

## **Academic History of Yuan Sun**

This is a brief account of the proceedings which have taken place to date that have motivated my complaint against the School of Education and Social Work. I believe that, through my time at Wessex as a PhD/MPhil student I have been badly treated and that the actions taken by my supervisors have been unfair. My work on the PhD has often been hindered rather than helped and I currently do not know the best way of remedying the situation.

The topic of my thesis is on the differences in study motivations and perceptions for students who transferred between Wanli and Wessex Universities between 2002 and 2005.

From September 2000- June 2005 Dr. Terry Viggers who was, at that point, in charge of the Certificate of Teaching in Higher Education Course supervised me. During that time I did not have any second supervisor. From September 2001- September 2002 I took a break from my studies because of a family illness and to do some background research/collect initial data at Wanli University. While I was in China there was a change in the university structure as the University Education Department merged with that of Northern College. As a result of this, the first half year of my break was granted by the Faculty Board of the Arts and Social Sciences and the second half was granted by the Faculty of Education and Social Work. Furthermore, Dr. Viggers joined the Personnel Department. However he kept me on as my sole supervisor and I had no other supervision.

From September 2002, I became part-time student. Despite some efforts on my part (particularly in 2003 and 2004), I had no contact with the Department of Education. I was not asked to go in front of a Thesis Monitoring Committee or given an opportunity to present my work at seminars. During this time, apart from a chapter handed in to Dr. Viggers, I was not asked by Dr. Viggers to give him any large-scale piece of work for the purposes of upgrading from MPhil to PhD. This meant that I was not assessed on my work or told whether it was inadequate or not. I was actually informed that I had been upgraded to PhD by Dr. Viggers but it turned out that this was not true in the later stage. It follows that, in the time that I was supervised by Dr.

Viggers, I had no feedback which would have given me the opportunity to improve my work if there was a deficiency.

In October 2004 I was called in front of the Departmental Thesis Monitoring Committee which was the first time since 2000. At this meeting there was substantial disagreement as to whether I was a PhD student or not. Dr. Viggers assured me that I was. In addition, Dr. Viggers did not seem to appreciate in his report to the committee exactly what I was doing and as a result our submissions clashed. I had no official feedback from the TMC, but only a briefing from Dr. Viggers.

My attempts to get a second supervisor worked when, in June 2005, Dr. Allen Thompson took over as my first supervisor and Professor Elizabeth Ling took over as my second supervisor. Dr. Viggers seems to have been summarily “sacked”. There was no changeover period. I should point out that most of the supervisory sessions have been held with Dr. Thompson. Professor Ling has only turned up to about 5 sessions in a year’s time and has not had a substantial role in my supervision.

From the start there seems to have been problems between me and my supervisors. I do not know the origin of these problems. It seems that my supervisors decided from the outset that I should study for an MPhil and took no notice of my desire to do a PhD. The October 2004 TMC meeting had decided that a meeting in March 2005 should decide whether I should be upgraded or not. This meeting never took place. My supervisors never made it clear to me, until much later on, why they did not believe I could make PhD standard. I asked frequently but did not receive a clear answer until much later on. Even then it came through a third party and seemed to me to be inadequate and unfair.

I admit that, when I started with Professor Ling and Dr. Thompson, I did not have substantial amounts of written work. However, I did have large amounts of different types of data. My thesis was an empirical thesis so this data contains the core of my thesis and any judgement must, surely, be based around the quality of the data. Dr. Thompson did not ask to see my data or to discuss it for many months. It was only when I almost forced it upon him in December 2005 that he took some notice. By this time, I had also done some written work.

At this point I was still confused about my status and so I got in contact with Dr Lingard in November 2005 to clarify my situation and to ask for his advice. He told me that when I first registered in 2000 a non-existing department – continuing education was created to accommodate me because Dr. Viggers was not a formal member of any academic department. I was told that I had never been upgraded. He recommended that if I wanted to make a complaint I should go through the internal complaints procedure. This, I started doing in November 2005. I met Professor Ling, the Postgraduate Advisor in the department and the result was not helpful. She told me to follow Dr. Thompson's recommendation. Then, I went to meet Mr. Wakefield, the head of the department. I was told there were possibilities to solve it out in the meeting, but none of them became available after I considered them.

In December 2005, Dr Thompson wrote a report on my work for the TMC meeting on February 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006. This report was highly critical of my work and stated that it would be difficult for me to even reach MPhil standard. This report was a shock to me as I did not believe that my work, for all its faults, justified such harsh criticism. In response I was allowed to write a reply to the report. This I did, in detail, pointing out what I believe to be the errors all his claims. I should say that I think that Dr. Thompson's report is unfair to my work and shows a basic ignorance of what I am trying to do. For this thesis monitoring committee I was not allowed to appear before it to argue my case. I should also point out that Professor Ling was one of the three members of this committee.

I should point out that, if Dr. Thompson is correct (which I do not believe) then this puts me in an impossible situation. At that time, and now, I have not been given chance to improve my work since I have not been given any such feedback before. This would mean that I have been badly supervised by Dr Viggers (breaching the University Code of Practice for Supervised Practice items 2.6(f); 3.1; 5.1; 5.2; 5.3; 5.7; 5.8; 5.9; 5.10 (a); 5.10 (e); 5.10 (f); 5.10 (g); 5.10 (h); 5.10 (i); 5.10 (j); 5.14; 5.15 (h); 5.16; 5.19; 5.16 (c); 5.25 (all items except g & j). I should also point out that Dr. Thompson, by not giving me the feedback on my data early enough, has prevented me completing my thesis according to his recommendations.

The TMC rejected my wish to be promoted to PhD level. I then went to the then Dean Dr. Liz Grant, listing my complaints. I also contacted the then chair of the TMC, (Professor Alison Littlejohn) asking for the reasons for the rejection. We agreed to meet together to discuss my problems. In February we met and Professor Littlejohn pointed out that the TMC could not come out with a definitive independent judgement since its members were from different background. Because of this, the decision made was solely based on Dr. Thompson's report. One of the outcomes of the meeting was that Dr. Grant decided that I should send three chapters of my work to an External Assessor. This was Professor Dai Harcourt of Edinburgh University. He is an expert in the field of Higher Education and has also done substantial work in the area of Qualitative Analysis. These two areas are crucial to my area of research. As such he is ideally qualified to comment on my research area. The three chapters requested were sent to Professor Harcourt.

When Professor Harcourt's report was received, I went to see the Dean (on June 2<sup>nd</sup>) and it was agreed that a special session of the thesis monitoring committee would be convened on 27th June. This committee had a different membership from the previous one and included Professor Jennifer Harris (chairing) and Professor James Hogg. The committee asked for all the documents which had been received to date namely Dr. Thompson's report and my response together with Professor Harcourt's report and responses to it by Dr. Thompson, Professor Ling and myself. It also called my supervisors and me to appear before it respectively.

I should state here (as I did in my response) that I largely agreed with the content of Professor Harcourt's report. The report was critical but he seemed to believe that I could make a PhD out of the material I had sent him. In general, I think that his criticism was useful to my PhD and I aim to take his comments on board when I revise my first three chapters. The one hole in the report was that he felt that he did not have enough information on the quality or quantity of my data to make a judgement about whether it was of PhD standard. I should point out that the part about Piaget and Vygotsky, which was highly recommended by Dr. Thompson, was regarded by Professor Harcourt as irrelevant in his report.

When the Thesis Monitoring Committee met, it refused my application to upgrade because of this uncertainty about my data. However, it decided that Professor Hogg should examine my data to see whether it was of sufficient standard for a PhD. Over the summer I met with Professor Hogg several times to discuss my data, during which time he thoroughly examined it. I have to say at this point that Professor Hogg was immensely helpful in his comments on my work and this has clarified my thinking considerably. Professor Hogg submitted his report in July. I am wholly in agreement with Professor Hogg's report and I believe that, while it makes some significant criticisms of my work it is largely favourable.

Since July I have heard nothing from the Department/ School apart from an e-mail from Dr. Liz Grant informing me that the TMC had not met and that she was stepping down as Dean in favour of Professor Ling. She also recommended that I seek advice from you. On 22<sup>nd</sup> November Professor Harris sent me a letter stating that, given the reports from Professor Harcourt and Professor Hogg, I would not be upgraded. It seems that this decision was taken on her own authority and that the TMC had not met to consider the reports.

In my view, this letter does not reflect the clear intent of Professor Harcourt and Professor Hogg in their reports. It seems to me that she has simply ignored what they have said to come to her own decision. If this is the case then this is grossly unfair and has wasted my time over the past year.

I should point out that I am now in an impossible situation. I have effectively had no supervisor since this June and I have found it difficult to make progress with my thesis in the face of so much uncertainty. I should point out that it would be virtually impossible to do an MPhil on Dr. Thompson's terms (even if I thought this was a just or fair solution.). I would have to tear up most of my data and produce something based on data which, as Professor Hogg has pointed out, is not fit for that purpose.

I should also point out that I am in an appalling position with my school. My ex-second supervisor is now Dean of the school and has consistently opposed my upgrade. Professor Harris is Research Coordinator within the School. I can honestly say, indeed already pointed out to the TMC in June, that there has been a breakdown in

relationships with both of my supervisors and I will no longer be able to work with them again.

In summary, I do not believe that I have been fairly treated at any point in my supervision. I believe that Dr. Thompson's report is unfair and is based on a lack of knowledge of my research. (I should point out that he has not even seen the bulk of my data). I would endorse the reports by Professor Harcourt and Professor Hogg. I believe that these reports justify me having an upgrade. If I do get an upgrade then I believe that I would need a strong, independent, new supervisor to complete my PhD. I also believe that, in my current condition, I would need independent submission of my thesis.

If none of the above is possible then I believe that I have a reasonable case to ask for my money back. I have been unjustly treated by the University from both administrative and academic viewpoints. I have been messed around by people who have had no regard for my welfare or my abilities. I should point out that, given the current situation in the School and the long period of time that has been taken in trying to sort this out, this may be my preferred option. Currently, I cannot see a better way out.

**Discuss the issues that have arisen and consider what grounds, if any, Sunny Y Sun has for compensation**

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**Team task:**

**From your consideration of this account what lessons are there for**

- 1. Research students**
- 2. International research students**
- 3. Supervisors**
- 4. Institutions**

**Put your main points on the acetates provided**

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