

Mr Kang and the 'lack of transparency'

Below is the explanation of the key points of my experience, almost like a process of weeding someone out. I would rather not disclose specific names at present as this may cause problems. After that is a detailed explanation of what I describe as a 'lack of transparency'. Hope this helps.

Diary of Key Events

Early 2005- Application to Capital College for research at Faculty of Engineering

Mid 2005- Application received, interview given by supervisor, unconditional offer of place made. Registered on research course (University of London registration, not Capital College), self-funded and expected to pay maintenance.

Late 2006- First transfer examination. Failed examination by two internal examiners. No corrections given to complete, advised to withdraw instead (unduly harsh recommendations given). Complete re-submission required for 2nd transfer examination.

Mid 2007- Second transfer- Transfer to MPhil after examiners saying that thesis at research standard but unfocused results. Advised to focus results in one direction and not go off on tangents. Recommendation to submit for MPhil and then decide whether or not to continue with research after completion hence given full options on my next career stages. Fair and impartial result given by examiners and I accepted, even though downgraded from PhD. I was pleased with examination process. I cannot remember mention of an appeal procedure for the decision given for the second transfer exam.

Early 2008- Submission of thesis to Registry. Before submission, requested that certain external examiner not to be brought forward in examination process. After submission, one internal examiner appointed from department and second appointed from Scottish University. External examiner on my list of examiners which I had disapproved of from experience and warning of others.

Mid 2008- MPhil Examination, recommended to re-submit the thesis with corrections within 12 month period due to major and minor errors identified within thesis. Given a list of corrections to complete by external examiner and a copy of examiners report. Told to complete 90% of correction list in order to pass thesis. Did not have any supervision and limited access to College facilities thereafter.

Mid 2010- Second MPhil Research Examination (without an oral at present). Examination not completed. Third examiner appointed due to mutual disagreement between examiners. Third examiner approved by Director of Postgraduate Studies. Registry currently asking for thesis to be electronically submitted via e-mail or in person.

January 2012- Withdrew from the examination and the College & will look for another institute to transfer to in the UK. At present have to raise funds to continue. I will also probably only go for an MRes or MPhil at the most, then start another subject another time. Things were very bad last year with my career on hold and financial hardships, but since withdrawing, a more positive outlook is now on the horizon.

Unfortunately, I have just recently found out that ANOTHER student (from a source I know) is going through a similar ordeal at Capital College.

The Lack of Transparency

What I mean by 'lack of transparency' is the complaints procedures are well-hidden within the department. It is made out that there is no method to complain. It may be mentioned somewhere in handbooks but is never mentioned and students are NOT clearly told of any complaints procedure. Worse, there is no clear advertisement of this throughout the College with the exception of Registry (that has a comments form to fill in). The College does not provide a clear, easy and comprehensive channel of complaints procedures and makes the effort to conceal this from students. The College adopts a policy of 'weeding research students out of departments'. After the period of registration has expired, the College ID card is cancelled and a temporary one maybe issued if requested (if the student is aware of it or been made aware by supervisor- I unfortunately was not made aware of it). This is during the 'write-up stage of MPhil/PhD stage'. Otherwise, the College treats the person as an outsider. Since registration is ended, supervision ends (more business than academic) and there are no more accessibility to facilities or services. Other Universities are known to treat finishing students as students and maintains full access to facilities and services until absolute completion of studies.

To make it clearer, the College does not clearly tell its students of certain complaints procedures and makes the effort to indirectly conceal this from students. It gives the impression to students that the College is 'doing you a favour' or 'your lucky to be here' and that by complaining against a member of staff, it is 'out of the ordinary'. It is an air of silence when it comes to complaints as complaints against a staff member can be seen as 'distasteful', 'ungrateful', 'unheard of' and obviously all staff members will support each other if the case arose. Therefore if something does go wrong or there is dissatisfaction with the services or facilities, the last thing to cross the mind of the student is to complain. It is made to believe that the College is a large institution and that when it wants something of interest i.e. a new student/researcher; it provides all facilities and services very quickly and efficiently (like a company). However, this is quite the opposite if it has something not of interest i.e. a complaint or disgruntled student. There are no published figures of complaints yet for the College. You do not see posters on ANY wall requesting feedback on the level of service in each department. There is no mention of who to go to for a complaint or if you are dissatisfied or have a problem. It's all hidden in hard-to-find sources and small columns

buried under pages of regulations, bureaucracy and difficult to read rhetoric. Ask any student and see if they knew of the complaints procedures.

An example will be given here. I was once speaking to my supervisor and we disagreed on something major (I cannot remember exactly what) he said if you have a problem with that, 'go to the Registry and complain'. On one level it seems the plausible thing to do. However, on close inspection what it really means is 'go and complain, I don't care'. It is a bureaucratic procedure of going to Registry for complaints that is 90% of the time completely disconnected to the department. The only use for Registry is payment of fees, registration and handing in theses. It has no connection with the department (from the students perspective) and access is limited with only a large help-desk and train station style barriers to access the main part of the Registry. You have to speak to one person at the desk, then another then another to before getting to the right person. There are no pictures of friendly people on the wall of the Registry to help decide who to see. It is all cleverly concealed behind closed 'barricaded' doors. It is more like an enforcement office of Westminster parking tickets (a friendly exterior), where secretaries and staff filter out whom you can see and whom you cannot. This is the use of spatial disconnection from one College department to another.

It is clearly why the College has research students with nowhere to turn to because every effort is made to conceal or indirectly hide the prospect of complaining and by use of time-delay, the problem or potential problem for the College is eliminated. It is a master of creating uncertainty in the mind of students when it does not get its way. This is why the number of dissatisfied students are discovered only at the end of their studies and the problem is not fully identified until it is reached an advanced stage or simply too late i.e. at appeals stage that requires the legal system to become involved. The real statistics are therefore never recovered. Once it gets to litigation against the College, the College can simply remark that 'the student never complained so we never knew' or 'why did not the student tell us?' Also at the litigation stage, the costs are on the students side and the College can simply summon its solicitors to weed the problem out as the student is no longer registered and the legal system will most probably take the side of the College (one person versus a large establishment). The College knows that this and uses this policy to its advantage.

At my time at the College, I NEVER once heard mention of the OIA (Office of Independent Adjudicator) or that a process existed. It was only until I spoke to an education specialist lawyer (costing £170 for 1 hour) that I was told 'I had to complain (and have it rejected) before a matter is brought before the OIA'. It is bureaucracy on top of bureaucracy and it is almost certain that students eventually give up. In conclusion, the College fails to recognise that students are paying customers and expect a level of service for what they paid for. It is expected that the College should serve the students in their best interests academically. The College gives the impression that all students are employees rather than customers and treats them accordingly to the level of research produced. It relies on its academic staff excellence rather than teaching levels or student satisfaction. In other words, they act like a business

rather than an academic institution.

Team task:

What are the lessons here for

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

List your answers on the acetate provided