

SPSO decision report

Case: 201203901, University of Edinburgh
Sector: further and higher education
Subject: complaints handling
Outcome: not upheld, no recommendations

Summary

Miss C complained that the university had not adequately handled her complaint of harassment by university staff. The university had dealt with this under their complaints procedure rather than under their personal harassment policy and she disputed the evidence they produced in handling it. She said that they produced documents written by staff that were not true, and had refused to meet with her to discuss this and her other concerns. The university later said that she had made false allegations about staff and the university.

We did not uphold Miss C's complaints. Our investigation found that although the university dealt with the complaint about harassment under the student complaints procedure rather than the personal harassment policy, the investigation fulfilled the requirements of the policy. The matter was investigated as part of a three-fold complaint, with the intention of investigating the complaints thoroughly and reaching a conclusion that would allow Miss C to continue her studies, which was achieved. We took the view that, therefore, although not strictly in line with the policy, the investigation was in keeping with its spirit.

On the complaint about failure to respond to her concerns and requests for clarification, which also related to some academic decisions, we explained to Miss C that we could only look at how the university responded to her concerns, not at the academic decisions themselves. Our investigation found that the university responded on numerous occasions, but that Miss C found it difficult to accept those responses as she did not agree with them. Our view was that they had responded in a reasonable way to her concerns and had addressed all the issues she had raised, regardless of whether Miss C agreed with what they said.

Finally, in relation to Miss C's complaint that the university unreasonably accused her of making false allegations about members of staff and of harassing the university, we confirmed that the university had said this. Our investigation was not, however, intended to determine whether the allegations were true or false, but whether the university's actions in responding to them were reasonable. Our view was that they were.