

SPSO decision summary

Case ref: 201000292
Sector: further and Higher Education
Body: University of Aberdeen
Subject: academic appeal/exam results/degree classification
Outcome: partly upheld, recommendation

Summary

Mr C was a student at the University. When he was awarded his degree he did not receive the classification to which he thought he was entitled. He complained that the University did not follow their procedure for classification of his degree, failed to follow their appeals process, with excessive delay in the handling of his academic appeal, and failed to answer his questions about how the marking scheme was applied in his case.

We cannot consider issues about academic judgment, so we cannot comment on whether a degree was awarded at the correct level. We can, however, look at whether or not they followed the proper procedure. In Mr C's case, the University acknowledged that their explanation about calculating final awards in the relevant handbook was not as clear as it could have been. They revised this for the following year. They also gave us a fuller explanation of how they calculated Mr C's mark. The handbook was, however, only a general guide for students, rather than a rulebook saying exactly how an award should be calculated. Having considered the evidence supplied by Mr C and the University, we were satisfied that they had properly followed the procedure when classifying his degree and that they also took appropriate steps to improve the explanation to students. We did not uphold this complaint, nor his complaint about his questions about the marking scheme. We found that Mr C asked these after the appeal process was completed, and the University told him that they had already dealt with the appeal and were not going to re-open it. We found this to be a reasonable response in the circumstances.

We upheld Mr C's complaint that the University did not follow their proper procedure when handling his academic appeal. They had decided that Mr C's original appeal was not competent. We took the view that they handled this decision appropriately. Mr C was then invited to submit another appeal. The University's communication on this second appeal was unreasonable. There

was considerable delay in dealing with this, and Mr C received no explanations or updates about this at the time. It took the University four months to deal with this, which was well over the timescale suggested in the guidance notes.

Recommendations

We recommended that the University formally apologise to Mr C for the delay in handling his appeal.

Published 22 June 2011