

Ivan's failed upgrade

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Dear John,

I've just come across your email address posted on a PhD forum and have seen that you provide advice to troubled postgraduate students.

Here's my scenario:

I've been studying for my PhD full time for two years and in the third year part time. I've been told that my submission date is November of this year.

I had an original upgrade after two years. I went into the upgrade unprepared - my supervisor at the time said that I had nothing to worry about and it should be a doddle. It turned out to be anything but a doddle. The panel suggested that I submitted a 12-page report where I illustrated an understanding of new relevant literature and refined my research question.

Before turning the page discuss this situation, supervisors' role and upgrades, and Ivan's options

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Following this experience, I changed supervisor and he deemed it necessary that I take on a whole chapter's worth of new literature. I accepted this and was quite happy because I was actually getting feedback on my work. It took a long time to finish the chapter but I did it, along with an introductory chapter (I also had a lit review and methodology chapter). The supervisor then suggested a new upgrade which following a 3-month break for personal reasons was finally arranged for 2 weeks ago. The upgrade decision was submitted for MPhil, which as you can imagine is disappointing.

The reasons for MPhil on the official report are that whilst they can see that there's a gap in the literature and the subject is original, I do not have enough time to finish. Also, that the methodology and theoretical framework wasn't developed enough and that the amount of interviews conducted wasn't sufficient.

My problem with this decision is that - firstly, at the time of the first upgrade, I had in fact already completed the interviews and they weren't at this point deemed insufficient. Secondly, I wasn't advised to submit the methodology or theoretical framework as part of the second upgrade. Thirdly, I was advised prior to the second upgrade that the time period wouldn't be a problem and my supervisor thought an extension would be possible.

To add to this- I questioned the length of time I have been registered (2 FT, 3PT) this would suggest that I still have another year (from September 2013) but the registry replied that I don't.

I was wondering if you have any advice for me? I'm meeting my supervisor for the first time since the upgrade on Wednesday. Should I appeal the decision? Should I just take the MPhil? What value would an MPhil have (I already have an MA)?

Another line of thought is that I either go to a different University with the current subject or take the MPhil and start again in a subject that my Masters was based on.

Best wishes,

Q1. What are Ivan's options?

Q2. Discuss how you would respond to Ivan's questions.

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Dear Ivan,

So sorry. I was running a residential Masterclass all week and had to prioritize communications. Now I have read your email in full I see that you had a meeting last Wednesday and wanted advice in advance. Have you any update since then?

Since at least one of your supervisors seems pretty vague (possibly misleading) about the regulations for upgrade etc, in my view you should not rely on their interpretations but go through them thoroughly yourself, and look at what they say about deadlines etc and conditions for appeal in detail. The problem is that the University will want to assume that, although you may receive advice from supervisors, in the end everything is your decision.

Was your registration suspended for the 3 months break? Don't you have a second supervisor as well as a primary one? from what you say there is a discontinuity between the two upgrade panels' decisions?

Also, do you have record of the key communications? If a supervisor or anyone in authority misled you, that is important.

NB. Work fast as there is usually quite a short window during which you can appeal a decision.

Keep me posted.

John

Q1. Discuss John's response

Q2. How would you have replied?

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Hi John,

Thanks for the emails.

I've had progress and I've decided to accept the offer of an MPhil. I had quite an open and frank discussion with my supervisor and I'll submit for an MPhil at the end of the year with the option of continuing as a PhD student in the same subject elsewhere.

However I've also had an informal offer from another university to continue research that I completed during my masters as a PhD i.e. straight to PhD rather than going through the upgrade process again. That university also has a great reputation and I think this is the path I'm going to take.

Therefore MPhil from this University and then a PhD from another unnamed great university (I don't want to reveal the university because the offer isn't formal etc).

Thanks for replying, I've ended up working through everything and have come to a conclusion I'm happy with.

Q. Discuss Ivan's decision

Team task

List the lessons here for

- 1. Postgraduate students**
- 2. Supervisors and**
- 3. Institutions**