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Funding and governance of library and information services for visually impaired people: international case studies

Part I: Summary Report

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Funders of the Study

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Executive Summary

This study aims to compare different approaches to the funding and governance of library and information services for visually impaired people, and to find out what impact these factors have on outcomes (see Part 3 Appendix A for a fuller version of the brief).

The methodology for the study was a combination of desk research and emailed questionnaires, supplemented by additional questions to elucidate replies and solicit further information, assisted by the expert guidance of the Advisory Group (see Part 3, Appendix B for the wording of the questionnaire).

Questionnaire responses were received from the key organizations in most countries but we were unable to complete a case study on one of the original target countries, Vietnam.

This Summary cannot substitute for the synthesis contained in the remainder of Part 1 or the detailed Case Studies in Part 2. It has been particularly difficult to make generalizations which are fully supported by the evidence.

In particular, the kind of quantitative evidence of performance on which to make valid comparisons between the services offered in different countries is seriously lacking, whether this relates to funding per person; annual production of alternative format materials; size of collections; percentage of material available in accessible formats or user satisfaction measures.

All these measures would be very useful, but either data is lacking altogether or varying definitions of the user groups served, the criteria for production (e.g. on-demand versus for stock) and the varied size of the universe of material to be converted, makes it impossible to be sure that comparisons are being made between like variables. Hence the use of the word 'perceived' in some of our findings.

There is, however, enough consistent information to enable us to arrive at a number of key findings:

1. There is a remarkable degree of consensus which emerges in terms of preferred models. With some exceptions, most respondents are in favour of:

a system of clearly defined and co-ordinated roles and responsibilities, whether these are fulfilled by private, voluntary or public bodies;

the funding of services by regular government expenditure;

the delivery of services as much as possible via mainstream physical and digital channels.

2. Definitions of the user groups to be served vary from inclusive, based on inability to use conventional print, to exclusive, based on medical criteria of vision loss. Many organizations favour functional definitions over overtly medical ones.

3. Service providers generally prefer to operate within models where there are clear roles and responsibilities, both in terms of government policy-making and funding, and service provision.

4. Models where multiple government departments share the overall responsibility can result in gaps in provision and a lack of co-ordination. In particular, the provision of materials for use in education often suffers as a result of divided responsibilities.

5. Relying mainly or purely on third sector funding is perceived to result in expenditure that is inadequate in relation to need. Regular government funding produces the best perceived outcomes, when both the relative affluence of countries and the effect of cultural factors (such as attitudes to disability) are taken into account.

6. Technological innovation is a key driver of change. Technology affects how reading materials are produced and delivered. It can also enable changes in models of production and service delivery and consequently the roles of organizations as service points.

7. Technology can to some extent allow more radical changes of organizational model (that is, the articulation of functions by different organisations which combine to create materials and deliver services) than would previously have been possible. It can, for example, enable faster, cheaper and more flexible delivery of materials direct to users or to local service points, or both. That means there can be changes in the 'tiered' approach to service between central providers and branch libraries, for instance, if that was regarded as desirable. Another example is the reduced need for central storage space through using print-on-demand for Braille materials. Clearly the extent to which technology can provide the support for new organizational models depends on a number of factors, including funding, users' income levels, infrastructure quality (e.g. telecommunications) and the acceptability of new technology to the user population. The point here is that it is now possible to think beyond the organisational solutions to delivery which were largely inescapable in the analogue era of paper and cassettes.

8. Changes in technology in society are potentially very positive for visually impaired people, but only if there is the effort (and money) invested by all the stakeholders in ensuring the accessibility of electronic information. Otherwise it could leave those unable to read conventional print no better, or even worse off, as more and more information and services move online.

9. Along with funding levels, copyright restrictions of various kinds, including the absence or narrowness of exceptions, were the most frequently cited barriers encountered by responding organizations.

10. It is possible for service providers to borrow and adapt from other countries' models, by seeing how particular functions in production and delivery can be fulfilled by particular organizations in their own countries and formulating a collective roadmap among all the stakeholders (including government) to reallocate roles, resources and responsibilities accordingly.

11. This is obviously not a process which can happen overnight. Reallocation of resources is critical – organizations cannot be expected to take on new responsibilities if the funding is not available.

12. The report concludes with recommendations addressed to the principal stakeholders, including national and local governments, service providers, IFLA, organizations representing user groups, other funders, the European Commission and WIPO.

13. Part 1 cannot capture all the experience and expertise which the survey provided, nor the thought-provoking ideas for the future which emerged. The reader is encouraged to explore the detail in the country studies in Part 2 as well as the rest of this summary report.

Introduction

This project was commissioned by the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA), the British Library and the UK's Museums Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) to investigate the different models in use for the provision of library services to visually impaired and other print-impaired people in twelve countries.

The focus of the study is on modes of governance, funding and delivery systems. It also examines existing barriers to providing better services, and drivers for change in policy and organisation. The full brief for the study is contained in Appendix A in Part 3 of the report.

The countries were chosen by the Advisory Group in order to cover a range of stages of economic development and social, political and cultural variations, though the majority of the countries are economically very developed. They are:

Australia

Canada

Croatia

Denmark

Japan

Korea

Netherlands

South Africa

Sweden

UK

USA

Vietnam

Unfortunately, it proved impossible to derive enough information about one of the countries, Vietnam, for a whole case study, so this report is based on 11 countries.

Part 1 of this report provides a summary analysis; Part 2 contains the country case studies; Part 3 consists of Appendices concerned with methodology in more detail than is presented here.

Methodology

The information was collected through an extensive emailed questionnaire sent to organisations concerned with the provision of such library services in the different countries (including government departments, public libraries, specialist libraries, third sector charitable and voluntary organisations, education libraries and alternative format material providers). Follow up questions were undertaken where appropriate. The questionnaire was in four parts (see Appendix B) and respondents could give either a national picture or one specific to their sector (public libraries, education, specialist). This information was supplemented by desk research covering basic data, relevant reports, conference proceedings, and information on organisational web sites. Invaluable guidance was also given by the Advisory Group. In many cases, respondents to the questionnaires pointed us in the direction of reports and documents.

Inevitably, responses from different countries were uneven in terms of the numbers and types of organisations responding. The vast majority of responses we did receive were very comprehensive in terms of the information given. In several cases, organisations contacted us to suggest that one organisation in the country was best placed to answer on behalf of them all. This was true in the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden and South Africa. Although we undertook considerable attempts, we were not unfortunately able to receive enough replies from organisations involved in provision in several countries e.g. the USA, to describe the full extent of service provision there. We have attempted to compensate for that through

desk research. But it should be borne in mind when reading the case studies that they may reflect a partial view of the situation. We do recognise that the organisations we contacted are in the main extremely hard-pressed, both in time and money. To those who responded, we are of course, extremely grateful.

Background

The proportion of people who have difficulty reading conventional print, whether because of actual vision loss or because of various cognitive problems, is substantial, and because of the ageing profile of populations in most developed countries, acquired vision loss is increasing. The question of how to make reading matter accessible to all is therefore becoming ever more important.

Each country's provision of library and information services for visually impaired people has emerged from complex historical, geographical, cultural, political and social developments to which we cannot properly do justice here. Some of these factors will be discussed in the contextual section which follows the discussion of the models themselves. They range from the general organisation of government – centralised, federal etc. – to social attitudes to disability.

There are however, some important commonalities. Every country has to provide educational as well as 'leisure' reading materials in accessible formats, and very often this provision is a matter of divided responsibilities, both between education and general provision, and within education between school and tertiary education. Often there are serious gaps and grey areas in provision, for example, who provides for adult education?

Technology too is a common factor, though clearly countries are at very different levels in terms of for example, the penetration of ownership of personal computers with Internet access and the extent of broadband availability.

The process of producing alternative format materials is also largely a common one, though individual countries may have particular issues to deal with arising from e.g. multiple mother tongues or complexities related to a particular language e.g. the conversion of the Korean language into Braille. Educational material, along with music, is some of the most challenging to convert, as it includes diagrams, references, footnotes, tables and so on which all pose problems. Avoiding duplication of production, within and across borders (where languages are shared or widely spoken), is a key goal of producing organisations.

A note on terminology

There is an extremely useful glossary on the European Accessible Information Network (EUAIN) project's wiki, see <http://wiki.euain.org/doku.php?id=wiki:glossary>, which covers terms used in the report, though we have tried to explain these where necessary.

Models

What do we mean by models of provision?

Models are a combination of the following factors:

The methods and organisation of the delivery of the materials to the ultimate customer, whether a person in their home, an employee, a school pupil or a university student, and whether they want reading matter for leisure, work, education or other purposes

The way alternative format materials themselves are created and made available, including the criteria for selection, format types and equipment supply, any involvement by commercial publishers, and prevailing copyright exceptions

The relationship between services for visually impaired people and people who have other types of print-impairment

The source(s) and extent of funding of the services

Policy formation and political/governmental structures governing the services

How success is measured

This study investigated the particular ways in which these factors are articulated together, and in so far as we could, we have tried to determine how successful each of the models is, and what lessons may be learned from them in other countries.

Since the models do not exist in a vacuum, we also asked a series of questions about definitions, rights and prevailing attitudes, as well as trends for the future. In many cases models are being changed as a result of policy decisions, campaigns and technological change. Many special projects and initiatives are under way. We have tried to discern where some of these trends are going.

Organisation and methods of service delivery

Organisation of services

This section attempts to create a typology of how services are provided in the different countries e.g. is there a single body creating materials and providing a direct service to end users, or are services tiered so that there is one or more organisations creating materials then delivering them to the end user via other organisations, or is there a patchwork of multiple providers, operating semi-independently and collaborating more or less effectively.

Some countries have relatively simple models of provision (but see case studies as well to understand exactly how these work in practice). Denmark's Danske Blindbibliotek (DBB) is a clear example of the single direct provider. Sweden is a clear example of a tiered model, with one body – the Swedish Library of Talking Books and Braille (TPB) – creating materials and then delivering them through public libraries. South Africa is similar, but with a serious gap in the provision of educational materials and with much less funding. Some of these models are changing, but they are changing from one fairly clearly defined model to another e.g. the Netherlands is moving from a broadly 'Danish' model to a broadly 'Swedish' one. Other countries have extremely fragmented models, which are characterised by a lack of overall strategy and also duplication of effort, for example, the UK and Japan.

In Japan, although the same range of organisations is involved in providing services as in the UK, the Japanese respondents believe the relative roles and responsibilities are clear, whereas in the UK they do not. Both Japan and the UK note good co-operation between agencies but this seems to be more systemic in Japan, whereas in the UK it was felt to depend more on contingent factors.

Korea was another case where roles and responsibilities between different specialist providers are not clear and where public and private not-for-profit provision is not adequately integrated into a single network. Public libraries are expanding in number but their role in servicing visually impaired people is very under-developed.

The USA is complex, which is not surprising given its sheer size in area and population. Though Japan has a very large population, it is relatively small in area and has a more centralised government structure and is very different culturally. The high degree of autonomy of the states in the USA means that there is not a national curriculum in schools, for example, and this affects textbook provision (though this is now being addressed by a national initiative). Educational materials (up to graduate level) are provided for loan by a private non-profit organisation, Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic. The National Library Service for the

Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS), the main provider of non-study materials, operates under the national library (The Library of Congress) and in this respect the USA has a tiered, Swedish-type model, though it works via specialist regional and sub-regional libraries, which are distinct from the public library system, while sharing administrative functions and standards. But, unlike in Sweden, there are also many other private, non-governmental organisations producing materials e.g. the American Printing House for the Blind, and the Jewish Braille Institute.

Australia also has some problems of fragmentation, but these exist mainly at the geographical level, with the most populous states working under a single umbrella while the others remain outside it.

Canada is a particularly interesting case in that the last few years have seen a concerted attempt to research and map out a national strategy for equitable services by a number of stakeholders, notably the national library, the library association and the central third sector specialist library. If this were to be established, it would be on the basis of a tripartite partnership structure: service libraries at the local level; a national co-ordinating office at the federal level to co-ordinate the network and provide funding; and production centres to acquire, catalogue, produce, store and preserve alternative format collections. In structure it would be similar to Sweden, though the members of the network would not all be government organisations. The government funding to deliver it is not yet in place, however; some funding was allocated by the previous government but after the election returned a new government there has been a hiatus.

This summarises the different situations, but always with the proviso that the 'devil is in the detail' which is covered in the case studies in Part 2 of this report.

Specialist library or libraries direct to end user

Denmark – digital services bypass public libraries

Canada – but many public libraries also serve users directly and in partnership with special libraries (see below)

Australia

Netherlands (up to end 2006)

South Africa

USA (via a network of regional and subregional special libraries, plus other voluntary and private agencies)

UK

Croatia – the national Croatian Library for the Blind is the main provider, but also works with general public libraries

Korea

Public libraries direct to user, with materials supplied by specialist library (no or limited direct service from specialist library)

Sweden: state-funded national library provides materials and bibliographic services, county libraries build collections, local libraries lend to end users

Netherlands (from Jan 2007); local libraries will provide the service to end users, a national service to immobile visually impaired people will continue and study materials will remain with specialist library

Public libraries direct to end user in addition to direct services from special libraries/providers to end user

Canada

Denmark – digitisation is changing this model

UK

Australia – the specialist library service provides some services in partnership; other agencies outsource services. Delivery models vary mainly along state lines.

Japan

South Africa – public libraries have access to rotating mini-collections of materials from the national library for the blind.

Korea – but very limited – only 10% of public libraries

A note on the role of national libraries

There is no “international standard” for national libraries. The scope and functions of individual national libraries vary considerably from one country to another, depending on their historical development and national context.

In some countries the national library acts as a **national library authority**, either advising Government on policy and on the overall provision of library and information services at all levels in that country (including the provision of services to the visually impaired) or the national library may have express responsibility and authority for the provision of library and information services at all levels.

Methods of delivery

Postal delivery is still extremely important, as are the accompanying postal subsidies. CDs, audio cassettes and e-books on diskettes are some of the formats sent out by mail. For example, in the US, NLS relies mainly on postal distribution for books and wholly for magazines.

Physical visits to libraries to borrow occur where the model of delivery is via public libraries, notably in Sweden (for talking books; Braille is usually borrowed direct from the TPB), and in the Netherlands from this year onwards. Provision is made for users unable to visit the library. It is also the usual practice for large print books.

DBB in Denmark also uses email to distribute e-books, which can be printed on Braille printers or used with a digital Braille display, or used with screen readers and synthesised speech on PCs. They can also be converted to large print.

Digital download

DBB has a portal from which electronic books can be directly downloaded; TPB in Sweden also plans to move to digital downloading. CNIB in Canada also offers digital download and streaming online.

The NLS in the USA provides Web Braille files of books, magazines and music, which can be read online or downloaded for use offline or with Braille embossers etc. With the transition to digital talking books from 2007 onwards, NLS will operate a dual system of sending and receiving requested titles on Flash memory devices (one book, one object) by post and allowing download of books direct, both to end users and to the NLS network libraries themselves who can download any titles they have not been supplied with (namely the retrospective digitised collection of titles) so that they can make copies. This is to cater both for early

adopters who want to be able to access material directly, and those who for financial, technical or other reasons, prefer to continue to receive physical copies.

There are some other interesting trials and pilots occurring:

The Ubiquitous Talking Book Library in Korea, which makes DAISY audio books, created by the Korean Braille Library, available to users over wired and wireless, including mobile, networks. There are plans to extend this into textbook provision.

Australia has a satellite service in limited operation, called Books in the Sky. The Books in the Sky initiative is a project between the Royal Society for the Blind (RSB) of South Australia and a private company, Audio-Read Proprietary Ltd, which delivers audio books, newspapers, magazines, learning materials and other text to print-disabled users via broadband satellite. It employs a secure digital multicast system and a patented portable audio playback device called the Audio Navigator. The system allows book orders for next day delivery and makes magazines available in advance of newsstand sales. It claims that publishers can be confident that their copyright is protected as material cannot be copied and its use leaves an audit trail. Evidently the system is undergoing a limited roll-out following a trial.

In Denmark, DBB's Braille books are produced by print on demand and the user can keep or discard the copy as they wish.

The provision of materials

Creation and conversion of reading materials

Providers were asked about how they obtained the original materials; who performs the conversions and into which formats; whether titles are converted for stock, on-demand or both; and what targets exist.

Providers purchase, borrow or receive donations of print and e-text for conversion. Many have in-house staff for conversion to Braille, but some outsource this activity to contractors (NLS in the USA, TPB in Sweden). A few use volunteers (Canada CNIB, Japan). For audio cassettes and audio DAISY, the use of volunteers for narration is more common.

As well as the acquisition of original printed texts and electronic files to convert, libraries will also acquire alternative formats produced elsewhere such as master DAISY files or audio files produced by other libraries e.g. in other countries or by other alternative format providers, commercial large print publishers or digital audio files from publishers (these are then converted to DAISY), as well as resources such as tactile children's books from specialist providers.

The most usual formats produced are Braille, audio cassette and audio DAISY. Both Dedicon in the Netherlands and TPB in Sweden no longer produce audio cassettes or standard audio CDs, and the NLS in the USA will phase out cassettes in the next 5 years. CNIB also has ceased production of audio cassettes for the collection, having gone totally digital.

In many cases, special libraries don't supply large print materials, which are sourced direct by public libraries e.g. Sweden, USA.

The issue of whether materials are produced for stock or on-demand does not divide along any obvious lines, but it clearly has major implications in terms of making any comparisons between the amount of output in different countries and also in judging user satisfaction levels: an efficient on-demand service could – in theory – satisfy 100% of demand with the production of a low percentage of material being converted to an accessible format.

This would still not be an equitable situation, however. One reason is that there is not an equal provision of the means of discovering the universe of reading material from which choices can be made. A sighted reader can browse physical or online bookshops and libraries; in future this could be easier for a visually impaired person,

but for the moment, this gap remains. Users may get everything they demand (though that is a distant goal in many cases) but they don't necessarily know what they might want to demand.

Stock only

NLS

Dedicon (fiction)

DBB

Mainly for stock

Blindlib

Korean Braille Library

CNIB

On-demand only

Dedicon (study materials)

Mix of stock and on-demand

TPB (60% on-demand)

Vision Australia (study materials for higher education all on-demand)

CNIB (15% on-demand)

Korean Braille Library (40% on-demand)

Targets for production levels

Most respondents did not have any formal production targets. Only TPB in Sweden had an annual target expressed as a percentage of total book production in the country.

TPB: 25% of Swedish book production annually must be produced as talking books (presently 3250 per year) as per a government decision

DBB: yearly quota decided by DBB.

Criteria for selection

Where the titles are selected for stock, there is clearly an issue about the basis for selection. Many of the special libraries said that that most or all titles for stock were chosen by teams of librarians or selection committees of librarians, sometimes with guidelines, but based on their knowledge and expertise in terms of what the customers want. Where public libraries make independent selections of stock e.g. of large-print books, this is in accordance with local collection strategies and constraints.

NLB in the UK referred specifically to input from users. Vision Australia referred to projected client requests as well as client suggestions and known preferences in terms of genre; and award winners, Australian content and popular authors. CNIB said that 75% of titles were selected on the basis of reviews or the fact that they had won awards; 5% was reserved for completing series or replacing missing titles and 5% for titles of specific interest to those with vision loss because of characters or subject matter. 15% are on-demand.

On-demand production forms part or all of the activity undertaken by some of the libraries: Dedicon in the Netherlands produces all its study materials on-demand, as each student requires particular resources for their education. Sweden's TPB produces 60% of

Braille copies on demand and part of its audio Daisy output. In Japan, libraries for visually impaired people produce 40% of titles on-demand. By contrast, NLS in the USA does not produce anything on-demand, using its resources to provide multiple copies of material it selects.

On-demand production is likely to become much more important in future; in principle it is much more efficient to hold digital files of all titles and convert only what is demanded, but it depends on close co-operation with publishers and speedy conversion processes. It also demands different budgetary disciplines to ensure that money does not run out part of the way through the year.

Number of titles produced annually/ total collection

It is interesting to make some comparisons of the number of titles converted in a year and the total collections, where we have this data. It shows, perhaps surprisingly, that in a very large country such as the USA, the central provider (and there are others) produced last year fewer audio titles than are produced in much smaller countries such as the Netherlands and Sweden (though there are differences in the scope of what NLS provides e.g. study materials are provided by RFB&D). This reflects a policy decision by the NLS to create more copies of fewer titles, and these mass duplicated titles are distributed to all the regional libraries to be stored for distribution to the end-user. On average, about 900 copies of each title are made, with the maximum being around 2,000 and the minimum about 400. This illustrates how the delivery model affects the decisions about production and reproduction. NLS has undertaken research and consultation about whether this model is applicable to digital talking books or if it should be modified to a part or fully on-demand duplication.

Canada.

CNIB: CNIB produces 600 DAISY titles from scratch each year but adds 2000 titles per year, the remainder being recorded elsewhere but going through a production process at CNIB; Braille 320 titles

Croatia.

Croatian Library for the Blind – total collection 2,087 Braille books, 2,092 audio books, 6,296 large print books

Denmark.

DBB

The current collection of audio books consists of approximately 12,000 analogue titles and 14,000 digital audio titles (DAISY).

The current collection of Braille books consists of approximately 4,200 titles. Braille books have been distributed on a print on demand basis since 2002.

Japan.

Libraries for visually impaired people have 495,327 Braille titles, 481,148 titles in cassette form and 267,090 DAISY book titles in stock.

Public libraries have 180,617 talking book titles in cassette form, 10,367 DAISY titles and 99,827 Braille titles, and other resources in terms of commercial audiobooks and cassettes, tactile books and handmade large print books.

Korea.

Korean Braille Library 3,000 Braille books per year, 1,200 DAISY titles. Total Braille collection in all libraries 110,000

Netherlands.

Dedicon: 3,500 audio books produced annually; Total talking book collection 115,000. Fiction talking books production: 1,200 titles; Braille fiction production: 450 titles per year.

Another smaller producing organisation, CBB, produces 500 talking books and Braille magazines.

Sweden.

TPB (2006)

Production of new talking book (DAISY) titles: 5,629

Older analogue titles transferred to DAISY: 8875

Total acquisition of talking books: 13,021

Total talking books stock: approx. 40,000 titles

Braille acquisition in 2006: 454 titles

Total Braille stock: 12,912 titles

UK.

RNIB – 13,000 talking book titles in the collection (Nov. 2006); added 450 in 2005

Calibre Audio Library – 7,000 titles, added 269 in 2005

NLB – At March 2006 NLB had 42,000 titles in stock (mainly Braille) and typically adds 1000 titles p.a.

(NLB and RNIB have now merged, as from 1 January 2007).

USA.

NLS FY2005 3,925 audio and Braille book titles (of which around 2,000 audio); 45 recorded and 33 Braille magazine titles. Total collection 360,000+

RFB&D (recorded textbooks for school and university students): 5,134 produced; 109,106 in the collection.

Copyright exceptions

As the World Blind Union has stated:

“As accessible formats are, in copyright terms, copies, in the absence of any exception or limitation to copyright legislation, producers of accessible formats require the express permission of the rights holder. The need for permission can create delays and impose administrative burdens on individuals or on agencies serving such disabled people. Rights holders can also sometimes refuse permission because they fail to understand the reasons for which it is being sought.”

Two main aspects of copyright law have restricted the ways in which libraries can respond to the needs of visually-impaired and other print-impaired people. One is the extent of barriers to make copies to produce accessible formats without express permission. The other is cross-border exchange of accessible format materials.

There are exceptions of various degrees of latitude in different countries to allow the production of alternate format materials. A comprehensive WIPO study of exceptions and limitations to copyright for the benefit of visually impaired people has recently been published (after the research for this report was completed) http://www.wipo.int/meetings/en/doc_details.jsp?doc_id=75696.

One of the key differences between countries is the extent to which the exceptions cover print-impaired as well as visually-impaired people. This is something that publishers sometimes find difficult in terms of the perceived problem of controlling the leakage of copies from a tightly-defined segment into the general population.

Changes in the EU occurred as a result of the Information Society Directive of 2001. Countries in the EU have implemented the Directive in slightly different ways. Distinctions are made in terms of who can make and distribute sound recordings compared with other formats such as Braille, and there are varying provisions on remuneration. The workings of the Directive have been the subject of some recent studies by the Commission as part of a review. These studies are available online http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/copyright/studies/studies_en.htm. Part 2 of the study on the implementation of the Directive contains details of all the provisions made in the member states for people with disabilities http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/copyright/docs/studies/infosoc-study-annex_en.pdf.

Most European countries (including Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands) have amended their copyright laws in ways which do not make a distinction between visually-impaired and print-impaired people in terms of the right to make copies in formats which allow them to enjoy the works. The exception in terms of this study is the UK, where in some respects the situation has worsened for print-impaired people since the Copyright Act was amended; while permissions are no longer required to make copies in accessible formats (where no commercially available version exists) to serve visually impaired people, permissions are still needed to make such copies for print-impaired people. This means that if libraries continued to serve print-impaired people as well, they would have to continue to seek permissions, negating the benefits of the act. The act also permits the levying of charges.

Lobbying of the official Gowers Review on Intellectual Property commissioned by the UK Treasury and published in December 2006, produced a recommendation on removing DRM barriers to accessibility in electronic files, but not the sought-for extension of exceptions to cover print disabilities.

The situation in Canada is similar to that in most European countries in that the copyright law exception permits the production of alternate format materials for the use of people who have both visual and perceptual disabilities. It does not cover large print or non-commercial narrative of cinematographical works.

In Australia, revision of the law is under review by the attorney general and libraries hope for improvements which will ease the burden of seeking permissions. They say that publishers are often reluctant to provide electronic files for use by people with print disabilities.

In the USA an exception for blind and visually-impaired people was introduced in 1996, but it does not apply to print-impaired people.

The situation in Croatia is very difficult as no exception exists and a contract with the rights owner is necessary in all cases. Authors are often difficult to contact or uncooperative and the Copyright Agency is expensive.

In South Africa too, Blindlib has to ask permission to create copies in audio or Braille for each work individually. Blindlib is lobbying for a change in the law, on the basis that the current law unconstitutionally discriminates on disability grounds, to create an exemption which would cover both visually-impaired and print-impaired people.

Japan has an exception covering the creation of Braille materials by anyone and the creation of recordings by special libraries for visually-impaired people and schools for the blind. There are no exceptions for print-impaired people.

Korea's exception is similar to Japan's.

The WBU would like to see a number of general principles observed in countries' exceptions, including:

A functional, not medical, criterion for who would benefit from the exception, so as to cover all who have difficulty with conventional print

The exception(s) should not be explicit as to formats; technology is changing too quickly and also adaptations to mainstream formats would probably be excluded

The exception(s) should not be limited to specified types of organisation, as technology is making the creation of accessible formats much more widely feasible

Though authors and publishers should be remunerated, if the additional cost of creating accessible copies is left to be borne by specialist organisations or disabled individuals, remuneration may not be justified.

It is clear that the exceptions in place do not generally embody all of these principles and in some cases, none of them.

Cross-border use

Organisations providing accessible formats would like to be able to exchange material across borders. The World Blind Union's position is that:

“It should also be possible for accessible material created under an exception in one jurisdiction to be imported for the benefit of blind or partially sighted people in another. This requires provision to be built into national legislation, at least amongst countries which have comparable exceptions.”

This view was certainly echoed by a number of our respondents. Though access to other countries' output is probably most useful for English-speaking countries, there is also output in English and

demand for English language materials in other countries where English is widely spoken, including northern Europe, India and some African countries.

Involvement of publishers

There is a very mixed picture in terms of how closely commercial publishers are involved in the provision of materials. This covers both the direct creation of alternate format materials by publishers for this segment of the market, and arrangements for publishers who only produce for mainstream readers to provide digital files to alternate format producers.

Most commercial publishers do not see this as a lucrative market segment to address, either in terms of large print editions or unabridged audio. Having said that, there are specialist publishers involved in supplying large print to special and public libraries, for educational users and sometimes (where the market is large enough to sustain such activity, for example, the USA) to consumers.

The supply of large-print is potentially changing radically as a result of digitisation and the falling cost of print-on-demand, which makes short runs much more economically viable and so can increase range and responsiveness to individual demand.

Unabridged audiobooks have in the past been produced in limited ranges for the general commercial market, where they also satisfy demand from visually and print impaired people; however as well as a limited range, they were very expensive. This too is an area subject to change due to technology, with the increasing mainstream publisher interest in selling audiobooks for use on personal music players such as the iPod. However, this may never replace the need for structured talking books in e.g. for study purposes.

The provision of digital files is an area where a number of projects are either in regular operation or in pilot phases.

Sweden – TPB: Since 2002, 50% of Braille books have been made from files supplied by publishers (sold or free); DAISY 3.0 books will also be produced from publishers' files.

Denmark – DBB: Publishers' digital files are readily available from major publishers, except reference works such as dictionaries and encyclopaedias which require encryption; smaller publishers are more difficult to persuade that there will be no misuse. There is an agreement with the publishers' association which is renegotiated every 2 years.

USA: The American Printing House for the Blind now has a repository, NIMAC, for electronic copies of textbooks published in the US. Publishers validate files prior to submission using a tool provided by the repository. This is intended to improve the timely delivery of textbooks to students compared with the system of creating alternative format copies either by the state Instructional Materials Centers or by other organisations or volunteers on a piecemeal basis.

Pilots and trials

Canada: the Pilot Project for an Electronic Clearinghouse for Alternative Format Production established a mechanism for publishers to make requested files available for alternative format producers who are trusted partners of the project. This was successful in that most publishers were willing to provide the files, though problems remain in ensuring that the files are properly structured. The functionality of the clearinghouse is being maintained by Libraries and Archives Canada (the national library), pending long term funding. It is likely that it will form part of the new model being proposed for the organisation of services in Canada.

UK: A pilot repository is planned following a report with recommendations, which will be finalised in March and presented at the London Book Fair. According to the RNIB, which is leading the initiative, most of the barriers to the concept of delivering accessible materials through the supply of digital files have been addressed,

but the issue of what the costs to publishers will be remains to be answered by conversion trials which are underway.

USA: A beta version of a site called the Publisher Look-Up Service was launched by higher education members of the Association of American Publishers last year, which allows disabled student services staff at colleges and universities to look up contacts in publishers so as to obtain electronic copies or other permissions for educational materials. It is part of the wider Alternative Formats Solutions Initiative, aimed at identifying ways to provide course materials in a timely way.

South Africa: there is agreement from the Publishers' Association of South Africa (PASA) to treat Blindlib as a trusted environment for digital files.

A bottom-up view

The survey attempted to construct a slightly different view of the services by asking how a reader would gain access to a variety of materials e.g. works of fiction, newspapers, magazines, children's books, reference works, school textbooks, academic works and scientific journals.

In and of themselves, this perspective does not necessarily tell us much about range and depth, but the answers reveal a number of differences and similarities, not always predictable. They also give some indications of how complex or simple it is for a user to navigate the system. There is too much detail to include here on that subject (see case studies), but it is possible to draw out some overall issues.

New works of fiction – predictably this is usually difficult, with delays of up to a year, but some countries such as South Africa and the Netherlands do attempt to get the most popular titles converted speedily, and Japan estimates around 2 months for bestsellers

School textbooks – the situation ranges from very good (Denmark, Netherlands) to highly variable, depending on local factors (UK) to very bad (South Africa). Several agencies send out books in parts so students can get started and to even out the workload over the year

Scientific journals – in spite of the wide availability of e-journals, this is an area where there is evidently a lot of difficulty. Most e-journals are said to be inaccessible, though in Sweden and Australia university libraries would take pdfs and convert them for a student

Magazines – this is generally an area where agencies feel they provide very little, though many Swedish publishers do produce accessible versions to which readers can subscribe and DAISY versions of magazines are increasingly available in Japan

Newspapers – a brighter picture in a few cases, partly because some countries now produce fully structured electronic versions of daily newspapers which can be delivered to clients overnight, partly because of the existence of well-established talking newspaper services and newer e-mail services.

Audio is generally much more available than either large print or Braille – not surprising in that surveys show that audio is the preferred format, with most people who have late-onset vision loss finding it difficult to learn Braille, for example

Users in tertiary education typically have to be extremely well organised and plan ahead to gain access to even the essential course materials to avoid falling behind sighted classmates (and sometimes if staff don't provide reading lists in time, they cannot).

Reference and academic materials for users outside the education system are very problematic; there seems to be little provision for specialised non-fiction outside the education setting

Denmark has a special service for employed visually impaired people to provide work-related material

Information on the proportion of materials available in alternative formats

Overall accessibility of materials in relation to the total available to sighted readers is predictably very low in most cases, though a number of respondents weren't able to put numbers on this. There are some important caveats to be made when using these as straightforward comparative measures of how well the systems are performing in different countries (see below).

Books: Typically from less than 5% to 10% is available in any alternative format. Sweden, Croatia and the Netherlands reported around 10%.

Research in the UK in 2005 estimated that only 4.4% of the print output of UK publishers becomes available in an accessible/alternative format.

In the USA, the NLS estimates about 3.5% of titles each year.

Newspapers: The Netherlands reported 60-80% and Sweden 75%. CNIB in Canada produces more than 40 newspapers, which are available by phone and online, out of 100 paid-for daily titles. The Talking Newspaper Association in the UK says it produces all the daily and weekly newspapers and offers a range of possible access methods besides CD and cassette, including email and online.

Many others indicated that far less was available and South Africa reported that it was minimal.

The most positive development in newspaper provision has come about not so much because of online availability per se, as many online newspapers are not really accessible or easily navigable to those with vision loss, but because of the conversion of production in many countries to structured XML files, which allow trusted intermediaries to produce versions for visually impaired people.

These can be delivered at the same time or earlier than the conventionally printed version. For example, the Netherlands has over 200 electronically readable newspapers and magazines in XML.

Magazines: The highest availability reported was 10-20% in the Netherlands and 50% in Sweden. Most reported very low availability.

Educational materials: It is impossible to overstate the importance of proper provision of educational materials for anyone who is studying and cannot read conventional print. It is also the case that in several countries covered in this report there is no clear responsibility for providing these materials and consequently provision is poor.

A study by Loughborough University (LISU) in 2005 for RNIB of school textbook availability in the UK found a complex picture of availability, with English literature texts having the highest availability at up to 80%, but mathematics and science more in the range of 15-20%. Generic texts are more available than those specific to particular exam boards. Research for the RNIB in 2006 suggested a worse picture, with only 12 per cent of mathematics and 8 per cent of science GCSE textbooks in England being available in Braille or large print. The research also found that not one of the dictionaries or atlases most widely used by 14 to 16-year-olds is available in a format that a blind or partially sighted child could read.

Australia said most textbooks were available.

Dedicon in the Netherlands reported that around a quarter of what educational publishers put on the market is available. However, they produce solely on demand, so in theory, all user needs are met. They placed two caveats on that: firstly, only 5,000 of an estimated 75,000 dyslexic students are registered as Dedicon readers, so there is unmet need from prospective users; secondly, they produce mainly textbooks, so there is likely to be unmet need for supplementary materials such as workbooks.

TPB in Sweden also produces educational materials on-demand, so regarded the percentage calculation as not relevant.

The issue of on-demand provision points to a conceptual issue around using such percentages as a yardstick of comparative success. Different organisations have made different decisions about priorities; as we have seen, NLS has prioritised making a large number of copies of fewer titles, whereas TPB in Sweden has a percentage target set by the government. The issue is also complicated by the different numbers of titles available in different languages: it takes much more time and resources to make 5% of published titles in the USA and the UK available in alternative formats than a similar percentage of the output of the Dutch publishing industry, for example, because many more titles are published. On the other hand, if copyright constraints can be overcome, English-speaking readers could get access to many more titles than are converted in their own country. Though most readers could be well-satisfied with far less than 100% of all titles being accessible (as most titles published – as opposed to sold – are for specialised readerships), philosophically, this would still remain inequitable, as noted before.

For newspapers and to some extent magazines, taking a percentage of the total available literature is a more useful measure. A sighted reader has access every day to a range of newspapers from which to choose and it is not only desirable but reasonably achievable (as the experience of Sweden and the Netherlands illustrates) to aim at exactly the same result for visually or print-impaired people. While newspaper markets do differ – some countries have national markets whereas in others titles are more localised – there is not the same discrepancy in the target numbers to be converted as there is in the books area. For example, according to World Press Trends, there are 94 daily newspapers in Sweden and 112 in the UK. Counting national paid-for dailies only there are 10 in the UK, 9 in the Netherlands and 4 in Sweden. The USA does present more of a challenge as its market is highly localised: there are 1,452 paid-for daily titles, and really only one that can be considered truly national.

Speed of supply is perhaps most relevant as a target for new works of fiction. The inability to get an accessible copy of an award-winning or best-selling title which is constantly being reviewed in the press and on TV and radio in less than a year after everyone else is surely extremely frustrating. Here there is no clear sense of any one existing model performing better than another.

For textbooks and academic books, it is the ability of the system to deliver the same materials to visually or print-impaired students at the same time as their sighted peers that is seen as critical. This is very hard to achieve; in universities especially, it is partly a question of educating teachers to produce reading lists well in advance and not to discriminate against some students by suddenly introducing new texts without warning. However, though, it is clear that some systems are delivering timely materials more effectively than others.

The solution must lie in more automated systems using files from publishers' workflows, when the various barriers can be overcome. Synthetic text-to-speech is also being trialled or used in some production processes; it can speed up production time, and its quality is improving considerably. DBB in Denmark markets a tool for producing talking books using synthetic speech, which it claims takes about 1 hour to produce 8 hours of recording. It can be used with compatible speech engines covering different languages or vocabularies. DBB suggests it is most suitable for reference works and manuals, perhaps implying that people would be unlikely to want to listen to a fiction work recorded this way as yet.

Arguments about what is an appropriate measure of availability might seem largely irrelevant when for most users there is neither a high percentage of available material nor a system for delivering it on-demand. However, it is becoming more feasible as a vision because of the existing projects to provide digital files from publishers direct to alternative format producers, and through various digital library initiatives e.g. those from Google, Microsoft and its partners, and the European Commission. It has enormous implications for the way services will be delivered in future, though there are admittedly many technical, economic and other barriers to overcome first.

With all the caveats in place, it still seems worth while to attempt to measure the effectiveness of services partly in terms of the proportion of materials available to people who cannot read conventional print.

Relationship of services to visually impaired and print impaired people

Clearly, this partly depends on the issue of copyright exceptions, discussed above. In the European countries under consideration here that have implemented the Information Society directive so as to include perceptual disabilities in the copyright exception, namely Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands, plus Canada which has a similar law, library services make little or no distinction in theory, though of course some formats such as Braille are not relevant to those with perceptual disabilities. In practice, funding for serving those with perceptual disabilities has not yet been clarified in the Netherlands and in Canada there is no universal funding for DAISY players for print-impaired people without vision loss. Some respondents also pointed out that library staff may have less training and awareness in dealing with people who are print-impaired but do not have vision loss.

In Japan there is very little awareness of perceptual disabilities and the community is hardly served. In the UK, some organisations such as Calibre and NLB are permitted by their constitutions to serve print-impaired people, but some charities are limited to serving visually-impaired people. Even where organisations are able to do so, copyright throws up barriers.

In Australia, by contrast, even though the copyright position is less clear than in the first group of countries, services are more inclusive. In the USA, RFB&D serves both groups, and if people meet the eligibility criteria they will also be served by NLS. The experience of RFB&D suggests that if an organisation does serve

dyslexic people as well as those with vision loss, the economics of the service are shifted, and this results in better uptake for visually impaired people as well.

There is also a view that serving those with learning disabilities is mainly an issue for the education system.

Sources and extent of funding

Our survey sought information on the total amount of funding for these services, and also the sources: central or local government, charities, overseas aid etc. Ideally, it should be possible to calculate a per capita spend and so make a meaningful comparison across countries. Unfortunately, that appears largely impossible. Such an exercise would require consistent data on both expenditure and the relevant population, neither of which is currently feasible.

This is because in systems where there are many different providers, public and third sector, there is usually no single authority which is calculating total expenditure and its sources. Where there is a single government source for funding, it is possible to determine total expenditure. But where general library services for visually impaired people come principally from third sector organisations e.g. Canada, Australia and the UK, and there is some government funding to public libraries and via the education system as well as for particular projects, it becomes extremely difficult. The amounts actually spent by different public libraries in their budgets vary within countries and there is no consolidated figure for spending on services to visually impaired people in cases such as the UK and Canada. In the USA, the NLS budget is publicly available, but there are many other organisations involved, public (e.g. public libraries, education authorities, universities) and private/voluntary (e.g. charitably funded alternative format providers). Postal subsidies are also very important in most countries.

Calculating the relevant population is somewhat easier, but even then varying definitions of vision and print-impairment between countries mean that figures may not be comparable.

We have grouped countries into categories according to the predominant funding source.

Funding coming predominantly from national government

Denmark

Netherlands

Funding coming predominantly from local government

Japan (there is an expectation that donations will become more important as government funding is seen to be increasingly constrained; public library services are also being outsourced to the private sector)

Funding coming from both national and local government

Sweden

Funding coming from a mixture of government and third sector fundraising and revenues

USA (federal, state, local, and third sector)

Australia – third sector funding predominates

South Africa

UK – third sector funding predominates and there is no regular national government funding

Croatia – government funding predominates

Korea

Canada – central specialist library is third sector, but users are also served from public libraries and the education system

How adequate is the funding?

Most respondents felt their services were not adequately funded, but the degree of perceived inadequacy varied considerably. There is also the issue of how adequacy is defined – in relation to the current scope of services or in relation to an ideal level and scope of service? Respondents tended to nuance their replies accordingly. No country is able to provide a service that gives visual and print-impaired people the same access to library services and materials as everyone else; funding would not be the only solution here as there also needs to be advanced supply of files from publishers in order to ensure that alternative format versions are available simultaneously.

Of the respondents to the survey, the most satisfied with their funding were the USA and Sweden. Those least satisfied with the adequacy of funding were those relying mainly on third sector and local government funding.

Two countries' respondents felt funding was not entirely adequate:

Denmark – not adequate for full equality of access

Netherlands – adequate for existing services but services need extending. Study materials need 30% more, general library services 10% more

Seven countries' respondents felt funding was very inadequate:

Canada – likely that current expenditure is less than 10% of what is needed to provide an equitable service

Japan – would need 10 times as much money

South Africa – only serves 1% of the potential client base

UK – hard to estimate what would be needed as there is no figure for current spending due to very fragmented provision, but the current level is considered to be very poor

Australia – only 16,000 out of 300,000 visually impaired people and 1.4m print impaired potential service recipients are served. Each state should fund services for visually impaired people as a public library, with at least matching federal funding (A\$14m for each state versus total \$A4m current special library budget)

Croatia – funding is very inadequate and decreasing, needs to increase 20-30% per year as planned

Korea – not adequate – need to fund national special library and then that could lead in the upgrading of public library service to visually impaired people

Of course, since we have been unable to measure the level of funding objectively across all countries, this is a subjective view, and it could be argued that it tells us nothing about how efficiently money is spent, nor how satisfied the end users are. But these estimates do come from organisations in the front line of providing services.

From these responses, the conclusion would be that regular government funding is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for adequately funded services. Relying mainly or purely on third sector funding results in the least satisfactory outcomes, but also some countries which rely mainly or wholly on government funding, such as Croatia and Japan, also feel that funding is very inadequate. In Japan this is related to the general squeeze on public spending which has hit local government particularly hard.

Perceived adequacy of funding of these services is not easily correlated with the percentage of GDP devoted to gross social expenditure; though Sweden and Denmark were the highest in the OECD in 2001 and Korea second lowest (after Mexico), the UK's spend was higher than the Netherlands, but because funding in the UK for these services does not in the main come from government, this is largely irrelevant.

There may be some underlying issues about local accountability and the strength of local government spending as well. OECD figures (admittedly from 2001, but the proportions are not likely to have changed radically) show that local government spending as a percentage of total GDP was especially high in the Scandinavian countries: over 30% in Denmark and over 25% in Sweden, compared with about 17% in the Netherlands. In the UK, the figure was only around 11%.

South Africa has a legacy of extremely uneven local provision from the apartheid era which means that public library services are very much better in areas where white people lived and reforms since have left public library funding in something of a limbo and carrying a low priority – though efforts are being made to put library services at the heart of drives to improve education and literacy.

Policy formation and governance

Governmental responsibility

In the survey we asked respondents to describe which ministry or ministries were responsible for these services. The picture was, as in the funding and the model, quite clear in some countries and very complex in others.

Single authority

Sweden – Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs

Denmark – Ministry of Culture

Netherlands – Department of Culture, part of Ministry of Education, Culture and Science

Croatia – Ministry of Culture

Korea – Ministry of Culture

Multiple authorities

UK – Department of Culture Media and Sport, Department for Education and Science, Department of Trade and Industry, the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, plus additional bodies in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland

South Africa – Department of Arts and Culture (national libraries); provincial and local government (local libraries)

Canada – no one federal ministry has responsibility but Library and Archives Canada is co-ordinating efforts to address the issue

USA – Library of Congress, Department for Education, state authorities

Australia – points of responsibility at both federal and state level in the Department of Family and Community Services and in the Department for Education, Science and Training

Japan – public libraries come under the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology; special libraries come under the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare

Accountability and measuring success

Success is often measured on an organisation by organisation basis, using criteria chosen by the organisation itself, or put in place by the funding organisation. These may include: percentage of target population reached; cost; range and depth of material produced; speed of supply and users' views of the service provided.

Organisations in the following countries had the most comprehensive formal standards which were mandated by funders:

The Netherlands

Sweden

Denmark

The NLS in the USA reviews its regional network libraries regularly using American Library Association standards relating to library services for disabled people; the NLS nationally is reviewed periodically by the Librarian of Congress and as part of that it conducts a survey of its users.

Vision Australia measures performance using Key Performance Indicators, based on comparisons with like organisations, used to benchmark and improve services year on year. These include user satisfaction; speed of supply; professionalism of staff; service effectiveness in relation to mission and values of the organisation. University libraries in Australia also try to measure their success in serving this group of users, often by surveys.

CNIB in Canada currently focuses on the proportion of visually impaired people reached; the range and depth of material available; speed of supply and users' views of the service. There are plans for national targets to be set by Libraries and Archives Canada.

Blindlib in South Africa reported having its own measures in place which it uses for internal and external reporting, but that there were not any general measures in public libraries or for national provision.

Japan

Japanese respondents said that there had been recent efforts by some public libraries to assess their performance using formal methods, but services to visually impaired people were rarely specifically included.

UK

In the UK, special libraries have their own targets and measures. For example, the NLB has targets for range and depth; speed of supply; proportion of users reached; cost; and user satisfaction. These are adjusted annually. The Calibre Audio Library has targets in relation to speed of turnaround of materials and user satisfaction.

The measures used by UK public libraries are all centred on the Public Library Standards, Culture Block of the Comprehensive Performance Assessments and Impact Measures. These are all generic indicators which don't necessarily identify such services. Any specific measurement is local. It is possible for a specific question on services to visually impaired people to be added to the general library satisfaction surveys which are carried out, but there is no evidence of libraries actually doing so.

Some respondents said there were no formal methods in place to measure how successful these services were:

Croatia

Korea

Participation of visually impaired people in operations and leadership

Though there is consistently some representation on boards and among employees, both in specialist and public libraries, it was not always the case that this was substantial, and certainly there is no clear trend to increasing participation. In one case, it was reported as decreasing. Another respondent pointed out the problem that elderly users, who form the majority, are under-represented.

Policy formation

Policies are influenced by wider social and cultural changes such as anti-discrimination laws, which in turn are partly brought about by grass-roots action. They are also influenced by overall trends in the way different countries organise government functions e.g. centralisation and devolved powers and the money that goes with them.

It is difficult to generalise about policy formation as it is closely bound up with the models of organisation. Where a single ministry is responsible for services which are delivered via state organisations (Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden) it is fairly straightforward to identify who is making policy, though of course, many other organisations, including those representing user groups, are involved as well. In other models, there is general government policy on disability issues and also policy governing education and public libraries, which impacts on the operations of special libraries and in which they are likely to have opportunities to submit views or be formally part of partnerships. Copyright policy is made by governments with input from stakeholders including rightsowners; these tend to have more influence in some countries than others and also to concern themselves not only with protecting rights against unlawful copying but also with territorial rights. Copyright is of course also the subject of international agreements.

In both Canada and Australia, bodies have been established to try form coherent policies which include all the stakeholders.

In Canada the first step was a task force on Access to Information for Print-Disabled Canadians, which in turn led to a Council on Access to Information for Print-Disabled Canadians comprising representatives of librarians, producers of materials, users, and service providers. This body gave rise both to the proposed network of equitable library services and the e-clearinghouse described elsewhere in the report.

In Australia, there is a Round Table on Information Access for People with Print Disabilities which has a membership representing education, government, business, alternate format producers, community and disability organisations throughout Australia and New Zealand, and a mission: “To facilitate and influence the production and use of quality alternative formats for people with print disabilities by optimising the evolving Round Table body of knowledge.”

How the models fit together

In several countries it is clear that these services, although they may have begun as a patchwork in the past, have now reached a point where roles and responsibilities between organisations are quite clear and straightforward and there are few areas of perceived overlap and duplication of effort. From the users' point of view, it is also apparently clear where they would go to get certain materials, though of course that doesn't mean they would be guaranteed to get them. The situation in Croatia, for example, is clear, but that is because there is only one poorly funded organisation supplying services.

The countries where the organisations are seen as generally having clear roles and responsibilities are:

Canada

The Netherlands

Sweden

Denmark

USA

Croatia

Some overlaps are perceived in Australia, but they are not seen as very problematic.

Some duplication of effort is perceived in:

Korea

South Africa (along with competition for funding)

UK

Services are perceived as suffering most from fragmentation and lack of overall strategy in:

Japan

Korea

UK

Contextual factors

Definitions of visual and print-impairment

Some countries have very inclusive definitions, such as ‘inability to follow a line of printed text’ while others have quite clinical definitions. These undoubtedly affect estimates of the size of the potential user group, but they can also seriously constrain the ability of libraries to serve some groups if they cannot obtain the necessary certifications. Even if they can, there may be deterrent effects to the take up of services. Definitions used in copyright exceptions can also affect the ability of libraries to serve some groups.

Anti-discrimination legislation

Though details vary from country to country, in general there are laws in place which in theory grant equal rights to everyone in access to education and cultural life. In most countries, laws also cover access to buildings, products and services (though these may be hedged about in the law and certainly the situation on the ground may be very different). There are rarely specific legal rights to library and information services. Depending on the legal system in place, test cases in court can also act to clarify duties by service providers and act as precedents.

Social attitudes

The question of expectations on the part of visually-impaired readers in relation to library services was a question addressed in the survey and opinions were quite divided as to whether visually impaired people expected the same level of service as sighted people. Some respondents from the same country disagreed.

This could be because the notion of expectations could be interpreted in different ways: users could at the same time feel that they have a right to expect equality, but know that in reality, they can reasonably expect to be treated equally but not to have access to the same range of material as a sighted person.

Some respondents agreed that expectations vary according to age and onset of sight loss, with older people who have recently suffered sight loss having lower expectations. However, in one case concerning university students, a respondent felt that students who had recently lost their sight had higher expectations, and students who had been educated in mainstream schools also had high expectations.

Cultural issues

Cultural factors were referred to most strongly in Japan, Korea and South Africa as affecting services negatively. In Japan, respondents felt that although there were formal laws and policies against discrimination and in favour of recognising the rights of disabled people to full and equal participation, attitudes lagged well behind, especially in relation to perceptual disabilities. In South Africa, among poor rural people there can persist an attitude which results in hiding disability from public view. On the positive side, disability politics is most advanced in Scandinavia in terms of placing full onus on providers of goods and services to make them accessible and in shifting the emphasis away from seeing disabled people as having to be helped by social and welfare services to being enabled to full social participation. This is related to long standing attitudes which tend to privilege social solidarity, compared with more individualistic approaches in for example, the UK and USA.

Forces for change

Technology

Technology is a major force for change in this area and it is repeatedly discussed in the report in relation to the initiatives that are occurring. For example, as more publishers move towards creating files in XML, there is great potential for converting more material more speedily to alternative formats in ways that require far less human intervention. One of the most interesting international initiatives in this area is the European Accessible Information Network (EUAIN) project, funded by the European Commission, which seeks to bring together stakeholders in the content creation and publishing industries and help them to solve the problems which currently form obstacles to the provision of accessible versions of their products and services. As the EUAIN site states:

“Accessibility for print impaired people can be an increasingly integrated component of the document management and publishing process and should not be a specialised, additional service..... From a technical perspective, it is now possible to address key concerns of content creators and providers and coherently address issues such as: automation of document structuring, adherence to emerging standards, workflow support, digital rights management and secure distribution platforms.”

Digital technologies are clearly a key driver for enabling improved library and information services to visually and print-impaired people in a series of ways:

Expediting and automating the creation of alternative format materials through the provision of publishers' electronic files

Accessible digital versions being created as part of the process of publication (websites containing official information; newspapers and magazines);

The convergence of the specialised and the mainstream e.g. unabridged audiobooks, text-to-speech synthesis and other voice technologies. This should not be overstated but it does have potential to lower costs and broaden ranges

Print-on-demand for large print and Braille, and the production of audio on demand, can increase the range of material available and also reduce the need for libraries to store large quantities of bulky material

Creating opportunities for alternative systems of delivery through digital networks (broadband, wireless, satellite) and to new devices which are more portable and easier to use

Creating opportunities for better responsiveness to user needs by allowing more two way communication and more content to be created on-demand

In some cases e.g. Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands, the impact of digital technologies on the creation and delivery of alternative format materials is already very advanced, in others the consequences are yet to be worked through.

However, there is a long way to go in ensuring that web sites genuinely are accessible and ensuring that users have the technology and skills to access what is available. Web accessibility standards are laid down in different countries, but not always followed; it is important that assumptions are not made that when material is made available online e.g. government information or newspapers and magazines, it is automatically accessible. In fact some research by W3C suggests that less than 3% of public information in Europe is truly accessible.

Given that most users are elderly, and often on low incomes, there are also considerable issues both of acceptability and affordability.

Other important issues thrown up by digital technologies concern to what extent and how quickly existing collections should be digitised; how quickly old formats should be phased out; and how to migrate users from the old access technologies to new ones and how this should be financed.

In some organisations, equipment manufacture and loan or sale is an important income source, but users may prefer to use more standard equipment as it becomes available.

There are some potentially negative impacts of technology.

The ease with which digital copies are made has also had the effect of making many rightsowners more nervous and cautious about exceptions to copyright; more proactive in enforcement; and more likely to resort to Technical Protection Measures (TPMs) which can have the effect of rendering electronic files inaccessible to equipment used by visually impaired people.

More fundamentally, if steps are not taken to ensure that visually impaired people keep pace with technology, a wider gap could open up between sighted readers and those with vision loss, as society as a whole comes to depend more and more on the Internet and electronic devices for information, e-commerce and entertainment. Digital divides on the basis of income have been apparent for a long time, and because the incomes of visually impaired people are generally low, they can be affected by a double disadvantage as they may not be able to afford the latest technology and even if they can, much of the information and content may be inaccessible.

Mainstreaming of services

This applies both to education in mainstream schools and to the tendency in many countries for services to be delivered through common access points in public libraries. Arguably, mainstreaming can also be construed as encompassing the kind of convergence of content between sighted and visually impaired people referred to above. The role of public libraries in general (and bookshops for that matter) is now a matter for debate as a result of the impact of the Internet. This is genuinely a moment when services can be recast to make them more inclusive, but the opportunity could also be lost.

Movements for equality

There are laws in place in all the countries under consideration, which theoretically provide for equal access to education and in most places to goods, services, buildings and cultural life. However, the reality is often very different, but this gap is increasingly the subject of campaigning and test cases in the courts. The Right to Read Alliance in the UK is a relevant example.

Demographic change

Population changes such as the growing numbers of over-65 year olds in the population of the countries under discussion, and the fact that the next generation of people who are likely to suffer from increasing vision loss are the 'baby boomers' who are used to campaigning and having demands met, will be influential.

Barriers

The major barriers to providing a good service for visually impaired people that were consistently cited were the level of funding and problems with copyright, which both occurred across the board. Copyright restrictions were cited in different forms, for example, barriers to international resource sharing of materials in alternative formats (Canada, Sweden and others).

There were some variations, however.

Lack of co-ordination between organisations (UK)

Lack of understanding of the full potential of digitisation (Denmark)

Inability to obtain a workable digital file in a timely manner so that the appropriate format can be produced simultaneously with print (Canada)

The legal position on the availability of DAISY players for print-impaired people needs to be clarified (Netherlands)

Making potential patrons aware of the service (USA)

Lack of training for staff in schools (Australia)

Lack of awareness by academic staff in universities leading to problems in providing course materials in alternative formats in a timely manner (UK, Australia)

Current data protection, ICT procedures in each local authority across the country often precludes making material available. A national policy or indicator would circumvent the often difficult relationships that libraries have with their own local ICT departments or providers (UK public libraries).

Preferred situation

We asked respondents to describe the ‘ideal’ service for their country, including who would fund it, how it would be organised and how materials would be delivered to the end user. People interpreted ‘ideal’ in very different ways, which to some extent reflected how satisfactory the current situation seems to them to be. So for some people, relatively incremental changes appeared very ambitious, while for others, nothing short of delivering anything any user wanted when they wanted it and via whatever delivery method they preferred would constitute an ideal situation. Perhaps the fault lay in the question but the intention was to draw out some ideas about how models could be changed and how organisations would work together.

Funding sources

The overwhelming majority of respondents wanted services to be funded by governments. The Netherlands wanted government funding to continue to be supplemented by private foundations and EU funding and donations.

Sweden saw the ideal situation as funding by the publishers, rather than the taxpayers, and Denmark and some Australian respondents in the education sector think that publishers should contribute along with the government. This is perhaps most understandable in the context of Danish (and other Scandinavian countries) disability politics, where the concept of ‘sector responsibility’ is important. That is, the obligation under disability discrimination legislation for organisations to make their products and services accessible to all their users. Most countries’ legislation on discrimination on grounds of disability does not place obligations on the manufacturers of goods, however, but on retailers and others with premises open to the public, transport and public services. There are exceptions in some cases e.g. makers of telecommunications equipment.

How services would be delivered

Most respondents envisaged services being delivered as far as possible through mainstream public libraries, schools and universities, in fact anywhere sighted readers would expect to find them. Special provision would be made for immobile people. The role of direct digital downloading in relation to library mediation was not entirely spelled out, but generally seen as operating in parallel. Some respondents also named bookshops and internet shops as delivery channels.

Clearly, public and educational libraries also need to be generally well-funded, in order to provide the number of outlets and trained staff to make them effective. Any model which places mainstream libraries in the forefront of service delivery implies good levels of public support as a precondition for delivering high quality services to visually and print impaired people. The country studies show that this is not necessarily the case everywhere.

How organisations would work together

Here most respondents envisaged a clear division of labour with skills in alternative format production, whether provided by voluntary or public bodies, being separated from skills in delivery to the end user and the ability of each part of the system to perfect their role in a complementary way to the others. Respondents in Sweden and the Netherlands essentially saw the organisational structures they currently have as perfectly functional, but supplemented by new channels of delivery and more automated production. Respondents in Canada and the UK mentioned national co-ordinating bodies and strategies. Greater international co-operation was desired by everyone.

Key findings

Knowledge and information

Objective comparative measures of performance in providing library services for visually and print impaired people across countries are lacking, whether these concern funding, collection development, penetration of services in the user population or user satisfaction. In many cases, there are no adequate measures of success or user satisfaction even on a non-comparable basis.

Inclusive or exclusive definitions of the user group served

Definitions of the user groups to be served vary from inclusive, based on ability to use conventional print, to exclusive, based on medical criteria of vision loss. Many organizations favour functional definitions over overtly medical ones, and wish to serve anyone who has difficulties reading conventional print. From a scale point of view, it makes sense to have production and services organized to serve the whole population with print disabilities, though obviously not all formats are relevant to each group. However, resources have to match responsibilities and copyright exceptions need to be aligned as well.

Copyright

Copyright restrictions were the most frequently cited barriers encountered by responding organizations, along with funding levels. The major problems are: copyright exceptions are not comprehensive and general enough and organizations cannot pool resources across borders, leading to wasteful duplication of effort.

Structures and governance

Service providers generally prefer to operate within models where there are clear roles and responsibilities, both in terms of government policy-making and funding, and service provision.

It is easier to inform users of where they should go to obtain materials if there is a single organisational structure or a clear apportionment of roles and responsibilities. This should also drive up penetration of services, and one of the main goals of these services is to ensure that people are aware of their existence and find them easy to access.

Models where multiple government departments have responsibilities can result in gaps in provision and a lack of co-ordination: no-one sees the whole picture. Provision of materials for use in education in particular is often a victim of lack of clarity about responsibilities and the funding to accompany them.

It is obvious that organizations cannot pick and choose models, as if from a menu, because they are constrained by the particular national situation and historical legacy. However, the Canadian example shows that it is possible to adapt other models, by seeing how particular functions in production and delivery (such as those which exist in the 'tiered' models) can be fulfilled by particular organizations in their own countries and formulating a collective roadmap among all the stakeholders (including government) to reallocate roles, resources and responsibilities accordingly. Other countries, such as the Netherlands, have also reallocated roles between central producing organizations and public libraries.

This is obviously not a process which can happen overnight. In some cases, the constitutions of organizations would have to be changed, for example. Reallocation of resources is critical – organizations cannot be expected to take on new responsibilities if the funding is not available.

Funding

Regular government funding is a necessary, but not always sufficient, condition for adequately funded services, as perceived by our respondents.

Relying mainly or purely on third sector funding results in a definite perceived inadequacy of expenditure relative to need (e.g. Australia, UK, Canada), which is not present in most countries with regular government funding (e.g. USA, Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden). However, in some countries (e.g. Japan, Croatia) which rely mainly or wholly on government funding, organisations also feel that funding is very inadequate and find it difficult to gain the political leverage to increase it. Controlling for both economic status (South Africa, Croatia) and cultural factors affecting attitudes to disability (especially noted in Korea and Japan), regular government funding produces the best perceived outcomes.

It would seem to be logical that it is easier to deal with the problem of overall funding where the organisations providing services are clearly not competing for money on the basis of providing the same or similar services, nor duplicating effort which would deliver better results if it was combined.

Technology

Technological innovation is a key driver of change, and examples of this have been given again and again by organizations responding to the questionnaire. Technology affects how reading materials are produced (e.g. conversion methods, tools, provision of digital files direct from publishers) and delivered (e.g. print on demand for Braille, direct downloading, streaming, e-book files, flash memory devices, satellite and wireless delivery etc).

It can also enable changes in models of production and service delivery and consequently the roles of organizations as service points.

Technology can therefore to some extent (and the extent will vary considerably from country to country) allow more radical changes of organizational model than would previously have been possible.

It is also clear that if the moment is not seized by all stakeholders, changes in technology in society generally could leave people who are unable to read conventional print no better and possibly even worse off.

Summary

There is a remarkable degree of consensus which emerges in terms of preferred models. With some exceptions, most respondents favour a system of clearly defined and co-ordinated roles and responsibilities, whether these are fulfilled by private, voluntary or public bodies; services funded by governments; and delivered as much as possible via mainstream physical and digital channels.

Recommendations

There is no single “best practice” model for providing library and information services to visually impaired and print impaired users: the situation varies greatly from country to country. However, we have identified a number of common elements that would form the basis of policy and practice when combined in appropriate ways.

Tools for focusing service providers’ and their representative bodies’ activities

Service providers should make it a priority to improve the level of knowledge and understanding of how well services are performing by developing accurate comparable measures – including measures of the actual experience of users (addressed particularly to: service providers and IFLA).

Organisations representing and working on behalf of visually and print-impaired people should allocate resources to ensuring that equitable provision is seen as an issue of civic or human rights and not as a question of public or private benevolence (addressed particularly to: organizations working on behalf of and representing user groups).

Collaborative approaches by service providers to applying for and using funding appear to maximise benefits for users; competition for limited resources should be eliminated from the funding systems (addressed particularly to: national and local governments, service providers, other funders).

As simple models where responsibilities are clearly defined seem to deliver the most effective provision, stakeholders should urgently investigate opportunities for creating clearly defined roles and responsibilities (addressed to all stakeholders)

Tools for influencing government strategy and policymaking, including at the level of international agreements

The overwhelming view from respondents to the survey was that “as of right” funding was an essential factor in improving the services they could provide. Sustained support should be provided from public funds rather than charitable donations in order to create the equitable provision required by laws or directives (addressed particularly to: national and local governments)

Governments should understand that visually impaired people have specified rights to access the content of published information and that they pay taxes which in part support public library services. Together with other print-impaired readers they represent up to 20% of the population (addressed particularly to: national and local governments)

Governments should provide policy and financial support to all organizations that provide library and information services to relevant user groups in their efforts to create clearly defined roles and responsibilities (addressed particularly to: national governments)

The definitions of visual impairment and print impairment should be based on functional needs rather than medical rules. Experience in the USA suggests that services to visually impaired people can actually benefit from expanding an organisation's remit to serve a broader user group, so this should also be taken into account. In view of this recommendation and of clear demographic trends in most countries also pointing to an expanding user community, resource provisions will need to be re-assessed (addressed particularly to: national and local governments).

Copyright exceptions should be related to functional requirements of visually impaired and print impaired people rather than defined in relation to purely medical definitions (addressed particularly to: national governments, publishers and their representative organizations, the European Commission, WIPO).

Exceptions to copyright should not specify particular formats (e.g. talking books or Braille) as rapid technology change is likely to mean new formats will arise and some existing ones become redundant, and users themselves will want to keep pace with these developments (addressed particularly to: national governments, publishers and their representative organizations, the European Commission, WIPO).

The exceptions to copyright should allow users to choose or create versions in the format that is most effective in meeting their own needs: such decisions should not be made in advance and embodied in the definition of exceptions as this would restrict this important empowerment of users (addressed particularly to: national governments, publishers and their representative organizations, the European Commission, WIPO).

National governments and appropriate international organisations should seek to facilitate the elimination of wasteful duplication of effort by establishing agreements whereby materials made accessible in one country may be used in another (addressed particularly to: national governments, publishers and their representative organizations, the European Commission, WIPO).

Tools for involving content providers and rightsholders

Publishers and service providers should consider how publishers might become more closely involved in making a full range of materials available as early as possible, for example, by making digital files for all content available for conversion. Evidence from the case studies shows that respondents believe this would make provision much more effective (addressed particularly to publishers, their representative organizations and service providers)

Publishers should be encouraged to use some of the efficiency gains arising from technology to support equitable provision by providing a full range of content in alternative formats without price differential as part of their normal line of business (addressed particularly to publishers, their representative organizations, national governments and service providers).

Recommendations directed to:

National and/or local governments

Recommendations numbered 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12

Service providers

Recommendations numbered 1, 3, 4, 13 and 14

Funders other than national and local governments

Recommendations numbered 3 and 4

The European Commission and WIPO

Recommendations numbered 9, 10, 11 and 12

Publishers and their organizations

Recommendations numbered 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14

IFLA

Recommendations numbered 1 and 4

Organisations representing or working on behalf of users

Recommendations numbered 2 and 4