

Counselling Service Business Process

PURPOSE

The purpose of this document is to describe the main procedures associated with the provision of services and activities of the Counselling Department.

RESPONSIBILITY

Overall clinical and administrative responsibility for this process is held by the Head of Counselling. The Head of Counselling is supported by a number of counsellors and administrative staff and the provision of services is provided by the collaborative input of all Counselling staff.

PROCEDURE

The Counselling Service (www.ul.ie/counselling/) is a professional psychological service for all undergraduate and postgraduate students to assist them with their journey through university life. Appointments are confidential, and the service works within the Code of Ethics and Practice of the Irish Association for University and College Counsellors.

The primary procedures associated with the delivery of the above services include:-

- A. Booking Appointments
- B. Drop-in Facility
- C. I-Grade Policy
- D. Child protection
- E. Students at risk.
- F. Record Keeping and Disposal

A. Booking Appointments

1. Student makes contact with the Counselling Department via telephone, email or by calling into the Counselling Office.
2. The Counselling Administrator:-
 - a. Assesses the urgency of the appointment requested.
 - b. Verifies where necessary that the student is registered on SI.
 - c. Invites student to present at the daily drop-in facility.
 - d. Maintains adequate provision to accommodate emergencies/urgent cases.

Responsibility for the above procedure lies with the Counselling Administrator. Detailed working guidelines associated with this activity are contained within the Counselling Operating Guidelines.

Counselling Service Business Process

B. Drop-in Facility

Students may seek an appointment with the Counselling Service by emailing or phoning the service or (preferred option) calling into Room CM072 during the daily drop-in times of 11:00–12:00 and 15:00–16:00. The purpose of this daily drop-in facility is to provide students with an opportunity to ask for help or information and address their problem at an early stage. The student is handed an intake pack which comprises a record card and consent form (on one sheet), an information sheet and a self-assessment instrument. In the rare event that the drop-in session is oversubscribed and a student drops in towards the end of the session, s/he may not be seen by a counsellor for an initial assessment there and then. At the very least, the student's name and contact details are taken and s/he is called back for assessment within 24 hours.

Having read the intake pack, signed the consent form and filled in the record card, the student is assessed by the staff member on duty. At the outset, the student is informed of the confidentiality terms and conditions, prior to disclosure of any personal details. During this brief session (10–15 minutes), the staff member asks the student to give an outline of his/her problem or inquiry. If it seems that counselling would be helpful, the student is offered a scheduled consultation appointment usually within 7 to 14 days. Should an appointment not be available, the student is put on a waiting list and given clear instructions as to when an appointment will be offered. This system of assessment ensures that all students are adequately catered for within the resources available and ensures that appointments are allocated in an organised manner. Due to the demands on the service, it is not possible to offer appointments to students outside of these arrangements, except in the case of an emergency.

Within normal working hours, spaces are reserved for emergency appointments during the daily drop-in times. When an emergency case (i.e. where the student is at risk) presents to the service, the case is given priority and the student is accorded due care until such time as the matter is resolved to our satisfaction. At times this will involve a staff member working over and above their allocated times.

A record is maintained at reception to record all enquiries by a student regarding accessing the service and this information is passed on to the relevant staff member for action. The student's name, ID number and contact number are taken for possible follow-up.

C. Child protection

The student counselling service has direct involvement with students who have been or are currently experiencing some form of abuse. In instances where it is clearly established that a child could presently be at risk as a result of what the counsellor has been told, the counsellor is obliged under statutory guidelines to inform the necessary authorities, in accordance with the child protection policy as laid down by the University.

Counselling Service Business Process

A comprehensive *proforma* is completed by the counsellor in all such instances and the Head of Counselling is duly notified.

D. Students at risk

A significant number of students will present to the Counselling with a high level of risk, specifically with regard to suicidal intent. In all such cases a rigorous screening takes place to establish the degree of risk, as well as identifying available supports and possible referral options. After due consideration, and in accordance with established professional practice, it may be considered prudent to breach confidentiality with the client and to inform family members of the concerns. A comprehensive report is completed and included on the students file in all instances of high risk and breaking of confidentiality.

E. I-Grade Policy

'I' grades are awarded in cases where the student has not completed all of the requirements for a module and has submitted certifiable evidence of medical and/or psychological illness or immediate family bereavement. 'I' grades are not recommended in response to a plea made in respect of pressure of academic work.

Students must submit satisfactory evidence to support the request for an 'I' grade. Such certification is valid only when it comes via the Student Health Centre, the Counselling Service or the Chaplaincy. The Head of counselling or his delegate determines what constitutes satisfactory evidence of psychological distress and may request additional clarification and/or certification if they deem it necessary. Where a certificate originates outside UL, the student concerned is required to submit the certificate to the Student Health Centre, Counselling Service or Chaplaincy in person unless the certificate clearly states the student is bed-bound. Certificates must be dated and, in the case of illness, include reference to the period of illness/incapacity and the nature of the illness and state that the student is not fit to sit examinations.

Students are required to complete the on-line application process for an I grade, this in turn is completed by the relevant counsellor on line and the application gets submitted.

Certificates must be presented within five working days of the relevant end-of-semester examinations in order to meet grading deadlines. Certificates received by post will not be accepted unless the student is bed-bound, which is clearly stated on the certificate. The relevant health service forwards properly completed certificates to the Student Academic Administration Officer.

The submission of a certificate does not guarantee the awarding of an 'I' grade. Requests for 'I' grades are considered by the University 'I' Grade Committee, which usually meets seven days after the last day of exams each semester. Following approval from the 'I' Grade Committee, the Student Academic Administration Office inserts an 'I' grade on the student's academic record.

Counselling Service Business Process

Students need to clear all 'I' grades no later than the annual repeat period following the award of the 'I' grade. A student who receives an 'I' grade should contact the faculty member responsible for the module immediately following the publication of the grade to determine how the outstanding requirements are to be completed. If the faculty member is unavailable, the student should contact the relevant head of department for a decision. Clearance grades will only be processed following the annual repeats.

Students who receive a second 'I' grade for the same module(s) in the annual repeats (up to a maximum of two modules in any one semester) will be permitted to clear the module(s) on a link-in and uncapped basis during the following academic year. Students who receive an 'I' grade for the first time in a module during the annual repeats will retain their original grade.

'I' grades are awarded to students who are considered unfit to sit their exams for physical or psychological reasons. There are very clear-cut instances of students being unfit to do exams, such as the death of a parent, acute psychotic breakdown, appendicitis or giving birth to a child during exam week. There are also clear-cut cases of students requesting but not meriting an 'I' grade, such as sleeping it out and missing an exam, being afraid of not doing well in the exam, the death of an aunt two weeks prior to exams or having a mild cough.

The difficulty lies in the area between both types of clear-cut scenarios, e.g. a student who is capable of sitting the exam seeks an 'I' grade because, due to circumstances, knows s/he will under-perform and therefore doesn't wish to risk sitting the exam. When a student falls into this in-between area, the professional concerned, on the understanding that such issues are not black-and-white, will use his/her professional judgment and discretion to determine the best strategy to adopt.

E. Record Keeping and Disposal

In-take chart

All students must complete an intake chart on engaging with the counselling service. This chart forms the basis of a hard copy record of the students presenting issues and on-going engagement with the service. All charts are kept in a central filing system, monitored by the office administrator. Individual counsellors may remove files while working with a client and will return the file once work is completed.

Computer Records

All records are maintained on Inform, a specialised computer package for student counselling services. Inform is security protected and is a standalone package that is not available outside of the service. Inform generates statistics on usage on an annual basis.

Counselling Service Business Process

Counselling records kept on computer are registered as being so kept with UL and under the Data Protection Act.

Client names are not entered into Inform in the interests of confidentiality and data protection. Instead, a coding system is used to identify clients. Students who refuse to give basic information about themselves or to allow data to be held on their file will not be seen by the service. This is for the mutual protection of both client and counsellor. Counsellors can keep minimal notes on Inform but are advised to keep more detailed notes on hard copy file if they so wish.

Case Notes

Each counsellor is expected to maintain case notes as a record of their on-going work with the student. Case notes should be as brief as possible, factual and to the point rather than opinion.

When writing the notes, it should be borne in mind that they may be read by the client. It should also be borne in mind that the notes may need to be used to make a case for the student at disciplinary committee level, etc. In addition, in the event that a counsellor is unable to see a client (e.g. through prolonged illness or a counsellor leaves the service), it should be possible for a colleague to pick up the case based on the case notes.

Case notes should be kept for a minimum of seven years, then shredded, burned or destroyed through the UL confidential waste system when no longer required.

Security of Records

The confidentiality of clients should be respected by always keeping records under lock and key. It is especially important to check Counselling Service desks on departure in the evening for any sensitive material.

Locked filing cabinets are provided in each office for holding records during term time. At the end of each academic year or as staff finish working with a student, these files are returned to the main office filing cabinet where they are held under lock and key. The key is held by the office administrator.

DOCUMENTATION

Documentation on all procedures can be accessed through the attached link. Some documentation is only available in hard copy and this is stored in the Head of Counselling's office.

RECORDS

All records created within the Counselling Department are stored in accordance with UL's Records Management and Retention Policy. [Records Management and Retention Policy](#)

PROCESS VERIFICATION

Evaluation of the Counselling Process effectiveness is carried out using internal audits. Changes to the process are put in place as required and as appropriate.

Counselling Service Business Process

REVISION HISTORY

Revision No.	Date	Approved by:	Details of Change	Process Owner
1	2 October 2013	D Aherne	<i>Initial Release</i>	D Aherne
			<i>Outline the key changes and reasons for the change in subsequent revisions.</i>	