

## SPSO decision report

**Case:** 201401364, West College Scotland  
**Sector:** further and higher education  
**Subject:** communication/ staff attitude/dignity/confidentiality  
**Outcome:** some upheld, action taken by body to remedy, recommendations

### Summary

Mr C, who is a student, attended an event organised by the college. Mr C said he became involved in an altercation with two college staff at the event, and he complained that their behaviour was unreasonable. He was also unhappy with how the college handled his complaint.

We looked at evidence provided by Mr C and the college. Mr C's account of what happened was different to that given by the college staff and because of this, in the specific circumstances, we could not resolve the complaint. However, that did not mean we believed one account over another. As there was no evidence available to help us determine the matter, we could not reach a finding and we did not uphold this part of the complaint.

We found that the college did not deal with Mr C's complaint in line with their complaints handling procedure. The college said that other staff were spoken to about the alleged altercation, and students would also be spoken to, but we found no evidence that this was done. There was also no evidence that any real investigation took place when Mr C's complaint was dealt with at the formal stage of the college's process. The written response did not deal with Mr C's main concern - the alleged altercation - but with another issue Mr C had raised about the event itself. The college also took too long to deal with Mr C's complaint, and we were concerned that the role of the student association president in dealing with complaints was not clear. We upheld this part of Mr C's complaint.

The college told us that, following a review of Mr C's complaint, they had committed to reviewing their complaints handling training, and were considering the introduction of wider awareness-raising sessions for staff. They said they would also make changes to their complaints form to improve their process. We noted this and made further recommendations.

### Recommendations

We recommended that the college:

- apologise to Mr C for the failure to deal with his complaint adequately;
- provide us with the outcome of the review of complaints handling training;
- provide us with the amended complaints form, with an explanation of how this will improve the process;  
and
- clarify the role of student sabbatical posts in complaints handling.