

# STUDENT AND ACADEMIC SERVICES

## UNIVERSITY OF WESTMINSTER

### **COUNSELLING SERVICE: INFORMATION, AGREEMENT AND PRIVACY NOTICE**

All students who wish to receive support from the Counselling Service are asked to confirm they have read and consent to the Terms and Conditions and Privacy Statement outlined below. This agreement describes our services and responsibilities in accordance with applicable Data Protection and Privacy laws, including the Data Protection Act 1998 and the General Data Protection Regulation.

The Counselling Service offers confidential short-term individual counselling (up to 6 sessions), group counselling and mental health advice by a team of professional counsellors and a mental health advisor experienced in working with students from many different backgrounds. The type of support and number of sessions offered will be based on the professional assessment of the clinician.

Students come to the Counselling Service seeking help for a variety of reasons, including study difficulties, family and relationship problems, sexual identity issues, self-harm and suicidal thoughts, mental health difficulties and substance misuse.

The Service is open throughout the year, apart from scheduled University and Service closures and is available to all students fully enrolled at the University.

#### **Reception opening hours**

The reception is based at the Marylebone Campus and is open Mondays – Fridays, between 9.30am–4.30pm.

#### **Appointments**

The initial appointment(s) is to assess your needs and to see how the Counselling Service can be of help to you. As the Service is in great demand, it is important that you attend your appointments.

Due to a high number of unattended appointments, you need to be aware of our appointments policy:

**“We will try and offer an appointment that best fits a student’s stated availability but due to high demand that may not always be possible. If students cannot attend their assessment appointment, they will be offered one further appointment. If they do not attend or cancel 2**

**assessment appointments, they will not be offered a further appointment and will need to complete a new counselling service registration form if they require further help.”**

## **Appointment Cancellations**

If you are unable to attend an appointment, please let us know giving at least 48 hours' notice, by email [counselling@westminster.ac.uk](mailto:counselling@westminster.ac.uk) or telephone: 020 7911 5000 ext 66899. If you miss or cancel an appointment at short notice, this may still be regarded as one of your sessions and you may have to wait longer for another appointment. However, if the Service cancels, this will not affect the number of sessions offered, and the appointment will be rescheduled.

## **Privacy and Record Keeping**

In order to provide you with a professional service, the Counselling Service will keep a record of our communications and appointments with you. Our records will comprise the personal data that you provide to us in the Counselling Service Registration Form and any subsequent questionnaires, and notes made by our staff.

Occasionally we may request to record a session, for the training purposes of our staff. We will always ask your permission before doing this and fully support your right to refuse.

Data will be held securely (paper files held in locked cabinets, electronic files held on secure, university approved Drives), in accordance with data protection laws.

All University staff receive compulsory data protection training. The Counselling Service produces anonymised data for the purposes of service analysis, improvement, audit and research. Your data will be held by the Counselling Service for 6 years from the end of your contact with the Service and after that your personal data will be destroyed.

You have a right of access to the notes held in your record and to request that your records are amended or destroyed. If those notes contain references to other individuals, these may not be available to you as protection is also granted to third parties. If you wish to see your notes, you should email the Counselling Service Manager, giving two weeks' notice.

## **Confidentiality and Data Sharing**

Counsellors work to the British Association for Counselling 'Ethical Framework for Good Practice in Counselling and Psychotherapy'. ([www.bacp.co.uk/ethical\\_framework](http://www.bacp.co.uk/ethical_framework))

The content of your appointments is confidential to the Counselling Service. In line with their professional requirements, practitioners may discuss their work with a clinical supervisor external to the Service. The purpose of clinical supervision is to help the practitioner to reflect on their work.

We work closely with other University support services such as Disability, Accommodation and Advisers and use a co-ordinated approach in order to provide the best service to students.

Where necessary, practitioners within the Service may need to liaise with colleagues to discuss the best possible support. These discussions are specific, limited and with your consent.

Where a student's welfare or vulnerability is a cause for concern, their needs may be raised with the Head of Student Support and Residential Life, at the University's Co-ordinated Casework meetings or with key staff. Any information shared by the Counselling Service will be limited and with the student's welfare in mind and to ensure that students are supported in an integrated and holistic way.

We would only disclose your personal information, without your consent, under the following circumstances:

- a) If we have good reason to believe that you or someone else may be at serious risk of harm. Unless the situation is an emergency, or we think otherwise inappropriate, we will always try to discuss things with you and obtain your consent beforehand.
- b) We may be legally bound to disclose personal information on certain occasions e.g. under a Court Order, as part of safeguarding responsibilities and prevention of terrorism.

If you have any questions about confidentiality, please discuss this with your Counsellor/Mental Health Adviser.

There may be occasions when you ask us to pass your personal data within the university, eg for Mitigating Circumstances evidence; or to an external agency for purposes of referral or support, eg your doctor. We will always seek your specific consent to share information and agree the detail of any information to be shared.

Subject to the above exceptions we do not discuss students' personal information (including those relating to your attendance) with parents, partners, guardians or tutors unless we have your permission to do so.

## **Evaluation and Feedback**

In order to help monitor the effectiveness of our work, we may ask you to complete a questionnaire at the beginning and at the end of any support you are offered.

After your final appointment, we will normally send you an evaluation form which invites you to comment on your experience. We greatly value this feedback as it helps us improve our Service.

## **Complaints**

If you are dissatisfied with any aspect of the Service, we encourage you to discuss this in the first instance with the practitioner you have met with. You can also contact the Counselling Service Manager via [counselling@westminster.ac.uk](mailto:counselling@westminster.ac.uk) 020 7911 5000 ext 66899.

Hopefully the complaint can be resolved satisfactorily at this level. However, if you are still dissatisfied, you have the option of pursuing this further via the University Complaints procedure.

**Counselling Service Manager**  
**September 2021**