

UCSA Model of Education Advocacy

Empowerment Advocacy for Student Members

There are many different types of advocacy eg best interest, brokerage advocacy and legal advocacy. The Education Advocacy service offered by the UCSA uses the empowerment advocacy approach.

Empowerment advocacy is based on the belief that it is better to support UCSA student members to uphold their own rights and resolve their own issues within the University of Canterbury academic policy, discipline and grievance processes than other forms of advocacy.

Empowerment is achieved by providing information to student members about their rights and the processes available to them to uphold their rights, and supporting them to achieve resolution of their concerns/issues.

Using empowerment requires the Education Advocate to assume the role of a facilitator – making it as easy as possible for the student member to pursue and resolve their concerns/issues regarding academic matters with advocacy support. The Education Advocate supports the student member and is not an impartial mediator, investigator, prosecutor or adjudicator. The Education Advocate will work on the instructions of the student member or their representative, rather than act on what they believe is the student member's best interests.

UCSA Education Advocate to empower consumers

1. *The UCSA advocate shall empower its student members by encouraging and assisting them to act on their own behalf to resolve issues and concerns.*

Advocates will use their best endeavours to assist consumers to self advocate to the greatest extent possible. This involves encouraging and assisting consumers to express their concerns, and to plan and take action to resolve their complaints or concern about issues related to a University of Canterbury academic matter.

Demonstrating the characteristics of the 'empowerment' model of advocacy in practice, ie advocacy is consumer focused and directed means the advocate:

- Is consumer focused and directed
- Works with, not for the consumer
- Undertakes only action specified by the consumer
- Encourages the consumer to participate in the complaint resolution processes to the level of his or her ability
- Ensures that the consumer is the instigator of actions over concerns or complaints about University of Canterbury processes
- Provides sufficient information for the consumer to make informed decisions and choices and decisions

- Provides assistance to consumers in taking action if he or she feels they need assistance
 - Supports and encourages consumer self advocacy
2. *The UCSA advocate should always act on behalf of a student member, and must ensure that they do not practice uninstructed advocacy.*

Sometimes student may be unwilling or unable to complain and may not give the advocate instructions. In other circumstances, student members may be simply be afraid to complain, for fear of future consequences or that their academic career will be compromised. It is inappropriate to provide advocacy or take action without the consumer's consent and active involvement. Students should be given full information about the options, processes and supports available to them to address their concerns through the University of Canterbury processes and make their own decisions on action to be taken. Students should not have pressure placed upon them to take any, or a particular action by Advocacy staff.

Low Level Resolution

3. *Wherever possible, the advocate will encourage the student to address their concerns/issues at the lowest appropriate level.*

The aim is to seek resolution by approaching, as appropriate:

- The lecturer concerned
- The course co-ordinator
- The HOD
- The Dean of the relevant Faculty
- The Dean of Post Graduate Studies

Approach to Support Provided to Students by the Education Advocate

4. *Activities undertaken by the Education Advocate to assist a student member to resolve their issues and concerns may include:*
- Assisting the student member eg by helping to obtain information from, and to communicate effectively with the relevant staff at the University of Canterbury and by giving them full information on the options available to them.
 - Supporting and empowering the student member eg by monitoring the student member's progress with resolving their concerns, affirming member decisions and actions where this is warranted, and suggesting other options for support/advice/information.
 - Representing students eg by acting on the student member's instructions, assisting with drafting letters with student input, making arrangements for meetings, and being a 'supportive presence' for consumers in meetings

with University of Canterbury staff. At all times, encouraging the student member to participate in the complaint resolution processes to the level of his or her ability and speak on their own behalf.

At all times, the student remains in control of the process and is responsible for making decisions about any action taken. At any time, the student may withdraw from the process or decide to pursue their issue alone.

5. *Advocacy Process*

The approach to be used by the Education Advocate with students with concerns is as follows:

- The student is asked to define the issues/concerns for them and what outcome they are seeking by coming to the advocacy service
- It is often helpful if students provide a written chronological account of events
- The advocacy service works with the student to identify a satisfactory and realistic outcome and the options for achieving that outcome
- Full information is given on the options and processes for the student to achieve their desired outcome and the support available to assist them to achieve the outcome through the Education Advocate and others.

Where the student's concern falls outside of the UCSA Education and Advocacy brief, ie academic issues, then the advocate should refer them to an appropriate service eg Student Health, Studylink, Community Law Centre etc

6. *Letters of Complaint*

- As part of their role in supporting a student to resolve issues of concern or make complaints, the advocate may assist with drafting letters (which may also include requests for information, the student's complaint or an outline of events) to other parties on the University of Canterbury Campus. At all times, any correspondence outlining individual student concerns or complaints or requests for information must be written from the student's perspective and be signed by the student complainant.

7. *The Education Advocate must report to the Support Services Manager, if any significant areas of concern arise, such as repeat complaints or those of a serious nature, involving departments or staff members.*

- Where there is a systems issue which arises, eg where several students report a matter of concern, this may be better reported through the Education Co-ordinator and the Class rep system to the Department concerned eg course requirements

- Repeated cases of a serious nature concerning a particular area of the University of Canterbury should be reported to the Support Services Manager.

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