

# Publishing

**Do you have a creative mind, a proactive and resourceful nature, good organisational skills and a passion for creating content? If so a career in publishing may be an interesting option for you.**

The UK publishing industry employs 29,000 people directly in the UK and is the largest exporter of books in the world. It divides into three main fields, with academic publishing being the biggest of the three:

- **Trade or consumer publishing:** fiction and non-fiction books that are published through the book trade to a general audience.
- **Academic publishing** makes scholarly research available via texts and journals.
- **Education publishing** produces school textbooks and English Language Teaching (ELT) materials.

There are a huge number of publishing companies in the UK, with the three largest companies (Penguin Random House, Hachette Livre, HarperCollins) taking around half of total UK customers sales. Other large employers include Macmillan, Pearson Education, Oxford University Press (OUP), Bloomsbury, Simon & Schuster, and Wiley, with many other smaller independent publishers.

Generally, the processes of publishing are divided into editorial, design and production, sales and marketing, distribution, contracts and rights, and finance. Specific job functions range from commissioning editor to content editor and



marketing assistant to web developer as the rapid growth of online and digital publishing drives change across the industry.

There are also literary agencies, which act as intermediaries between trade publishers and writers. Normally working in small firms, agents have exposure to the whole publishing process: editing books with authors, convincing publishers to buy them, and dealing with contracts and media enquiries.

### Getting in and entry points

A few of the larger publishers run formal graduate schemes. Most, however, recruit graduates for specific entry-level jobs such as marketing or rights assistant, and the majority of people in publishing start in administrative positions and work their way upwards.

For any job, a demonstrated interest in the sector is extremely important, and having relevant work experience can be a real advantage. A few large players offer formal internship schemes, but outside of these, you can make speculative approaches to seek work experience at any publisher.



CareerConnect is a useful source of vacancies for jobs and work experience in the sector. Key external job sites include The Bookseller, Oxford Brookes' list of publishing jobs and internships (they run three publishing masters' degrees), and the Independent Publishers Guild (IPG) job board. Many companies, particularly smaller publishing companies and literary agencies, do not formally advertise vacancies, which means you need to get in touch speculatively to enquire and follow their social media pages.

The Publishers Association website [www.publishers.org.uk](http://www.publishers.org.uk) provides lots of information on the industry, roles and careers.

### Extra-curricular ideas

- Join the Society of Young Publishers (Oxford). Run by professionals in the sector, it holds regular networking nights and careers events.
- Demonstrate interest by joining other related student societies, such as the Oxford University Society of Bibliophiles.
- Gain experience by working for a student publication, such as, *The Oxford Student*, *Cherwell*, *Isis*, *The Oxford Scientist*, *The Oxford Blue* and so on.

Many offer experience in editorial and technical roles.

- Choose a topic you are interested in and blog about it. Developing a regular blog is a good way to demonstrate relevant publishing skills.
- Offer to help in your department or college, for example, to support the production of conference materials and reports, internal documents or promotional material.
- [Sign up for the Careers Service's Insight into Publishing programme.](#)
- Working in a bookshop will give you useful insights into the consumer market.

Professionalism and a positive attitude can take you very far in any sector - I joined my current employer after a literary agent who interviewed me for another job a few months before recommended me for the role.

*Noosha Alai-South, BA French and Italian, Jesus College, 2021; Assistant Editor, Penguin Press*

### Next steps

[www.careers.ox.ac.uk/publishing](http://www.careers.ox.ac.uk/publishing)

## Alumni profile

# Aimee Ashurst

**What:** I work on a wide variety of educational materials for students of all ages including revision guides, workbooks, and online resources. Editorial tasks at CGP include writing original content, devising questions, creating and editing graphics, formatting pages, copyright research, and proofreading, to name just a few.

**How:** I found the advert for the role online and submitted a CV and cover letter. After a brief telephone interview and a couple of pre-selection activities I was invited to an assessment day at CGP's head office before securing the job. CGP advertise all new job openings on their website and accept speculative CVs at any time.

**Why:** Working in educational publishing has suited me perfectly. I've really enjoyed the creative side of the job as well as the insight into publishing as a business. This role is quite unique for a graduate publishing job as it allows you to immediately start working on books after your initial training period. This has provided me with great experience within my relatively short time so far at the company and has been immensely fulfilling. Everyone at CGP has been welcoming and has made the transition from university study to full-time employment much easier.

**Advice:** Don't worry if you're unable to secure an internship or think you lack the necessary experience to break into the publishing sector – often the extracurriculars and experiences you've had outside of publishing will have provided you with many of the skills employers are looking for. Secondly, make sure you use the Oxford Careers Service. Not only do they offer an Insight into Publishing session, but they also are available to you for CV advice and mock interview sessions, both of which I found extremely helpful. Lastly, be kind to yourself. Don't let any setbacks prevent you from trying again. Keep an open mind when looking for post-university employment: a job that's perfect for you could be something you would have never thought about applying for.

**Position**

Trainee editor, Coordination Group Publications (CGP).

**Background**

BA English Language and Literature, Lincoln College, 2022.

## Alumni profile

# Noosha Alai-South

**What:** I'm an assistant editor, helping two editors with their lists, working across non-fiction and the Penguin Classics. I handle administration (maintaining metadata, managing diaries, drafting contract memos, etc), give feedback on proposals, make first-round edits on manuscripts, write copy, clear permissions, find potential endorsers and research possible additions to the list.

**Why:** During my year abroad I did an internship as a rights assistant at a French publishing house, which got me interested in publishing. After graduation I applied for lots of roles across the industry, casting quite a wide net; after two months I found a job as a contracts assistant at Hachette. But I had always been interested in editorial and a month into my contracts job I was invited to apply for an editorial assistant role at Penguin Press. Throughout my applications I had some great sessions with one of the Oxford careers advisers who helped me with everything from CV writing to interview prep.

**Advice:** Read a lot of new releases and engage in publishing as an industry: go to literary festivals, follow publishers, bookshops and authors on social media, and read *The Bookseller* to see what people are excited about in publishing right now. When you start applying, make sure to do your research well – why this specific publishing house? If you manage to get an interview, go to a book shop and skim-read some of their books to get a feel for the list (or listen to the audiobooks which can often be a lot cheaper/free), and make sure you prepare lots of questions to ask at the end. Once you get a job, try to preserve your boundaries as much as possible – beware of doing too much unpaid overtime. In general, be ready for a lot of rejection as entry-level roles in publishing can be super competitive, and be open to roles across the industry – there'll be lots of jobs that you didn't even know existed that could be perfect for you.

**Position**

Assistant Editor, Penguin Press.

**Background**

BA Modern Languages (French and Italian), Jesus College, 2021.



# INSIGHT INTO PUBLISHING

**Three-part programme** designed to demystify publishing and increase Oxford University students' understanding of professional life to prepare them for a job in the sector.

**[WWW.CAREERS.OX.AC.UK/IIP](http://WWW.CAREERS.OX.AC.UK/IIP)**

