

SPSO decision report

Case: 201701240, University of the West of Scotland
Sector: universities
Subject: policy / administration
Decision: not upheld, no recommendations

Summary

Ms C was a PhD student at the university. She complained that the university unreasonably withdrew her PhD registration, and that they failed to follow the appeals process appropriately.

We found that the university had the authority to terminate a student's PhD registration and that, ultimately, it was the academic judgement of university staff to do so in Ms C's case, despite her disagreement with that judgement. By law, the SPSO must not investigate the exercise of academic judgement and, therefore, we could not reach a finding on this part of Ms C's complaint.

In relation to the appeals process, we found that the university had no appeal regulations to cover Ms C's specific situation, which was the withdrawal of her registration. However, they had regulations dealing with appeals on examiners' decisions in relation to research degrees. Given that the context stated in the regulations was decisions on student assessment, progression and awards, they interpreted these regulations to cover Ms C's situation. We noted that Ms C disagreed with the university's interpretation of their regulations. We found that their interpretation was reasonable in the circumstances. Given this, and the evidence of the university's formal communication with Ms C, we considered that the university followed the appeals process appropriately. We did not uphold Ms C's complaints.