Recent Experiences in International Publishing Education

Ian McGowan

INTRODUCTION

PUBLISHING education is a young and modest subject compared with its elder brother, print training, and its noisily fashionable younger siblings, communications and media studies: well-established in the U.K. and some other western countries, it is still in its infancy in many parts of the world. As Stirling University has run a one-year postgraduate Master's degree in Publishing Studies since 1982, it seemed useful to survey and reflect on the needs and experiences of students from outside the U.K.

A number of articles over the last decade in such journals as *Scholarly Publishing, Book Research Quarterly* and *LOGOS* have discussed the changing context and institutional or national initiatives, though they have usually been concerned with developed countries. The most recent account, by the Canadian publisher Ian Montagnes, who has experience as a trainer for the developing world, appears in Garland's *International Book Publishing: An Encyclopedia* (1995), where he distinguishes three western patterns: France's development of university courses as a response to government's cultural concerns; the U.K.'s proliferation of university programmes alongside vocational training through industry; and the North American laissez-faire combination of trade association, interest group and university initiatives. Montagnes explains why even in the developed world the traditional in-house apprenticeship system came to seem inadequate, especially in the 1980s, as the tradition of dedicated stable staff fostering their juniors came under pressure with changes in industry structure and company ownership, patterns of employment, introduction of new technology, greater emphasis on profit and less on nurturing talent: 'as in-house training shrank,

education for publishing developed elsewhere'; and he identifies the University of Stirling's as one of the best known programmes.

But for much of the world, as Montagnes remarks, education for publishing has been a postcolonial experience, with indigenous governments giving publishing, apart from that of textbooks, low priority; yet it is now possible to point to various initiatives in Africa, the Indian sub-continent, and south-east Asia that show there are people concerned to establish solidly-based industries. Montagnes himself, in a Canadian-funded project in the Philippines, developed short cross-cultural courses that attempted to marry the analytical approach—explaining why something is done—with the practical, skills-based. Reflecting on the significance of world-wide developments, Gordon Graham in a 1991 speech to publishing educators suggested both that the publishing industries of the developed world have a moral obligation to assist their counterparts in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and that it is 'in the interests of publishers everywhere that every country in the world should have a flourishing publishing industry. Publishing is at the heart of the democratic process.' How, then, have the various interests met in academia?.

Between 1982 and 1997, the Stirling M.Phil. course had almost 400 graduating students, of whom approximately one third were from outside the U.K. Of the more than 30 countries represented on what has always been a strongly international course, Malaysia has been consistently there from the earliest days (18 students), with the People's Republic of China, a late starter (13), and Nigeria (9) close behind. Students and visitors have come from most parts of the world, the major exception being South America. In association with *LOGOS*, the international journal of the book world, we sought the experiences and opinions of those who had graduated before 1995, and we had available their occasional reports back to Stirling from the publishing fronts. We were interested to discover who had come to the U.K. from where, from what educational background and professional experience, nominated and funded by whom, what they felt they had learned, and what they had done subsequently.

The total number of non-U.K. students contains several groups differing in background, needs and expectations. English-speaking students may have come from such countries as Ireland, Canada, U.S.A. either because precisely-equivalent courses were not available locally, or because they wished to extend their educational horizons and career prospects: Irish students can move easily into the British education system and job market, though many go home to work; North Americans are often attracted by the prospect of a career in the U.K., but as non-European Union citizens they find it harder to get work permits and are more likely to find employment at home. This group has a common background with most British students in being recent graduates in their early twenties, with little experience of the book world, native English speakers, from countries with developed publishing and bookselling systems. A smaller group from other European countries such as Switzerland, France, Italy, Greece has in many ways a similar background, normally a high standard of English as a second language, and often eligibility to work in Britain, though in practice most return to their own publishing industries. For groups such as these, many of the

structures, systems and procedures, and the roles within companies, will have elements in common. Most of these students work in their own countries in the kinds of jobs and companies familiar in the U.K., in editing, marketing or production, usually for commercial publishers.

Some two thirds of non-U.K. students in the period came from the more or less prosperous rest of the world, often from countries in which English, as the language of the former colonial power, is widely understood and used as a medium of instruction (Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Singapore); Malaysia is an anomaly in that the government's national language policies have in recent years put greater stress on Bahasa Melayu as the medium of instruction in schools and universities, creating demands on authors and publishers for which there is little local precedent; young Malaysians may therefore be less confident linguistically than the older generation educated in a British-created system. To these may be added students from outside the traditional U.K. sphere of influence—Ethiopia, China, Taiwan—for whom English is a second or third language.

Overseas students in these groups tend to be older—late twenties and upwards; on a postgraduate course they are by definition, except in special circumstances, graduates, but their subject range is greater than that of the traditional western liberal arts publishing aspirant. The majority already have some professional experience, almost always in official or educational or academic publishing, or in a research institute with some responsibility for output, and almost never in the consumer market. African students, for instance, came from institutes of geological surveys, medical research, resource surveys, a national herbarium, which meant that they were graduates in a variety of scientific disciplines who did not see themselves as career publishers *per se* so much as people who needed to develop publishing skills to achieve specific communication aims. The majority had what might broadly be called editorial roles, though in small organisations with a limited sense of specialised publishing functions this may not mean anything very precise. It is evident that many students in this group were either direct employees of their government or worked in a state-funded official body, such as research institute or university press.

Given the stress that governments of developing countries put on literacy and textbooks, it is not surprising that significant numbers in this category worked for ministries of education, or for institutes producing school materials: numbers of Malaysians had been practising teachers before being recruited to the ministry's textbook division to evaluate needs and help authors and commercial publishers develop books appropriate to the indigenised syllabus. Most of the Malaysian students have wisely chosen to write dissertations directly related to their professional experience and useful for their career development. There have therefore been dissertations on such topics as textbook publishing and design, and scholarly publishing. There have in addition been dissertations on more general topics of importance to the development of Malaysian publishing, such as copyright legislation and enforcement. Over some fifteen years therefore, a body of Malaysian graduates has accumulated professional expertise and a wider knowledge of publishing

which they have then fed back into their own environment. By conducting their work in Britain and mixing with international students, they have also widened the outside world's knowledge of the Malaysian publishing scene. The course tutors have also developed their knowledge of Malaysia during this period, and have been able to make comparisons of issues across national boundaries. (The author of this article visited Malaysia as long ago as 1988, and has more recently visited Japan and Beijing.)

What many students in these categories, from small organisations in small countries, are seeking is the opportunity to learn what happens in larger, more complex systems, to be able to identify the different elements within the publishing process and the ways their own role can be efficiently developed; to compare their own situation not just with western models, but, more importantly, with those in other countries with which they have more in common; to have access to modern technology; to have time to reflect, analyse and discuss; and to have access to books and journals, often containing information about their own country, not easily obtainable at home. Students from the People's Republic of China (some of them fairly senior), who only came post-1990, are in a slightly different position: almost all from one of the official English-language publishing houses in Beijing or from government agencies with responsibility for the industry, they came from large organisations with specialised job functions, catering for millions of readers; but they found themselves at the beginning of a move away from the traditional post-war certainties to a world of growing political and cultural debate, of desire for western knowledge being met by demands for payment and respect for copyright, of gradual privatisation and commercialisation of their industry, and the slow rise of the market. Their prime need in most areas is not technical, but to experience at first hand the operation of a minimally-regulated, commercially-driven system. It can hardly be coincidence that the flow of students began about the point that China finally passed a copyright law recognising something like the western concept of private intellectual property.

In terms of syllabus, it will be clear that no single course could hope to discuss in detail a series of widely-differing national situations while meeting the core needs of home students (from whom overseas students do not wish to be divorced: there are great benefits to both sides in encouraging the easy exchange of information and ideas). The Stirling solution has been to have a basis of taught elements common to all students, in the areas of editorial, marketing, business, production, which take developed models as their starting point but attempt to discuss the implications in different economic, political or cultural contexts. Since staff have had a variety of publishing experience internationally, it has been possible to create seminar strands—again, common to all students—that look at the specific problems of developing countries. As the university library holds materials relating to international issues and to specific parts of the world, many students encounter for the first time the books edited by Philip Altbach and Hans Zell, or the journals such as *LOGOS*, that address the issues they have been longing to articulate.

Specific areas of the syllabus require different kinds of attention: in marketing, Chinese students readily grasp the importance of communication of information but are slower to adjust practically to the relevance of the market to the editorial role, or to production standards or pricing. Questions of taste are a minefield, and national standards on defamation, obscenity, blasphemy, national security and so on can only be dealt with by raising issues and inviting informed comment from a varied class. (It caused some surprise when the Salman Rushdie affair first broke to hear suggestions for his treatment in one Moslem country.) In legal matters, it is always necessary to refer students, once they have grasped the theories and the range of possibilities, to their own national laws, if any. Copyright is the most immediate practical concern, for publishers on both sides of the great divide: fortunately, a combination of trade pressures and a sense of their own long-term interest has led many countries, especially in Southeast Asia, to acquire or revise copyright legislation in the last decade; and as communist countries have moved towards the western model, it has become pedagogically simpler to relate the exotic fruits to the rootstock grown from the Act of Queen Anne (while recognising cross-fertilisation by, for instance, the continental concept of moral rights). This is an area in which some students have been able to educate staff and to contribute otherwise inaccessible documents; it is noticeable that a number of eastern students chose to work on copyright in their dissertations. It is this 20,000-word piece—on a personally-chosen subject and individually supervised—that gives students the greatest chance to work extensively on a subject of particular concern; most overseas students choose to write about the issues facing their own country and to analyse the way forward in their own publishing role.

How is all this paid for? The University itself has not been able to offer funded scholarships; students from developed countries have sometimes received help from public funds, more commonly relied on a combination of family help, part-time jobs, career loans, and occasional help from educational charities. Students from developing countries almost never pay their own fees: to the hurdles of gaining a place at an institution and being granted leave of absence from a job they must add the burden of finding sponsorship if their employer is unable or unwilling to pay; probably not more than one quarter of those offered places are in practice able to take them up. In some countries that have identified the development of publishing skills and a local industry as a priority, there may be government scholarships, especially for those who are already state employees. (Some students, with fees paid, living expenses or full salary, family allowances, paid passages, book funds etc. end up far better off than western colleagues.) The British Council proved to be an important source of funds for Africa and parts of Asia. International donor agencies in Switzerland, Sweden, Canada, the U.N. Development Programme or the European Commission seem to have been particularly relevant for African students from research institutes, though charities with more specific interests such as the World Council of Churches also featured.

It is clear that individuals are not going to get far in this training process unless their employer or a foreign donor is prepared to sponsor them against considerable competition:

there may not be much argument about the value of having good publishers, but there is debate about the priority for one country or project and the appropriateness of the individual and the proposed training. It has been Stirling's experience that sponsors often agree to fund an individual without detailed consultation with the host institution, although they may reasonably take the provisional offer of a place as some evidence of suitability, and successful reports from and upon previous candidates presumably increase confidence. The question of how to define students' needs is an interestingly complex one. In advance correspondence they and their local supporters sometimes show a touching faith in the perfection of western practices and institutions and their own ability to pick up the magic skills to transform their own industries. It is surely the educator's duty neither to impose solutions on them nor deny all responsibility to guide and warn, but to provide a structure within which they can more precisely identify their own and their country's needs and make a realistic plan for their own contribution: large grants and a computer cannot be the answer to every publishing problem. Educators meanwhile may have an uneasy awareness that bodies such as the British Council have, in the broadest sense, political, and commercial aims in the promotion of Britain and, in addition to providing access to specific courses, encourage the vision of particular political, cultural and educational models. To take the Chinese example again, as China's masters turned again towards the west and as copyright became a high-profile issue, British funding was available under a variety of programmes such as Technical Cooperation Training and Senior Research Fellowship. What, in addition to the personal benefits, both nations derive from the association will be seen in the next decade.

If some nations have seemed more equal than others in the search for external funding, some individuals or groups appear to have been favoured by processes of local selection and sponsorship. It is not always clear to an outsider what policy priorities and selection criteria are being laid down, but while all applicants undoubtedly have to compete with their peers at home and demonstrate a certain level of talent and commitment, in addition to satisfying the university's admissions criteria, actual sponsorship patterns suggest the operation of other factors: from a multi-racial Asian country, almost all students have been from one racial group; from some parts of Africa, scholarships have been awarded to inexperienced and not obviously outstanding candidates apparently from well-connected tribes. Occasionally students appear to be directed rather narrowly by home institutions as to what dissertation topic they should choose, or seem to look over their shoulder towards employer or government when contemplating writing assessments in any way critical of their own publishing environment.

Graduates' responses to the survey and other correspondence about their learning experiences revealed something of the changing nature of the course on which they were commenting, as on their perceptions of their own needs, and their careers; they would hardly have been credible if entirely uncritical. Asked what had been directly applicable to their professional careers, students mentioned a wide variety of elements, in addition to the provision of a broader understanding of publishing as an overall process: editorial

skills, design, production processes, desktop publishing, copyright and contracts, marketing, financial aspects. One commented: 'I learned to be more dissatisfied with the "common practice"'; another: 'I have found that having a broad-based M.Phil. degree surpasses any other candidate's training here and is a selling point for the company itself'. Several suggested a different relationship between the academic and practical aspects of the course (compare the Montagnes project above and the implications of 'education' as against 'training'), but another said: 'Great course; excellent lecturers. Mix of theory and practical work is useful.' And an experienced educator commented several years after the event: 'The experience of my younger [British] colleagues seemed to indicate that they didn't think they had learned much—until they actually got out in the field, and found they'd absorbed more than they thought!' Although beginners are always anxious simply about getting a job on the strength of their qualifications, the real test of a course's value lies in their ability to develop as publishers over a number of years, and to think beyond the immediate task.

Most of those who responded had after graduation either entered publishing for the first time or returned to their former organisations, many to more responsible managerial positions. It was clear that most felt they had gained in confidence as well as technical knowledge, and graduates in developing countries were notably determined to apply their skills to national benefit. Many had taken part in training seminars or informal discussions with colleagues as part of the continuing education process, though one despondently commented: 'None of my bosses seemed really interested' (he subsequently left publishing for translation and teaching). Several graduates have published articles based on their Stirling dissertation work in such journals as *Scholarly Publishing, African Book Publishing Record* and *LOGOS*. Two returned to Stirling to do Ph.D. research on aspects of their national publishing industries; others are engaged in or planning research on reading habits, scholarly publishing, intellectual property law and other subjects. Several graduates have combined careers in employment with their own publishing ventures: one named his company 'Stirling-Horden' in honour of the course director at the time of his study. A number of respondents commented that as no similar course existed in their own country, they are now formally engaged in part-time teaching of publishing within librarianship, communications or printing courses; and several had moved on to become full-time academics helping to develop courses in Africa and Asia. Some graduates seem to have found themselves in university teaching jobs at a very early age with little practical experience of publishing: to the outsider it may seem undesirable to appoint people who have not developed skills and judgment in work situations, but developing countries in a hurry may have no real alternative. Asked to what stage of a person's professional career the course is best fitted, students from developed countries, especially the English-speaking, tended to suggest it was appropriate to recent graduates wishing an introduction to the industry; whereas students from developing countries were more likely to think it of maximum benefit to people with several years' experience in a publishing-related job. The Stirling course team would agree with both of these judgments.

When the Stirling course began in 1982, there were few comparable activities, especially at postgraduate level. Since then, the provision of publishing education and training at various levels has increased notably in Britain, and existing courses have developed in response to changes in the industry, in technology, and in students' perceptions of their needs. Stirling, having always run a course with a strong international component, was a natural port of call for academics and practitioners from many parts of the world—not only developing countries—interested in setting up local courses. Correspondence, personal contacts and overseas visits in the last fifteen years or so confirm that the interest has intensified, especially in Africa. In 1991, the International Association for Publishing Education—composed largely of western educators—held its inaugural conference in Vancouver, at which the editor of *LOGOS* gave the keynote address quoted above. Although it was not immediately as active as had been hoped, its second conference— in Edinburgh in 1995—confirmed intentions to share information about training needs, course structures and resources by electronic and printed newsletters. Simultaneously there have within Britain and Western Europe been initiatives to strengthen liaison between trade-based training bodies and between them and the academic institutions. Readers of the specialist journals and newsletters will be aware of conferences in Mexico and Zimbabwe; of possible academic courses in South Africa; of postgraduate teaching and research in Malaysia; of the coordinated African initiatives centred on Harare. It is in many ways an encouragingly active scene.

Readers in Malaysia will be aware of important developments in the study and teaching of publishing within the country in the last ten years at such institutions as the University of Malaya and MARA Institute of Technology. Since the late 1980s, three members of staff of Malaysian institutions have successfully researched Ph.D. topics at Stirling: Md Sidin Ahmad Ishak, 'Malay Book Publishing and Printing in Malaya and Singapore, 1807-1949'; Firdaus Ahmad Azzam, 'Scholarly Publishing in Malaysia: A Study of Marketing Environment and Influences on Readership Behaviour'; Azizah Hamzah, 'A Study of Book Marketing in Publishing Houses in Peninsular Malaysia: Contexts, Practices, Problems'. By working on substantial topics involving original research, Ph.D. students contribute to the historical or contemporary knowledge of the subject, and lay a base for further investigation. (One of the recurring difficulties in Malaysian publishing research seems to be the lack of authoritative statistical data or of collaboration between the various bodies that might have an interest in promoting the study of books and reading.) There is always a problem for an overseas student working in a foreign country on a subject related to their home country: in each case the Malaysian student divided the research time betwen the U.K.—where libraries usually offer larger and more specialised collections to support study in particular areas—and Malaysia, where many primary materials are located and surveys of practitioners need to be conducted. (I recall, on a visit for quite different purposes to the University of Leiden in the Netherlands, which has a major library collection of Asian material, making enquiries on behalf of Md Sidin.) In practice, the researcher needs to develop a range of expertise and an international outlook, and to be aware of developments in research and teaching worldwide.

There is clearly an intensely felt need in developing countries as in developed for more training opportunities, though in both sectors the ability or the will to pay remain restricting factors. Countries with successful commercial industries are by that very fact likely to have the skills and experience on which training programmes can be built. For many parts of the world, however, the issue of publishing development as a contribution to national educational and economic development is crucial, but there is difficulty in defining training needs and resources. For those who can make the appropriate contacts, there may be substantial benefits in bringing in experienced consultants to analyse current structures, make recommendations and help with financial applications for training, equipment, or materials.

The discussions and initiatives mentioned above suggest that greater attention is now being paid to local training needs; this is to be welcomed especially for the provision of short-term courses in practical skills. In many places, however, there remains an assumption, especially on the part of governments, that publishing and print production are much the same thing, with attention being focused on machines and materials at the expense of management, editorial development, marketing, and distribution as areas of training. It is in these areas that longer, more broadly-based courses can make a more distinctive contribution, but they are not widely available and are expensive per head. Some reasons have been offered above why, although publishing courses should give specific attention to the issues in developing countries, it is beneficial to all students to share elements of learning. This is especially true if developing countries are seeking the publishing leaders of the future, people capable of comparison, analysis, problem-solving and vision.

What are the practical implications of this?. For the foreseeable future, high-level publishing courses are likely to remain cultural hybrids, but this is no bad thing. Sponsoring governments, institutions and funders should try to define more clearly their objectives in sending candidates abroad for training, should identify appropriate candidates in the light of a development strategy, should identify institutions with interests and resources appropriate to those needs, and should communicate those to the potential host. Given the scarcity of opportunity, there is waste all round when a mismatch occurs. Academic and training bodies should therefore collect comparative information on a wide range of publishing situations and be prepared to learn about hitherto little-studied industries with key issues very different from their own. If sponsors are genuinely interested in education in a broad sense, they must be prepared to take the risk of letting the individual read, discuss, investigate alternative models to the indigenous and explore solutions that diverge from officially-sanctioned practice. The Stirling course has benefited from contributions of experience from around the world, and questionnaire responses show graduates' desire to continue the debate with their colleagues. The occasional inability even to open dialogue in the home company about problems makes one wonder why the organisation was interested in personal development in the first place. The value of research in publishing does not always seem properly appreciated by people and bodies able to contribute to it: students with some official encouragement may still find it practically impossible to get

access to information on turnover, title output, educational policy, censorship, from ministries of economics, education or culture, national libraries, even their own universities.

In spite of the problems outlined, there have been many successful initiatives throughout the world, mainly arising out of the talent and enthusiasm of a few people, but sometimes encouraged by contact with the wider publishing and education community. There are more comparative data and commentaries on publishing world wide; collection of local information should be further encouraged as an area of possible cooperation between academics and the book trade; the recent flow of textbooks and practical guides is to be welcomed, especially where they can be adapted for use outside specific, sophisticated industries. Through dialogue this process can be continued. As an instance of the happy possibilities of the local and the international, I think of the chance meeting at the Frankfurt Book Fair of former Stirling classmates from opposite ends of the earth—Scotland and Southeast Asia—each representing a small indigenous publisher, and I think that hybrid can be beautiful.