



# Publish and be doctor-rated: the PhD by published work

Publish and be  
doctor-rated

Graham Badley

*Anglia Ruskin University, Chelmsford, UK*

331

## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is, first, to provide a brief account of the PhD by published work focusing especially on quality assurance issues such as eligibility of candidates, the nature of the submission itself, supervision and assessment procedures. Second, it seeks to offer a discussion of the criteria to be met by candidates in writing a critical appraisal as a central feature of the submission.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The approach taken is that of an analytical, conceptual and discursive essay.

**Findings** – There is still a lack of commonality in higher education about the nature of the PhD by published work. One way of gaining greater commonality would be to strengthen the use of the critical appraisal as an academic text which also should be required to meet the admittedly problematical standards of publishability.

**Research limitations/implications** – The paper's main limitation is that many of its ideas and much of its information are derived from sources within the UK's higher education sector. Nevertheless the issues raised should have relevance to practice in other systems.

**Practical implications** – A case is made for the usefulness of the PhD by published work as an important route for achieving doctorateness especially when the critical appraisal is given greater priority and supervisory support.

**Originality/value** – Papers discussing the use and value of the PhD by published work are still relatively rare in academic journals. The emphasis on the critical appraisal in this paper is an original contribution to the debate.

**Keywords** Publishing, Doctorates, Educational tests, Research, Quality

**Paper type** Conceptual paper

## Introduction

Publishability is one major of criterion by which doctoral level work may be judged. Publishability criteria, as used by various refereed journals, may include such notions as criticality, extent of contextualisation, impact, leading-edge, originality, rigour, scale, significance and topicality (see Shaw and Green, 2002). Traditional PhDs, depending on the discipline, may result in publication after, rather than before, presentation of the doctoral thesis. This is one reason why many universities continue to make a clear distinction between the traditional PhD and the PhD by published work (see Powell, 2004). Nevertheless, the concept of publishability has long been associated with the German tradition of submitting a PhD so that the introduction of the Cambridge PhD by publication in 1966, although an innovation in the UK, was a relatively late contribution to academic practice (see Simpson, 1983).

Since 1966 a further 60 + UK institutions have introduced the PhD by published work but the actual number of PhDs awarded via this route – 116 in 2004 – remains small (see Powell, 2004). But numbers are growing. Indeed one influential text identifies “the rapidly expanding doctorates by publication that are a visible response to policy-led pressures for research productivity within the ‘performative’ university” (Boud and Lee,



---

2009, p. 7). In this paper I suggest that more academics and other professionals could be encouraged to publish for personal as much as for institutional research productivity reasons in order to get themselves doctor-rated: to get a PhD by published work. Unfortunately, mainstream discussions of the PhD very rarely pay much attention to the PhD by published work. For example, there is little else in Boud and Lee (2009) apart from the quotation already given in this paragraph. Similarly there is only a cursory mention of the PhD by publication in Park's long contribution to the debate on the changing doctorate for the Higher Education Academy (see Park, 2007). In part one I briefly discuss a number of quality assurance concerns in relation to the PhD by published work. In part two I look at key criteria that candidates should consider when they prepare to write a critical appraisal as part of their submission.

### **Part one: quality assurance issues**

#### *What is a PhD by published work?*

A standard definition of the PhD by publication is that of a PhD awarded to a candidate "whose thesis consists entirely or predominately of refereed and published articles in journals or books which are already in the public domain" (UKCGE, 1996, quoted in Hoddell *et al.*, 2002, p. 67). However, individual institutions may offer their own variations on this theme. For example, rather than restrict the definition of published work to "refereed and published articles in journals or books" some universities broaden the range to include "...papers, chapters, monographs, books, scholarly editions of a text, edited collections of essays or other materials, software and creative work...or other original artefacts" (ARU, 2008, sec. 2.3).

The important issues here refer to whether the published material represents a "significant" contribution to knowledge and indicates a candidate's ability to continue to do so "in an independent, original way" (see Powell, 2004, sec. 5.1.2). However, there are still inconsistencies across the UK's university sector about the place of published work in any PhD submission so that "examiners may well be confused about the status of any published work in a PhD submission though relatively clear about the value of publication or publication potential"(Powell, 2004, sec. 5.1.2).

#### *Quality assurance concerns in the PhD by published work*

There is, according to some critics of the PhD by published work, "a significant concern over quality assurance" (Hoddell *et al.*, 2002, p. 67). Initially, this concern may seem odd since the main constituent elements of the thesis have already been peer reviewed and accepted for publication. In the UK published works are now usually assessed for their originality, rigour and significance (the standard criteria of the UK's Research Assessment Exercise 2008[1]) by representatives of the relevant discourse community, the referees and editors of academic journals and books. Even here, though, terms such as "originality", "rigour" and "significance" are problematical in their vagueness and subjectivity (as analysed, for example, by Johnston (2008) and see part two of this paper). However, quality assurance issues may not be related specifically to the published works so much as the eligibility of candidates themselves, the actual nature of the submission, the supervision received as well as the assessment procedures of the award.

---

*Eligibility of candidates*

Eligibility is still variously and inconsistently interpreted across the higher education sector in the UK. Until the mid-1960s eligibility was often restricted to current members of an awarding HE institution. This restriction may have created the impression that the route was a privilege or that, indeed, it was less academically demanding than the traditional PhD (see UKCGE, 1996). Even a decade later a majority of institutions (54 out of 62 who replied to the UKCGE survey) restricted eligibility “to those with a defined relationship with the institution of one kind or another” (Powell, 2004, sec. 6.1.3). It was as if the PhD by published work was an award for insiders and as such “may reflect an uncertainty about the nature of the award and a hesitancy about opening it up as an alternative mode of learning about research and gaining a research degree award subsequently” (Powell, 2004, sec. 6.1.3).

Nevertheless, the 2004 survey did show that eligibility was being gradually extended rather than further restricted. The biggest increase in eligibility was related to alumni as distinct from an institution’s current staff. Further, a small number of institutions has begun to make the award available to appropriately qualified applicants irrespective of where they had studied or worked (see Powell, 2004, sec. 6.1.2). One example of current eligibility regulations states that eligible candidates are expected to hold either a high quality degree (I. or II.i or its equivalent) or another appropriate equivalent qualification and not less than five years’ relevant professional experience (ARU, 2008). In this case, the PhD by published work may be interpreted as overlapping with the professional doctorate. An example of broadening eligibility to professionals outside the HE sector rather than restricting it to academics within is that which evolved as the result of a university’s staff development provision for potential managers in local companies. These potential managers were themselves scientific researchers who had already achieved the generic research skills expected of conventional doctoral candidates and who were also publishing in prestigious journals (see Wilson, 2002).

*The nature of the submission*

One of the most difficult issues for candidates and universities in the PhD by published work is the question of the number and coherence of the publications for a successful submission. Indeed most UK institutions (51/59 in the 2004 survey) fail to specify a particular number. However, some institutions are specific: “either one or two books, or at least six refereed journal articles or research papers already in the public domain” (Powell, 2004, sec. 6.3.1). But the question of how many “probably leads to an overestimate of the number of publications required for the published work route” (UKCGE, 1996, p. 10). Best practice in numbers of publications expected will, of course, vary according to different subject areas and according to the number of articles submitted which have two or more joint authors.

Rather than focus on the number of publications submitted (often not less than a minimum of six and, usually, not more than ten) universities may be more concerned to establish that the overall submission has its own internal coherence. Coherence, in the context of the PhD by published work, may be regarded as a candidate’s attempt to provide a convincing critical narrative about the overall intellectual position unifying the submitted articles or papers. This narrative would usually be provided in the form of a critical appraisal where a case should be made which demonstrates and critiques the cohesiveness of the works submitted (see Powell, 2004, sec. 7.4 and see part two of

---

this paper). Some universities require candidates to provide an initial critical appraisal of 1,000-5,000 words at a *prima facie* stage of the submission. Supporters of this process believe that the initial critical appraisal and its defence provide valuable experiences and peer feedback for candidates in developing their ability to defend their research achievements (see Wilson, 2002). At the final submission stage there is still considerable variation across the UK HE sector in the nature of the critical appraisal required. Some require no critical appraisal at all whilst others demand appraisals ranging from 1000-10000 words (see Wilson, 2002).

#### *The supervision received*

Most (80 per cent) UK institutions now provide an advisor or supervisor as intellectual support for candidates submitting a PhD by published work (Powell, 2004, sec. 7.1). The main roles and responsibilities of advisors/supervisors include guiding candidates on:

- the selection, coherence and quality of the published work to be submitted;
- writing their critical appraisal (where one is required); and
- preparing for their oral examination (based on UKCGE, 1996 and Powell, 2004).

Whether or not all candidates for the PhD by published work in all institutions receive the quality of advice and supervision that is outlined here and that is clearly required remains debateable. However, as the trend is now towards seeing the award as being given on the basis of the case that is made rather than on the published works alone, so supervision and training for supervision become key factors for all institutions (see Powell, 2004, sec. 7.3-7.4). Skilled and effective supervision is needed in order to support candidates in writing an explicit critique of their own work, a critique which especially identifies their research strengths whilst not ignoring their weaknesses. In a recent Australian article on the PhD by published work one important conclusion is that “the active support of supervisors is central to enabling publication by doctoral students” (Robins and Kanowski, 2008, Section 6).

#### *Assessment procedures*

I have already noted that some institutions may require a preliminary assessment of candidates for the PhD by published work. In effect candidates may be expected to make a *prima facie* case that the quality of the publications submitted (will) meet the general criteria for the award (see Powell, 2004). These criteria are, despite calls for greater commonality throughout the sector (see Shaw and Green, 2002), inconsistently specified and expressed. Indeed assessment of the traditional PhD usually focuses on “the products of learning and research” rather than on “the processes of learning and research” (Shaw and Green, 2002, p. 122). Assessment of process outcomes such as autonomy, independence, interpersonal and group interaction, motivation, pro-activity, tenacity, time management and working to deadlines “are at best merely implied” (Shaw and Green, 2002, p. 122).

At least in the PhD by published work there is often a requirement for candidates to write a critical appraisal of “the products of learning and research” (the publications themselves) which makes explicit the key skills of learning and research at doctoral level. These should include the skills of analysis, creativity, criticality, discrimination, evaluation, research management and synthesis (see Shaw and Green, 2002, p. 122). In general, assessment of the PhD by published work has to show that candidates are

---

competent researchers, know their subjects and can plan, implement and evaluate their research activities (see Wilson, 2002, p. 76). In Part Two of this paper I suggest that candidates should write an effective critical appraisal by showing that the publications submitted meet the (admittedly problematical) criteria of originality, rigour and significance as well as demonstrate an overall intellectual coherence.

But all such candidates still have to be assessed according to “the same academic standards as those which operate for a traditional PhD” (see Powell, 2004, sec. 8.2.1). Therefore, examiners of the published work route need to:

- evaluate the intellectual merit of the candidate’s cited published work;
- establish if a satisfactory case is made for coherence amongst the publications;
- assess the contribution to knowledge represented by the publications and made apparent in the critical appraisal;
- evaluate the appropriateness of the methods employed in the research and the correctness of their application;
- assess the candidate’s contribution to the various phases of the research embodied in multi-authored works;
- establish the candidate’s ownership of the published work and appreciation of the state of (historical and current) knowledge within the candidate’s research area; and
- assess the candidate’s research skills in terms of his/her potential as a continuing, independent researcher (see Powell, 2004, sec. 8.2.2).

These major criteria – appropriate methods, coherence, contribution to knowledge, critical appreciation, independence, intellectual merit – overlap with those outlined by Shaw and Green (2002) and represent a formidable level of doctorateness. Together they suggest that the PhD by published work is a far from straightforward option. However, one possible limitation of the PhD by publication may lie in the timing of the published works submitted. For example, some institutions allow candidates to submit papers published over as long a period as ten years. In such cases examiners may have difficulties in assessing the ability of candidates to contextualize their work which may well be a particular concern with science-based PhDs. One solution to this problem is to require candidates to use their critical appraisal to review (contextualize) relevant literature at the beginning of the period and also to show how their research connects with the contemporary context and literature (see Wilson, 2002, p. 76). Candidates need to check their institutional research degree regulations for appropriate guidance.

Again, in order to ensure that the PhD by published work meets the same standards as the traditional PhD, most universities require at least one external examiner and sometimes two (15/62 responding – see Powell, 2004, sec. 8.3.1), especially for members of their own staff. Nearly all institutions (97 per cent of those responding) have a compulsory oral examination for the PhD by published work “as a necessary part of judgement making about the merit of the collected works and/or the candidate” (Powell, 2004, sec. 8.4). However, even here there may be little consensus in the UK regarding the role of the viva in the PhD assessment process since there are widespread inconsistencies in both policy and practice (see Jackson and Tinkler, 2001). Indeed the doctoral viva may be regarded more as a socially constructed encounter rather than as an impartial and objective process (Park, 2003). Nevertheless, in one

university, anxieties that the PhD by publication route represented an easy option to a doctorate “have certainly been dispelled and candidates will readily testify that their experience was challenging” (Wilson, 2002, p. 77).

However, just as some have called for greater commonality across the UK HE sector in the criteria used for assessing all PhDs (see Shaw and Green, 2002) so have others identified a need for more harmonization of policy and guidelines amongst institutions (see Powell, 2004, sec. 10.7). Such a harmonization “would help allay anxieties about the academic merits of the publication route to PhD” (UKCGE, 1996, p. 19). Further, although anxieties about the PhD by publication across the UK HE sector may now have lessened somewhat there are still differences about eligibility of candidates, about the perceived nature of the award itself and about its relationship to other forms of doctoral study. Indeed “differences of view at such fundamental levels may be problematic if the sector as a whole seeks to develop the range of doctoral study with some sense of coherence” (Powell, 2004, sec. 10.7).

### **Part two: writing a critical appraisal for the PhD by published work**

I suggest that the most important quality criteria that candidates have to meet when writing their critical appraisal for the PhD by publication are mainly those of originality, rigour and significance. But any claim that their selected publications make a valuable contribution to knowledge also requires candidates to convince examiners that what they have submitted may also be evaluated as a coherent body of work. How then should candidates go about writing an appraisal which demonstrates clearly that they have satisfied these four criteria?

First of all candidates have to recognize that the criteria to be satisfied are not the objective standards that universities and examiners would like them to be. This lack of objectivity is especially the case in the hermeneutic enterprises of the social sciences and the humanities. Here the main research goals are to identify newer and deeper interpretations of individual and social life rather than, say, to seek better explanations of physical phenomena through the application of scientific methods. Indeed:

Whereas most natural scientists can identify progress, and perhaps agree substantially on its importance, within a normal scientific framework, the same cannot be said of most academics in the social sciences and the humanities (Johnston, 2008, p. 128).

This difference means that defining terms such as coherence, originality, rigour and significance (and then trying to meet the standards they imply) is difficult enough in the so-called objective natural sciences but even more so in other disciplines. This difficulty is because the social sciences and the humanities tend to have more fluid structures and “sub-communities with fuzzy boundaries and changing memberships”. In such academic communities “how can there be common criteria for evaluation, let alone agreement on what is the most significant (and original, and rigorous) work” (Johnston, 2008, pp. 128-9). And what would each one define as coherent?

Journal editors and RAE (Research Assessment Exercise) assessors generally evaluate the quality of articles on their originality, rigour and significance. Similarly, universities and examiners assess candidates for the PhD by published work by the same problematically vague and subjective quality standards. Additionally they also look for a unifying theme in the works submitted – their coherence. What candidates should do is to look carefully at what the various descriptors (where they exist) appear

---

to mean and then to show as effectively as they can how their own work matches the standards required. In the following sections I discuss what candidates should take into account about criteria such as originality, rigour, significance and coherence in their attempt to write a convincing critical appraisal.

### *Originality*

Originality means different things in different disciplines and is therefore one of the most difficult criteria for candidates to demonstrate in their work. Also, most European universities “are almost silent on how originality is to be determined” (Dunleavy, 2003, p. 27). It can mean: applying existing stances, methodologies or theories to new data; finding new ways of analysing/theorising existing data; proposing new methods/theories for old problems; reinterpreting existing data or theories and revising old views. It can also mean new knowledge or new theories or new connections with previously unrelated materials (see Park, 2005, p. 198). Indeed the traditional PhD “privileges the creation of new knowledge over the application, extension, interpretation or questioning of existing knowledge” (see Park, 2005, p. 199).

It is, however, possible for candidates to claim that their publications are original in terms of their approach, their presentation or their topic (see Blaxter *et al.*, 1996). Original approaches include the use of a new research technique or of testing existing ideas or of being the first to try an approach in a particular region or country or disciplinary area. Original presentations include those which offer different ways of compiling a thesis such as the kaleidoscope style of the performative text described by Nolan (2005) or the post-modernist text described by Andrews (2003). Original *topics* include subjects which have not previously been researched. The important point is that the element of originality in most research is usually small. However, the best defence against the charge of lacking originality probably lies in the choice of a distinctive and personalized research question and approach rather than a claim to have occupied a new niche or topic. Indeed when candidates focus on their own approach and contribution (their “value added”) they are usually in a stronger position to assert their own originality (see Dunleavy, 2003, pp. 30-1). (For a helpful list of 15 definitions of originality see Blaxter *et al.*, 1996, p. 14.)

### *Rigour*

Rigour is usually linked to robustness of argument and method and may also refer to methodological advances. But again different subject disciplines may offer different definitions. For example, the definition used in the RAE 2008 by the Architecture sub-panel described rigour as including “research processes which are not necessarily systematic or linear, yet demonstrate intellectual precision and material integrity, and innovations in process and/or product in relation to its context” (see Johnston, 2008, pp. 132-3). How an article could be intellectually precise without being systematic was not made explicit whilst the inclusion of “innovation” in the definition suggests a blurring of any distinction between rigour and originality.

Natural scientists are particularly “big on rigor” according to the iconoclastic philosopher Richard Rorty. To him, scientists are like the “careful and exacting quasi-transcendental logician teasing out preexistent relations among concepts - as if concepts were like bits of DNA molecules”. He also suggests that the notion of rigour “seems to entail that there is something to be gotten right” (Rorty, 1998, p. 338). But for

Rorty it is hard to separate the notion of rigour from that of a consensus of inquirers, of participants in an ongoing social practice:

Rigor, it seems to me, is something you can have only after entering into an agreement with some other people to subordinate your imagination to their consensus. . . It is hard to be rigorous all by yourself, and equally hard to praise the same accomplishment both for originality and for rigor. When somebody does something for the first time, she may do it brilliantly, but she cannot do it rigorously (Rorty, 1998, p. 339).

What Rorty appears to be getting at here is similar to Johnston's point that academic communities operate within paradigms with shared understandings of knowledge, approaches and methods "from which spring appreciations of the relative quality (originality, rigour and significance) of work" (see Johnston, 2008, p. 130). For scientists and technologists especially the concept of rigour (as well, indeed, as those of originality and significance) is largely unproblematic. They know it when they see it and assume that their colleagues know it when they see it too: "there is no need to define what is self-evident" (see Johnston, 2008, p. 132).

Candidates submitting a PhD by published work in science or technology may or may not take comfort from this view of the self-evident meaning of rigour (and originality and significance). If they believe themselves already to be part of the relevant community then they will know rigour when they see it. Candidates in other disciplines may need to worry a little more. This is because social scientists have also learned to be big on rigour: We like our data hard and our methods stiff – we call it rigor (Eisner, 2002). But Eisner was being ironic and mischievous.

For candidates in the humanities and the social sciences it would be wise to seek guidance first in their own university's research handbook. Second they could read what their relevant RAE 2008 panel or sub-panel had to say on rigour and then to use that as their (probably vague) benchmark. For example, Panel C, which included Nursing and Midwifery and Allied Health Professions, simply referred to "scientific rigour with regard to design, method and analysis" (see Johnston, 2008, p. 132). The numerous panels devoted to languages defined rigour as "intellectual coherence, methodological precision and analytical power; accuracy and depth of scholarship" whilst those assessing art and drama and music described it as "the degree of intellectual precision and/or systematic method and/or integrity embodied in the research" (see Johnston, 2008, pp. 146-7). These definitions may or may not help depending of course on whether examiners have a similar understanding of the concept. Candidates could use these statements, given the lack of anything more precise, to show, at least, that they have been as explicit as their esteemed peers on the RAE panels.

### *Significance*

In their critical appraisals candidates for the PhD by published work have to convince their examiners that their submissions are serious contributions to scholarly conversations in their own discourse community. They must, in effect, show that their publications have:

- achieved the goals for each piece of work;
- added consequentially to the field; and
- opened additional areas for further exploration (see Glassick *et al.*, 1997, p. 29).



---

In other words the outcomes of any piece of research or scholarship have significance when, first of all, it meets its own goals because its results have meaning within the parameters that the candidate set for each project. Candidates need to demonstrate that they have gone about each project in a scholarly and reflective way. Further, a scholarly project such as a published article is significant if it helps “shape public debate and broaden understanding of the issues at hand” as well as “open whole new areas for further expansion” (Glassick *et al.*, 1997, p. 30). Here Dewey’s well-known view that inquiry should be seen as proceeding from doubt to the resolution of doubt and to the generation of new doubt is important. It should remind candidates that, no matter how important they may think their results to be, their significance is likely to be provisional and temporary since their outcomes are also bound to raise other questions – other doubts – for further examination.

Significance may also be claimed for each publication if candidates can provide evidence that, already in the public domain, it has begun to have an impact within the discourse community. The best kind of evidence is probably that provided by formal citations and by comments from others. Examiners are likely to be impressed if candidates can point to actual citations and to examples of written comments that they have received. These latter could include favourable judgements made by editors and referees offered as feedback to articles submitted to journals. Other valuable evidence – rare in academic publishing - includes comments which identify articles and books as primary points of reference or comparable to the best work in the field or agenda setting or developing new concepts or paradigms for research (see Johnston, 2008, pp. 134-5). However, candidates must realize that such comments are not common and that, anyway, citations are “retrospective indicators” which are difficult to find for recently published items whose impact may not be immediate (see Johnston, 2008, p. 137). Also “paradigm shifters” are rare and most candidates would be unwise to claim that their work has revolutionary status. They should be hopeful instead that their examiners (like RAE assessors) might evaluate their work as having “potential impact” at least (see Johnston, 2008, p. 139). Candidates would be best advised to make relatively modest claims for the significance of their work

### *Coherence*

I have already noted in part one that coherence, in the context of the PhD by published work, may be regarded as a candidate’s attempt to provide a convincing critical narrative about the overall intellectual position unifying the submitted articles or papers. This narrative would usually be provided in the form of a critical appraisal where a case should be made which demonstrates and critiques the cohesiveness of the works submitted (see Powell, 2004, sec. 7.4). Here “coherence” means “unification” and “cohesion”, terms which are intended to indicate that a set of published papers can be seen, and can be shown, to form an integrated whole. What examiners hope to find in any thesis – including the PhD by published work – is “integration and cohesion” (see Winter *et al.*, 2000). What examiners actually say is that a particular thesis or submission demonstrates coherence by using vague phrases such as “Everything fits together as it should do” and “The thesis hangs together as a whole” (see Trafford and Leshem, 2008, pp. 162-3). “Togetherness” is all. A further set of coherence descriptors includes:

- displays coherence of structure when conclusions clearly follow from the data;
- skilfully organises a number of different angles;

- is cogently organised and expressed;
- possesses a definite agenda and an explicit structure; and
- presents a sense of the researcher's learning as a journey, as a structured incremental progress through a process of both argument and discovery (based on Winter *et al.*, 2000).

The key terms here are argument, coherence, discovery, learning, process, progress, organisation and structure. Perhaps it is the final descriptor – of a research project as a completed journey - which best conveys an overall notion of integration and coherence since completed journeys can be said to signify and summarize intellectual processes of planning, travelling (actually or virtually), stopping (addressing, analysing, reflecting on the issues raised in the places visited), overcoming difficulties en route, and arriving at a real or imagined destination. The doctoral journey may now have become commonplace but, nevertheless, the metaphor usefully helps candidates to present their completed (and complete?) work as a unified doctoral narrative with its own beginning, middle and end.

Making the research journey explicit, even retrospectively in the PhD by published work, should help candidates argue that what they have achieved is an integrated and coherent whole. The coherence of their research journey should help candidates make the claim that throughout the planning, implementing and reporting of their work they have clearly demonstrated the various necessary qualities of doctorateness. The journey metaphor should help candidates express their critical understanding and achievement of doctorateness through their use of appropriate methods, their contribution to knowledge, their growing independence and the overall intellectual merit of learning from all that they have confronted. In this way, too, the metaphor should help candidates shift attention away from the traditional PhD emphasis on the research product – the thesis itself – towards the development of the “autonomous scholar” (see Park, 2005) who is capable of undertaking further research journeys. Examiners admire candidates who show themselves to be ready to join (or have already joined?) the club of autonomous scholars.

### **Concluding reflective critique: towards a publishable critical appraisal?**

Given that their claim to be awarded a PhD by published work rests initially on the publishability of the articles or other materials submitted candidates ought to consider whether their critical appraisal itself should also be publishable. If so, they should write their appraisal in the form of a critically reflective essay which meets the criteria of publishability as identified at the beginning of this paper: criticality, contextualisation, impact, originality, rigour, scale, significance and topicality. My view is that many of these criteria are, as we have seen, subjective and vague and that they often overlap. Throughout Johnston's astute analysis (Johnston, 2008) the impression may be gained that, for example, works are evaluated (by RAE assessors) as original because they are significant, significant because they are original, and paradigm shifting because they are original and significant.

A publishable critical appraisal should include an overall reflective critique of the submitted work. Such a reflective critique would involve candidates thinking about their own work and learning from the process of reflecting on its strengths and weaknesses. Candidates therefore need to:

- critically evaluate their own work;
- bring an appropriate breadth of evidence to their critique; and
- show their intention to use such critical evaluation to improve the quality of their future work (based on Glassick *et al.*, 1997, p. 34).

Candidates should also critically reflect on their work in order to examine whether it is consistent with what they claim to be their own academic values. These values could include, for example, freedom, growth, variety, conversation, consensus, knowledge and truth (themselves also “essentially contested concepts”). However, the important point here is that “what *unifies* the activities of a scholar, whether engaged in teaching, research, or professional service, is an approach to each task as a novel situation, a voyage of exploration into the partially unknown” (Glassick *et al.*, 1997, p. 34 – my emphasis). It is this image of a voyage of exploration or a research journey that should characterise candidates’ claims that their work meets the standards of the doctorate. A critical appraisal for a PhD by published work should always contain some serious attempt to provide a reflective critique of what candidates think they have achieved or failed to achieve in their voyages and explorations. It is through reflective critique above all that they will most clearly help improve their own future contributions to research and scholarship. And it is through such reflective critique that our research and scholarly communities will also develop and grow (see Badley, 2003).

#### Note

1. The Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) is an exercise undertaken approximately every five years on behalf of the UK higher education funding authorities to evaluate the quality of research undertaken by British higher education institutions.

#### References

- Andrews, R. (2003), *Research Questions*, Continuum, London.
- ARU (2008), *Research Degree Regulations*, Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge and Chelmsford.
- Badley, G. (2003), “Improving the scholarship of teaching and learning”, *Innovations in Education and Training International*, Vol. 40 No. 3, pp. 303-9.
- Blaxter, L., Hughes, C. and Tight, M. (1996), *How to Research*, Open University Press, Buckingham.
- Boud, D. and Lee, A. (Eds) (2009), *Changing Practices of Doctoral Education*, Routledge, Abingdon, Oxford.
- Dunleavy, P. (2003), *Authoring a PhD: How to Plan, Draft, Write and Finish a Doctoral Thesis or Dissertation*, Palgrave Macmillan, Abingdon, Oxford, Basingstoke.
- Eisner, E. (2002), “What can education learn from the arts about the practice of education?”, *The Encyclopedia of Informal Education*, available at: [www.infed.org/biblio/eisner\\_arts\\_and\\_the\\_practice\\_or\\_education.htm](http://www.infed.org/biblio/eisner_arts_and_the_practice_or_education.htm) (accessed 9 March 2009).
- Glassick, C., Huber, M. and Maeroff, G. (1997), *Scholarship Assessed: Evaluation of the Professoriate*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA.
- Hoddell, S., Street, D., Wildblood, H. and Doctorates, -. (2002), “converging or diverging patterns of provision”, *Quality Assurance in Education*, Vol. 10 No. 2, pp. 61-70.

- Jackson, C. and Tinkler, P. (2001), "Back to basics: a consideration of the purposes of the PhD viva", *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, Vol. 26 No. 4, pp. 355-66.
- Johnston, R. (2008), "On structuring subjective judgements: originality, significance and rigour in RAE 2008", *Higher Education Quarterly*, Vol. 62 Nos 1/2, pp. 120-47.
- Nolan, K. (2005), "Publish or cherish? Performing a dissertation in/between research spaces", in Barnett, R. (Ed.), *Reshaping the University*, Ch. 9.
- Park, C. (2003), "Levelling the playing field: towards best practice in the doctoral viva", *Higher Education Review*, Vol. 36 No. 1, pp. 47-67.
- Park, C. (2005), "New variant PhD: the changing nature of the doctorate in the UK", *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, Vol. 27 No. 2, pp. 189-207.
- Park, C. (2007), *Redefining the Doctorate*, Higher Education Academy, London, available at: [www.hea.ac.uk](http://www.hea.ac.uk) (accessed 14 March 2009).
- Powell, S. (2004), *The Award of the PhD by Published Work*, UK Council for Graduate Education, Lichfield.
- Robins, L. and Kanowski, P. (2008), "PhD by publication: a student's perspective", *Journal of Research Practice*, Vol. 4 No. 2, Article M3, available at: <http://jrp.icaap.org/index.php/jrp/article/view/136/154> (accessed 14 April 2009).
- Rorty, R. (1998), *Truth and Progress: Philosophical Papers*, Vol. 3, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Shaw, M. and Green, D. (2002), "Benchmarking the PhD – a tentative beginning", *Quality Assurance in Education*, Vol. 10 No. 2, pp. 116-24.
- Simpson, R. (1983), *How the PhD Came to Britain – A Century of Struggle for Postgraduate Education*, Society for Research in Higher Education, Guildford.
- Trafford, V. and Leshem, S. (2008), *Stepping Stones to Achieving Your Doctorate*, Open University Press, Maidenhead.
- UKCGE (1996), *The Award of the Degree of PhD on the Basis of Published Work in the UK*, UK Council for Graduate Education, Lichfield.
- Wilson, K. (2002), "Quality assurance issues for a PhD by published work: a case study", *Quality Assurance in Education*, Vol. 10 No. 2, pp. 71-8.
- Winter, R., Griffiths, M. and Green, K. (2000), "The 'academic' qualities of practice: what are the criteria for a practice-based PhD?", *Studies in Higher Education*, Vol. 25 No. 1, pp. 25-37.

**Corresponding author**

Graham Badley can be contacted at: [graham.badley@anglia.ac.uk](mailto:graham.badley@anglia.ac.uk)