



# **Sydney University Postgraduate Representative Association (SUPRA) Postgraduate Advocate and Policy Officer Procedures**

---

## **A. Preamble**

### **Name of Procedures**

These are the Sydney University Postgraduate Representative Association (SUPRA) Postgraduate Advocate and Policy Officer Procedures.

### **Commencement**

These procedures commenced on 15 August 2013.

### **Procedures are binding**

These procedures bind SUPRA, its staff and members.

### **Statement of intent**

These procedures:

- a) support the SUPRA Constitution ('the Constitution') and the SUPRA Enterprise Agreement in force at the time ('the SUPRA EA'), and shall not be interpreted so as to contravene either the Constitution or the SUPRA EA.
- b) should be read in conjunction with the SUPRA Safer Spaces Policy and the other policies in the SUPRA Policy Manual which cover specific areas of personal and professional conduct.
- c) should also be read in conjunction with the duty statements of staff employed as caseworkers.
- d) cover the operation of the postgraduate advocacy service.

## **B. Procedures**

### **1. Definitions**

- 1.1 The definitions set out in the Constitution, the SUPRA EA, the SUPRA Safer Spaces Policy, and the SUPRA Postgraduate Advocate and Policy Officer Policy shall apply to these procedures.

### **2. Scope of Service**

- 2.1 Caseworkers will provide:
- a) advice relevant to the matter presented by a student client and in accordance with the University's policies and procedures, or government legislation;
  - b) review of and suggestions on draft letters written by a student client;
  - c) representation or advocacy, in person or in writing, to the University or external services, on behalf of and with the written consent of the student client, as determined by the caseworker to be the best course of action;
  - d) attendance as support to the student client at meetings with the University or externally, as determined by the caseworker to be the best course of action; or
  - e) referral to other services or parts of SUPRA, the University, or to community or private practice services known to SUPRA.
- 2.2 Caseworkers will not:
- a) provide legal advice or assistance;
  - b) provide counselling; or
  - c) draft letters or applications, or contact the University or external services on behalf of a student where it is within the student's capacity.
- 2.3 Caseworkers must refer students whose needs, requests, issues, disputes, or grievances are beyond the caseworker's scope of practice or training to an appropriate service.

### **3. Development of Knowledge**

- 3.1 Caseworkers will receive induction and basic training regarding the service and the University before commencing casework and will receive ongoing professional development.
- 3.2 Caseworkers are expected to participate in education and training on issues that will enhance their advocacy and case work skills, including, but not limited to:
  - a) University policies and procedures;
  - b) sector-wide changes and trends;
  - c) advocacy and conflict resolution skills; and
  - d) welfare issues that may affect students.
- 3.3 Caseworkers are also expected to continue the development of their own knowledge and practice skills by maintaining and participating in networking within the University, and with other tertiary student and relevant community organisations.
- 3.4 In accordance with the SUPRA EA, caseworkers will participate in annual performance development reviews to identify additional professional development opportunities.

### **4. Intake**

- 4.1 Intake refers to the initial contact for assistance by a student, whether it is by drop-in to the service, via phone, via e-mail, or by approach at outreach or other SUPRA events.
- 4.2 Appointments are to be made by relevant administrative staff or caseworkers.
- 4.3 Students will be required to provide their identity and contact details to become SUPRA members in order to access ongoing service from a caseworker.
- 4.4 Students who require crisis assistance and choose to withhold their identity or contact details may access emergency casework assistance only at the discretion of the casework coordinator.
- 4.5 If a student requests a preference for a specific caseworker based on gender, disability/ies, ethnicity or culture, or other intersectional experience, every effort will be made to accommodate that request.
- 4.6 Requests for assistance from other than current students will be considered by the casework coordinator on a case by case basis.

- 4.7 All initial contact enquiries will be responded to within two (2) working days of their receipt by the caseworker, where possible.
- 4.8 Caseworkers will rotate 'on-call' days, so there is always a caseworker available to assist any student during designated on-call times.
- 4.9 If a caseworker is unable to take on any more cases, they will arrange with the casework coordinator to refer incoming students to another caseworker.

## **5. Record Keeping**

- 5.1 Caseworkers should record case notes in an impartial and accurate manner taking care to:
  - a) report only essential and relevant details;
  - b) not use emotive or derogatory language;
  - c) acknowledge subjective opinions; and
  - d) protect the privacy of all those involved.
- 5.2 Case notes should include:
  - a) date of contact and/or appointment;
  - b) form of contact (e.g., Drop In or appointment in person, by phone or Zoom);
  - c) relevant information provided by the student and the advice provided to the student at the appointment;
  - d) details of advice provided, casework and/or advocacy resolution, and referral if applicable.
- 5.3 Case notes and relevant documents must be kept in a case file in a neat and chronological order.
- 5.4 Caseworkers should enter consultations and relevant case comments including outcome where known, in the service's digital database.
- 5.5 Where a student's case file is required to be passed on to another organisation only relevant information shall be made available, and this will only be done with:
  - a) the written permission of the student; and
  - b) the approval of the casework coordinator.
- 5.6 Case files must be stored:
  - a) in a secure cabinet or secure storage area if a hard copy file; or
  - b) on a password protected computer or on a SUPRA server if a soft copy file.

- 5.7 Closed case files will be archived and kept by SUPRA for a period of seven (7) years.
- 5.8 After a period of seven (7) years archived paper records will be destroyed and related computer records will be deleted.
- 5.9 Students have the right to view their own case file.

## **6. Confidentiality**

- 6.1 Caseworkers must not divulge identifying personal and private information about a student case unless:
  - a) the student or their legal representative gives written permission for that information to be released;
  - b) the release of information will protect people from harm; or
  - c) it is legally required that the information be released.
- 6.2 Caseworkers must consult with the casework coordinator prior to disclosing information pursuant to subclause 6.1 of these procedures.
- 6.3 All students accessing the service have the right to trust the privacy and confidentiality of their information and to trust the responsible use of their information. This involves:
  - a) determining what information and to whom the person consents their information be released to; and
  - b) treating information obtained from relatives or friends of students in the same manner as information obtained by the person themselves.

## **7. Communication**

- 7.1 Without breaching the confidentiality requirements of clause 6 of these procedures, caseworkers will regularly communicate issues and trends arising out of casework to Council and key stakeholders. This communication will occur in:
  - a) regular briefings between caseworkers and student representatives participating in university committees;
  - b) staff reports to Council;
  - c) communication with members on broader issues through publications and the SUPRA website; and
  - d) formal reports and funding applications to the University.

## **8. Case Management**

- 8.1 Caseworkers should reasonably anticipate the termination or interruption of services to student clients (e.g., if the caseworker is leaving the position, taking leave or changes working hours) and notify the student appropriately.
- 8.2 The caseworker will arrange the transfer, referral, or continuation of services on behalf of the student.

## **9. Case Closure**

- 9.1 Before closing a case the caseworker will arrange for any post-casework support as necessary and provide appropriate referrals.
- 9.2 The caseworker will be responsible for closing the file.

## **10. Termination of Service**

- 10.1 In special circumstances, it may not be appropriate for a caseworker to continue assisting a student in a particular matter. These circumstances may include, but are not limited to, situations where:
  - a) the student's matter is beyond the capacity of the caseworker's expertise and authority;
  - b) the caseworker feels all reasonable avenues to assist the student have been pursued, and/or the caseworker's advice on the particular matter has been exhausted;
  - c) the student has been adequately advised on a matter but, as is their right and at their discretion, does not wish to follow the advice;
  - d) the student has behaved inappropriately and/or engaged in conduct that in the view of the caseworker has, or could reasonably be considered a risk to the health and safety of any employees covered by the SUPRA EA or postgraduate students;
  - e) the student has failed to provide information necessary to pursue the case;
  - f) the student is no longer a postgraduate student at the University;
  - g) the caseworker is aware that providing assistance to the student on

a particular matter may present a conflict of interest for the caseworker; or

- h) the student is currently receiving primary advice and advocacy on the particular matter from another professional service, because this could:
  - i) lead to the caseworker providing parallel advice that may conflict with the advice being provided by that service: and
  - ii) be considered an unfair or unnecessary use of SUPRA's resources.
- 10.2 Any caseworker wishing to terminate service should discuss the matter with the casework coordinator.
- 10.3 The casework coordinator will inform the student of the termination of service and advise them of the reasons and their right to a review of the decision.
- 10.4 Where the termination results from inappropriate student conduct, the casework coordinator will inform SUPRA administration and the President of this decision.

## **11. Review of Decision to Terminate Service**

- 11.1 A student may seek review of a decision to terminate service in accordance with the process outlined under clause 14 of these procedures.

## **12. Feedback from Student Clients**

- 12.1 At least twice each calendar year, the casework coordinator will administer a random survey of recent student clients to monitor client satisfaction and seek suggestions on how to improve the service.

## **13. Debriefing**

- 13.1 SUPRA shall ensure that all caseworkers are given the opportunity to debrief.
- 13.2 Debriefing for caseworkers shall occur in a safe and confidential place.
- 13.3 A caseworker can debrief with the casework coordinator or a colleague within SUPRA, or with an appropriate staff member from another

relevant organisation.

- 13.4 All caseworkers have access to, and are encouraged to use, confidential external professional supervision services.
- 13.5 All debriefing sessions shall be confidential and ensure that the privacy and rights of students are upheld and protected.

## **14. Complaints**

- 14.1 SUPRA recognises the right of all students to make a complaint if they have reason to be dissatisfied with the service.
- 14.2 SUPRA is committed to:
  - a) treating the complaint seriously;
  - b) dealing with the matter promptly; and
  - c) maintaining the privacy and rights of all individuals concerned.
- 14.3 Where a student has a complaint against a caseworker or the casework service they should contact the casework coordinator by email, setting out details of the complaint.
- 14.4 Where a student is seeking review of a decision to terminate service they should contact the casework coordinator by email, providing reasons why they disagree with the decision.
- 14.5 Where a student contacts the casework coordinator as set out in subclauses 14.4 and 14.5 of these procedures, the casework coordinator will investigate the matter or consider the arguments provided by the student and respond by email, within two (2) weeks where possible.
- 14.6 A student may write to the President who will, at their discretion, review the matter and respond to the student by email, within two (2) weeks where possible.
- 14.7 Where a student writes to the President they may be required to provide a release of their confidential information to enable the President to make an informed decision.
- 14.8 In response to a complaint or review of termination of service, the casework coordinator shall recommend appropriate action which may include, but is not limited to, one or more of the following:
  - a) referring the student to a caseworker not involved with the matter;
  - b) making an appropriate referral; or
  - c) taking no further action about the matter.
- 14.9 A student, caseworker, or casework coordinator has the right to refer



the matter for consideration by Council *in camera*.

- 14.10 Where a matter is referred to Council all parties must make all submissions in writing.
  - 14.11 Copies of all documents relating to the complaint must be retained by the casework coordinator in a separate file.
-

## NOTES

### **SUPRA Postgraduate Advocate and Policy Officer Procedures**

Date ratified by Council: 15 August 2013

Date commenced: 15 August 2013

Date last amended: 28 October 2021

Administrator: Casework coordinator, SUPRA

Review date: 28 October 2023

### **Amendment History**

#### **Name change:**

These procedures were previously incorporated in the SUPRA Student Advice and Advocacy Officer Policy 2013.

#### **Dates amended:**

1. 28 October 2021