



EvenUP: a case study of building cross-publisher collaboration on Equity, Diversity, Inclusivity and Belonging

This case study charts the building of an informal collaboration in the scholarly publishing ecosystem to bring like-minded presses together to enhance Equity, Diversity, Inclusivity and Belonging (EDIB) practice. It is not intended to be a step-by-step guide on EDIB because excellent introductory resources for publishers already exist, nor is it a theoretically informed explication of collaborative advantage. Instead, it is a messy narrative of how university presses founded in 1534 through to 2022, with outputs ranging from more than 6,000 books a year to not having published a single book yet, could come together with openness to try and push forward a moral imperative. We share this experience, as a group of university press publishers, in case it helps others considering informal modes of collaboration to drive change.

Keywords

university presses; equity; diversity; collaboration



ANTHONY COND
Chief Executive
Liverpool University
Press



TASNEEM
BHOPALWALA
Group HR
Global Diversity and
Inclusion
Oxford University
Press



VALARIE GUAGNINI
Head of EDIB
Academic
Cambridge University
Press

Introduction

The publishing industry is not unique in belatedly grappling with long-standing societal challenges over recent years. Amidst policies, surveys, membership organizations, legal requirements and the global platform of social media, it ought to be possible to find a robust roadmap for progress against any one of the UN Sustainability Goals or other fundamental moral questions of the age. Except that it is not that simple. What if I am not a member of an organization which takes a leadership role on a particular topic? What if my publishing house is too big or too small for an initiative to be practical? With whom can I share questions and insecurities? How do I learn from those with similar and different experiences or pool collective wisdom for the greater good?

This case study charts the building of an informal collaboration in the scholarly publishing ecosystem to bring like-minded presses together to enhance Equity, Diversity, Inclusivity and Belonging (EDIB) practice. It is not intended to be a step-by-step guide on EDIB

2 because excellent introductory resources for publishers already exist, nor is it a theoretically informed explication of collaborative advantage. Instead, it is a messy narrative of how presses founded in 1534 through to 2022, with outputs ranging from more than 6,000 books a year to not having published a single book yet, could come together with openness to try and push forward a moral imperative. We share this experience in case it helps others considering informal modes of collaboration to drive change.

Background

Equity, Diversity, Inclusivity and Belonging (EDIB) has become such a familiar phrase that it is easy to lose sight of what it means. Finding ways to effectively lead EDIB efforts is often seen as the grand challenge for today's leaders. In recent years, research and data-driven analyses of global organizational practices indicate a clear link between diversity, equity/equality, inclusion and belonging and organizational and commercial performance. This in turn highlights the importance of making effective and cognitively inclusive decisions across the publishing sector. Moreover, investing in EDIB is widely regarded as morally 'the right thing to do'. As publishers, we have the power to influence minds and consciously create an impact on the globally diverse markets we reflect and represent. We recognize the benefits that diversity of skills and perspectives brings to any organization.

In 2017, the Publishers Association (PA) launched an industry-wide, ten-point action plan to tackle inclusivity and ensure that publishing better reflects the UK population. Their 2022 survey results show that there has been an increase in the diversity of the workforce, but that there are still areas which need to be improved upon.

Community building

In this context a group of university presses (UPs) came together to consider how they could drive forward inclusivity in their own distinctive part of the scholarly communication ecosystem. University presses share a common bond. They are mission-driven. They are part of, or owned by, universities. As Charles Watkinson has noted, they are part of the often-invisible infrastructure of scholarly communication, especially in the humanities. They exist to share knowledge rather than to swell the coffers of corporate shareholders. This commonality has, over the years, led to a number of touch points between UPs. Formal modes of interaction include the Association of University Presses, founded in 1937, which provides a vibrant sense of community for around 160 international birds-of-a-feather imprints, and more recently the University Press Redux Conference, founded by Liverpool University Press in 2016, which filled an obvious gap in European programming for the sector.

Informally, regular knowledge-sharing among UK university presses has taken place over many decades, notably in the collegial relationship between the 'mid-sized five' presses: Bristol, Edinburgh, Liverpool, Manchester and Wales. Over time, that group has occasionally grown to a wider collection of presses from across the UK and Europe.

Of course, there are limits on what can be discussed in such contexts. Competition law ensures that publishers cannot discuss commercially sensitive issues. Despite firm friendship, the presses remain commercial rivals to an extent, competing for the same primarily humanities and social sciences authors and selling books and journals to the same markets. For that reason, a central vision for collaboration eluded the group, with the sense that it was a solution in need of a problem.

Like most sectors of society, publishing has been very belatedly grappling with long-term failings around EDIB in recent years. In 2019, a subset of senior leaders from UK UPs – Goldsmiths, Cambridge, Bristol, Liverpool and Westminster – met informally at the British

'it is a messy narrative of how presses ... could come together with openness to try and push forward a moral imperative'

'we have the power to influence minds and consciously create an impact on the globally diverse markets we reflect and represent'

'publishing has been very belatedly grappling with long-term failings around EDIB in recent years'

3 Library to discuss this in the context of UK UPs specifically. It became strikingly apparent that the issues the presses faced were the same regardless of any difference in the scale of the imprints.

At the same time, the group noted the inspiring work of the Coalition for Diversity and Inclusion in Scholarly Communications (C4DISC),¹ an organization founded in 2017 by ten trade and professional associations in scholarly communications that was formed to discuss and address issues of diversity and inclusion. Yet C4DISC was strongly rooted in a North American context and although many causes and aspects of inequality cross borders and oceans, it seemed logical to consider whether there was additional value in considering those issues and others with a local perspective. As the Association of University Presses (AUPresses) was a member of C4DISC, the group welcomed input from Peter Berkery, Executive Director of AUPresses. In addition to his time and ideas, Berkery offered some resource in the form of an AUPresses-facilitated UK EDIB group on Humanities Commons² to act as discussion list and repository. The group thus had the beginnings of an idea and a potential home for it, but to progress further we needed to bring a larger collection of presses together.

Building upon the networks forged at the first Redux conference, upon AUPresses membership, and upon personal connections, a number of presses were pulled into a series of Zoom meetings to explore what collaboration might look like. Every press approached was enthusiastic about doing something that moved beyond empty rhetoric and virtue signalling and would drive forward an urgent agenda. The initial group consisted of Bristol University Press, Cambridge University Press, Cork University Press, Edinburgh University Press, Goldsmiths Press, Harvard University Press (UK office), Liverpool University Press, Manchester University Press, MIT University Press (UK office), Oxford University Press, Princeton University Press (European office), University College Dublin Press, University College London Press, University of Wales Press, University of Westminster Press and Yale University Press (UK office). It has never been a closed group and continues to welcome any university press in the UK or Ireland that wishes to collaborate, with UPs such as University of London Press, LSE Press and Scottish Universities Press subsequently joining.

'Every press approached was enthusiastic about doing something that moved beyond empty rhetoric and virtue signalling and would drive forward an urgent agenda'

Challenges

One of the immediate challenges concerned the very particular status of university presses. UPs are, directly or indirectly, part of a parent institution and usually beholden to the policies and practices of that larger organization. A further complication came from the UK offices of US-headquartered presses. In both scenarios the parent institutions were similarly engaged in reforms to address inequality and had devoted considerable resource to the development of best practice. Wishing to avoid unnecessary reinvention of the wheel, but cognizant that the operating context for a publisher is different to that of a higher education institution, we soon realized that a prescriptive, uniform policy might be impossible.

It was thus decided that we needed a looser framework that spelt out long-term, meaningful collaboration. One which enabled knowledge sharing, accelerated change and amplified the individual efforts of the presses that signed up but allowed for a multitude of approaches. We needed a set of principles that would enable us to work together and which we could publicly declare.

'we soon realized that a prescriptive, uniform policy might be impossible'

With that in mind, the group brainstormed over a number of meetings to arrive at the following:

'UK and Irish university presses are committed to equity, diversity and inclusivity in our workplaces, in who we work with and in what we publish. Recognising that different presses and parent institutions have their own EDI initiatives but eager to collaborate in order to amplify them, we undertake to:

- 4
1. Share best practice for EDI across presses.
 2. Commit to using either the AUPresses survey tool to collect demographic data, or our own surveys of comparable quality, in order to assess and understand areas in which we can improve, benchmarking across presses where appropriate.
 3. Create and share a programme of training and events, such as guest speakers, webinars, online symposia.
 4. Promote and demonstrate transparency and equal opportunity in recruitment and career progress processes in university presses, including:
 - paid internships
 - listing salaries/salary bands on all entry level roles and on all recruitment advertising, subject to commercial or confidentiality requirements
 - inter-press career mentorship for colleagues from under-represented groups.
 5. Work together to raise awareness of career opportunities in our presses with groups that are currently under-represented in scholarly publishing.
 6. Have a designated lead for equality, diversity and inclusivity in our organisations and have those leads meet regularly.'

Creating a brand

Next, we needed a name. Various cumbersome acronyms were trialled before the simple and memorable EvenUP was chosen. Colleagues at Manchester University Press designed a logo and colleagues at Liverpool University Press a simple website to host the framework.³

The group began to meet on Zoom regularly before a public announcement was made of its establishment. It was felt to be essential that we were 'doing' rather than 'talking' when news of EvenUP was shared. That public announcement was not a PR exercise, rather we felt it essential to announce the framework to the scholarly community so that we could be held to account, and so that we could hold ourselves to account, in order to improve our EDIB practice.

'A lack of hierarchy can encourage participation in the early stages of building collaboration, but leadership is required'

Looking forward

What began as an informal group now has a structure, name, website, logo and regular meetings. To ensure continuity of action it has also been necessary to appoint annual co-chairs. A lack of hierarchy can encourage participation in the early stages of building collaboration, but leadership is required to monitor and sustain progress. The democratic selection of areas of focus for each year ensures engagement.

Diversifying academic publishing, to ensure broader representation at all levels, needs work on many fronts. One simple way for us to work together is through the sharing of materials in a dedicated repository of information, including learning and development materials such as:

- recruitment agencies along with their specialties
- shared training manuals
- EDIB toolkits for external and internal usage
- transparency in career progressions.

'One simple way for us to work together is through the sharing of materials in a dedicated repository of information'

Utilizing a common repository of information will help us to share best practice and each make faster progress. EvenUP will be able to show that what works for a small press can be applied to a large press and vice versa.

Whilst EvenUP's primary focus is on transforming the diversity and inclusion of the people within our industry, we are also united in the belief that academic publishing output needs to become more diverse. Having more diverse editorial and marketing teams will be an important step towards this goal but in addition, where it is

5 appropriate to do so, we will share best practice guidelines and policies, such as author name change policies, and share/publish demographic author data.

EvenUP will curate panel discussions at international conferences, bringing forward the challenges and wins we have collectively experienced. Again, by sharing our wider experience we can support progression in EDIB initiatives across the industry. It is imperative that transparency is at the heart of these discussions so that those in the industry, whether from a small or large publishing group, will be able to identify with the issues on hand. Transparency will help break down hierarchical and patriarchal behaviours.

Key takeaways

In striving to achieve more together, we have learnt the following lessons for building collaboration:

1. The core of your network may already be there through other collaboration or personal contacts.
2. A clear and urgent vision will bring buy-in from multiple stakeholders.
3. A loose framework will allow a greater range of participants in the formative stages.
4. Giving the collaboration a name, logo and website is an important stage of development. If you build it, they will come.
5. Early collaboration needs organizers but not hierarchies: participants will invest more if they feel an equal part of the group.
6. Established collaboration needs leadership to ensure momentum and continuity.

'Through ongoing knowledge sharing and continued collaboration, EvenUP can help in a small way to change the EDIB landscape of academic publishing'

Through ongoing knowledge sharing and continued collaboration, EvenUP can help in a small way to change the EDIB landscape of academic publishing by providing a safe and friendly space to share with and learn from each other.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

A list of the abbreviations and acronyms used in this and other *Insights* articles can be accessed here – click on the URL below and then select the 'full list of industry A&As' link: <http://www.uksg.org/publications#aa>.

Competing interests

The authors have declared no competing interests.

References

1. "Latest News – Upcoming Events," C4DISC, <https://c4disc.org/> (accessed 19 June 2023).
2. "Humanities Commons," Humanities Commons, <https://hcommons.org/> (accessed 19 June 2023).
3. "Even UP: A UK and Irish University Presses Commitment to Equity, Diversity and Inclusivity," Even UP, <https://evenup.hcommons.org/> (accessed 28 June 2023).

Article copyright: © 2023 Anthony Cond, Tasneem Bhopalwala and Valarie Guagnini. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution Licence](#), which permits unrestricted use and distribution provided the original author and source are credited.



Corresponding author:

Anthony Cond

Chief Executive

Liverpool University Press, UK

E-mail: acond@liverpool.ac.uk

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3637-0762>

Co-authors:

Tasneem Bhopalwala

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-8340-8587>

Valarie Guagnini

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-6380-8363>

To cite this article:

Cond A, Bhopalwala T and Guagnini V, "EvenUP: a case study of building cross-publisher collaboration on Equity, Diversity, Inclusivity and Belonging," *Insights*, 2023, 36: 16, 1–6; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1629/uksg.623>

Submitted on 05 April 2023

Accepted on 01 June 2023

Published on 05 September 2023

Published by UKSG in association with Ubiquity Press.