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# Academics reflecting on highlighting creativity and originality in the synthesis for their PhD by published work

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## Literature and Rationale

The growing diversity of doctoral programmes within the global Higher Education (HE) environment contributes to knowledge and enhances innovation and creativity. (Halse and Malfoy, 2010; Lee, 2011).

Academic staff who work in HE both in the UK and internationally are now required to have a PhD and there has been a subsequent expansion in enrolments. (Watts, 2012, p. 1101).

Staff who have worked without a PhD in Universities in the UK for many years, but have been publishing, are now being encouraged to enrol for a PhD by published works. This PhD by published work award enables these staff to use their peer-reviewed academic writing for a PhD award.

This approach encourages academics to write new work in a coherent area or use existing work written about a particular subject or theme. In addition, candidates have to write a “synthesis” which captures the originality, coherence, connectivity and the contribution to knowledge of their work in their subject area. Making these areas explicit in the synthesis and defending them well in the viva voce examination is key to successfully meeting the requirements for the award.

## Methodology

Focus groups of existing PhD by published work candidates (n=8) and an e mail survey of 20 UK and international candidates for this route concentrated on a range of issues which explored candidates’ experiences of undertaking this route.

Thematic content analysis of the transcripts and surveys generated key issues relating to demonstrating the originality and coherence of their work in their synthesis. They are presented here in the form of questions and approaches.

## Findings

### 1. Enhancing the creativity and originality of work

The PhD by published work candidate could ask themselves....

- 1: Does my work **demonstrate** or **re-interpret an existing theory/methodology** and data *or* **find new ways of analysing** or applying an existing body of knowledge *or* propose a new theory?
- 2: Can I identify a focussed subject area with a very focussed “golden thread” and take forward original ideas generated from each research project and each concurrent paper and **foreground the originality** of the work at each stage in every new paper and during my research journey?
- 3: Can I **separate myself from my co-authors** and devise my own original view to demonstrate in the viva voce examination?
- 4: Can I show progress in the development of my original ideas? Can I show the **impact of the originality on the wider learning community**?
- 5: Can I show how my contribution is new to the subject or context at that time? **Have others cited me in their work?**

## Findings continued

### Developing coherence in the candidate’s synthesis

The “**golden thread**” is the single theme which links the ideas presented in the synthesis. This thread draws together the content and ideas presented in the separate papers.

Approach 1. Some used the “golden thread” of **one underpinning theory** from their research and extrapolated it to different subject areas or environments

Approach 2. Some explored how a specific type of **methodology** and their associated methods have been used as a “golden thread”.

Approach 3. Some explored how their work was influenced by emergent contextual **literature and policies** and how the evidence-based framework they applied to the new literature became their “golden thread”.

Approach 4. Others (usually in covert or overt observational studies or qualitative interviewing) used **meta-inference** (exploring their personal stance to their own research questions) as their thread to enhance the synergy of their publications.

## Conclusions

This poster outlines participants’ suggestions to:

- i) enhance the **creativity and originality** of the work presented in their synthesis writing and
- ii) enhance the **coherence** of the work presented in their synthesis.

Participants reflected on how this process enhanced their own inquiry, passion for their subject and their teaching and research practice.

This framework of questions and approaches also helps supervisors supporting individuals undertaking a PhD by published work.

## References

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