

Monash Graduate Association Inc. Advocacy Charter

1. About the MGA

The Monash Graduate Association Inc. (MGA) is the representative body for all research and coursework graduate students enrolled through Monash University's Victorian campuses.

The MGA is an incorporated association pursuant to the Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012 (Vic). The MGA is a recognised representative association under the Monash University Regulations. The MGA receives a small portion of the funding collected by Monash University called the 'student services and amenities fee' (SSAF). The MGA enters into a funding agreement with Monash University, whose responsibility it is to ensure associations meet the legislative requirements under the Higher Education Legislation Amendment (Student Services and Amenities) Act 2011.

2. The Advocacy Service

All graduates at Monash University have rights in regard to the quality of their education and the way that they are treated by their faculty, the University and other students. In recognition of these rights and to support students navigating University processes, MGA provides independent, free and confidential advice to graduate students.

Students are encouraged to access the assistance of the MGA at any stage even if it is only to ask a question. The sooner advice is sought, the better. Consultations can take place face-to-face at either the MGA Clayton or Caulfield office, by telephone, by Zoom, or by email. The MGA Advocates may attend off campus locations from time-to-time to deliver advocacy services. While advocates will oversee most cases, during peak times, advocacy staff may be assisted by other case workers.

3. The Advocate Role

The role of the MGA Advocate is to:

- explain and guide graduates through the policies and procedures of the University;
- provide information and/or advice on any study related matter, whether academic or administrative in nature; and
- provide options and suggest solutions to help the graduate student achieve their desired outcomes.

The MGA Advocates do not act on behalf of graduate students. It is up to each individual student to decide whether to act on advice provided by MGA staff. The MGA does not have any coercive powers and as such cannot compel the University to act or not act in a particular way.

In complex cases, the Advocate will usually prepare a detailed letter(s) of advice to each student outlining their options. They may also accompany students at formal meetings and hearings with the University as a support person. In these cases, advocates do not speak on a student's behalf, but can answer student questions and observe the process. The Advocate does not usually attend meetings with lecturers or supervisors, although suggestions may be made to the student about how to approach the matter.

4. Accessing Advocacy Services

Any Monash graduate student can access MGA services. A graduate is a student enrolled in a course or study leading to an award of graduate certificate, graduate diploma, master's degree, professional doctorate or doctor of philosophy. Former students may also access MGA services for a period of six months post enrolment.

5. Scope of Services

Areas where the MGA can provide advocacy and support services include but are not limited to:

- special consideration;
- remission of debt and withdrawn grades;
- underloading and intermission;
- supervision;
- assessments and remarks;
- research milestones;
- removal from placement;
- formal complaints;
- course quality;
- fee payment plans;
- academic progress review;
- general or academic misconduct; and
- requests for welfare assistance.

The MGA cannot assist in the following circumstances:

- in matters unrelated to graduate study;
- where the internal decision-making process of the University has been exhausted;
- where students contact the Victorian Ombudsman after internal University proceedings have concluded;
- while the matter is still in the negotiation or informal stage, or is an academic matter; and
- in cases involving equity issues or harassment or bullying where the student seeking assistance is not accused of general misconduct.

6. Termination of Services

In select situations, the MGA Advocacy Service may terminate support for a graduate student, or refer students to a different advocate or service. This includes where:

- a relationship of trust cannot be achieved between the Advocate and student;
- the advocate cannot meet a level of service expected by a student;
- a conflict of interest is identified; or
- the student is found to have behaved inappropriately toward the advocate, such as through engaging in abusive or harassing behaviour.

7. Privacy

The MGA adheres to Victorian Privacy Principles which are embodied in the Privacy Regulations of the MGA. Student case information is treated as confidential and will only be disclosed to third parties at the student's request or with the student's consent. In the event that the Advocate or case worker holds a reasonable apprehension that the student is at serious risk of harming him/herself or a danger to others then the matter will be disclosed to the relevant authority without any prior warning to the student.

Case files are stored in a secure MGA digital database. Information is accessible among all advocates, especially in cases where an advocate becomes unavailable to continue supporting a student. An individual student may request to see the notes on their case file or obtain a copy of their digital file.

Anonymous and detailed examples of student issues may be used by MGA for training or lobbying purposes.

For more information, please also refer to the MGA:

- Information Handling Procedure
- Privacy Procedure

8. Complaints

Complaints about the quality of service should be addressed to the Advocacy Manager in their role as coordinator of the MGA advocacy service. Complaints may also be directed to the MGA Executive Officer, both at: mga-advocacy@monash.edu