

SPSO decision report

Case: 201304380, University of Glasgow
Sector: further and higher education
Subject: special needs - assessment and provision
Outcome: upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr C complained about the university's actions, after he had a period of ill health while studying there. He complained that they did not do enough to support him through a difficult time, and did not make reasonable adjustments to enable him to continue his studies. He said this led to him having to withdraw from the course.

We found that Mr C had had a number of absences, despite the expectation that he attend all elements of the course. We reviewed what the university expected of Mr C in order for him to continue to the next year of the course, and noted the meetings he had with staff and the support that he was offered in trying to overcome his situation.

We sought independent advice from an equality and diversity specialist, who noted that the university had referred Mr C to sources of support. However, she said that Mr C's department did not take reasonable steps to inform and assist him. They had not implemented the university's policies about equality of access and fees refunds. She took the view that had they done so Mr C might have been able to agree an approach with the university that would have enabled him to continue his studies. She also noted that they had not sought advice from occupational health before making a decision about Mr C's future studies.

We noted the difficulties for Mr C and the university in predicting how the year would progress, and in deciding what he could best do to overcome these challenges. However, we considered that the university could have done more to discuss the options with him, highlight their concerns, and review any alternative approaches available to him. We noted that an occupational health referral could have assisted with this, and we were critical of the lack of notes or minutes of meetings.

Mr C also complained about the number of people that he had to inform about his health issues, saying this breached his privacy. Our review of the university's policies and procedures identified who he was required to tell about his sickness absence. We noted that, on occasion, Mr C chose to share personal health information with staff when he was absent due to ill health, beyond the requirements of the university's procedures. However, we found that there was a lack of procedures in relation to situations other than reporting illness. We were critical of this, as it meant that information could have been shared with more people than was necessary.

Recommendations

We recommended that the university:

- apologise for their handling of Mr C's poor health in the academic session 2012-13, for the stress this has caused him, and the potential impact on his career;
- consider applying their refund policy to Mr C's fees for the academic session 2012-13;
- undertake a full review of the events that led to the curtailment of Mr C's studies, to identify what they could have done differently, and how their policies and practices could be improved in future;
- review their policies regarding the provision of support and adjustments for students, and consider

consolidating them into one document, to ensure clarity for students and staff in relation to what support is available and how it is implemented;

- ensure staff are aware of the need to minute meetings with students, particularly where performance is in question, and that these minutes should be shared with the student;
- apologise to Mr C for their handling of his sensitive personal information; and
- review their policies relating to the provision and sharing of personal sensitive information, to ensure that they clearly indicate why such information is required and who needs to have access to it.