

Blue Pencil

Newsletter of
the Society
of Editors
(NSW)
Patron: Hazel Hawke

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Whither public sector publishing?

Peter Frankis, publications manager for the NSW Department of Urban Affairs and Planning, addressed the society's May meeting about opportunities for editors in government publishing in NSW.

My somewhat ironic title does not mean that I will be proffering any direct answers to this, other than to note that governments have been in the publishing business for nearly as long as there has been publishing. This will probably continue, but the way it's done has changed markedly.

I need to acknowledge the support of the NSW Department of Urban Affairs and Planning in assisting me with some of my preparatory research, and also make it clear that my remarks do not reflect government policy nor the policy of the department.

Having got the disclaimer out of the way, I'll move on.

Why is public sector publishing important?

Certainly by the amount of scholarly attention which has been paid to it, one would conclude that it isn't important at all. Yet it comprises one major way that governments communicate with the citizenry — it is an industry of substantial size, yet its dimensions have not been clearly measured.

Based on the results of my limited survey, I estimate that:

- more than 600 people are directly employed in NSW public sector publishing;
- there are a comparable number employed as contract writers, editors, and designers and in the printing industry;
- NSW public sector publishing produces over 13,000 new titles each year

and it has an annual expenditure in excess of \$40 million.

This prodigious level of activity is, however, sadly unrecognised. To answer the question why, it may help to contrast the public and private sector publishing, which I've done in a table (see page 2).

What is public sector publishing?

Generally, public sector publishing can be divided into three broad categories (after Borschadt, 1979):

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Next meeting: Tuesday 3 June 1997

Alison Pressley on the editor and publishing success

Alison Pressley has been a book editor and publisher for 27 years, in England and Australia. She feels strongly that the role of the editor is undervalued in Australia — and that this is the fault of both publishing management and the editors themselves. Her talk, on 'The editor and publishing success', will concentrate on ways in which editors, particularly in-house editors, can increase their involvement in the publishing process and therefore their influence on the future of the Australian book business

Alison's last in-house job was as Publisher of Illustrated Books for Harper Collins. She now has her own company, Belladonna Books, which will publish five titles with Hodder Headline between now and the end of the year. Alison also ran the Editing and Publishing course for TAFE in 1988, the predecessor of the Macquarie University course.

6.30 pm for 7 pm in the Rooftop Function Centre, 4th floor, Australian Museum (enter from William Street). Drinks and light refreshments provided. Please RSVP by Friday 30 May to (02) 9552 0039 (voicemail). Members \$10; non-members and those who don't RSVP, \$12.

Next month:

Tuesday 1 July: Thoughts on the role and meaning of 'style' from Lindsay Mackerras, editor of the AGPS Style Manual.

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Publishing by the legislature — papers, votes, proceedings, Hansard, bills, acts and ordinances. Most of this is done directly through an in-house service within Parliament. NSW Parliament's volume of printing varies substantially.

The 1994–95 Joint House Services Annual Report indicated expenditure over \$1 million, which includes producing Hansard for the two houses, and a substantial number of reports from a substantial number of committees.

Publishing by the judiciary — legal judgments and cases — reported through diverse agencies.

Publishing by the executive — executive orders, proclamations, statements published in the *NSW Government Gazette* — in 1996 the *Gazette* was 8,910 printed pages — but 140 years ago in 1857 it was still a substantial volume of 3,000 pages. This category also includes publishing done by government departments or agencies; these represent a broad and substantial part of public sector publishing.

The early years

The NSW public sector has a long and proud tradition of publishing.

Although the availability of books had greatly increased since the invention of movable type and the printing press in the 16th century (Jardine, 1996), it was not until the latter years of the 18th century in western Europe that major improvements in printing technology and an increase in general literacy rates saw

the book become a means of mass communication.

The British Admiralty was sufficiently conscious of this change that it included a printing press with the stores of the First Fleet. However, no one knew how to operate it (Webby, 1988), so it remained idle for the first seven years of the colony.

The first two Australian printers were convicts who were closely watched and subject to government orders. Most of their output concerned the day-to-day administration of the prison colony. Little is known of the first printer, George Hughes, other than he started work as a printer in 1795. His successor was George Howe, who was transported for shoplifting in 1800. He was probably the first Government Printer as well as the first Australian journalist.

The first book published in Australia was a government publication, *New South Wales General Standing Orders*, in 1802. This brought together, in one indexed volume, legislation that was scattered in hundreds of broadsheets. It was an attempt by the government to counter the claim of ignorance of the law by colonists.

In 1803, Governor King permitted the first newspaper to be published, edited by George Howe, but censored by the Governor's secretary. The *Sydney Gazette* combined reporting of current affairs with publishing official notices.

The *NSW Pocket Almanac* was first published in 1806, and annually from 1808 to 1835. Subsequently, there was the *Wealth and Progress of New South*

Wales 1897, which eventually became the NSW yearbook series. As well as being statistical summaries of the major activities of the state, they were often directed towards overseas audiences in the hope of attracting them to emigrate to New South Wales.

In 1832, the separation of government publishing from journalism became clearer with the first edition of the *NSW Government Gazette*. It was renamed in 1900 as *The Government Gazette of the State of NSW* and has been in print continuously since that time.

In 1851 Victoria established its own printing office, and with Federation this office also published Commonwealth publications.

The Commonwealth Printing Office was established in Canberra in 1927, but it was not until 1969 that the Australian Government Publishing Service was established.

AGPS's charter was to address the need for consistent approaches to presentation, marketing, copyright control, and printing standards by Commonwealth agencies. AGPS became the Government Printer and publisher, providing editorial, design, and printing services to the Commonwealth Government and in its heyday it employed more than 700 people.

In 1989, the NSW Government Printing Office in Ultimo, an enterprise of comparable size, closed. While it continues to operate and to publish *The Government Gazette*, its dominant role as Government Printer has been supplanted by private sector printers and publishing that has been devolved to individual government agencies. Similar changes have been foreshadowed at a Commonwealth level with substantial reductions in the printing facilities of AGPS.

Why do governments publish?

From these examples, one might conclude that government publishing is about social control, mainly through the regulatory announcements of the executive. However, a substantial area of public sector publishing is concerned with advising, explaining, and involving the community in decision making, as well as a form of government's accountability to the people — for example, through departmental annual reports.

To paraphrase Borschadt (1979) — one of the few writers on public sector

Table 1: Private sector vs public sector publishing

Feature	Private sector	Public sector
Publishers	Many publishers, 186 Australia-wide	Many agencies, 213 in New South Wales
Content	'Literature'	Prosaic, non-fiction
Central effort of agency	Core business	Non-core business
Motive	Profit	Not-for-profit
Distribution channels	Obvious	Not obvious, hidden
Scholarly attention	Extensive	Scarce
Celebrated	Awards, criticism	Ignored

Source: ABS Book Publishers, Australia, 1994, Cat. No. 1360.0, NSW Treasury, *Budget Paper 2, Appendix D*.

publishing — 'to stay in power, elected governments have always needed to ensure that their policies are understood either via the media — which can be hazardous unless the media are pro-government — or through the distribution of its own publications.'

Public sector publishing is thus linked to the process of participatory democracy. As one former prime minister has said, 'If the Australian electorate is to be able to make valid judgements of Government policy, it should have the greatest access to information possible'.

Changes in government publishing

Government's functions and role change over time, and government publishing has changed with this. In Australia these changes have been from government as an investor, builder, and developer up to World War I, to a facilitator, regulator and referee at present.

Since World War II, the range of functions of government has broadened considerably. Contemporary concerns are reflected in portfolios such as Community Services, Aging and Disability and Ethnic Affairs, the Environment, and Water Resources. Major infrastructure development (roads, railways, electricity, water), the main concerns of pre-World War I governments are becoming non-core activities.

As well as the change in roles and concerns of government, the way policy is made has changed. Technocratic policy making — where an answer to a particular policy problem is either an extrapolation from existing positions or where problems are seen largely as technical problems with technical answers supplied by technical specialists — has been replaced by participatory and collaborative decision-making. That is, to establish adequate support for a policy, it needs to be explained and those affected by the policy need to be consulted and their support elicited.

This change has been matched by changes in the quantity and quality of government publishing. There is generally more of it, and it tends to be directed towards particular audiences often seeking their comment, and it tends to be less bureaucratic — although I'm sure there are members in this audience who may disagree, and the public sector has a way to go to achieve clarity, precision, and brevity.

The size of public sector publishing in NSW

According to the *NSW Budget Papers No. 2*, the NSW public sector has 213 individual agencies (excluding Area Health Boards). It has an annual outlay of over \$27 billion. It employs over 344,000 people — about 9% of the total NSW labour force, or 46.5 public servants per 1,000 population.

As noted previously, however, there is no single place where NSW public sector publishing is reported, counted, or categorised. It is diffuse, disparate, and decentralised.

The survey

My survey was designed to measure the size of NSW public sector publishing, the types of materials published, expectations about quantity published, and use of external contractors.

A sample of 21 government agencies (10% of the total number of agencies) was selected at random from the *NSW Directory of Services*.

A brief (between 10 and 15 minutes) telephone interview was conducted with 'the person in charge of publications for your agency'. The survey sought 'yes/no' answers and, due to the pressures of time on both parties, not much qualitative information was obtained.

All agencies approached agreed to respond to the survey.

Publishing — All agencies surveyed produced new titles each year. Agencies produce between two and 250 new titles per annum (median 22.5). Six agencies in the sample published fewer than 10 new titles, five published more than 100 new titles, and three of these published 200 or more new titles each year.

Type of publications — Around 95% of respondents publish brochures and flyers, 81% publish reports and Internet pages; 57% publish books and magazines; 48% publish exhibitions. Other products include CD-ROMs, calendars, manuals, videos and audio tapes, and even fridge magnets.

Audience — Around 80% directed their publishing towards the general public, 76% to industry groups, 66% to students, and 62% to other government departments

Core business — Around 50% said that publishing is considered a core business of their agency; however, most respondents described publishing as an es-

ential support function. Around 70% have a single publishing unit within their organisation. Unit, however, may be only a single person.

Organisation — Around 50% located publishing within their public relations or media area, 38% within the corporate management area, and 24% within the public programs educational area.

Teams — Most work within small teams. The average size of the team was 2.85 people. Around 30% of the sample had five or more in-house staff, 48% had between one and five people, and 24% had one person or less — that is, a person may be either part-time or have other duties unrelated to publishing.

In-house staff — Around 90% of respondents had an in-house publications manager/coordinator, 57% had in-house editors and desktop publishers, 52% had in-house writers, and 48% had in-house designers.

External contractors — Around 95% used external printers, 90% have used external designers, 66% have used external editors, and 57% have used external writers and desktop publishers.

Policies — Around 50% had a written plain English policy and a written policy for publishing for non-English authors. Nearly all had an ethos or general direction about these matters. Around 70% had a written style guide for editors.

Expectations — On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is a lot more titles and 5 is a lot fewer titles, respondents were asked about their expectations of amount of work for 1996 to 1997 compared to the previous financial year. The median response was 2 (expect to publish a little more), and the mean response was 2.5 (between a little more and the same amount). Three agencies in the sample expected to publish a lot more this financial year.

When asked about their expectations in using external contractors, most expected to use them at about the same level as in previous years. Six indicated that they expected to use contractors 'a lot more' or 'a little more this year'.

Around 75% said that generally contractors understood their business.

Recruitment of Contractors — When asked how new contractors are recruited, most indicated that word of

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mouth and references were preferred. Interestingly, only one respondent indicated that they would use a professional register or organisation.

What does it mean?

Size — Public sector publishing is substantial in size. Extrapolating from this sample, the NSW public sector produces approximately 13,000 new titles each year.

The best figures I could arrive at for Australian private sector publishing was from an ABS survey into book publishing conducted in 1994 which estimated the number of titles published in Australia in 1994 as 13,741. Now I'm not suggesting that NSW government publishing is of comparable size to the total output of the entire private sector industry in Australia, but I am making the point that NSW government publishing is of a substantial size.

Change — Public sector publishing is varied in the type of work and is often substantially affected by changes in technology — for example, the strong representation of agencies who had published Internet pages in the sample. Other changes such as PC-based desktop publishing have also brought about substantial changes to the publishing process.

Audience — Publishing is directed at both general and specific audiences. All agencies were able to articulate who their main audiences were. Most agencies have a written style guide. Nearly all will have expectations of contract editors in understanding plain English and publishing for non-English speakers.

Teams — It is run as both single-person and quite large operations. Contractors need to consider what type of organisation they are approaching — often the size of the agency does not correlate with the size of the publishing unit. Smaller units may welcome a greater range of services, for example, desktop publishing and print management.

Technology — The number of electronic applications — Internet pages, CD-ROMs or non-paper publishing — was increasing. External editors need to consider these new technologies, or at least be familiar with them.

Expectations — Most agencies expect modest growth; however, use of

contractors or external suppliers is not necessarily expected to increase.

Contractors — Most contractors were considered favourably, but this was as a result of developing a positive relationship with the client agency. Those that mentioned it said that if they had problems, they wouldn't use the contractor again.

Recruiting — Word of mouth or good referees are the preferred way of recruiting new contractors to this work. Registers or professional bodies were not highly valued by the respondents.

So you want to work in public sector publishing?

Having made these general points, I'd like to conclude with some practical advice for those wishing to provide editorial services to the public sector about how to access government work.

Understand something of the work of the agency you are approaching. They all have annual reports; nearly all do publishing. Target your approach to their business. For example, is it scientific, social advocacy, health, legal?

Understand the process of quotations — three written quotes is normal. Often work may change, but your initial bid often needs to be in writing. You may be unsuccessful. Make sure you follow-up quotations.

Add value to the services you offer. Smaller operations in particular may be seeking additional services — desktop publishing, printer liaison. Public sector publishing is multi-skilled; the services you offer should match these needs.

Be aware of new technology like e-mail, Internet services, desktop publishing. In my view, multi-skilling is a term that is here to stay.

Understand something of the 'big P' political process — where are we in the electoral cycle, is there a government imperative with this work, what happens when governments change, policies change? Understand something of how the media operates and offer advice.

Understand that often there is no single author — often there is a corporate author. This may mean that work doesn't always proceed in a linear way; it may be delayed or occur in desperate rush. This is what I call the 'small p' of the politics of publishing.

Understand ideas such as one-stop-shops, open government, and new technology.

Question: You've said we should do some research about the agency we're dealing with, but quite often we're just rung up on a Friday afternoon and asked for a quote. It's not often we have time for preparation; they want the quote by fax.

This is letting out a secret, but I would guess that if somebody is ringing you up at 5 o'clock, either you have got the job, or you may just be fulfilling that requirement of three quotations. You have to decide, as you're running your own business, what you're going to do about that. If you spend all your time estimating, making judgments, and getting anxious and nothing happens, you may be justified in saying, 'I'm sorry, I'm not going to provide that kind of service'.

Question: You can spend 11 hours doing something like that, and it's unpaid.

You can, if you like, build that into your billing. You might add an extra three hours because you know a meeting is not going to be half-an-hour, it's going to be three-and-a-half hours. They're decisions that you make as a business person, and they're perfectly legitimate.

Question: What rates does the public service normally pay?

Rate is a very interesting question, and it's something I didn't ask about. I think it's something we could probably do with some guidance on, because I have editors working for me in a whole range of prices. Some guidance would help enormously, because then I could say to people, 'This is twenty hours of work and you're going to be up for so much an hour'.

Question: Do you always like to see an hourly rate in a quote?

Well, that can be difficult. When I say I've got 150 pages of manuscript I need edited, that will often change. Often you'll then hear, 'Oh, I forgot about the appendix', or it's single spaced.

So it's sometimes more useful to give a rate, as an indicative amount. This is why I think it's useful for editors to ask to have a look at the work, get a half-dozen pages of it faxed over so they know what the writing is about. Unless you assert that [hourly rate], I'm going to expect the same thing that I get from printers: somebody says, "This is A4, saddle stitched, two colour and it will

cost you \$360', and somebody else says it will cost me \$380. That's a straightforward comparison.

It's about informing us, as public sector publishers, how quotes should work.

Question: Do you use contracts between the public sector and the editor for larger jobs?

I've not, but that's because I just hate paperwork, and I don't have time for it. But it's a good idea, particularly if the job is undefined or is difficult. I'd suggest formalising as much of your understanding in writing as possible. It may not take the form of a formal written contract, but it's as good as a contract.

Write out what your understanding of the job is, and what you will provide and what you won't provide — for example, will you do it on-screen? Will you lay it out for us as well? Will you do printing liaison, will you do this, will you do that? The more explicit you make that relationship, the easier it is when you have to go back and say, 'We have now crossed this line; you are now asking me to do something that's not in our original agreement. Let's renegotiate the contract'. Often we can do that, because often it's our fault. Suddenly we want three books instead of two.

Question: You said that some people will not hire the same person again for performance' sake, or to spread the work around. Is there a percentage who, if their work is keeping up to standard, will perhaps be re-commissioned?

Well, I've got a relatively modest budget; I spend about \$300,000 a year in publications. Some of that goes to contractors. I make a practice of trying to spread the work as broadly as possible because that introduces fresh ideas into the place. We all get stale. But there's no reason why you could not earn a living from working for the public sector. People do it.

Question: Would an editor ever have the opportunity to work at the beginning of a project with the committee or with the person who's writing the project?

Yes, one of the things I spoke about earlier was the difficulty that the projects are seen as core business [but publishing is not]. If we've got a solid committee together that's working on a particu-

lar transport intervention, my problem is in the organisation. I'm seen as non-core, so I'm kind of over here to one side of that important activity. What I try to do is promote myself to that committee by saying, 'Look, I know this work is terribly important and you may think I've got nothing to contribute here, but have you thought about contracting a professional writer for this work or, indeed, an editor?' It's something I struggle with, but it's certainly possible, and I've probably done it — not a lot — but we should do it more.

Question: Can you tell us how to be more aware of the big 'P' politics?

What I meant by big 'P' was broad stuff — seeing in the paper what various departments have been up to. Just be aware that sometimes jobs take on this awful sort of 'Minister's just rung up, he's got a space in his diary for Tuesday next, we need the document' situation. At that point, you may decide you don't want that kind of work. Or you might decide to do it, but tell them you'll have to charge at a higher rate because you'll have to work overtime and arrange childcare, or drop some of your other work, etc.

You also need to ask if there's some other way to handle the situation. Could they publish just the Executive Summary, and release the rest at a later date? The more aware you are as an editor of how things like launches and events work, the better prepared you are to deal with those contingencies.

Question: Can you say anything more about adding value to our services?

From my own personal experience, working with a team of six, we have three editors. These people don't just edit. They lay material out, they talk to printers, they do new technologies. I've got somebody working on our home-page at the moment.

I'm not just after a publication anymore. I'm after a whole service, and the consultants that get work in our department provide a whole suite of things. They come in and try to solve my whole problem.

They might say, 'Well, we can look after not only the publication, but we can do the exhibition, and we can do the launch, and if you want we'll arrange the catering'. So that's the kind of value-adding I was talking about.

If you look at the history of printing and the history of things like the introduction of computers and word processors into the workplace, a lot of those barriers that used to exist between distinct trades and professions have been broken down.

So it's really about multi-skilling yourselves, because there's huge appeal if somebody can say, 'Well look, I've also got experience in writing press releases'.

Comment: But they're not going to be experts.

Comment: Well, another way of doing it would be to develop teams yourself and actually approach departments as teams — become publishing consultants.

I'm just saying there is growth in this centre. It's good for me to find people who actually want to add value to their services by being a partner as well as just dealing with the certain stuff in boxes. Value-adding is a very helpful thing, and I think if you know people with whom you can form consortiums, groups, teams, you then have made your quote more attractive.

Question: How do you get onto the word-of-mouth network? How do you get a toe in the door?

Well, you might try bidding for smaller jobs, like newsletters. Aside from word of mouth, what my respondents in the survey said was that they wanted a clear, well-presented CV, and some referees.

New members

A warm welcome to all those who joined the society from 16 April to 15 May 1997.

Kerry Davies
Lyn Sandstrom
Brendan Atkins
Diane Jardine
Anne Hewer
Louise Diamond
Peter Murray

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Noticeboard

Thank you, thank you!

We thought the hard part would be getting members to return their surveys, but a whopping 125 of you replied. Now begins the fun of compiling your answers. Watch for the results in a future issue of *Blue Pencil*.

Basic grammar workshop

There are still a few places in the society's June 14 Basic Grammar Workshop to be presented by Anne Tarulli at the State Library of NSW. Registration deadline is Friday 6 June. Use the registration form included in this issue of *Blue Pencil*. To obtain extra registration forms, please leave your name and address on the society's voicemail on 9552 0039 or write to the secretary, Society of Editors (NSW), PO Box 234, Broadway 2007.

Indexing workshop

Make a note in your calendar that the society will present an indexing workshop to be conducted by Caroline Colton and Michael Wyatt on 16 August 1997. The workshop will introduce participants to the purpose, principles, and mechanics of indexing. Watch for details in the July *Blue Pencil*.

Principles of editing

Robin Appleton will present a workshop, the Publishing Process and Principles of Editing 14–29 June, and a Practical Editing Workshop 19–20 July at the NSW Writers' Centre, Rozelle. Phone (02) 9555 9757 for information.

Better Writer

Better Writer is a new forthcoming magazine (distribution 20,000) designed to help writers sell their work, write more, and refine their craft. The magazine will pay up to 50 cents a word for instructional articles on all aspects of writing. *Better Writer* also has 7000 free one-year subscriptions (no less than six issues) to give away. For writer's guidelines and/or free subscription, send a SSAE to: *Better Writer*, PO Box 446, Prahran Vic 3181.

Book fair

The Women's Library is holding a book fair on Saturday 14 June (9–4 pm) outside the Newtown Neighbourhood Centre on King Street, Newtown. There will be a large collection of women's fiction for sale, as well as general fiction and non-fiction books. For information, call (02) 9319 0529.

Register update

Kerry Davies, former manager of Magabala Books, Broome, has established in Sydney as Kerry Davies Publishing Services. Project management and editorial services for any non-fiction titles, specialising in indigenous publishing. Phone/fax (02) 9807 7149.

To purchase a *Register of Editorial Services 1997*, send \$10 to Register, PO Box 254, Broadway NSW 2007.