

## SPSO decision report

**Case:** 201204579, University of Edinburgh  
**Sector:** further and higher education  
**Subject:** academic appeal/exam results/degree classification  
**Outcome:** some upheld, no recommendations

### Summary

Mrs C was studying for a law PhD, but failed to pass her first year review panel, which she needed to do before she could move into second year. She was granted a second panel, which she also failed. As a result of this, the university terminated her studies. Mrs C then complained that she was not offered an appropriate level of supervision. She felt her supervisor was not sufficiently experienced and did not have the required subject knowledge. She also complained that the university failed to appoint a second supervisor for some time.

The university upheld her complaint, in so far as they did not meet the requirements in appointing a second supervisor and that her supervisor did not have sufficient experience to act as a principal supervisor, in terms of their code of practice. They took the view, however, that effective supervision was still provided, which they evidenced by the considerable correspondence between both parties as well as the supervisor's academically challenging, but supportive, comments. The university apologised to Mrs C for the failures, and recommended that the law school explore the possibility of awarding a lesser degree. The school did so, but found that she did not meet the 50 percent pass mark required for such an award.

After reviewing the evidence we reached a similar decision to the university, in terms of the supervisor's experience and the failure to appoint a second supervisor. We cannot challenge matters of academic judgment so we could not comment on the quality of supervision, but we did note that the university considered that it was good, and that they had evidence to support this view. As we have no role in considering academic appeals either, we did not comment on the decision to terminate studies or whether the criteria for an award of a lesser degree were met. We did, however, note that the university had not recommended that the school award a degree (as Mrs C had claimed), they simply recommended that the possibility be explored.

As the university had already apologised to Mrs C, carried out a review of their supervisory processes and implemented changes, we made no recommendations. We did, however, arrange for them to refund fees she had paid in advance, which she had not previously reclaimed.