RISE BOOKSELLING

eibf The voice of booksellers

Industry insights

Educational and vocational training programmes for booksellers



What are Industry Insights?

RISE Industry Insights is a series of research papers that investigate priority topics for the bookselling sector. They give insights into key issues, policy reforms and external initiatives that affect the sector. In addition, they provide RISE network members with tools to engage with relevant political stakeholders, culture sector professionals and private sector representatives to ensure that their priorities are adequately upheld and supported.

This Industry Insights paper was produced in September 2026 by Tora Åsling and Lorenzo Dall'Omo, respectively Policy Advisor and Policy Officer at the European and International Booksellers Federation (EIBF).

About RISE Bookselling

'Resilience, Innovation and Sustainability for the Enhancement of Bookselling' (RISE Bookselling), is an EU co-funded programme run by the European and International Booksellers Federation (EIBF) for its network members, aimed at upscaling, reinforcing and maximising the capacity and resilience of the European bookselling sector.

About EIBF

The European and International Booksellers Federation (EIBF) is a non-commercial European and international umbrella organisation representing national booksellers associations and booksellers across Europe and worldwide. Our mission is to represent our members and their interests on a global platform, as well as to provide a forum for cooperation and foster the exchange of best practices.

About Creative Europe

Creative Europe is an EU programme that supports a wide range of cultural and creative sectors, as well as encouraging cooperation and exchanges among cultural organisations and artists within Europe and beyond.

Contents

Introduction **4**

Methodology **5**

Case studies **5**

- **FRANCE** 6
- **GERMANY** 10
- **ITALY** 14
- **UK AND IRELAND** 18

Concluding remarks **22**

Acknowledgements **23**

Endnotes **23**



Introduction

Bookselling is not merely a trade; it is a craft that requires a deep understanding of cultural and political trends, digital literacy, financial management, community engagement and much more. In an era marked by rapid digital transformation, economic uncertainty, and shifting political priorities, today's booksellers must also be innovators, capable of leveraging digital tools, adopting green practices to promote sustainability, and fostering inclusivity. Across Europe, the resilience of the bookselling sector is tied to the availability of high-quality, adaptive educational programmes that equip aspiring and established booksellers with the skills needed to navigate a complex and evolving landscape.

This *Industry Insights* report, produced by the European and International Booksellers Federation (EIBF) as part of the RISE Bookselling initiative, explores the state of educational and vocational training programmes for booksellers across Europe. Through in-depth case studies from France, Germany, Italy, the UK, and Ireland, the report examines how these programmes are structured, funded and highlights the diversity of approaches (from university degrees and vocational apprenticeships to industry-led online platforms) that are shaping the next generation of booksellers.

This report seeks to answer critical questions: How are educational programmes preparing booksellers for the realities of the modern marketplace? What are the financial and structural models that ensure their longevity? And how can policy interventions support both the profession and the institutions that train its practitioners? By analysing the strengths, challenges, and future needs of bookselling education, this report aims to provide actionable insights for booksellers, educators, policymakers, and industry stakeholders.

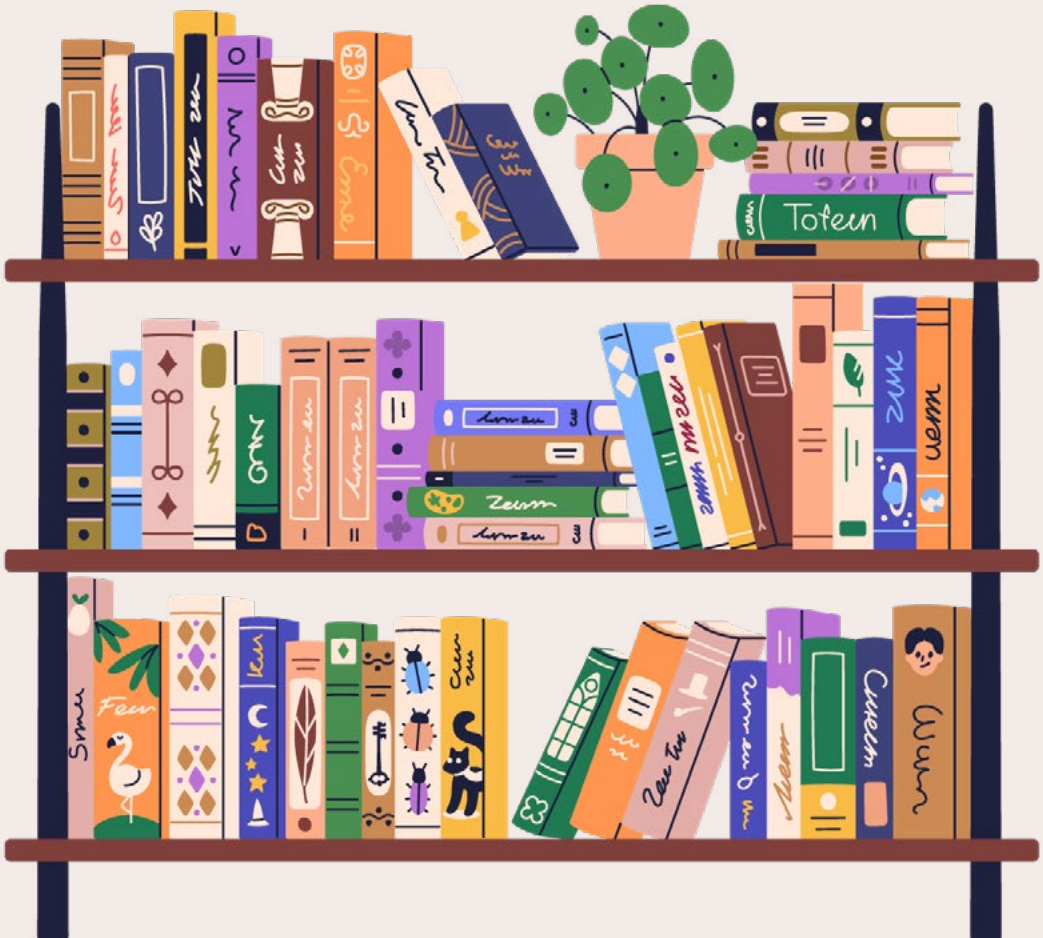
Methodology

The findings presented here are based on interviews with educators, vocational trainers, and booksellers' associations, offering a representative, panoramic view of the opportunities and obstacles shaping the future of bookselling education in Europe.



Case studies

In this *Industry Insights* report, we present four case studies from five different countries: France, Germany, Italy, Ireland and the UK. Ranging from complete 2-5 year programmes offered by vocational schools and universities to fast-paced industry-led training courses, this report offers a deep-dive into four different paths to studying the art of bookselling.



France



TYPE(S) OF EDUCATION OFFERED:
University degrees at bachelor and master level; vocational training programmes



PROGRAMMES OFFERED BY:
Around 10
Universities and 3 vocational schools



PROGRAMMES AVAILABLE SINCE:
1970s



LENGTH OF STUDY (AVERAGE):
2-5 years
Depending on degree

Introduction and context

In France, if one wishes to study bookselling, there is a multitude of options available across the country. While it is not per se required that you have a formal education in bookselling to open or take up work in a bookshop, it is strongly encouraged, and often expected by the industry. The consistently high subscription to the bookselling study programmes is a testament to this structure, and the popularity–sometimes attributed to the public recognition of bookselling as an 'essential' service during the Covid-19 pandemic–also reveals that bookselling is considered an attractive profession by many. However, it is important to note that the demographic constitution of students is rather homogenous, tied to a specific gender, age and socioeconomic background, as we shall discover later in this report.

This Industry Insights will focus on the bookselling studies offered at one French university, the Paris Nanterre University, as a representative example. Situated in the western parts of Paris, the Paris Nanterre University offers programmes in several disciplines, including in 'book professions' such as publishing, library and information science, and bookselling. Out of the 35,000 students that Paris Nanterre receives yearly, around 20 complete the bookselling specialisation bachelor and 15 the master.

For this case study, we spoke with Nina Stavisky, Head of the Bookselling Strand at the Paris Nanterre University, and general delegate to the French booksellers association Association des librairies informatisées et utilisatrices des réseaux électroniques (ALIRE).

Curriculum, programme structure and expected learning outcomes

There is a national curriculum for university programmes on the bookselling specialisation strand, but in practice the education offered depends on the teachers at that particular school. At the Paris Nanterre University, students may pursue their studies in bookselling from bachelor to master's degree.

The curriculum of the bachelor's degree in bookselling differs slightly depending on the university, but generally adheres to the following structure (with the addition of internships in bookshops at varying lengths throughout the programme):

1st year: Includes visits to bookshops, exploring the sociology, culture and economics of bookshops; the function of bookshops as public spaces, as well as the history of categorisation and curated sections in bookshops.

2nd year: Introduces more practical elements, like technical and IT elements of bookselling, the French fixed price system, how to sell (B2C, B2G), and some legal courses. This year also explores how to build a curation of books.

3rd year: Dives into the management of finances of bookshop, negotiating with distributors, and other practical parts of promoting books such as setting up window displays, organising events and reading sessions, among other things.

Throughout the three years, the students also receive academic courses in history, sociology, literature, general and academic knowledge, foreign languages and communication skills courses.

The Paris Nanterre University also offers a special option for those who already hold a Bachelor's or Master's degree in another subject to complete the programme and obtain a bachelor's degree in bookselling in one year.

Within the bachelor and master programmes at the Paris Nanterre University, students are expected to acquire key skills necessary to work as a bookseller and manage a bookshop. This includes, among other things, the following:

Environmental sustainability

The programme teaches key skills for green practices in bookselling. While these have been integrated as partial elements in several courses up until now, the programme plans to place further focus on environmental sustainability in bookselling and offer teaching in a standalone course.

Digital skills

Obtaining a wide variety of digital skills is essential for a modern bookseller and therefore a key focus of the programme. Ranging from social media management and graphic design to logistics, point of sale system management, e-commerce and e-lending, among other things, the programme aims to make graduates well-equipped to take on bookselling as a hybrid profession–which naturally occupies both the physical and the digital space.

Diversity and inclusion

There are no dedicated courses or expected learning outcomes on diversity and inclusion. Some time is dedicated to the topic of bibliodiversity, i.e., cultural diversity in the world of books.

Preparedness for climate emergencies, war and other crises

These subjects are not yet part of the curriculum.

Professional experience (internship) in bookshops

Throughout the programme, emphasis is placed on practical professional experience: between 22 and 26 weeks of the bachelor's programme, divided over the three years of study, is dedicated to internships in bookshops in France or abroad.

At master's level, the emphasis on practical experience is reinforced: during three days of the week, students are required to take up a so called 'apprenticeship' in a bookshop for which they may earn around 50-65% of minimum wage.

Long-term financial sustainability

Funding for education and trainings in bookselling comes from either or both public and private sources depending on the outlet. The Paris Nanterre University, like most French universities, is publicly funded and has very limited tuition fees, between €170 and €255 per year depending on the diploma. Prospective students are therefore granted access to a solid education in bookselling at minimum personal cost.

This financial model is ostensibly dependable and should ensure the longevity of bookselling study programmes, however, as the geopolitical climate has transformed dramatically over the past years, national priorities have shifted towards defence and preparedness. We can observe that this trend, coupled with inflation and the energy crisis, tends to draw public spending away from education and culture. This is true for many European countries, not least France, and puts bookselling studies, and any publicly funded education and cultural programmes, at risk.

Advantages

The main advantages of bookselling studies in France are their robustness, availability and accessibility: programmes teach a standardised curriculum and are offered at multiple universities and vocational schools across the country, at little to no cost for the students as the majority are publicly funded. Furthermore, the public recognition of the importance of bookshops during the Covid-19 pandemic lends the profession a reputability, attracting many new students to pursue a degree in bookselling.

Additionally, a key strength of bookselling studies in France is the focus on practical experience and the possibility for students to work and earn some income as apprentice booksellers during their studies.



Challenges

Besides the apprehension for the continuity of funding for education and culture, one of the main challenges cited by Nina Stavisky, Head of the Bookselling strand at the Paris Nanterre University, was the saturation of the job market. While it is uplifting to see the popularity and high subscription rates to bookselling studies, the disheartening truth is that the market is simply not able to absorb all recent graduates and many will therefore struggle to find work. This situation can be explained in many ways, but Stavisky points to the heavy economic pressure many bookshops face amid the cost-of-living and energy crises, which leaves them struggling to take on apprentices, let alone hire new staff.

It's symptomatic that, in 2025, for the first time, France reported more bookshop closures than openings.[1]

Furthermore, Stavisky highlights a shift in the sociology and culture of the trade, ongoing over the past 15 years. To put it frankly, bookselling is in the process of turning into a low-income profession, shifting from a predominantly male, upper-class trade, to now a majorly female, lower-class profession. At the Paris Nanterre University, for example, 90-95% of students choosing the bookselling strand today are women from working class backgrounds.

Moreover, the low salaries engender a new problematic trend: after a few years in the business, many of the skilled booksellers choose to leave bookselling, moving towards higher-paid positions in other fields and thus creating a (skills and generational) gap in the workforce.

Looking ahead: future of bookselling schools and policy needs

The bookselling trade, and all entities offering education in bookselling are and will continue to face many multifaceted challenges ranging from digitalisation and green practices to responding to geopolitical shifts and cost of living and other crises. Trade representatives caution that, should matters continue along the current course, some bookselling studies will have to close or be drastically reduced, because it's not sustainable to have so many students when the industry cannot absorb them. Equipping the bookselling workforce with the right skills, and retaining skilled and experienced workers, will therefore be essential to ensure the resilience and adaptability of the trade. As Head of the bookselling strand at the Paris Nanterre and General Delegate to ALIRE, Nina Stavisky, puts it: "Bookselling is a real job which requires advanced concrete skills for which you need education."

When asked whether some challenges could be solved through policies and targeted actions by the government, Stavisky pinpoints three key measures that would have the highest positive impact:

- Maintain funding for universities;
- Implement support schemes to alleviate the cost-of-living crisis (not targeted at booksellers exclusively, but at the general public to strengthen purchasing power);
- Invest in reading promotion schemes to strengthen reading culture.

She humorously adds that European governments should "buy less bullets and more books," alluding to how the shift in political priorities harms the cultural and educational sectors, as discussed further above.

Ending on a positive note, Stavisky shares exciting plans for a collaboration project with Ecole de la librairie and Mediacampus in Germany to offer exchange opportunities for students to visit vocational training campuses in other countries. They are currently looking into funding opportunities within Erasmus+.

[1] Guerrin, Michel. "La lecture s'effondre et la conséquence est là : une bonne partie des librairies sont menacées de disparition." Le Monde, 19 June 2026, www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2026/06/19/la-lecture-s-effondre-et-la-consequence-est-la-une-bonne-partie-des-librairies-sont-menacees-de-disparition_6704889_3232.html. Accessed 6 Aug. 2026.

Germany



TYPE(S) OF EDUCATION OFFERED:
apprenticeships, vocational programmes, and university degrees



PROGRAMMES OFFERED BY:
Various institutions across the country, including Mediacampus



PROGRAMMES AVAILABLE SINCE:
1946
Mediacampus



LENGTH OF STUDY (AVERAGE):
3 years

Introduction and context

Germany possesses one of the widest networks of bookshops within Europe. In total, there are around 4,400 bookstores–including branches and bookshops at train stations and airports–as well as many thousands of other book retail outlets.

To launch a bookselling career, the most common avenue is for aspiring booksellers to undergo vocational courses in parallel to apprenticeships, not dissimilar to other vocational career paths. Indeed, Germany's dual model consists in this two-pronged training, with one part anchored in practice (at the company in the relevant profession, so in this case, a bookshop) and the other anchored in theory (at the institution offering vocational courses).

One of these institutions, which will serve as the example for the German case study, is **Mediacampus Frankfurt**, the central training and education centre for the German book and media industry, a subsidiary of the Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels (German Publishers and Booksellers Association) and located on a 13,000-square-meter residential campus in Frankfurt-Seckbach. It provides vocational schooling, seminars, and advanced career programs for publishers, booksellers, and media professionals.

For this case study, we spoke with Mediacampus' Judith Hoffmann, Head of Professional Training and Business Development, and Nele Drewello, Head of Academics, to better understand how the programme works.

Curriculum, programme structure and expected learning outcomes

Firstly, Mediacampus offers a plethora of programmes, with differences in content, duration, and the final academic qualification awarded. While many programmes also equip you with skills relevant to other areas of the book trade, such as publishing, the following are directly aimed at shaping and training future booksellers:

Buchhändler:in Ausbildung :
an apprenticeship lasting for three years, alternating between academic courses and professional experience in a bookshop

Bachelor Professional Buchhandel:
an advanced professional qualification lasting around 14 months aimed at those who already have substantial amount of work experience and would like to transition towards more senior roles in the book trade (such as those in management)

Grundlagen des Buchhandels:
a distance-learning course lasting around 19 months aimed at those wanting to pivot into a career in the book trade

For this specific case study, we will delve deeper into the programme most pursued by budding booksellers: the apprenticeship.

Drewello highlights that the specific programme offered at Mediacampus differs from other public vocational schools, which typically offer up to two days of classes per week, as it instead runs an educational programme consisting in two nine-week blocks across students' apprenticeships. The first block is usually taken after working in their respective bookshop for a year, while the second is taken shortly before their final exam.

The educational curriculum is divided into thirteen areas of study, with a greater focus on sales, purchasing, marketing, and e-commerce. The specific courses include:

- Conducting sales talks in a customer-oriented manner
- Processing payment transactions in sales
- Procuring, receiving and storing items of the book trade
- Capture and represent business processes
- Managing special sales situations
- Success-oriented management of business processes
- Advising customers on book trade items
- Attract and retain customers with marketing concepts
- Developing a business in the book trade

After completing their training, the students are much more familiarised with essential skills of the bookselling profession, such as curating a product selection, providing customer advice tailored to specific target groups, handling all internal bookshop operations, and planning all the related costs these entail.

The campus also boasts an in-house bookshop, where practical courses such as product presentation and sales training are taught, where an entrepreneurial mindset and approach is encouraged among the students. That said, their actual work experience remains at the students' respective bookshops themselves, where they are carrying out their apprenticeships.

Furthermore, the courses offered have evolved over time to meet the demands of an increasingly changing society and have gone beyond traditional aspects of the profession itself, such as the addition of workshops on social interaction and mental health, contributing to building the students' overall resilience and equipping them with human skills on top of the practical skills acquired through the other courses and the apprenticeship itself. Students can also participate in extracurricular clubs and attend Mediacampus' activities at the Frankfurt Book Fair, further embedding them in the ecosystem of the bookselling trade.

Environmental sustainability

Sustainability is currently not treated as a separate subject, but rather as an integral element incorporated in the courses already offered. However, Mediacampus also leads an internal project called "Green Pilots", in which students voluntarily commit to advocating for issues relating to sustainability throughout their time at the institution.

Digital skills

Digital skills are also incorporated throughout the curriculum, given their increasing importance in the profession in the recent years. The students learn to work with and use AI, gain digital literacy, as well as important implications of the digital age such as the legal aspects like copyright law. To further bolster the learning of these skills, Mediacampus has developed tools such as self-study units and digital learning content which can be easily accessed through their own media library, available to all students.

Diversity and inclusion

There are no dedicated courses or expected learning outcomes on diversity and inclusion.

Preparedness for climate emergencies, war and other crises

There are no dedicated courses or expected learning outcomes on preparedness for climate emergencies, war and other crises.

Professional experience (internship) in bookshops

Professional experience is a fundamental component of the apprenticeship programme and is expected to last around three years (including the two nine-week blocks of academic courses).

Long-term financial sustainability

The vocational courses are usually paid for by the respective bookshop the student is working for, and there are cases in which students have ad-hoc arrangements with their apprenticeship hosts regarding tuition and accommodation costs, which students will also have to partly cover. In the instances where students must cover some of the costs, funding is available from the Support Associations of the German Publishers and Booksellers Association ("*Förderverein Berufsbildung Buchhandel e.V.*" and "*Sozialwerk des Deutschen Buchhandels*"). In addition, the Mediacampus Frankfurt also receives dedicated vocational school funding per student from the State of Hesse.

There are some options for state funds for the professional trainings and bachelor degree courses as well, but usually they are paid for by the employers or the participants themselves.

Advantages

One of the biggest advantages of the German system is its vast offer as well as its optimal blend of both the practical and the theoretical. Given the possibility, especially within the Mediacampus programme, to swiftly alternate between academic courses and work experience, there is an immediate chance for the students to put the knowledge and skills they are acquiring to the test in a professional environment. This also enables the students to immediately enter the workforce upon completing their studies, as opposed to "delaying" it further with other internships to gain additional work experience.

Furthermore, the interdisciplinarity of certain programmes are also not to be taken for granted. As explored through the case study, while a particular attention is given to practical skills, there is a holistic approach towards bookselling as a profession not only pertaining to the bookshop itself, but the society and community it finds itself in.

Challenges

According to Hoffmann there has been a general shift in consumer behaviour, with the expectation of convenience leading to a proclivity towards immediate availability. These expectations are best met online, with consumers being frustrated when such demands are not being met with the same immediacy in brick-and-mortar stores. As a result, tones and discussions in the bookshops have become more confrontational, which of course is now part and parcel of the daily experience of a bookseller.

Hoffmann also notes that the retail sector in Germany as a whole is under increasing pressure. According to official statistics from the *Börsenverein*[2] the number of people buying books in 2025, compared to 2024, has declined by 4.9%, with the biggest decline recorded among consumers aged 10-15 (30.6%) across the same dates. Similarly, total turnover has also decreased, from €9.88 billion in 2025 to €9.62 billion in 2024. In addition to this, as hinted before, the online book trade remained stable while physical bookstores, which remain the largest sales channel for books, suffered losses.

These fluctuations in the industry will have to be considered when moulding the vocational training programmes of the future, as adapting to the changing industry will also have to be a key skill future booksellers will ultimately need to have. Hoffmann says that, while keeping up with these changes in society is becoming increasingly challenging, books and reading are nonetheless enjoying great popularity, especially among younger people. According to Hoffmann, this gives the industry a huge reason for hope.

Looking ahead: future of bookselling schools and policy needs

Hoffmann considers it crucial to strengthen and preserve the culture of debate across society as a whole and learn to listen to one another again, especially when living through times of extreme political polarisation. It is fundamental now more than ever to uphold freedom of speech, as well as freedom of the press, otherwise bookselling as a profession will also be threatened.

There is, however, great power lying in the book industry, as everyone, from booksellers to publishers, can contribute to upholding these cornerstone values. Hoffmann also stresses that to preserve the diversity and freedom of thought that books represent and grant, from the institutional side, it is also particularly important to maintain laws and protections such as fixed book pricing and lower VAT rates for books.

While there is much to be concerned about, both within and outside the book trade, there are also encouraging and positive signals that should propel us forward. One of these, Hoffmann notes, is a positive trend with a stable number of apprentices in bookselling, pointing to a continuing appreciation for the profession. Bookselling is still valued–on both sides of the counter.

[2] "Reading Literacy Declining, Need for Action Is Growing: Young People Are Buying Fewer Books." Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels, 9 July 2026, www.boersenverein.de/presse/pressemitteilungen/detailseite/reading-literacy-declining-need-for-action-is-growing-young-people-are-buying-fewer-books/. Accessed 25 Sept. 2026.

Italy



TYPE(S) OF EDUCATION OFFERED:

Certification of participation



PROGRAMMES OFFERED BY:

Scuola Librai Italiani and **Scuola Mauri**

PROGRAMMES AVAILABLE SINCE:

2006 Scuola Librai Italiani
1983 Scuola Mauri



LENGTH OF STUDY (AVERAGE):

6 months

Scuola Librai Italiani

Introduction and context

Italy has a robust network of bookshops, with approximately 3,700 bookshops active across the entire country. The *Associazione Librai Italiani–ALI* (Italian Booksellers Association) represents around a fourth of these bookshops, with over 1,000 members, both individual bookshops as well as regional and local bookshop associations.

Among its numerous activities and missions, such as national advocacy and support to bookshops, ALI also runs a flagship educational programme originally aimed at shaping future booksellers, called *Scuola Librai Italiani–SLI* (Italian Bookselling School). The course, founded 20 years ago, is the only one in the country directly affiliated with a bookseller's association. Today, the SLI also offers several masterclasses for booksellers who wish to upskill and progress in their already established careers.

There is also another bookselling school in Italy, the *Scuola per Librai Umberto e Elisabetta Mauri* (The Umberto and Elisabetta Mauri Bookselling School), the first one founded in the country over 40 years ago in 1983. As opposed to a curated single curriculum, the Mauri school offers individual seminars and classes specialising in different aspects of the industry.

For this case study, we spoke with Aldo Addis, Vice-President of ALI, who also acts as the Director of the SLI.

Curriculum, programme structure and expected learning outcomes

The SLI offers a programme that runs for six months, from April to October of each year. Courses are offered mostly online (with various in person events and masterclasses also organised), and the students must attend twice a week, with each lesson lasting for two hours for a total of four weekly hours. Addis stresses that while the cultural significance of bookshops is not ignored, the course also aims at underlining the bookshop's reality as a business which can, in the end, only be sustained financially in the long-term by profit and turnover. This is why the programme places a great emphasis on the operational aspects of running a bookshop, reflected in the structure of the programme which revolves around six main areas:

The Economic, Social, and Cultural Context of Bookshops

To develop a critical understanding of the macroeconomic and cultural forces that influence bookshops and to identify opportunities and threats for the industry.

The Bookshop as a Business and Strategic Marketing for Bookshops

To learn advanced tools for defining a robust business strategy, with a strong focus on creating value for the customer and competitive positioning.

Operational Marketing for Bookshops

To develop operational skills in day-to-day marketing, ensuring consistent and effective communication.

Core Operations of a Bookshop

To acquire practical tools for the efficient management of daily activities, from inventory to the cash register, with a focus on supply chain efficiency and space organization.

Financial Management

Advanced financial skills to ensure the bookshop's financial sustainability and support growth with clear data and metrics.

The Bookshop as a Hub for Social Gathering and Cultural Promotion

To build a true community of readers by organizing events both inside and outside the bookstore.

The academic staff is extremely varied and professors come from renowned Italian universities across the country, such as: Università Bocconi, Università La Sapienza, Università di Verona, Università Roma Tre, and Università Ca' Foscari. Lecturers also include figures from the industry such as booksellers, publishers, and librarians. In addition to the courses, the programme also includes a mandatory work placement in a bookshop (more detail is included in the dedicated section below).

Every year, around 30 students enrol in the course. Addis notes that while this number is stable, the makeup of the demographics has varied greatly over the years. Before the COVID-19 crisis, when the course was strictly in person, the students were almost all either fresh graduates or university students. During and after the COVID-19 emergency, the course's transition to an almost exclusive online model also enabled those already working to participate in the programme: this change ultimately also increased the average age of those attending the course. Addis notes, however, that this increase in age could also be a consequence of a wide social reckoning during the pandemic. Indeed, he says that the emergency gave the space and time for people to think about their future in many spheres of their lives, including the professional one: ''there are many people leaving their previous jobs to pursue a new one—the one they would have chosen if they hadn't chosen the wrong high school or university degree, if they hadn't had financial problems or a family business that needed to be passed on to them. These are all things they tell you during the application process''. While the age has varied greatly over the years, the gender of the students has not: around 80% of students is always female (which also reflects the demographics of the profession out 'in the real world').

Roughly, out of the 30 students in the cohort each year, two or three go on to open their own bookshops while the rest are typically hired by bookshops that are already operating; some even go on to work at the bookshop they interned at during the programme.

Environmental sustainability

There are no dedicated courses or expected learning outcomes on environmental sustainability.

Digital skills

Digital skills have increasingly become a key part of the course curriculum, specifically when it comes to topics like digital marketing and the effective employment of online sales platforms, two aspects of the profession which have become fundamental especially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Addis adds that, in the coming years, incorporating courses on AI will also be crucial, despite its future role in the profession not yet being clearly outlined or defined.

Diversity and inclusion

There are no dedicated courses or expected learning outcomes on diversity and inclusion.

Preparedness for climate emergencies, war and other crises

There are no dedicated courses or expected learning outcomes on preparedness for climate emergencies, war and other crises.

Professional experience (internship) in bookshops

Work placement in a bookshop is a mandatory part of the programme and coordinated entirely by the SLI. In total, students must complete 210 hours of internship, with 30 weekly hours across seven weeks. Over these seven weeks, the students get to see the entire daily life of a bookseller, spending their days working alongside everyone involved: ''there's a week when they handle deliveries, a week when they work on stocking the shelves, and so on and so forth''.

Long-term financial sustainability

The programme at SLI has two main funding streams. The first is tuition fees, which are €3,500 (VAT included), with an early bird discounted rate of around €2,800 (VAT included). Each year, roughly 60% of students take advantage of the early bird rate, while the remaining 40% pay the standard fee.

The second funding stream comes from sponsorships and partnerships with major publishing groups like Mondadori, Giunti, and Feltrinelli. These partnerships provide a fixed annual funding amount, ensuring stability in student enrolment and a consistent income year after year. New sponsors have also joined, recognizing the programme's value in giving them direct access to potential future clients within the book industry. Some sponsors are even invited as guest speakers, as their expertise is invaluable for students learning the dynamics of the publishing world–essential knowledge for aspiring booksellers.

Another example of this blend of sponsorship and education is SLI's collaboration with distributors, who offer students tours of their warehouses, providing equally important hands-on experience.

Advantages

The main advantage of the course, given its predominantly online structure, is its flexibility. This makes the programme much more accessible as it is a viable option for those currently already working as they do not have to choose between their career and their education. In turn, this leads to a wider diversity among the participants when it comes to age and experience, creating a more enriching learning environment. In addition, for those just starting out in their bookselling career, the internship is clearly also a huge asset as it gives them direct access to a wide network of bookshops as well as other partners, setting them up with a solid foundation and network in the industry.

Challenges

One of the current challenges that SLI faces, Addis reveals, is the disparity of students coming from the north of the country compared to those coming from the south. While this reflects a stark economic reality, with the bulk of economic activities and, consequently, employment opportunities coming from the North, it also reinforces inequalities already deeply entrenched in Italian society. When looking at the bookselling sector, this is also problematic given that the South is exactly where more bookshops should be opened. Indeed, according to data from ALI, around 33% of all bookshops in Italy operate in the South, which is why the SLI is aiming to attract more students from there.[3]

Looking ahead: future of bookselling schools and policy needs

Addis concludes that there are many challenges facing bookselling, as well as the wider book chain. The first one is the uncertainty around AI: ''will it be an asset or a problem? A problem or an opportunity?'', Addis asks. Before understanding how to insert it in the curriculum, one must understand how it works. That said, at least when it comes to the bookselling sphere, he believes it will mostly be linked to operational tasks related to stock management.

Another challenge facing the course is the personal conviction of the booksellers themselves–while they doubtlessly and ardently believe in the importance of their profession, as well as their passion behind it, many are still reticent to see training as valuable. In Addis' opinion, this is because those who are already booksellers (with perhaps many years of professional experience) do not fully understand the added value of attending a school for something they already know quite well. Addis would advise letting them know that you can always learn more, not just from those teaching, but from your fellow colleagues in the course with you, as they all come from different realities, contexts, and backgrounds.

Of course, there is also the wider systemic issue of economic hardship. Similar to what was mentioned by Stavisky, businesses across society, including bookshops, are experiencing heavy economic pressure under the current cost-of-living and energy crises. To properly address this, support schemes should be effectively implemented to alleviate the issues caused (not targeted at booksellers exclusively, but at the general public to strengthen purchasing power).

''Looking ahead to the future of the course'', Addis concludes, ''I see it in a very positive light, and I have to tell you that–as I said before–with a little effort, I'm sure we'll convince more and more booksellers to attend our courses''.

[3] Associazione Librai Italiani. Observatory of Bookshops in Italy–April 2026. Internal research report, Apr. 2026. Accessed 25 Sep. 2026.

UK and Ireland

TYPE(S) OF EDUCATION OFFERED:

Online courses and informal trainings, coaching programme & mentoring programme



PROGRAMMES OFFERED BY:

Booksellers Association of the UK and Ireland

PROGRAMMES AVAILABLE SINCE:

2022 Skills Hub
2017 BA Mentoring Programme
2021 Coaching
2006 Introduction to Bookselling Course



LENGTH OF STUDY (AVERAGE):

Flexible

Introduction and context

Since 2022, the Booksellers Association of the UK and Ireland (BA) has offered a service called the 'Skills Hub' to its members. The Skills Hub is a 'one-stop-shop', a resource library where members can access learning modules on all areas of bookselling. It includes specialised training sessions, downloadable guides, videos and podcasts. The platform is designed to be used on demand.

The Skills Hub is not a structured training programme designed to take booksellers through every stage of their career, nor does it lead to a formal qualification or certification. Instead, it is a practical resource library that brings together the information, guidance, templates, and tools booksellers need to run and develop a successful bookshop.

The Skills Hub is a widely used and appreciated resource. With 552 bookshops registered and a catalogue of 179 unique topics, the resource library had been accessed 4,238 times at the time of writing in July 2026. The most popular topic is the 'Guide to the National Year of Reading', closely followed by the 'Guide to hosting Author Events'.

While this case study will focus on the Skills Hub, it is relevant to note that the BA also offers one-to-one business mentoring for bookshop owners, called the BA Mentoring Programme.[4] Since its inception in 2017, the mentoring programme has helped well over 150 booksellers from across the UK and Ireland.

For this case study, we spoke with Sheila O'Reilly, Project Manager of the Skills Hub and former bookshop owner.

[4] Booksellers Association. "BA Mentoring Programme." The Booksellers Association of the United Kingdom & Ireland, 2025, www.booksellers.org.uk/Member-Services/Business-Support/BA-Mentoring-Programme. Accessed 6 Aug. 2026.

Curriculum, programme structure and expected learning outcomes

The Skills Hub is broadly structured into four categories of content:



BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES



STEP-BY-STEP GUIDES



INFORMATIONAL VIDEOS



PODCASTS

The Skills Hub also serves as a centralised platform for the dissemination of content, campaigns and guides produced by and supporting the work of the BA. For instance, there are guides on how to participate in BA coordinated campaigns, or on how to get the most out of the BA conference or London Book Fair.

Environmental sustainability

There are many resources that focus on environmental sustainability: from conference panel discussions, to presentation from industry experts.

Digital skills

There is a diverse offer of content on digital skills, covering, for instance, graphics in Canva, newsletters, engaging social media posts and digital marketing etc. There is also a series of user guides to stock management systems, such as Batchline and Gardlink, and to booktokens.

Diversity and inclusion

The BA has placed a lot of focus on inclusion and diversity in recent years. They work with Creative Access (CA), an organisation that aims to diversify creative industries and improve access to them. CA recently devised three modules to help booksellers diversify their workforces, make their workplaces more accessible, and deal with unconscious bias. Their tutorials are supplemented by bookseller testimonials as to how they have put diversity and inclusion initiatives into action.

The BA also worked in partnership with CA on a mentoring programme designed to support young people seeking to enter–or advance within–the bookselling profession. Fifteen mentees, selected by CA from communities historically underrepresented in the book trade, were paired with experienced bookseller mentors identified by the BA.

Preparedness for climate emergencies, war and other crises

The Skills Hub has modules on business continuity and on how to manage various emergencies, for instance flooding. There are also modules on how to de-escalate confrontational (and potentially abusive) situations. These modules were put together with the help of the Retail Trust, a charity which aims to support the health and wellbeing of those working in the retail industry in the UK.

Long-term financial sustainability

The Skills Hub is offered free of charge as a service to BA members. Each bookshop gets one licence, which can be utilised by the entire team in that shop, and which gives full access to the Skills Hub. Currently, 552 bookshops have registered on the platform.

After the initial set-up of the platform, which required a significant investment and was made possible thanks to the support of the Unwin Charitable Trust, the Skills Hub is now run and financed entirely by the BA and considered an essential member benefit. There is no 'tuition fee'. So far, maintenance costs have proved manageable.

Advantages

The Skills Hub offers a flexible learning strategy, accommodating the diverse experience and needs of the bookselling workforce. One of its key advantages is that it allows booksellers to dive in and upskill as required, and in their own time. The Skills Hub recognises that bookselling is exposed to social, cultural and political shifts and needs to adapt to, for example, digital, environmental, business and legislative developments. Content for the Hub can be created and added quickly, so the BA can be responsive to booksellers' ever-changing requirements.

Additionally, the Skills Hub offers the BA a unique place to streamline and collect practical guides and resources on current and pressing issues, thereby helping to fulfil the Association's mission to support its members at every stage of their bookselling careers.

Challenges

O'Reilly notes that the key challenge to digital courses is a noticeable decline in concentration abilities and shortened attention spans, especially among the younger generation. This development begs the question: how do we create content that caters for these limitations?

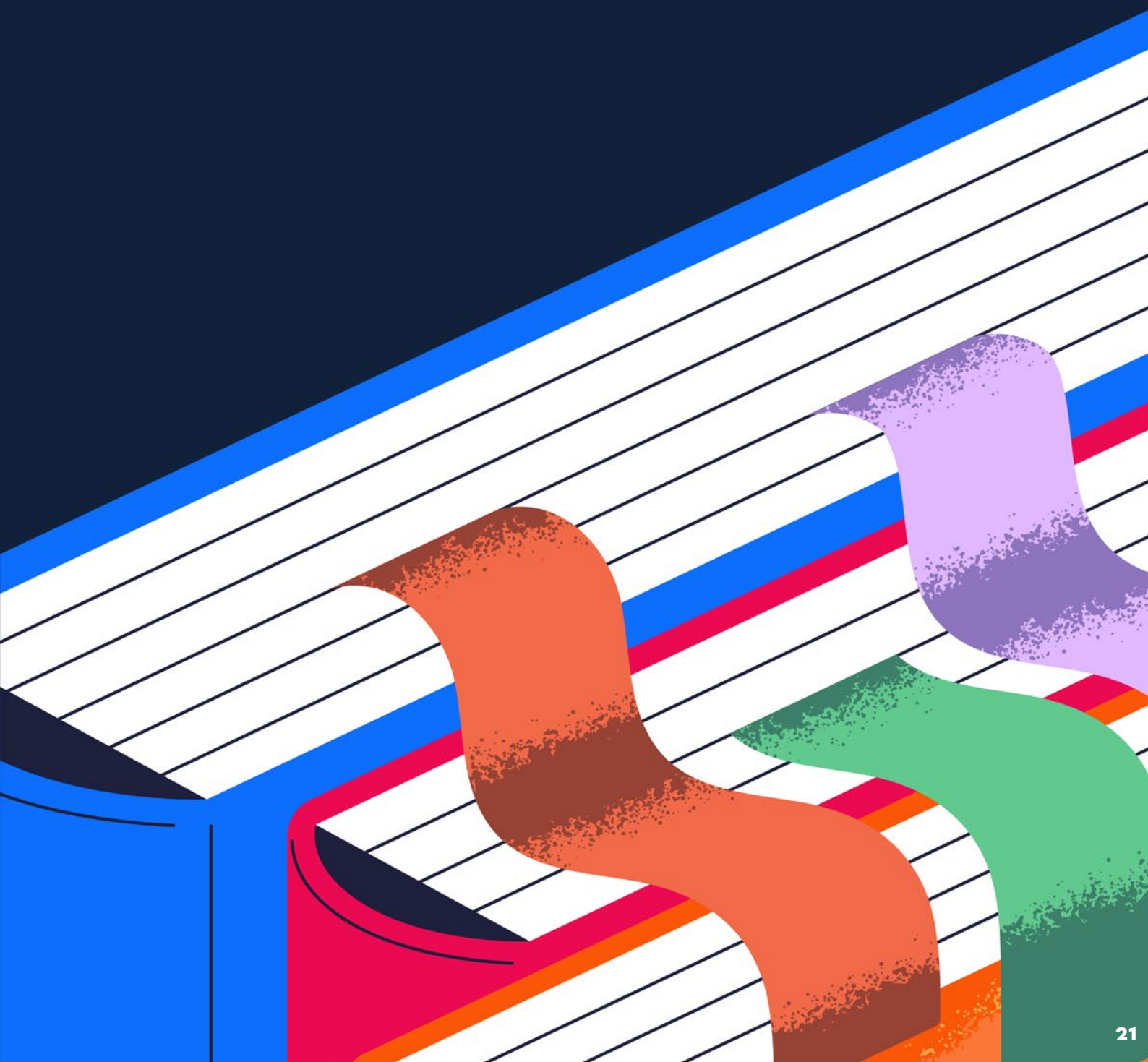
"You need a lot of motivation and discipline to complete online courses," O'Reilly says, noting that some Skills Hub courses are long and densely packed with information. It is therefore a big challenge to make the material engaging throughout those courses.

However, the flexibility and adaptability of the Skills Hub mean it can evolve promptly according to its users' evolving learning requirements. Shortform videos and podcasts, increasingly popular digital formats, are now frequently used for Skills Hub learning modules.

Looking ahead: future of bookselling schools and policy needs

In today's fast-paced world where challenges are becoming increasingly multi-faceted and complex, teaching new booksellers and upskilling experienced ones will be key for the trade's resilience and long-term viability.

Whether it is about acquiring new digital skills, adapting to the challenges of climate change or facing societal issues, booksellers need to have a place where they can go to get what they require. The more focus is put on upskilling the BA membership, the greater chance it has of surviving and building the bookshops of tomorrow. Resource libraries, like the Skills Hub will have a fundamental role to play in future-proofing the profession.



Concluding remarks

The case studies presented in this report reveal a clear truth: bookselling education is as diverse as the profession itself. From France's publicly funded university degrees to Germany's dual apprenticeship model, the UK and Ireland's flexible online Skills Hub, and Italy's specialised vocational training, each approach reflects the unique cultural, economic, and structural realities of its context. Yet, despite their differences, these programmes share common goals: to equip booksellers with the practical and adaptive skills needed to thrive in a rapidly changing industry.

One of the most striking findings is the centrality of upskilling in ensuring the long-term vitality of the bookselling sector. Industry-led training, such as the Skills Hub platform from the Booksellers Association of the UK and Ireland and the online programme offered by SLI, demonstrates how flexible, on-demand learning can empower booksellers to respond to immediate challenges, whether digital transformation, environmental sustainability, or societal shifts. Meanwhile, formal education systems, like those in France and Germany, provide structured pathways for aspiring booksellers to gain comprehensive expertise, from curating book selections to managing financial and operational aspects of a bookshop.

However, the sustainability of these programmes—and the profession itself—hinges on two critical factors. First, continued public and private funding is essential. In France, the threat of reduced public investment in education and culture looms large, while in Germany, the dual system relies on employer contributions and state support. In the UK and Ireland, the Skills Hub's viability is tied to the financial health of the bookselling trade and the association's membership base.

In Italy, decreased support from private partners would seriously undermine the variety and quality of courses offered. Without stable funding, even the most innovative programmes risk being scaled back or discontinued.

Second, bookselling must remain a viable and attractive career path. The report highlights a concerning trend: the profession is increasingly becoming low-income, leading to a brain drain as skilled booksellers seek higher wages elsewhere. Addressing this requires a multifaceted approach, including policy measures such as financial support for succession planning, proportionate business rates, various initiatives to boost purchasing power, and investments in reading promotion to strengthen the cultural and economic value of bookshops.

Looking ahead, the bookselling sector must prioritise resilience, adaptability, and collaboration. Educational programmes will need to evolve alongside technological advancements, environmental imperatives, and societal changes. Cross-border initiatives, such as the proposed exchange programme between the French and German bookselling schools, offer promising avenues for sharing best practices and fostering a new generation of booksellers equipped to face global challenges.

Ultimately, this report underscores that bookselling is not just a profession—it is a pillar of cultural diversity, freedom of expression, and community cohesion. To secure its future, we must invest in the education of those who keep its flame alive. By supporting bookselling schools and vocational training, we are not only preserving a profession; we are safeguarding the very fabric of our cultural and intellectual heritage.



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Endnotes

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