

**Case:** 201102474, The Robert Gordon University  
**Sector:** further and higher education  
**Subject:** academic appeal/exam results/degree classification  
**Outcome:** not upheld, no recommendations

### Summary

Ms C was studying for a degree. There were problems with the course in her final year. Several students, including Ms C, appealed their honours classifications and, because of this, the university carried out an investigation. Ms C's honours classification was upgraded, but she felt it merited a further upgrade and so she appealed again, but the appeal was dismissed. Ms C complained to our office that the university failed to provide her with a reasonable explanation for their decision to upgrade her final results along with those of a number of others on her course.

We found from looking at the evidence that the university's investigation of the problems on the course indicated systemic failings in the frequency and quality of feedback from academic staff to students. The university did not tell Ms C this in their letters about her appeal, and they explained to us that such an explanation would not normally form part of appeal letters. As this was an exceptional situation, we took the view that it would have been helpful if the letters had stated the key outcome of the review about the feedback failings. This might have helped explain to Ms C why there was an apparent disparity between the feedback she received from academic staff and the honours classification she was awarded. We drew this point to the university's attention.

It was clear that Ms C wanted to know what went wrong on the course and the reasons why. However, this was different from an explanation of why the university upgraded her honours classification. The university's academic regulations did not require them to provide an explanation for the decision to award a mark, grade or honours classification. The requirement was that they notify a student in writing of the decision, which they did. The university combined this notification with the outcome of Ms C's first appeal, which was upheld due to material administrative error. This was the ground for appeal that Ms C ticked on the appeal form. Taking account of the university's responsibilities under their academic regulations we were satisfied that, in the

circumstances, they did provide Ms C with a reasonable explanation for their decision to upgrade her final results.