

The third degree: Jamie's PhD in Art and Design

1 A question from Jamie

I wonder if there is any advice that might help me resolve a difficulty with the examining team who recently assessed my submission for PhD (Practice based work supported by thesis). The Viva went way off track, and I'm left, without much warning, with a virtual rewrite of the thesis in its entirety – including title, abstract, conclusions, methodology i.e. the whole thing.

I haven't actually been failed, just referred – however in practical terms it might as well be the same thing – for example the revised title they want substituted doesn't actually describe a research issue now since just a broad generalisation of a topic that's impossible to research – I know because I already tested out this title very early on in the process and know where it leads – much too big! It seems to me that the title should stay fixed and the thesis be assessed regarding how well it answers the title or not. The current system appears to allow the title to be changed by the examiners at the Viva with the candidate then left trying to corner the subject all over again.

Up until now there have been no issues with my approach, and in fact positive, intelligent and responsive feedback from a variety of peer sources, with some valid challenges in the mix. I had a formal annual review each year whereby any concerns could have been highlighted or changes made to the status of the research but these never showed up any issues. I have paper records of these. Similarly all the research training was completed and scheduled regular meetings with my supervisors took place throughout. My mock viva raised no significant issues.

The examining team praised the practical work as being of a high standard, and have no issues with questions of originality of the research – they just seem to take particular exception to the route by which I have arrived there

They seem to want the information presented in a form which is inappropriate to the research. Some of their observations are valid and can be addressed or amended but the bulk of it still seems nonsensical.

I always assumed the model for the research was the prerogative of the researcher and would also echo, in form, the specific needs and findings of the research topic. I'm coming in at quite an advanced level in my own practice and feel that I know my subject sufficiently well to give it the most appropriate shape.

However the end result is that whilst I've fulfilled all the obvious requirements of the PhD and as stated in the regulations I'm presumably going to end up failing to qualify

since the examiners' amendments dismantle the thesis and therefore the methodology and are just not achievable, whether in two weeks or a year. My own personal circumstances will not support further work on this in any case – health, financial and family.

In my own opinion a model, which is quantitative, evidence-based and linear in form, has been arbitrarily superimposed onto my research, which is essentially qualitative, philosophical and theory based. Its overall pattern is circular, overlapping and complex – the issue of complexity being particularly key to the research questions.

This significantly alters the way the thesis can be assessed and certainly if treated as a quasi-scientific piece of research it would fail miserably since this would require an entirely different form of data and methodology! My research hasn't generated this kind of data so it's impossible to provide it. Although I will try and disentangle this quite basic difference in my meeting with supervisors tomorrow the main issue for me is that now being post Viva there doesn't seem to be a way out of this other than by appeal or to accept the impossible rewrite.

There is some basis for an appeal since two of the examiners were not considered sufficiently experienced by the research committee to be allowed to examine the research independently, although they each have specialist knowledge of one of the two main practice areas I seek to combine in the research. Therefore a third examiner (internal) has been brought in specifically to cover this gap since s/he has a lot of experience in examining PhD's in general. Unfortunately this examiner, although from the same University School, (Art and Design), has no demonstrable knowledge of even the broad subject areas I address let alone the highly specialist knowledge of the processes and issues affecting the two specific subject areas and in turn how these might then be integrated.

That all examiners have at least knowledge of the broad subject area is stated quite clearly as a requirement in the University's own regulations. However in terms of status in the team this additional examiner appears to have been given, by the research school at least, a rather greater authority in which way the research is assessed, hence an inappropriate model seems to have become involved, unlikely to have come from the original team.

So now I have three examiners who are all apparently unqualified but for different reasons. Rather than solve any problem it's just compounded it further. The university is also now prepared to redefine my broad subject area so broadly as to be meaningless. This can now encompass anything within Art and Design even though it's stated perfectly clearly and simply in the title of my research which two disciplines are

being researched, followed by a sub heading which locates the much more specific questions being considered.

If this isn't difficult enough, the third examiner actually comes from one of the very few subject areas in art and design which have no connection with the practice I'm researching and acts without reference to it. This would not necessarily be apparent to the research committee, since drawn from other university departments I think who perhaps see it all as encompassed within Art and Design, but this is not the case. I actually quote this issue at least four times in the thesis in support of my main argument – not intending it to be interpreted as a particular challenge or cross into another discipline, merely as a way of clarifying what the research is by clarifying what it is not.

Either way, this was sufficient of an issue to make me object directly to the inclusion of anyone from this other subject area when this was first suggested. This is not a personal issue but an academic and practical one.

This concern was initially accommodated by my supervision team. They were subsequently overruled - very late in the process - by the research school, post submission of my thesis if I'm correct, at which point it became an issue which wasn't seen as being very important – mainly because it was impossible to arrange anything else - so my objection was effectively ignored. It is very difficult for the candidate to keep objecting and this would have meant going up against both the university and also the supervisors.

I realised early in the process the particular importance and also difficulty of finding the right examining team and have regularly put forward a variety of names for the external. None of these were followed up or explored further, including my main choice of specialist in the field, who was perceived as too challenging, although not by me. If I'd then been referred it would at least have told me something relevant about my own research findings.

This is probably the only real complaint I would ever have against my supervision team who have been great to work with and otherwise wholly supportive. I'm unwilling to cite it as an appeal issue but it is unfortunately quite a significant reason things have gone so badly from my perspective. However I'm also now being told it's just my opinion regarding what my broad subject areas are, which I find rather interesting.

I've received AHRC funding in addition, so feel a big responsibility to finish on this count alone but am starting to understand why there are such big failure rates.

Unfortunately without the actual qualification I'm unable to generate new income so very much in a catch twenty-two situation. I had just started to be given academic interviews prior to this latest event but of course am now not in a position to apply for anything similar and beginning to fall behind.

I now have some additional concerns having released my research into a more public domain – some of the information is very good. Can I recall the thesis from the examiners etc. if I withdraw my research from the University? This is very unclear to me and the University doesn't seem to know.

Therefore I wondered if it would be possible to ask if there is any advice or guidance available regarding the best and most sensible course of action here? Whilst I don't want to prove anything, other than the validity of my research, I do have a strong sense of self-preservation in the face of quite a major inequality of resources and am genuinely concerned about the direction this could take from here. As you will notice I haven't identified the University in question – at the moment I feel that's the best option, and hope this is alright.

Many thanks for providing a route by which this can be discussed; it's clearly an area that needs substantial research in its own right!

Yours sincerely
Jamie

Q1: before reading further, list the main issues raised in Jamie's account

Q2: how you would respond to Jamie's request for advice?

2. John's response

Jamie,

Thanks. I am concerned at some of the things you say and imply about the examination process. Here are two points as a start:

1. Examiners' report: it is your right to be provided with a precise and unambiguous list of the things that need doing to make it a PhD (and if there is to be a second viva, the exact purpose of it). If you, with any advice available from supervisors etc, are not entirely clear exactly what has to be done, you should write to the university official who sent you the report requesting clarification from the examiners.

You should note that it is impossible for you to address the requirements until they are specific and clear. So any delays in getting a response will involve you being given additional time to produce your revised thesis. This is extremely important as in most universities the examiners do not have the option of giving you another chance after the second examination. (Check this in the exam regs.) You may like to send me current version of the examiners' report to look at as a non-expert.

2. Appeal: meanwhile, I should take time to double check the regs for the exact grounds available to you for appeal, and draft out where the examination of your thesis already fell short. Start a new file on this so that you are ready should need arise.

Put 'support' from supervisors etc on one side here. You have a right to be thoroughly, fairly and professionally examined by experts in your field. So, you will need to assert your rights to this, and any appeal will not take into account support or views of supervisors etc. It is a legal process, based on regs and evidence. Cover who was involved in the examination at what stages and their contributions etc etc before you forget, and file all e-mails and documentation.

The thing to remember is that the AHRC and you have both invested a very large amount of money and time - years of your life - on this work and that it should not be discredited by an unprofessional examination process. In any case the institution should want a success on its record rather than a failure...

Best wishes
John

Q: discuss this response and how it compares with yours

3. Jamie's decision

Dear John,

Thank you for sending such a considered reply and the points you raise are important ones.

I think just at the moment I ought to keep going with the rewrite/ reorganization of the thesis whilst there's an opportunity. I've re-read the examiner's report with a view to sending you a copy and know that what I've presented is just too much at odds with their expectations of what a PhD thesis should look like.

Unfortunately my thesis is also an accurate reflection of how the research developed and the methods I used, which are deliberately non linear i.e. don't produce neat chronological trajectories, main case studies etc. but nonetheless have a coherent structure of their own, which is drawing specific including a historical context which is very revealing concerning the universal structures underlying drawing as a practice. This is one of the main research findings and explained as such.

This takes some of the research into philosophical areas, presented in this context as evidence i.e. there are issues in contemporary drawing but some are not as new as they appear. This was all explained in the original thesis i.e. its' qualitative rather than quantitative nature. So I'm not hopeful that they will understand the revised version despite now giving the methodology an entire chapter of its own. On this basis I can't see how I would be able to make a successful appeal. I can send the report although it might not make that much sense without the thesis to compare it with.

In terms of the next stage I'm *not* required to have another Viva as the examiners agree that the practice based work is substantial and there's no need to see this again. However understanding how this substantial work came about seems to be of no consequence and the examiners would prefer that it had come about by a different method. By examiners I mean two of the three, the other examiner understands it perfectly as far as I can see.

I should perhaps mention that I also requested/ suggested quite a long list of potential external examiners who I felt knew the field in which my research operates and the issues that are circulating just now but these were all turned down on different pretexts - the external appointed was the last on the list due to the relatively narrow area in which s/he works. However this would probably still have been manageable and interesting if I'd been discussing the research with two examiners not three, due to the group dynamics involved.

Best wishes,
Jamie

Q: Before reading further discuss the issues now raised

4. Rewriting

Dear John,

The update from yesterday's meeting with my supervisors is that the meeting itself was useful and helpful in terms of approaching the re-write and raising the main issues contained within this. They also accept some of the key problems - for example the issue of the title and suggest I hold out for this with a written explanation as to why I think it's central. They also advise me to go back and discuss things with the chair of the meeting, particularly the question as to when a title is considered finalised.

Anyway they gave a lot of time to the problem in terms of delivering the thesis with what amendments are possible which I appreciated, and also accept as part of a general development/ learning curve. They think there's more flexibility in what this mix of examiners will accept as a response to their criticisms - I'm still wary about this obviously. They also acknowledge that there were major issues in terms of the mix of examiners and how that worked on the day, so I found that recognition supportive.

The meeting was also interesting in terms of clarifying some of the central issues for practice orientated PhD's in the Art and Design area, e.g. that methodologies are necessarily individual in a way that is not applicable or comparable within other disciplines. So I'm making notes as well whilst in the process. As yet I haven't found any definitive guide in the literature regarding this area of research practice so it probably needs some input.

Regarding the problems of sorting out the procedural issues retrospectively there was much less flexibility, as I expected. They still hold out firmly that the broad area of my research is not Drawing and Glass as stated clearly in the title but anything at all from the huge Art & Design field, including photography and media. So we don't see eye to eye on that at all.

[Jamie summarizes here her experience of how the university dealt with a serious personal injury, ensuing complications and their affects on her morale.]

Re submission is obviously necessary to salvage the PhD itself and technically the rewrite looks more possible as I go further into this and a more productive route than

an appeal.

Everything else is fine...

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Some weeks later John asks about progress...

Dear John,

Thank you for the help – yes, I am rewriting and possibly also resubmitting if I feel I've been able to answer the criteria requested. I've followed up today with someone who knows the area I'm working in and may be able to read the first version of thesis or at least look it over, and that feels like a positive move.

I think that was one of the reasons the Viva was difficult as actually one looks to that opportunity to gain real feedback on the content, not just an assessment of formal criteria so no further forward in real applied terms. There's also a conference at the end of March which would give me an opportunity to make some new contacts – I missed submitting a paper as at the time didn't feel up to it. However it would still be worth going.

I'll also check again with the university regarding the open ended timeframe I seem to have been offered due to injury but should have until May to resubmit. I found the slide you sent very interesting if alarming! It's revealing to see it presented that way. No wonder one becomes a bit obsessed; it's obviously the only way to get anything done...

Sending best wishes,

Q: List the issues that arise when rewriting a thesis for resubmission

5. Resubmission

Dear John,

I thought I'd just let you know that I did in fact manage to resubmit my thesis last week – I think it manages to answer most of the examiners' recommendations to a greater or lesser extent, the only one I couldn't get at was the proposed re-title of the research, perhaps unsurprisingly.

I reversed the order to give it a slightly different emphasis and also explained that I have instead rewritten the thesis in its entirety including a whole new chapter on methodology in order to help make the purpose of the title more explicit, so perhaps that will be acceptable I remain convinced however that this detailed additional explanation of methodology alongside many other amendments are due to having to explain basic information in the discipline to an examiner inappropriate for this research. Overall it's a better document but not sure that justifies the process to get to this stage.

Anyway glad it's over, whatever the outcome – I think they have until the end of October to re-assess this. Thanks again for all your help with this, which I know helped greatly to keep a handle on things here. I will of course let you know the outcome in due course.

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Dear John,

Just a quick update and also an enquiry in case you can advise? I heard back from the main internal examiner quite soon after my last email to you i.e. early August to say she was very supportive of the thesis and had approved it, which was very good to know. This confirms her original position at the Viva. Other than that there's no news however and am also assuming that the timing of the revised thesis probably collided with the August break. Obviously they have three months from receiving the thesis so still within the timeframe.

However it would be useful to know at this stage whether, in the case of having three examiners, they all have to approve the thesis for it to go through since no one seems to be clear on this issue here. I'm reluctant to make any further enquiries with the university just at the moment. Is this known, and if so does the external have to be one of these? I had a chance to test out the content of the thesis – albeit abbreviated from 50,000 words to a more modest 1,500 (quite cathartic!) – but was well received by conference peer group and a good test so I found that reassuring/ encouraging.



Best wishes,

Jamie

Q: what happens if the examiners cannot agree?

6. The third examiner

Dear John,

Apologies for the delay in updating you on progress here. The latest progress to report is that the external examiner is now satisfied. The original internal examiner confirmed the thesis was fine in July this year and in fact didn't have a problem with the original thesis other than some minor points.

However the third examiner, whom I've always felt to be the problem in the equation, is asking for more amendments to be made i.e. full amendments not minor corrections, and I've now been given until May of *next* year to complete these...(!). Some of these appear to be repeats of amendments already asked for and answered but now asked for again in a different form. Some appear to be entirely new...

The report I've received back doesn't acknowledge that these have been addressed or in what way these have been deficient either. The situation is somewhat aggravated by the fact that the third examiner, now being referred to by the University as the Internal Examiner, is a photographic historian without either general or specialist knowledge of my subject areas (drawing and studio glass) and is not a practitioner of either, which I've objected to repeatedly from the outset. I still can't understand why this person is allowed to examine my work.

The (real) Internal Examiner left the University in the July this year and is therefore no longer on the staff.

My main supervisor – supervising his first PhD since completing his own – thinks I should just do the amendments, communicated to me briefly by email. The co-supervisor, who is in charge of research here and was originally the main supervisor before changing roles, has not been in touch with me at all for quite some time – I would say probably from the time the third examiner submitted her report.

I've had to wait for the full three months allowed – plus an additional ten days requested after this by the external, reason not given to me – before hearing back.

It's been highly stressful, however I did think this would at least be the end of the process. However I now face a third submission of the thesis with substantial and also new amendments requested by an examiner from outside my subject areas. I am unable to tell whether these amendments are being requested by this examiner or by the external via the new internal examiner. I've been told by my supervisors that the internal examiner is very supportive of my "project" – I have no idea what I'm supposed to understand from this.

As yet I haven't attempted to contact either of my supervisors, which seems like the best approach at the moment. I've added the email from the GRS Office below. I'm not certain what the congratulations are for as nothing seems to be resolved! I'm sorry this isn't more conclusive and as always welcome any insights you might have. I also need to look at the amendments in more detail before making any further decisions – in comparison to the last report it's lessened but still far from a good situation.

I also feel that I'm being treated extremely unfairly. The knock-on effects are of course highly damaging and I'm really not certain I can maintain this process further. Anyway I imagine you know the story only too well – why does the University find it so difficult to respect the contract that's been made?

Q: is this treatment 'unfair'?

7. The third version

Hi. I've wanted to email you for a while in fact but felt I ought to wait until I either had more definitive or more positive news to relay. I'm still working my way through very problematic and extensive amendments to produce a third version of the thesis.

The PhD has now been awarded 'technically', which I'm obviously meant to feel pleased about. But it is still subject to these amendments being done "to the satisfaction of the internal examiner" – in other words if the amendments aren't made "to the satisfaction of the internal examiner" then the PhD isn't awarded, so not sure how this is meant to imply that things have moved forwards.

Unfortunately the internal examiner is not the original internal examiner, who has now left the university, but the extra examiner brought in at a late stage, who is a photographic historian - albeit one with a PhD. I don't see how this can constitute an examination process - for example it's very unlikely that this person will have read any of the works cited in the bibliography, is definitely neither a practitioner nor a theorist in either discipline being discussed, will know nothing of the context in which the research is set either historically or in the contemporary field or be able to evaluate if the research is making any new contribution, bearing in mind this might be only a small addition...

So what's actually being examined? The only thing left would be a stylistic presentation of the research which is, itself, determined by the methodology. If the examiner doesn't understand the methodology because they come from a different discipline with a different methodology then this would be inappropriate obviously.

The amendments reflect this situation and are almost unanswerable because they don't relate to the language, protocols and methodologies implied by practice based research. Many are a repeat of information already provided i.e. tautologies, and a significant amount are amendments which were not asked for previously i.e. are new since the previous resubmission.

Since the thesis is now also fully illustrated – in itself a carefully constructed visual narrative and specifically asked for in the previous resubmission – written amendments which have to be included all the way through the text also disrupt this aspect by breaking up every page layout so there's an additional workload which is also not being recognized. So I'm not confident that I can actually satisfy this requirement and therefore the PhD seems as unlikely as before, other than possible peer pressure from the university itself to let this through.

This is extremely time consuming and also being done without any new resources.

I have until May to complete and decided against making an appeal at this stage although have made my objections very clear, just short of falling out with my supervisors which is a real risk. The reasons for not making an appeal are principally due to the university's extensive timescales and rules surrounding this and also because the time allowed for making such an appeal was very short.

My supervisor was eventually prepared to take this back to the research committee, but which would lead to a protracted process and probably be contested again. So I felt it was marginally less stressful for me to continue with the amendments. I will however now appeal if necessary. It may also be fair to put in a formal complaint since the cumulative effect of this has been significantly damaging at a personal level, all of which seems to me to be avoidable.

It seems to me that the general attitude within the university is that it's both pragmatic and justifiable to ignore any research requirements or ground rules – i.e. the PhD contract between university and student - which are inconvenient or difficult to understand and that the PhD candidate should accommodate this at any cost in order to be awarded the degree.

I don't see any sign that either examiners or supervisors are receiving or seeking any specific or detailed training or ongoing professional development, particularly worrying considering the number of professors in this field who have never done doctoral work of their own or been required to present it as a thesis. In my case neither my main supervisor, who also heads up research in art and design nor my external examiner, who heads up research in fine art at a Russell Group university have actually done a PhD themselves or written a thesis. It's not a personal criticism since PhD's have only recently been more widely available, but to not recognise this as a serious skills gap given the exacting and specific demands involved is a major failing.

To give just one example of the new amendments I've been asked to provide is to "ensure that each sub-section is adequately summarised before moving on to the next" – I can't even count the number of sub sections involved! The next amendment asks for "further (unspecified) editing throughout to ensure clarity and succinctness" ... If the subject and methodological basis was familiar to the examiner/s the thesis might be easier to understand. The thesis, from my perspective, is now overly long due to having to explain basics as well as contain the actual research. So do I now edit out the research in order to simplify things and keep the thesis down in size ?

On a more positive note I'm now working with Barchester University as an artist in residence, two days per week for 10 months – a post funded by a Trust and not dependent on having a PhD.



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Thanks for enquiring about progress here, which is much appreciated – I hope to be able to see this through from here, which is probably the best way to improve things.

Q: discuss Jamie's perspective on the University's procedures

8. Conclusion

Dear John,

Just by way of keeping you in touch with progress, I have now resubmitted a third version of the thesis for the third examiner, which went in on the 2nd April, but don't have a clear picture of how long it should take to hear back – no indication as yet and the Graduate Research School couldn't say. There don't appear to be any guidelines, perhaps because nothing normally goes this far? In the interim I've also put in an application for a research post at another university, which is post doctoral – so am hoping I won't have to withdraw this if there are further problems. Fortunately I still have the support of my two supervisors who are willing to act as referees despite things remaining unresolved. I'll let you know what happens

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Dear John,

Just a very quick line for now to let you know there was a successful outcome to the prolonged PhD process, which I heard this afternoon and it has been awarded. This is a great relief here and I hope to get a more complete picture of why things became so problematic when I catch up with my supervisors, possibly next week. But in the meantime I thought I should relay this latest news on to you.... With genuine thanks as always,

Team exercise

What lessons are there here for

1. PhD candidates
2. Supervisors, and
3. Institutions?

Jamie's reflections

As you recognize this has been a particularly protracted and complicated process. I hope mine is not a common experience, but empathized with the two case studies you sent in your first email.

One has to ask just what it is that universities find so very complicated about this process? I think a key requirement ought to be that everyone concerned in the direction and evaluation of someone else's potential PhD reads through and understands both the accepted requirements of a PhD per se and also their university's own regulations and then goes on to understand the necessity and purpose of actually adhering to them.

Then as research candidates we would know where we stand and could fail, succeed or appeal on that basis. If we are expected to work from the written regulations in the handbook then this should be recognized as a contractual document and much more than a tacit and endlessly flexible agreement. What is the point of undertaking research training if it's then bypassed? I never saw such a muddle before.

This probably also needs to be overseen by an external body so the process has some degree of neutrality to protect against subjective and/or vested interests, and also requires transparency. Research degrees have a finite and perfectly measurable set of requirements and outcomes. Whilst the actual quality or scope might be quite variable amongst research projects this isn't really so important in terms of a formal qualification in research being awarded. If the research is valid and thorough it will have additional mileage anyway, although not if the candidate has been so undermined in the process that they cannot continue to make a contribution.

The examiners seem to forget their job is to examine to see whether what has been presented is or is not a PhD and it's actually not relevant for the examination whether they think it could have been done differently, better, in another subject or to some other personal preference – that's a supervisors job and the candidate's decision! I was not, for example, questioned on my thesis during the Viva, which I understood to be a key aspect of the examination. I did, however, spend a lot of time explaining the work in the supporting exhibition, again to the examiner from outside my subject areas. However the regulations for practice orientated PhD's state quite clearly that the candidate should be questioned on the thesis in the presence of the work, not the other way round.

It's good that there's an additional opportunity to get things right or fully up to standard after the Viva, but post Viva is rather too late to start off a whole new process. Examiners are not there to become additional supervisors when the project has

already been concluded. My examiners wanted to change the actual title of my work right at the end of the research.... rather than examine the research to see if it fulfilled it. The title incidentally was fairly straightforward, and had already been approved. It was changed at my request as the research process concluded, requiring separate approval, to give a slight alteration of emphasis, so not something unconsidered or arbitrary but central in describing it. Dismantling the title would have left the research without a boundary or a purpose so I refused to do this and retained it, but had to go through a fair amount of stress just on this one issue.

I think the reason the PhD experience can be so unexpectedly catastrophic at both a personal and professional level is that the researcher is also being subjected to a virtually legal, public and also binding decision about both the specific project and their ability to conduct it, a judgment unfortunately which can, on occasion, be made by individuals who are quite possibly insufficiently experienced, trained, qualified - and fairly unaccountable.

This is a dangerous combination. This comes as a profound shock to any candidate whose intention was to undertake good or even high level research in their own subject, particularly if they've also been conscientious about their own training and responsive to the advice of supervisors i.e. a good researcher. It also concludes a very long process by which time the commitment made is considerable.

The effects of an unsuccessful outcome are substantial, long lasting and real. This is an aspect that is not made clear at any stage of the process, presumably because this would put an onus of responsibility on the university system to do its part of the job properly and to be accountable. The loss of confidence, status and self belief and the shame described by candidates is therefore very easy to understand.

I'm personally fortunate to have enough experience as a mature candidate to be able to deal with this slightly differently, but nonetheless found the experience hugely stressful and for a prolonged period of time. Most of it had nothing to do with the problems involved in research per se. which is straightforward stuff although demanding and complex. To get through I've had to access a massive amount of professional help. The process has taken twice the length of time I had expected.

I don't see much evidence that supervisors and examiners currently receive any real training to deal with or understand the responsibilities they've been given. In my own area this problem is currently exacerbated by the fact that not only supervisors but also examiners have not necessarily been subjected to / gone through the stresses and hidden difficulties of the PhD process themselves, but are allowed to guess how to do it in quite an arbitrary fashion and according to personal preference despite caveats. This is about to be further aggravated by the prospect of the "Taught PhD" - can there

be such a thing? Pupils are taught, students study, researchers research!

The “research student” appears to be a construct of the university – personally I went into this in order to research an area of practice not to be a student of research per se, and think this is fairly typical in the art and design field where general research is part and parcel of practice. Perhaps this aspect needs to be clarified? Do universities in general find it easier to assess on this basis rather than assessing actual research results?

In Art & Design the nature and role of practice within research is currently problematic. The terminology *Practice Based* and *Practice Led* are used interchangeably but are not, in fact, the same thing. Practice based refers to practice based outcomes e.g. in the studio, whereas Practice Led refers to the theoretical basis informing practice. Therefore the correct term appears to be Practice Orientated research which encompasses both. [Ref for this particular insight is Candy L. (2006) *Practice Based Research: A Guide*. CS Report: 2006-V1.0.November, Sydney, University of Technology. (Available at <http://www.creativityandcognition.com>)]

I’m glad that my experiences may turn out to be useful....

Sending on best wishes and thank you again,

Jamie