



Advice &  
Support at  
Keele SU

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Advice & Support at Keele SU (ASK) is a dedicated advice service that is independent from the university. We provide free, confidential, and impartial advice to our students on a range of issues.

A conflict of interest happens when ASK cannot provide independent and impartial advice to a client, or when it might appear that we cannot. To remain impartial, our advice must always be based only on the client's best interests. Neither the ASK Adviser nor the organisation should have any personal interest in the outcome of a case.

ASK aims to identify conflicts of interest as early as possible. Our case management system helps with this, but conflicts are not always immediately identifiable. For example, a client may have changed their name or address, or a conflict may involve a family member or third party. Sometimes conflicts are identified through informal conversations.

Providing general information (for example, explaining University regulations) to both sides in a dispute is not a conflict of interest. However, if both parties request advice or representation, a conflict of interest will arise and we will not be able to support both.

Each situation will be managed in line with this guidance and assessed on a case-by-case basis.

This policy will be reviewed and updated regularly to ensure it remains effective.

### Common situations where Conflicts of Interest may arise

- Disputes between a landlord and tenant (*ASK does not advise landlords, unless doing so supports the tenant's interests*)
- Issues following a relationship breakdown
- Discipline cases where the complainant is another student
- Collusion
- Neighbour disputes in halls or off-campus accommodation

- Complaints against the SU. If someone is involved in a dispute with the Students' Union or a member of staff, ASK cannot provide advice on that specific issue. However, we can continue to support them with unrelated matters.

This list is not exhaustive.

## Identifying Conflicts of Interest

Where the nature of an enquiry suggests a conflict of interest may arise, ASK takes the following steps:

- Clients are asked to provide details of any potential conflicts when completing the online booking form.
- Advisers check the other party's name against our case management records.
- If the other party has previously accessed ASK, we then assess whether the parties are in dispute about the same issue.

If no conflict of interest exists, both parties can be supported by ASK. If a conflict develops later, the Head of Student Experience has discretion to decide how the situation should be managed appropriately.

## Managing Conflicts of Interest

If a conflict of interest (or potential conflict) is identified and the parties are in dispute:

- ASK will provide advice and representation to the **first person** who accessed the service regarding that issue.
- The second party will not be able to receive support from ASK on that same issue. However, they may:
  - be sent general information about the issue,
  - be signposted to appropriate alternative support,
  - access ASK for advice and assistance on unrelated matters.

If ASK has already been advising both parties, the Head of Student Experience must be informed. In some cases, both parties may be referred to another agency for support.

If referral is not possible, both parties should be informed that a conflict of interest has been identified and that if the case goes further, e.g. to a hearing or to court, ASK will cease to act for both parties. Where this is likely, ASK will consider referral at the earliest opportunity.

## Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest

When we identify a conflict of interest, we will inform one party that we cannot act for them due to conflict of interest.

No further information will be shared. However, if that party is already aware of who they are in conflict with, this could lead them to infer that the other party has accessed ASK.

## Signposting when we cannot advise

If ASK cannot assist due to a conflict of interest, we will direct the individual to appropriate alternative support. This may include:

- Other services at Keele University or Keele SU (e.g. Student Services, Elected Officers)
- External, quality-assured advice services (e.g. Citizens Advice, Shelter, National Debtline)
- Staffordshire Students' Union Advice Centre, under the reciprocal arrangement. More information about this [agreement can be found on our website](#).

## Collusion

ASK operates an exception to this Conflict of Interest Policy in cases involving collusion. For full details, please see the Collusion and Conflict of Interest Policy.

Collusion is where an individual piece of work is prepared by more than one student. This could include working with another student too closely, copying someone's work, or willingly sharing your work.

In collusion cases, ASK may advise both parties where a potential conflict of interest exists, provided that:

- Each client is supported by a different adviser, with separate supervision arrangements. Advisers must not discuss their clients with each other.
- Both clients are informed that ASK is advising the other party, understand how this arrangement works, and explicitly agree to it. For this purpose only, confidentiality between the two cases is limited to allow this arrangement.

Where a case involves more than two parties, ASK will assess the situation on a case-by-case basis and aim to provide fair and impartial support wherever possible. However, if at any point our ability to remain impartial is compromised, we reserve the right to withdraw support from all parties involved.