and appeals.

Please note that this list is not exhaustive. If the Advice Service is unable to help or advise, we will do our best to signpost to the appropriate organisation.

The Advice Service can offer signposting to services both on and off campus for financial, health and employment advice.

This document outlines what you can expect from the service and what we expect from you as a user of our service. The advice provided is not a substitute for professional legal, medical, or psychological advice, and clients should seek appropriate help if needed.

It should be noted that by using the Advice Service, you agree to the terms laid out in this document in addition to our Privacy Statement, Confidentiality Policy and Complaints Procedure. The policies and procedures can be found on the student association website.

2. Services that we are unable to advise on

The Advice Service will aim to provide the best advice and support; however, there are some areas where we are unable to impart support:

- Immigration or Visa advice
- Legal advice or advocacy
- Emotional / Psychological counselling

- Mediation between flatmates
- Housing Tribunal
- Employment Issues/Disciplinaries

If you require support on any of the issues listed above, we will signpost you to the appropriate organisation.

3. Who can access the Service

We offer advice to UHI students currently registered with the UHI and any of their Academic Partners.¹ We also can advise:

- Recent students of UHI and its Academic Partners (graduated or withdrawn) whose case has continued past their enrolment. Please note that if your student status changes, we will keep your case open until an outcome is reached.

4. Accessibility / Reasonable Adjustments

We will seek to make reasonable adjustments if you request them and inform our staff of any health issues or a disability. If we find that making certain adjustments may not be practical, we will consult with you and consider other more feasible alternatives. If you have any concerns regarding reasonable adjustments, please discuss this further with us.

5. Equal Opportunities

The student association is actively committed to a policy of equality of opportunity in its activities, employment practices, and service provision for its members. Accordingly, the Advice Service will not discriminate on the grounds of sex, marital status, race or ethnicity, colour, nationality, disability, trade union activity, sexual orientation, age, language, gender identity, family responsibility, social-economic background, HIV/AIDS status, religious or political belief. We are committed to equal opportunities for all individuals who use the Advice Service.

6. How the service is delivered

The Advice Service will aim to respond to enquiries within five working days (or sooner) and arrange a meeting with clients virtually, where necessary. We will inform you if it takes us longer to provide a full response to your enquiry.

¹ Academic Partners within whom there is associated membership, we will aim to support clients where possible, but our service might be limited in advocacy.

In the circumstance that we are experiencing an exceptionally high workload, we may not be able to assist you. If this is the case, we will inform you of alternative options.

Clients should aim to contact the service directly so that we can collect information and manage the case appropriately. Advice will be provided on a one-to-one basis; consequently, group appointments will not be available.

6.1 Service Operations

The Advice Service is open five days a week, Monday through Friday, between 09.00 - 17.00, excluding student association, University and Academic Partner closure days, national holidays and staff development days.

6.2 Contacting the HISA Advice Service

The Advice Service encourages students to engage with us virtually in the first instance. We will continue to review this as the term progresses and will provide updates as appropriate.

Clients can contact the Advice Service through various channels to accommodate for accessibility. We appreciate that clients do not always operate on regular working hours due to studies or caring responsibilities. Therefore, we aim to accommodate clients where possible.

Options to communicate via phone or virtual meeting are to help accommodate our members who are studying remotely or who may be on placements, working or caring for family/children, and a face-to-face meeting is not suitable.

a) Email

Clients can submit email enquiries to the service, and they will be subject to triage –to assess how the enquiry can be dealt with, such as replies by email or if a client should be invited to a virtual appointment.

Our contact email is HISA.advice@uhi.ac.uk.

We kindly ask that email enquiries contain a description of the issue and any deadlines attached. In addition, when making first contact, clients should aim to send any documents, e-mails, letters and other materials relevant to the case, as the details in these items may be central to the advice provided.

The Advice Service recommends that clients use their university email addresses for security purposes for correspondence. However, if the client has

no access to their university email address due to suspension or other reasons, a client can contact the service through their personal email.

Clients should note that email is not always a secure method of contact, but student association staff will make every reasonable effort to ensure that communications remain confidential and secure.

b) Online Form

You can complete the Initial Enquiry form via this [link](#). However, please be aware that it may take 3 – 5 working days for us to reply to your enquiry.

If the matter is urgent, please get in touch with the service via email.

c) Telephone / Virtual Appointments

Appointments are available. We encourage students to have an appointment virtually via Teams or by telephone. The contact number is 07894907024. However, all appointments will be arranged by advisers once initial contact is made, so students should make contact via our email address or online form (see above).

d) Walk-In

You are welcome to attend any of our Student Association offices and ask to access our Advice Service. A student association staff member can help you access the service or provide details about what we can do and how you can get in touch.

e) WhatsApp

Clients can submit text enquiries to the service via WhatsApp, and they will be subject to triage –to assess how the enquiry can be dealt with, such as replies by email or if a client should be invited to a virtual appointment.

6.3 Written Confirmation of Advice

Clients will receive written confirmation of the advice provided during the advice process. This will allow the client to consider the advice and their options at their leisure. The written confirmation will also provide evidence against any claims of inadequate advice. After each consultation, an adviser will confirm their advice by emailing the client to their preferred contact address. The written confirmation should include a summary of the issue discussed, the intended course of action, and any relevant timescales. If a client would like to change a proposed course of action, this will be confirmed in writing.

7. User Conduct

Please note that the service will not usually act on your behalf nor complete any paperwork, but we will support you to take action yourself. The purpose of the service is to provide the best information and advice for clients to make their own decisions.

We must know all the facts and information surrounding your circumstances to provide accurate advice and information. Therefore, we ask that you are open and honest so you can be provided with clearer and more specific advice.

7.1. Withdrawal of Service

As a last result, we may withdraw access to our service from a client when certain issues arise, and the client fails to adhere to fair user conduct. If the service is withdrawn, the advisor will signpost the client to alternative sources of advice and support. If an adviser, following discussion and agreement with the student association CEO, wishes to withdraw service from a client, then the client will be informed in writing of this decision and the reasons for it. If they wish to challenge this decision, they will be directed towards the HISA's Complaints Handling Procedure to raise the matter for resolution formally.

Please refrain from doing the following when using the service to avoid withdrawal of service:

a) Excessive communications:

We kindly request that you take responsibility for managing email communications and refrain from sending excessive emails to our advisers. Our advisers will prioritise workload according to urgency, and where deadlines apply, we will always try to give advice within this timeframe. However, when excessive communications are made, it can slow down the process of helping you and other cases.

b) Missed appointments:

Clients booking appointments with our service are responsible for attending on time and bringing relevant information. Missed appointments are defined as appointments that are not cancelled with 24 hours' notice prior to the scheduled start time or if you are more than 15 minutes late to an appointment without notice.

c) Inappropriate requests:

Inappropriate requests include but are not limited to, repeated requests for assistance that exceeds advisers' expertise or long-term support demands that

require substantial staff time, which would be at the detriment of other cases taken on by the advice service.

d) **Third-party advice:**

If the Advice Service becomes aware that a client is receiving advice on the same matter from another organisation, and it causes interference with the work of the service – our service will be withdrawn.

e) **Inappropriate behaviour:**

The Advice Service has a zero-tolerance policy for rude or disrespectful behaviour. If a client or member of the public engages in this type of behaviour, we reserve the right to refuse or withdraw service.

8. Data Collection & Management

The Advice Service is fully committed to compliance with the Data Protection Act 1998 requirements and GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation). The student association will follow procedures which aim to ensure that all members of staff who have access to personal data are aware of their duties under the data protection act.

The Advice Service must collect and use information about its service users to operate efficiently and effectively. Therefore, only data relevant to the operational work of the service will be collected.

We will only use collected data for the following purposes:

- Provide you with the advice you require and for the organisation to undertake quality assurance.
- Monitor the issues that clients are experiencing and use this to support evidence-led action on behalf of clients to address common problems.
- Ask you for feedback on our service after the completion of your case.
- Produce statistical reports on the use of our service.

When booking or contacting the service online, clients will fill out a form asking for personal information. When submitting the form, they will agree to HISA Terms and Conditions and consent to sharing their data in line with the HISA Privacy Statement.

Our full Privacy Statement and Confidentiality Policies are made available to clients at any point via the student association website or on request.

8.1 Case Recording

It is crucial that all case files remain precise and current. The notes must clearly indicate the current stage of the case as well as the necessary actions required by both the client and/or advisor.

Case notes should be recorded on the client's file at the earliest opportunity, with care taken to accurately record the date and time of notes to ensure logical order to the case file. The notes should include the duration of case management, advice delivery method, source of advice, background information of the case and advice provided to the student.

All relevant documentation, including correspondence with the student, should be uploaded to the case file. Cases and enquiries should be reviewed regularly and closed at the earliest opportunity upon their conclusion.

8.2 Storage

In accordance with Article 6 of the General Data Protection Regulations 2018, the Advice Service has a legitimate interest in processing information relevant to your case or enquiry. Accordingly, we will process your information for a period of six years to satisfy your interests and those of Advice Service.

9. Confidentiality / Privacy

We believe all clients have the right to confidentiality to protect their interests and maintain a relationship of trust between the client and the Service.

Information relating to individual users of the Advice Service will be recorded in the casework system, which is only accessible to Advice staff. No personal information regarding a client shall be given out directly or indirectly to any external organisation without the client's explicit consent. For example, staff within the Advice Service will not contact or provide information to parents/guardians, course coordinator/personal tutors or any authority without prior consent from the client. The client reserves the right to withdraw this consent at any time by informing us via phone, email or in person.

9.1 Breach of Confidentiality

There may be some instances when an adviser feels they need to breach the usual confidentiality policy. Examples of these instances include: an adviser feels a client is at risk of harming themselves or others; an adviser has received information that may help prevent acts of terrorism or apprehend a terrorist, where there is a court order requiring disclosure.

For other potential criminal offences, there is no duty of disclosure, however, it is an offence to aid or encouragement with a crime.

If an adviser feels that confidentiality should be breached for one of the above reasons, the adviser must discuss the issue with the student association CEO. If the CEO deems it necessary to disclose client information to an outside body, then a specific and limited disclosure may occur. All details of the disclosure shall be recorded in the casework system. If the CEO is unavailable, the adviser may seek authorisation from another senior management team member.

10. Data Access Requests

Clients with open cases may ask for access to their records anytime. This can be provided on request. Clients with closed or archived files will need to complete a subject access request to gain access to their files. This must be made in writing and include sufficient information to identify the client and source the information. A client making a data access request must receive a reply within 40 days if any necessary fee has been paid.

11. Feedback

The Advice Service welcomes any feedback from past clients. Upon closure of a case, students shall be sent a link to complete an online survey.

All the feedback we request is anonymous, and we aim to ensure that all feedback is taken on board where possible.

12. Complaints

Complaints regarding the Advice Service should follow the [HISA Complaints Procedure](#). Complaints should be made in writing by emailing HISA@uhi.ac.uk.

Appendix



Certificate of Membership

This is to certify that the following organisation is a Network Member of AdviceUK:

Highlands and Islands Students' Association

demonstrating compliance with AdviceUK's Network Membership criteria:

- ✔ Advice is independent and impartial with the interests of the client being paramount
- ✔ Advice is confidential
- ✔ Advice is covered by Professional Indemnity Insurance
- ✔ Terms on which services are offered are clearly stated
- ✔ A complaints procedure is in place and a data protection policy
- ✔ Accountability to service users and other stakeholders
- ✔ Commitment to equal opportunities

Membership Expiry Date
31 December, 2024



Liz Bayram
Chief Executive