

SPSO decision report

Case: 201508150, University of Edinburgh
Sector: further and higher education
Subject: academic appeal/exam results/degree classification
Outcome: not upheld, no recommendations

Summary

Mr C was a Masters student. The university decided not to pass his project dissertation, as a result of which he was not awarded a masters degree. Mr C appealed the decision to the university and then complained to us. His view was that the feedback the university gave him about their decision not to pass his project dissertation was deficient. He also complained that the university had acted unreasonably by not providing feedback on his draft literary review.

The university considered that Mr C's appeal was a straightforward challenge to academic judgement, which is excluded as grounds for appeal. Mr C was aware that we do not have the authority to investigate complaints about action taken by the university in the exercise of academic judgement by them. Mr C's complaint to us was that the university had acted unreasonably by failing to provide any evidence or explanation that they had considered the information he had provided to question the factual accuracy of the feedback he received. Following investigation, we concluded that we were satisfied that the university's appeals sub-committee had been provided with all relevant documents, including the documents where Mr C said he complained about the factual accuracy of the feedback, before they reached a decision on his appeal. We were satisfied that the university had provided a reasonable explanation as to why they considered that Mr C was questioning academic judgement and that the sub-committee's report provided sufficient explanation/evidence that they had considered his appeal and gave the reasons for their decision. We therefore did not uphold this aspect of Mr C's complaint.

We also did not uphold the complaint that the university had acted unreasonably by failing to provide feedback to Mr C on his draft literary review. Mr C said he was told that he would receive feedback if the review did not meet the required standard. When this did not happen, he assumed that it had met the required standard. However, the examiner's feedback he received indicated that this was not, in fact, the case. Following our investigation, the only evidence we found that indicated that Mr C may be provided with feedback was in an email from a member of staff to him regarding the review which stated that '... feedback will be given if required'. It was not clear whether this was if the university deemed it was required or if the student required (ie asked) for it. However, when Mr C did not receive feedback, there is no evidence that he contacted the university about this. We did not consider that it was reasonable for Mr C to assume that, in the absence of feedback, the review met the required standard.