

Angela's appeal (2 – outcome)

Dear John

I wrote to you in 2010 for advice about appealing the result of a terrible viva examination. I wanted firstly to thank you for your help and guidance at that time. I felt very letdown by the university (CRS) and by my supervisor and examiners, so it was very reassuring to receive your advice on how to appeal. I also wanted to let you know how I got on, now that I am Dr - finally!

I was granted permission to appeal the result of my viva (which was to refer my thesis). I had understood from CRS regulations that I could only appeal on the grounds of procedural error or inadequate assessment (evidence of prejudice) during the viva examination itself. This was fine, as I had clear evidence of such errors during my examination. However, the CRS appeal committee involved clearly had another interpretation of these rules - and judged my viva on the basis of the reports written after the examination (they thought the reports were adequate, so disregarded my description of the viva examination itself).

They wrote that the joint and preliminary reports indicated that the examiners had read the thesis thoroughly and that their conclusions were valid, therefore there was no evidence of inadequate assessment. This of course was not the point of the appeal, which was against the *conduct* of the viva. What's more the appeal committee had of course not seen my thesis so I don't know how they came to that conclusion.

I was terribly disappointed to learn that my appeal had failed. But luckily *both* my examiners had resigned at this stage, so CRS had to appoint new examiners anyway to reexamine the thesis.

I resubmitted my thesis after a year with some revisions, based on one of the reports. I was very careful with my choice of examiners the second time around, and requested a CRS internal (rather than just University of London). The result, after my second and very nerve-wracking viva in January, was that my doctorate was awarded and my thesis passed, with a few minor revisions.

I learnt a lot from this process, mostly about how unregulated, unstandardized and unfair the whole PhD system is. The comments in my second viva and report were completely different from those in my first, emphasizing entirely different issues and debates. The minor revisions were mostly a couple of typos and clarifications, but two of these actually reversed changes I had made based on the first reports. Although the second viva was a textbook examination and rather enjoyable in a masochistic way, I feel now far less confident in my work than before I started the whole process - a year of pointless revisions, followed by the horror of a second viva, really took any joy out of academia for me. Any confidence I may have had in the regulatory system of the university has disappeared with their mishandling of my appeal. I think it is imperative that viva examinations are recorded for the sake of both student and examiner, to avoid what happened to me during my first viva.

I thought I should let you know anyway how things turned out! Your help came at a crucial stage for me. I was pretty desperate for advice, and your calm and measured responses were just what I needed. Thanks again.

All the best

Angela