

## **What are the barriers to and opportunities for involvement in academic research within a profession-based discipline? A case study within Publishing Studies**

Dr Alison Baverstock (Kingston University) and Jackie Steinitz (Data Analyst and co-author of paper) with Dr Beth Driscoll (University of Melbourne); Assistant Professor Per Henningsgaard (Portland State University); Emma House (Publishers Association, UK); Dr Beth Le Roux (University of Pretoria); Dr Marianne Martens (University of Kent, Ohio); Professor Brigitte Ouvry-Vial (Univesites d'Angers et du Maine); Professor Claire Squires (Stirling); Dr Ann Steiner (University of Lund).

### **Abstract**

This paper reports findings from an international survey into the research involvement and support of university teaching staff in a relatively new profession-based discipline, Publishing Studies (PS).

Many academic, professional and specialist publishing houses recruit student sdirectly from such courses, both for short term placements and full time roles, finding them a useful source of ready-trained employees. This paper considers the discipline of those teaching such courses, Publishing Studies, and the barriers to and opportunities for academic research they experience. A greater understanding of barriers to and opportunities for research in profession-based disciplines was felt to be of value as universities internationally are coming under pressure not only to create close links with the wider economy and to produce employable students, but also to encourage relevant and implementable research. The particular value placed by universities on Publishing Studies is also highly relevant to the publishing industry.

The survey suggested that while there is strong agreement among respondents that it is beneficial for those teaching PS to be research active there was considerable variation in current levels of their research activity. Respondents rated their own level of research activity highest in departments with an active research culture and effective support processes.

Lack of time was the main reason cited for reduced or non-involvement in academic research. While this is an issue for academics across all subjects the PS respondents felt their lack of time was exacerbated by a number of factors including: the need to remain involved with practical and consultancy work in order to effectively represent a fast-changing sector; the challenges of maintaining access to placements and guest speakers; time spent advising colleagues from other departments about publishing, and the strictures of a fractional contract (and other work commitments) which permit little research time. Other barriers noted included the lack of a research culture within the home institution, lack of formal support processes for research within profession- and practice-based disciplines, and lack of clear institutional ownership or siting for cross-disciplinary areas. There appears to be very little commercially funded research currently within PS departments in universities, although there is a perception amongst respondents that could be opportunities for such research.

Research opportunities could be created both by addressing the identified barriers and by pursuing new opportunities. Ten such areas of opportunity are suggested in this paper, including the allocation of management support to undertake administrative tasks to liberate academics, better

access to information on research processes, improved inter-disciplinary collaboration, and developing opportunities for commercial research and civic engagement.

The paper also argues that as research outputs of academics are increasingly monitored it is important to consider how the full range of disciplines housed within institutions can be accommodated within research support and monitoring processes; options for development of the main findings are suggested.

The research has a strong relevance to the disciplinary value and prestige of many employees within the publishing industry, as well as many of those seeking such employment. It also has a relevance for inter-disciplinary areas, and other profession- and practice-based subjects within universities.

## **1. Introduction**

There is a growing awareness among university staff from all disciplines of the significance of research as an indicator of the quality of their establishment, its staff and the education on offer to those who enrol. Involvement in research is increasingly identified as what separates higher education from further education and other organisations offering education or training.

Within the university sector however there is currently discussion about what constitutes research, and how it should be both defined and documented. Up to now universities have tended to record traditional academic/theoretical research, from a range of long-established disciplines, largely disseminated through academic conferences and journals; the pedigree of the publication and its associated peer review processes providing a measure of the value of the associated research.

Times are changing. The range of disciplines now available through universities means that colleagues are research-active in previously unanticipated fields and in new ways; their ability to affect thinking within their discipline achieved through an expanded range of media and formats. At the same time, a general economic recession combined with the substantially increased costs associated with university education have meant that those deciding on/funding higher education are entertaining new criteria for choosing both institutions and courses; the practical connectedness of teaching staff may be more significant to potential students and those resourcing them than their academic research. It follows that the involvements of staff within industry, which indicate the extent to which they are up-to-date in their field, whether captured as practice-based research or commentary in professional publications, can both ensure the organisation's research reputation and support recruitment.

Internationally, governments are also adapting the metrics by which they appraise the success of higher education. In addition to excellence in research, new indicators are being introduced such as the employability of emerging students (as evinced by their success in finding graduate-level jobs), the extent to which research can be put into practice (often more easily achieved in disciplines that relate to a specific profession), and opportunities for (paid) knowledge transfer partnerships between universities and the wider economic environment.

Within the discipline of Publishing Studies, these issues are explored within a context of huge change within the publishing industry, where new borrowing patterns (information professionals are

monitoring user requests and find online information is becoming more popular than print); severe pressure on library budgets (often resulting in a desire to cut printed resources); growing environmental pressures (promoting further resistance to printed resources) and a desire for greater speed of dissemination (academics are particularly active on Twitter and many blog) mean that the traditional journals are finding it increasingly difficult to survive. The spread of publishing understanding outside the portals of the traditional associated industry, often through involvement in self-publishing, is opening up new ways to share ideas, and new mediators are emerging (e. g. academic forums managed by universities, groups of scholars or other commercial interests) to challenge publishers.

Within this context, and having outlined the idea within a group of profession-based colleagues attending a meeting of the UK Association of Publishing Education<sup>1</sup>, a research project was suggested within Publishing Studies to consider how those involved in profession-based subjects are supported and encouraged to develop their research, to report their outcomes and to measure their effectiveness. Within the UK, this was a particularly timely exercise given preparation was going on for the 2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF), an exercise to gather, assess and note excellent research within UK universities over the last 5 years.

The objectives of this research were two-fold. Firstly to investigate opportunities for involvement in academic and professional research in the field and to consider associated barriers. Secondly to research how Publishing Studies, as a relatively new academic discipline, is being accommodated and welcomed within existing institutions and their research support processes. This paper will deal with the first objective, providing information on the location of related courses as context. It is anticipated that a subsequent paper will consider the second objective in more detail.

## **2. Methodology**

Following informal discussions at the meeting of the Association of Publishing Education (APE) in early 2013, with PS colleagues at the London Book Fair in April 2013 and at the SHARP<sup>2</sup> Conference in Philadelphia in July 2013 an international research group of academics in PS was established under leadership from Kingston University. The group comprised eight academics (names at the head of the paper) from six countries together with a representative from the UK Publishers' Association, an organisation that has been instrumental in monitoring the spread of publishing education within universities.

The group agreed that the target population for the research would be contracted university staff who teach Publishing Studies and allied disciplines; specifically it would include those who have a contract (either full or part time) for the regular delivery of the course, irrespective of whether they are from an academic or professional/practice background but would exclude those who just give single guest contributions or a short series of lectures.

An online questionnaire was developed using SurveyMonkey and reviewed by all in the group.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.publishingeducation.org](http://www.publishingeducation.org)

<sup>2</sup> Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing [www.sharpweb.org](http://www.sharpweb.org)

Besides questions about the constitution, size and location of their courses, it included questions about the respondents' own involvement in research, barriers to involvement and their perceptions of the value and inclusion of their discipline within their institution. For UK respondents there were further questions about their involvement in the 2014 REF. The question format was a mix of multiple choices, rating scales with a 7 point scale (1 is low, 7 high, 4 the mid-point), and open-ended questions, as these are particularly useful in providing insights.

The sample was constructed by asking each member of the group to compile their own list of all known contacts from the target population in their country/region. Each member emailed an announcement about the survey to everyone on their list, then a week later, on 10 September 2013, emailed the link to the questionnaire. Two weeks were allowed for response. Respondents were invited to email the link to any colleagues from the target population who had not received the link, and to avoid duplication respondents were asked to answer only once if they received more than one questionnaire.

This approach was undertaken for three reasons. Firstly it was thought that a personal approach from an academic colleague in the same field would be more likely to solicit a response than one from an unknown contact. Secondly it was thought better to boost the number of replies by allowing onward forwarding of the link. Thirdly as the outcome sought was a picture of the international performance and treatment of the discipline, it was important to avoid any sense that the project was a market research exercise by a single university. Responsibility for contacting the overall research cohort was thus shared, and although Kingston kept a watching brief on those being approached, and sought to remove duplications where possible, an overall mailing list for Publishing Studies was not compiled and academics were reassured that no subsequent marketing approach or other identification of their involvement would result from participation. Kingston paid for the services of the Data Analyst and co-author of the paper, Jackie Steinitz. The project was managed by Dr Alison Baverstock (Course Leader for MA Publishing at Kingston, .5 fractional post) within her own time and APE have since contributed to travel costs connected with the dissemination of outcomes.

In total 127 people were emailed directly by the steering group and there was some onward transmission by the initial recipients. 77 replies were received in total including 30 from North America, 28 from Europe and 9 each Africa and Australia.

Before discussing the survey results several caveats about the potential for bias should be noted. This could have stemmed from:

- Sampling bias: the composition of the steering group – recruited through an academic forum for those involved in teaching Publishing Studies, a major bookfair and an academic conference – may have impacted on the range of those involved. Similarly, although the research group was asked to forward the questionnaire to all their known contacts in the target population and the initial respondents invited to forward it onwards to any colleagues who had not received it there may have been a degree of selectivity imposed; thus the cohort approached may not be fully representative of the target population.
- Response bias (i. e. the tendency of respondents either consciously or unconsciously to distort responses). In this instance there may have been an element of 'courtesy bias', as the

respondents were sent the questionnaire by a familiar individual, and even though assured of anonymity this may have influenced their responses.

- Non-response bias. There may be a difference between those who were sent the link to the questionnaire and responded and those who did not. Also if, as seems likely, the findings are of interest to academics involved in other profession- and practice-based areas, those within PS may not behave in the same way.

While these caveats and unexamined areas must be borne in mind when interpreting the results it was felt that the survey offered interesting insights into the discipline of PS, particularly given the opportunity to make more substantial comments through the open-ended questions. Ten key findings are summarised below followed by a discussion of barriers to and opportunities for research.

### 3. Key Findings

#### 3.1 Analysis of the research sample revealed strong industry experience within university departments of Publishing Studies

Respondents were mostly highly experienced; 61% had 10 years or more experience of professional experience in the industry. The average time working in the industry was more than 15 years. Current involvement of the respondents in professional practice varied widely. 39% of the sample described themselves as highly involved (top two boxes on a 7 point scale) while a quarter were currently uninvolved. The average rating was 4.4. Involvement was highest by region in North America (average score 5.2) and lowest in Europe except the UK and Australia (both 3.4).

*Figure 1: Professional experience, research activity and contract size of the respondents*

Years professional experience/ practice in publishing <sup>1</sup>	21+ years (38%), 11-20 years (25%), 6-10 years (14%), Under 5 years (23%)
Current involvement in professional practice <sup>2</sup>	Highly involved (39%), medium (37%), low involvement (24%) Average rating 4.4 (out of 7)
Current level of research activity <sup>3</sup>	Highly active (39%), medium (34%), inactive (27%) Average rating 4.3
Contract size at university <sup>4</sup>	Full time (65%) 0.6 to 0.8 contract (8%) Half-time or less (27%)
Reasons for fractional contract (% of those on fractional contracts. Multiple answers possible) <sup>5</sup>	No full time post available (63%), Allows maintenance of professional commitments (38%), Allows maintenance of personal commitments (17 ++)

Number of respondents (n): n1=71, n2=70, n3=71, n4=66, n5=24

The respondents' level of research activity also varied widely, with 39% describing themselves as highly active (top two boxes) and 27% as research inactive; the average rating was 4.3.

65% of the sample worked full time for their university while a quarter of the sample worked 50% time or less. The average contract size among those working part time was 0.4. The most common reason for working part time was that no full time post was available.

**3.2 While all interviewed were active in research, professional practice or both, there is an inverse correlation between professional practice and level of research activity**

Everyone who responded to the survey was involved in research, professional practice or both, but there was an inverse correlation between professional practice and level of research activity. 31% of the sample had a high involvement in professional practice but only low to medium research involvement while 34% had a high involvement in research but only low to medium involvement in professional practice. This implies that academics within PS have to choose how to allocate their research time. They are likely to choose practical work or research, but seldom both.

Figure 2: Level of Own Research versus Level of Involvement with Professional Practice

Own involvement in Research	Own level of Professional Practice			Total
	High	Medium	Low	
High	7%	19%	15%	42%
Medium	13%	9%	9%	31%
Low	18%	9%	0%	27%
Total	39%	37%	24%	100%

n=65

**3.3 Publishing Studies courses come in all shapes and sizes, and are accommodated in many different faculties/schools**

The subject of how PS is accommodated within universities will be covered in more detail in a second paper but in brief, and to provide context to this paper, the survey demonstrated that the size of PS departments ranges from just a few students to departments with more than 500 full-/half-field undergraduates. About 60% of respondents had undergraduates and 90% postgraduates, both categories either as full- or half-field. A third of respondents had PhD students undertaking further study within PS. Of these the median number of PhD students in the department was 3, with a mean of 4.4.

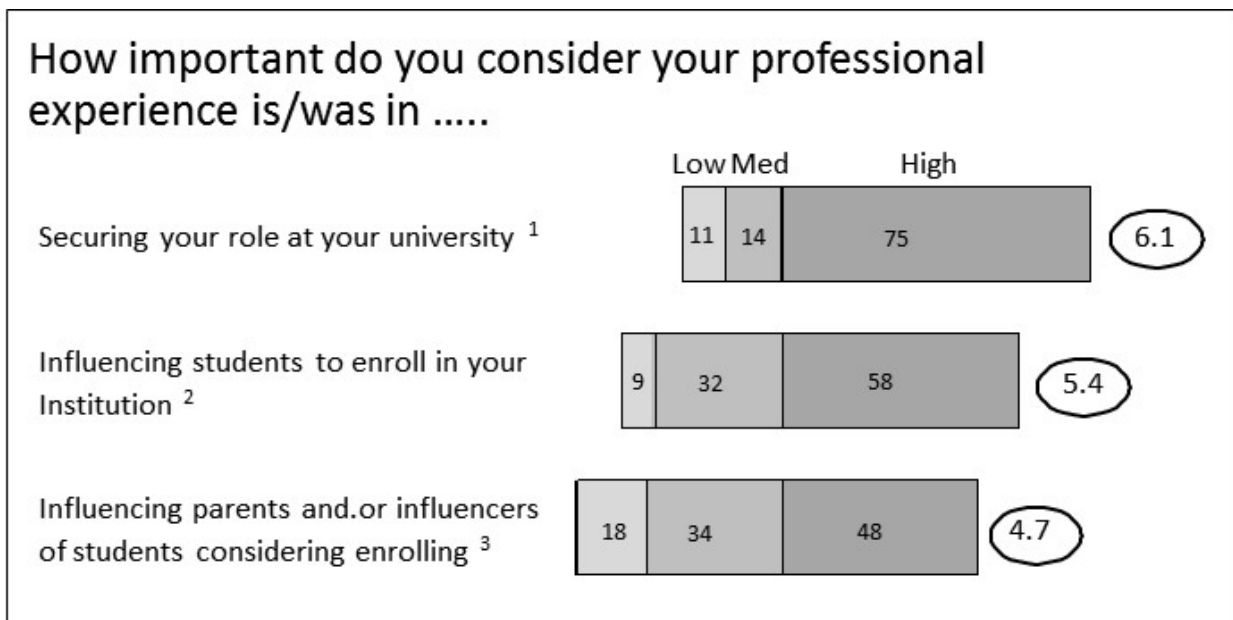
For the most part these departments are relatively new. Just 3 respondents taught on courses which were established prior to 1980. Sixty per cent of the respondents taught on courses which have begun since 2000.

PS sits in many departments, (including Publishing, Communications & Media, English, Writing and Information Science), and many faculties/schools (including Arts Schools, Engineering, Humanities and Technology). The usage of visiting lecturers for teaching within the field is various. 40% of respondents reported that half the teaching or more was done by visiting lecturers while 29% reported that teaching was almost totally (90%+) in-house.

**3.4 The universities put value on professional practice and experience when recruiting PS staff, and it is considered important in attracting students**

Respondents agreed strongly, and across the board, about the importance of their professional experience in securing their role at university. When asked to rate the importance of their experience in getting their job on a seven point scale the average score was 6.1, the highest average score of all the rating questions.

Figure 3: Significance of Professional Experience <sup>1</sup>



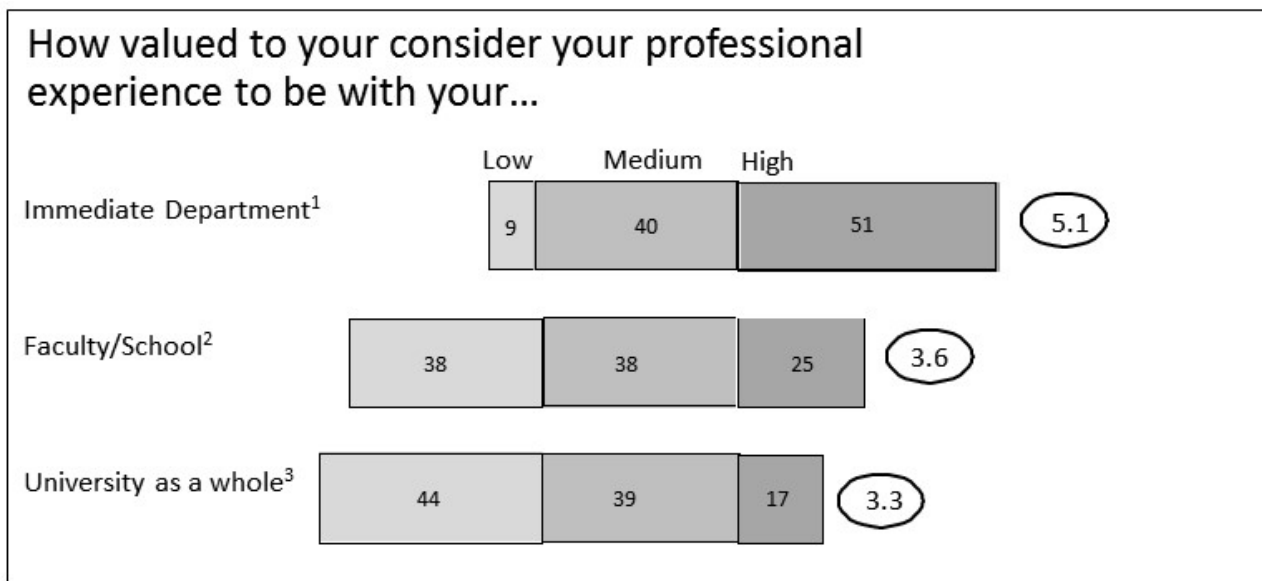
n1=64, n2=65, n3=65

Professional experience is also considered an important factor in attracting students to an institution (average score 5.4). To a lesser extent it is also considered important in influencing the recommendations of their parents/school advisors (average score 4.7).

**3.5 Professional practice/experience is not generally used or valued by colleagues from other departments**

While respondents felt that their professional experience was reasonably valued within their immediate department, (average score of 5.1), they felt that little value was placed on it by their school/faculty (average score 3.6) or by the university as a whole (3.3).

Figure 4: Significance of Professional Experience

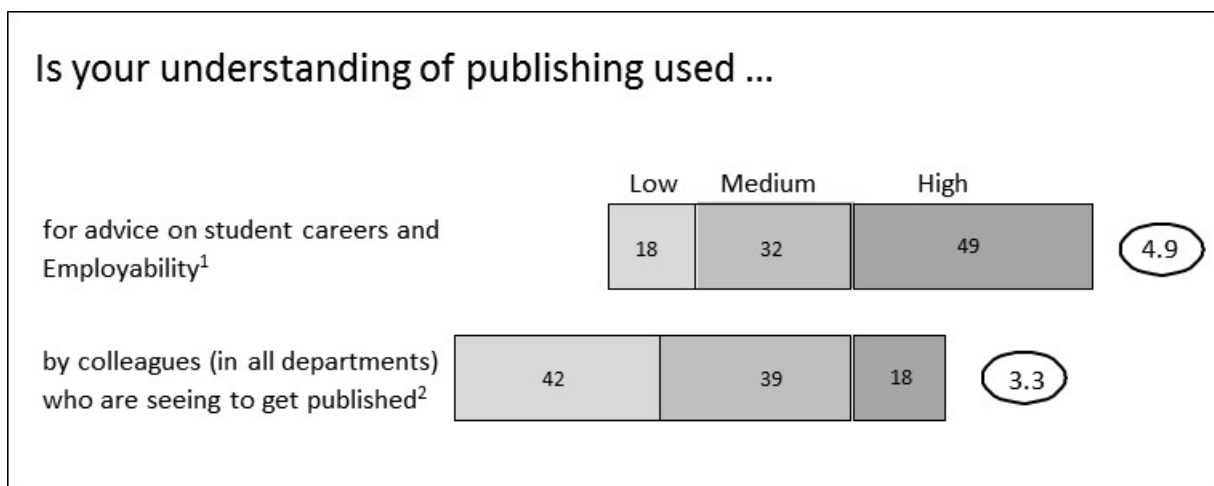


n1=65, n2=64, n3=64

Similarly while in general respondents felt that the advice they gave to students on careers and employability was somewhat valued (average score 4.9) they felt that their understanding of publishing was not being used by colleagues seeking to get published (average score 3.3 with just 18% in top two boxes).

By region, advice on careers was most highly valued in North America (average score 5.4) while advice to colleagues on publishing was most valued in Africa (average score 4.8).

Figure 5: Extent to which knowledge of publishing is used for advice on careers and publishing



n1=71, n2=71

It is clear from the verbatim replies that some respondents feel they could be used to better effect to help. Many replied that they would definitely like to help more. However time pressures clearly represent an issue for a number of respondents, and there is some evidence of resentment at the attitudes towards the PS departments:



*'We are used in this way as much as we are capable of being used; anymore and we would not have time for our central responsibilities to our own students and our own research.'*

*'I give publishing workshops on other campuses, but my institution does not welcome this service.'*

*'It would be helpful if these services were taken into account when allocating workloads.'*

*'I'd be interested (in offering help to colleagues) if I didn't believe the only time colleagues showed interest in the publishing faculty was when it serves their interests.'*

*'Happy to be involved. We are usually ignored.'*

### **3.6 The resources and encouragement devoted to research in PS within the universities is currently mixed. There is evidence of organisations 'talking the talk, but not walking the walk'**

Research activity is generally considered important as part of performance review/appraisal for PS academics, with an average score of 5.3. 59% noted that it is an important element of their review, while just 16% felt it unimportant. Some respondents explicitly mentioned that their university was not research focussed:

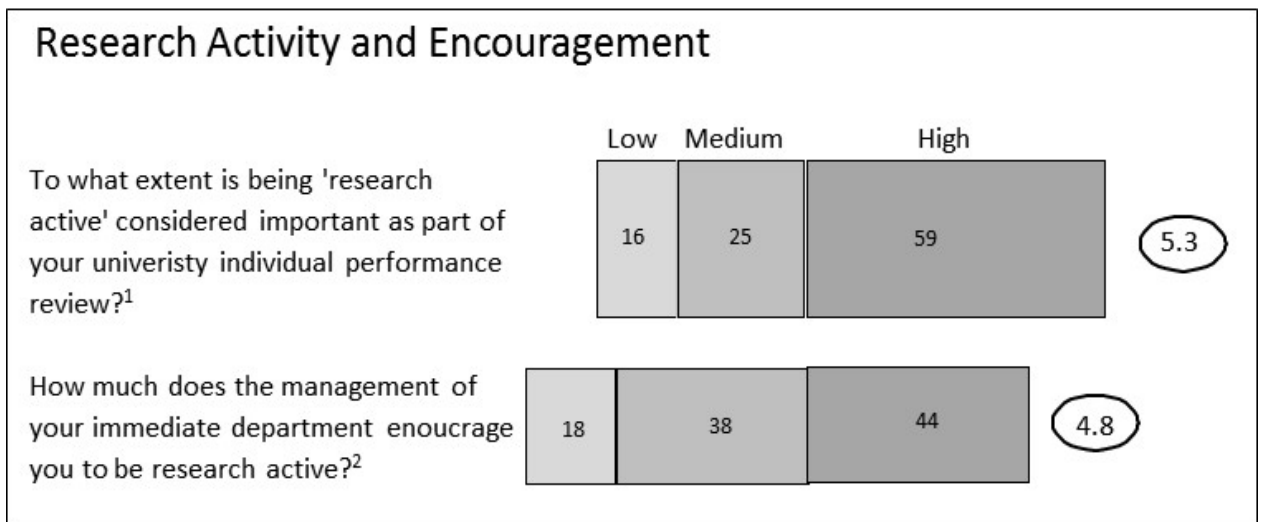
*'Our Publishing Studies course is very practical and professionally orientated with little connection to academic research.'*

*'We are not a research university. Everyone in the publishing faculty pursues research or professional work as appropriate to their own particular field of interest.'*

Similarly there are varying levels of encouragement within institutions to be research active. The average rating was 4.9, with 45% scoring in top two boxes, and 17% who felt their institution was discouraging of involvement in research. Encouragement tended to be perceived as highest by those with the least number of years of professional practice: those with under 5 years scored an average rating of 5.9 falling to 3.7 for those with 25+ years. This could imply that those who are not from a professional background are being encouraged to research, whereas those from a professional background are seen as otherwise engaged. A verbatim comment is interesting in this light:

*'In 2011 the Australian Qualifications Framework was introduced in Australia. This is a national policy for regulated qualifications in Australian education and training. This coupled with universities preferring to only employ people with PhDs as part of their teaching cohort could ultimately lead to practice-based areas (such as Publishing Studies) being taught by academics with little or no industry knowledge and it being taught at a theoretical rather than a practice-based level.'*

Figure 6: Encouragement to research, and significance of research in performance appraisal

































n1=69, n2=66

Although research was considered important by 59% in their appraisals only just over half of the respondents had a Director of Research with a responsibility for Publishing Studies, and only 40% had either participated, or knew of a colleague similarly involved in participating in a research committee or group. Of those with groups just under half were considered to be very active (top two boxes) and 20% were inactive (bottom two boxes).

The responders' awareness of research processes within the university was mixed. 36% felt that they were very aware of the processes while 25% felt that they were unaware. The average rating was 4.3. Not surprisingly, awareness was highest amongst full-time staff, those who are involved in research themselves and those working in departments where there is a research group and/or PhD students and in departments where research is important in appraisals and is encouraged. There were notable regional differences in the awareness of research processes with Europe except UK scoring the highest.

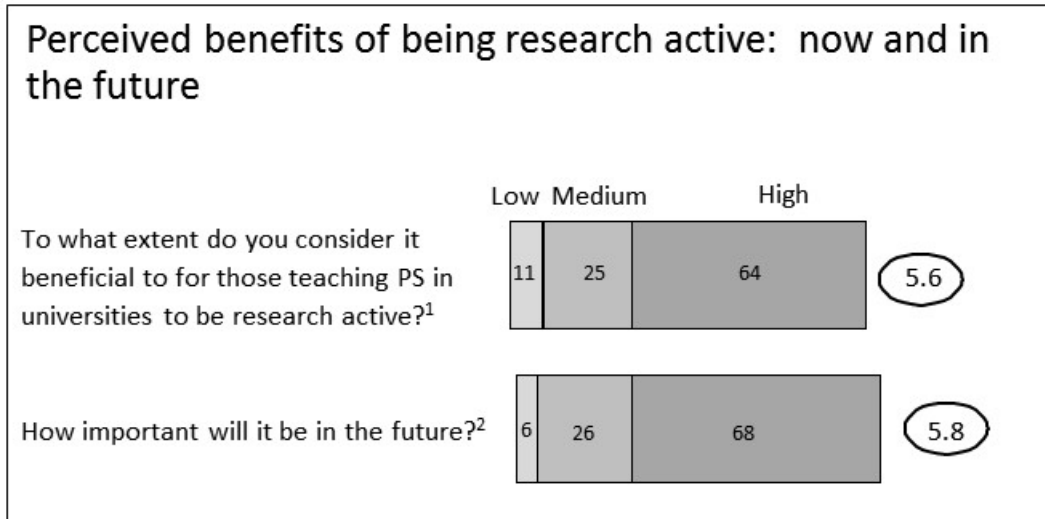
Figure 7: Awareness of Support Processes for Research within the University  
Average Score by category (7 point scale, 7=strongly aware)  
(number of respondents)

<b>Presence/activity level of a Research Group</b>			
Active group		6.2	(12)
Moderately active		4.9	(11)
Inactive group		3.3	(6)
No group		3.9	(30)
<b>Region</b>			
Europe excluding UK		6.0	(9)
Australia		5.3	(7)
UK		4.8	(19)
Africa		4.2	(9)
North America		2.9	(24)
<b>Own level of Research Activity</b>			
High		5.6	(28)
Medium		3.8	(23)
Low		2.6	(16)
<b>Importance of Research in Appraisal</b>			
High		5.4	(39)
Medium		3.4	(17)
Low		2.4	(11)
<b>Involvement in Professional Practice</b>			
High		3.3	(25)
Medium		4.5	(25)
Low		5.4	(16)
<b>Management Encouragement of Research</b>			
High		5.3	(29)
Medium		4	(24)
Low		2.7	(11)
<b>Presence of PhD students</b>			
Yes		5.3	(20)
No		4.2	(32)
DK		3	(5)
<b>Contract Size at University</b>			
Full time		4.8	(41)
Part time		3.2	(21)
<b>Presence of a Director of Research</b>			
Yes		4.2	(36)
No		4.8	(25)
Don't Know		2.7	(7)
<b>Total</b>		4.3	(71)

### 3.7 There is strong agreement at the respondent level with the benefits of research

There is strong agreement that it is beneficial for those teaching within universities to be research active (average score 5.6) and that it will be important in the future (5.8).

Figure 8: Perceived benefits of being research active now and in the future



n1=67, n2=69

### 3.8 But also a strong recognition of the time difficulties involved and other barriers to conducting research

The main reasons for not taking part in research were 'Too busy /no time/don't want to use own time' (30% of sample) and those who felt that they had been 'Recruited as a practitioner not a researcher' (28%).

*'I could do a lot more research if I was not running two programmes, teaching on another, and registered for a PhD.'*

Other barriers noted included lack of knowledge about research opportunities and processes, lack of funding and lack of appropriate associations:

*'A key thing is identifying what the larger research groupings/disciplinary allegiances that research-active colleagues have. And also how much publishers value research.'*

*'The need for an effective professional body. More industry funding for scholarships!'*

*'It would be great if there was a readily accessible list of conferences and journals that are appropriate for Publishing Studies -- maybe an email list/network?'*

*'I would suggest that a network of publishing departments be established especially in Africa or global where conferences/seminars/workshop for sharing their challenges and other issues.'*

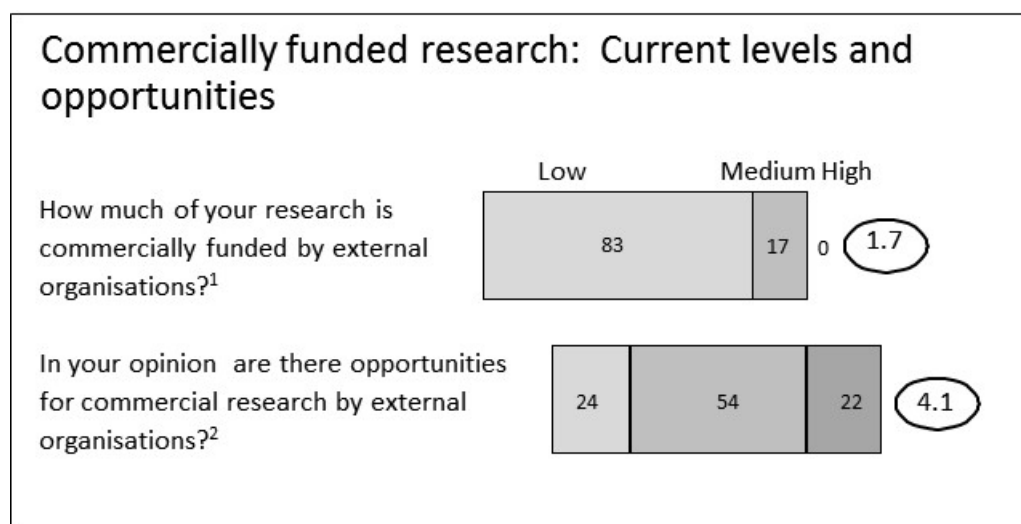
*'More research opportunities are needed in Australia for publishing research.'*

### 3.9 The survey indicated that there may be missed opportunities for commercially funded research

Respondents across the board noted that they were not involved in commercially funded research by external organisations – the average rating was just 1.7, the lowest average of all the rating questions.

Opportunities for commercial research were thought to exist however, with 22% believing there were extensive opportunities (top two boxes) while the average score was 4.1. A respondent from the US noted that there could be opportunities through organisations such as Google or Microsoft, but for the moment his/her university still primarily aims for government funding and grants for research.

Figure 9: Current engagement in commercially funded research and future potential


































n1=60, n2=63

### 3.10 The most active researchers are those working full time in departments with a strong research culture

While respondents rated their level of research activity as 4.3 on average, scores were higher in Europe excluding the UK (6.0) and Australia (5.7). They were also higher in institutions where there is a strong research culture; the scores for institutions with an active group (6.0) or moderately active group (5.6) were particularly high though other indicators were high management encouragement of research (5.5) and a high importance of research in performance appraisal (5.4). Academics who were highly active in professional practice and academics on a part time contract had a relatively low level of research activity, with scores of 3.3 and 3.2 respectively.

Figure 10: Analysis of Research Activity. (Q: How research active are you? )

Average Score by Category, 7 point scale where 7 = Very research active  
(number of respondents)

<b>Region</b>			
Europe excluding UK		6.0	(8)
Australia		5.7	(7)
UK		5.1	(18)
Africa		3.8	(9)
North America		3.2	(26)
<b>Presence/activity level of a Research Group</b>			
Active group		6.0	(10)
Moderately active		5.6	(11)
Inactive group		4.7	(6)
No group		3.5	(31)
<b>Presence of PhD students</b>			
Yes		5.6	(19)
No		4.5	(33)
DK		1.5	(6)
<b>Involvement in Professional Practice</b>			
High		3.3	(26)
Medium		4.7	(25)
Low		5.6	(16)
<b>Management Encouragement of Research</b>			
High		5.5	(28)
Medium		3.8	(24)
Low		4.1	(11)
<b>Importance of Research in Performance Appraisal</b>			
High		5.4	(37)
Medium		4.4	(17)
Low		2.2	(11)
<b>Contract Size at University</b>			
Full time		5.0	(41)
Part time		3.2	(22)
<b>Years of Professional Experience</b>			
Under 5 years		5.0	(15)
6-10 years		3.4	(10)
11-20 years		5.4	(17)
21+ years		3.6	(26)
<b>Presence of a Director of Research</b>			
Yes		4.5	(35)
No		4.8	(25)
Don't Know		2.2	(8)
<b>Total</b>		4.3	(71)

#### **4. Discussion. What are the barriers to and opportunities for research within Publishing Studies?**

This research revealed a number of barriers to and opportunities for research within the discipline being studied. While they were in this case explored within the context of Publishing Studies, they may however be instructive for the consideration of profession- and practice-based areas in general. We will begin with consideration of the barriers and then move onto the opportunities identified, considering both within the context of this research and the wider experience of the contributors to the paper.

##### **4.1 Barriers to involvement in research within Publishing Studies**

###### **4.1.1 Shortage of time**

While shortage of time is a general *cri de coeur* among academics across all disciplines, the PS respondents felt their lack of time was exacerbated by a number of factors, as outlined below.

###### **4.1.1.1 The administrative responsibilities of a profession-based discipline**

Courses with a practice or professional focus often require a level of administrative servicing that is not required within more traditional disciplines.

*'My non-teaching time is consumed by administrative responsibilities.'*

Students taking PS in most cases undertake a placement, and many courses incorporate assignments into this experience which require reflective thinking and prior study of the host organisation. Although institutions generally put the burden of finding the placement onto the student, there are still many associated management tasks such as promoting an effective match, screening CVs for organisations who require a shortlist to be put forward, ensuring formalities are established (hours of work, health and safety procedures, confirming procedures for employer feedback and access to a reference in future) and many lecturers also try to visit the students while they are in situ. Placements that work well may require little attention, but inevitably some go less well than others. Those that require more diplomatic management can consume a lot of time, with the fear that the host organisation may be unwilling to take a student from the same institution in future.

Similarly, guest speakers from the profession are solicited within courses to extend student understanding of the profession. There can be a temptation for these to be viewed internally within universities as 'double time' accounting; paying a lecturer to manage the class and then paying someone else to deliver the content. The management of guests can be very labour intensive – and sometimes feel more work than the individual just delivering the lecture themselves. The speed of change within the industry, and hence changing requirements, means a fixed programme of visiting lecturers, rolling from year to year, is not always appropriate.

Similarly, module assignments need regular updating. Setting up 'live' projects in conjunction with publishing companies benefits the student experience, and helps them make contacts within the industry they hope to join, but takes considerable liaison and management time.

*'I am research active but always have to do this in my own time due to my teaching/responsibility load.'*

Courses with an industry focus regularly establish a board of associated professionals in support. Theoretically they are there for advice and consultation; in reality their role is two-way as many professionals appreciate the 'helicopter' view of the academic who builds up an overview of the industry from all sides. Board meetings are organised at regular intervals, and for these there is associated planning and delivery of materials, as well as the need to maintain relationships in between formal opportunities for contact.

#### 4. 1. 1. 2          The need to keep up-to-date with industry practice in a fast-changing sector

There is a strong need for those teaching Publishing Studies to keep up-to-date with what is happening within the publishing industry.

Whereas a university lecturer working within an established discipline may still be able to deliver a basic syllabus based on what they were themselves taught as an undergraduate, furnished with updated references to more recent papers and new research, all aspects of publishing, from manuscript creation and production to dissemination and marketing are undergoing a tremendous period of change. If courses in PS are to deliver students whose understanding and skills are relevant to the contemporary employment market, it is vital for those teaching them to maintain their own industry awareness; perhaps by professional involvement; freelance work or maintaining close contact with industry professionals. How such professional involvement is monitored and reported within the host university needs consideration.

#### 4. 1. 1. 3          Managing international students

Although not unique to Publishing Studies, there is a strong international market for students within this field, particularly among institutions offering courses in English. Ensuring that all are able to participate fully and monitoring how international students are adapting to new methods of content delivery, methods of assessment and cohort communication is, however, labour intensive. Many universities are introducing measures to improve student experience and hence engagement, but systems of one-to-one tutoring appointments are a further drain on academic time.

#### 4.1.1.4 Time spent assisting others and volunteering

While Publishing Studies academics were in general willing to offer guidance to colleagues seeking information on the industry, or how best to present material, this reduces time that could otherwise be spent on research:

Similarly, involvement in university service (taking part in university committees and working parties; lobbying for the inclusion of a profession-based discipline within university systems) may be undertaken in order to widen the profile, or demonstrate the value, of associated staff, and may be best achieved through volunteering participation. But time can only be spent once.

#### 4.1.1.5 Financial support for time on research



Finally under consideration of time comes the issue of how universities fund and allocate academic contracts; this is of direct relevance to time available for research. A significant number of staff within Publishing Studies are on fractional contracts; this the consequence of the lack of availability of full-time contracts rather than lifestyle choice. 34% of the sample were working part-time, with 27% on half-time or less, and so in receipt of little paid time for their research activity. Fractional members of staff were often supporting their part-time university hours with paid employment elsewhere, thus leaving little time for research even in their own time.

*'I am already at the extent of what I can manage.'*

Information on sabbaticals was not specifically requested in the survey (in retrospect, a clear oversight) but one respondent noted:

*'I am not permitted access to paid sabbaticals to perform research ... I would love to write academic papers but often get caught up in the teaching and admin side of the job and my freelance work.'*

#### **4.1.2 Lack of inclusion for PS within research support processes; lack of awareness of these processes amongst PS academics**

It is also important to consider how well PS is integrated within the research culture of the host university. What gets credit in traditional academic disciplines (writing papers, securing academic grants) may need different criteria within profession-based disciplines (promoting entrepreneurialism, creativity and commercial awareness; securing placements; gaining financial support from non-academic sources including industry) and there was evidence that monitoring processes were not established to spot the benefits of good practice within profession- and practice-based areas.

The research also identified that a significant number of respondents had low awareness of the research support processes.

*'I choose to be active but as someone from professional practice it is difficult to find out how research works in academic institutions.'*

*'The barriers really for us are around not knowing how to go about doing research and getting funding. Also no hours are allocated to doing it in any real way so you have to do it in your own time.'*

*'I would welcome the opportunity to research publishing in this new publishing environment of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.'*

Individual awareness of the Director of Research and involvement in research processes was heavily linked to an active research culture within the department already.

#### **4.1.3 Lack of integration of PS within academia**

##### **4.1.3.1 Lack of ownership for a fundamentally inter-disciplinary area**

Publishing Studies draws on many disciplines (Business/Commerce; Marketing; History; Philosophy; Literature; Sociology; Anthropology etc.) but given that publishing is a requirement of any academic discipline it is relevant across the entire university. Siting of associated departments of PS is varied, from Information Management to Business Studies, from Literature to Journalism. A lack of both interest and responsibility for an area that is hard to define consistently emerged from the research.

The issue of PS as a discipline is relevant, as it is for academics involved in any new field of study. Publishing Studies has the characteristics of an academic discipline (an academic community, peer reviewed publications, conferences, a student body) but there is a tendency for academic communities to be boundaried; with an automatic resistance towards new disciplines and an instinctive mistrust of multi-disciplinary areas. Profession-based disciplines can thus be seen with double suspicion rather than the natural beneficiary of academic curiosity:

*'I sense that Publishing Studies is not seen as a real academic discipline. Its inter-disciplinary nature means it spreads across faculties and is hard to boundary. The subject is useful for case studies when the university needs to show how it engages with industry or produces useful research but is otherwise not really included. '*

*'Colleagues tend to view the publishing faculty as a free resource towards getting published and receiving free publishing services and advice (editorial design, production, publicity, marketing etc. ) without a real interest in what we do. '*

*'I'd be interested (in offering help to colleagues) if I didn't believe the only time colleagues showed interest in the publishing faculty was when it serves their interests. '*

*'Publishing studies in Africa is still in its infancy. Not many people are taking it seriously. Poor funding also leads to poor research interest by academics. '*

*'As the area needs theoretical rigour more than vocationalism, associations with Book History and Media Studies academic networks are crucial. '*

#### 4.1.3.2 Bias against Publishing Studies based on negative experiences within publishing

Given that any academic involved in research must necessarily deal with publishing professionals, several responders raised prejudices within the academic community against publishers as a species and how this impacts on views of PS. It's common for authors in general, not just academic ones, to underestimate the contribution publishers make to content being ready for dissemination, with the ongoing irony that effective publishing is often evident only when absent. It's fairly predictable that those who have been turned down by the industry – their ideas for publications not accepted – may be tempted to downplay the professionalism of the individuals involved, and to pass on resentment of the gatekeeper to those from a similar sector background.

*'Publishing studies programme is misunderstood by many in the university and in the country. Most think that doing a degree in languages is enough for one to practice publishing in the field. There is need for lecturers in the field to work extra hard to influence the thinking of those who make decisions in universities about publishing. '*

This tendency reaches its apogee within universities where senior staff arrange for external speakers (often their own publishers, perhaps as a way of cementing the relationship) to come and address academics how publishing works.

*'It's rather insulting when senior management bring in their own publishers to advise on how to get published when they have an MA Publishing Course and associated experts within the university.'*

#### 4. 1. 3. 3 The usefulness of PS metrics to support case studies within universities

Ironically PS's usefulness when universities need to be able to demonstrate both their ability to link with industry and promote the employability of students may block further identification of opportunities to involve staff in research. The development of associated case studies can promote assumptions that profession- and practice-based areas are useful box-ticking examples for the various metrics of university monitoring rather than active areas of research.

#### 4. 1. 3. 4 Negative attitudes towards academic research from practitioners working in universities

The usefulness of PS as evidence of engagement with industry is a concept that wins favour among those who do not wish to engage in academic research; perhaps managing fractional contracts alongside their professional commitments.

An AJE<sup>3</sup> conference in January 2013 attracted papers on the benefits of research to staff with professional experience now working in universities and considered that research-informed teaching is more energetic, more focussed and more up-to-date – hence benefitting both lecturers and students. But this wider thinking on the benefits of research for profession-based subjects within academia for those recruited from a professional background is not necessarily universally accepted; managerial staff who do not themselves wish to engage in research may not encourage wider involvement.

## 4. 2 Opportunities for increasing involvement in academic research within Publishing Studies

Analysis of the research findings suggests a number of opportunities, both from addressing current barriers to research, particularly in administration, and by exploiting strengths and opportunities to undertake research, profiting from associated commercial and governmental opportunities.

### 4. 2. 1 Addressing the barriers to research

There is considerable scope for improving participation in research through making administrative changes. These could include:

#### 4.2.1.1 Allocation of management support to liberate academics for industry-based research/paid consultancy

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<sup>3</sup> Association for Journalism Education [www.ajeuk.org](http://www.ajeuk.org)

Opportunities for academic involvement in research could be developed through relatively routine reallocation of management tasks associated with course administration. For example, there are considerable opportunities for academics who maintain an industry involvement to be more involved in commercial research and with some administrative realignment this should be achievable; liberating them from some of the time-heavy management tasks connected with running a profession-based MA such as booking guest speakers, organising placements and circulating information on jobs and opportunities to students. Perhaps there is a useful 'lab technician' model that could be developed for course support.

#### 4. 2. 1. 2 Better access to information on research processes and support and their inclusion within staff monitoring

There is clear evidence that research involvement is greater within departments where there is consistent research support and where research is valued in appraisal.

#### 4. 2. 1. 3 Improved inclusion of PS within university planning, processes and communications

The identification of PS as a discipline and the interest of senior management in its students, processes and research outcomes would arguably increase the perceived importance of academic research within Publishing Studies, and promote individual academics' willingness to be involved.

#### 4. 2. 1. 4 Promotion of collaboration

There is scope to increase inter-disciplinary initiatives and collaboration, including research groups and involvement in grant applications and bids. Here a profession-based area can offer strong benefits in establishing routes to successful outcomes and impact. The outcomes of profession-based research within PS are relatively easy to justify, both for grant applications, professional and academic impact. This is the kind of research that supports student employability and that governments internationally seem keen to see develop.

#### 4. 2. 1. 5 Increase in staff fractions and the allocation of sabbaticals

This would provide staff with more time for research. As this would require an increase in funding, this leads to consideration of associated commercial opportunities.

### **4. 2. 2 Developing commercial opportunities**

#### 4. 2. 2. 1 Explore opportunities for the commercial development of funded research

Turning to commercial opportunities, consideration of these should perhaps start with the significant gap reported in key finding 9 above between 'How much of your research is commercially funded by external organisations' (average score 1.7) and 'In your opinion, are there opportunities for commercial research by external organisations?' (average score 4.1).

Institutions that have developed this involvement further, for example by engaging publishers to monitor student projects and dissertations, have thereby offered commercial organisations the opportunity to develop industry-relevant research and allocated support from a junior researcher for project development. This surely has a commercial value, and might in the long run lead to financial

remuneration, either a direct monetary contribution to university or students or the establishment of paid bursaries with a promise of a job in the longer term; both models strengthening the links between academia and industry. Similarly, many courses recruit 'live' projects from publishers for student assignments, involving professionals in delivering feedback and this could potentially grow into remunerated relationships. Taking these opportunities further, the addition of 'Enterprise Support' from marketing colleagues could similarly look for opportunities to sell the expertise of academics within industry, whether for consultancy or support on individual projects.

Also highlighted was the implicit value placed by industry on student skills and knowledge; this suggested by the number of job opportunities made available through academics in this area:

*'During the last academic year I had close to 100 (student) job opportunities come across my desk, at least 65-70% of which were paid.'*

In addition to commercial opportunities that could result in a financial payback, there may also be opportunities for building the reputation of the institution, with longer term potential for building the department. PS courses are already spawning publishing services companies, and maybe this development could be shepherded from within the university through reputational link in the same way that professional choirs have grown out of university music departments or industry specialist PR firms out of fashion courses. Perhaps start-up funding and business mentoring could be offered in return for a financial stake in the business, rather than requiring enterprising students to manage alone from the moment their course finishes.

#### 4. 2. 2. 2          Exploit the high perceived value of the academic overview

Universities offering Publishing Studies regularly recruit a mixture of academic and professional external examiners and it's significant that those from a professional background often highlight their involvement with a university as a career positive, itemising it on their CV to demonstrate the extended commitment to thinking and reflecting on their industry.

The academic overview of industry also has a potential commercial value. Whereas the traditional perception has often been that the publishing advisory boards assembled by departments of Publishing Studies are there in order to ensure connectedness to industry, in fact high levels of attendance at associated meetings, and ongoing connectedness between meetings, has implied that professionals feel they too benefit from the connection; both from the academic's industry-overview and from involvement with the reflective practices of universities.

#### 4. 2. 2. 3          Make content from PS courses more widely available within industry and society

There are possibilities for individual modules from PS courses to be offered within industry, either for longer term credit if the student decides to do more in future or standalone study, and for more experienced professionals to consider taking a professional PhD. This is a route that is already well established within the discipline of Education, where mid-career educationalists can study alongside their professional role and develop a work-based project which enhances both their skills and their standing in the workplace.

#### 4. 2. 2. 4          Develop civic engagement, with opportunities for funded contributions

Universities are also developing plans of civic engagement, one element of which is sharing academic content within their wider community. Again opportunities exist for this to be a commercial arrangement, perhaps involving local industry and recruitment agencies, either within or without the university. There are opportunities for publishers and academics to work together on the development of short courses and other saleable academic content for different markets, extending the range of products and services publishing companies are able to offer their market, all such developments potentially resulting in additional income for the university. Publishing firms are already offering courses in how to get published or write, but there are some other some subject areas that may also be particularly ripe for wider development, in particular Book History.

#### 4. 2. 2. 5            Make the content from PS courses more widely available within academia

Finally there are significant inter-faculty or inter-institutional opportunities for the use of PS staff, with their expert knowledge of a professional area of interest to the entire academic community, to explain how the industry works and promote effective engagement:

*'I believe there are many opportunities for other departments to use the publishing programme.'*

These could be made available across institutions, raising internal invoices; saving external expenditure and at the same time highlighting in house expertise.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the research suggests that the involvement of new disciplines in research, including those that are profession-based, is encouraged (at least in theory) by universities. In the UK, for example, the definition of research provided by Hefce<sup>4</sup> is broad-ranging, and in addition to conventional academic research:

*'It includes work of direct relevance to the needs of commerce, industry, and to the public and voluntary sectors...'*

As research is becoming more important within universities there is clear evidence of barriers to involvement by academic staff within Publishing Studies. The barriers have been explored and include shortage of time (for a variety of reasons), lack of inclusion for PS within research support processes and lack of awareness of these processes among PS academics, and lack of integration of PS within academia.

The research has shown that within a professional-based discipline such as Publishing Studies, research flourishes best where there is a research culture, effective support processes, and staff have access to contracts that support their involvement. Potential income-producing opportunities have been outlined that could be used to pay for such support, perhaps at a lower levels of responsibility and pay scales than the academics who in the process they liberate.

Finally some suggestions for how this research might be further developed, and three avenues of enquiry seem particularly pertinent. Firstly the work may be useful as part of a general examination

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<sup>4</sup> Hefce is the Higher Education Funding Council for England

of the role of profession-based disciplines within universities; the effectiveness of the opportunities they are afforded for disciplinary development; the extent to which they can invigorate professional practice through an enhanced awareness of a variety of methodologies for analysing processes, enriching the interpretation of data gathered during practical work. This is worth further development within Publishing Studies, and research might be useful within the comparative context of other inter-disciplinary and practice-based areas, such as Librarianship, Information Science, Creative Writing and Media Studies.

Secondly, given the strong significance of an active research group to academic involvement in research, and collaboration as a key publisher skill, academics within Publishing Studies could be considered as strong candidates for involvement in inter-disciplinary and collaborative research projects within both their home university and other institutions.

Thirdly, given that profession- and practice-based areas permit the development of research that can be implemented quickly within a practical/industrial context, perhaps Publishing Studies could be considered as a model for how research might be developed within other disciplines in future.