

SPSO decision report

Case: 201809395, Glasgow School of Art
Sector: universities
Subject: admissions
Decision: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

Miss C complained about the university's communication with her regarding the visa she required to obtain to enter the UK to take up her place on a taught research degree. Miss C complained that the university unreasonably delayed in identifying the fact that Miss C required a Certificate of Acceptance of Study for a visa and delayed in advising her of this. We considered that the university had two opportunities to clarify Miss C's status with her and did not do so. However, we considered that it was Miss C's responsibility, prior to accepting the place on the course, to establish which visa she required and what documentation she needed to produce in order to obtain the visa. The fact she required a Certificate of Acceptance of Study from the university in order to obtain the visa was set out on the UK government's website. We noted that Miss C had accepted a place at the university in the knowledge she could not study in the UK without a visa but she delayed in providing this information to the university. Therefore, we did not uphold this aspect of the complaint.

Miss C also complained that there was a delay in advising her that she required to demonstrate her ability in English by sitting a Secure English Language Test (SELTs) before she would be issued with a Certificate of Acceptance of Study. For this type of course, the UK government allows the university sponsor to determine how they evidence English language ability and it is the university's decision regarding whether or not they require a SELTS. However, we found that the university's website and correspondence did not make it clear that it requires students on this course who require a Tier 4 visa to sit an International English Language Test System (IELTS) test to prove English language ability. Therefore, we upheld this aspect of Miss C's complaint.

Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Apologise to Miss C for an unreasonable delay in advising her that she required to demonstrate a CEFR B2 ability in English by sitting a SELTS before she would be issued with a Certificate of Acceptance (on the basis it was not clear they only accepted IELTS (Academic) and she had other qualifications). The apology should meet the standards set out in the SPSO guidelines on apology available at www.spsso.org.uk/information-leaflets.

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

- Information regarding what language tests are acceptable, and when they are required, is clear and non-contradictory.

In relation to complaints handling, we recommended:

- To ensure there is awareness of the higher institution's role in determining how they choose to assess English language ability for this type of course.

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.