

## Can Celin's Dentist Save Her PhD?

### 1 The panic

29 March 2015

Sorry John I am writing to you about my story. I am in panic.

This week, just learned that my examiners failed me outright after my PhD viva which took place on 17th March. The University has terminated my PhD registration on 23th March. My supervisor and I were shocked. We found that entirely unacceptable. I feel I am in a really bad situation. I am very upset at the moment. These were not expected.

For one week I have not been eating properly. I think I lost 3 kilos. Yesterday when I was out I felt my mind was detached from my body and disconnected with the world around me. I don't know who I can talk to, what I should do: my family, friends, colleagues, all have been waiting so long to hear my good news that I had passed...

John, I read from internet articles there are Papers recommending your experience and expertise.

I was wondering whether you could be kind enough to advise me where I can seek for assistance – I would like to make an appeal.

You must be preoccupied by your busy schedules. Here, I will try to write as much as I can. I hope you won't mind.

I think, before the failing viva, my Internal examiner Dr. S, my supervisor Professor R's colleague, may have had warned him their intention to fail me. I had that feeling because when I arrived earlier prior to the viva, my supervisor asked me to go with him for a ten minute-walk in a park close to our campus. We had a talk; instead of reassuring my confidence by encouraging me, what I heard was opposite: he said that the examiners might ask me difficult questions and if I did not pass I could still publish my work. I became very concerned. I asked my supervisor whether he had talked to the examiners. Before the submission he always praised me – I did extremely well and that the thesis was a PhD – no one can do what I did. My supervisor replied 'no': he did not talk to them.

The viva took place in my Internal examiner S's office. When I entered the room the External examiner N looked in bad mood. She asked me questions in an arrogant attitude. She was awfully unfriendly, no smile at all. The Internal was quieter though – no smile either. I became extremely nervous right from the beginning of the viva. N set up a laptop and sat next to me, whatever I answered to their questions she

immediately typed them down to make records. The way the External examiner looked at me and kept on typing made me feel I was at a courtroom and questioned by a jury – though after half way through she stopped typing – an atmosphere of oppression – that scared me. My External commented that I should do more modern scholarship review. I explained that my supervisor had not thought I should focus on it, as my work was original – no one has touched similar subject – is mainly using primary sources and there are almost no one has done much work in the field / subject that I researched. Upon my answer, the External looked unconvinced. I felt the viva took ages to finish. In the end even my mind was blank I was still able to see a smile shown in the corners of the tightened lips of my External's face, it was the only smile I had noticed in the viva – I felt it was a victory smile and me a seized prey. My toothache got worse.

Overall, the viva was a very unpleasant experience which was very different from ten years ago when I passed my viva in another English Higher Education institution.

(My lawyer commented later: 'you are not a little girl, don't expect them to give you sweet; you are sitting a viva.')

My choice of supervisor:

I already hold a doctorate, and came to study in 2009 for my second doctorate with a well-known professor in politology of religion. Possibly my supervisor considered I was mature as I already hold a doctorate, he gave me much space to study by my own.

My Examiners:

My examiners said they were not very happy with my performance. They said that I was not capable to construct arguments at the viva. They found that I did not understand what they said even they had to repeat the sentences again and again when asking questions.

They provided intensive criticism in their Joint Report. But I think their concerns only centred on the subjects they specialised in, not the core of my thesis. The External examiner N was focused on the terminologies that she is familiar, although the section I wrote she criticised and cited most is in the Appendix, not in the main text of my thesis.

John, actually I had two viva exams. I had my first viva on the 16th of February. It had only lasted for ten to twenty minutes because, my examiners discovered that there are about five pages which are edited a little differently – I accidentally submitted two different copies of my thesis. After I resubmitted two identical copies, the second viva was rearranged to take place on 17th March. I got result this Tuesday 24th March.

I wanted to make an appeal. But, my supervisor said the University might be reluctant to accept it as they have to pay the External examiner again for her transportation travelling from other city to my University. I am not sure this would matter.

I also was wondering whether I should talk to my Department or the Student Union about my situation, or not.

To make an appeal I am preparing to pay for legal advice and assistance. But looking on different websites I don't know which appeals lawyer to choose.

Looking forward to hearing from you

...a little later, I wrote to John again:

My name is Celin, my apologies – I forgot to introduce myself! My mind has been unsettled.

There was one thing I also forgot to mention: early on the viva day, in the morning I called my dental practice – I already had some tooth problems, and probably because of the stress I had a sleepless night, I experienced severe tooth pain – I wanted to book an early appointment. But my dentist's available time in early afternoon did not suit me; I had to travel earlier to the University for my viva at 4:00pm. Following my viva day, on the 18th March I attended my dentist which was scheduled two weeks ago. Don't know if my medical condition can be a ground for not performing well at the viva or not.

Thank you very much for taking time reading.

Looking forward to hearing from you,  
Celin

## 2 Are there grounds for appeal?

John's reply on 30 March 2015, at 18:40

Dear Celin,

Thank you for both your emails. I do appreciate that this has all been very distressing for you. I will try to help.

The first thing to do is to become completely familiar with the examination regulations and the procedures for appeal that apply in your case.

Start with the following:

(link to university regulations)

You will see that the grounds for an appeal are very narrowly drawn, and, for instance, exclude the quality of your supervision and 'academic judgement', and that you have two months from the official notification of the result in which to lodge any appeal.

The cost of the examiner's fees and transport are irrelevant to any appeal.

I suggest you go carefully through how the examination was conducted and consider whether it departed in any significant ways from the specified procedures. If so, list them. Then send me your list.

You could of course look for compensation from the University if you consider the support you received during your registration was seriously inadequate, but I assume that your main objective is to establish whether the examination was carried out according to the rules.

I can recommend lawyers, but, unless there is the basis for a case, there is no point in going down that route.

I look forward to hearing more.

John

A few days later I have my draft done and sent it to John:

Dear John,

I have just drafted my Appeal Letter. Could you please kindly have a look?

Here I tried to make a list of the possible grounds for my appeal.

Unbalanced review: The examiners are experts on economic anthropology and ethnology who have not asked any questions on my study in politics and religion. They criticised I have not done enough analysis on the impact of religious views on environmental issues. But, it seems to me there are biases on their part; the criticism is from an economical and environmental perspective, not historical discipline!

Inadequate, misread or misjudged my thesis: They said I have no idea of economics. But the points they gave were incorrect. I could easily correct them by showing how I have carefully dealt with it.

Inappropriate procedure: When the viva started they appeared unfriendly. It was not expected; I expected the viva would be stimulating and inspiring, like my previous PhD viva. That made me very nervous and I felt that my tooth pain worsened; I could be obviously seen unconnected because of that. In the Report they noted that I could not understand their language even they had tried to speak slowly. I even asked to stop, but I was not offered any real break during the long process.

Irregularities of the Examination procedure: I have experienced too many problems during the examination process. I actually completed my thesis two years ago. I completed and submitted my Degree Examination Entry Form on 25th September 2013. The Office advised me that the nomination of examiners will get underway in the Department. After my reminders – one of the staff forgot process it – it was not until May 2014 I got acknowledgement, confirming that the Office will proceed with appointing examiners and will arrange an entry of the examination for me. I was allowed to submit my thesis on 20th December 2014. I was under great pressure to complete my degree so I could move forward to the next phase of my life.

I am not certain any of them could be strong enough. Would they conflict with each other if I appeal them all?

John, I think my supervisor is not very experienced at how to make an appeal. He told me that too. He said the 'unbalanced review' and 'my study is politics and religions, not economics nor ethnology' might be the ground for my appeal.

Your advice on what I should emphasise in my Appeal Letter, and your comment on whether I could have a chance to appeal, would be highly appreciated. Words cannot explain how grateful I am for the advice you have already given me. Please let me know if your office provides any Appeal service, I would like to take the opportunity. As soon as I have my lawyer's updates and your advice I will have my second Appeal draft done.

Many thanks,  
Looking forward to hearing from you,  
All best wishes,  
Celin

John replied to me:

Dear Celin,  
Looking through your draft it does seem that on a strict interpretation of the University Guidance you quote the examiners may not have carried out the examination as thoroughly as they should have done. But, I imagine, the University will want to say that you are just questioning the examiners' professional judgement.

Was there a chair or your supervisor present? it would be helpful if there is an independent view of what went on.

In any case if you want to pursue an appeal, you have two months from the receipt of the official notification of the result, and you might want to consider using a lawyer to help you in writing your appeal in the most appropriate form. I attach an example.

Here is a firm that specialises in such cases ([link](#)).

But you should be aware that, if the result was an outright fail, with no opportunity to resubmit, the examiners must have considered the quality very low. So, even if your appeal were to be successful, you could get a similar result from the new examiners.

Keep me posted.

Best wishes

John

On Monday, 30 March 2015, 22:16

Dear John,  
Good evening!

Thank you very much for your advice, especially generosity sharing your time and expertise.

Yes, my supervisor was present. Do you mean that he could give 'an independent view of what went on' during the viva and what happened to my weak performance?

Celin

John replied to me:

Dear Celin,

The value of having your supervisor there is that he can confirm your account of what went on at the viva and whether the examiners carried their task adequately. He does not need to have experience of appeals.

Keep me in the picture.

John

A few days later

Dear John,

Thank you for your recommendation; my lawyer Dr DS is excellent. He helped to simplify my draft and get to the core issues that he considered most effective to win the appeal. Dr DS also advised me to make enquiry to my University Information Compliance Manager about accessing my personal data: during the Appeal course, I have the right to apply for my data relating to my studies.

Celin

I had started to apply for obtaining information from the University about

1. All comments, communications and correspondence relating to my PhD made by the Internal and External examiners;
2. All comments, communications and correspondence made between the examiners and the University, and
3. All comments, communications and correspondence between the PhD supervisors and the University, and
4. Any other Internal documents relating to the progress and assessment of the PhD.

The information which I obtained in April and May 2015 reveal the communication / comments between examiners: External and Internal.

10 April

Dear John,

I have found this:

“That there is evidence of prejudice, bias or inadequate assessment on the part of the examiners such that the result of the examination should not stand.”

Based on these grounds, can I appeal against my Examiners’ judgement?

Look forward to your reply.

Celin

John,

Just updates: I went to the University Student Union to meet the Union Adviser K yesterday.

After consulting with my University Information Compliance Manager A, the Union Adviser got back to me:

"Celin, Just an update on my meeting with A regarding your case: After our discussion, it was agreed that you do have a claim to make a complaint on the following potential grounds:

Discrimination on the grounds of language – that you previously had obtained your PhD in an English Higher Education Institution, and you were allowed to continue your studies for many years in this University, and the alleged language problems [Celin was not able to understand examiners' questions despite their repeating sentences at the viva] which your examiners claim state you have were not picked up on any time before your submission date.

You should include these in your appeal as requests should your appeal be accepted. Does that make sense?

Student Union Adviser K"

(Celin's subsequent note: I had not mentioned this to my lawyer, maybe I should.)

Celin

19 Apr 2015 at 12:54

Dear John,

At my personal worst moment when I faced the bad news of my doctoral examination result you were the first person listened to me and helped me greatly.

I wish to thank you again.

Here please find my supervisor's support letter. You did suggest that it would be helpful if he can provide an independent review on the viva.

[My supervisor's support letter draft dated 17 April 2015:]

"I did not explore the possibility of outright failure in this case because it was my belief that for examiners to conclude that the candidate was incapable of meeting any higher degree standard would be unreasonable, not least given the evidence that Celin already has a higher, doctoral degree"

"This is no doubt very distressing for Celin, and I am sure that had Celin written a shorter thesis omitting all matters relating to economics or ethnohistory she would with appropriate examiners have had an easier time. But these aspects were certainly involved in Celin's main topic, and I hoped that by selecting experts in these areas it would help Celin to rewrite if necessary parts of her work that touched on these matters. It seems unfortunate Celin has been assessed on these areas alone. "

My supervisor also talked about resubmission with some revision if there was a chance.

Here are more updates:

I had two meetings face to face with my lawyer, Dr DS, and he redrafted my appeal letter.

I now have my dentist Dr AY's support letter regarding my medical conditions on the viva day.

Following a treatment on the 18th March, in a second previously arranged follow-up appointment I saw Dr AY in April the 13th; I asked whether he could provide a medical statement, he said to me: "We don't normally do that." I was disappointed and thought that was the end of it and I decided not going to ask him any more for the letter. We continued to focus on his treatment on my aching tooth. He then was whitening my teeth, I made a joke – we normally carry on chatting during my visit – about the improvement of the look of my teeth, "since my teeth are done and I should look great, maybe I can change my career [instead of pursuing anything academic] to become a performer artist [to entertain my audience]."

Then, I think the great pressure from the appeal preparation was overwhelming me, plus just learnt Dr AY was not going to write me a letter to approve my medical condition of the viva day – I have been his patient for five years and tomorrow would be the last day of his practice in the Clinic, my eyes all of a sudden became a waterfall. I did not want it happen actually. I turned my head not to face Dr AY and apologised: 'I am sorry.' He did not say anything but continued his treatment and finished it in time just before his next patient came in. Next day, to my surprise, the Clinic's secretary rang me up and said my dental surgeon's medical statement was ready for me to collect. I sent my dentist support letter to my lawyer to review. My lawyer suggested in time to my dentist how he could represent my case better in his letter of support. I handed my lawyer's comment letter to the secretary of the Clinic. Within half day (14 April 2015), Dr AY got back to me with a slightly amended support medical letter with evidence of laser images of my tooth and facts about how the treatment was going through.

Just imagine if I had missed Dr AY on his last day [to my knowledge, the Clinic would not give any contact of their leaving dental surgeon to their patients], or, if nothing happened on my treatment day, I would not be able to have a chance to talk to Dr. AY to obtain his medical statement.

My lawyer also commented on my supervisor's letter (quoted above, dated 17 April) and had my supervisor to redraft a more proper one. My supervisor wrote: "... I can understand the reasons [during the viva on 17 March 2015] why Celin did not reveal them [the tooth pain] given that she felt under pressure not to postpone the examination. This was because the examination [on 16 Feb 2015] had already been postponed in mid-course after getting under way at an earlier date due to her inadvertently supplying two slightly different dissertation copies to the examiners...But a mistake of this nature should have had no bearing on the process of examination, and while the examiners might understandably have pointed out the inconvenience



they had suffered, it could have been helpful had they assured her that their concern was solely with her academic performance. Though the situation was unusual, and certainly not one I have ever encountered as an examiner, so I cannot criticise their conduct, it did mean that the viva was conducted with the candidate both in pain and feeling a fool from the start. This was unfortunate: I had explained to the candidate the reasons why I had chosen examiners outside her field and pointed out the necessity of her articulating clearly her reasons for abiding by criteria other than those that they might naturally find more familiar, on the assumption – which I had no reason to doubt, on the grounds of several years of acquaintance – that she would not have trouble in doing this verbally, under normal conditions of examination. Matters turned out differently. Professor R” (signed and dated 18 April 2015)

These are the updates. Thank you and look forward to hearing from you,  
All my best wishes,  
Celin

On 21 May 2015, under my request and application made in April, the Information Compliance Manager B, Legal Services of the External examiner N’s institution supplied me in time the information about the communication between her and my Internal examiner relating to my studies.

Among them, in an email dated 20 March 2015, just three days after my viva and before their submission of the Joint Report, in which the External N wrote to the Internal S [when working together to make amendment in their Report]:  
“Here you go. Do hack at my bits at will. I’m sure it doesn’t really need to be 10 page long, though we do need enough to make a watertight case.” (underlined emphasis in original)

The Joint Report does read 10 pages long. These communications show clearly how they collaborated together and reached the objective to fail me. By reading the four-time amendments of its draft, particularly those comments initially shown neutral or positive in Preliminary Report [dated on 16 February 2015], are edited, particularly by the External, to appear negative in their Joint Report (dated on 20 March 2015), I found the version of their final statements peripheral. Many statements recording the viva were incorrect – an impression is conveyed that the examiners in many cases manipulated what to quote [turning to citing all negative] and what to omit [anything positive about my viva performance they don’t record]. The Report then was produced to include fabricated elements.

On reflection, the Joint Report is an unbalanced review; the examination appears to have undergone no careful assessment to the fundamental issue for this thesis: none of the questions in the viva went to the core of my thesis. I feel the examiners were ill-suited to the examination of the thesis.

On 21 May 2015 I appealed for the outcome of the Examination.

### 3 Getting ready for the hearing

On Monday, 15 June 2015, 13:42, at last I received my personal data from Information Compliance Manager A of my University. They are in relation to my PhD held by my Internal examiner. It has been like two months delayed.

Dear Celin,

Apologies for the delay in getting these to you but, finally, I have the relevant emails held by your [Internal] examiner S (see attached). [Celin: they are communications by email between my External and Internal.]

I have redacted (blacked out) some information which does not constitute your personal data.

Kind regards

Information Compliance Manager A

Two months later

On 31 Aug 2015 I heard from John:

Dear Celin,

I hope you are well.

I am going through my diaries and student problems and wondered how yours was resolved? I hope all is well for you. It is helpful know so that I can give good advice to others.

With best wishes

John

Dear John,

Thank you very much for your mail.

Yes, the University has established that an appeal hearing needs to be held. Now the date for it is being organised, hopefully as I planned, in sometime late October or early November when I will return to the UK after my trip to the U.S.

I appealed that the result of my examination was unfair and another panel of examination should be set up.

My supervisor and the hearing panel members have confirmed to be present.

My lawyer will attend the hearing as well.

The cost for the legal fees that I paid to my Lawyer is estimated around 3500 pounds.

John, thank you again for being there supporting me, it is important to me and valued greatly always. I will keep you updated.

Please feel free to let me know any more information that you would like to know.  
Meanwhile hope you enjoy the season!  
Yours sincerely,  
Celin

On 12 October 2015, 18:05, my University Manager wrote to me:  
Dear Celin,  
I am writing to advise that the appeal will take place on the morning of 2nd November 2015. I will be in touch later in the week with further details.  
Regards,  
University Manager

I wrote to John to update about it.

John replied:  
Thanks. I am glad to hear that there is to be an appeal hearing.  
I have a draft of your appeal letter dated 1st April. Is that the version you submitted, or was it revised with the help of both your supervisor and your lawyer? If so, please let me have the revised version as submitted. I can then alert you to the kind of questions you may expect at the appeal. In planning for the appeal you may like to consider being accompanied. So check the regulations on what is allowed."  
John

I replied to John,  
Hi John,  
Here is the summary of my lawyer's statement to present on the hearing (dated 20 May 2015).  
"This is an appeal against the decision of the PhD examiners, dated 20 March 2015, to fail Dr Celin's PhD thesis after the first submission, without permission to resubmit the thesis for the consideration of a PhD or MPhil degree. Dr Celin's performance at the viva was adversely affected by severe dental pain, of which the examiners were unaware, and that this produced an unfair result;  
There is evidence of inadequate assessment on the part of the examiners, namely the use of inappropriate criteria to evaluate the worth or otherwise of the thesis, such that the result should not stand;  
There was a procedural irregularity in the conduct of the viva, namely the failure to allow Dr Celin some time to compose herself in the face of evident and abnormally severe nervousness.  
FACTUAL BACKGROUND Celin had previously received a Master degree and a PhD degree. She submitted her Form for submission in September 2013 but the office lost it, the nomination of the examiners eventually was arranged and the examination took place in 16th February, and then 17th March 2015."

"At 4pm on 17th March 2015, the rescheduled viva took place. During the viva, she was in severe pain and extremely nervous. Dr Celin performed very poorly in the viva. She struggled to get words out, to think and structure her answers coherently, and generally performed at a level far below her usual standards. The weak performance in the viva was one of the reasons for the examiners' decision. In their joint report, dated 20th March 2015, the examiners note at p.6: 'With regret, our assessment of the thesis and the discussion in the viva lead us to determine that this is not a PhD' (emphasis added) Dr Celin was visibly nervous from the outset of the viva but was not offered an opportunity to step out and compose herself." (summary of the Lawyer's draft for my appeal)

27 Oct 2015 at 22:07

Hi Celin

I am glad your lawyer will be present. If you have not already done so, you might like to check on how the appeal meeting will be organised:

1. who will be present. Will the examiners be there or submit statements? can you see these in advance? (I note that the University has not yet complied with your request for communications. I imagine that, unless they do in good time, your case is hampered and would mean that it would be difficult for the judgement to go against you without a deferment of the hearing. Your lawyer will advise on this.)

2. any part your supervisors will play?

3. is your lawyer allowed to contribute?

4. are you expected to give an opening statement?

etc

If I were on the appeal committee I would press you on the following three points:

1. Why did you not explain to the examiners at the viva that you were in pain? why did you not ask to stop the viva or ask for an adjournment?

2. Please explain what was wrong about the criteria applied by the examiners. A clear reply to this will help your case a lot.

3. what are you wanting out of this appeal?

Keep me posted.

Best wishes

John

On 22 October 2015 at 09:55

I took John's advice and made his points and wrote a letter to the University Manager Further, I asked the Manager about my personal arrangement after the hearing on 2nd November timewise,

"Can I assume that I would be able to become free after early afternoon on the 2nd November? I have made my reservation of a flight to depart Heathrow at 21:00pm. I am going to São Paulo for a conference event taken place on 3rd.

Thank you and look forward to hearing from you,

With my best wishes,  
Celin."

26 October 2015

The Manager replied to me:

Dear Celin,

I attach a response from Dr S (Internal examiner) which will also be circulated to the panel. If Professor N (Extremal from C city University) responds I will also circulate this in the same way. Your Internal Dr S has confirmed that he will not attend. I am assuming from your email that Professor R, your supervisor, wishes to attend. I will advise the Chair of this. I would expect that yourself, your lawyer, Supervisor Professor R and the examiners would be invited to attend the full hearing. The hearing is scheduled to begin at 9.30 [on the 2nd November] and you will be free from early afternoon so there will be no issue with your flight.

Regards,

University Manager

27 October 2015

The University advised me that the two examiners will not be present; but they submitted their 'comment letter.' Both examiners sustained their view that the work is not of PhD standard and that the examination was carried out according to the regulations.

My University sent to me, "Notes to the attention of the appeal committee Celin":

From Internal Examiner: "During the viva the candidate gave a composed impression. She was as nervous as any student would be in a viva situation. I did not notice any sign of extraordinary distress or of pain. It was my impression that the student was physically and emotionally fit to sit an examination."

"Concerning the assessment 'of the thesis using criteria from different fields, namely history of economics and ethnology': This allegation is too vague and unspecific to allow a proper reply. May I suggest that the appeal panel asks the writers of the appeal statement to come forward and explain precisely what criteria they believe had been applied that are valid for the study of Politics and Religions only, but not for Study of Economics or Ethnology. "

"As I have seen the candidate under examination conditions on two occasions [16 Feb for twenty mins, and 17 March at the viva] I believe I could not have failed to notice a dramatic difference if there had been any. On 17 March the candidate behaved and spoke in the same way as she did during the first viva that was adjourned. As mentioned above there was no indication of undue distress or of pain that would have allowed me to suggest a recess." (My subsequent note: In the first viva, I only spoke to my examiners to answer their questions for less than five minutes and it was stopped.)

From External Examiner:

"Celin failed to show in the viva that, for instance, she had a sound grasp of such fundamental concepts as the dating of sources, and this reinforced the examiners' reading of the thesis. I cannot see how Celin's consistent failure to show understanding of such basic matters could have been purely the result of nervousness and dental pain, even in combination. Accordingly, I do not see how the outcome could have been altered had the examiners been aware of Celin's situation."

27 Oct 2015 I showed my examiners' comments to John and asked,  
John,

Have you seen any case like this that the examiners were so determined to fail candidate in the hearing process? Honestly my supervisor and I were shocked when we read the examination result report in March and indeed now too, when I read their "Notes to the attention of the appeal committee": unthinkable!

Look forward to hearing from you.

Celin

John replied:

Celin,

Unfortunately for you, if the examiners follow the rules their judgement is final whatever the views of the supervisors.

bw

John

27 Oct 2015 at 22:07

My response to John:

No, my case would also count my medical conditions, right?

John to me,

That's your argument, but the committee will need persuading that they were serious enough to significantly affect the result.

Though John put a note afterward

27 Oct 2015

Hi Celin,

Many thanks. I do recall them now. I think you have a reasonable chance of getting re-examined on appeal, and possibly by new examiners.

I have no more suggestions, but be prepared for the panel to push you on whether your grounds are of a sufficient level of severity to have affected the result of the examination.

Do keep me posted.

Best wishes

On 2 Nov 2015, at 18:36, John wrote:

Dear Celin,

I assume you have forwarded your examiners' comments to your lawyer. He should advise you on how to deal with the points raised. I imagine – in the light of this reply – the appeal committee members will need convincing that you do have a strong case.

Best wishes

John

I wrote to thank John,

Dear John,

You would never know how important and helpful your support has been to me.

Whenever I read your notes I feel more confident to face the challenges.

Thank-you from my heart.

Will keep you posted.

#### 4 The day of the Appeal hearing

2nd November 2015, 9.30am Hearing was held by the University Appeals Panel at the University

My lawyer suggested there was a straight factual dispute between the examiners, who indicated they saw no unusual sign of distress, and the Supervisor, who stated that the distress was evident and of a level he had not seen in forty years of experience of PhD examinations.

My Lawyer asked the panel to find in favour of me and my Supervisor in our claim that I was visibly distressed and the failure to offer to defer the viva was a procedural irregularity. He indicated that the Panel should do so on the basis that I and my Supervisor were in attendance at the appeal hearing and exposing ourselves to challenge on our claims while the examiners were not.

Later on, on 10th November, I was sent the records of the Hearing by the University:

"Questions: Inadequate Assessment

The Panel asked if there were instances which evidenced the use of inappropriate criteria being applied to a PhD in the study of political science and religion. Supervisor responded: he would prefer to answer on the basis that it was less a case of inappropriate criteria from other disciplines being applied than there being an apparent lack of appreciation of the norms of political science and religion. Supervisor said that a stress on economics, which might possibly be relevant for a political science thesis, would be more appropriate to a research in economics or ethnology. This was the issue that gave Supervisor greatest unease. Supervisor reiterated that he felt the larger

problem was the lack of a degree of sympathy with political science of religion and stated that he was surprised that the examiners affirmed that there was no possibility of extracting a worthwhile thesis. ”

“Panel asked if the decision that the thesis could not be revised successfully was not also a matter of academic judgement? Supervisor stated that this outcome was not a possibility that he had considered and that he was flabbergasted that someone who has already achieved a PhD could not be capable of revising the work. Supervisor asked how this could be done without calling into question the award of previous PhD.”

“Panel stated that he understood the examination was based on the thesis under consideration, did not consider previous awards and that the consideration of this was a matter of academic judgement? Supervisor indicated that his opinion may not be a matter for the appeal panel but that he felt bound to state his academic judgement.”

“Lawyer highlighted that the phrase in b) relates to inadequate assessment and that by misapplying norms of other disciplines and deciding on an outright fail, the examiners have come to a conclusion that no reasonably competent panel would have come to. Lawyer also stated that the fact an academic of Professor R’s experience was ‘flabbergasted’ is prima facie evidence that that the assessment was inadequate.”

“Panel asked whether Supervisor offered any advice or guidance to Celin or the examiners regarding the issues arising from Celin’s dental pain and nervousness? Supervisor replied that he did not recommend deferral and suggested that he misjudged the situation at the time. Supervisor also suggested that graduate candidates are adults and that it was not his place to offer such advice except in extreme circumstances. Although Supervisor felt that the discomfort he saw was extraordinary he did not think it was extreme.”

“Panel asked why Celin had not raised the issue of the need for either a break or a deferral? Celin replied that she was too nervous to concentrate or think clearly. Supervisor said that he did not make any request or recommendation but he believed that the length of PhD vivas can be an issue. While this viva was not dragging on it was clear that it was not going very well at all.

Panel asked if Supervisor’s hope was the Celin would pull through and whether it was not an unreasonable assumption that the examiners felt the same? Supervisor stated that while there was no suggestion of unreasonable behaviour by the examiners, he feels it is difficult for examiners to calibrate the distress of a candidate that they do not know. Supervisor stated that he got a strong sense during the viva that we were not getting anywhere. The examiners were not at fault for callousness but he believes that things were clearly amiss and that he regrets his colleagues not picking up on this.”



“Lawyer noted that Supervisor had stated that in four decades he had not seen such distress and asked if he, as an examiner, would have offered a break? Supervisor stated that he would probably not have asked in that way but that he would have asked if things were okay.”

“Lawyer asked if a reasonably competent examiner would have raised the issue? Supervisor R stated that carrying on with the viva was clearly not going to result in an adequate assessment and that the examiners should have done something.”

“Lawyer asked if Supervisor would have done something. Supervisor stated that he would.

Lawyer asked whether Supervisor would have accepted a break. Supervisor stated that he would. Lawyer asked what advice Supervisor would have given. Supervisor stated that he would have advised a deferral and that the examination is an academic procedure, not a gestapo interrogation.”

“Panel asked what was considered to be the difference between preliminary and joint reports that indicates that the poor performance at the viva was key to the outcome? Lawyer suggested that it could not be clearly stated that the viva had no effect because the joint report refers to both the thesis and the examination. If we can't be sure, Celin should be given the benefit of the doubt and a fair chance to defend the thesis under normal circumstances. Lawyer stated that there were some positive comments in the examiners' Preliminary Reports and that while the reports were clearly problematic they did not indicate an outright fail.”

“Lawyer believed that the examiners were clearly looking for evidence of understanding at the viva that Celin was not in the position to provide.”

“Panel asked for any concluding remarks. Celin stated that all she wants is the opportunity to defend her thesis in a healthy condition and to achieve a fairer result.” (the Notes of the Panel Hearing by the University Manager)

2 November 2015 18:00pm

I reported to John after the hearing:

Dear John,

I am a bit exhausted as I flew from Chicago back to my home in England yesterday for today's hearing. I stayed in England for less than one day. Now am on my way to the airport; am going to São Paulo for a conference.

The hearing took place this morning and went okay. We all think so: my lawyer, my supervisor and myself.

Just quickly, a report to you:

The panel did not push me how seriously the pain had affected me. They asked my supervisor about the criteria issues and why he did not stop the examiners to continue since he knew I was in bad condition. My supervisor answered okay – my lawyer helped a bit by presenting his opinion.

The chair questioned my lawyer whether the viva discussion affected the outright result. My lawyer pointed that in final report the examiners did say the result was based on the combination of the thesis and the viva.

In response to a question from the panel, the University manager also said 'yes', "PhD exams should include a viva. "

I was asked two questions: why I did not ask to stop the exam? I replied at that time I was too nervous as a result of unwell and could not think clearly what I should do. At the end, they asked if I had any comment. I said I wish to have an opportunity to defend myself in a healthy condition and get a fairer result.

My lawyer said that, as the two examiners were absent but my supervisor was present, they should take the evidence from my supervisor instead of the examiners because their statements were not tested in the hearing. Instead, the panel can ask my supervisor why he said this and that, testing whether he was telling the truth, or asking him what he meant by wrong criteria.

I know these might not be clear enough, am on the train.

I thank you for all of your kind help!

Celin on the hearing day

On 10 November 2015, 16:06, the notes of the panel hearing [see above on the day of hearing, 2nd November] and the completion of procedures letter were sent to me. It advises the Outcome of the Appeal: My appeal was partially upheld – medical condition. A new examination will be established for me.

"Please find the notes of the panel hearing and the completion of procedures letter attached. Hard copies of these have been sent out today.

Full details of the considerations and the outcome are in the attached but I can confirm that the final decision of (the University) is that:

Your appeal on the basis of medical circumstances of which the examiners were unaware was upheld, but

Your appeal on the basis of inadequate assessment was not upheld

Your appeal on the grounds of procedural irregularity was not upheld.

So: In accordance with Item c) of the Appeals Procedure a new examination is to be established with new examiners:

Re-submission of two clean copies of the thesis to the University is required by Friday 27 November 2016.

(your supervisor) is responsible for nominating new examiners through the Nominations Panel and for arranging the viva.

In accordance with Item d of the Appeals Process the new examination shall be conducted in accordance with the regulations in place at the time of original submission and the examiners will not be given any information about the previous examination except the single fact that they are conducting a new examination following appeal.

Please make arrangements for submission of two clean copies of the thesis for examination by the deadline of 27 November 2016."

I have copied to your supervisor with a request for him to make arrangements for the nomination of new examiners.

University Manager

I wrote to John on 10 November 2015 16:10

Dear John,

I have good news to share with you: I won! I wish to thank you for your support and useful advice. I did not feel alone because of your existence.

I have attached here the results of the hearing for your reference. Hope this helps your research also. Please let me know any comment.

Best wishes,

Celin

In addition my email to John:

Thank you for being so kind when I was devastated early this April and May. Most importantly, thank you for your dedication to promptly answer my questions and giving support whenever I needed.

10 November 2015 John replied to me,

Hi Celin,

Congratulations. Very interesting result. All you can do now is to work with your supervisor to prepare for the next viva. You have the advantage of knowing the sort of questions you will be asked.

Keep me posted. When all is done, we can discuss how we can use your experience to help others.

John

On reading the University hearing outcome letter, I had a question for John whether my resubmission date of my thesis was in November 2015 or 2016:

John,

In 'Notes of the Appeal Hearing', it says: "Outcome... Celin should re-enter for examination as a first attempt and submit clean copies of the thesis to the University in accordance with the examination requirements by 4pm FRIDAY 27th NOVEMBER" but in the 'Completion of Procedure Letter' : "The final decision of (the university) is

that ..." Re-submission of two clean copies of the thesis to the University is required by Friday November 2016."

I think above two 're-enter as a first attempt', and 're-submission' are different concepts but maybe my supervisor took the latter. But I think the result of my Appeal gives me a chance to re-enter an exam. Am I correct?

Celin

In reply, John alerted me that the date for resubmission was due in one month. John advised me to confirm it with the University.

After careful reading the University letter and consulting with my lawyer, I wrote to John,

Dear John,

I had advices from my lawyer he told me not to write to the University. And, my supervisor said that it should be a resubmission so the deadline for November 2016 should be correct.

My supervisor asked me to rewrite my thesis by removing all elements of economics and ethno-history. I do not agree with him at this point – I think the new examiners may have other concerns.

He has a new External examiner in mind, a scholar in the field of European mediaeval religions. The Internal will be in other college of my University ... as it is hard to find many experts in religions in relation to politics. My supervisor considers the problem of previous examination was that the two examiners do not know religions. However, the nomination will wait until I finished the new version of my thesis.

I am pretty occupied by current international job but have planned to do my rewriting after next February.

Thank you for asking, anything you would like me to respond I will do it promptly.

Thank you again for all your help.

Celin

I now have a year to resubmit two clean copies of thesis. John wrote to me providing further advice,

Dear Celin,

Sorry I made the wrong assumption on date. It is not often that a candidate is allowed another year after an appeal to revise their thesis. That is very good as you now have plenty of time to rethink it. Among other things, if you have not done so already, research the publications of the potential examiners so that you are aware of their perspectives. Also, can you consider ways of getting feedback on your work in addition to that from your main supervisor? if you can get peer review from a conference paper or journal, that may set your mind at rest. Even if it is rejected you get independent expert review of your approach. I recommend this to all research

students. it is no criticism of your supervisor. Btw, don't you have a second one [supervisor] too?  
Best wishes

I replied,  
Dear John,  
Yes I was surprised that I was given one year to revise.  
Thanks for reminding me about paying attention to the respective examiners' perspectives. I did when preparing material to defend my thesis in my first examination but the two seemed not to appreciate it. My discoveries of what they have not done were considered of no value...  
I will however research the new examiners' works to know their views and focuses so that I don't miss / neglect them when address mine. (Subsequent note: I did not consult any of my first examiners' notes in their Report when I revised my thesis; I had been only focusing on my thesis)  
From what you suggested: 'can you consider ways of.....if you can get peer review...' (sorry I am using a phone not typing complete).  
John, I am not quite aware of how to get 'peer review', do you mean I write an article about my work and give it to a journal? Or I can send it to you to find someone to review?  
Thanks for all and look forward to hearing from you soon.  
Happy New Year,  
Celin

John explained to me,  
Dear Celin,  
Doing a PhD is like joining a community of scholars in your field of work. In effect your examiners are drawn from that community with the task of judging whether your work and defence of it prove your fitness to be admitted as a member. While your supervisors will to some extent be aware of what is expected, it is very helpful to you to get your approach reviewed by others in that community.  
You will be looking carefully at the criticisms made by original examiners, but I also attach a slide I use in my courses for new doctoral students. Not all are feasible for you now, as you have been upgraded, but I strongly recommend that you offer to give a paper to at least one conference of people working in your field and look for journals who might be interested in an article which draws on your main theme. In this way, whether they are accepted or not, you will get some independent critiques of your approach that you can take into account in redrafting your thesis. If they are very critical it is likely your examiners would be too.  
Your supervisor has no influence on the examiners' decision and so any input you can get for others will be helpful.  
Best wishes

John

My response to John:

Thanks John,

Forgot to answer: I do have a second supervisor, Dr. A. He has never supervised me though. My supervisor has never asked me to contact him, and he is my supervisor's former student.

I probably will send him a copy asking about his view.

Regarding peer review, actually it is not normal practice for PhD candidates in historical studies in my University to publish their findings prior to their submission, but those in archaeology or anthropology fields may do.

Celin

....

I have been working on revising the thesis whilst many things happened to distract me, including my supervisor's absence to read my revised thesis. Finally I managed to complete my work.

On 23 Aug 2016 I asked John's help,

Dear John,

I hope this mail finds you well. My planned resubmission date is to be around mid-November and I am going to complete the revision of my thesis. I was wondering whether you know any proof-reader on religions/history subject who can do a good job.

Your recommendation will be much valued.

Thank you and look forward to hearing from you.

With all my best wishes,

Celin

Dear Celin,

I have found someone who may be able to help you, who is copied into this email so that you can get in touch.

I hope all goes well.

Best wishes

John

I engaged experienced proof reader recommended by John.

I wrote to John,

Just let you know that Miss Z (proof reader) is excellent. Thank you very much for the recommendation.

## 5 Delays, delays...

I send chapters to my supervisor and promised another.

25 Oct 2016

I had a question for John

How are you John?

I was wondering if Supervisor can't have enough time to read my thesis before the deadline can I apply for a new deadline?

It would be unfair for me to submit a copy without his approval.

My supervisor initially promised to me, before he left the country he would try to read my writing and get back to me with comment. There are eight chapters. He has only commented three so far.

I feel insecure in this situation.

Thank you and look forward to hearing from you.

With best regards,

Celin

Dear Celin,

What is your deadline for submission?

Has your supervisor made major suggestions in the past?

Is your second supervisor available?

Have you had feedback on your work from others in the past? what was it like?

bw

John

October 27 2016 my letter to John:

The deadline is 27th November Sunday 2016 (two months ahead). Now he seems abroad – he has not answered my mails, I am worried.

Look forward to hearing from you,

Celin

John to me,

.... Look at the University's regulations on extensions. That will give you the procedure for making an application and the grounds available.

I think it is important to get other people to read your work. That is your second supervisor's job too.

bw

John

Dear John,  
Thank you. I will try to find out what I can do. I will write to my second supervisor.

(A little later...)

I just asked my second supervisor Dr A, he could have time after next Spring. Now is end of October, my thesis will be due to submit in one month time. My viva would have already taken place by then.

Celin

(Subsequent note: I did not ask my second supervisor to read my thesis at last, I wanted to make things simple)

Dear John,  
Good morning!

Thanks again for recommending wonderful proof-reader Z, she is very helpful.

Would you mind I have questions for you:

Q1: Do you know anybody who does formatting and layout? I can do it well myself but not confident within such a tight time frame. I should focus on checking the main text and submit my thesis in two week time.

Q2: If the deadline set up by my University is Sunday, can we submit the document on the next day Monday?

Q3: Do you know if a deadline can be extended? Is there any regulation?

Asking this is because my supervisor has not given me feedback. I already gave him my copy one month ago. He promised to give me his feedback on 20th September. But early this month (October 2016) he said he had four papers to present and could not do it. Now he is still abroad and won't have any time for me before the 27th November. That is the deadline when I need to submit my thesis. Can I ask my University to extend the deadline? But it may sound that my supervisor is irresponsible – I don't know how much I should tell my university about it.

Q4: what is your office address? I wish to send you a seasonal greeting. You have been so helpful I am very grateful,

Look forward to hearing from you,

Celin

Dear Celin

Good to hear that.

A1. In time available, I suggest you do your best. I doubt if it will be very important in the examiners' decision. If they think it could be improved they will just make that one of their recommendations.

A2. email the registry or wherever you have to submit it. First thing Monday morning would sound reasonable

A3. Extensions: you need to look at the rules in your research student handbook. I



imagine it would be normally restricted to major health reasons etc, probably not because your supervisor is 'irresponsible'. However, instead, since this is unacceptable, you should immediately submit a formal complaint about the lack of feedback from him, especially in the final stages, suggesting that the University allow you to await his response before doing a final copy for submitting. Do not wait any longer to do this. Indicate what you sent to him and his exact responses. (What about your second supervisor?)

A4. Thanks for offer of greeting. I'll send address when we have this sorted.

bw

John

Dear John,

Thank you very much for all very helpful advice.

Q1: yes I think I can do it okay I am experienced at editing but was in panic and worried running of time.

Q2: I also thought it should be alright based on my past experience. Yes, in case I need to do it Monday.

Q3: can you believe I have already sent my enquiry to the office asking about extension, someone replied me from the office that I will receive a response, it had been two weeks... that is why I asked you. The old manager and staff have left and new people including the new manager have never responded to my questions.

Two years ago they had even lost my application entry form and postponed my application for eight months. Eventually they found out: a staff forgot it and my supervisor had not signed the form. During that period both of them repeatedly told me I would just have to wait and it was in the progress!

Your suggestion about my submitting a formal complaint is good. I will do it. But I think I should go to the office in person. If I made it in letter and they replied me cc'd to my supervisor that might not (look) be good for my supervisor's reputation. And he does continuously supervise and support me.

Actually, I have copied my supervisor the letter which I sent to the registry ten days ago about my intention /question to extend the deadline.

Thanks very much for prompt advice always. I think nobody cares about what I am doing; the staff are just doing their work, if nobody complained they would just keep their pace.

Conversely, you help... without asking return – this makes me want to say A heartfelt appreciation.

I will keep you updated,

Thank you again,

Celin

John to me,

yes. go to the office and share the problem. This is totally unfair to you. Keep good records in case you need them.

John

I sent an email to the University Office:

5 Nov 2016 at 11:17

Dear S. (Office),

I have tried to contact the Office by a few e-mails since early this month and called the office too, unfortunately no one ever answered my question below. I wonder whether someone in the office today will be available (15th November Tuesday) to meet me. I would like to come in person, would 15:00pm suitable?

Complaint and Application for Extensions:

Due to the lack of feedback from my supervisor, Professor R, in the final stages of my submission preparation, I wish the University allows me to await my supervisor's response before completing a final copy for submission.

Explanation:

As explained in below e-mails attached, I could not submit my thesis without receiving my supervisor's feedback – I am still waiting for that but the deadline of my submission is only one week to go: 27th November 2016.

I need to make a special inquiry for my deadline extension application. If my supervisor could give me feedback, hopefully soon, I should be able to amend my draft following his advice and submit it by 27 December.

Your response will be highly appreciated.

Celin

15 Nov 2016 at 22:38

John, I have talked to a staff on the phone. He made notes and will talk to his manager. He will respond to me by end of this week. He said my application will have to get the Dean's approval. I sensed that the extension could be approved. Thank you for helping me with useful advice.

Celin

15 Nov 2016 at 22:38

OK. keep me posted.

John

17 November 2016, 13:53,

Email from office Manager

Dear Celin,

Apologies for not getting back to you earlier.

I am not sure when you were expected to get your draft read by Professor R as he has informed me that he was able to look at your work in September but somehow this did not happen.

Can you please confirm that it is the case as I need to get all the required information before your extension can be approved?

Best wishes,

Office Manager

18 November 2016, 9:51,

I consulted with John about the draft to reply to the University:

"Dear Manager,

I looked at my record:

On September 9 I wrote to my supervisor my plan to work with him:

"9th, 17th, 24<sup>th</sup> September, and 1st, 8th, 25th, 22nd and 29th October: I will send one chapter on each of these dates" (see attached email record)

Following my plan on 9 September I sent Chapter 1 to my supervisor; on 17

September: Chapter 2; on 26 September: Chapter 3. I received on September 28 Professor R's comments on Chapters 1-3. In October as planned I sent the rest of my writings to Professor R. He wrote to me that he had been preparing to travel to Hong Kong and Australia for a few days from early morning, and got quite tired, since he had to write four papers very quickly. He said he had been going through my work but he was not able to comment due to the time limit, he said that he would read again when he would be back in second week of November and give me his comment.

When I sent my last chapter on 27th October, I wrote to my supervisor that I expected he would have a chance to read and give me comment in time.

When I sent a mail to your office on 2nd November (attached, please see your record as well) I asked if there would be any possibility for an extension, for another four weeks. You may notice that I also forwarded that mail to my supervisor. I explained that even if my supervisor gave me feedback around mid to last week of this month (November), just a couple of days before the deadline, I would not be able to finish my final copy."

Celin

John's comment on my draft,

Dear Celin,

Looks fine, but start by pointing out your current deadline. Then you could suggest that, if your supervisor has no major changes to suggest, you could submit within ?4 weeks of receiving his comments on the remaining chapters?

bw

John

Dear John,  
Thank you very much!  
I will do it.  
So nice to have someone so experienced to advise me when needed!  
Have a good weekend!  
Celin

26 November 2016 Email from Supervisor to me

Dear Celin,  
Thanks for all these chapters, which I am receiving. I have just got back after three weeks on four different continents, during which I picked up a bad cold, though this is improving. I aim to take a break and visit family in the West of England for the rest of this week, so I will attend to your chapters next week. Meanwhile I have explained the situation to the University, so I imagine you will get an extension.  
Best wishes,  
Supervisor

couple of months later

2 Feb 2017 at 12:00pm

Office to me,  
Dear Celin, I hope this finds you well  
We were expecting you to provide your re submission by end of January 2017 and have not received anything yet. The University is granting a further and final extension of Thursday 16 February 2017, 4pm. Please ensure you meet this deadline.

On 2 Feb 2017 at 11:35, I wrote to my supervisor about the office message

Dear Professor,  
Just suddenly got this mail by surprise.  
Celin

2 Feb 2017 at 15:37

Supervisor to me,  
I don't know how the University will respond, but you can try asking for a 28 February submission date.  
Supervisor R

I also wrote to John,  
Happy New Year!  
Could you please comment on this?

The officer S of the University told me on the phone today (2nd February) that she forgot to send me (on November 28 2016) the confirmation of my granted date (30 Jan 2017) to resubmit. She realised today that was her mistake so she sent me a mail (subject: Important...) asking me to submit on 16 February 2017. I called her to say that it would be impossible for me on such short notice; I have been waiting for her news but yet got any confirmation.

I will write to the University staff S explaining about this:

"After my application for extension in November I called the University on 28th November to learn about the news, they asked me to wait for the decision, there was no need to call them again, the notice will be sent to me by mail.

When waiting for the news because of the uncertainty about the new deadline I have been revising my thesis quite liberally. I put many notes in my text and that it will, by estimation, take me at least one to two weeks to finalise its current form. I also rewrote two chapters: Introduction and Conclusion.

Upon receipt of the University's notice today I contacted Professor R he kindly promised that he can read and return them to me by 14 Feb.

I need one week for proofreading and another one week for printing and binding.

I wish to apply: 28 February to be the new date to submit. "

What do you think? Do you think it is reasonable?

If yes I will write to the Office.

Many thanks.

Celin

2 Feb 2017 at 18:26 John to me,

What a shower they are!

They originally promised you two months? so say you may need the two months but will aim to submit earlier as you have started on the necessary work and will try for 4 weeks. It would unreasonable for them to refuse, since they made a serious error, and you should not lose out because of that.

bw

John

I replied,

Thank you, John, yes the officer S told me that I can complain. I will write to her now since your comment gives me confidence.

Again, appreciate your being always supportive and sharing invaluable thoughts!

I will write to them and reapply for a new deadline tomorrow.

All best wishes,

Celin

On 2 Feb 2017, supervisor wrote to me:

Dear Celin,  
I am in the UK till 15 February anyhow. What are your plans?  
Supervisor R

On 2 February 2017 at 12:47, I wrote

Dear Professor R,  
Thank you! Can I send you the rest chapters (1 Instruction and 8 Conclusion) early next week (7 Feb) and the revised texts following your comments (in chapters 2-7) end of next week (10 Feb)?  
Look forward to hearing from you.  
Celin

In February my father became very ill. I had to stop working on my thesis and join my family to take care of him; the completing of my thesis subsequently had further delays. I managed to submit my thesis on 5th May 2017 which was a new deadline arranged by the University.

## 6 Getting new examiners

15 June 2017

My supervisor wrote to me:

Dear Celin,  
I am afraid that the University has decided that since I am retired I should not organise your examination, and that this should be done by the Department. But they have not stopped me from reading your work, and I would read it anyhow. I hope all is going well.  
Best wishes,  
Supervisor

My University has advised the nomination of my new examiners which was recommended, not by my supervisor R but a research tutor of my department, Professor F.

15 June 2017 at 19:48

University Office to me,

Dear Celin,  
I appreciate you sending us the Thesis Submission Form. I am sorry to hear of your father's condition, and do hope that he has speedy recovery.  
I now write to ask whether you could supply us with a PDF copy of your thesis, so that we can send this to your examiners.

Usually, we send out the thesis to the examiners through post; however, your examiners have also asked whether a digital copy of your thesis can be sent to them, as they have stated that a PDF is useful for marking comments and corrections to give to the candidate. In order to prevent unnecessary delays in your examination process, we have gained Research Office's approval to have a digital copy of your thesis emailed to your External examiner.

If you are happy to proceed on this basis, please do send a PDF copy of your thesis to this email address but addressed for my attention, and I will ensure it is emailed to your examiner as soon as possible. I must stress that you also confirm that the PDF is an identical copy of the thesis submitted for examination on 05 May 2017, when sending this document to us via email.

Kind regards,  
Officer A

15 Jun 2017 at 20:33

I wrote to John,

Dear John,

How are you?

I have questions if you would not mind:

Q1: my University said my supervisor Professor R was retired and is no longer a member of the University so the Submission Form will be completed by a department research tutor [Professor F] (as my new supervisor).

I returned the Form and still put my supervisor's name and don't know how they complete the form (signature will be otherwise I guess) – very strange to me.

Q2: Although my supervisor is retired but he spent over these years to supervise me, why the supervisor should be replaced when I submit the thesis? and, the examiners are named by a member of staff, my new tutor, without asking my opinion. Is this a normal practice?

Q3: I am worried whether I can ask my supervisor to be in my viva? I have never met the new tutor.

Q4: I was asked yesterday by the University whether I could submit a PDF digital version of my thesis for my examiners to read. (See below attached email).

Further,

Q5: I think these two examiners are not religious scholars – my previous examination was an unpleasant experience. I am a little worried about whether my new examiners are competent: I used lot of primary sources.

I think the University should have my supervisor to choose examiners which is a reasonable thing to do – my supervisor already thought of suitable persons in the field this time. Some time ago before my submission the University suddenly said that they would remove him and ask someone to nominate the new examiners.

I asked them why, and commented "how someone who does not know my subjects can choose suitable examiners?" The University replied me that they would consult with Professor R. My sense is that they may not take my supervisor's opinion. The two examiners are not in religious field. I had bad experience in my first submission I don't want to have another nightmare. Neither of my previous examiners seemed very familiar with classic language, particularly the External, she is not a religious scholar...

Q6: Can I have a choice not providing a PDF copy to them?

Could you be kind enough to comment on my questions?

Thank you so much and wait for your reply.

Best wishes,

Celin

15 Jun 2017 at 20:57

Dear Celin,

Accept your supervisor's offer and can you ask him what he thinks about the two examiners who were nominated and whether he can reassure you that they are appropriately qualified?

John

See my comments below:

A1. Possibly just so that examiners can be appointed.

A2. It is usual – but not a regulation – to consult the candidate.

A3. If he is willing to attend, you could raise this suggestion.

A4. I assume the university has tried to appoint the most qualified examiners. I can't see why they would not do so. But, if you have well founded doubts, I think you should raise this with your new tutor Professor.

A5. I can't see that it would be to your disadvantage. But if you have evidence that it would be, what would be the alternative?

A6. Can you seek (your supervisor's) evaluation of the qualifications of the examiners?

bw

John

Dear John,

Thank you very much for prompt answers which are very valuable to me.

I should take your advice, will keep you updated.

Best wishes,

Celin

## 7 The second examination



On March 2, 2018 I had the viva – it went very well. The new examiners, External examiner V and Internal examiner W, seemed very pleased with my performance and I found the discussion and communication in the viva were very inspiring. They are very helpful.

On 26 April 2018 The University notified of the result of my research degree examination and accompanying reports. Congratulating on my initial result:

Dear Celin,

The examiners have recommended that you be awarded the degree of PhD subject to the satisfactory completion of the minor corrections. The deadline for you to submit your amended thesis to the University is within three months of the date of this letter. This means that your deadline for resubmission will be 26 July 2018. Your [Student's] Maintenance status will continue during this time."

Apart from one-page long comment, the Preliminary Report noted by my External examiner Professor W reads: "All in all, this is a well-researched and meticulously executed thesis, which should be passed with minor changes." (signed by Professor W, 2 March 2018)

Apart from one-page comment, the Preliminary Report by my new Internal examiner notes: "This thesis is an ambitious attempt to explain the religious and ideological issues underlying the impact of politics on religions in mediaeval period. It covers a great deal of ground, and in doing so certainly meets the standard of an original scholarly contribution, and deserves the award of a PhD, with minor corrections required." (signed by Dr V, dated 2 March 2018)

8 May 2018 at 14:07

Dear John,

I wish to share good news with you. I passed my viva and going to be awarded my PhD once I have completed some minor changes.

Please read below attachment.

Final Joint Report by the new examiners, W and V, concerning the examination of my thesis:

"This is the joint report following the viva voce examination of Dr Celin

It summarizes the points raised in greater detail in the individual reports previously sent to the candidate, as well as to the University, and complements the notes provided to the candidate after the viva.

This thesis represents an original item of research, which has critically re-examined historical, cultural and ritual evidence relating to politics and religions in mediaeval period. It has followed the standard methods of critical research and presents the outcome in a highly satisfactory manner. All suggestions are intended to enhance the outcome during the eventual publication phase and are not wholly conditional for

passing this thesis. In our reports we highlighted a small number of changes which we would like to see implemented before the conferring of the PhD degree can be recommended, and we are of the opinion that this can be done within three months in the shape of 'minor changes'."

(signed by External examiner V and Internal examiner W, dated 20 April 2018)

John, I wish to thank you for helping me from the first day I learned the bad news I was failed without chance to resubmit. I had my lawyer Dr DS's help to appeal and succeeded to enter a new examination.

I made right decision not following the first pair examiners' comments but keep the same structure and arguments of my old version, only facts are added and texts are refined. Thanks to your recommendation of proof-reader Z, who did a great job to read my thesis.

Without your encouragement and help, my path to walk down to here might not have been so smooth. Thank you again.

Would you please let me know which address I could use to send something to you? I wish to express my gratitude.

Look forward to hearing from you,  
Celin

## 8 I was wondering how John was doing

.....4 months later

21 Sep 2018 at 05:18,

Dear John,

How are you?

This is Celin. You had helped me to solve the problem of my appeal in 2015. I asked for the re-examining of my PhD thesis which was failed in my first submission. During the course of my preparation of the second submission you have been generous to give me great amount of assistance to resolve many problems. I was fortunate. The second submission and viva in last year was successful and I passed it. Now I am going to expect to complete my minor correction all soon.

I wish to thank you by sending a gift but few months ago my mail sending to you did not get a reply. I am a bit concerned and hope all is well with you. Please drop me a line to let me know you are well.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes,

Celin

21 Sep 2018 at 07:57

Dear Celin,

Many apologies for not responding – with my congratulations – in May. Fantastic news. And thanks for alerting me. I had put it on one side and then forgotten to come back to you.

It is very generous of you to think of sending me a gift, but the thing I would most value would be a short account of your story, which I would anonymise with the disciplines that you studied changed and return to you for checking. I could then add it to my collection which would enable many other candidates to learn from your experience. Would you be prepared to do that for me? There is so much others could learn from your experience.

It only needs to be quite brief – perhaps starting with your first email to me in 2015 and ending with a successful PhD. Alternatively if it helps, I could start the ball rolling by looking through your emails and doing a first draft, changing details, names etc to ensure it was anonymous. There are various other examples on my website

<http://www.missendencentre.co.uk/links.html>

as you probably know.

I hope you will say 'yes'.

With all good wishes.

John

21 Sep 2018 at 12:13

I was happy to hear from John,

John,

Thanks for your emails, YES! I will do whatever you proposed.

I am still finishing my minor corrections and will have to submit it by 9th November – after that I will send you my draft. I hope this is ok.

I will be in touch and thanks to you again.

With all my best wishes,

Celin

## **9 Minor corrections submitted and approved**

Due to personal reasons including my hand injuries, the deadline to submit my minor correction was postponed to 7th January 2019.

On 15 Jan 2019, 13:56

The University sent a notification about safe receipt of my submission and said that the examiners do have up to 3 months to get back with their feedback (outcome) on my corrections.

Dear Celin,

I hope you are well. I can confirm safe receipt of your amended thesis and list of changes. I will now forward these to your examiners for review.  
Examination Officer

30 Jan 2019 at 01:33

I received letter from my University confirming the examiners had approved the minor correction of my thesis:

Dear Celin,

We have now received confirmation that you have completed minor corrections on your thesis.

You now need to submit a hard-bound copy and a CD copy of your thesis to the University Section so that we can confirm your award.

Kind regards

Administration Officer

## 10 Publication plan

Mon, 18 Feb 2019 at 08:09,

Internal Examiner W to me:

Once again, Celin – congratulations! Your thesis really represented the level of scholarship, both in argument and in execution, which it takes to gain a doctoral degree. Like this, it is \*almost\* publishable – almost, since publishers always want to tone down the “academic purity” of doctoral theses; in other words, to make the outcome more reader-friendly in order to widen the scope of the audience. Once you enter the next step, namely the choice of a suitable publisher, but your External Professor V and I shall be doing our best to assist you.

Best wishes,

Internal Examiner W

I continued to revise the final copy of my thesis for the purpose of publication while preparing for the final submission to my University. I submitted my final copies to the University on 1 April. The award ceremony is expected to take place for me on 18 July 2019 afternoon.

Happily, my examiners found my final copy of thesis’s publishable and recommended a renowned publisher for me to contact. The editor of the publisher replied

15 Apr 2019 13:39

Dear Celin,

We do not publish unrevised doctoral theses, but if you are planning to convert it into a monograph, then we could indeed be interested.

I've attached guidelines on what we need in a book proposal, and you may also find it useful to consult our full Author Guide, available. Your manuscript could potentially fit in our series on late antiquity and the early middle ages: [\(link\)](#) However, we do also sometimes publish books outside a series, and so there are different options to consider. Once I know more about the manuscript, I would be happy to advise. I hope to receive a proposal in due course, and please let me know should you have any queries.

With best wishes,  
Editor

I asked my supervisor whether he would like to obtain a soft or hard binding copy. I also reported to him that my Internal and External examiners have been helpful giving me advice on converting my thesis into a monograph for publication. I invited him as a guest to attend my graduation ceremony, and his wife together in a Piccadilly club for dinner on that day which my family will give as a party to celebrate.

23 April 12:03 my supervisor replied

Dear Celin,

This is good news. If you would like to give me a copy of the final version, a soft copy would be fine. I have marked the July date in my diary, though since my wife is travelling I have not been able to inform her.

I am glad that you are getting advice from your examiners (on the publication proposal), since I believe strongly that one should not learn from one teacher alone, and that it is probably time for me to fade into the background. But I am very impressed by your achievement, and your persistence through many difficulties to reach your goal, and I am sure you will show the same spirit going forward.

Well done!  
Supervisor

On 20 May 2019 my University wrote to me:

Dear Celin,

Please find attached a confirmation of award letter. Copies of these have also been sent to you by post. Congratulations on your excellent result.

You will be eligible to attend the University Graduation ceremony this year. This is normally held in July each year. If you wish to attend the ceremony please see the details at [\(link\)](#).

Congratulations again on your achievement. We look forward to seeing you graduate in summer 2019.

Kind Regards,

Officer

The Award Letter dated 14 May says:

Dear Celin,

I am pleased to inform you that the Examiners for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy for which you are a candidate have reported that you have satisfied them in the examination:

Thesis title: State Religions in Medieval Period

You will receive a diploma bearing the date of award of the degree 30 April 2019 after this has been processed by the University.

Congratulations on the result.

Yours sincerely,

Manager

Celin graduated on 30th April 2019 and the ceremony took place on 25th July 2019.

Final comment from John: so a thesis two examiners considered a complete failure is now not only a highly rated doctorate but also the basis of an academic monograph... But where would Celin be now if her dentist had left the practice without writing her his support letter?