

QMSU Advice Service Conflict of Interest Policy

Purpose of the Policy

Aims of the service and purpose of policy

The Queen Mary Students' Union (QMSU) Advice Service is committed to providing free, confidential, impartial, and non-judgemental support to all Queen Mary University of London students. This policy outlines how the service will manage situations where a conflict of interest may arise, ensuring fairness and transparency.

QMSU Advice Service hold information electronically in a secure database, which is only accessible to authorised QMSU staff. Advisers may discuss cases within the team where appropriate. Exceptions, due to conflict of interest, are outlined in the policy below.

What is a 'Conflict of Interest'?

A conflict of interest occurs when the Advice Service may be unable to support a student in an impartial and independent manner. Examples include (but are not limited to):

1. Disputes between students both seeking advice from QMSU – e.g., complaints involving accommodation, disciplinary matters, or academic integrity breaches.
2. Adviser as Complaint Investigator – where an adviser has investigated a student complaint under By-Law 13, but students request QMSU representation at either QMSU meeting or in the case of escalation to the University.
3. When Advisors Support Student Union Elected Panel Members - A potential conflict of interest may arise when an advisor is supporting a student union elected panel member who is involved in judging decisions in a case.
4. Sentiment against Advice Service staff – when a student challenges the conduct or impartiality of an adviser.
5. Actions that may harm QMSU or its services – if a student's intended course of action could negatively impact the Union.
6. Pre-existing personal relationships – if a student has a personal connection with an adviser.

Procedure in Case of a Conflict of Interest

Any potential conflict of interest should be identified, and the student informed, as soon as possible. This is to ensure that the student can be given appropriate directions to other sources of help at an early stage in their case, and to prevent the outcome of the case being jeopardised by a delay in advising the client that we are unable to act.

If there are more parties involved in a case than we have advisers available, then QMSU advisers will be allocated on a first-come first-served basis.

1. Disputes Between Students:

If multiple parties in a dispute approach Academic Advice Service, each will be allocated a different Adviser (within the resources of the service). The Advisers concerned will not discuss the case with each other but may discuss the case with the QMSU Senior Management Team. Steps will also be taken to restrict access to case notes.

Separation of cases:

- Students must inform the Advice Service if other students are involved in their case.
- The Advice Service will allocate different advisers to each student in dispute, to maintain impartiality.
- This does not apply if there are multiple students involved in a case with the same position.

Case Management:

- All advisers will be able to see the initial contact made by the student to the service via the Academic Advice Form.
- Advisers will not access any documents uploaded by the student until a case is allocated to them.
- Once a conflict of interest is identified, access to case notes, notes or documents will be restricted to the relevant advisor.
- If separate advisers are supporting multiple students in a case, they will ensure not to discuss the case with other advisers, staff, or students involved.

2. Adviser as Complaint Investigator

In cases where an adviser has previously acted as a complaint investigator and the students involved request representation:

- The adviser must declare their prior involvement to the Advice Manager.
- The Advice Service will assess whether impartial support can be provided.
- If impartiality cannot be guaranteed, the adviser will not represent the student.
- The student will be offered support from a different adviser, if available.

3. Advisers Supporting Student Union Elected Panel Members

This includes situations where the advisor supports SU panel members, e.g. reads the case information, summarises it, and proposes potential questions for the panel member. Such involvement could compromise impartiality and fairness in the decision-making process.

- The advisor must check the list of students involved in the case before offering support to the panel member.
- If any of the students involved have previously received support from the advisor, the advisor must inform the panel member that they cannot support them in this case.
- In such cases, the advisor must refer the panel member to another SU staff member who is impartial and able to provide support.
- This ensures that all parties receive fair and unbiased guidance throughout the process.

4. Sentiment Against Advice Service Staff:

If a student raises that they do not believe their advisor to be impartial or independent, a new advisor, where possible, will be assigned.

- The student can contact the QMSU Deputy CEO - a.ramsamy@qmul.ac.uk if they believe there is a conflict of interest with a current advisor. They will need to include both an explanation of what the issue is as well as supporting evidence. This will be reviewed by a member of the QMSU Senior Management Team.
- If the SU identifies the conflict, the adviser will explain the conflict and withdraw from the case.
- The student will be offered support from a different adviser, if available.
- Where possible and appropriate, any existing case notes, documents or materials will be shared with the new advisor.

5. Harmful Actions Toward QMSU Services:

In cases where the proposed action by a student is in contravention of QMSU's existing Articles, By-laws, Policies or other restrictions e.g. another regulatory body.

- If the SU identifies the conflict, this will be referred to and reviewed by a member of the QMSU Senior Management Team
- The adviser will explain the conflict to the student and explain why they cannot support the student or the proposed action.
- In ongoing cases, the adviser will cease involvement and report the matter to the Advice Manager and/or QMSU Senior Membership Team.

6. Personal Connections:

Students must understand that their relationship with Academic Advice Service staff is a professional one, and they should not expect to have social contact with them.

In the case of existing personal connections, students will be assigned a different adviser to avoid bias.

Arising a Conflict of Interests

If a conflict subsequently arises after a case has been assigned; the Adviser should discuss the situation with the Advice Manager, or if more appropriate a member of the QMSU Senior Management Team. Where possible, the appropriate steps, as suggested above, should be followed.

Disputing a Conflict of Interest Decision

Students who wish to challenge a decision made under this policy may do so via contacting the QMSU Deputy CEO - a.ramsamy@qmul.ac.uk They will need to include both an explanation of what the issue is as well as supporting evidence. This will be reviewed by a member of the QMSU Senior Management Team.

Review

All staff within the Advice Service will receive a copy of this policy and it will be fully explained to them as part of their induction. The policy will also be publicly visible on QMSU's website and should be made available to all students involved in a conflict of interest.

Reviewed: 01.04.2026

Next Review: 01.10.2027

