

## Lara Diskus, International Publishing and Licensing Executive at Dorling Kindersley



Course of study	M.A. in Modern European Studies	Year of graduation	2016
City / Region / Country	France		

**1. Tell us more about your job; an example of day-to-day work, average week, or a recent project (or how would you describe your job to a friend?).**

My job as International Publishing and Licensing Executive at Dorling Kindersley (DK) is divided into two main areas of work, sales and production, within which I have an array of different responsibilities. To put it briefly, I liaise with publishers in various countries and sell them the rights to publish DK books in their local markets. The business model such transaction is based on is called co-edition. Once the deal is agreed, I am responsible for coordinating the production of the international edition by sending translation and design material to co-edition publishers, by being the point of contact between them and the printer and, more generally, by making sure that the book they want will be the book they'll receive throughout the production process. It is a fast-paced, hands-on role that allows me to follow the entire journey of an international edition, from finding the right publisher for it to delivering the finished copies and seeing how the title performs on the local market and everything in between.

**2. What attributes make someone successful in this job (or what skills are involved in your current role)?**

The role I play is pivotal and requires a dynamic, flexible and nuanced communication style. On the same day, I can be liaising in English and in French (my mother tongue) with stakeholders as varied as co-edition publishers, printers and in-house departments such as Editorial, Finance or Asset Management. Core organisation and prioritisation skills are also crucial to juggle the many different tasks that make up a single day. I could be tending to production emergencies one minute and sending an urgent quote for a key title the next. No two weeks will ever be the same, which can be challenging and demands high levels of adaptability, but is also why the job is exciting, interesting and fun. In addition, language skills are highly sought-after in my department. I used to think that speaking 3 languages was quite exceptional, but it is actually commonplace in International Publishing and Licensing! It's a great platform for Modern Languages students to practice in a professional context, or a good opportunity for multilingual students to make the most of their linguistic heritage.

### **3. What do you like most about your job?**

Publishing is a creative industry where people are truly passionate about their jobs. The people I work with are inspired and inspiring, which transpires in the books Dorling Kindersley makes, markets and sells. This atmosphere of creativity, commitment, curiosity and genuine care is unique and particularly valuable to me: colleagues easily become great friends and your department can quickly feel like a quirky little family. Although a significant portion of my day is dedicated to abstract tasks such as coordinating deliveries to places I've never been or getting publishers interested in books that haven't been published yet, receiving the finished copies of an international edition I've spent months working on substantiates all my efforts and is always cause for celebration. Working in publishing can be extremely demanding and as with every job there are many frustrating episodes; but the people, the books and some immensely rewarding moments make it all worth it.

### **4. What are the most challenging aspects (role or sector)?**

The production side of my role is particularly deadline-heavy. Be it an imminent co-edition schedule, an approaching book fair or a critical delivery date that cannot be missed, urgency is part of my daily routine. Managing it while working in unison with people on opposite sides of the world, such as a printer in Asia and a publisher in North America, is an intricate exercise that often cannot be performed without preparedness and nerves of steel. I don't believe that pressure-handling is necessarily innate, however, and with good training it is possible to get used to it after a couple months on the job. On the sales side, it can be quite discouraging to see arbitrary factors, such as a change in leadership or in editorial direction, put an end to relationships with publishers that required tremendous amounts of time and work to sustain. The game can sometimes feel a bit unfair, but I found that there was usually a silver lining in such cases. The pool of co-edition publishers is wide and there are always more business models and structures to explore.

### **5. How did your degree prepare you for your current role (or are there any skills/knowledge you developed which you are using now)?**

I graduated from Queen Mary University with a B.A. Joint in German and Russian and furthered my education at UCL with a M.A. in Modern European Studies. While my undergraduate and postgraduate degrees weren't tailored to the career path I am currently on, the transferrable skills they helped me acquire were instrumental in finding my first job and performing well in my current role. To give a few examples, the rhythm of essay writing throughout the academic year taught me how to organise my time, prioritise and arrange my ideas in a methodical way. Leading workshops and presenting to my classmates gave me prior experience of public-speaking and enhanced my communication skills. Even the process of dissertation writing could be considered as project management experience, from finding the right supervisor to drawing authoritative

conclusions and coming up with innovative strategies and solutions. Completing degrees in subjects targeted to a specific sector is the ideal scenario, but it can also be quite reductive and does not mean that one cannot apply some of what has been learned at university to multiple sectors and different careers.

**6. How did you get to where you are now in your career (or what experiences helped you)?**

I was fifteen when I first engaged in volunteering work in my hometown's secondary school in France. From then on, I made the most of every summer to gain as much work experience as I could. I was very much encouraged to do so by my family, who understood its value and the network-building opportunities that would come with it. They were right: I did a 3-months internship in a local cruising company in the summer of my 20th birthday, which led me to work part-time as Sales and Operations Officer in their London branch during my postgraduate degree at UCL. The first-hand sales skills I acquired during this office experience led me to land a job in the industry I felt the most passionate about: publishing. I started as Assistant in Dorling Kindersley's International Publishing and Licensing department and I was promoted to an Executive role within two years. The journey to where I am now truly shows that essential skills can be extracted from every single work experience and greatly benefit your professional development, even if at first glance it seems far removed from your career goal.

**7. What advice would you give to current students about getting into / starting out in your sector? (e.g. relevant experiences, supportive people, necessary education)**

If publishing is the aim, there are plenty of things that can be done to stand out from the crowd of applicants for an entry-level job. Start your own podcast, become a serial reviewer on Goodreads, launch your digital book club, volunteer for reading sessions at your local primary school, take part in cover design or essay contests... competition is fierce so no aspect of your personal interests and endeavours should be left aside in an application. While a publishing-specific degree would not usually be required, some professional experience, especially in the creative and cultural sector, will maximise chances to get your CV noticed. This could be a part-time Bookshop Assistant role or a short internship in a literary agency, for example. I would also advise to start thinking about what will happen after completing your studies as early as possible so as to make the most of the support your university can provide. Careers events, conferences, fairs and workshops will not only prepare you for what will come next, they are fantastic windows into the professional world and will help shape the decisions you'll make for your future.

**8. What is on the horizon within your industry that our students should know about? (positives or negatives)**

2020 is a difficult year that forced the publishing industry as a whole to call into question the way it functions, both internally and externally. In the face of the Covid-19 pandemic, worldwide economic crisis and societal movements, this relatively traditional sector has had to adapt to unprecedented changes much faster than anticipated. While audiobooks and eBooks were already booming prior to 2020, they are now considered just as essential as printed books. Online market places weight the same as brick and mortar shops in our new increasingly digital commercial world. Many aspects of the industry, such as marketing or sales, and of the book itself as a cultural artefact, have to be re-thought and re-moulded to fit rules by which no one has ever played. While it means taking greater risks, it also opens up new opportunities. In my opinion, knowledge of data and analytics, supply chain sustainability or diversity management will be more and more sought-after in the coming months and years. While these crises have already urged the publishing industry to be more self-critical, I hope that they'll pave the way for it to become more modern, more inclusive and more open.

**9. If you could give a current student one piece of advice on something you wish you'd have known prior to starting your career what would it be?**

Keep an open mind. I believe that publishing sometimes suffers from 'glamorisation' in mainstream culture, where it is too often depicted as an urban, high-flying, editorial-only sector when there is so much more to it. Within one publishing house, Production, Sales, Finance, IT, Operations, HR, Marketing & PR are all branches, to name but a few, that contribute to making bestsellers. If the 'dream job' is not available immediately, there are other routes that can be just as thrilling and lead to making your mark in the book industry. Tying into this, it is also important to keep an open mind in the face of rejection. Receiving a negative answer, or receiving no answer at all, isn't necessarily a reflection of the candidate's suitability for the role. Random, unpredictable and uncontrollable reasons can be at the root of rejection, such as the position being cancelled or reserved for an internal applicant. I found that the smartest thing to do in such cases is to not take it personally, grow out of it and move on to the next opportunity.