

Assessing Edward's MD

I Background

September 2000

Edward is a qualified surgeon with ambitions to be a consultant. He had been told that a pre-requisite for a consultant is an MD. Edward contacted me. I had previously supervised two other surgeons in his field whilst doing their MDs. So I agreed to supervise him. He arranged that a consultant surgeon with an honorary contract with the university was his second supervisor.

September -December 2000

He worked in the laboratory regularly and with my help wrote a grant application for peer review to obtain funding for his MD.

December 2000

He submitted his grant application

February 2001

He received a letter stating that his grant application had been successful and that he had been awarded funding to complete his MD.

August 2001

He started work full time for his MD.

September 2001

He enrolled at the University to do his MD.

February 2002

He was awarded a scholarship award to attend a conference and present his work.

March 2003

He won the best poster prize when he presented his MD findings at a prestigious European surgical meeting.

May 2003

He submitted forms to the University notifying them of his intention to submit his MD in September 2003. I nominated examiners for Edward's MD and sent in the forms. The external was a very eminent surgeon with a high profile in the surgical speciality in which Edward wished to train. The internal was a newly appointed lecturer who seemed a decent and reasonable fellow.

September 2003

Edward submitted his thesis one week in advance of the deadline. The University stipulates that students who submit on time should be examined within 6 weeks of the submission deadline. The University's communication to the internal examiner

stated that Edward's results and examiners' report were to be available by 28 October 2003.

25 November 2003

Edward's viva had however to be delayed until 25 November 2003 because both examiners had very busy schedules. Edward was confident about his research and did not ask his supervisor to attend the viva.

Q1 Any comments on the situation so far?

Q2 Is there anything that Edward or his supervisor should be doing in preparation for the viva?

2 The viva

The viva started with reasonable question and answer discussions between Edward and the external. Subsequently, however, the internal became very aggressive and attacked Edward's work. Edward defended his work. Edward explained that areas that concerned the internal had not been a component of his research because they had been investigated by a previous MD. Edward informed the internal that the previous MD had published these results in three peer review journals and that he had cited these publications several times in his thesis. The internal became more aggressive and then Edward got angry. The oral deteriorated into a heated exchange between the internal and Edward.

Q1 What procedures are in place at your institution to govern the format of a viva and the conduct of participants?

Q2 What should Edward do at the conclusion of his viva?

3 Differing perspectives

Edward returned to me and reported that he had to re-submit his thesis. He also told me that the internal had told him that I was unfit to supervise higher degrees and that the privilege would be withdrawn by the University in the near future. I found these reports hard to believe, but when I contacted the internal he confirmed that all Edward's statements were true.

Q1 What should the supervisor do about this?

Q2 What should Edward do in this situation?

4 Reports

I told Edward that his main concern was to complete the thesis while everything was fresh in his mind. He should start the preparation for his re-submission as soon as he got the list of corrections. Since the university stipulates that the examiners' reports should be available within a week of the oral, I considered that this should not cause any problem. I had been an internal examiner on two occasions in the university. I knew that examiners' reports consist of 3 signed reports that are submitted together to the Student Record's Office after completion of the oral. Preliminary reports are written and signed by the internal and external examiners before they discuss the thesis in advance of the oral. An examiners' joint report is written immediately after the oral.

December 5 2003

Edward had not received his list of corrections from the internal. He asked me what he should do. I advised him to contact the internal.

December 6 2003

Edward contacted the internal who told him that he was far too busy to write the list of corrections. It would have to wait until after Christmas. When Edward reported this to me, I advised him to contact the Postgraduate Dean of the Faculty.

Edward contacted the Postgraduate Dean. I requested the examiners' reports from the University, but was told that it had not been submitted yet.

December 9 2003

The Postgraduate Dean phoned me to inform me that the internal was too busy to write the list of corrections because he had two papers to submit.

5 Corrections

Edward started to mention legal action. So I approached my Head of Department who informed the Dean of the Faculty. The Dean of the Faculty contacted the internal examiner.

December 16 2003

Edward received his list of corrections. When he read them he contacted me. Most of the corrections were additions. The requested additions already existed in his thesis. Edward was angry and talked about legal action again. I told him to detail the page numbers where the requested additions already appeared and to draw attention to the other anomalies.

January 8 2004

Edward gave me a document clearly outlining the anomalies in the internal's list of corrections. I revised this document before forwarding it to the internal by email. I requested advice from the internal as to how to approach the re-submission.

January 22 2004

The internal had not responded to my email.

Q1 Comment on the actions of all parties

Q2 What should the supervisor do now?

6 Conclusion

I went to the Dean of the Faculty to ask his advice on how to proceed. The Dean promised to look into it.

January 29 2004

Receiving no further communication I again requested the examiners' reports from the university. They had not been submitted.

February 9 2004

The examiners' reports were received by the university. The university sent me copies. When I examined the copies of the reports I saw that the independent reports had been signed after the oral had taken place. The Internal's independent report had been signed 6 days after the oral on 1 December 2003 and the External's independent report had been signed 2 months after the oral on 29 January 2004. The joint report was signed by the Internal on 26 January 2004 and by the External on 29 January 2004. I was angry because the examiners had blatantly ignored university regulations which are clearly laid out and communicated to the examiners in advance of the examination.

February 16 2004

The internal examiner rang me and said that things had really spiralled out of control. He said that Edward had submitted a worthy piece of work and he deserved an MD. I was stunned, but wanted a successful result. So I asked the internal to forward a revised list of corrections. He emailed a revised list of corrections.

March 23 2004

Edward resubmitted his thesis.

July 2004

Edward graduated.

Team tasks:

On the acetate provided list

1. the main lessons for

**Postgraduate research students
Supervisors
Examiners
Institutions**

2. Edward's grounds for

**Appeal
Compensation**