

How is the discipline of Publishing Studies accommodated within universities?

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Abstract:

This paper offers an overview, both internationally and with a particular concentration on the UK, of how the profession-orientated discipline of Publishing Studies (PS) is accommodated and established within those universities where it is offered. It presents a combination of data, gained from a survey of professionals teaching PS, desk research into courses of PS in the UK and from Heidi and HESA. The findings offer information on the size of the field, the location, the employability of graduates and associated staffing and research support structures. While of interest to publishing studies per se, it should also be relevant to those working within other profession-orientated disciplines; to those considering the employability of graduating students and to those considering the value of postgraduate studies.

Structure of this paper

The paper begins with an analysis of the size of Publishing Studies as a discipline within UK universities and proceeds to isolate trends for the discipline within international data gained from a survey. After discussion of the findings, there is brief consideration of responses made by UK academics to the process of REF¹. The paper then considers suggestions for the effective accommodation of a profession-orientated discipline such as PS within universities where it is offered, and further options for associated research.

Methodology

This paper takes a second look at data from an international survey of university staff who teach Publishing Studies in order to consider how the discipline of Publishing Studies is incorporated within institutions where it is offered. The first paper was published as paper 'Barriers and opportunities for research in Publishing Studies', *Learned Publishing* Volume 27, pp207-221. The original data has been augmented by desk research into those institutions in the UK reporting that they offer Publishing Studies and data drawn from Heidi, (the Higher Education Information Database run by HESA (the Higher Education Statistics Agency)).

The research population for the survey was contracted university staff who teach PS and allied disciplines; specifically including 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 excluding those who just give single guest contributions or a short series of lectures.

An online questionnaire was developed using SurveyMonkey and emailed to the sample and 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. A full explanation of the methodology and sample construction is given in the first paper.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to estimate the total size of the field for PS internationally and we do not offer complete figures for discipline size. Rather the data gained, and supported via

¹ 2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF), an exercise to gather, assess and note excellent research within UK universities over the last 5 years

further research, offers an interesting basis on which to examine the structure and siting of associated courses and departments – and the consideration of wider trends affecting the market for a profession-orientated discipline. It should be noted that the international survey data is respondent-based and that in some cases there was more than one respondent from the same institution.

The size of PS as a discipline within UK universities

In 2012/13 there were 1,180 students (in full person equivalents) studying Publishing as a principal subject at UK universities and other higher education institutions. Of these 490 were studying for a first degree, 170 were enrolled on other undergraduate courses, 515 were enrolled on a taught postgraduate course, and just a single digit number (figures are rounded to the nearest 5) were studying for a postgraduate research degree.

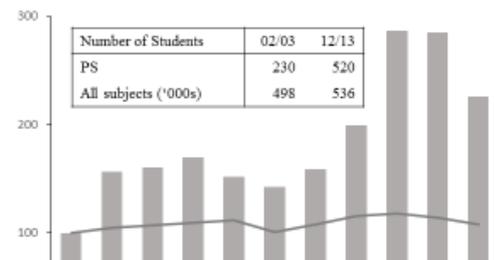
Analysis of trends over the last ten years reveals a sharp contrast between undergraduate and postgraduate levels. While the number of PS undergraduates has fallen to less than half the level of ten years ago the number of postgraduates has more than doubled, rising by 126% and very considerably ahead of the 8% growth in the total number of postgraduate students over the period.

The profile and employability of PS students

The profile of these PS students (Figure 2), shows that the postgraduates are international (just 50% are UK nationals), skewed towards females (81%) and mostly young (with 80% under 30), though the 20% over 30 suggest that some are undertaking the Masters to support a career change or to enhance promotion prospects. By contrast, undergraduate students taking a first degree on UK PS courses are younger than the postgraduates (67% are under 21), less international (78% are UK nationals), more likely to be full-time (94% on a full time course and 4% on a sandwich course) but also strongly likely to be female (77%). Those on other undergraduate-level courses (not shown in the chart) tend to be older (with 42% over 30) and male (67%).

Figure 1: Students enrolled in PS (bars) and all subjects (line) at UK universities, 2002/3 to 2012/13, Index 2002=100

1. Postgraduates



Source: Heidi (Higher education information database for institutions), HESA. (Higher Education Statistics Agency)

2. Undergraduates – First Degree

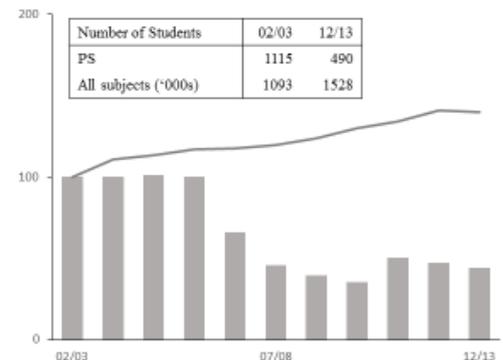
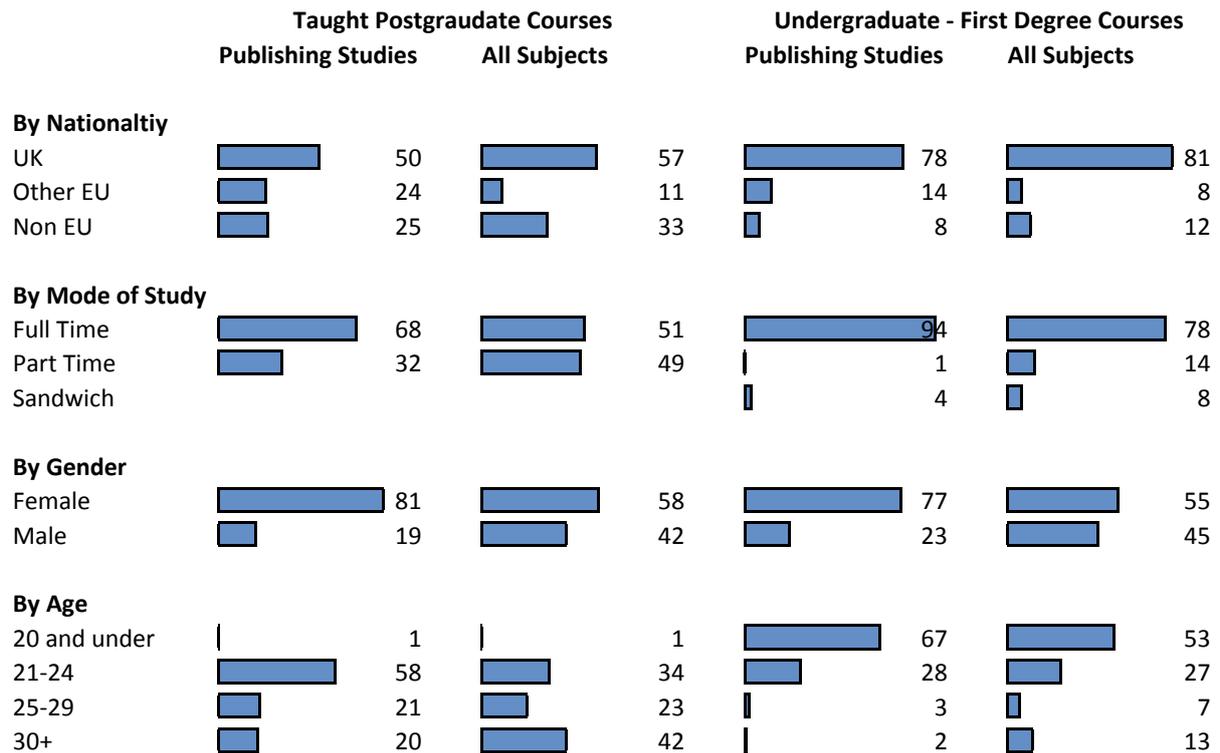


Figure 2: Profile of Students enrolled on PS courses in UK Universities 2012/13, % of category



Source: Heidi

Publishing Studies postgraduates are highly employable. Heidi and HESA data from the annual 'Destination of Leavers Survey' in 2012/13 shows that, six months after leaving, 85% were in full time employment compared to an average of 69% of students on taught postgraduate courses. The number of subjects covered in the data is extensive, covering 149 fields, but when filtered for subjects with more than 100 responses and ranking the subjects by the percentage in full time employment after 6 months, Publishing was ranked 2nd out of 96 subjects (15th out of 149 fields when all the smaller fields are included). In 2011/12 PS ranked 5th out of 94 subjects when filtered by subjects with more than 100 respondents.

PS first degree graduates are also more likely than their peers in other subjects to find full time employment after graduating. In 2012/13 83% were in employed six months after leaving (59% full time and 24% part time) compared to 69% of first degree graduates overall (split 55% full time, 14% part time). Conversely however first degree PS graduates were less likely to continue into further full-time education; just 6% did so compared to 12% of students of all subjects.

Course size and age

HESA data show that there are 18 institutions in the UK with students enrolled in PS. Of these, 14 offer postgraduate courses. The mean number of students per course is 37 FPEs while the median is 35. Six institutions offer undergraduate first degree courses (with a mean of 82 FPE students) and there are a small number offering other undergraduate courses. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the trends in student numbers by level, the number of institutions with postgraduate courses in PS has risen from 8 to 14 over the last 10 years, while the number offering a first degree in the subject has fallen from 10 to 6.

Figure3: Institutions of higher education offering Publishing, by level and by number of students

	Institutions			Students			Mean students per institution	
	Postgrad	First degree	All HE ¹	Postgrad	First degree	All HE ¹	Postgrad	First degree
2002/3	8	10	16	225	1115	2135	28	112
2012/13	14	6	18	520	485	1180	37	81

Source: Heidi, ¹ includes other (non-first degree) undergraduate students

Figures from the international survey on the size of courses are not directly comparable as they are respondent-based (rather than the HESA's student and course-based data) and as they measure students (not FPEs). Nonetheless they paint a similar picture of a sector in which postgraduate taught courses are significant.

The survey showed that 90% of respondents taught at institutions offering PS for postgraduates with 86% offering it as a full field, and 54% as a half or minor field. The median number of full-field students fell in the range 26-50. Meanwhile about 60% of respondents taught at institutions which offer PS courses for undergraduates with 49% offering it as a full field, and 50% had undergraduates studying it as a half field. The number of undergraduates ranged from just a few students to over 500 full/half-field students with a median of 51-100 full-field students.

Figure 4: Percentage of respondents offering courses by degree level, field-size and number of students

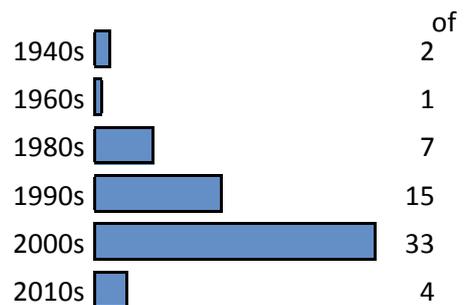
Postgraduates			Undergraduates		
	Full field ¹	Half Field ²		Full field ³	Half Field ⁴
Course Offered	86	54	Course Offered	49	50
1-50 students	26	35	1-50 students	18	21
51-100 students	26	12	51-100 students	22	19
101+ students	33	8	101+ students	9	10
Course not offered	14	46	Course not offered	51	50
Total	100	100	Total	100	100

Source: Survey data, n1=55, n2=52, n3=57, n4=52

Just one third of respondents taught at institutions with PhD or research students in PS. Of those with PhD students the median number was 3, the mean 4.4 and the maximum was 15.

Comparing the HESA figures for PhD students within PS in the UK the numbers are very small (under five) and yet individual academics in the UK did respond to say there were instances PhD supervision. This is possibly explained through the allocation of PS academics to the supervision of PhD dissertations within Book History, English, Creative Writing and other allied fields. As institutions move to get more of their staff established as PhD supervisors, such a process may find encouragement.

Figure 5: Start date for Publishing Studies course at institution, by decade of incidence



Source: Survey data, n=62

Respondents were asked about the year in which their PS course started at their institution. The responses show that PS is relatively new as a discipline. Just three respondents taught on courses established prior to 1980 while three quarters of the responses were for courses starting in the 1990s and first decade of the 21st century (i.e. 2000-2009). The median course age was 12 years.

Who is delivering PS courses?

The employment status of those delivering Publishing Studies within universities includes a mixture of staffing arrangements: full time staff; part-time staff; those on short-term contracts that are regularly renewed; those on hourly based contracts; visiting/guest lecturers.

The survey showed that the mean number of teachers per PS department is 6.6 while the median is 5. A number of these are part-time however (including 35% of our sample) so in full-time equivalent staff the mean is 4.3 and the median 3.5.

Figure 6: The number of university teaching and research staff involved in the regular teaching of PS.

	Mean	Median	Min	Max
Total Staff per institution ¹	6.6	5	1	17
Full time equivalent ²	4.3	3.5	1	13

Source: Survey data n1=54, n2=48

Information about the profile of these staff was given in our first paper and is summarised again in the table below. The teachers in the survey had been in their current post for a mean of 7 years (and a median of 6 years). 65% worked full time while 35% worked part time. The average contract size among those working part-time was 0.4. From verbatim comments (the survey consistently offered the opportunity for respondents to amplify their answers) it was clear that part-time working was effected in various different ways; from teaching just a certain number of classes per year, to only teaching part of the time in a year, to sharing time with involvement in another discipline. Just over one third of respondents chose to teach part time in order to maintain other professional commitments (including editing, consulting, book reviewing, award committees, design, chairing panels at book festivals) while two respondents wanted to maintain other personal commitments.

Figure 7: Profile of teaching staff in PS

Years professional experience/ practice in publishing ¹	21+ years (38%), 11-20 years (25%), 6-10 years (14%), Under 5 years (23%)
Current involvement in professional practice ²	Highly involved (39%), medium (37%), low involvement (24%) Average rating 4. 4 (out of 7)
Current level of research activity ³	Highly active (39%), medium (34%), inactive (27%) Average rating 4. 3
Contract size at university ⁴	Full time (65%) 0. 6 to 0. 8 contract (8%) Half-time or less (27%)

The relative frequency with which PS courses have been relocated may also hint at their relative self-sufficiency – or lack of staff teaching on other modules/courses within the first location. Similarly, this may enable the relocation of PS to be a useful – and relatively easily implemented – strategy in a bid to equalise staffing structures, and student numbers, within different departments/schools.

The inclusion of PS within formal research structures at the university

Respondents were asked two questions about support structures for research within their institution, specifically whether they were aware of a Research Director with responsibility for PS and whether they or any of their colleagues from PS were part of a research group, and if so how active it was. We cross-referenced this to their involvement in research in order to estimate the associated effectiveness.

Figure 10: Impact of a Research Group and Research Director on various metrics
Average Score by category (7 point scale, 7=strongly aware/strongly research active)



Source: Survey data, n1=69, n2=64

From analysis, the presence (or absence) of a Director of Research had no impact on involvement in research or awareness of research processes, whereas participation in a research group, and the level of activity of that group, were both significant.

Discussion

While this paper makes no pretensions to offering complete coverage of the field of PS and the range of associated institutions, there are many interesting threads that emerge from these findings.

An early deduction might be that as a profession-orientated discipline, with rising and international recruitment (exceeding the average for postgraduate studies in general), and generally low staffing levels and low associated costs, Publishing Studies offers its institutions good value for money.

HESA data for employment levels after six months shows PS students are particularly successful in finding employment. This, combined with low numbers of PhD students within the field, might imply that students are choosing PS in order to boost their employability, gain a job or change career rather than as the starting point for a possible academic career.

The reasons that lie behind the students' selection of course have implications for staffing structures within universities offering profession-orientated disciplines. Publishing Studies blends academic enquiry with professional practice, and within a fast-changing profession it is important for those teaching the subject to remain up-to-date with both professional practice and industry metrics. The recruitment and employment patterns of those delivering associated courses should arguably continue to reflect the inclusion of industry professionals who remain active in the industry as consultants and practitioners, but the issue of who funds this wider connectedness remains. Should academics who are busy with professional practice in their non-teaching time, have this involvement equated with research activity?

Although the specific rationale for establishing PS courses was not sought, it is likely to include both the specific research interests of existing staff and observations that related courses were recruiting well in other universities. This is a newish field, one that is inter-disciplinary and that draws on the methodologies and interests of various colleagues. It should hence not surprise that courses of PS have been established across various faculties and departments. The discipline's tendency subsequently to rove may be the fate of other small fields that can serve, through transfer, to balance inequalities between departmental sizes. But this very mobility may serve to demonstrate its relative self-sufficiency, with staff teaching primarily in a consistent discipline rather than being active across various modules or courses within their unit of operation.

Survey data on the breadth of staff involved in the delivery of PS courses within universities also reveals the complex staffing structures that are often in place. There is certainly a wealth of others involved in delivering such courses, with visiting lecturers, visiting professors, Masterclasses (one-off presentations, or individuals 'in conversation'), the involvement of advisory boards, representatives from firms offering placements, external dissertation tutors etc. Such broadening may be mapped as the 'Continuing Professional Development' of staff and an enriching of the student experience, but it should be considered that the management of so many additional contributors is not always straightforward and does not necessarily release staff from commitments. While it can be tempting to view guest speakers as double-accounting for teaching time, in practice the briefing, management and hosting of guest speakers can require significant administrative time.

From the publishing industry's point of view, such courses may be seen as evidence of the professionalization of the workforce; employers may view the recruitment of students with a degree in PS as a risk reduction strategy. University courses offer informal (and low cost) networks for advertising job vacancies and recruiting appropriate staff, who arrive ready to function and with a mentor network already established.

UK REF

Having considered these findings, it is interesting to look at responses from the survey relating to the REF in the UK, a discrete final section of the questionnaire. Although responses were invited from UK academics only, there are similar assessments going on elsewhere, and the responses may be

considered as a potential snapshot, reflecting the extent of the discipline's accommodation within universities. As one UK academic commented:

(the REF) 'has been a subject of real debate, as while I work in an English department, Publishing doesn't fit the narrative comfortably and there is a reluctance to submit me as a sole researcher as it could look incoherent.'

A broad conclusion is that in the UK, academics within PS were not fully involved in the processes or information-sharing associated with the management of the REF. For example, of the 21 UK academics who responded to this section:

- Only 9 knew within which assessment area their work would be considered
- Just 6 people supplied the name of the unit (3 for 'English Language and Literature'; 3 for 'Communication, Cultural and Media Studies, Library and Information Management')
- 4 people knew whether their work would be considered in another unit (2 within 'Education', 2 within 'Culture/Media')
- 7 people had been asked to submit their best four items of research for a trial or mock assessment
- 7 people (including 3 of the above 7) were offered the opportunity to submit a reduced number of items on grounds of status as early careers as a researcher/health grounds (an opportunity meant to be made available to all)
- 12 people said that work from their department would be part of the 2014 REF. 6 were unsure.

Conclusion

Demand for Publishing Studies is growing at postgraduate level. This is in line with the increasing popularity of programmes of Masters education as workplace preparation and a CV-differentiator – and international governmental concern that universities should offer relevant courses that prepare students for employment.

Publishing Studies is developing as a discipline, with the usual identifying characteristics. It now has its own literature, conferences and academic community. There was, for the first time, a scheduled panel discussion about courses of Publishing Studies within the 2014 AWP² Conference in Seattle and in the UK the Association for Publishing Education now has an international membership.

Overall, the discipline is cost effective to deliver and punches above its weight in its ability to attract international students. Associated staff can offer expert support to colleagues on the publishing process, and the field delivers commercial opportunities for the marketing of industry-relevant research and the sale of academic/short courses to other groups within programmes of curriculum repurposing and civic engagement.

There remains evidence however (e.g. lack of inclusion for PS within institutional structures for research support; variable inclusion of UK PS academics within the processes leading to the REF) that as a discipline, Publishing Studies is not fully integrated within the institutions where it is offered. As the discipline is flexible in its location and relatively self-sufficient, its inclusion and perceived value may increase as universities become more conscious of income streams attached to profession-orientated and internationally relevant disciplines.

² Association of Writers and Writing Programs

The implications of this paper are relevant to all institutions offering profession-orientated disciplines and those considering its development.

Recommendations

- 1.** Publishing Studies is a newish academic field, which lacks a standardised location, and often an established profile, within the universities where it is available. As governments prioritise courses that prepare students for the employment market, and the appetite within the market for profession-orientated disciplines is evidently growing, particularly at postgraduate level, the optimum location for, and support of, such disciplines merits careful attention.
- 2.** The relative ease of movement between departments demonstrated by PS has potential implications for how professional practice is regarded/integrated within the university. Consideration should be given as to whether such subject areas should be co-located with each other, as hubs of profession-orientated activity, or allocated in support of more traditional – and less directly industry-orientated – areas of the curriculum. Associated discussion could benefit the institution as a whole.
- 3.** There is evidence that the presence of PS academics in research groups has a positive impact on attitudes and involvement in research so more widespread inclusion of PC academics within research groups is suggested. While the presence of a Director of Research does not currently appear to have any impact, it may be beneficial to encourage Research Directors to take more note of PS in order to impact more on research outcomes in PS.
- 4.** The various locations of PS, and its relative self-sufficiency, imply that Publishing Studies could be usefully considered as a discipline of relevance across the institutional curriculum. PS has a particular significance within an international market for education, and a relevance to both colleagues and students from a wide range of disciplines. Broader recruitment strategies (avoiding assumptions that the publishing industry is the particular preserve of English graduates), the development of joint modules across faculties (e.g. in Science publishing) and encouraging the offering of publishing expertise by PS faculty members within broad university research groups can all spread an appreciation of the transferrable skills the discipline fosters. Wherever there is a need for finalised content there is an associated need for those with publishing expertise, and such an understanding benefits both students and university colleagues.
- 5.** For PS staff on fractional contracts, and who seek either a full-time or a larger contract, increases could perhaps be justified through a wider offering of their publishing expertise within the institution. This could have added benefits: promoting collegiality and inter-disciplinarity and generally augmenting levels of research support.
- 6.** Courses of Publishing Studies regularly rely on a complex mixture of staff contracts, ranging from full time (often fractional) academics to visiting and guest lecturers in order to ensure an ongoing currency and connectedness with a fast-developing professional field. Given that the discipline of PS relies on a combination of non-standard university teaching contracts and the importance of active involvement in industry, perhaps new metrics are needed in order to assess its success as a field. Traditionally such metrics included income from research grant funding, academic publications and PhD students. But as it would seem students are choosing these courses for different reasons, and primarily for the preparation they offer for the world of work, maybe new metrics of disciplinary success are needed such as professional connectedness and participation/publication in industry forums/media. It is

consequently recommended that the metrics for disciplinary success within an academic environment are broadened in the case of profession-orientated disciplines such as PS.

7. Options for further relevant research include: comparison with other profession-orientated disciplines; qualitative research to further explore quantitative patterns observed within this survey; how the market for PS postgraduate education in the UK will be impacted by a growing internationalisation of student applications and an increasing standardisation of the language of delivery as English within Europe.

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