

SPSO decision report

Case: 201104623, Queen Margaret University
Sector: further and higher education
Subject: teaching and supervision
Outcome: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

Ms C complained that the university did not follow their regulations in the way they handled her PhD programme. She also complained that when she appealed against being de-registered from the programme, the university failed to respond reasonably to her appeals.

The particular issues which Ms C complained about related to the way in which the university supported her with difficulties she encountered with her research, including the loss of samples and a change in blood sampling techniques. She also complained that they had not provided her with sufficient written feedback on assessments she completed for the course. When she declined to meet with staff on several occasions until they provided her with information in writing, the university started to invoke procedures for de-regulation. Ms C was unsuccessful in her appeals against her de-registration.

We upheld the complaint about the way the university handled the PhD programme. Our investigation identified failings with the way in which the university provided feedback to Ms C following her assessments. Feedback was delayed, insufficient in detail, and not always in writing. We also identified issues with the sharing of other information about the conduct of research. In relation to the de-registration, our investigation found that the regulations had not been followed; insufficient notice was given of the situation, and this was followed by delays in providing responses to Ms C's appeals. However, we found that the content of the responses provided by the university was reasonable.

Recommendations

We recommended that the university:

- remind all staff of the obligation to follow through procedures in relation to any future cases of de-registration;
- review the way in which they communicate with students to ensure they provide consistent written feedback and communications, particularly where there are concerns over research methodology; and
- apologise to Ms C for any confusion caused by the irregularities in how the early stages of the de-registration process was handled.