

About the department

The Students' Union Advice Service offers independent, confidential advice to students on a wide variety of issues. The Service is a core part of the support offer from the Union (and works closely with university support services) to ensure 50,000 students at the University of Manchester are supported when they need it. Support is a key strategic theme in our new organisational strategy so a thriving Advice Service that is sustainable for the future is key to achieving our strategic goals. Below are examples of the range of advice we currently offer.

- **Academic issues:** mitigating circumstances, academic appeals, complaints to the University, changing course, interruptions, academic malpractice, and University disciplinary issues.
- **Housing:** private tenancy rights, dealing with disrepair, tenancy agreement checks, council tax, tenancy deposits, eviction, landlord harassment and problems in halls of residence.
- **Student Finance:** financial support options, Advice Service Emergency Loan, queries with student finance, money guidance, general advice on government benefits.
- **Student life:** sexual violence and harassment, domestic abuse, fraud or scams, free drug testing kits and drug support, homesickness, social isolation, concern for a friend, help after experiencing a crime and mental health difficulties. This area of advice involves providing students with practical and emotional support, signposting or referring to specialist services and providing advice on their options when facing a difficult personal situation. Practical support can entail supporting them with wider academic, housing and money issues related to their initial enquiry.

As a Service, we often work with students facing complex and challenging circumstances and who may be in crisis. Students contact the Advice Service for support with a range of personal difficulties such as mental ill health, sexual violence, domestic abuse, housing crisis, estrangement, and financial hardship.

Students facing allegations of sexual misconduct or other serious behavioural breaches of university regulations can also seek advice and support from the Service. Allegations can range from a low level to serious breaches, such as sex without consent. Our Service offer includes providing support and advice to these students during the University investigation process, through to formal disciplinary proceedings.

We ensure that staff have regular opportunities for reflection and support for wellbeing, including access to external restorative supervision with an independent practitioner.

Current Context of the Service

The Service is going through a period of change and transformation. Over the last few years, the Service has seen increasing student demand, increasingly complex enquiries, and high staff turnover. This has led to significant capacity gaps and impacted service development. The Service is now at a point where it needs a reset, and a transformation plan has been outlined. Included in the plan is a restructure of the advisor role from a grade B post to a grade C manager / senior technical expert role. Over the next 12- 24 months the focus of the Service will be a transition to the new staffing model, carrying out an in-depth processes and systems review and implementing new ways of working. By 2026 we are looking for updated and best use of technology, updated data and insight gathering, a comprehensive set of up to date internal and student facing resources being continuously reviewed, an updated and proportionate quality of assurance process, data and insight is being used to improve Service operation and to influence students' experience so there is less demand for the Service.

Team Structure

The current team is made up of a Head of Advice, Advice Service Manager, 1 Senior Advisor, 2 Advisors (transitioning to the senior role), 1 Graduate Intern (Triage Advisor), Student Staff Caseworker and a team of Student Staff on reception. A Financial Advisor funded by the University will be joining the service later in the year, recruited and managed by the Head of Advice. The Service operates a stepped approach to support in line with the Union strategy. Our Student Staff provide a first point of contact on reception and support students with signposting and straight forward enquiries. Our Student Caseworker is trained to respond to specific academic enquiries such as appeals and malpractice. Our Intern supports the student staff on reception and takes on a wider range of cases. The Advisors / Senior Advisor and Advice Service Manager take on complex casework, as well as supporting with more straightforward enquiries as needed. Line management of our Intern and Student Staff currently sits with our Senior Advisor.