



UNIVERSITY
OF WOLLONGONG
AUSTRALIA

Student Advocacy Service - Terms of Reference

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The Student Advocacy Service (SAS) is a free, confidential service for currently enrolled students at UOW. The service consists of two Advocacy Officers who support and assist students through the process of making complaints and appeals, or responding to allegations.

In accordance with the Student Services, Amenities, Representation and Advocacy Guidelines made under the *Higher Education Support Act 2003 (Cth)*, the SAS provides independent information, advocacy and referral services for all students enrolled at the University of Wollongong (UOW) across a range of academic, procedural and administrative issues. These include, but are not limited to, issues relating to equity, discrimination, harassment, grievances, complaints, disputes, exclusion, discipline and misconduct, supervision, and unsatisfactory progress.

The SAS is also a point of contact for students who wish to discuss options regarding behaviour that threatens their own wellbeing or their academic and/or student experience or that of other students. The SAS can provide follow-up assistance with Academic and General Complaints, as well as support and advice at hearings and appeals regarding allegations of Academic and General Misconduct.

The SAS can provide a voice FOR UOW students.

The Student Advocacy Officers (SAOs) may also:

- travel to the satellite campuses (subject to their availability) for appointments with students or staff;
- visit local court, police station, hospital, tenancy service or other relevant services / providers with a student or to meet a student at these venues in cases where their studies are directly impacted by extenuating circumstances (subject to the Advocate's availability and discretion.)
- facilitate telephone conferences in the Advocate's Office between a student and an organisation, (i.e. Immigration Review Tribunal, Centrelink) where the students' circumstances directly affect their ability to continue to engage in their studies;
- work with key stakeholders of the UOW Campus Community to provide effective communication between students and staff, i.e. Accommodation Services, Student Support Services, Academic staff, Administrative staff.

The SAS approaches all cases with the intent of preparing a student with the best opportunity to have their case considered accurately and in a timely manner.

In cases where a student does not receive their desired outcome from a University process, the SAS will (where applicable) assist in connecting the student to further support services to help them manage their circumstances.

The SAS can inform relevant UOW stakeholders of systemic issues as they arise during the course of an investigation or review of a student's circumstances.

The SAS will abide by the principles of Privacy and Confidentiality in accordance with the relevant legislation.

The SAS has the discretion not to commence or to end further involvement in a case which is outside the scope of the SAS's role.

AUTHORITY

The Student Advocacy Officers are not 'decision makers' with regards to a student's complaint or appeal. Their role is to provide independent advice and support and to advocate on a student's behalf.

SAOs rely predominantly on the information provided to them by students. In cases where additional information is sought, the SAOs will seek permission from the student and will discuss the parameters around what information may be disclosed to and requested from others.

SAOs are available to provide moral support, referral, clarification, mediation or to liaise between relevant parties in a student's case.

SAOs may provide proof-reading of students' written complaint or appeals prior to submissions for ease of readability and to make sure that the relevant points have been addressed.

SAOs may assist with navigating the University's policies and procedures, or seeking clarification about the interpretation and application of these documents in relation to a student's case.

A key function of the SAS is to discuss available options to students and assist with the process of decision making, weighing up the possible consequences of their decisions and helping to identify factors within a student's circumstances that could be disclosed to a committee, to a Primary Investigation Officer or set out in a written appeal.

The ultimate decision to disclose information, or to decide on a course of action, remains with the student.

ACCOUNTABILITY

The Student Advocacy Service provides independent advice and support. It provides reports to and liaises with the UOW undergraduate and postgraduate student associations and provides an annual report to the University Council. The SAOs have line management responsibility to the Director of the Governance and Legal Division in the Chief Administrative Officer's portfolio..

The Student Advocacy Service provides an Annual Report of the previous year's caseload to the University Council. The report includes de-identified data based on case themes and issues by faculty and across various student cohorts (domestic, International, undergraduate, postgraduate). Trends, achievements and recommendations and also reported.

This de-identified data on student complaints and issues provided by the SAS is also used in the preparation of the University's Annual Report to the NSW Parliament.

Student Advocacy is a requirement of the Student Services, Amenities, Representation and Advocacy Guidelines (see above). Additionally, the National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018, Standard 6: Student Support Services, provides that the University is required to have an orientation program that provides overseas students with information about the support services available to them. The SAS is an integral part of these support services. Standard 10: Complaints and Appeals states that overseas students must have an opportunity to present their case at minimal or no cost, and be accompanied and assisted by a support person if necessary. The SAS provides free and independent support services for all students which meets this accountability.