

Reflections on a Retrospective PhD-by-Publication Journey

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In a context where enhancing career options and economic welfare are increasingly important, many teachers view gaining a PhD as key to cultivating competitive advantage. However, traditional PhD programs are often perceived as inaccessible, and numerous misconceptions surrounding PhD-by-Publication programs remain, especially with regard to what examiners will accept as equivalent to a traditional thesis and what topics and students the programs are suitable for. To address these misconceptions, this article focuses on the retrospective route to completing a PhD by Publication. I reflect on my experiences of completing such a program, outline the process I undertook to obtain the PhD, and add my own perspective to the wider discussion. It is hoped that this short article will help improve understanding of the current contextual factors that shape the retrospective PhD by Publication and encourage others to consider undertaking similar projects and share their own experiences.

キャリアの選択肢の拡大と経済的福祉水準の向上がますます重要になっている状況で、多くの教員は博士号の取得が競争上の優位性を培う鍵となると考えている。しかし、従来の博士課程は敷居が高いものであると認識されることが多く、論文博士号取得プログラムを巡っては、特に審査官が何を従来の論文と同等のものとして認識するのか、そのプログラムがどのようなテーマや学生に適しているのかという点に関して、多くの誤解が依然として残っている。本論では、これらの誤解に対処するために、遡及的に論文博士号を取得する道をたどることに焦点を当てている。このようなプログラムを修了した自身の経験を振り返り、博士号を取得するために取り込んだ過程を概説し、より幅広い議論に自身の視点を加えている。この論考が、遡及的論文博士号を形成する現在の状況要因への理解を深め、人々が同様のプロジェクトに取り組むことを検討し、自分達の経験を共有することを奨励するのに役立つことを願う。

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Recognized as being the pinnacle of scholarship (Mowbray & Halse, 2010), completing a PhD and achieving “doctoralness” (Johnson & Chong, 2022, p. 219) demonstrates an ability to independently undertake and potentially publish quality research (Jackson, 2013). As publishing plays a significant role in obtaining research funding, universities in a number of countries, including the UK and Australia, now list holding a PhD as a condition of academic appointment. It is also an important factor when applying for the highest faculty positions at the tertiary level in Japan. However, for a variety of reasons, including time and financial constraints, PhDs are often not perceived to be accessible or

inclusive (Smith, 2015) and thus can appear to be out of reach to many practicing educators.

In response to this view of PhD programs, alongside changes in job markets and heightened interest in obtaining the award from increasingly varied student cohorts, more diverse PhD pathways have emerged (Peacock, 2017). Among the different types of doctoral programs, the PhD by Publication has become one of the more popular and well-established routes (Frick, 2016). However, in 2023 still only one in three UK universities offered PhDs by Publication (Grove, 2023) and the traditional PhD route still predominates. Furthermore, as much of the published material on PhDs focuses on the conventional route, many misconceptions regarding the PhD by Publication remain, especially with regard to what examiners will accept as equivalent to a traditional thesis and what topics and students the program is suitable for.

To address a specific area of this gap in knowledge, this article focuses on the retrospective route to completing a PhD by Publication, an option popular with published authors and active researchers. By reflecting on my experience of completing a retrospective PhD by Publication, outlining the process I undertook to obtain the PhD, and adding my own perspective to the wider discussion, I hope to improve understanding of the current contextual factors that shape the retrospective PhD by Publication and encourage others to consider undertaking similar projects and share their own experiences.

PhD by Publication

When undertaking a PhD by Publication (also known as PhD by Public Works, Published Works, or Portfolio), instead of writing one thesis of 80,000 to 100,000 words, a series of artefacts are produced, collated, and submitted. The artefacts (i.e., articles, books, book chapters, presentations) are typically drawn together by an overarching contextualizing statement (or critical exegesis) and this work is then usually defended by oral examination (*viva voce*).

The PhD by Publication is commonly offered via prospective and retrospective routes. In the prospective route, candidates create, write, and publish

artefacts along with a context statement throughout their candidacy. In the retrospective model, candidates collate a selection of their previously published or created artefacts and write an accompanying context statement which considers what drove the production of those artefacts and what their overall contribution to the field is. Hybrid routes that allow the inclusion of both prior and new publications are also offered by some institutions.

The Retrospective Route

Unlike other PhD routes, which are usually conducted at the beginning of a researcher's career, the retrospective PhD by Publication provides researchers who have already published an alternative route to a PhD by allowing them to demonstrate, through their publications, that they have undertaken doctoral-level research and have the appropriate skills for that level (Smith, 2015). However, similar to traditional PhDs, many people who would like to undertake a retrospective PhD by Publication view the programs as inaccessible, unattainable, exclusive, and overly confusing. These feelings are often compounded by the wide variation of regulations across institutions (see Table 1 for an outline of common similarities and differences).

A further deterrent for those considering a retrospective PhD by Publication is the range of misconceptions and confusion surrounding the programs' advantages and drawbacks. To address this con-

sideration, Table 2 outlines a range of positive and negative factors relating to six main themes. Issues that were particularly significant in my own experience are discussed in more detail in the following sections.

Practicalities / General

The positives identified in Table 2 relating to this theme were instrumental in my decision to pursue this route to obtaining a PhD. The increased flexibility and autonomy combined with savings regarding time and money were important as traditional PhD routes are often both more time intensive and expensive.

While there were concerns that this award would be viewed as less valuable or rigorous than a traditional PhD, these were mitigated by my previous positive experiences of completing two online master's degrees, which are also subject to possible stigmatism and skepticism.

Artefacts

The retrospective PhD by Publication appealed to me because my prior research addressed a number of different research questions and used different methods and theoretical frameworks. Although this could have led to issues drawing the publications together into one piece of work, with the help of my supervisors I was able to establish an overarching theme that demonstrated coherence and signifi-

Table 1

Common Similarities and Differences Among Retrospective PhD-by-Publication Programs

Similarities	Differences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The award is equivalent to a conventional PhD by thesis. • The candidate must already have a substantial body of work in the public domain that is connected to a sustained theme. • The work must show originality and the application of independent critical thinking. • There is an identifiable and significant contribution to knowledge. • Artefacts need to be critiqued and contextualized. • The artefacts and exegesis are brought together into a single, coherent piece of work. • The work is assessed by at least one independent external examiner. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some universities restrict the award to their own staff or those having strong connections with the institution. • In some cases, work in non-written form may be allowed. • Some awards are conducted in collaboration with other institutions. • There are a variety of arrangements for supervision and attendance. • Some universities appoint "supervisors" with a record of successful completions, whereas other appoint "mentors" with a lighter advisory role.

Table 2*Factors Relating to Retrospective PhD-by-Publication Programs*

Benefits	Drawbacks
Practicalities/General concerns	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often completed in shorter time frame. • Often less expensive than traditional PhD programs. • Combine producing published works and earning PhD. • Offer candidates more flexibility and autonomy. • Expose candidates to peer review, critique, and criticism, enabling them to deal with feedback better at PhD level. • Partition PhD into smaller, more manageable pieces of work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of general consensus on objectives, purpose, or context. • Possibility of being seen as less rigorous or valuable than traditional PhD. • Issues regarding consistency of awards among universities. • Often restricted openness to candidates other than staff and faculty. • Resistance among scholars due to perceived challenge to, or weakening of, traditional PhD (Lee, 2010). • Fewer chances to network, develop relationships, and participate in university research culture.
Artefacts	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Already created or published, so not a new project. • Often previously peer reviewed, so already at a publishable level. • Completed progressively, easing pressure of preparing a single thesis. • Can be co-authored, so candidates not isolated as a lone researcher. • Can include wide variety of research questions, methods, and frameworks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limits on age of their creation / publication. • Difficult to combine into single coherent body of work. • Issues regarding which to include. • Confusion over sufficient / appropriate number to include. • Potential enticement for candidates to prioritize time and effort on developing “countable” work → performativity. • Potential temptation for candidates to engage in academic misconduct in order to reach required inclusion number. • Confusion over where they should be published due to flawed systems for determining journal quality. • Questions about definitions of “published” or in the “public domain.” • Issues relating to copyright agreements and confidentiality. • No guarantee that prior publications are of doctoral standard.
Context statement/Structure	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourages candidates to reflect on their artefacts and previous research projects. • Encourages candidates to reflect on their research methodologies, biases, and epistemologies. • Allows candidates to begin writing their context statement almost immediately as it is based on their research. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of general consensus on length or format. • Confusion regarding writing style, voice, and intended audience. • Inconsistent or absent guidelines on inclusion criteria. • Fewer exemplars of best practices compared to traditional PhD route.

Benefits	Drawbacks
Supervisors / Examiners	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often take on more “equal” roles with candidates. • Can have valuable insights and access to a wider range of resources that could improve candidates' work. • Provide support during candidacy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May be inexperienced with this route. • Need to be published authors themselves.
Future research	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better preparation for publishing after graduation. • More opportunities for research avenues, funding, and collaborations due to increased exposure of candidates' previous work. • Discovery of new research themes and ways to extend previous scale and scope of previous work following reflection on artefacts. 	
Career	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater candidate flexibility and autonomy. • Potentially greater opportunities for advancement. • Better chance of gaining long-term, secure employment. • Possible financial incentives. 	

cance.

Although artefacts included in a PhD by Publication can take many forms and can be solo authored or joint authored, in my submission, I only included publications in the form of research articles for which I was the sole author (4), lead author (5), or co-author (1). For the publications of which I was not the sole author, it was necessary to outline my precise contribution, in terms of both the contribution percentage and the details of the tasks I undertook. Determining and agreeing on authorship and level of contribution can be problematical in some cases (Paltridge & Starfield, 2023), so keeping well-labelled records of article drafts during their development is recommended.

Most institutions emphasize quality over quantity, and one of the issues that was highlighted regarding my submission was the inclusion of too many publications (generally between three and six, not ten as in mine). On reflection, I included so many articles due to a combination of insecurity regarding the impact of the articles I had written (which focused mainly on fairly small-scale studies and interventions), a desire to produce an exemplary thesis, and the likely presence of impostor syndrome, a sense of self-doubt regarding competence and whether a person feels they “belong” in

high-achieving contexts (Clance & Imes, 1978). This mindset is not uncommon, but it is one that should be avoided.

When I was selecting which publications to include, it was important to identify which ones had made the most substantial contribution or impact. The articles' relevance to the overarching theme and their importance as examples of my journey as a practitioner-researcher were also significant factors. I was further aware of the need to acknowledge omissions in the articles' coverage, rigor, and depth. I was fortunate that all the articles I selected had been published within a suitable time from the planned PhD submission (the length of accepted time from publication and submission varies among universities). The ranking of the journals in which my articles had been published was not questioned during the development of my context statement. However, during my oral examination I was asked to justify why I had submitted my research to particular outlets.

Context Statement / Structure

A major consideration regarding the context statement for me, and an issue that is part of a wider discussion on PhD thesis metadiscourse

(Johnson, 2022), was the voice in which it should be written. As the majority of the included articles had been written in the third person and using the academic distancing style, that is how I began writing my exegesis. However, after realizing that I was documenting my own personal journey, I found it more apposite to write in the first person, despite this leading to a different writing style between the included articles and the context statement.

In my case, the most challenging part of writing the context statement was demonstrating the originality and unique contribution of the articles, instead of simply introducing them and setting the context. To do this, it was essential to not only establish a coherent overarching theme, but also reflectively critique my approach to the research I was including. Reviewing the research paradigms, methodologies, and epistemologies was very challenging, but it was also insightful and allowed me to identify certain biases that I had held or other issues that were present in my research design. This has provided me with a better, more informed understanding of the research I had conducted and a platform to improve future research ventures. In my opinion, articulating this realization is a major aspect of a retrospective PhD-by-Publication submission.

A further issue was deciding on an appropriate structure. As each candidate's included artefacts will be different, the structure that best fits their work will differ, but in order to create an exegesis that was more than the sum of the included articles, I felt it was imperative to:

- introduce the artefacts by detailing the educational context and the background to how the teaching interventions included in the articles were developed,
- explicitly state the contribution to knowledge,
- outline my journey as a practitioner-researcher, and
- critically reflect on the significance of the included articles.

In order to fully cover the points above while maintaining coherence and making sure the writing was succinct, the final exegesis contained eight main sections:

1. Introduction
2. Educational context (important as my research was based in the Japanese EFL context, but I was a PhD candidate at a UK university)
3. Background to interventions (i.e., the re-

search projects discussed in the articles)

4. Theme I
5. Theme II
6. Theme III
7. Discussion (focusing on practical, theoretical, and methodological contributions)
8. Conclusion

Depending on the individual submission, some candidates place their artefacts in the body of the context statement, while others include them as appendices.

Supervisors / Examiners

When undertaking any PhD, supervisory mentoring and advice is considered vital as it provides emotional and academic support for candidates when writing their context statement and preparing for their oral examination. I was very lucky to have a good working relationship with my supervisors in which I felt comfortable being open about my ideas, concerns, and issues. However, some supervisors may not be well prepared for the PhD by Publication as it may demand a different doctoral supervisory pedagogy from the traditional route (Lee, 2010) and there is a general lack of guidance on how to best help students through the process (Solli & Nygaard, 2022). Supervisors may also have different incentives as it anecdotally appears less common for supervisors and students to co-publish after PhD-by-Publication candidature. Furthermore, there are possible issues of mismatches in approach and research philosophy between candidates and supervisors. In my case, I extensively read potential supervisors' publications before making a formal application. It was also beneficial that my two supervisors had worked together before and I felt that this helped us work better together as a group of three. Therefore, I strongly recommend considering the perspectives of potential supervisors, the style of their publications prior to appointment, and their previous co-authors and collaborators, before applying to enroll in a program.

My submission was assessed by one internal and one external examiner. The level of input candidates have on who is approached to examine their work may be limited, but it is common for their opinions to be sought. I believe that it is important for suggested examiners to have experience working in a similar context to the candidate, who is tacitly encouraged to cite their work (as well as that of their supervisors). The examiners may be leading authors in the field, which can be intimidating, but

it is important to remember that if they accept the offer to assess your work, it is often because they are genuinely interested in what you have produced. Again, in my experience, I was very fortunate to have been assessed by supportive examiners who used the oral examination as a way to better understand my work rather than as an opportunity to strongly criticize my work or be overly negative.

Future Research

Another factor that influenced my desire to pursue this route was the opportunity I would have to reflect on my journey as a practitioner-researcher in an objective way. Submission of a retrospective PhD by Publication illustrates the candidate's progression as a researcher, highlighting both the strengths and weaknesses of that person's work. I looked forward to revisiting my research in this way, critically assessing the contributions I have made to this field via my published research. To do this, I needed to conduct a deep analysis of my articles in order to reach new conclusions that were greater than the findings of the individual articles. However, it was also necessary to analyse the articles subjectively so that I could reflect on my own personal journey as a practitioner-researcher. The process of internalization that I undertook during candidature changed my perceptions of my research and also challenged my sense of self and identity as a practitioner-researcher.

Career

In order to manage and enhance their career and economic welfare, it is important for educators to make responsible choices. Many view publications as a key area in which they can cultivate competitive advantage, employability, and advancement opportunities. If a teacher has published research as I had, then undertaking a retrospective PhD by Publication is potentially the next logical step.

Other Considerations

When deciding whether the PhD-by-Publication route is the best option, it is important to consider the motivation for undertaking the project and the implications that it may have on performativity. It has been argued that PhD-by-Publication candidates can come to think about their research in terms of numbers of publications and journal impact factors, and that these quantitative indicators then become the motivating factors for publication (Jackson, 2013). Consequently, Ball (2003) outlined some key questions to ask:

- Is completing a PhD by Publication important, worthwhile, and something to fully believe in; or is it simply being done because it will be measured or compared?
- Does the research have a greater purpose, or is the purpose to simply publish to sustain your individual career?
- Does the PhD by Publication project truly add to the field or is it just a way of promoting yourself and your published articles by increasing their accessibility? (p. 220)

Process

Having discussed some of the main considerations, influences, and issues I encountered while completing a retrospective PhD by Publication, I will now outline the process I followed and expand on some of the sections illustrated in Figure 1.

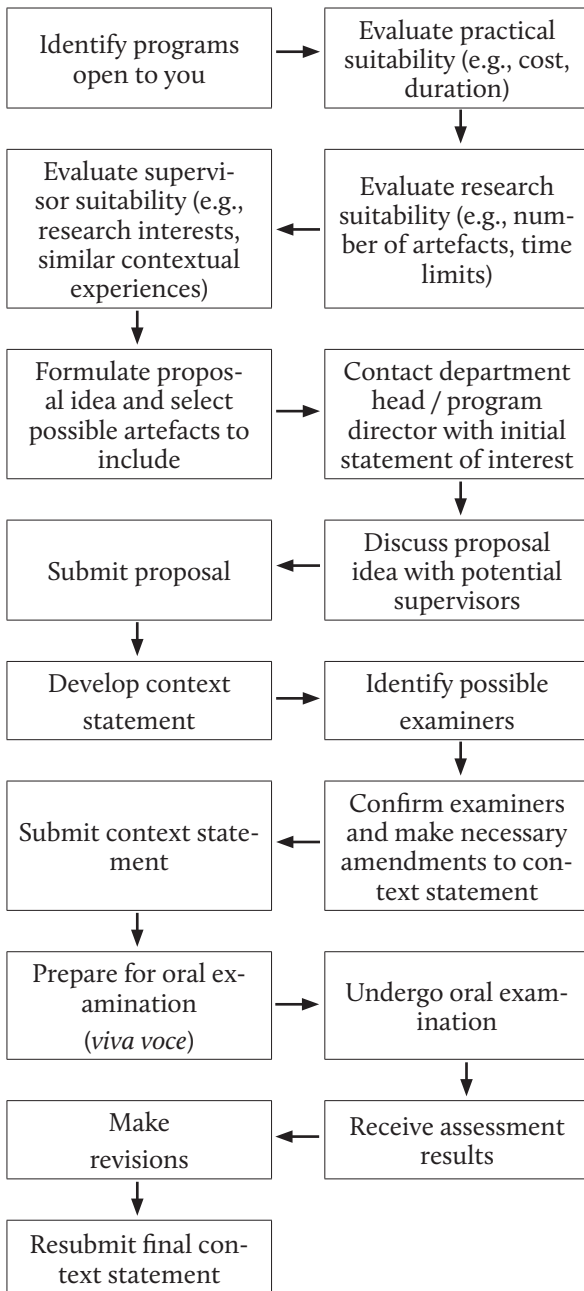
As with all courses that people take, ensuring suitability is imperative to success. Once suitability has been established, a proposal idea needs to be formulated, focusing mainly on an initial conceptualization of an overarching theme that connects the artefacts. This is a difficult task, so discussing and reviewing the proposal with the department head, program director, and potential supervisors is a key process at this point. It also allows all stakeholders to better understand each other's philosophies and approaches at an early stage.

Once the context statement had been written and submitted, I began preparing for the oral examination. For a PhD *viva voce*, it is common for candidates to be allowed to bring a copy of their exegesis and a set of notes with them. I prepared a 2-minute and a 5-minute introduction to my work, and also predicted potential questions relating to themes identified in Appendix 1. This preparation was invaluable in the oral examination, not just because two of my predicted questions were asked, but also because it gave me the confidence to know that I was as familiar with my work and the connected concepts as possible. Without the generous approaches of my examiners and the support of my supervisors, the *viva voce* could have gone very differently, but I enjoyed the experience and I encourage others to view it as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that should be cherished.

Following the oral examination, the examiners required minor revisions to my submission. As this is the most common outcome of a PhD *viva voce*, I had prepared myself for this result. The changes included some amendments to the context statement, especially to clarify and strengthen the claim to having developed a unique contribution. Once

Figure 1

Process Undertaken While Searching for, Applying for, and Completing a Retrospective PhD by Publication



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those changes had been made, the revised thesis was approved and the PhD awarded.

Conclusion

The move toward PhD-by-Publication routes aligns with a continued focus in academia and tertiary education on the ability to conduct and publish research. Completing a retrospective PhD by Publication is a major project and one that should not be entered into without full consideration of factors such as financial pressures, family issues, support networks, and the balancing of study and writing with paid work. However, the opportunity for deep self-reflection, the chance to draw previously published research work together into a single opus, and the great satisfaction gained when finally receiving the award can make it a rewarding process overall.

Although the journey toward a retrospective PhD by Publication can be destabilizing and uncomfortable, the point of this article has been to raise awareness of such programs as a credible route for obtaining a doctorate and I hope that it will inform ongoing conversations about pathways to PhD accreditation.

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[JALT PRAXIS] TLT INTERVIEWS



Torrin Shimono & James Nobis

TLT Interviews brings you direct insights from leaders in the field of language learning, teaching, and education—and you are invited to be an interviewer! If you have a pertinent issue you would like to explore and have access to an expert or specialist, please make a submission of 2,000 words or less.

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Welcome to the May/June edition of *TLT Interviews*! For this issue we are happy to bring you a fantastic conversation with Dr. Gary Barkhuizen. Dr. Barkhuizen is Professor of Applied Linguistics at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. His teaching and research interests are in the areas of language teacher education, teacher and learner identity, study abroad, and narrative inquiry. Originally from South Africa, he obtained his MA from Essex University in the UK, and his doctorate from Teachers College, Columbia University. He has recently served as editor of the book, *Language Teachers Studying Abroad: Identities, Emotions and Disruptions* (2022). Dr. Barkhuizen was interviewed by Michael Ellis, coordinator for the EFL program at International Christian University High School in Tokyo. Michael holds an MA in TESOL from Teachers College, Columbia University. His research interests include reflective teaching practice and the use of CLIL to amplify marginalized voices.

An Interview With Dr. Gary Barkhuizen Michael Ellis International Christian University High School



Appendix

Oral examination preparation themes

Introduction

- Tell us about yourself
- In which area do you wish to be examined?

Overview

- In one sentence, what is your exegesis?
- Can you start by summarizing your exegesis?
- What is the idea that binds your exegesis together?
- What are the main issues / areas of debate in your field?
- Why was your research area worth investigating? (What was the point?)
- What is the key focus of your research?
- What is the key idea that is indispensable to your thesis?
- What are the theoretical underpinnings of your research?

Development

- What motivated and inspired you to carry out this research?
- How did your research questions emerge?
- Why / How did you narrow down your focus of enquiry to this?

Method

- Why did you use this research methodology?
- Describe the necessary decisions taken in your process.
- Was there any chance of implementing a different type of analytical technique?
- Can you explain why and to what extent your results are valid?
- What did the qualitative analysis contribute to your work?
- What steps have you taken to minimise researcher bias in your work?

Literature

- Who has had the strongest influence in the development of your subject area in terms of theory and practice?
- Which are the three most important papers that relate to your thesis?
- Explain the recent developments / advancements in this field.
- How does your PhD work fit in with the wider literature?

Results / Findings

- Summarise your key findings.
- Which of your research observations are you most interested in / curious about?
- How does your research contribute to solving problems / practice?
- What is the relevance of your research in the current context?
- How do you know that your findings are correct?
- How can this research help others working in the same field?

- To what extent do your results / contributions generalise?
- How long do you expect your work to remain current?
- How has your work been received so far?

Others

- How has your view of your research topic changed?
- What are the strongest/weakest parts of your work?
- What would have improved your publications? / What could you have done differently?
- What was the biggest challenge during the interventions?
- What was the biggest challenge while writing the thesis?
- Who will be most interested in your work?
- What have you learned / achieved from the process of doing your PhD?
- What are you most proud of, and why?
- What's original about your work? Where is the novelty?
- How have you evaluated your work?
- What are your future research plans / proposals?
- Where will you publish your future work?
- How did you deal with any ethical issues while conducting your research?
- What advice would you give to a research student entering this area?
- What have you done that merits a PhD? / Do you think that your work is enough to constitute getting a PhD? Why?
- What are the limitations of your research?
- Is there anything you'd like to share or discuss we've not asked you about?