

## Service Overview

The Advice Centre offers all members of SUSU free, confidential and independent advice on practical matters.

We provide information, advice and support on a range of matters.

Academic, housing and finance matters are our main areas of advice.

We are a team of 6 trained and experienced members of staff. The Advice Centre is managed by the Head of Advice and is made up of a team of advisers and Coordinators.

## Purpose

We aim to support students to make their own informed choices about problems in a friendly and professional environment.

## Scope

This applies to all Advice Centre staff members

## Reception

## Face-to-Face

Visitors will be welcomed, and their concerns listened to. They will be signposted to the correct service if it is deemed that The Advice Centre is not the correct support outlet. If we are the correct support outlet, the registration form will be scanned and completed. Then an appointment with an adviser is booked either through Microsoft Teams or face-to-face. We will aim to accommodate the students' preferences where possible. See [Enquiry allocation](#)

## Telephone:

We will always aim to answer the phone but on occasion when we are supporting somebody else at reception, it may be necessary for our messaging service to answer the call. If contact details are given, we will attempt to phone back within 24 hours unless on a weekend/bank holiday/university closure in which case we will phone back as soon as we return. Students will have an opportunity to discuss their needs and will be signposted to the correct service, have their questions answered if possible or have an appointment booked as above. (See TAC charter)

## Email:

We aim to respond to emails within 48 hours unless received on a weekend/bank holiday/university closure in which case we will reply as soon as we return. If an appointment needs to be booked, we will ask that the registration form be completed (The link being provided in the email), once done the appointment can be arranged. Appointments will be booked as above. (See TAC Charter)

## Adviser appointments

### What you can expect from us:

- Free, confidential, impartial advice
- A non-judgmental approach
- Politeness and respect from all staff
- Fairness and equal treatment for all students
- Email replies within 48 hours (except for extremely busy periods, weekends, bank holidays or university closure days)

## What we cannot do:

- Make decisions for you
- Tell you what you should do
- Give you legal advice
- Give you immigration advice
- Provide you with counselling
- Continue to work with you if you are aggressive, abusive, display inappropriate behaviour, or appear to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- Support you in a dispute with SUSU

## Complaints

- If you wish to raise a concern about the service or advice you have received, please follow the Complaint policy

## Is there a maximum fee amount to pay?

- Allowed fees are usually limited to a specific amount (capped), for example:
- Security deposit must not exceed the equivalent of 5 weeks' rent.
- Late rent payment charges can only be 3% above the Bank of England base rate in interest from the date the rent payment is missed.
- Holding deposits can only be a maximum of one week's rent and there are clear rules of having it refunded:
- A decision about what happens with the holding deposit will have to be made within 15 days from when you pay it.
- The landlord or agent will have to refund the holding deposit if the tenancy does not go ahead due to his action, (for example landlord backs out, or decides to rent to someone else).
- You won't get the holding deposit back in full if you drop out, don't provide necessary information to the landlord, fail the "right to rent" checks or provide false or misleading information.
- If your tenancy does proceed, you should receive your holding deposit back within 7 days of the agreement, unless it is converted into a security deposit (that must be protected in one of the deposit protection schemes) or is used towards your first rent payment.
- Changes to tenancy - The landlords/agents will only be able to charge you £50 for any tenant amendments/swaps on the contract. They would have to provide evidence in writing if the cost they incur is more than £50. If during the tenancy you decide to leave early (surrender), the landlord or agent will only be able to charge you for the loss they incurred, so for example the lost rent. They cannot charge new reference fees, new tenancy drafting for the replacement tenant etc.

## Can the landlord or agent charge for anything else?

- Yes. If you have breached your tenancy agreement and caused damage as a result (for example you have broken an item that belongs to the landlord), your landlord may be able to claim the cost of the repair by making deductions from your deposit or taking court action if necessary.
- The landlord/agent will have to provide evidence of any costs they have incurred before they ask you to pay for it. This cost will also have to be reasonable and adequate, for example, the landlord/agent cannot ask you to pay £200 for replacing a smoke detector you broke.

## What can I do if the agent or landlord wants to charge me fees that are banned?

- Firstly, you can make a complaint in writing pointing out the legal ban on fees. The Advice Centre can help you with the complaint. If you have already been charged a banned fee you can write to the agent requesting a refund. You will find an example template letter in Annex B of the [UK Government Tenant Fees guide](#).
- If the agent does not resolve your complaint you can complain to your local Trading Standards department, who will be responsible for enforcing the fees ban.
- All letting agents are required to be members of one of the two redress schemes; The Property Ombudsman or The Property Redress Scheme, which can be used for escalating your complaint if you are unsatisfied with the agent's response.
- It is worth knowing that a landlord cannot evict you using the Section 21 eviction procedure until they have repaid any unlawfully charged fees or returned an unlawfully retained holding deposit.

## Helpful information:

[Southampton City Council: Consumer Advice and contacting Trading Standards](#)

[Shelter website: Complain about a letting agent](#)

[Shelter website: Letting agent and tenancy fees](#)

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### *Disclaimer:*

*While care has been taken to ensure that information contained in The Advice Centre publications is true and correct at the time of writing, changes in circumstances after the time of publication may impact on the accuracy of this information. The Advice Centre and SUSU cannot accept responsibility for any actions taken as a result of advice given in this publication.*

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*Providing free, independent, and confidential advice and information.*

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