

SPSO decision report

Case: 201900614, University of Glasgow
Sector: Universities
Subject: special needs - assessment and provision
Decision: upheld, recommendations

Summary

C complained on behalf of their relative (A), a student at the university. A is blind and has arrangements in place to digitise course materials. A attended a law fair hosted by the university to allow students to meet prospective employers. A received a number of leaflets from law firms present and submitted these to the university for digitisation. Having not received any response to this request, C complained to the university, who informed them some months after the initial request that they did not consider responsibility to digitise the materials lay with them and that instead it was the responsibility of the law firms who provided them. They returned the leaflets around six months after initially receiving them. C complained to us that the university had mishandled the request for digitisation due to delay and refusal to accept responsibility. C said that, due to the time that had passed, A had missed out on internship opportunities detailed in the leaflets.

We concluded that the question of responsibility for providing the materials in an accessible format was a complex one, which could likely only be resolved through the courts. Regardless, we considered that there had been an unreasonable delay in handling the request and returning the leaflets. As such we upheld the complaint.

We also identified that the university had failed to reasonably handle C's complaints about the matter, as they did not adhere to the timescales for complaints and ultimately refused to investigate the matter fully.

Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Apologise to C and A for failing to respond within a reasonable timeframe and for mishandling C's complaints. The apology should meet the standards set out in the SPSO guidelines on apology available at www.spsso.org.uk/information-leaflets.

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

- Where the university do not consider they are responsible for digitisation of materials, the student requesting this should be made aware and the materials in question should be promptly returned.

In relation to complaints handling, we recommended:

- All complaints should be processed in line with the requirements of the Model Complaints Handling Procedure.

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.