

SPSO decision report

Case: 201201691, James Watt College of Further and Higher Education
Sector: further and higher education
Subject: policy/administration
Outcome: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr C complained to the college on behalf of his daughter (Miss A), after the Student Awards Agency for Scotland took recovery action against her. This highlighted a disagreement about the date on which Miss A's studies had ended, as Mr C said that Miss A was still attending college after the date on which the college said they had withdrawn her from her studies. This affected the amount of student award she was due to repay.

The college had investigated this and decided that the evidence supported their recorded withdrawal date. As part of our investigation, we reviewed the evidence that they provided, along with Mr C's evidence. Having done so, we considered the college's position on the matter to be reasonable and we did not uphold the complaint. However, we noted that it was not the college's practice to issue withdrawal letters and that Miss A, therefore, received no formal notification at the time of her withdrawal. We took the view that this might have avoided the subsequent disagreement and complaint, and made a recommendation to address this.

Mr C also complained about the college's complaints handling, as he was unhappy with the the time it had taken for him to complete their complaints process. We found that stage one of the college's process was informal and that three separate members of staff had dealt with Mr C during this stage before his complaint was formalised and escalated to stage two. We considered that this informal stage was unnecessarily protracted. Once the complaint was formalised, we found it was handled reasonably. However, we noted that throughout the process the college failed to proactively signpost Mr C to the next stage. In the circumstances, we upheld his complaint about complaints handling. However, we considered that the imminent introduction of a standardised complaints handling procedure for the further education sector will address this and so we made no further recommendations.

Recommendations

We recommended that the college:

- revise their policy to ensure that students who are withdrawn from courses are notified of this in writing.