

SPSO decision report

Case: 201405612, Queen Margaret University
Sector: further and higher education
Subject: communication staff attitude dignity and confidentiality
Outcome: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr C enrolled as a student on a postgraduate course at the university. He complained that a lecturer had been dismissive of an enquiry he made during a class, which caused him to feel bullied. Mr C was dissatisfied with the university's investigation into his complaint. He said the university had unreasonably failed to consider all relevant evidence. This included a failure to interview students who were present when the alleged bullying occurred, and a failure to obtain an audio recording of the class (which was available). Mr C left the university and received a full refund of his course fees.

Our investigation found that the university had addressed Mr C's complaint about being bullied with the lecturer concerned. However, given the serious nature of the allegation, and in the interests of fairness to both Mr C and the lecturer, we considered that the university should have interviewed other students who were present. We also considered that, for the purposes of determining Mr C's complaint, consideration should have been given to reviewing the audio recording. We found the university had unreasonably failed to consider all relevant evidence and so we upheld this part of Mr C's complaint.

Mr C also complained that the university did not have suitable policies and procedures in place for managing his allegation of bullying. Although the university did not have a specific bullying policy for students, we were satisfied that they had a number of policies and procedures in place which dealt with allegations of bullying made by students. Therefore, we did not uphold this complaint.

As the university has a specific harassment and bullying policy and procedure in place for their employees, we recommended that they give consideration to introducing such a policy and procedure for students.

Recommendations

We recommended that the university:

- apologise to Mr C for failing to undertake a reasonable investigation of his complaint;
- ensure the findings of our investigation are fed back to relevant staff; and
- give consideration to introducing a specific harassment and bullying policy and procedure for students.