

**- Chris**  
**a PhD student struggling to finish because “life gets in the way”**

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**April**  
**Email from Bren**

I attended your supervisor workshop last week and I would like to take you up on your offer to advise on a problem where I can't see a clear way forward.

I 'inherited' my PhD student, Chris, in her second year from a colleague who left the department, as I was the only member of staff left with experience in qualitative research. I had previously done fieldwork in the area of her PhD. Her previous supervisor seemed to have not given the best guidance or start, and was herself off sick for a few months. Chris had an 'odd' supervisory set up –



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Two weeks ago I was expecting a draft methodology chapter. She said it would be “very rough”. She had been house sitting for her mum that week, and described it as quite “unproductive”, which is worrying. The chapter very rough, really just a cut and paste job on bits of other documents she had produced before. Lots of relevant literature was missing, and it was mainly a chapter about ‘what she had done’. It didn’t have any kind of flow. I’ve given her the methodology chapter of my other PhD student who has just submitted, so she knows what standard is expected and how it should be argued. She has looked at other people’s PhDs from the library, which I suggested a long time ago. I said that the chapter from the other student was t

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There is a bit of a 'culture' of PhD slippage in our centre. Chris is friends with another PhD student in our centre who is still finishing writing up in his 5<sup>th</sup> year, having gone part-time for a year to take a full-time job, and just returned. One colleague has been doing her PhD practically full-time for 6 years. That culture doesn't help progress.

I have been giving Chris 2-3 hours supervision every 2 weeks since taking over her supervision – offering critical perspectives on her work, showing how to do qualitative analysis, checking on progress etc. This is far more contact time than I ever received as a PhD student. In a way, I feel there is not enough input or ideas from Chris, too much from me, and a bit of a culture of dependency. I have two other PhD students who are making good process, and one part-time student has just submitted her thesis in just over three years. They are very self-motivated and know exactly what they want to do in their thesis, and just require critical guidance. There is the added complication with



other senior member of the department I mention above to sit in on some supervision meetings.

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**Team task**

On the acetate provided list the main suggestions you would make to Bren

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## **Update August**

You asked what is currently happening with Chris? Well, her completion year is up at the beginning of Jan. We are looking to convince the dean to get a further completion year.

Chris is self funding at the moment, and has indicated she will need to get a job in the next few months. It has recently become apparent that she has problems at home which are the route cause of most of her delay, which she has only just confided in me about. She is not getting on very well with her partner since moving in with him in her second year, and is thinking about whether she should find a place of her own, although finance is prohibitive. She is determined to finish the PhD, and thinks this would be easier if she lived elsewhere. But it appears she is constantly distracted by the situation at home, and emotionally upset by it.

She has improved her progress since the last board and received a 'good' this time. She is still getting lost in coding her data however, and is now hitting the stage of writing her results chapters. She produced a very good methodology chapter which was a great improvement, and seemed to have taken on board my comments about argument and flow. We are getting on much better since I made it clear that she was in charge of her progress, that I am around to facilitate whenever she wants, and that I am not going to be her PhD policeman. So your advice has worked. She has slipped from her timetable