

Major problems with my PhD began prior to my viva. The first related to the number of external examiners that the Academic Registry advised my director of studies that I required.

Over the four-year period between my initial registration and submission of my PhD thesis, I was a research student for three and for the final year worked as a member of support staff (setting up practical classes supporting units on the BSc offered in the department where I was registered - the job title was Experimental Officer). As Experimental Officer, I was employed on a three year fixed-term contract (full-time post). With my new status as a staff member in mind, my director of studies approached the academic registry to take advice about the number of external examiners that I required. He was told I would need two, as I was a member of staff in the University. So, after discussions with my second supervisor, three examiners - two external and one internal - were appointed and the viva took place.

After the viva I was checking the regulations and I noticed that the specific regulation that gave details about the number of external examiners a PhD candidate required said "where the candidate is on the permanent staff of the University or of an affiliated or associated institution, a second external examiner shall be appointed". My contract was temporary and hence my staff status could not be described as permanent. Secondly, I emailed the member of staff in the academic registry who deals with research degrees and asked her to define the phrase "permanent staff of the University" that appears in the regulation quoted above. She replied that "it usually covers an academic member of staff with a permanent contract". As I was employed as a temporary support staff member, in my mind, it is clear that the academic registry made an error when they advised my director of studies about the number of external examiners I required.


But, in numerous letters between the academic registrar and myself and the academic registrar and my director of studies he has failed to address this issue and has constantly attempted to "throw a smokescreen" over the academic registry's error by focussing on other issues. For instance, he initially claimed that the appointment of two external examiners was because one of them did not have any experience of examining PhDs in the UK. When it was pointed out to him that this could not be the case (as the examiner in question was not even mentioned to the academic registry until at least 6 months after the decision was made that I needed to have two external examiners) he retracted this and wrote a letter claiming the problems I was experiencing subsequent to my viva were due to a dispute between the internal and external examiners! All of this information is documented and easily provable should this matter go to litigation.

The viva was a difficult affair. From what I was told before the viva by my supervisors about the content of the preliminary reports, one of the two external examiners was very positive about my work and made no criticism of anything whatsoever, but the other one was not so happy with it. This was confirmed when I read the full reports afterwards. (It has also subsequently been revealed by one of my PhD supervisors that this examiner may have been trying to get some kind of revenge over him as he acted as examiner for one of her PhD students some years before in an examination process that did not go to well – possibly politics with a small 'p'?)

However, on the advice of my PhD supervisors I read up on certain key areas so that I would be able to defend myself against criticisms of the latter examiner during my viva. Also, at this point there seemed to be no real reason for concern as my second supervisor, who is a senior professor in the research area of my thesis and who had successfully supervised over twenty PhD students and examined more than fifty) felt my work easily met the standard for a PhD.

Just prior to the viva, something happened to change the first examiner's attitude to my work. Perhaps there had been discussions between the examiners. But, a



To bring things up to date, I have recently resubmitted my thesis in an almoswrry 

Overall, I have mixed feelings about the period prior to my viva.

On a positive note, through my own hard work, I feel I have learned a lot about my subject and developed a lot of skills that will make me a good and competent researcher. For instance, I now feel confident about using some advanced and specialised statistical techniques and also feel very confident about my writing skills. On a less positive note, I never really felt a tremendous sense of ownership of my PhD and have, to a large extent, simply been forced to act as research assistant to my second supervisor (the starting point for the studies in my thesis was series of studies he carried out in the early seventies). It was difficult to see this coming as, when I was accepted as a research student, my first and second supervisors informed me I would be doing a series of studies that was very different to those that I had been interviewed for. All through my PhD, at the request of my director of studies, I have put my 100% trust in

