

## SPSO decision report

**Case:** 201607496, North East Scotland College  
**Sector:** colleges  
**Subject:** policy / administration  
**Decision:** fully upheld, recommendations

### Summary

Ms C complained to us that the college unreasonably sent her an invoice for her course and that their complaints handling was poor. Part of Ms C's course fees were to be covered by an Individual Learning Account (ILA) token which Ms C said that she handed in to the college reception shortly after she had booked her course. The college said that they had not received this token and sent Ms C an invoice to cover these fees after she had already started the course. Ms C complained to the college but was unhappy with the response and brought her complaint to us.

We found that the college allow ILA tokens to be handed in at a number of locations but it is only registered once it has arrived at the information and booking centre. The college had no record of Ms C handing in her token to the main reception. We also spoke to the Students Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS) who advised that Ms C should not have been allowed to begin her course without the college having received the ILA token. We concluded that we could not determine whether the ILA token was mislaid by the college or if it was not handed in by Ms C in the first instance. However, the college should have prevented Ms C from beginning the course until they received the ILA token which would have allowed Ms C time to seek a replacement token. Therefore, we upheld this complaint.

In relation to complaints handling, we found that the college's response to Ms C was poor. They had not fully explained their investigation of Ms C's complaint in their response to her and we therefore upheld the complaint. However, we were able to provide Ms C with the information she required and did not make any recommendations to the college about this aspect of the complaint.

### Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Stop seeking to recover the outstanding course fees from Ms C.

What we said should change to put things right in future:

- The college should have a set procedure in place across all points where ILA Tokens can be submitted, similar to the process in the information and booking office, to register (and provide receipts for) all ILA tokens.

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.