Key issues

The editorial process is at the heart of publishing. However well a publisher markets and disseminates its books, however well its books are designed, copy edited and typeset, it is likely to be the content of its books on which it will be ultimately judged. For scholar-led publishers, this usually means a strong focus on soliciting and delivering texts with high levels of academic quality and integrity. However, there are broader issues at stake. How publishers engage with authors and editors may play a significant role in the press' reputation amongst relevant academic communities.

Such issues are often particularly important for smaller and scholar-led Open Access presses. On the one hand, potential authors and readers may – often unfairly – have concerns about issues around quality for presses operating outside the commercial mainstream. On the other hand, many such publishers are more explicitly values-driven than large publishers. For these reasons, the editorial process is an opportunity to both allay concerns about quality and to put into practice a publisher's ethics and values.

An opportunity for small and scholar-led publishers

Within the Open Access community there is often a strong focus on seeking to demonstrate that a publisher's work matches the standards of large commercial publishers. This can mean overlooking that, in many cases, smaller presses can offer a better editorial experience for authors. For smaller and scholar-led publishers, issues of academic 'care' are sometimes foregrounded to a greater extent than in some commercial publishing contexts, with publishers keen to offer a more engaged editorial process.

Whatever a press' approach to working with its authors intellectually, it should carefully consider how, practically, to manage author relationships (see Nordhoff in Cookbook, Gatti in Business Models for OA Books). Making clear to authors exactly what the press' approach to the editorial process is a crucial part of this. So too is ensuring good channels of communication throughout, as well as ensuring that authors have a good understanding of what the different stages of the editorial process will be.

Peer review

For many Open Access presses, having a clear approach to peer review is a vital means to ensure the quality of its content, as well as to allay any concerns authors and readers might have about a publisher's standards. It is potentially important for other reasons: indexing and dissemination services can have particular entry requirements around peer review. And peer review can also be a requirement for inclusion in membership organisations (including the Open Book Collective), or for attracting funding via a library membership scheme.

Assuming peer review, of some type, is to be used – usually after an initial assessment by editors – a key consideration is what, precisely, should be peer-reviewed? A full manuscript? A proposal and a sample of work? Just a proposal? Are expectations the same for monographs as for edited collections? Smaller and scholar-led publishers vary in their approaches, but many require at least a proposal and an indicative sample of work for edited collections, and further material or a full manuscript for monographs.

While the types of peer review used vary hugely between Open Access publishers, many smaller and scholar-led presses are moving away from fully anonymous peer review, towards more open forms of peer review. This perhaps reflects a growing unease within many academic circles about the efficacy and equity of anonymous peer reviewing, as well as an argument that anonymous peer reviewing procedures are at odds with some core Open Access principles. Whatever form of reviewing a publisher uses, they may wish to steer away from the ableist connotations of reference to 'blind' peer review.

Options other than fully anonymous peer review include:

- Partially anonymous review, in which reviewers remain anonymous, but the author's identity is known.
- Open peer review, in which author and reviewer identities are made known to each other. This can extend to reviewers continuing to work with authors through the revision process.
- Community or collective review, in which a draft version is published, either publicly or to a closed group, with comments encouraged from participants.

The opportunities digital platforms offer for experimenting with such models have been described in detail by Janneke Adema, Samuel Moore and Tobias Steiner in a recent article. The COPIM report P*romoting and Nurturing Interactions with Open Access Books: Strategies for Publishers and Authors – Part 1: Interaction in Context* is also a useful resource that has a useful contextualization and overview of debates and practices around open peer review.

Publishers do not have to allow only a single type of peer review. For example, both punctum books and mediastudies.press offer authors a degree of choice in which form of peer review should be used to assess their work. Often a review template form is made available to reviewers to make sure that reviews are comparable and relevant aspects of the book's quality and fit with the aims and values of the press are assessed, and often to keep the reviews short and manageable.

One of the biggest challenges that all presses face is to finding reviewers, which is especially difficult when it comes to books. It is also unlikely that smaller and scholar-led publishers can pay peer reviewers for their reviewing work. Peer reviewers can be found in different ways. Authors are often asked to make suggestions although these should be evaluated by the press to avoid any conflicts of interest. Recommendations from the board or other academics in the field are another way to identify reviewers, as is a desk search for academics working in the field. It may take a few attempts to find a reviewer who has the time and expertise to undertake a review. The number of

reviewers involved in assessing a book may vary, typically from one to three.

Often in academic publishing, reviewers receive little public credit for their (often unpaid) reviewing work. To enable this work to receive greater recognition, punctum books acknowledges some of its reviewers as 'Curators' in its books, especially in cases when they become heavily involved in a book's development. Mattering Press similarly always makes sure to include an acknowledgement to any reviewer involved in an open peer review process (with their permission).

Soliciting proposals and manuscripts

Especially for newer presses without an established reputation, it is unlikely that book proposals will be sent to publishers entirely unsolicited. Editors will therefore have to be proactive. This can mean seeking submissions by issuing calls for proposals, using existing networks and/or institutional contexts (for example, for university presses), or extended networks by spending time at subject-specific conferences and events. This is an approach used by both White Horse Press and Mattering Press. Particularly for scholar-led presses, this can involve members of a publisher having a dual role – both as an academic presenting at a conference and as a publisher looking for interesting proposals.

Publishers can also promote themselves by having a stand at a conference. Mattering Press has done this to good effect, including securing heavy discounts from organisers because of their status as a charitable and community-led organiser. The Cookbook also provides advice on how to display books at conferences without paying fees for book stands. At some conferences, Language Science Press have used a combination of unmanned book stands and conference ambassadors. Copies of books are displayed on an unmanned stand and after the conference, are donated to organisers, student assistants, or libraries (Cookbook, p. 12)

One of the major challenges in starting a small or scholar-led new press is assembling all the documents required to support the submission and editorial process. For this reason, rather than creating documents entirely from scratch, careful consideration should be given to what can be reused and adapted from the materials already published online by other similar publishers. If the licensing terms for such materials are not explicit, permission should be sought (and will likely be given). Here are some resources to begin with:

- Book proposal forms from Mattering Press, Open Book Publishers, Stockholm University Press, University of Westminster Press (drawing on the NUP Toolkit).
- Guidelines for authors from African Minds, Mattering Press, punctum books, Open Book Publishers.

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