



About the Advice Unit

The following information is intended as a general guide only. The Advice Unit has made every effort to ensure its accuracy, and all information was correct at the time of creating this webpage.

The Students' Union cannot be held responsible for any action taken as a result from reading the Advice Unit web pages.

If you need more information or advice on your individual circumstances that are not covered in the Advice Unit web pages, then you should contact the Advice Unit or the President of the Students' Union.

The Students' Union is here to help, and the Advice Unit will be happy to assist you with any health, academic, housing, financial or welfare problems you may be facing.

The Advice Unit

Your friendly, confidential, independent, one-stop advice shop!

The Advice Unit offers a free, impartial and confidential advice and assistance service to all students at the University of Bolton. Ask any of the hundreds of students who contacted us last year! We can also guide prospective students embarking on courses during the academic year.

We believe in putting the student first, and work purely in the interests of students. Our aim is not only to provide support and guidance on a problem, but also to empower you to tackle the problem yourself.

We aim to make the service as accessible as possible. We deal with personal callers on an appointment based and 'drop in' facility (as far as possible). The Advice Unit Co-ordinator handles all telephone enquires to the Advice Unit. The Advice Unit is affiliated to Advice UK, which is a professional body supporting and representing independent advice centres. We are authorised to provide level 2 immigration advice and hold a group licence for debt counselling and debt adjusting.

We are also members of UKCISA (UK Council for International Student Affairs), NASMA (National Association of Student Money Advisors), RAWs (NUS arm of Research and Welfare Staff) and SKILL (National Bureau for Students with Disabilities). We also subscribe to many other relevant organisations who provide regularly updated information.

Although we are a Students' Union service and so independent of the University, we have an excellent working relationship with the University, particularly Student Services and the International Office. This means that we are often able to liaise with University departments on behalf of our students.

Our strong links with local and national agencies, gives us a great understanding of other support networks. Therefore, in the event that we are unable to help you we can usually refer you to someone who can.

We deal with hundreds of queries each year, and the bulk of our casework deals with representing and assisting students with money related problems such as student support (LEA), benefits, dealing with debt, Access to Learning Fund, employment, tax and accommodation costs such as rent and deposits.

Our international service provides advice and representation on immigration (we stock visa application forms), arranging NI appointments for students, tuition fees and money related problems.

The Advice Unit is widely recognised as a friendly and efficient service to which students can return to talk at ease in a confidential environment.

Mission Statement

The Advice Unit aims to ensure that all students are empowered with the knowledge and information they require to enable them to make the most of their time at the University of Bolton.

We will endeavour to provide relevant and accurate information and support to enable our students to make informed decisions.

We will ensure that our services are accessible to all our students and we will continually strive to deliver and maintain the highest possible standard of service at all times.

The Team

The Advice Unit relies on two core members to make the team; the Vice President Education and Representation and the Advice Unit Co-ordinator.

The VP has overall responsibility for the Advice Unit and The Advice Unit Co-ordinator has responsibility for the day-to-day management of the Advice Unit.

The Advice Co-ordinator works extensively with the students and will help resolve any welfare problems students might be facing. The Advice Unit Co-ordinator is a trained professional advisor who receives thorough and regular training in student related issues.

The VP is your official representative to the University and deals with all academic issues relating to appeals, reviews, course and tutor complaints, course delivery and teaching standards, mitigating circumstances, delivering Course Representative training to co-ordinating meetings and any other issues connected to your course.

Application Forms

Forms are available from the Advice Unit on:

- Access to Learning Fund
- Emergency Loans

- FLR (S) and (O) - application for visa extensions for international students.

Confidentiality

We are committed to providing a strict confidential service. We are wholly impartial and will advise according to your best interests. We operate in an equal opportunity environment and do not discriminate on the grounds of age, gender, ethnic origin, religious belief, disabilities, sexual orientation or any other individual characteristic, which may affect a person's opportunities in life.

We advise students experiencing difficulties irrespective of how those difficulties arose, and approach issues in a sensitive manner.

The Advice Unit operates a strict Confidentiality Policy, which is reviewed regularly. All personal interviews are held in a private interview room with the Advice Unit Co-ordinator. If you wish to speak to the President/Vice President you will be seen in a private interview room.

No information will be given directly/indirectly to any third party without your consent. You will be advised as appropriate during your interview.

However, confidentiality may be breached in specific circumstances and according to our Confidentiality Policy. If you have any questions or are worried about any aspect of confidentiality please inform the Advice Unit Co-ordinator or the Vice President.

Advice Unit Objectives

The Advice Unit signifies the Student Unions' recognition of its responsibility to its students to provide advice, information and representation on a wide range of issues that they may experience during their studies at the University of Bolton.

The Advice Unit will therefore seek to:

- Raise the service profile of the Unit amongst students, staff and the local community.
- Keep abreast of any changes in legislation and ensure that staff are equipped with these skills and knowledge on issues that may affect the needs of students.
- Maintain and acquire a comprehensive knowledge of student related issues.
- Develop and maintain a productive working relationship between the Advice Unit and the University's Student Centre.
- Develop and maintain links between the Advice Unit and relevant external student bodies.
- Maintain a friendly and helpful environment in which the student feels at ease and able to be listened to in total confidence.
- Provide updated and relevant literature and resources so students can access information through us.
- Identify 'high need' groups with the assistance of student Executive Officers, Students' Union research and Advice Unit monitoring procedures.
- Develop a comprehensive 'Virtual Advice Unit'

Code Of Practice To Ensure Efficiency

We operate a strict Code of Practice, you can expect us to:

- Offer an appointment with the Advice Unit Co-ordinator within five working days or an emergency 'drop in' slot within two working days.
- Respond to all telephone messages within two working days.
- Respond to all e-mail and Internet enquiries within three working days.
- Welcome all students with due regard to any cultural differences.
- Endeavour to answer your queries as fully as possible and inform you of how long any follow up work may take, and to keep you updated on any relevant progress on your case.
- Discuss all available options relating to your query to enable you to make informed decisions.
- Provide accurate advice, information and skills in order for you to tackle the problem yourself.
- To act as your representative where appropriate.
- Assist with your query via the telephone, post, e-mail or Internet if you are unable to visit the Advice Unit.
- Advise you until all practical avenues of assistance are exhausted.
- Withdraw our service to any student who becomes abusive, violent, uses threatening language or whose behaviour contravenes our Equal Opportunities Policy.
- Withdraw our service to any student who deliberately attempts to provide misleading information, fails to disclose vital and relevant information to their case and any other action, which affects the professional integrity of the service.
- Withdraw our service to any student who persistently fails to keep appointments without good reason or continually seeks our advice but fails to act on it.
- If a conflict of interest occurs, you will be advised according to our policy.

The Advice Unit relies on the full co-operation of its clients to ensure the best solution.

Therefore, you are expected to:

- Keep your appointments with the Advice Unit Co-ordinator and be punctual. If you are delayed or cannot attend you must inform us as soon as possible so the appointment maybe offered to someone else.
- Provide us with full and accurate information, as this will determine the level of action and service you will receive from us.
- Not deliberately attempt to mislead or fail to disclose vital and relevant information.
- Keep us updated on any developments.
- Treat all our advisors and representatives with respect without resorting to intimidating, abusive and threatening behaviour.
- Not to seek to involve the advisors and representatives in any unethical behaviour or discussion.
- Fulfil any agreed course of action as discussed with the advisors.
- Respect all our guidelines and Code of Practice.
- Respect the privacy of the Advice Unit staff by not approaching them outside normal office hours.

- Submit complaints if you are unhappy about any aspect of the service you have received. Please contact the Advice Unit Co-ordinator or relevant service provider who will endeavour to solve your complaint according to our Complaints Policy.

Complaints Procedure

The Students' Union Complaints Policy is reviewed regularly to ensure that all complaints are handled appropriately. The Advice Unit strongly encourages client participation and welcomes any comments and suggestions about how the service can be improved to benefit all students. You have the right to complain if you feel dissatisfied with our service.

Students can submit complaints in writing, telephone or e-mail or alternatively post comments in the Union's comment boxes or complete our evaluation questionnaire at the Union's reception counter.

The complaints procedure leaflet is available from Reception who can guide you on the process. We also welcome any comments on the procedure itself to make sure that it is user friendly. Please remember that the service provider can handle most complaints, therefore you are encouraged to contact them in the first instance.

The Advice Unit will give all complaints serious consideration in strict confidence, and will endeavour to deal and solve problems within a reasonable time limit and according to our Complaints Policy.

Details of complaints will be held centrally and be analysed termly for use in improving the service.

Referrals

Whilst the Advice Unit is well resourced in leaflets and other material, please remember we do not know everything! On occasions it will be necessary to refer you to a specialist agency if the matter is particularly complex or outside our remit.

You will be signposted or referred according to our Referrals and Signposting Policy, However, we do encourage students to keep us updated on their progress and request that you complete a referral questionnaire.