

## SPSO decision report

**Case:** 201805182, University of St Andrews  
**Sector:** Universities  
**Subject:** Communication / staff attitude / dignity / confidentiality  
**Decision:** upheld, recommendations

### Summary

C complained about the way that the university handled their complaint.

We found that the university did not communicate clearly with C regarding the procedure being used to investigate their complaint. We also found that the university failed to adhere to their Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP) and the Model Complaints Handling Procedure (MCHP) when determining that all of C's complaints should not be considered as a complaint under the CHP. As a result of this, C was not kept updated or given a timescale for when the investigation into their complaint was expected to conclude, there was a significant delay of nine months in C receiving a response to their complaint, C was not kept updated with the reasons for the delay in issuing the complaint response and was not provided with a revised timescale. C was also told that they could not approach us to consider their complaint and they were not signposted to this office.

We also found that the university did not respond to the complaints C raised in writing about how the investigation was carried out and that the university's CHP states that complainants will be expected to complete the appropriate complaint form for complaints considered at investigation stage. This is not a requirement of the MCHP.

Therefore, we upheld C's complaint.

### Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Apologise to C for failing to communicate clearly with C regarding the procedure being used to investigate their complaint, failing to adhere to their CHP and the MCHP when determining that all of C's complaints should not be considered as a complaint under the CHP, not keeping C updated or providing a revised timescale for when the investigation into their complaint was expected to conclude, failing to respond to C's written complaints, the significant delay in responding to C's complaint, not keeping C updated regarding the reasons for the delay in issuing the complaint response and not providing them with a timescale for when they could expect a response, telling C that they could not approach this office to consider their complaint and not signposting C to this office in the complaint response. The apology should meet the standards set out in the SPSO guidelines on apology available at [www.spsso.org.uk/information-leaflets](http://www.spsso.org.uk/information-leaflets).

In relation to complaints handling, we recommended:

- The necessary systems should be in place to ensure that complaints are handled in line with the university's CHP and the MCHP and that all staff responsible for dealing with complaints should be aware of their responsibilities in this respect.
- The university's CHP should reflect the MCHP.

We have asked the organisation to provide us with evidence that they have implemented the recommendations we have made on this case by the deadline we set.