

SPSO decision report

Case: 201300412, Queen Margaret University
Sector: further and higher education
Subject: academic appeal/exam results/degree classification
Outcome: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr C, who was a student, appealed against the results of an exam that he had not passed. The university did not uphold his appeal, and because this was his fourth unsuccessful attempt at the exam, Mr C had to withdraw from the course. Mr C was unhappy with the handling of his appeal, and complained to us. We were not able to consider his complaint at that stage, as he had not been through the second stage of the university's academic appeals process. After corresponding with us, Mr C wrote to the university to ask them to consider his appeal at the second stage, although it was over a year beyond the normal deadline for this. The university agreed to do so, and upheld his appeal, but offered him an alternative course to complete a different degree, rather than a further attempt at the exam.

Mr C was not happy with the university's handling of his appeal, and complained again to us. He claimed that the university had not reasonably considered it, and had not taken his support needs into account when putting him through the second appeal.

After considering the information provided, we found that the university had not followed its own policies and procedures in considering Mr C's second appeal. The appeal was considered by a single person, rather than an independent panel, and Mr C had not had an opportunity to hear and respond to the issues and evidence being considered. However, we found that the university had made reasonable adjustments to support Mr C in completing the appeals process.

Recommendations

We recommended that the university:

- issue Mr C with a written apology for the failings our investigation identified;
- reconsider Mr C's stage two appeal, in line with the academic appeals regulations; and
- review the academic appeals regulations to ensure that the powers of the deputy principal in relation to stage two appeals are clearly stated.