

Directors' Cut

When did you start working for Intellect and what was your first role?

May: I did an internship with Intellect in 2002, which I very much enjoyed. Masoud Yazdani, the company's founder, had a real passion and optimism. After a short stint in London, I returned to Bristol to join Intellect's team of four. The company felt exciting and full of possibilities and potential. My first role involved working on books. I did everything – acquisition, managing peer review, typesetting, cover design, eBook conversion, marketing, distribution - I remember feeling like I had been thrown in at the deep end, but it was an amazing way to learn about publishing. That entrepreneurial spirit has always been at the core of Intellect, along with a willingness to explore new ideas.

Holly: I joined Intellect in July 2009. After years working in magazine design I was excited to start my role as company designer. Working for Intellect has always allowed me to be creative. It is a collaborative environment where I am constantly inspired by both my colleagues and our authors. Now, as Marketing Director, I still help with the occasional cover, but spend most of my time running the business. This calls for creative problem solving skills, pragmatism and a sense of humour!

Having two women directors isn't unique but it should be celebrated. Has the landscape



Holly Rose,
Marketing Director

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Holly Rose".



May Yao,
Production Director

changed for women and do you have any advice for women entering the industry in 2024?

May: Publishing is an industry with overwhelmingly more women than men, but the balance starts to shift at the executive level. The barriers around leadership positions are probably similar for women in publishing as those in other industries. However, as an industry of women, it feels like publishing should be well positioned to remove those barriers. There are three directors at Intellect – Mark Lewis, Holly and me – meaning that women are in the majority. Holly and I work well together as a team. We have different areas of focus; Holly tends to cover marketing, creative and people, while I usually cover issues related to editorial, production and finance. Nevertheless, we see our roles as quite fluid and serve as back up for each other, which I think is a great strength for the company as well as for us personally – both of us being working mothers. I believe thinking creatively about how work is structured within a company can help promote gender equality. Women don't need particular advice on entering the industry, the challenge often comes later, when navigating the balance between career and family. My advice would be honest with yourself and your employer about your time and energy commitments, find an employer who is supportive and offers flexibility, and colleagues who can be your back up.

Holly: It is an absolute pleasure working alongside May and the many inspiring women at Intellect. Like May, I don't feel publishing has more barriers than any other industry for female leaders and for me that comes down to the 'juggle' – balancing a career with caring responsibilities, many of which still fall to females in our society. We are lucky at Intellect to be able to work flexibly and, when needed, from home. This enables me to care for my children and continue working in a profession I love. ▶

My advice to women in the industry is to go for the opportunities when they arise – don't worry about what you want to be doing in three years' time. Find an organization where you aren't afraid to ask questions about things you don't understand – the jargon, the business rationale, etc. Imposter syndrome predominantly affects women and unnecessary self-doubt can stop your progress... And one last thing – email your member of parliament or equivalent about childcare reform!



The publishing industry has received criticism for its lack of diversity. What is Intellect doing to address this?

May: We are very much aware of the lack of diversity in publishing and are always looking for ways to make a real difference. In our recruitment process, we use Creative Access, a social enterprise platform that provides opportunities to individuals from underrepresented backgrounds in the creative industries. We support the Strive Internship Scheme, which enables us to offer paid work experience placements to Black, Asian, and minority ethnic university students interested in a career in publishing. We actively engage with such industry-wide groups as the Independent Publishers Guild Diversity and Inclusivity Action Group and support the Joint Statement of Principles of the Coalition for Diversity and Inclusion in Scholarly Communications as part of our commitment to fostering diversity and inclusion.



Holly: There should be no economic barriers to enter the arts as a profession, but the publishing industry, like design, can be difficult to break into for disadvantaged groups. After graduating twenty years ago, I worked for free during the day to gain experience in a design studio and worked long nights waitressing to pay the bills. Because of this, I think some of the most important efforts Intellect has made, in this regard, are our paid, flexible internship programmes and transparency





when it comes to wages.

It's hard to pick favourites, but are there any projects you are especially proud to be associated with?

May: I'm most proud of the new and emerging subject areas we have supported – both the research communities around them and the scholars themselves of course. Our journals have been really impactful in this way, and it's rewarding to watch the evolution of a field of research over time. Because we publish both books and journals in our subject areas, our publications work synergistically to bring together and promote the researchers in those areas. We have seen this with so many of our journals – *Craft Research*, *Short Film Studies*, *Metal Music Studies*, the *Journal of Gaming & Virtual Worlds*, the list goes on.



Holly: Some of the projects where I have designed the whole book are close to my heart. Reading a blurb, then designing the cover and internals is very rewarding. When the finished product comes back from the printers it gives me an enormous sense of pride to have been part of its creation.

In your opinion, what makes Intellect different from other scholarly publishers?

May: While we operate as a scholarly press, we are independent from any institution. Because of this, and the fact we are also the shareholders, we don't need to justify our editorial decisions. We are legally categorized as a commercial press, but our operations are guided by a mission-centred approach, meaning that we function as a not-for-profit organisation. All profits generated are reinvested into the business to support the publication of forthcoming books and journals, and not paid out in shareholder dividends.

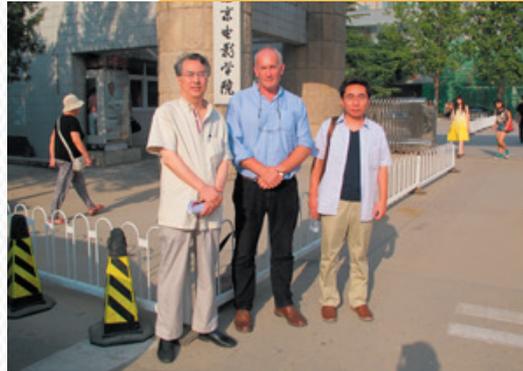


Holly: Intellect stands out thanks to our creativity, integrity and commitment to transparency, and our business planning process is emblematic of this. Every September, each member of our various teams (journals, books, marketing, editorial, etc.) reflect on the previous year and collaboratively agree on actions to create the overall business plan for the following year. More broadly, at the core of our ethos lies our mission to champion new and emerging research areas; being a small organization allows us to quickly respond to innovative ideas or exciting projects. While we recognize that some of our publications may not command a large market, we prioritize the author's voice and the communities we serve over profit.

What do you see as the biggest threats to Intellect and other independent scholarly publishers?

May: I think Open Access could be considered a threat – particularly independent publishers – but also a potential opportunity. It's still not clear where the funding will come from in the arts and humanities, and how it will remain sustainable. It's also difficult to see how Open Access can be made genuinely equitable, which is one of this publishing model's principal tenets. In a similar vein: artificial intelligence. There is so much potential, but it's not yet clear what the impact will be on research, publishing and scholarly communication. Mark, our Managing Director, looks at this in his article about Intellect's relationship to AI.

Holly: There are certainly challenges facing Intellect and other scholarly publishers – Open Access and artificial intelligence obviously being among the biggest. The declining budgets of libraries also seriously limits growth opportunities and investment in important new technologies, including AI, which will become vital parts of the publishing process. Bigger academic publishers get a lot of bad press from academics and





librarians, accusing them of exploitation and greed. Unfortunately, we all get tarred with the same brush despite the fact most small publishers only just get by and are dedicated to providing a good service at a reasonable cost. Luckily, when we are challenged, it's very easy for Intellect to demonstrate that, like most university presses, we operate as a not-for-profit and provide a valued service to our authors, editors, librarians and readers. Sadly, the media prefers the more sensationalist narrative.

What is your vision for the future of Intellect?

May: Our vision is to get better at what we already do well; we want to remain an independent publisher in the arts and humanities, and work collaboratively with our authors and editors to share their ideas as widely as possible. In practical terms, this means engaging with the latest research trends and developments, understanding the needs of librarians, and building on our existing, international network of sales and distribution partnerships. Whatever the future brings, I know Intellect will retain the honesty, integrity, humility, transparency, passion and optimism that defines us.

Holly: Our focus remains on working in new and emerging areas of the arts and humanities. Intellect will grow organically by remaining true to our ethos and continuing to support more authors and editors in important academic debates. We will also focus on investing in technologies that will support librarians across the world to enable more easy access for researchers and learners. We will continue to attend academic conferences to connect with and meet the needs of our communities, and ensure we are publishing timely and significant research. •

