

University of Bristol Student Services Confidentiality Policy

This policy should be read in conjunction with the University's Student Data Policy¹ and Data Protection Guidelines².

Advice on the implementation of the policy should initially be directed to the head of the respective student service (Disability Services, Student Counselling Service etc.), then to the Student Services Project Manager and the Director of Student Services and Employability.

Scope

The Student Services Division comprises the following services, who abide by this policy:

- Students' Health Service
- Student Counselling Service
- Disability Services
- Careers Service
- Multifaith Chaplaincy
- Vulnerable Students' Support Service

The Students' Health Service complies with the General Medical Council's 2009 best practice guidance on confidentiality³. The Student Counselling Service has its own policy⁴ which provides more operational detail about the handling of information.

They are members of the British Association for Counsellors and Psychotherapists (BACP) which places expectations on members, and they abide by the BACP Ethical Framework⁵. All of these documents are analogous with this Policy. The Multifaith Chaplaincy includes staff of many faiths with their own views and some may be freer than others to share information.

Principles

1. Students should feel assured that they can seek confidential, professional advice from the Student Services. Confidentiality is held with the particular service, not the individual: individual advisors routinely discuss student cases with their colleagues within an individual service in order to inform best practice.
2. All personal information will be used legitimately with good reason, on justifiable grounds and in accordance with the Data Protection Act. Records will be kept and stored securely, and only accessed by staff of that individual service when required.
3. Information previously shared as part of the application to study process, for example on UCAS forms, is not deemed confidential to the Student Services.

¹ University of Bristol. Student Personal Data Policy. Available from www.bristol.ac.uk/secretary/dataprotection/studentpolicy.html

² University of Bristol. Data Protection Act 1998 guidelines. Available from www.bristol.ac.uk/secretary/dataprotection/guidelines.html

³ General Medical Council (2009) Confidentiality. Available from www.gmc-uk.org/Confidentiality_core_2009.pdf_27494212.pdf

⁴ University of Bristol Student Counselling Service Confidentiality Policy. Available from www.bristol.ac.uk/student-counselling/policy-docs/confidentiality/

⁵ BACP Ethical Framework. Available from www.bacp.co.uk/ethical_framework/

4. In order to support students there will be instances where information will need to be shared with colleagues within the Division. This sharing will be undertaken after informed consent is gained from the student. This may be as part of the initial signup with a service, or when a specific circumstance arises where sharing of personal information would allow the University to provide the best possible level of service/care for a student.
5. There will routinely be occasions when Student Services staff will need to liaise with University colleagues outside the Division, for example selected staff in academic schools to arrange a particular form of support, on a need to know basis. This will be explained in advance of any disclosure. There is an expectation that colleagues in academic schools will share information with Student Services, so that this sharing works in both directions.
6. Student Services routinely work with external professionals such as local NHS healthcare providers and educational psychologists. The same principles of sharing information apply; students will be asked to provide their consent in advance. External professionals will be expected to share information guided by their own policy and practice where it is thought to be in the best interests of the student.
7. If students refuse to give consent for information to be shared then the consequences of this will be clearly explained. This is likely to mean that support cannot be arranged.
8. Requests for information from parents, other family members or friends will be refused unless the student has given their consent.
9. If a member of Student Services staff takes the view that a student is at risk of harming themselves or others then they can make a decision to break confidentiality without consent. Such a decision will not be taken lightly. Attempts will be made to gain consent from the student whenever possible.
10. There may be circumstances where the law requires disclosure for the prevention and detection of terrorism⁶ or where non-disclosure is likely to prejudice the prevention or detection of crime^{7,8,9}.
11. Student Services staff can receive information from any source outside the division. Examples include colleagues in academic schools or the NHS Community Mental Health Teams. Any such information will be recorded on file. Without the consent of the student being referred to, it will not be possible to engage in a dialogue with the person providing the information. Professional judgement will be used to support the student in the best way possible.
12. Requests for information from the Police will be routinely referred to the University Secretary's Office.
13. Students may request copies of the records held about them.

Richard Edwards
Student Services Project Manager

First issued August 2011, reviewed October 2012

⁶ In accordance with section 19 Terrorism Act 2000 (as amended by the Counter Terrorism Act 2008)

⁷ In accordance with section 29 Data Protection Act

⁸ In accordance with the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002

⁹ In accordance with child protection legislation (including but not limited to the Children Act 1989)