

SPSO decision report



Case: 201806224, Heriot-Watt University
Sector: Universities
Subject: policy / administration
Decision: upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr C had a number of concerns about the way the university handled a disciplinary process and an appeal process.

Mr C was subject to an allegation that he had committed academic misconduct in relation to a coursework submission. Mr C was invited to attend a disciplinary meeting to discuss the allegation. Mr C wished to bring his mother to the meeting; however, the university informed him that he could not do this under their policy. Following the conclusion of the meeting, Mr C was found guilty of collusion and a penalty was applied.

Mr C appealed the outcome of the appeal process. An informal meeting was arranged, to which Mr C brought his mother and university staff for support. No procedural failing was identified during the appeals process and Mr C was informed that grounds did not exist for the appeal to be considered.

We found that the university failed to consider making a reasonable adjustment in relation to the policy for who may accompany a student to a disciplinary meeting. We also found that the university failed to document their consideration of part of Mr C's appeal and provide him with a reason for their decision on this point. On balance, we upheld Mr C's complaints about the disciplinary and appeal processes.

Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Apologise to Mr C for failing to consider making a reasonable adjustment in relation to the policy for who may accompany a student to a disciplinary meeting; and failing to document their consideration of part of his appeal and provide him with a reason for their decision on this point. The apology should meet the standards set out in the SPSO guidelines on apology available at [HYPERLINK "http://www.spsso.org.uk/information-leaflets" www.spsso.org.uk/information-leaflets](http://www.spsso.org.uk/information-leaflets) .
- Provide Mr C with a reason for their decision on his appeal submission that his actions did not amount to collusion. If the university is unable to establish that this point was considered fully, then consideration should be given to re-opening the appeal for further consideration.

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

- Where appropriate, the university should consider making reasonable adjustments to ensure that disabled students can fully participate in education and enjoy other benefits, facilities and services that are provided to students.

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.