

Case: 201103563, Queen Margaret University
Sector: further and higher education
Subject: academic appeal/exam results/degree classification
Outcome: not upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr C studied remotely for a masters degree. He was required to write a dissertation over a period of two years. He proposed a topic for his dissertation and began work on it, supported by his allocated supervisor. Mr C said that he came to realise that his chosen topic had certain limitations. He requested a change of topic but was told that this would not be possible and that he would have to complete the original dissertation or withdraw from the programme. He completed the dissertation but failed. Upon being allowed to resubmit his dissertation, he again asked about a change of topic, but was again refused.

Mr C complained that his change of topic was refused based on time constraints, but felt that there was ample time to complete the required work. He believed he would have passed his masters programme had he been allowed to change topic to one more relevant to his experience and interests.

We found that, although the university's guidance does not mention a specific procedure for considering such requests, it makes it clear that the university has the ultimate say on whether a topic is acceptable. We found that Mr C was told that it was possible to change topics and that the decision was his. However, after submitting his proposed timeline, he was advised that he could not do so. He was told this in good time for completing the required work. After he asked if he could change topics for his resubmission, he was told that this was an option, but was strongly advised against changing due to the lack of support that would be available to him. We found that it was Mr C's choice not to change at this stage.

We did not uphold Mr C's complaint as we were satisfied that nothing went wrong in the university's process when making the decision not to allow Mr C to change dissertation topics. We did, however, make a recommendation as, although they reached their decision quickly and did not alter it, we recognised that some of their communication with Mr C was confusing.

Recommendation

We recommended that the university:

- include in their guidance documents information on the consideration process following requests from students to change dissertation projects.