

## Gerry's problem

Internal memorandum  
In strict confidence

To: Gerry Evans  
Tutor to postgraduate students

From: Judith Connor  
Head of Department

### Sue's PhD

Gerry. Many thanks for agreeing to take on the role of postgraduate tutor this year. It will be a great help while we are trying to develop the Faculty Graduate School.

I have one immediate problem for you. I have been trying to sort it out, but it is rather delicate. It concerns Sue's supervision. I wonder if you could suggest what we do?

As you know, Sue is not only on the teaching staff but also registered part-time for her PhD, with Alan as the internal supervisor and Prof Beatrice Hamilton from Barchester University as the 'external'.

According to the files Sue seems to be making very slow progress and is now almost three years into the seven or eight year period allowed by the University. One of her problems is probably her very heavy teaching load - which has increased substantially following her recent promotion. But I also hear that she may be having some domestic difficulties as well. In my view the latter could have if anything increased her resolve -which was always very strong -to gain a PhD, but she is equally determined to gain further promotion. Indeed she sees that and the PhD as interconnected.

Alan is relatively new to supervision. He says he fully appreciates the other demands on Sue's time and realises how her conscientious attention to her students is interfering with her progress. In fact he mentioned to me at the end of term that he is now also seriously doubting whether she is being realistic in expecting to complete the degree.

Beatrice on the other hand is not only a very experienced supervisor but also heads a department at an institution where research is the top priority for all staff. So she has been demanding that Sue give her PhD studies top priority, apparently showing little understanding of the realities of working life here, dominated as it always is by administration and teaching.

I gather that supervisory meetings between the three have often become extremely stressful and sometimes tearful. Alan says he recognises that Beatrice may well be approaching this problem in the correct way, and feels that he should support Beatrice in order to bring about a

resolution of the matter. Sue will have to resolve either to abandon her studies or to complete them. On the other hand, Alan works alongside Sue in their professional lives, including running the new theory course jointly with her, and values the professional relationship which they have built up in that context. By adopting Beatrice's approach, Alan reckons he will undoubtedly risk that professional relationship.

Could you please sort this out as soon as you have time, and let me know what you are suggesting?

**Team task**

**On the acetates provided, what advice would you, as Gerry, give to**

- 1. Alan,**
- 2. Sue**

**and, to avoid this kind of problem in future,**

- 3. The Head of Department?**