The Press Syndicate: An introduction

The [Syndicate of the Press of the University of Cambridge](#) is the body established by the University to oversee the affairs of the Press. Syndicates are appointed to govern various aspects of University life (there is for example a Sports Syndicate, a Library Syndicate and an Accommodation Syndicate), but the Syndicates of the Press and of Cambridge Assessment have special roles in governing large outward-facing organizations which generate significant revenues from commercial activity.

The Press Syndicate is provided for in Statute J of the [Statutes and Ordinances of the University of Cambridge](#), which states that the management of the finance, property, and affairs generally of the Press shall be the responsibility of the Syndicate. Chapter I of the *Ordinances* provides that the Chief Executive of the Press shall be the Secretary of the Syndicate, and in this way the Press’s executive body is formally connected – and accountable – to the University via the Syndicate. Responsibility for the day-to-day management of the Press is delegated by the Syndicate to the Chief Executive Officer and the Press Board, which includes a Chief Financial Officer.

Chapter I of the *Ordinances* determines that the Press Syndicate shall consist of:
- The Vice-Chancellor of the University or a duly appointed deputy as Chair;
- A University Officer appointed by the Council;
- Sixteen members of the Senate appointed by the Council in the Michaelmas Term to serve for four years from 1 January following their appointment.

These 18 Syndics are supplemented by the Secretary (= Chief Executive of the Press).

The Press has in recent times also appointed various co-opted members who bring a range of subject and business expertise to the [Press & Assessment Board](#) (PAB), a committee reporting both to the Press Syndicate and to the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate, which exercises overall strategic and financial governance of the Press and of Cambridge Assessment on behalf of their Syndicates; and to the five Press-related sub-committees of the PAB, which are:
- **Academic Publishing Committee**
  Provides quality assurance and formal approval for the academic book and journal titles published.
- **English Language Teaching and Education Publishing Committee**
  Provides quality assurance and oversight of ELT and Education output.
- **Audit Committee**
  Ensures the integrity of the Press’s reporting processes and systems of financial governance, control and risk management.
- **Remuneration Committee**
  Determines the packages of the most senior executives.
- **Nominations Committee**
  Determines the make-up of the PAB.
The Press Syndicate is one of the oldest continuously operating corporate governance functions anywhere in the world. Syndics first met under the name ‘Curators’ on 23 August 1698, their role having been defined by Regius Professor Richard Bentley in 1696 in a set of notes headed ‘The design of ye Press’. At that first meeting 13 members discussed and approved the printing of quarto editions of Virgil, Horace, Terence, Catullus, Tibullus and Propertius. A later project was the second edition of Newton’s *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica*, one of the great foundational texts of modern science, published in 1713.

In 1733 the name ‘Syndicate’ was adopted, and that body has, along with the sub-committees it spawned along the way, overseen the affairs of the Press ever since. Many notable strategic and financial decisions were taken by the Syndicate (e.g. to re-enter the Bibles market in 1741; or to cut costs by streamlining operations in 1849; or to close the Printing House in 2013), and commitments made to projects and publications which include such great works as the *Baskerville Bible* (1763), *Codex Bezae* facsimile (1793), *Cambridge Stereotype Bible* (1804), Doughty’s *Arabia Deserta* (1888), Thomson’s *Conduction of Electricity through Gases* and Moore’s *Principia Ethica* (both 1903), Jeans’ *The Mysterious Universe* (1930), Needham’s *History of Science and Civilisation in China* (1954-); Stahl’s *Essential Psychopharmacology* (1996-), *The New Cambridge History of Islam* (2010); ground-breaking ELT and Education materials such as the *Cambridge Latin Course*, *Cambridge School Mathematics Project*, *New Cambridge Shakespeare*, *Grammar in Use*, *Cambridge English Course*, *Interchange*, *Touchstone*, *Cambridge English Empower*; and a wide range of influential scholarly and scientific journals beginning with the *Journal of Physiology* (1893) and leading to a list of some 350 today. Perhaps one of the Syndicate’s less fortuitous decisions was to decline (in 1877) a proposal for what eventually became the *Oxford English Dictionary*!

The present Syndicate preserves its dual historical roles of ensuring that the content published meets a standard of quality sufficiently high for it to merit the Cambridge imprimatur, and of overseeing the business operations of the Press. Increasingly the Syndicate is called upon to exercise judgment on a range of digital offerings and technological services as well as traditional print publications, and its expertise is being shaped to equip it for this extended role.

Cambridge University Press’s mission is to further through publication the University’s objective of advancing learning, knowledge and research worldwide; and to do this it aims to operate sustainably for the public benefit a publishing programme that upholds the integrity of the Cambridge name. The optimal governance of such a mission-driven organisation, which remains an integral part of the world’s leading research institution and shares its educational charitable status while also having to operate in a highly competitive and fast-changing commercial world, is the challenge for the present-day Press Syndicate – a challenge which its members find richly rewarding and never short of interest.

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