

SPSO decision report

Case: 201507875, University of St Andrews
Sector: further and higher education
Subject: policy/administration
Outcome: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr C suffered from a long-term illness of which he had made the university aware when he began his studies. After his final exams, Mr C made a request for the university to take into account special circumstances of illness when determining his grades (known as S-coding). Mr C complained to us that the university unreasonably rejected this request. He also complained that they did not communicate this outcome directly to him until five months after the decision was made.

Mr C appealed this decision, providing evidence that he was suffering from another illness alongside his long-term illness while taking exams. The university rejected this appeal on the grounds that Mr C should have made his additional illness known to them at the time of exams and Mr C complained to us about this. Mr C appealed this decision again, stating that the reason he had not disclosed his additional illness was because he did not want to discuss his long-term illness with staff. The appeal was again rejected and Mr C complained to us about this also. The university said they had carefully considered all aspects of Mr C's circumstances and found that there was no compelling evidence to suggest that Mr C's additional illness could not have been disclosed to them at the time of the exams.

During our investigation, we found that the university's policies on special circumstances affecting exams are clear, and that the university had followed these policies. We did consider that the university should have made their decision on the original request known to Mr C earlier. However, during the course of our investigation the university changed their policy to ensure students are notified of the outcomes of such decisions within ten working days of the decision being made.

We also found that the university had reasonably considered Mr C's reasons for not disclosing his additional illness at the time of his examinations and that they had reasonably considered the medical evidence he provided.

Recommendations

We recommended that the university:

- offer an apology for the unreasonable delay in communicating the outcome of Mr C's request for retroactive S-coding.