Being a Departmental Adviser

- Your role
- Boundaries and expectations
- Common issues
- Contact information
Overview

Adviser systems increase engagement and retention, encourage attendance, and promote academic success. They provide students with a personalised approach to their studies, help them to feel they are part of the University community, and ensure they complete their degrees.

Our Departmental Adviser system has been designed to enhance the student experience by providing a framework to support students in their academic journey. It enables Advisers across the University to ensure that all students can benefit from the same, basic support, no matter what they are studying.

As a Departmental Adviser, you will be expected to provide general and academic support to a small group of students. At key points during their studies, you will offer the opportunity to discuss their academic progress, the transition between years, and their progression into the world beyond the University. You will work with your department to provide them with essential information and referral to specialist central support if necessary, get to know them over the course of their degrees, and be a friendly face to whom they can turn. All Departmental Advisers will be supported by a Senior Adviser, and have access to necessary information and training.

Much of what is described in the policy may already happen as a part of other systems within your department, and which are scheduled into the calendar. This system has been designed to complement such existing arrangements.

This handbook covers:
- Your role
- Establishing boundaries and setting expectations
- Students under 18
- Working with students who are distressed
- Students at risk
- Students not accepting help
- Common issues and how to get support

The role of the Departmental Adviser

Departmental Advisers are friendly faces within departments, schools and centres to whom students can turn if they have questions. As an Adviser, you are not expected to have specialist pastoral support skills, nor are you expected to offer counselling, specialist advice (beyond your discipline) or to provide ongoing emotional support.

In this role, you are likely to be the one seeing students most consistently over the course of their degree. There are two elements that are central to the role: providing advice and offering referrals. In order to be able to do both well, you need to be prepared with specific information about where students can go to find more information, support, and opportunities to develop their skills. When issues arise that fall outside your areas of expertise, you should refer students to the appropriate central support services, which will continue to offer the same excellent service that you’ve come to expect.

There should be regular opportunities for students to meet with you, either scheduled by the department, or by request from your students. If you notice that one of your students is having difficulties – through their absence, for example, or because of changes in behaviour, or on the advice of a colleague – it is important to talk to them. Sometimes all they might need is for someone to notice that they're having problems and to be offered the chance to chat. If, however, issues are raised that would be better dealt with by specialist services, you should encourage the student to contact them. Further information on what to do and who to contact should the need arise is provided later in this handbook.

The role of the Senior Adviser

Senior Advisers are responsible for coordinating and ensuring the smooth running of their department’s adviser system. They will provide backup to Departmental Advisers, oversee peer mentoring arrangements and liaise with the mentoring scheme co-ordinator, and act as a link between your department and Student Support. Peer mentoring information and resources are available at www.essex.ac.uk/stdsup/peermentoring

Contact your Senior Adviser for more information about:
- How students are assigned to individual Departmental Advisers
- The structure of meetings, and what is delivered individually or in small groups
- How often you should contact and meet with your advisees
- The most appropriate way to contact your advisees
- Your department’s approach to record keeping
- Confidentiality in the Adviser relationship

1 Departmental Advisers are the Essex equivalent of the Personal Tutor role described in the NUS Charter on Personal Tutors: www.nusconnect.org.uk/campaigns/highereducation/learning-and-teaching-hub/personaltutors/ accessed 09/05/12.
Boundaries and expectations

It is a good idea for everyone involved if boundaries are established at the beginning of the Adviser relationship. To a large extent, this will depend on individual Departmental Advisers, but the key thing is to establish expectations – both yours, and your students.

**Boundaries to consider:**
- When you are and are not available
- How long meetings will last
- The best way to arrange a meeting
- How quickly you will respond to email
- What you can offer as an Adviser, and what is offered centrally

**What can you expect?**
- Students to attend scheduled meetings (and give notice if they won’t be attending)
- Students to contact you if they need meetings beyond scheduled departmental provision
- Students to ask questions that you can easily answer, and others that will require you to direct them towards specialist services

**What can be expected of you?**
- Like your students, you are available when you say you will be
- Within reason, you accommodate your students requests for meetings
- You treat the information students share as confidential, unless absolutely necessary
- You have an appreciation of equality and diversity matters

**You keep up-to-date on support systems available to students so that you can make appropriate referrals**
- You are not expected to have specialist pastoral support skills
- You are not expected to offer counselling, specialist advice or ongoing emotional support

**Confidentiality**
- As an Adviser, you are in a position of trust. Your discussions with your students should be treated as strictly confidential
- Confidentiality is not secrecy, and some confidential issues will need to be shared with Senior Advisers and/or specialist services. These cases should be treated with utmost sensitivity. See page 6 for examples

**Offering Advice**
As a Departmental Adviser, you will provide a friendly and impartial ear to your advisees, but you are not expected to act as a counsellor; listen to their concerns and offer possible routes to solutions. Most of the time, it’s likely you’ll be able to help them sort things out. If, however, the issues they raise are outside of your area of expertise, you should make a referral, and advise them to consult one of the university’s dedicated support services.

**Making a referral**
The majority of students you see will probably want to discuss situations that relate to their studies. However, some may come to you with more complicated problems (you’ll find a list on page 6). These students should be encouraged to seek out the appropriate professional support service. When you make referrals, it’s worth remembering that they are most successful when the student chooses to make contact with the service themselves. You are not expected to ‘compel’ students to follow up on your referrals, but you can help them by ensuring they know what support services are available to them. Explain to the student why you feel they would benefit from talking to someone else and then encourage them to visit the service or make an appointment.

**Writing references**
During their time here, and especially towards the end of their studies, your students will probably ask you for job references. This is an important part of an Adviser’s role, as you will have known them since they started at the University, and your personal endorsement can boost their confidence and chances of getting a job.

There is detailed advice on the procedures for providing references on the Academic Section webpages:
www2.essex.ac.uk/academic/services/staff

**Supporting Students with individual needs**
Guidance on supporting students with individual needs is available in the How to Guides provided with this pack.

**Supporting students who are under 18**
Every year, the University has a few students who are under 18 at the time of registration. Because of their age, we have an enhanced duty of care to them. As their Adviser, you will need to make contact with them close to the start of term and maintain regular contact until they reach 18. As part of your role, you should also ensure that they are familiar with the policy for the protection of under-18s and vulnerable adults and associated guidance, all of which is available through Student Support.

Any concerns, however minor, should be discussed with the Director or Deputy Directors of Student Support or with one of the University’s ‘Designated Officers’. Student Support should hold contact details for next of kin, including contacts in the UK for those resident abroad, in the event of a serious problem.
Supporting distressed students

Sometimes students might get upset or become distressed when discussing personal issues. If this happens, please resist the urge to immediately pick up the phone and pass them onto someone else. This can reinforce any negative feelings they may have about themselves and increase any sense they might have of how unmanageable their difficulty is.

If one of your students is distressed or crying, start by acknowledge that the situation is clearly a difficult one for them. Avoid making physical contact (it can sometimes be misconstrued). Allow them to cry and to express their feelings, let them talk, and just listen. It may be that they don’t want or are unable to accept a possible solution at this time, but just want an opportunity to express themselves and ‘get it all out’.

When dealing with a situation where you feel uncomfortable or uncertain, tell the student that you may not be the best person to help them and that they may find it helpful to seek advice from one of the University’s specialist support services. Explain that you recognise that they are clearly finding things difficult, and whilst you are pleased they have been able to talk to you, they might benefit from seeing someone with whom they can explore the situation in depth and offer the most appropriate advice.

Further useful information, including on making effective referrals, is available in the How to Guides on the Learning and Development website (under Resources).

Students at risk

Occasionally a student may exhibit or refer to disturbing behaviour, leading you to believe that they might be at risk and that there is a need for urgent intervention. Things to watch out for include:

- Serious physical illness, or dramatic change in appearance
- Alcohol abuse, substance abuse, and addiction
- An inability to function academically or in other areas of life
- Hallucinations, hearing voices, or paranoid or irrational beliefs
- Evidence of self-harm or talk of harming others
- References to suicide

Please contact Student Support without delay to discuss your concerns and/or encourage the student to do so. You should also let your Senior Adviser know.

What if a student refuses to accept help?

If a student is not prepared to talk or to seek help from specialist services and is not ‘at risk’, there is little action that can be taken, other than noting your concerns with appropriate staff in the department and informing the services that may come into contact with the student. This may not feel comfortable if you are concerned about the student, but a student cannot be coerced into doing something they do not wish to do. Make your concern known to the student, confirm this by e-mail and try to keep the line of communication with them open.

A-Z of Common issues

Student Support maintain an online directory of common issues with links to relevant information and procedures. This can be found from the University of Essex home page by clicking on ‘STAFF’ (www.essex.ac.uk/staff), scrolling down to ‘Support’ and clicking on ‘Staff guidance on Student Support issues’.

Information includes:

- Academic issues- late submission, extenuating circumstances
- Accommodation issues
- Changing course/ university
- Disability and dyslexia
- Financial issues- including grants loans fees and hardship funds
- Health issues- including mental health
- Intermission or withdrawal
- International students
- Serious incidents- including death of a student

How to Guides are also available on the Learning and Development website (www.essex.ac.uk/idev/how_to_guides/default.aspx) Please let Student Support know if you have any suggestions for additions to the A-Z or the How to Guides.

If you are ever unsure, please contact Student Support.
### Useful contacts: Support Services for students

#### Advice and Guidance

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<tr>
<td>Student Support Advice</td>
<td>University Staff</td>
<td>Duty advisers for each of Advice, Disability and Wellbeing services – no appointment generally required: Mon, Weds and Fri 10am to 4pm Tues and Thurs 1pm to 4pm</td>
<td>4N.6.2, Colchester <a href="http://www.essex.ac.uk/stdsup">www.essex.ac.uk/stdsup</a> T 01206 872366 E <a href="mailto:sso@essex.ac.uk">sso@essex.ac.uk</a></td>
<td>Immigration (except visa extensions). Funding - debt and money advice. General advice and guidance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Support Disability</td>
<td>University Staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Information, advice and guidance on disability and specific learning difficulties, study strategies workshops and tuition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Support Wellbeing</td>
<td>University Staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Support for emotional, psychological or mental health difficulties including assessments, counselling, mentoring and support groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Support Southend Campus</td>
<td>University Staff</td>
<td></td>
<td>Floor 2 Gateway Building T 01702 328351 E <a href="mailto:wellbeing@essex.ac.uk">wellbeing@essex.ac.uk</a></td>
<td>Initial advice on all of the above and liaison with Colchester for specialist support and referral.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Support Loughton Campus</td>
<td>University Staff</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ground Floor, Hatfields T 0208 508 5983 x46 E <a href="mailto:loughton@essex.ac.uk">loughton@essex.ac.uk</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ Union Advice Centre</td>
<td>SU Staff and Student Volunteers</td>
<td>Mon to Fri 10am to 4pm</td>
<td>Square 3, Colchester T 01206 874034 E <a href="mailto:suadvice@essex.ac.uk">suadvice@essex.ac.uk</a> <a href="http://www.essexstudent.com/services/advice_centre">www.essexstudent.com/services/advice_centre</a></td>
<td>Academic appeals and complaints, Housing, Immigration (visa extensions), Legal and more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registry</td>
<td>University Staff</td>
<td>Mon to Fri 10am to 4pm</td>
<td>Room 6.116, Colchester Humanities and Comparative Studies T 01206 872284 Law and Management T 01206 872973 Science and Engineering T 01206 872972 Social Sciences T 01206 872984 E <a href="mailto:registry@essex.ac.uk">registry@essex.ac.uk</a> <a href="http://www.essex.ac.uk/academic/offices/registry/index.htm">www.essex.ac.uk/academic/offices/registry/index.htm</a></td>
<td>Registering for a course, enrolling on a module, collecting your registration card, intermitting, withdrawing, changing course or module, exam information including results, academic offences and appeals, bank letters, visa letters (including Tier 1 Post-study work letters), Confirmation of Acceptance (CAS), and more.</td>
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Southend Campus, Registry functions are provided by the Student Administration section on the second floor of the Gateway Building. Loughton Campus initial Registry enquiries should be directed to the main office at Hatfields.
## Useful contacts: Support Services for students

### Other Support Services (A-Z)

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<tr>
<td>Accommodation Essex</td>
<td>University Staff</td>
<td>Mon to Thurs 10am to 5pm</td>
<td>North Campus (main office) &lt;br&gt; T 01206 873615 &lt;br&gt; E <a href="mailto:accomm@essex.ac.uk">accomm@essex.ac.uk</a> &lt;br&gt; <a href="http://www.essex.ac.uk/accommodation">www.essex.ac.uk/accommodation</a></td>
<td>University accommodation issues including eligibility for accommodation, room exchanges, maintenance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation Southend Campus</td>
<td>University Staff</td>
<td>Hours may vary in vacations</td>
<td>University Square Reception &lt;br&gt; T 01702 330226 &lt;br&gt; E <a href="mailto:scaccom@essex.ac.uk">scaccom@essex.ac.uk</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation (Private): Student Lets</td>
<td>SU Staff and Student Volunteers</td>
<td>Mon to Fri 9am to 5pm</td>
<td>Square 3, Colchester &lt;br&gt; T 01206 878978 &lt;br&gt; <a href="http://www.essexstudent.com/services/studentlets">www.essexstudent.com/services/studentlets</a></td>
<td>Accommodation: private accommodation / finding a place to live</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employability and Careers Centre</td>
<td>University Staff</td>
<td>Mon to Fri 10am to 4pm except Weds 1pm to 4pm (Colchester)</td>
<td>Colchester, Square 2 &lt;br&gt; Southend: Open Study Area, Gateway Building &lt;br&gt; E <a href="mailto:careers@essex.ac.uk">careers@essex.ac.uk</a> &lt;br&gt; <a href="http://www.essex.ac.uk/careers">www.essex.ac.uk/careers</a></td>
<td>Employability skills, jobs and careers advice. Developing employability skills via The Big E Award, Frontrunners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harassment Advisory Network</td>
<td>Staff Volunteers</td>
<td>Lines are open 9am to 5pm, Mon to Fri</td>
<td>T 01206 874334 &lt;br&gt; <a href="http://www.essex.ac.uk/eo">www.essex.ac.uk/eo</a></td>
<td>Advice on Harassment and bullying issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Centre</td>
<td>NHS Staff</td>
<td>Mon to Fri 9am to 12:30pm</td>
<td>Colchester-North Campus &lt;br&gt; T 01206 794484 &lt;br&gt; E <a href="mailto:hcentre@essex.ac.uk">hcentre@essex.ac.uk</a> &lt;br&gt; <a href="http://www.rowhedgesurgery.co.uk">www.rowhedgesurgery.co.uk</a> &lt;br&gt; Southend-Gateway Building &lt;br&gt; T 01702 762762 &lt;br&gt; <a href="http://www.thepracticeplc.com/index.jsp">www.thepracticeplc.com/index.jsp</a> and search for Luker Road.</td>
<td>Health and well-being - treatment and info to registered patients. Nurse triage and GPs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income and Payments</td>
<td>University staff</td>
<td>Mon to Fri 10am to 4pm</td>
<td>Square 4, Colchester Gateway building floor 2 Southend. E <a href="mailto:income@essex.ac.uk">income@essex.ac.uk</a> &lt;br&gt; <a href="http://www.essex.ac.uk/finance/for_students">www.essex.ac.uk/finance/for_students</a></td>
<td>Payment of tuition fees, accommodation rents, online payments. Debts to the University.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi Faith Chaplaincy Centre</td>
<td>External staff and volunteers</td>
<td>7 days a week, times vary</td>
<td>Off Square 2, level 3, Colchester Gateway Building, Southend &lt;br&gt; <a href="http://www.essex.ac.uk/chaplaincy/contacts.shtm">www.essex.ac.uk/chaplaincy/contacts.shtm</a></td>
<td>Prayer, meditation and quiet reflection Representatives of faith groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Skills Centre (also known as Learning Resource Centre)</td>
<td>University Staff</td>
<td>Mon to Fri, 9am to 5pm</td>
<td>Off Square 3, Room 4.204. &lt;br&gt; T 01206 874834 &lt;br&gt; <a href="http://www.essex.ac.uk/skillcentre">www.essex.ac.uk/skillcentre</a></td>
<td>Academic Literacy skills (how to prepare for assignments etc.), study skills, English language skills, numeracy skills</td>
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More information, guidance and links: [www.essex.ac.uk/stdsup](http://www.essex.ac.uk/stdsup) and [www.essex.ac.uk/students](http://www.essex.ac.uk/students)
# Useful contacts: Support Services for students

## Out of hours support services

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<tr>
<td>Information Centre (Security)</td>
<td>Patrol Staff</td>
<td>7 days 24hrs (Hours may vary in vacations)</td>
<td>Square 3, Colchester T 01206 872125/3184 Emergencies 01206 872222</td>
<td>Security, emergencies, first aid, directions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security Southend Campus</td>
<td></td>
<td>Until 10pm (6pm on Sunday) After these times</td>
<td>Gateway Building reception T 01702 328208 University Square Security T 01702 878408</td>
<td>Security and emergencies at Southend campus. Support to University Square Residents 24 hours per day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nightline</td>
<td>Student Volunteers</td>
<td>10pm to 8am term time only</td>
<td>Keynes Flat 1, Colchester T 01206 872020/2022 Or via StudentComm within University accommodation dial 224 2020/2022 Freephone 08003265454 E <a href="mailto:nlhelp@essex.ac.uk">nlhelp@essex.ac.uk</a> <a href="http://www.essex.ac.uk/nightline">www.essex.ac.uk/nightline</a></td>
<td>Crisis listening, bed for the night, tea and toast, emergency contraception, pregnancy tests, panic alarms. General Information, someone to talk to.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residents’ Support Network</td>
<td>Student and staff volunteers</td>
<td>On call Resident Assistant available 5pm to 9am and at weekends.</td>
<td>Based in residences- see kitchens or contact security for contact details. <a href="http://www.essex.ac.uk/stdsup/welfare/rsn/index.shtm">www.essex.ac.uk/stdsup/welfare/rsn/index.shtm</a></td>
<td>Enhancing your living and learning environment, critical incident responses and referrals.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More information, guidance and links www.essex.ac.uk/stdsup and www.essex.ac.uk/students