

SPSO decision report

Case: 201201566, Queen Margaret University
Sector: further and higher education
Subject: policy/administration
Outcome: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr C complained on behalf of his son (Mr A) who has Asperger's (a form of autism, in which people may find difficulty in social relationships and in communicating), that university staff had not been made sufficiently aware of his needs as a disabled student. Mr C told us that his son's disability was 'hidden', in that his condition was not obvious to those who met him. We agreed that there were some shortcomings in relation to Mr A's individual learning plan (ILP) which was not regularly updated or reviewed according to the university's policy.

We did not find evidence to support Mr C's complaints that requests for additional clinical support and for a change of supervisor had been unreasonably refused. However, Mr C also complained that his son was invited to a meeting without making its purpose clear in advance, and without inviting him to bring along a supporter or advocate. We agreed that Mr A should have been invited to bring somebody with him, particularly as his ILP identified that in difficult situations he was prone to anxiety which could overwhelm him. We also found the outcomes of meetings between the university and Mr A were not adequately recorded. This was particularly important as he had an identified need to record and confirm verbal discussions.

Recommendations

We recommended that the university:

- arrange for a programme of staff training to raise awareness of hidden disabilities and their impacts;
- review the procedures related to the review and updating of individual learning plans (ILPs);
- make greater use of notes to record discussions, issues, changes, decisions and update ILPs, and copy for any student with any additional support needs;
- ensure that staff pay greater attention to the detail of the ILP when dealing with students with additional support needs; and
- use email to confirm arrangements for students with additional support needs arising from hidden disabilities.