

SPSO decision report



Case: 201904485, University of Glasgow
Sector: Universities
Subject: Special needs - assessment and provision
Decision: upheld, recommendations

Summary

C complained on behalf of a family member (A), who was a disabled student at the University of Glasgow.

C was unhappy with the university's assessment of A's IT and assistive technology needs. C considered that the equipment and software recommended following the assessment were unsuitable and ineffective. We found that the documentation from the assessment included insufficient detail about how the equipment and software recommended for A was suitable for their needs. We also found that the university did not act appropriately once concerns were raised about one of the devices. We upheld the complaint and made recommendations.

C also complained that the university failed to make appropriate provision for A to attend an employability event. A was unable to attend the event as they did not have support in place in time. C felt the university were responsible for this. The university upheld C's complaint in part and acknowledged that someone should have approached A about whether they would like to attend the event. We were satisfied that the university had taken steps to prevent a similar issue. We upheld C's complaint and recommended an apology.

C had concerns that the university failed to treat C and A with an appropriate level of dignity and respect. The university partly upheld C's complaints in relation to this matter and made a number of recommendations. We noted that the complaint related to challenging and sensitive issues for both C and A, as well as the members of university staff involved. We were satisfied that the matter was investigated robustly by the university. We found an apology had been provided and that appropriate action had been taken in relation to the issues identified. We upheld the complaint, but did not make recommendations.

C also had concerns about the arrangements made in anticipation of A's exam diet and in relation to the way the exams were conducted (including provision of breaks and access to water). We found that, in the weeks leading up to the exams, there was a failure to respond to C and A's correspondence which led to a missed opportunity to fully explore exam arrangements within good time of the exam diet commencing. We noted that there was limited evidence in relation to the way the exams were managed. We considered that it would have been appropriate for clearer instructions about breaks and water to have been provided to C. We upheld the complaint and made a recommendation.

Finally, we considered the university's handling of C's complaints. We found that the university had inappropriately responded to some complaints at stage 1, as the complexity of the complaints meant that direct investigation at stage 2 was more appropriate. We also found instances where the university did not manage the timescales at stage 2 appropriately and we noted in one case that there was a substantial delay in the university accepting a complaint for investigation. We made a recommendation in view of our findings.

Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Apologise to A that the documentation from the needs assessment included insufficient detail about the IT recommendations; the university did not act appropriately once concerns were raised about the equipment recommended; the university failed to make appropriate provision for A to attend the employability event the university failed to respond to C and A's correspondence which led to a missed opportunity to fully explore with them the exam arrangements within good time of the exam diet commencing; and there were inappropriate delays in complaint handling. 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:

- Documentation of a needs assessment should provide a clear rationale for the recommendations. Where the recommendations involve substantial expenditure, the university should seek assurance of the suitability of any equipment once delivered and support a student to return it if needed.

In relation to complaints handling, we recommended:

- Complaints should be handled in line with the Model Complaints Handling Procedure for Higher Education.

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.