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Developing a model for university presses

This article presents a model for developing a university press based around three guiding principles and six key stages of the publishing process, with associated activities. The model is designed to be applicable to a range of business models, including subscription, open access and hybrid. The guiding principles, publishing stages and strategic points all constitute the building blocks necessary to implement and maintain a sustainable university press. At the centre of the model there are three interconnected main guiding principles: strategic alignment, stakeholder relationships and demonstrating impact. The publishing process outlined in the outer ring of the model is made up of six sections: editorial, production, dissemination, preservation, communication and analytics. These sections were based on the main stages that a journal article or monograph goes through from proposal or commissioning stage through to publication and beyond. The model highlights the overall importance of working in partnership and building relationships as key to developing and maintaining a successful press.

Keywords

University presses; open access; Plan S; publishing workflows

Sharing knowledge in a growing university publishing sector

A number of university presses have been launched recently, with five new UK university presses (NUPs) launched in 2015–2016,[1] and a 2018 Jisc report[2] indicates there are a total of 21 NUPs in the UK. This increase in publishing activity within the university sector means that an increasing number of library professionals are developing publishing expertise and skills. We believe that by sharing knowledge, skills and best practice across the higher education sector we can work towards forming a supportive and collaborative publishing community which is inclusive of a diverse range of products, business models and practices.

With this in mind, in June 2018 the University of Huddersfield Press organized a best practice sharing event to bring together those working in university and library publishing, and initial findings from the event were shared on the Press blog in September 2018.[3] Participants were all at different stages of developing a press; in some cases there was a well-established business model, whereas others had no funding model or definite mission statement in place.

From the analysis we identified three main themes:

- key considerations for starting a university press – including strategic alignment of press aims with existing internal and external agendas

- identifying and building strategic stakeholder relationships – working in partnership with key stakeholders including editors, authors, central services such as marketing and IT, and research leaders across departments

- designing and implementing a sustainable publishing process – identifying the key stages of the publishing journey and thinking about the actions and resources needed along the way.

Based around these themes and the discussions that emerged during the events, we have developed a structural model: A university press model – guiding principles and key stages of the publishing process (Figure 1).

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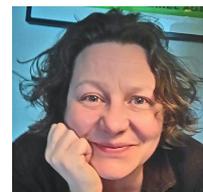
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'a supportive and collaborative publishing community'

Guiding Principles

Strategic alignment - with institutional, subject area and wider research sector aims

Stakeholder relationships - embedded throughout the publishing journey

Demonstrating impact - by monitoring and communicating the shifting nature of impact

Editorial

Quality editorial services and resources provided, with transparent costs

Transparent author rights and editorial processes, in line with COPE

Clear communications plan developed with stakeholder input

Production

Transparent production costings

Signposting to tailored resources to streamline revisions

Clear communications plan developed with stakeholder input

Consideration of appropriate formats in line with Plan S requirements

Analytics

Tailored and automated analytics functions within publishing platform

Understanding of key data for institutional, subject and title stakeholders

Clear communication of analytics for each stakeholder group

Dissemination

Dissemination plan at press and title level developed with stakeholder input

Automated provision of content through publication platform to third parties

Consistent and high level metadata at press, title and article level

Integration of content into library supply chain

Communication

Press, title and article level communication plans, developed with stakeholder input

Integration of content into reading list process

Engagement of central and school level communications teams

Clear signposting of open access and paid for content

Preservation

Press level preservation policy

Understanding of preservation costs

Transparency of preservation activities for stakeholders

Figure 1. A university press model
Created by Megan Taylor and Kathrine S H Jensen, 2019. CC BY 4.0

Organizing the building blocks of a university press

The model features three interconnected main guiding principles: strategic alignment, stakeholder relationships and demonstrating impact. These principles are based on the findings from the event, which highlighted the overall importance of working in partnership and building relationships as key to developing and maintaining a successful press.

> 'working in partnership and building relationships … key to developing and maintaining a successful press'

Strategic alignment

The strategic alignment principle is about making the most of existing internal and external agendas, including research, teaching and international strategy plans, and ensuring that press activities and developments are designed to support and enhance these. The Research Excellence Framework (REF) – the system for assessing the quality of research in UK higher education institutions – with its increased requirements for open access (OA) for both journals and monographs is an example of an opportunity for NUPs to provide a platform and a service for a growing body of OA research. Of course, NUPs are not the only publishers looking to respond to this requirement, as the ecology of the publishing landscape is ever changing and highly competitive.[4] The Registry of Open Access Repository Mandates and Policies (ROARMAP)[5] now lists over 940 mandates and policies currently held by institutions and funders. Open research is fast becoming embedded in the policies which shape how research is supported, funded and presented. In this complex environment, stakeholders, with competing interests, are increasingly demanding information around the impact of research, driving the need for impact data to be collected, analyzed and summarized. These tasks are being taken up more and more by professionals within the

library sector.[6] Plan S is also part of the building momentum of OA publishing and open science and how the landscape of scholarly communication is constantly shifting. Later on in this article we look at Plan S and how it relates to the publishing model we have developed.

It can be a challenge for presses to find out about relevant research developments. However, it is essential for a university press to position itself in relation to priorities that may differ by subject area, faculty level and university level. If a university press is to provide a platform for research that the scholarly community will use, it is key to involve that community in the strategic planning and decisions which are made along the way. This leads us on to the second guiding principle.

Stakeholder relationships

Embedding stakeholder relationships throughout the publishing journey is related to the above principle of alignment and about understanding how important it is to work in partnership with a number of different people, including but not limited to authors, editors, readers/audiences, research leaders, people in marketing, people in IT and of course a range of colleagues in the library. Creating meaningful relationships with such a diverse range of stakeholders is a challenging process. Practical ways to do this can be grouped into four themes:

'If a university press is to provide a platform … the scholarly community will use … involve that community in the strategic planning'

- *services and support* – added value via workshops, training, tips and information packs. It is key to develop these with stakeholder input. Provision of accurate, accessible and consistent information across all platforms

- *commissioning* – active commissioning via existing author relationships and through market research of stakeholder reading patterns

- *strategy* – stakeholder consultation when developing and updating the press strategy, particularly to include press boards, editors and university research support staff where appropriate

- *communication* – tailored communication plans at title, collection and press levels, developed with input from stakeholders. Regular title-level development meetings to keep editorial teams engaged and supported.

Demonstrating impact

The third guiding principle deals with demonstrating impact and is about having an awareness of why and how to evidence the outcomes of the press activities. It is important to create a two-way conversation around impact and what useful analysis and metrics look like. As NUPs we need to be having conversations with our stakeholders, whether researchers, community groups or members of the public, and finding out what impact means to them. As public engagement and the impact agenda gain in importance as part of the research process, including funder requirements and assessment processes, NUPs can be well placed to be part of this collaborative conversation. Using metrics to evidence benefits of OA publishing can be one way to demonstrate to academics the worth of publishing with a university press, but it is equally important to listen to and respond to the scholarly community's needs in terms of support, resources and platforms.

Key stages of the publishing process

The publishing process outlined in the outer ring of the model is made up of six sections: editorial, production, dissemination, preservation, communication and analytics. These sections are based on the main stages that a journal article or monograph goes through from proposal or commissioning stage through to publication and beyond.

Within each stage of the publishing process there are a number of strategic points to consider in order to implement a plan to build a sustainable university press. We use the term sustainable, as defined by Graham Stone, to mean '…both stability for the Press and the need to innovate and grow in order to achieve longer term viability'.[7]

These strategic points represent a summary of the key issues facing university presses. We are not suggesting that every stage of the process takes an equal amount of staff time or resources, and it was clear from the participants at the event that they were much more involved in some stages than others.

The guiding principles, publishing stages and strategic points all constitute the building blocks necessary to implement and maintain a sustainable university press. It is important to note that the model is designed to be applicable to a range of business models, including subscription, OA and hybrid.

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Contextualizing the model – is it Plan S compliant?

Plan S was announced in September 2018,[8] as the push organized by COAlition S for all publicly funded research to be immediately OA upon publication. There are a number of Plan S requirements, still being finalized, which we have summarized below.

- Research which is funded by public grants via UK and European research councils must be published in compliant OA journals or on compliant OA platforms. The research needs to be free to access for all, with no restrictions, immediately upon publication.

- Authors retain copyright with no restrictions, and should be able to choose an open licence such as CC BY. The licence should be embedded in each article.

- Any publication fees should be transparent and appropriately capped/waived dependant on geographical location.

- The journal/platform must be registered in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) or be in the process of being registered.

- The journal/platform must have accurate and transparent review and ethics policies in line with the standards of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

- DOIs must be assigned and registered for all publications.

- Content must be deposited with a preservation programme.

- Full text must be available in machine-readable format.

- Metadata must be high quality and consistent.

Adapted from COAlition S Implementation[9]

The current model has been evaluated against what we currently know about Plan S. As Plan S requirements will no doubt be updated and added to, the model can be re-evaluated and adapted.

> 'The aim is for the model to be a useful tool for the university press community'

What next for the development of a university press model?

The aim is for the model to be a useful tool for the university press community – and for that, we really need more community input. We would love to hear from those of you working in scholarly communications and publishing about whether you would find this model useful, and whether you think there is anything missing which could make it of more practical use to those setting up and developing university presses. Please do get in touch with your feedback and questions.

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