

SPSO decision report

Case: 201508028, Scottish Qualifications Authority
Sector: Scottish Government and devolved administration
Subject: policy/administration
Outcome: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr C complained that administrative errors when marking his Advanced Higher exam papers had resulted in him narrowly missing out on achieving an A grade. The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) accepted that the wrong information was placed on their website in relation to the marking instructions for a particular question. However, we did not find evidence that Mr C's exam script had been assessed with these incorrect marking instructions or that he had been disadvantaged by this error. In relation to the marking of another question, it appeared that the original mark given had been amended to a lower mark. By law we cannot investigate matters of academic judgement and therefore we could not investigate why the mark was given, as it related to the academic judgement of the marker concerned. However, we were satisfied that the final mark given for this question was as stated on the exam paper.

Mr C also questioned why the same marker had both marked and reviewed his exam papers. We considered that the SQA in a communication with Mr C had given him an expectation that his scripts would be reviewed by a different individual. However, we also considered it was a matter for the SQA to decide how they operated the marking and review of examinations. We did not find evidence that the SQA's assessment processes were not followed in Mr C's case or that it was unreasonable for the same marker to have marked and reviewed Mr C's exam papers. Therefore, we did not uphold Mr C's complaints about these matters.

Mr C also complained that the SQA failed to follow their complaints handling procedures and, instead, treated his complaint correspondence as enquiries and feedback. The SQA accepted they failed to treat Mr C's concerns as a complaint and apply their complaints procedure including a referral to this office. We considered the SQA's complaints handling was poor and upheld this aspect of Mr C's complaint.

Recommendations

We recommended that SQA:

- apologise to Mr C for the failings identified in relation to complaints handling;
- ensure that appropriate training in complaints handling is being undertaken by relevant staff and that the failings in complaints handling identified during this investigation have been shared with relevant staff, and provide this office with evidence of this; and
- issue Mr C with a formal apology for the expectation given to him in relation to the reviewing of examinations.