

SPSO decision report

Case: 201102648, University of the West of Scotland
Sector: further and higher education
Subject: teaching and supervision
Outcome: upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mrs C complained on behalf of her son (Mr A) that the university failed to offer guidance and support on his projects during his final honours year. She also complained that the university failed to deal appropriately with her complaint.

We upheld Mrs C's complaints, as our investigation found that there was a lack of documentation to show that Mr A had received adequate support and guidance, and that the project supervisor had not responded to the majority of emails about Mr A's project. We also found that there was a lack of clarity in the way the university had handled the complaint. At the time Mrs C complained, they had a four-stage complaints procedure, which is what they should have used. They had, however, subsequently approved a two-stage procedure and it was this that they tried to use. The university also failed to respond to, or try to clarify, the detail of Mrs C's complaint about adequate guidance and support.

Recommendations

We recommended that the university:

- ensure that the 'usual practice' of students taking minutes of supervision meetings be communicated to students more clearly;
- remind the academic supervisor of the importance of managing email communication with students; and
- ensure that their complaints procedure is adhered to in future and that the quality of responses is monitored.
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