

Janet's appeal

I have been reading for my PhD in population genetics for the past 8 years. I have been examining the possible differences in origin for the north Welsh verses the south Welsh peoples. I submitted my thesis for examination in 2004 and was examined by viva voce in November of 2004.

This process was gruelling. My examiners were two very different people. One was a very experienced researcher in the field of population genetics (although this was his first PhD examination). (he was the principal examiner). The second examiner was not a population geneticist. Her speciality was bird genetics (she had the experience of examining 2 PhD theses). The third member of the panel was a University staff member who didn't get a vote in my result but was there as an assessor.

After my viva I was asked to leave the room so the examiners could discuss my result. When I was called back in a while later they said that I had passed my PhD but the thesis needed major modifications. In other words, my work was of a good enough quality and important enough to be a considerable scientific contribution but needed some changes to be made to it to make it acceptable to them. I was given two years to perform these changes with another viva at the end of the process. After all they said, I was working, bringing up my family and studying so they gave me the longest time they could to make the changes.

After considerable extra work – (I had to virtually get the understanding of statistics of a third year university statistics student) to run the extra analyses they wanted. In addition to this the examine(d) -0.2 (E Q 0988 358.53 cm BT 50 0 -0((d) -0.2

examples of such requests not what you would expect to see if you have to rewrite from scratch. All of us misunderstood the complete rewrite from scratch request – my two academic supervisors and myself.

Both of my vivas were upsetting processes. The examiners pulled my PhD apart and had left no room for misunderstanding when they told me that it was not up to the required standards. When I subsequently spoke to a colleague he said that being in viva could be likened to being the parent of a particularly ugly child; you know that your child is ugly but you don't appreciate anyone telling you just how ugly it is! He is correct! It is a horrible process.

Unfortunately in the first version of my thesis I had criticised one of the papers that had been published by one of my peers. In this paper the authors had taken a sample of 96 men from one village in north Wales and called it a Welsh sample. To my shock this is the usual mode of sampling in this field. I was highly critical of these methods slating them for being unscientific. Indeed I remarked that this paper was 'fundamentally flawed'.

Unfortunately one of my examiners (the principal examiner) was a co-author

my defence was 'spirited and positive and showed a greater understanding than the thesis itself would suggest'. The statements she made in my appeal paperwork were very different from the original thoughts after my vivas.

During my second viva the principal examiner put his hand on my thesis and said 'reading this was like reading a Nazi document'. According to the Pro Vice Chancellor of the University (in my personal hearing) I shouldn't have taken this personally as he was referring to my work and not to me. I pointed out that, as I had written the thesis, surely it is an extension of me and as such it reflects my views. She said I was being 'too touchy'.

I had a barrister with me in my personal hearing, as I wanted to ensure that I had done as much as I could

transcripts of his interviews and articles regarding his views on racism, but their final decision was that I hadn't provided enough evidence of his bias.

I am not going to do another year's work to resubmit to that examiner for an MPhil as I don't trust him or the University to play fair with me. I feel that the academic community has closed ranks against me and will continue to close ranks against students as they will always support the 'established expert'. There is nothing I can do to fix this which is a very frustrating position to be in. However, I know that I tried my hardest. I know that I did everything in my power and I know that I was probably never realistically going to win my appeal.

The only sensible thing I can do now is to try to get on with my life, teach my pupils, love my family and try very hard to not let this become a big thing in my life. I just want to make sure that I move on in a healthy manner with no regrets and no bitterness. I sincerely hope that this account has not come across as bitter in any way.