SPSO decision report

Case: **201101385, University of Aberdeen**
Sector: further and higher education
Subject: academic appeal; exam results; degree classification
Outcome: not upheld, recommendations

Summary

The university awarded Mr C a third class honours degree. When he reviewed his marks, he found that in three of the courses he had achieved a common assessment score of 11. He understood that, if he had achieved a mark of 12 in any of the courses, he would have been awarded a 2:2 degree overall. Mr C drew this to the attention of his subject department, and it was discovered Mr C should have been treated as a 'borderline' student, and had his course papers reviewed by an external examiner.

Mr C appealed through the university appeals process. The university corrected the procedural irregularity and arranged for Mr C's work to be reviewed by an external examiner. Mr C also felt that, as a borderline student, he should have the opportunity to be invited for viva (an oral examination). The external examiner, however, confirmed that Mr C's work demonstrated a third class performance, and said that Mr C was not eligible for viva. Mr C went to the final stage of appeal and requested a hearing, but this was refused on the grounds that his appeal was based on academic merit rather than other mitigating or extenuating circumstances.

Although the Ombudsman cannot consider matters of academic judgment (such as the level of degree awarded) we reviewed whether the university followed its procedures correctly, and whether it had returned Mr C to the position in which he would have been but for the error occurring. We found that the university did so, that the review by the external examiner was appropriate and sufficient, and that Mr C did not meet the criteria set to be invited for viva. We did not uphold his complaint, although we did recommend that the university apologise to him for their initial failure to correctly follow their procedure, as there was no evidence that they apologised during the appeals process.

Recommendation

We recommended that the university:

- provide Mr C with a full apology for initially failing to follow the examination procedure correctly.