

Ola's story

I

From: Ola

Sent: 23 January 2009 22:29

To: john@missendencecentre.co.uk

Dear John,

We met during your workshop “Doing PhD in UK” at the University of Barchester just before Christmas. I promised to send you “my story”.

My main concern is how to find additional financing for my PhD studies. The whole situation is quite complicated.

The background:

I graduated with masters degree in from top five university in Poland. Even though I had the third highest average from a five year course (c. 60 students and over 40 exams) I was not accepted to continue a PhD. The reason behind was that the department does not need any PhD students. So decided to change a department within the University, I fulfilled all requirements, with exam scored over 90%, had a promise from one of the professors to supervise my work. Finally my application was rejected – reason: the department has no need for PhD students.

After such experiences I decided to apply abroad. After a going through a regular application process I was awarded with a PhD scholarship and Graduate Teaching Assistantship here at the University of Barchester.

In the meantime my personal situation has changed, I got married and have a two year old son. My husband refused to move to England for a 3-year period of time. His whole family is supporting him with the decision. In the result I can't count on any financial help from his side.

Finally I decided to take to opportunity and came with my son alone. For many, quite obvious reasons I can't leave Jan (my son) with my husband.

Current situation:

I have a very strict day routine. Jan attends nursery fulltime and I work on my research project or GTA duties. Afternoons and weekends are for my son exclusively. I can work after he goes to sleep but can't leave the apartment.

The scholarship and maintenances cover accommodation expenses. A very big portion of our expenses is nursery – comparable to accommodation. For the current year I have borrowed money from my family and friends but next year looks miserable.

I am discriminated in terms of state aid in two ways. Firstly I'm a foreigner and most of the support is not available for me. Secondly, even though I'm on the University payroll, and a tax is deducted from my tiny salary, the amount of working hours in my contract is not enough to be considered as a work in terms of revenue customs. I'm filed as grant beneficent and therefore have no right to any benefits arising from working in UK.

If you know about any foundation, grant or any other kind of support that may help in my situation, please let me know.

If you need any additional information I'll be happy to supply you with it.

Regards,

Ola

Before turning the page

Q1 Discuss how this situation has arisen and any lessons for the University concerned

Q2 How would you respond to Ola?

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Dear Ola,

I remember you and your very difficult and serious situation with which I have great sympathy. So I am writing back straight away to start the ball rolling. (Which year and which department are you in? have you been upgraded from MPhil to PhD?)

1. Can you confirm that you have contacted all of the following?

1. The Uni international office to check on your tax and benefit situation?
2. The Guild and Uni officers to check that there no emergency funds to help – e.g. with child care costs.
3. Your supervisor and departmental postgraduate tutor to see if they can see a way to help you earn more. I assume that they are happy with your academic progress so far?
4. Any British/ liaison organisations who might have funds to help? there is a British/Polish young scientists/social scientists fund for instance - see British Council website - and the Polish Embassy seems to be encouraging students to come to UK.

2. Can you roughly sketch out your likely expenditure and income so that we can look at the shortfall?

One problem is that you can't afford to spend too much of your valuable time applying for funds... If I can use your story in due course I'll contribute £50.

I will treat all this in complete confidence

Best wishes
John

Before turning the page

Q1 Discuss John's response

Q2 What other questions would you have asked?

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From: Ola

Sent: 24 January 2009 00:04

To: Wakeford, John

Subject: Re: workshop at Barchester University

Dear John,

Thank you for such a quick response. Referring to points mentioned in your e-mail:

- 1) I am in Business School, Management Department, with interest in international finance. It's my first year, starting second semester. I plan to upgrade to PhD in summer. There is a general procedure/tendency to upgrade in end of May, before the annual conference.
- 2) the Uni international office directed me to the Revenue Customs and tax offices. I called all the institutions. Theoretically I should get a child benefit (c.17 pound a week). I applied for it in November, just recently got another forms to fill in, because there are different rules for foreigners, which they did not mention to me in the first conversation. I have also applied for child care benefit, (c. 200 pound a month) but probably won't get it because of the employment rules. Other benefits and supports are for either working residents or British undergraduate students. I have checked it in several offices both at the University and in Revenues.
- 3) I talked to Uni Officer responsible for financial support. In my situation in case of emergency I may apply for a low rate credit. No other possibilities.
- 4) My supervisor is very supportive. I did some extra work for him and will be paid for it. He also is willing to find additional projects for me so I can earn some extra money, but it takes my time out of studies. So I have to be careful to keep the right balance. Luckily, what I'm doing now is in line of my research.
- 5) So far no one except me is complaining about my academic progress.
- 6) Have checked both British Council and Polish Embassy before coming to UK, but could not find any grants that could support me at this stage. I still monitor the situation.
- 7) One thing that came across my mind is to become a half time teaching assistant (I don't know if I can being a GTA and what are the procedures, and how much time consuming is it – have to check this option)

8) Budget: My tuition and fee is covered by the School, I'm getting roughly 9 000 pound a year on the top. This covers accommodation on campus, comfortable, safe for child, convenient and time saving. Hope to be able to stay here for next year, but this is unsure. University does not assure family flats for second year students. Another 8 000 an academic year is the nursery. The main problem is that even if I leave for break I have pay for the nursery. If Jan attends half time I won't be able to work. He is still too small to entertain himself for a longer period of time. Food and fun (i.e. nappies) is c. 50 pounds a week. From my calculations: we need 1 500 a month to survive and pay bills. And I have half of it.

I'll be grateful if you pass any ideas I can use. Feel free to use my example as a case study for students. If it can help anyone I'll be happy.

Regards,

Ola

Q1 What further suggestions do you have for Ola at this stage?

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Dear Ola,

Thanks. You seem to have explored just about everything. I'll think more, but a friend with whom I discussed your problem wondered if there is any way to reduce child care costs - particularly if there is in Barchester a Polish community, as there is in many UK cities, a member of which might be willing to take on childcare - for instance if they have a small child of their own. Have you explored this possibility?

Best
John

From: Ola

Sent: 24 January 2009 16:23

To: Wakeford, John

Subject: Re: workshop at Barchester University

Dear John,

I have thought about having a kind of a babysitter. However there are two reasons I did not explore it further. The first one: it's really difficult to find a responsible person to take care of your child. Especially if you listen to the news how people are treating children. Being enrolled to a nursery eliminates at least this problem. Comparing costs it's become more less the same amount. Another matter very important for me is to give my son an opportunity to learn the language in the natural environment. If a babysitter is Polish he will lose that possibility.

I think the only idea will be to take extra paid job and work longer with PhD.

If you have any idea I'll be grateful if you share with me.

Ola

Q1 Have you any further comments on Ola's situation

Q2 Have you comments on the University's treatment of Ola?

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2nd March 2009

Dear Ola,

Just checking through my 'pending' files and wondered how things are going with you? Well, I hope.

When I get time I will edit your story for you to approve and then send you £50 for your permission to use it, anonymised of course.

Best wishes

John

Ola's response

I'm fine thanks, trying to survive 😊. My story has got "Part II", which is both funny and scary at the same time. I did some extra work for my supervisor helping him with preparing a conference. He was willing to pay for it and got budget to do so but the school said NO. In their interpretation I'm not allowed to make any additional money at the university because I'm getting a scholarship and I should concentrate only on the teaching hours I got in contract. By the way this department has got the lowest scholarships within the school.

Finally we came to a consensus that I'll get that money next year as increasing maintenances. Anyway it took time and effort and the university owes me anyway some money for the exam I sat with students and I should be paid for.

So as you see I can't get bored but I still believe I'll make it 😊

Ola

On the acetate provided list the lessons here for

- 1. Institutions**
- 2. Supervisors, and**
- 3. International postgraduate students**