

SPSO decision report

Case: 201401337, Fife College
Sector: further and higher education
Subject: complaints handling
Outcome: not upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr C was a student on a course that included an assessed placement. Towards the end of his course he complained about a number of issues regarding his experience on the course and in particular how his placement, and assessments which he had not passed, had been handled. Departmental staff held informal meetings to discuss Mr C's concerns with him and to resolve the issues to enable Mr C to complete his qualifications. Mr C then disputed some months later that one of the outcomes of these meetings required him to apologise to a member of staff about whom the college said he had made unfounded allegations, although arrangements were made that he could complete his qualification free of charge once the apology was made. Mr C then complained to the college about the issues he had raised previously, and also complained that he was required to apologise before progressing with the final element of his course. The college determined that the outcomes of the informal meetings required him to give an apology.

Mr C complained to us that the college had not adequately investigated the issues he had raised. We reviewed all the correspondence and responses given by the college, the college's complaints handling procedure, and the evidence considered in their investigation of his complaint. Our investigation found that, although the college had made every attempt to thoroughly explore matters at stage two of their complaints handling procedure, there was no record of the early stages of the college's handling of Mr C's concerns and the outcomes of initial meetings were not communicated clearly to Mr C. Whilst we did not uphold Mr C's complaint, we made a number of recommendations.

Recommendations

We recommended that the college:

- apologise for not clearly confirming the outcome of the meeting to Mr C;
- consider how best to ensure that all staff are aware of good practice in dealing with frontline complaints, including an appropriate level of record-keeping and communication; and
- re-consider whether an apology from Mr C is now appropriate before allowing him to complete his qualification.