

Alan's experience

It was only after the viva that they told me that I'd been given the wrong supervisor for my PhD. When the examiners supplied me with a single page of A4 outlining the grammatical errors they had found, the internal examiner told me that they would only award the MPhil and that Dr Jones would have been the appropriate expert for my research topic.

Three years before I had been accepted by the University to work on a PhD in religious studies and informed that Dr Davies would be my supervisor. It had not been a helpful relationship. He often visited the College where I was registered, but we only met once year, usually at his second home in the midlands, for meetings in each case cut short by his lunch appointments. He was always too busy to spend more time with me. He was working at two universities in different parts of the country and complained that he was doing more driving than teaching. So it never went beyond that. Our communications were mainly by email, but his assessment of my work often took so long (2-3 months to read 110 pages of work at one point) that I actually dreaded sending him anything.

There was little monitoring of my progress. I believe he filled in forms for the University, but nothing was passed back to me. If anything had been wrong at any point I can only assume that they would have told me. There was an upgrading seminar in my second year when I gave a summary of my thesis. Afterwards I was praised by the Head of School for the amount and high quality of the research I had done and I was given clear instructions on the format and content of my thesis.

I followed these recommendations exactly and provided my supervisor with the list and how I had attended to them. Towards the end of my third year my supervisor stated that my thesis was ready for submission and that I had met the suggestions of the upgrading panel.

I was therefore astounded when after the viva the examiners told me that I had failed because the whole format, not just a part or a section, that had been recommended by the panel and approved by my supervisor, was completely wrong and that my thesis could never make a PhD.

The outcome of Alan's appeal

I have pursued the matter for over two years, and taken my case to the University Appeal Board which concluded that 'the allegations of inadequate supervision were not substantiated'. I could have gone to the Visitor but I have had to take a full time job and do not have the time or energy to go through another negative experience.