# Open College of the Arts Advocacy Guidelines and Procedure

OCA recognises that there are times when it may be easier for a student to communicate through the use of an advocate. Individuals requiring advocates are likely to be students with disabilities such as Asperger’s syndrome, students with communication difficulties, students who have insufficient confidence or who have difficulty expressing themselves and students who are under 18 years of age.

Here we outline the guidelines for working with an advocate and the procedure to appoint an advocate.

## What is advocacy?

In the context of OCA, advocacy is defined as working in partnership with a student to help them:

* express their views
* communicate effectively
* understand complex information
* secure their rights
* represent their interests
* obtain the support and services the student needs

## Who are advocates?

An advocate is any person *o*fficially appointed by the student to speak and/or otherwise act on their behalf in dealing with OCA. An advocate could be a relative, a friend, a support worker/non-medical helper, or a member of an advocacy organisation ([www.actionforadvocacy.org.uk](http://www.actionforadvocacy.org.uk)). The advocate’s role is to empower the student to communicate independently and make informed decisions regarding their studies.

## Procedure

OCA will treat communication with an advocate in the same way as communicating with all students and will only communicate with the named advocate and/or the student. OCA will respect all concerns of the student raised by the advocate on behalf of the student, making an electronic record of all communication between the advocate and OCA, in exactly the same way as it does for all students. OCA reserves the right not to communicate with an advocate who fails to conform to OCA’s policies and procedures as outlined in the Student Regulations.

## Guidance for students

* the student must appoint a named advocate by completing and signing the attached form and forwarding it to Student Services;
* by signing and returning the form the student gives their consent for OCA 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’s studies;
* the student is responsible for forwarding communications from OCA to their advocate;
* a student may continue to contact OCA whilst using an advocate;
* the student may revoke their advocate’s authority to communicate with OCA at any time, in writing only. Verbal requests to revoke an advocate’s authority will be noted, but not acted upon until a written request is received;
* the student must accept responsibility for ensuring that the advocate conforms to OCA’s guidelines regarding appropriate communication and behaviour as outlined in the Student Regulations.

## **Guidance for advocates**

The advocate should:

* agree with the student, in advance, clear guidelines in relation to confidentiality;
* raise any issues as directed by the student, relating to the student’s studies in a timely manner
* only raise issues as directed by the student
* only speak to OCA as agreed by the student
* accurately represent the student’s concern
* accurately report OCA’s response back to the student
* remain objective at all times
* treat all OCA staff with respect
* conform to OCA’s Student Regulations

To inform OCA that you have appointed an advocate to communicate with us on your behalf, please contact Learner Support by email at [learnersupport@oca.ac.uk](about:blank) or by post to OCA, The Michael Young Arts Centre, Redbrook Business Park, Wilthorpe Road, Barnsley, S75 1JN for an **Advocate Authorisation Form**, which should be returned via email or by post.

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