International Student Support

Service user policy

International Student Support aims to provide accurate and comprehensive advice services to both prospective and current international students at the University of Sussex, as well as those who have graduated within the previous four months. We do so in a non-judgemental and anti-discriminatory way. By providing impartial advice, information, support and representation, we provide you with the knowledge and confidence required to make your own decisions. This document outlines our responsibility and practices with respect to information relating to service users (students) and explains our policies on confidentiality and data protection. If you have any queries or concerns about this policy, please discuss these with your adviser.

The service

The International Student Support team, herein referred to as ‘the Service’ refers to the following roles:

- Head of International Student Support
- Assistant International Student Advisers *
- International Student Support Assistants
- International Student Advisers *
- International Student Support Officers
- Country Support Officers

(These positions * are collectively known as the Immigration Advice Team. They are experienced and trained to provide immigration advice and services and are regulated by the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner, OISC. The OISC is an independent organisation which sets standards with which the Immigration Advisers and Assistant International Student Advisers must comply. They are the only designated officers for immigration advice at the University of Sussex.) Members of the International Student Support team will share relevant information about you with each other, as necessary, with the intention of resolving the issue you’ve raised with us. All members of the team will have access to advice records in order to provide appropriate support, as well as to complete statistical monitoring duties and appointment bookings.

What advice can we offer?

The International Student Support team’s main area of expertise is in the immigration laws and rules as they relate to studying in the UK. We can advise in the following areas:

- Tier 4 visas
- Short term study visas
- Visa corrections and replacements
- Applications for Tier 4 dependants
- Doctorate Extension Scheme
• ATAS
• Conditions and responsibilities attached to your visa (for example, employment regulations, attendance etc)
• Immigration implications of changes to your study (for example, repeating a year, intermitting or withdrawing from your course)
• Lost / stolen passports or Biometric Resident Permits (BRPs)
• Visa refusals or rejections. (Where necessary, for example if your situation is complex, we will refer you to an immigration solicitor. In such instances you would be liable for any costs.)

Please note that we do not advise on residency, or marriage/civil partnership related visas including EU/EEA national relationships, and we are unable to check Schengen visa forms or visit visa application forms.

In addition, we offer general support and advice on a range of issues related to living in the UK, including:
• Opening a bank account
• Access to health services
• Travel information
• Adapting to life in the UK
• Advice for families

Our advice is free of charge and is in line with the UK Council for International Student Advice (UKCISA) Code of Ethics for advising international students.

We are only able to advise students and prospective students (and their family members). Staff need to refer to Human Resources or an independent legal adviser.

How to access our service

International Student Support is open to in-person visits during term-time and vacations (except University closure days), Monday to Friday from 10am until 4pm. We are on level 2 of Bramber House. You will be able to find the answers for many of your questions on our webpages.

For immigration enquiries:
• We operate daily ‘quick question sessions’. These are up to 20 minutes long so if you need more time, the adviser will book you in for a longer appointment. Quick question sessions are usually available Monday to Friday, 2-4pm, but check our webpages for the latest monthly schedule. These sessions not pre-bookable and are available on a first come, first served basis.
• Pre-booked appointments will be offered by an adviser where your issue is more complex and requires more time. Appointments are available most weekdays and are booked on a case-by-case basis.
• You can email us for advice at immigration@sussex.ac.uk. An adviser will reply to your email as soon as possible but please allow up to five working days during busy times.

Please note that we are unable to offer immigration advice by telephone.
For non immigration enquiries:

- You can email us for advice at international.support@sussex.ac.uk
- You can request an appointment either by emailing us or by visiting the office.

Please note that, from time to time, our service offer may have to be changed (for example, closing for staff training). When this happens, these changes will be advertised on the International Student Support notice boards and via our social media.

Our commitment to you and our expectations of you

You can expect to:

- be assisted at the earliest possible opportunity
- have a private interview space for in-person appointments (where possible) and have your query remain confidential (see service user policy)
- receive full and accurate information regarding your case
- have an independent observer, family member or friend at the interview if desired
- be contacted as soon as reasonably possible, if there has been a development with your case
- be informed about further specialist help and where it can be obtained, if necessary
- be notified if we have to cancel or change an appointment for any reason
- be offered arrangements that are suitable for you if you have problems accessing our service
- be treated in a courteous and non-judgemental manner, in accordance with values and principles of the University of Sussex, in particular with mutual respect, dignity and professionalism regardless of age, disability, gender identity, race, sexual orientation, religion or beliefs.

We expect you to:

- contact the service as soon as it becomes apparent that you need / will need assistance. If you would like advice or information relating to a UK visa extension, this should be at least 30 days before your visa expiry date. (We recommend that you contact us approximately two months before your visa expires.)
- arrive on time for appointments and let us know in advance if you’re unable to attend or are going to be late
- provide full and accurate information pertaining to your case including all relevant documents
- follow all agreed action points by the time agreed
- inform us of any change in circumstances, including changes to your immigration status or contact details
- not take advice from other staff or other students on immigration matters
- check your Sussex email regularly and reply to our email
- be aware that the University accepts no liability if your immigration application is refused. Whilst we make every effort to ensure that the advice we offer is accurate, the ultimate responsibility for any visa application is your own. You need to check that your form and documents are correct before signing and sending your application to the Home Office
- accept the principles and values of Sussex, in particular treating each other with mutual respect, dignity and professionalism regardless of age, disability, gender identity, race, sexual orientation, religion or beliefs.
Additional information for immigration issues

UK visa extension applications
Before requesting a form and documents check for a UK visa extension application, please ensure that you complete the following steps:

- Obtain a Confirmation of Acceptance of Studies (CAS) from either the Student Systems and Records Office (students on undergraduate or postgraduate taught programmes) or the Research Student Administration Office (students on postgraduate research programmes)
- Fill in your Tier 4 application form online
- Collect any supporting documents

Service level during peak period
We need to prioritise certain areas of advice during our peak period (September until mid October). At that time can offer in-person advice to the following groups only:

- Students from the International Study Centre who are progressing onto a Sussex degree programme
- Students from the Sussex Centre for Language Studies who are progressing onto a Sussex degree programme
- Students holding a University of Sussex CAS with a course state date of September
- Continuing students whose visa expires within 30 days
- Continuing students applying for the Doctorate Extension Scheme

Conflict of interest
Advisers must act objectively and in the client’s best interest even where they hold different personal views or beliefs from the client. Under OISC rules, an immigration adviser must not act where there is a real or potential conflict of interest between themselves and the client (student). In such situation where there is a conflict of interest, we would explain the circumstances clearly to you. It may be appropriate to refer your case elsewhere or transfer it to another member of the Immigration Advice Team.

Confidentiality and your data
We believe you have the right to confidentiality, to protect your interests and ensure a relationship of trust between us. Any information you disclose to a member of International Student Support remains confidential to our service and we will process your non-sensitive and sensitive personal data in line with the University’s Data Protection Policy. Under OISC rules, a record of any immigration advice that is given to you must be kept. All computers are password protected. Electronic records, email communication and case notes from appointments are maintained within the provisions of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and are stored within areas with restricted access. Case notes and files are stored for six years and after this time they are securely destroyed.

We will not pass on your personal information to anyone outside the service subject to the following exceptions:

- Where you have given express permission to the adviser to disclose the information in order to take action on your behalf (eg contact a third party such as UKVI). You will be asked to give this consent on our service user agreement
Exceptions:

In certain circumstances, it may become necessary to disclose information to a third party and where possible and appropriate this will always be discussed with the client first. Such circumstances may include:

- If you are considered to pose a risk of physical harm to yourself or others
- If you share information relating to criminal activity or planned criminal activity
- Where a disclosure is required by law
- Under the Prevention of Terrorism Act
- If you pose a risk to the University
- Where you are under 18 and there is a child protection concern
- Where you are in breach of your visa conditions
- Where our duties as a Tier 2 and 4 Sponsor require us to notify UKVI.

Please note that if you disclose information that may affect the University’s Tier 2 or 4 sponsor licence, the adviser must report this to the University’s Academic Registry Compliance Manager. The University is required to report any breaches of visa regulations (including any breaches of work conditions or overstaying your visa).

Consultation

In line with professional requirements, staff in International Student Support may discuss their work with colleagues within the team; within Student Services or with the University’s UKVI Tier 4 Premium Account Manager, where appropriate and with consent (as explained in the confidentiality policy). In addition, staff regularly consult external agencies and professional bodies including the UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA) and Association for International Student Advisers (AISA) although in these instances the purpose of the consultation is to help the staff member reflect on their work and find an appropriate solution, and the identity of the client would not be revealed.

Useful contacts

The Student Life Centre: situated on the ground floor of Bramber House, the Student Life Centre is your central point for information, non academic advice and welfare support for issues which are not specific to you being an international student.

http://www.sussex.ac.uk/studentlifecentre/
Email: studentlifecentre@sussex.ac.uk
Tel: 01273 876767

The Students’ Union Advice and Representation Centre: Based in Falmer House, the ARC can provide help with academic appeals, student discipline issues and advice if you’ve been accused of academic misconduct. They are independent of the University.
https://www.sussexstudent.com/support/
Email advice@sussexstudent.com
Tel: 01273 877038

UKCISA: The UK Council for International Student Affairs is the national organisation which gives advice to international students studying in the UK. They have information sheets which can be downloaded from their website. They operate a free student advice line.
Immigration Law Practitioners’ Association* (ILPA): Legal professionals who specialise in immigration law are often members of this association. You can search their database for a local solicitor who specialises in the area for which you require assistance.

www.ilpa.org.uk
Email: info@ilpa.org.uk
Tel: 0207 251 8383

The Law Society*: This is the professional association which regulates the legal profession and all reputable solicitors are members. You can search their database for a solicitor in your area.

www.lawsociety.org.uk
Tel: 0870 606 2555

*Remember to check the fee a solicitor will charge before you book a consultation.

How can you help us to improve our service?

We welcome your feedback about our service or suggestions for improvements. Please either email us at international.support@sussex.ac.uk or complete our anonymous online feedback form.

Complaints

International Student Support is committed to a partnership approach in our dealings with students through open and transparent communication, by providing clear information and ensuring that our processes are fair.

If you feel dissatisfied with our service, please follow the University’s complaints procedure.

If your complaint relates to immigration advice, you have a right to complain to the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC). Copies of OISC’s Code of Standards and Complaints Procedure are available from International Student Support.

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