

SPSO decision report

Case: 201602065, University of Glasgow
Sector: further and higher education
Subject: academic appeal/exam results/degree classification
Decision: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

Miss C complained that the university failed to advise her, and other students, that the criteria for progression to honours may change. She said this was not mentioned in the pre-course open day material or in the year one student handbook which advised of the progression requirements at that time. The progression requirements were changed when she started second year and she did not achieve the required progression results at the end of second year to allow her to progress to honours. She was unhappy that she had not been told that progression grades could change, and she felt that changes to student numbers had required the school to amend the criteria upwards, which she felt was unfair. She submitted an appeal on these grounds and also on the grounds that personal circumstances had affected her studies. Her appeal was rejected. She also submitted a complaint about aspects of the course which was also rejected. As she was unhappy with this, and with the level of support provided to her by the university, she approached us.

We considered the background information and could find no specific evidence to suggest that Miss C had been informed that the progression criteria could change from year to year. Although we noted a caveat in the student handbook advising that information in the handbook was subject to change and could not be guaranteed to be up-to-date, we felt that this was not sufficient to fully inform students. We felt that the information provided to students, both at the pre-course stage and post-enrolment, was not sufficient. For this reason, we upheld this aspect of the complaint. However, we were satisfied that the university was entitled to change the progression criteria and we were not critical on this point.

We were also satisfied that the university made clear how students could access support and we noted the support given to Miss C following the notification of her results. We considered the university's handling of Miss C's appeal and were satisfied that they had addressed the issues she had raised and did so within the time frame required by their appeals process. We were also satisfied with the way the university had dealt with her subsequent complaint.

Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Apologise to Miss C for failing to make it clear to students at both pre-course stage and on enrolment that progression criteria to honours can change. This apology should comply with SPSO guidelines on making an apology, available at www.spsso.org.uk/leaflets-and-guidance.

What we said should change to put things right in future:

- A review of the literature used at pre-course open days and the course handbook should be carried out to ensure that they make clear that progression to honours is not guaranteed. The literature should make clear that progression depends on meeting the required progression criteria and that the criteria can change from year to year, including during the course of the degree.

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.