

Advocacy: guidelines and procedure

The Open University recognises that there are times when it may be easier for a student to communicate with the University through the use of an advocate. Individuals requiring advocates are likely to be students with disabilities such as students with asperger's syndrome, communication difficulties or students who have insufficient confidence in expressing themselves. They may also be students who are under 18 years of age.

This document outlines the guidelines and the procedure to follow.

What is advocacy?

Advocacy is taking action to help people say what they want, secure their rights, represent their interests and obtain services they need.

Advocates and advocacy schemes work in partnership with the people they support. Advocacy promotes social inclusion, equality and social justice.

www.actionforadvocacy.org.uk/

Legal representation

This procedure is not for the purposes of appointing a representative to act for the student in a legal capacity. An appointed advocate will not be permitted to enter into contracts with the University on behalf of the student.

Who are advocates?

An advocate is any person who is appointed by the student to speak and/or otherwise act on their behalf. An advocate could, for example, be a relative, a friend, a support worker employed by the student or a member of an advocacy organisation. An advocate's role is to empower students to communicate independently and make informed decisions regarding their studies. Advocates serve a role distinct from that of a learning support tutor.

Procedure

What the student must do:

- The student must appoint a named advocate.
- The student must complete and sign the attached consent form and return it to their student support team. By signing and returning the form the student gives their consent to the University to communicate with their appointed advocate including disclosing to the advocate and/or receiving from the advocate personal data and/or sensitive personal data relating to the student for identified purposes. You can access a copy of the University's data protection policy on our website at www.open.ac.uk/students/charter/essential-documents.

Disability Advisory Services

The Open University is incorporated by Royal Charter (RC 000391), an exempt charity in England & Wales and a charity registered in Scotland (SC 038302). The Open University is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority in relation to its secondary activity of credit broking.

- The student is responsible for passing communications from the University to their advocate. A student may continue to contact the University whilst using an advocate. The student must inform the University in writing if they do not wish the University to communicate with the advocate at any time.
- The student must accept responsibility for ensuring that the advocate conforms to the University's guidelines regarding appropriate communication and behaviour as outlined in the University's student policy documents at www.open.ac.uk/students/charter/essential-documents.

What the University must do:

- The University will treat communication with an advocate in the same way as communicating with all students.
- The University will only communicate with the advocate and / or the student.
- The University will respect the concerns of the student however unusual they may be.
- The University will record any communication between the advocate and the University in our customer relationship management system (VOICE) in exactly the same way as for all students.
- The University reserves its right not to communicate with an advocate who fails to conform to the University's student policy documents at www.open.ac.uk/students/charter/essential-documents.

The University's expectations of the advocate are that they should:

- Raise any issues, as directed by the student relating to the student's studies.
- Only raise issues as directed by the student.
- Only speak to staff as agreed by the student.
- Represent accurately the student's concern.
- Accurately report back to the student the response of the University.
- Remain objective at all times and treat all individuals with respect.
- Agree clear guidelines with the student in relation to confidentiality.
- Conform to the University's student policy documents at www.open.ac.uk/students/charter/essential-documents.

To tell the University that you have appointed an advocate to communicate with us on your behalf, please complete the attached authorisation form and send it to your student support team – their contact details are in the Help Centre

Authority for an appointed advocate to communicate with The Open University (OU) on behalf of a student ¹

To be completed by the student

Name:

OU Personal Identifier:

Email address:

I authorise The OU to communicate with the person named below as my advocate and to disclose to and/or receive from them my personal data and/or sensitive personal data.

Authorisation valid until:

I understand that you will treat the information I have provided on this form as confidential, and will pass it on to OU staff and the University's agents, as appropriate, for the purpose of providing me with services and facilities as an OU student. I also understand that you may use the information as a basis for inviting me to take part in research unless I've already told the University (on my registration agreement) that I do not want to be contacted. I give you permission to process the information for this purpose

Student's signature:

Date:

To be completed by the student's advocate:

Name:

Address:

Email address:

Telephone number daytime

Evening:

Professional position/relationship to student:

I agree to be the contact point for the above named student and to act as their appointed advocate for the above purposes during his/her studies with the OU until the date:

I agree to be governed by the OU's student policy documents at www.open.ac.uk/students/charter/essential-documents.²

Advocate's signature:

Date:

Please return the signed and completed form to the student support team – their contact details are in the Help Centre.

¹ The University will only use this information to contact an advocate in connection with the above named person's studies with The Open University.

² It is the student's responsibility to inform the advocate of The Open University's policy, procedures and guidelines.