

SPSO decision report

Case: 201101545, Edinburgh Napier University
Sector: further and higher education
Subject: complaints handling
Outcome: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

Ms C complained about the way in which the university handled her academic appeal. The officer handling her appeal chose to process it as a complaint. We found that the officer had not followed the procedure appropriately. We found that written records of communications between the officer and Ms C and other academic members of staff had not been kept. We found this unreasonable, as it made it difficult to impartially assess what Ms C had been told. We also found that the officer had used a complaints process that did not comply with the university's own complaints procedure, and we were critical of this. We made a number of recommendations to address the fact that procedures were not appropriately followed in Ms C's case.

We did not uphold Ms C's other complaints, including that she had not been told she could consult with an independent student advice service, as we found that she could reasonably have obtained a copy of the university's complaints process herself. We also did not uphold her complaint that she was graduated in her absence without her consent, as the university provided evidence that Ms C had been sent the date of her graduation ceremony in writing. We also accepted their position that should a student's appeal change a degree award, they would be invited to another ceremony as long as they had not crossed the stage during a previous ceremony.

Recommendations

We recommended that the university:

- reconsider Ms C's AP1 form through their academic appeals procedure;
- provide us with evidence that their student complaints procedure is being adhered to;
- provide us with evidence that written records of communications in relation to student complaints files are being maintained; and
- amend the student complaints procedure to highlight the supportive role that can be offered to students by the students' association's independent student advice service.