

SPSO decision report



Case: 201701825, University of the West of Scotland
Sector: universities
Subject: policy / administration
Decision: upheld, recommendations

Summary

Ms C complained that the university failed to follow their procedures correctly when they decided that she should be removed from a course due to her lack of progress.

We found that staff had made reasonable attempts to assist Ms C with determining a project topic and identifying a supervisor. However, the university were unable to provide evidence that their mitigation process had been followed appropriately when Ms C made a mitigation claim. Their records in relation to the decision that she should be removed from the course were also inadequate and there was no evidence of her supervisor's view on whether she had made sufficient progress. Therefore, we upheld this aspect of Ms C's complaint.

Ms C also complained that the university had failed to follow their appeals and complaints procedures in response to her correspondence on the matter.

We found that the university's response to Ms C's appeal contained inaccurate information. They had also failed to respond to her correspondence in line with their complaints handling procedure. Whilst the university had told Ms C that staff had reported that they had many meetings with her to discuss the matters she had raised, there were no records of these meetings. We upheld this aspect of Ms C's complaint.

Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Apologise to Ms C for failing to provide information that they followed their mitigation process, including inaccurate information in their appeal response, failing to respond to Ms C's correspondence under their complaints handling procedure and failing to make a record of meetings. The apology should meet the standards set out in the SPSO guidelines on apology available at www.spsso.org.uk/leaflets-and-guidance.
- Obtain a written statement from the supervisor in relation to Ms C's progress at that time and then decide if any further action needs to be taken in relation to the matter.

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

- Mitigation claims should be dealt with in line with the university's mitigation process.
- The university should be able to demonstrate administratively through clear records that the decision to remove a student from a course is made appropriately.
- The university should ensure that correspondence in relation to appeals is accurate.

In relation to complaints handling, we recommended:

- Complaints should be dealt with in accordance with the university's complaints handling procedure.
- Where meetings are held to provide an answer to concerns raised by students, an appropriate record

should be made.

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.