

3 Admission

The important thing for me with my PhD was to tie it into my area of work (drug and alcohol addiction) as much as possible. This way I knew that I would be able to spend some work time on the study and I would also have the full support and backing of my manager, an expert in the field.

It took a while to decide what the study would be, toying with various ideas. I had the support of my Masters supervisor, who had also been keen on me

4 Induction

I was surprised that, after the viva-like experience when meeting the second supervisor,

5 Year one

So I started. In my initial meetings with my supervisors we discussed that I wanted to try and complete the PhD as quickly as possible. Whilst the University has some regulations on this, I wanted to work on it whilst I was at my most motivated and whilst I was allowed to spend a day each week of work time on the study. The other motivation behind trying to complete the study in under 7 years was that of finance – as a self funding part time student, any time saved has a real cost benefit, as the fees were in the region of £1500 a year.

The first year went well. Particular highs were being awarded a bursary for half of the fees, and also the award of a small fieldwork grant. I also applied and I was granted ethical approval for the study towards the end of the year I started the fieldwork.

As the year went on I struggled with some aspects of studying part time. Just exactly when does part time mean you work? It was a challenge to fit the work around my paid employment and my social life. I also struggled in not really being an active or recognised member of my department, and so did not have a peer group who I could discuss things with or relate to. In fact, I felt particularly isolated and my non academic friends did not quite understand what I was doing.

I found it very easy during these low periods to lose motivation. If it wasn't for the regular meetings with my supervisors, and their continued interest and belief, I'm certain that I would've given up. Other low points of the first year

6 Year Two

The second year started strangely. Firstly, there was the issue with my lead supervisor having now gone on 6 months sabbatical. Then I discovered that I did not appear as a registered PhD student in the departmental information or on the departmental website. I couldn't help wondering if this was because I was studying part time, with little departmental contact.

Whatever the reason, coupled with the first supervisor's sabbatical, it was a

Like the first year, there were highs and lows. The major highs were the fact that it really felt that I was *doing* a PhD, maybe because the fieldwork had started, but also linked to my greater ownership of it. However, it was still tough, particularly financially as a couple of funding applications that I had spent a lot of time on were unsuccessful. I was awarded a further small amount of money towards more fieldwork costs, so at least this went some way to helping with the indirect costs.

Q1 Identify the issues that are now facing Clare and discuss how they could have been handled

Q2 Have you any suggestions for her at this stage?

Q2 Have you any comment on her decision?

8 Conference attendance

During the year I also presented the progress of my work at two postgraduate conferences, one in my own department. Whilst used to giving research presentations I was rather concerned about nominating myself to give a presentation – as it would be the first time that I had spoken to an audience about my doctoral work. I was anxious that other postgraduates would see

9 The upgrade

The upgrade proved difficult to organize as finding a time that all 5 of us could make was impossible. September had been chosen for the upgrade as the lead supervisor was in the country, albeit for a week, prior to taking yet another 3 months of study leave. Nevertheless, it was still impossible to find a date that all parties could make during that week. Only the second supervisor was therefore present at the upgrade.

The upgrade meeting itself went well. Whilst I was nervous, especially as I did not know the postgraduate tutor or the internal examiner, I found myself actually enjoying talking about my work and answering their questions about it. The outcome was positive, with good feedback from the panel and I was upgraded from my provisional status. I was even told that I was one of the strongest PhD students in the department! I found this particularly surprising and somewhat ironic, given the fact that I had been omitted from the departmental information earlier in the year. I was also allowed me to discuss with the panel any concerns that I had.

I raised two. Firstly, about the lack of active involvement and apparent concern from the lead supervisor. This was linked to the second concern – which was how the Department had (not) responded to the lead supervisor taking so much study leave and more generally how they had dealt with me as a part time student. The postgraduate tutor took the concerns seriously and suggestions were made to help me integrate in the department – adding me to mailing lists and study groups. We decided that the second supervisor could formally become the lead supervisor and the possibility of a stand in supervisor with the methods expertise would be investigated.

I couldn't help feeling that I had been pushed from pillar to post by the department on numerous occasions, but now felt like they were starting to take my concerns more seriously. About time!

Q1 Comment on the upgrade procedure

Q2 How should the make up of supervisory teams be reviewed?

10 Year Three

more specialist knowledge in the area and thus the other academics would be approached to gauge their interest in acting as a third, yet more informal, supervisor.

Whilst the change in supervision arrangements took some time to resolve, progress with the research continued. I completed my fieldwork which felt like a real achievement and gave me a boost during periods of frustration or uncertainty. I was half way up the PhD mountain and I was determined to carry on to the top. If anything, all the setbacks and the problems that I had experienced did not deter me from continuing with the doctorate. Rather, they inspired me to continue on the journey and I became even more determined to succeed and complete it.

As if that wasn't enough, a further significant event occurred during the third year of the part time study – I got a new job. And not just any new job – a senior research job!! I couldn't believe it – I got a senior research job without having completed the PhD. I wished that I could tell the external examiner from my Masters viva! Admittedly, the new position was not within academia, but nevertheless the opportunity was fantastic.

I knew I had to take it, despite it meaning leaving a job that I enjoyed and that I had been in for seven years. Not only that, it meant leaving a job and an employer who was very supportive towards the PhD and moving somewhere where working towards and having a PhD was much less important. It meant moving cities, relocating and leaving friends.....but I knew that it brought many benefits and would professionally be an important career move. I knew that in accepting the job, I would have much less 'work' time to spend on the PhD and my goal of completing it earlier than the stipulated 5 years would be pushed without devoting yet more of my 'free' time to the studies. However I also knew that that was a sacrifice that I had to take.

Q1 Comment on the reluctance of Clare's Department to agree to using a supervisor from another department

Q2 What effect do team members predict Clare's move to her new job will have on her progress?

Team task

On the acetate provided suggest guidelines for

- 1. Candidates**
- 2. Supervisors**
- 3. Departments/schools/institutions**

engaged in part-time postgraduate research degree programmes
