

SPSO decision report

Case: 201606306, North East Scotland College
Sector: further and higher education
Subject: special needs - assessment and provision
Decision: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

Ms C, who works for an advocacy and support agency, complained on behalf of her client (Miss A). Miss A has epilepsy and was studying at the college. Ms C complained that the college did not provide Miss A with adequate support, despite this being requested. Miss A had enlisted the support of an epilepsy specialist nurse who wrote to the college explaining Miss A's memory difficulties and the medication she needed to take. She had highlighted the need for her to have paper copies of notes so that she could revise at home, and confirmed that she would need extra time to copy details. Ms C complained that the college put no support in place to help Miss A compensate for her memory issues, and she was given no additional time to copy information down.

The college provided evidence that a significant amount of support had been provided, with records showing 29 additional support sessions over a nine-month period. A learning needs assessment had also been arranged, with details of recommendations circulated to academic staff associated with Miss A's course. We did not find sufficient evidence of a failure to provide agreed support, so did not uphold this complaint.

Ms C also complained that the college unreasonably failed to comply with the terms of their Equality and Diversity Policy. The college did not specifically address this aspect of Ms C's complaint in their response to her or to this office in the course of our investigation. We highlighted this as a point for future improvement in their complaints handling. However, we found no evidence that they had failed to comply with the terms of their Equality and Diversity Policy, and did not uphold this complaint.

Ms C complained that the college's response to a letter she had sent was unreasonable. After Ms C's initial complaint, the college issued their response stating that Ms C had the right to bring her complaint to this office, but also asking her to contact them again if there were aspects of her complaint she felt had not been fully addressed. She wrote asking for more information and gave a number of specific examples of Miss A's concerns about lack of support. The college responded, declining to investigate or comment further. We found that the college had provided poor customer service, and noted that their complaints policy did not reflect the model complaints handling procedure (CHP) for further education institutions in Scotland. We upheld this aspect of the complaint.

Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- The college should apologise for the failure to consider Ms C's letter and respond accordingly.

In relation to complaints handling, we recommended:

- The college should revise their complaints policy to ensure it complies with the model CHP.

We have asked the organisation to provide us with evidence that they have implemented the recommendations

we have made on this case by the deadline we set.