

Challenges and Opportunities for the Children's and YA Market

Hello and welcome to the Oxford International Centre for Publishing podcast bringing you the latest on publishing for children and young adults.

My name is Lucy Derges and for this October 2022 episode, I will be travelling to the Frankfurt Book Fair to investigate the current health of the children's and young adult market, the coming global challenges it could face and how incorporating diversity, equality and inclusion though requiring additional investment, also offers opportunity.

[Sound effect: airplane landing]

[Sound effect: bustling book fair crowds]

My first port of call is a keynote presentation on the European book market by the Federation of European Publishers' Enrico Turrin. He explains that across Europe children's books showed resilience, continuing to grow during the pandemic, from 14.5% overall turnover in 2020 to 15% in 2021 and amounting to 3.54bn Euros in net publishers turnover (Turrin, 2022). Turrin remarked that he assesses this resilience to be due to parent's recognition of the value of books for their children.

According to the World Intellectual Property Organisation, total global revenue generated from children's book sales was in excess of 8.9 billion US dollars in 2020 (World Intellectual Property Organization, 2022, p. 8).

For the UK market, according to the UK's Publisher's Association, (Publishers Association, 2021), children's book sales rose by 2% in value in 2020 and this was driven by digital sales such as eBooks and audiobooks. It seems the resilience of the sector, in the UK at least, could be attributed to a net invoiced value of digital sales showing a 2019 to 2020 growth of 38.5% while growth for print flat-lined during 2020 (Publishers Association, 2021, p. p45).

More recently Keira O'Brien, speaking at the Bookseller's Children's conference in September this year, calculated that the 2021 UK market value has further grown by 3% on 2020 and is now worth 1.82bn (*Monday Stream 1 Sessions | The Bookseller Children's Conference 2022*, 2022, p. 12 mins).

Print continues to represent more than 90% of children's book sales for UK publishers, both at home and by export (Publishers Association, 2021, p. 45).

So, what could threaten a strong market sector that showed such bounding resilience during the pandemic? could there be storm clouds on the horizon?

[Sound effect: a storm]

During his presentation at the Frankfurt book fair, Enrico Turrin cautioned of what he termed 'a perfect storm' heading for the publishing industry, including resurgent demand, paper supply shortages and the global energy crisis.

The majority of children's and YA book revenues are, as the case in the UK, derived from print. The increased cost of paper and energy may drive an urgent need to increasingly fold digital production and sales into publisher business models but doing so, as we have learned from other sectors across the industry, is not an easy feat.

A pervasive force for change evident in the key themes selected both at this year's Bookseller Children's Conference and at Frankfurt was that of diversity, equity and inclusion. One upcoming challenge for eBook producers in Europe will be the European Accessibility Act requiring publishers to produce their digital publications in an accessible format. It also requires the entire supply chain to make content available to users through accessible services and this will come into effect in June 2025 (Hilderley, 2021)

There are many steps to think of in adapting a digital production workflow...

- Author's need to write additional content, such as descriptions of images for the visually impaired.
- Typesetting may need to vary to accommodate dyslexia and other forms of neurodiversity
- It is also important to ensure that the correct metadata is used to link a book to specific needs or representation, so that the right customers can find it.

Implementing these changes for eBooks is more readily achievable than in print production where different versions of the same book to accommodate different readers, of potentially limited numbers, could be costly, particularly in light of additional pressures such as paper shortages, energy crises and pressures to be sustainable. Perhaps only the larger publishers can spread the cost of additional production measures across the rest of their lists in order to achieve an equity in price.

Stacy Scott, accessibility manager at Taylor and Francis, also spoke at the Frankfurt book fair, she advised that a good approach is for books to be 'born inclusive'. She also suggested that the larger and better resourced publishers share their knowledge with the rest of the industry and should not compete on a factor such as accessibility. Such collaboration and adaptation will allow children's and YA publishers to gain further access to what Stacy called 'the purple pound' and extend their customer base.

Encroaching global pressures such as paper shortages and energy crises will put a challenging squeeze on production while simultaneously a cost of living crisis squeezes consumer spending. There is also increasing pressure to be more sustainable in production practices while also producing more accessible publications.

Digital sales proved a bolster to the sector in the UK due to its resilience to the impact of the pandemic.

All these factors suggest an increasing logic that the sector should transition further to digital... but for a market still so reliant on print revenues, it requires a leap of faith that consumer demand will also adapt accordingly.

For more information on the topics discussed and a list of resources, go to www.oxfordpublish.org/podcasts.

Thank you for listening.

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Bibliography

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