

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. Accessing Advocacy Services

MGA is able to provide independent, free and confidential advice to graduate students.

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.

3. The Advocate Role

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. The MGA Advocates do not act on behalf of graduate students.

The role of the MGA Advocate is to help graduates navigate their way through the policies and procedures of the University and to provide information and/or advice on any study related matter, whether academic or administrative in nature. In complex cases, the Advocate will usually prepare a detailed letter(s) of advice to each student outlining their options.

Advocates deal with most cases, however during peak times may be assisted by other case workers. Consultations can take place face-to-face at either the MGA Clayton or Caulfield office, by telephone, by Zoom, or by email. Meetings are subject to any directives given by the Victorian Government, such as during the pandemic crisis disallowing face to face meetings. The MGA Advocates may attend off campus locations from time-to-time to deliver advocacy services.

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.

4. Scope of Services

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

- supervision;
- assessment;
- intellectual property;

- authorship;
- removal from placement;
- formal grievances;
- course quality;
- fee disputes;
- academic progress proceedings;
- general or academic misconduct proceedings;
- 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, 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;
- in the event that a relationship of trust cannot be achieved between the Advocate and student, the Advocate has the discretion to cease to support that student, in the same way a student may request to change Advocates or seek support from elsewhere;
- in cases involving equity issues or harassment or bullying where the student seeking assistance is not accused of general misconduct. In these cases, MGA will refer the students to the appropriate body.

MGA resources are limited. If the Advocate cannot meet a level of service expected by a student, then the Advocate may refer the student elsewhere and/or cease to support the student in matters. This may, for example, involve conflicts of interest.

It is entirely 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.

5. 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 hold 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.

Anonymous and detailed examples of student issues may be used by MGA for training or lobbying purposes. If the Advocate is unavailable and a student needs to see another Advocate then this Advocate will have access to the student's file. The file will include a brief summary of the student's matter and any advice given. The file may also include medical reports provided by the student.

Files will be kept in the MGA paperless data base, and if in hard copy then in the office of the Advocate or Advocates concerned. Email communications are accessed by password. An individual student may request to see the notes on their case file or obtain a copy of their file. The MGA reserves the right to charge a photocopying fee.

6. Complaints

Complaints about the handling of a case should be addressed to the Senior Advocate in her role as coordinator of the MGA advocacy service. Complaints may also be directed to the MGA Executive Officer, both at: mga-advocacy@monash.edu