

How did you end up here? What made you choose St Andrews? Was it an excellent supervisor, a fascinating subject, the picturesque location? All or none of the above? For me, it was almost an accident – having done my undergraduate degree here, I tried to leave, but a combination of factors pulled me back in and I ended up choosing to remain here for my PhD. For a time, all was well.

But there was a problem, a ticking time bomb in the background even from the start. My supervisor was also trying to leave, to find a more senior job elsewhere. For nearly two years, the poor economic climate worked in my favour and my supervisor remained here, but eventually he got a fantastic job elsewhere, and I finally had to face the problem I'd been wilfully ignoring.

This isn't an unusual situation. Many, many students have to deal with the challenges of their supervisor moving to another institute. Any senior staff members will more than likely have moved and left students behind. I was lucky that my supervisor was still in the UK, but I was faced with a dilemma all the same. Stay in St Andrews and try long-distance supervision, or uproot my life and move to the other end of the country?

There's no easy answer to this, and it's a situation that forces you to weigh up the personal and the professional aspects of your life. Professionally, moving often makes a lot of sense. It lets you experience a different institution, allows you to meet new people and make a different set of professional connections, and it looks good on a CV to have affiliations in different places.

On a personal level, though, it means you need to be willing to up sticks and move at the drop of a hat. Sometimes that's good, sometimes it's not. Initially I was very tempted, but I became a lot less sure when I realised the cost of such a move on my personal life.

Before we get too deep into the agony of indecision, the thing which will ultimately decide your fate will be funding. If the new institute doesn't have any money for you then you'll find you don't have a choice. Pressure your supervisor to find this out early on, as part of the interview if possible, to avoid prolonged negotiations after the fact.

In the meantime, while *a posteriori* negotiations about my funding took place above my pay grade, my supervisor and I worked long-distance, with the occasional trip to meet in person. We've found this works well – for our work, keeping in touch via e-mail and Skype was sufficient. The School of Physics & Astronomy here was (as usual) spectacular at looking out for me. This illustrates a crucial point: if you choose

to stay, you need to make sure your home institute is prepared to adequately support you.

It also depends on what stage of your PhD you're at. When my supervisor left, I was halfway through, at the stage where I was able to become a bit more independent and take more control of my own PhD. I had clear ideas and definite ambitions, and I was now ready to steer the PhD in the direction I wanted it to go. Losing my supervisor at this point wasn't the death blow it could have been had it come a year earlier. The later you are in your PhD, the easier you'll find it to cope with remote supervision.

As I write this, the negotiations for funding are still going on in the background. By popular opinion (mine included), it looks like the best option for me is to stay in St Andrews and travel regularly to visit my supervisor. This means I get to remain living and working here with minimal disruption to my personal life, but also I get to spend time at a different institute with different people, netting me the professional benefits as well.

My advice, if you find yourself in this situation? Make a clear decision early on as to what *you* want to do. Take control of the situation and make your opinion heard. It's your PhD, it's your life, and you should never let yourself be manoeuvred into a position that makes you unhappy, disadvantaged or causes you to miss out on opportunities.

The longer you leave it before making a decision, the more uncertain your life will become. Make that decision early on, to stay or to go, and suddenly your future is more certain and secure, and you'll be able to concentrate on living your life instead of worrying about what's around the corner.

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