A survey of services to visually impaired people in UK public libraries

PLEASE CITE THE PUBLISHED VERSION

PUBLISHER

Loughborough University

LICENCE

CC BY-NC 4.0

REPOSITORY RECORD

Kolousek, Jennifer E.. 2021. "A Survey of Services to Visually Impaired People in UK Public Libraries". Loughborough University. https://doi.org/10.26174/thesis.lboro.14339033.v1.

A Survey of Services to Visually Impaired People in UK Public Libraries

by

Jennifer Kolousek

A Master's Dissertation, submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the award of Master of Arts degree
of Loughborough University.

September 1998

Supervisor: Dr. A. Goulding
                Department of Information and Library Studies

Abstract

This study attempts to discover the present role that the public library (and to a lesser extent the variety of organisations and agencies for the blind and partially sighted) plays in providing information and library services to visually impaired people.

Following the description of the aims and objectives in the introduction, this study explains what these needs are and attempts to explain the affect of visual impairment in the accessing of library services. This study then looks at how the range of special equipment and low vision aids can enable some visually impaired people to access information and reading material, although it is made clear that important as such technology is, it does not provide the perfect access solution.

The role that the various charitable organisations and agencies serving the blind and partially sighted play is examined in Chapter 5 as they have historically been the main providers of library services to visually impaired people in this country. The role of the public library can only be completely seen and understood against this background.

The main area of investigation was to find out to the extent to which provision of library and information services to visually impaired people was through co-operative relationships with voluntary organisations or projects and whether this was indicative of changing professional attitudes towards serving this client group. The main method used was a postal questionnaire to UK library authorities and a 58% response rate was achieved. The main findings were that all libraries were now providing some material suitable for visually impaired people although the quality and variety of provision varied considerably across the country. The benefit for visually impaired people in those authorities where co-operative projects or involvement with various charitable organisations was noted. Given this, there is a clear need for a set of standards and guidance by a national body to enable those authorities where provision was poor to improve. The main way that library services to visually impaired people can be improved is by supplying simple low vision aids, and good lighting and signing in the library. Ways of improving the range of alternative format material are suggested in the final chapter.

Acknowledgements

Contents

Chapter 1

Introduction

Context and Background

Historically public librarians have, generally speaking, had little to do with visually impaired people -particularly the blind. Post-war librarians left services in the hands of agencies for the blind such as the RNIB and NLB and this "represented a decline from the time when many public libraries maintained reasonably strong links with these two institutions" (Craddock 1985, p1). This decline can be attributed in part to the introduction of free postal services in the 1970s that favoured centralised distribution of materials. The result was the strengthening of the role of social services as providers of services to blind people at a local level and the decline of public library provision of library and information services for the blind.

Surveys in the 1980s showed that public libraries were still peripheral providers of services to visually impaired people at a local level. An important contribution to research at this time was Bell's (1980) extensive survey of the impact and provision of large print books. Her methodology included a combination of documentary sources, questionnaires, and interviews to three groups of people: librarians, library users and the general community. She therefore provided a comprehensive and important source of reference for those serving the information needs of visually impaired people. Moreover, her research highlighted a need for large print books and promoted professional interest in this area of provision. However, she found that the demand for large print books was not being met; that the publicity for the books was inadequate and that reference services were practically non-existent.

Craddock (1985) hoped to complement Bell's survey by focusing on those with more serious visual impairment (and therefore less likely to only use large print books). He conducted a wider survey of services provided specifically for blind people. His methodology included a questionnaire to all the public library authorities in the UK which achieved a 92% response rate. Craddock felt his research was timely due to the general technological growth including low vision aids; the growth of national and local

voluntary agencies which were producing a variety of audio cassette publications and the improvement in community based services which opened up avenues of approach to serving the blind for public libraries which were not previously available. However, his research concluded that public libraries were not, on the whole, meeting the needs of blind people and had failed to develop policies of provision. In addition, despite the finding that over 60% of libraries (Craddock 1985, p18) had links with agencies and institutions for the blind, this was often one of referral, and like Bell (1980), he found that there was little evidence of liaison between libraries and agencies for the blind.

Although provision of services was disappointingly poor in the 1980s, recent surveys point to a growing awareness of the needs of visually impaired people and an increased willingness to do something to improve services for them. Williams (1996) conducted a survey of library services to the blind in the UK and Ireland and found that there were projects carried out by agencies for the blind in conjunction with public library authorities in order to promote "community based library services for visually impaired people with the aim of localising library and information services for the blind community" (Williams, 1996, p137). Examples of these projects include 'Share the Vision' and the EXLIB project.

Need for this Survey

The reasons for undertaking this research are threefold. First, the existence of these co-operative projects points to a new role in public library provision for visually impaired people. It therefore seems opportune to review the relationship between the public library and agencies for the blind to find out what is currently happening in the development of such services and the effects on provision. It will also be interesting to discover whether these co-operative projects are indicative of changing professional attitudes.

Secondly, there has recently been great interest in the general value and future role of the public library. This has been put in terms of its role in the emerging learning or information society and it is widely held that "if the values of the public library service are to survive into the next millennium, then public libraries must embrace the new information and communications technologies (ICT) and exploit them for the benefits of

all users" (LA, Jan. 1998). This is seen as a key to universal access and opportunity and therefore there are important implications for the provision of services for visually impaired people. In the long term, the 'People's network' would seem to offer extensive prospects for visually impaired people to finally access information services on an equal and independent basis. The general trend towards the public library's role in electronic networking could help in delivering this change. To what extent this network is in place and whether the needs of visually impaired people have been considered in this is also, therefore, of interest.

The DDA (1995) which requires service providers to make changes to the way in which they provide services to disabled people if they would otherwise be unable to use that service could be important in ensuring visually impaired people have equal access to networked information sources.

Finally, a further incentive to carry out this research has been a personal interest in the information needs of the visually impaired which has originated from working as a volunteer for the RNIB. I am interested to know to what extent librarians as a whole recognise the reading and information needs of visually impaired people.

Definitions

This survey hopes to assess the variety and range of services provided by public libraries and unlike most previous studies, is not concentrating on either the blind or partially sighted but on the visually impaired generally. It could be argued that trying to separate blindness from partial sight is to make a arbitrary distinction as the range of visual impairment presents a continuum, with perfect sight on one end of the scale and total blindness (no light perception) at the other. It is difficult to practically distinguish between the two 'groups' of the blind and the partially sighted. It is even problematic to find an adequate definition of what 'blindness' is. It cannot be equated with darkness since only 15% (Bruce 1991, p70) have no light perception. Bell's (1980) research highlighted the fact that "no entirely satisfactory definition of 'blindness' or 'partial sightedness' has been found" (1980, p13). In fact, according to Cullinan (1977) there are at least 67 different definitions of 'blindness' in use around the world.

One way around this difficulty would be to use the criteria used for registration purposes in Britain. To be registered blind the criteria used is that a person is "incapable of any work for which eyesight is essential, or to have a visual acuity of less than 3/60 (Snellen)" (Bell 1980, p14) while to be registered partially sighted the individual has to have a visual acuity of 6/60 (Snellen) or to be "substantially and *permanently* handicapped by defective vision caused by congenital defect or illness or injury" (Bell 1980, p14). It is apparent that the distinction between the two groups is not clear cut, and that there are two main problems with using these ophthalmic criteria for a survey into provision of library services and information needs. First, it does not take into account inability to undertake leisure activities such as reading. Secondly, registration is voluntary and large numbers of visually impaired people, particularly those who are partially sighted, are not registered even though they meet the required criteria for registration. The RNIB found that there were a predicted 300 000 blind and 457000 partially sighted people aged 16 and over, (Bruce 1991, p43) of these, 23% (Bruce, 1991, p3) were registered.

Therefore, the best definition for 'blind' and 'partially sighted' is an operational one. Bell (1980) uses the definition "those unable to read normal print, wearing spectacles if normally worn" for visual handicap, for the purpose of her study. Similarly Long (1993) uses "those who do not have enough vision to see the daily national papers distinctly" (1993, p373) to define 'blindness', and "those who have noticeable difficulty reading the papers due to a problem with their eyesight" (1993, p373) for those who are partially sighted. Therefore, for the purpose of this study similar operational definitions are used.

Where a distinction must be drawn, the term 'blind' is used for those people who for most purposes cannot see to read print while the term 'partial sight' is used for those who, if they wear normal spectacles, they will no longer correct vision to the level required for easy reading of print. The term 'visual impairment' is used as a generic term to cover both conditions. Despite the difficulties involved in making a distinction it is necessary for the study to distinguish between those most likely to rely on large print and those needing audio and tactile publications. Similar definitions have been used

satisfactorily in the studies by Bell (1980) and Craddock (1985) despite their imperfections.

Aims and objectives

The general aim of this research is to assess the role of the public library in the provision of library and information services to the visually impaired. However, because of the time constraint this survey could only make a small contribution to this. It does however, aim to indicate current trends in this area and attempts to make some conclusions about the public library's current role in such provision.

This research also has a number of specific aims:

(i) To investigate the present range and variety of materials and services provided in UK public libraries.

(ii) To examine the role of the public library in providing services for the visually impaired.

(iii) To attempt to establish how effectively services are being provided and promoted to visually impaired people.

(iv) To investigate levels of satisfaction among the visually impaired with library services.

(v) To make some assessment of current professional attitudes among library staff to the provision of such services.

The objectives of these are:

(i) To make some assessment about whether attitudes towards providing services to the visually impaired have changed since the 1980s.

(ii) To discover current trends in the provision of services.

(iii) To assess the impact of the growth of new technology in the public library on the provision of services to the visually impaired..

(iv) To investigate to what extent the information needs of the visually impaired are being met.

(v) To examine relationships with other agencies and institutions that serve the blind and partially sighted and their effect on service provision.

(vi) To make recommendations that might improve library services in the future.

In this chapter an overview of the research that has been carried out into the subject of visual impairment in a library context has been attempted. In chapter two the methodology for this project will be set out including the boundaries and limitations of this study. Due to the large number of acronyms that are used a glossary is included in appendix 1. Chapters 3 to 5 give an overview of the main themes and issues concerned with the provision of services to the visually impaired. Chapter 6 discusses the results of questionnaires and interviews with service providers and library users. The dissertation concludes with a discussion of results and recommendations for improvements to practice.

References

Bell, L.J. _The Large Print Book and its User_ Library Association, 1980

Bruce, I., McKennal, A. & Walker, E. _Blind and Partially Sighted Adults in Britain: the RNIB Survey_ Vol. 1 London:HMSO 1991.

Craddock, P. _The Public Library and blind People_ Library and information research report 36 British Library, 1985.

Cullinan, T.R. _An Epidemology of Visual Disability_ Health Service Research Unit Report 28. HMSO, 1977.

Long, C.A. "Making information available to partially sighted and blind clients" _Electronic Librarian_ vii Dec. 1993, pp373-84.

Williams, S. "Library Services to the Blind" _Journal of Librarianship_ 1996

Chapter 2

Methodology

Boundaries

The project commenced on 20th March 1998 and concluded after six months work on 15th September 1998. It was necessary to impose and clearly define boundaries at the outset. The limitation of time meant that the project concentrated on the situation and material only in this country, on visually impaired people rather than those with multiple handicaps (including vision loss), and on those over 16 rather than on children. The latter were ignored because of Shaw's (1969) research that demonstrated that, for children, the size of type was of less statistical significance than for adults as they could hold text closer to their eyes to achieve a larger image. Also, children's books tend to be in larger print anyway and it would be difficult to find a group of visually impaired children who were library users.

The methods used

The three main methods of collecting data that were used were documentary sources, questionnaires and interviews.

The study began with a literature search which was conducted using all the main bibliographical tools to produce a core of texts on all aspects of welfare for blind and partially sighted people, large print books, embossed print, technological aids and other related subject matter. These were obtained and their bibliographies consulted to add to the list of relevant material and then relevant notes were taken.

A list of organisations and agencies for blind and partially sighted people was also compiled and they were contacted about their range of services and any co-operation between themselves and other voluntary organisations, or public libraries.

Information received from these two methods was used to compile a questionnaire to library authorities in the UK (appendix 2). The intention was to provide an overview of provision for visually impaired people in public libraries. Particularly important were questions on co-operative relationships with organisations and agencies for visually impaired people and their effect on services.

Following a pilot study to seven authorities and minor alterations to questions, the questionnaire was sent to a sample of fifty percent of all the UK library authorities. These were spread throughout the UK in areas that were geographically and economically diverse in order to be as representative as possible. The aim was not simply to identify how many libraries were providing suitable material since the introduction of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA 1995) made this a legal requirement. Rather the intention was to discover to what extent the role of the public library was as a provider of services to visually impaired people particularly to those who are blind.

The questionnaire was designed for speed of completion which regrettably meant that this was at the expense of depth and that some useful questions had to be omitted, particularly on methods of publicising services. Therefore to obtain additional information and to add richness to the data gained from a relatively brief questionnaire, interviews were conducted with a sample of librarians in three public library authorities in the Midlands area. The purpose was to find out more about attitudes to provision of information and library services to visually impaired people. Information required included publicity methods and effectiveness, attitudes, library initiatives, funding allocation and its justification and access issues. These were obtained by semi-structured interviews and opportunity was given to comment generally on provision of services to visually impaired people.

For library users, the nature of the survey was determined by the characteristics of the user group. It was obviously unreasonable to expect people with serious sight problems to complete a questionnaire form. Therefore it was decided to conduct structured interviews to collect data. A pilot study of five interviews suggested that length would not be a problem so this method was used throughout the survey. The use of flashcards was precluded so lists of options were read out so that a range of answers would be considered and readers were also encouraged to state choices which were not included.

These interviews were conducted with sample of fifty library users from three libraries in the Midlands: Wolverhampton Central library, Bilston library and Chesterfield library. These interviews which took an average of ten minutes to conduct were carried out over

a two week period. Library users were approached on a purely random basis. The only exceptions to this was when the interview subjects were obviously in a great hurry and would have refused anyway. Following the methodology used by other researchers (Bell, 1980 and Herbert, 1982) the users browsing at large print book shelves were observed and when they were seen to select a large print book they were approached for an interview. Previous surveys (e.g. Bell, 1980) had included messengers in their samples who were allowed to answer on behalf of the person for whom they were choosing books and it was anticipated that the number of visually impaired people using the library might be very low. It was decided however, that only the visually impaired people themselves could answer the questions fully so any messengers encountered were thanked and told that they need not continue. Fortunately the number of visually impaired people encountered was not too low.

Limitations

The obvious drawback with collecting data from visually impaired library users in this way is that only those with sufficient residual vision to read print would be discovered. It was, however, felt to be impractical to attempt the same methodology by observing use of special equipment or low vision aids. This was because of the very low use of such equipment in such libraries as discovered from the questionnaire, and because blind people comprise a very small number of visually impaired people in a particular area generally. Unfortunately this meant that the views of blind people are not included in this survey.

Some compromises also had to be made in designing the survey due to the limited time available. Larger samples would have been desirable, as would the inclusion of other service points such as day centres or local blind organisations with a deposit collection. It was also apparent that a longer period of more extensive studies of this nature would be required to build up a more comprehensive picture of current library provision and co-operation. Despite these limitations it was felt that sufficient information was gained in order to reach some conclusions about the current situation .

References

Bell, L.J The Large Print Book and its User Library Association, 1980

Craddock, P. The Public Library and Blind People Library and information research report 36 :British Library, 1985

Herbert, D. An Appraisal of Library Services for the Blind and Partially Sighted Loughborough Thesis 1982.

Shaw, A. Print for Partial Sight: a Report to the Library Association's Sub-Committee on Books for Readers with Defective Vision Library Association, 1969

Chapter 3

The Reading and Information Needs of Visually Impaired People

Introduction

As outlined in the introduction, it is difficult to find an adequate definition of what 'blindness' or 'partial sightedness' is and the terms are often misunderstood, evoking stereotypical assumptions. In this study an arbitrary distinction is made between the terms, so 'blind' is used for those 'unable to read normal print wearing spectacles as normally worn', while 'partial sight' is used for those who 'have great difficulty in reading wearing spectacles as normally worn'. These definitions tend to create a mental distinction where 'blindness' equals 'those unable to see anything', while partially sighted people can see something, if not very much. This belies the real picture which is much more complex with visual impairment presenting a continuum ranging from those with no light perception on the one hand, to those with perfect sight at the other. Further, as Craddock (1985) notes:

> ...the scale is multidimensional as well as linear with many variables of age, other disabilities, needs, abilities and opportunities...which refute simple definitions. (Craddock 1985, p13).

Therefore, when serving visually impaired people it is not possible to meet their needs by considering one easily definable group of users since it may not always be possible to isolate a person's blindness from their other disabilities when considering their needs. Perhaps the only true criteria is to consider that person as an individual although this is impractical.

As most visually impaired people are over 75 and female (RNIB, 1998), it is easy for those providing services to them to do this according to a stereotype and this may not meet their needs at all. This is because there are people of both genders and all age groups to be considered. Besides, even the information needs and reading preferences of just two people categorised in this way may be very different.

Visually impaired people have the same range of information and reading needs as those who are normally sighted. The difficulty is that most of this information is in an inaccessible format i.e. normal print. The provision of information and reading material plays a number of important roles for everyone. The five main ones are to support citizenship, daily living, education, employment and culture/leisure.

Information to support citizenship

To support access to citizenship, information is needed on local council, local and national governments and voluntary bodies. In order to make an informed choice to vote in elections and know about changes that may affect how we live, information is of vital importance without which a person becomes divorced from the country in which s/he lives and the laws that govern them. Without information on the candidates in an election, for example, how can a person meaningfully exercise their right to vote?. This information is vital to us all as citizens but can be denied to those who are unable to read normal print.

Access to information about voluntary bodies is especially important as many visually impaired people are reliant on state or charitable services. They may require information on benefits and housing and on the range of organisations, services and equipment which is available to them as blind or partially sighted people. This is especially so if the person is elderly and unregistered as blind or partially sighted. Bell (1980) found that there was a great deal of ignorance about services that were provided by social services and blind organisations and many visually impaired people in her study who were interested in Talking Books had never previously heard of them. Similarly, the RNIB (Bruce 1991) discovered that many people who could have been registered were not. The lack of information in these areas can create disadvantage for those who are deprived of it.

Information for daily living

Information needs of visually impaired people are no different from those of the general population, but they also require information about their visual impairment and the

services and benefits available. Sighted people often take for granted the information they use for daily living. Train and bus timetables for example, are available only in very small print yet without such information a visually impaired person's ability to travel independently is affected. Watching TV is one of the main leisure activities for visually impaired people and provides them with a main source of information, however the listings are available mostly in small print. The *Radio Times* is available in Braille but only 3% (Bruce 1991, p118) of visually impaired people can read this so many may miss out on programmes that would be useful or enjoyable to them because they did not know about them.

Another area of daily living is local- programmes of arts, music, local organisations etc. Material providing this information is usually in leaflet form but knowledge of local events can contribute to the quality of everyone's life and is a factor in social communication and integration within a community.

Information for education and employment

Information for the purposes of education is particularly important for younger visually impaired students. Because of special units or schools for the blind and the production of material in the student tape library most of the information they require can be made available to them. Because such textbooks are not standard, however, there is often a delay between when information is required and when it can be produced. This delay can place a visually impaired student at a disadvantage when compared to the sighted student who can simply obtain the book from the library. Further, older visually impaired people who are not registered may be denied access to non-fiction material as few non-fiction titles are available in large print.

For employed visually impaired people reading can be vital to maintain current professional awareness and this is usually available in printed journals. This means that visually impaired people who are unable to read print may be placed at a disadvantage in the job market if information is inaccessible. Provision of vocational material is currently provided almost exclusively by transcription services.

Reading for pleasure

Finally, an important need for access to print for people is to provide access to culture-literature, drama, music or art. One of the biggest providers for meeting the leisure needs of visually impaired people is the RNIB's Talking Book service. However it is dangerous to assume that since the majority of visually impaired people are elderly, leisure reading satisfies all their needs. This common assumption stems from the conceptualisation of stereotyped models of talking book recipients as passive, elderly and listening to Catherine Cookson. This promotes an erroneous conception of elderly people and also misrepresents the scope and use of the Talking Book service. In fact, it is significant that a majority of visually impaired people do not use the Talking Book service. The RNIB needs survey (Bruce 1991, p97) discovered that 88% of those questioned had either never used the service or were lapsed users therefore, it serves a fairly small minority of visually impaired people, largely those who are blind but unable to read embossed print. Since most blind people are not elderly, the stereotype would undoubtedly lead to unfulfilled needs if used as a service model.

This does not mean however, that audio material does not meet information needs or has little significance. The Talking Newspaper Association of the UK (TNAUK) made the first large scale provision of recording of newspapers and magazines, which may have represented the main source of reading before the onset of poor vision. In this context it is important to discuss the importance of linked reading and information services to the underlying needs of their users. An important need for anyone is to be able to communicate with others and this is vital for social integration. Information is often gathered through print sources, however, which may be closed to visually impaired people and may make conversation difficult "their exclusion from so many of the visual avenues of information gathering may cause them to feel so ill-informed on details of news and current events that they become passive listeners rather than active participants" (Dobree and Boulter, 1982).

Talking newspapers are important because they relate specifically to the local community and local culture and play a role in aiding social integration. Their rapid expansion in the last two decades since their introduction suggests that they meet an important need which lay dormant and unarticulated before they were introduced. This, however, raises the question of how many other reading and information needs still wait to be identified.

Identification of reading needs

The introduction and consequent expansion of both talking newspapers and large print books indicates the reactionary nature of provision of services to the visually impaired. There are three possible reasons which explain why this is the case. First, there are certain empirical problems in identifying the needs of visually impaired people from observation, particularly in a library setting, which are not present for other disabilities. Bell (1980) observed large print book shelves in order to identify visually impaired users. She found however, that only 5 out of 602 people seen at the large print shelves were visibly handicapped yet one third of these were unable to read normal print when questioned (Bell 1980, p197). Moreover, those who were identified as being visibly handicapped may in fact have been able to read normal print. This is because most visually impaired people with guide dogs or white canes suffer from "tunnel vision" which makes mobility difficult but leaves the central visual field unaffected enabling them to read standard print. This means that observation as a method of identifying the needs of those with visual impairment is difficult and can lead to misdiagnosis.

The identification of a need for large print material is further compounded by the tendency for those in the largest sector of visually impaired people- those over 75, to accept sight loss as an inevitable part of old age and to deny or ignore eye problems. Their impairment may even seem unimportant if there are other disabilities present. Thus, with a largely unrecognised and unvocal user group it is not unsurprising that their needs have often been overlooked and that the demand for information in suitable formats has been vastly underestimated.

It is the elderly who comprise the largest group of visually impaired people who may have the most acute need of material in a suitable format. Because they often tend to disregard their visual handicap, they are not registered and so do not have the benefit of reading and information services from organisations for the visually impaired. Pedley (1987) recognises that it is in this age group, however, that reading can play a particularly important role. Retirement can lead to a loss of purpose and feelings of boredom and worthlessness while reading has been linked to the maintenance of self-esteem, providing mental stimulation, the opportunity for interaction with others and the ability to maintain autonomy. Mental stimulation is provided from the vast amount of ideas and information that is present in books and the discussion of which leads to interaction with others. Autonomy comes from the ability to find out for oneself rather than relying on an intermediary. While information remains largely print-orientated, however, this is often denied.

Effective provision of reading and information services to meet demand relies on the identification of largely unspoken needs. These are needs of two basic types- the need for material in suitable formats, and the need for the right types of material to suit individual preferences for particular subjects or authors. Those providing information and reading services should bear in mind that there may be little common ground between what will meet the needs of one visually impaired person and what will meet the needs of another.

Unfortunately, it is likely that demand is not being met because of the reactionary nature of provision. This is due, on the one hand, to the failure of librarians and other service providers to recognise the needs and provide services to meet them, and, on the other, to the failure of those who are visually impaired to articulate those needs. Older visually impaired people in particular tend not to be vocal in their demands or complaining if their needs are not met. Bell (1980) for example, found that elderly large print readers in her survey were uncomplaining for what amounted to a basic level of provision. This means that there are likely to be needs that are still largely unfulfilled. Moreover, the number of visually impaired people whose needs are unmet will inevitably increase:

> ...as the proportion of elderly people within the population grows...the incidence of visual impairment will also increase. In fact it is established that the numbers of registered

blind people alone will increase by an average of 4.3% per annum at least until the year 2001. (RNIB 1985, p35)

This makes the identification of the reading and information needs of visually impaired people and the provision of material in suitable formats of increasing importance. If this is to happen however, the library service must become proactive rather than reactive to the needs of visually impaired people. A more demanding approach to such provision will be a prerequisite of effective service provision.

The focus of the next chapter is the large variety of equipment and technology which exists to meet the reading and information needs of visually impaired people and the difficulties in using these in the library setting.

References

Bell, L. J.   The Large Print Book and its User   Library Association , 1980

Bruce, I, Mckennal, A & Walker, E. Blind and Partially Sighted Adults in Britain: the RNIB Survey Vol 1 London: HMSO 1991.

Craddock, P.   The Public Library and Blind People   Library and information research report 36, British Library, 1985

Dobree, J.H & Boulter, E.   Blindness and Visual Handicap: the facts Oxford University Press, 1982

Moss, J. Initial Demographic Study RNIB London: 1985

Pedley, H.   Large Print Provision for the Elderly: a Case Study of Two Notttinghamshire Libraries Loughborough Thesis, 1987.

Royal National Institute for the Blind "Blindness the Facts" (Leaflet) RNIB, 1998

Talking Newspaper Association of the UK "What does it take to make a Newspaper Talk?" (Leaflet) TNAUK, 1998

Chapter 4

Background to Information Media, Low Vision Aids and Technology

Introduction

Visual impairment imposes the burden of restricted access to the printed page and therefore to recreational, professional and educational material. This chapter discusses the particular access problems that people with different eye conditions experience, and the wide variety of formats, devices and technology which are available to help them.

The previous chapter explained that there is no straightforward definition of 'blindness' or 'partial sightedness', likewise the problems of accessing library and information services differ according to the type of visual impairment an individual has. There may be little common ground between one visually handicapped person and another apart from the inability to read small print. A basic understanding of the physical problems faced by those with the main types of visual impairment and the implications for those attempting to access library or information services is necessary if visually impaired people are to be served effectively.

The most extreme form of visual impairment is total blindness which is, unsurprisingly the most handicapping aspect of visual loss. It is also the rarest (Collins 1994, p70). The majority of visually impaired people are over 75 years old and their impairment is age-related and due to glaucoma, macular degeneration or cataracts (Collins 1994, p67). Thus, most have been normally sighted for most of their lives and retain a degree of usable vision.

Most blind people also have some vision and the incidence of total blindness (those with no light perception) is very low affecting only between 6000-7000 people in the entire UK (Collins 1994, p67). Access to reading and information material for blind people is difficult because provision is almost entirely orientated to printed and other visual forms and the blind individual would usually require audio or tactile facilities. With the increase of new technology, this includes optical scanners or computers with speech synthesisers.

For those who are blind there have been a number of developments to allow them to read independently and access information. The first major breakthrough came with the development of embossed print of which there are two types: Braille and Moon.

Embossed print

The most widely used embossed print is Braille. This was developed in the mid-nineteenth century and was adopted by French and British blind associations. It consists of a number of raised dots using 63 out of a possible 64 symbol variations. Of these, 25 represent letters of the alphabet while the remaining 38 stand for combinations of letters, punctuation marks etc. The main drawback of Braille is that it is difficult to learn, and for libraries providing material in Braille there is the problem that Braille books take up much more room on shelves than ordinary books. For example, Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire translates into 65 volumes of Braille (Herbert,1982). Although libraries supplying books have attempted to solve this problem by producing series of half size volumes these are still larger than the average book. Despite these difficulties, for the blind person who can learn Braille there are the advantages of independent access to information and Braille has a certain flexibility which means it can be adapted to musical notation.

A second less well known tactile print is Moon which was invented in 1845 and adopted in the 1860s. The Moon alphabet is made up of 14 characters used at various angles.It is considered simpler to learn than Braille as it more closely resembles the Roman alphabet. It is most often taught to those who lack sensitivity in their fingers, particularly to older blind people. Unfortunately, very little material in Moon is produced. The National Library for the Blind's (NLB) collection of over 4000 titles is the largest collection in the world (NLB information, May 1998).

Although embossed print provides the means for blind people to access information and to read independently, there are a number of difficulties in attempting to meet blind people's information and reading needs in this way.

Firstly, only a minority of blind people have learnt Braille or Moon, or more importantly, can enjoy reading by this method. In the RNIB's Needs Survey (Bruce 1991) it was found that only 3% of visually impaired people were Braille readers ("were sufficiently fluent in Braille to read a book or magazine" Bruce 1991, p118). Further, the RNIB found that there was a relationship between fluency at Braille and age. Although most visually impaired people are over 75, it was found that Braille usage was concentrated among younger visually impaired people. While 14% of those aged 16-59 were fluent at Braille, only 1% of those aged over 60 were fluent (Bruce 1991, p119).

A second reason why Braille is not the dominant reading medium for visually impaired people is simply that insufficient material is produced in embossed print. The RNIB are the main producers of material in Braille but even they only produce 3500 items each year (RNIB information, 2/5/98.

Thirdly, many blind people do not use Braille simply because they prefer other means of retrieving information, particularly if they have become visually impaired later in life. Therefore, for these reasons Braille would not be the best way to meet the information needs of the majority of blind people.

Large print material

There are also a number of conditions which result in partial sight. Of these, central vision loss is the most common type of visual impairment in the UK with 85% of people over 75 affected by it (Collins, 1994, p70). Accessing information can be extremely difficult as to find a book on a library shelf would involve picking up individual titles and then using some sort of magnifier to see the title. Good lighting is also essential for access because the "vast majority of visually impaired people require considerably higher levels of illumination than their fully sighted peers" (Collins 1994, p71).

A third type of vision loss is peripheral vision loss ("tunnel vision") where the individual may retain central vision and be able to read the smallest print sizes, but their mobility and orientation may be badly affected. Therefore, for people with this type of impairment

normal print may well continue to be legible so equipment that magnifies is the last thing they need. Instead, they would require a field expander that makes print smaller. As with those with central vision loss, good lighting is also crucial for access to be possible.

A fourth kind of visual impairment is lowered acuity (without field losses) which gives the individual an overall poor level of definition. Reading of normal print is likely to be difficult if not impossible without some type of magnifier therefore individuals with this condition are likely to benefit from large print material.

There are a number of ways in which the reading and information needs of people with visual impairment, but not total blindness, can be met. For those with less serious visual impairment, large print provides easier access to printed material. Large print is typically 14-20 point and printed in blacker ink than usual, on lightweight paper. Large print reading material has been available in Britain since 1964 and was first produced by the Ulverscroft Foundation. The RNIB needs survey found that large print books were used by 14% of blind people with residual vision, and were the second most popular way of reading for those who were partially sighted (Bruce 1991, p136).

Surprisingly, for 29% of blind people, ordinary print is the most used medium (Bruce 1991, p136). However, although many visually impaired people can read ordinary print using magnifiers there is a difference between the ability to do so and enjoyment from doing so. King (1994, p53) says that "the strain of doing so is likely to limit this activity to essential activities: getting information rather than leisure reading".

Also, while only 12% of blind people under 60 can read ordinary newspaper print, 42% could read large print, therefore it more than doubles the access to print for these people: "these figures provide a strong argument for organisations serving visually impaired people to produce information material, not merely leisure reading, in print as well as in other media" (Bruce 1991, p8). This points to the use of large print as one of the best ways of providing material to meet the reading and information needs of the majority of visually impaired people.

Recorded media

Besides print, recorded media are important to provide visually impaired people, particularly the blind, with information to meet their reading needs. There has been a large increase in the production of tapes as they have a commercial interest, and production is widespread. Tape services are one of the main ways that the RNIB serve the blind with the Talking Book service reaching the largest number of visually impaired people. Overall, the RNIB found that 24% of blind and 6% of partially sighted people use tapes (including Talking Books) as their preferred 'reading' medium (Bruce 1991, p136). They have the advantage of being easily accessible to a large number of people, although those which are commercially produced are restricted to the most popular titles. The underlying disadvantage, however, is that for visually impaired people who have been able to read print, tapes cannot achieve the feel of reading a normal book- there tends to be a physical and psychological gap from what is being read. This may account for the Talking Book's lack of popularity among the partially sighted and demonstrates that blind people may have different reading preferences from partially sighted people.

A more recent development in tape services has been the production of Talking Newspapers. The Talking Newspaper Association of the UK (TNAUK) listed over 400 talking newspapers in the UK in 1985 (Craddock 1985, p10) and growth has continued today with around 730 talking newspapers produced every year (TNAUK 1998). Production began with a few local newspapers but in the mid-1980s this was extended to national newspapers and magazines. The use of tapes, Talking books and Talking Newspapers are considered to be important sources of information particularly for the blind, with 22% naming one of these (Bruce 1991, p20).

> In view of their popularity, talking newspapers are obviously meeting a widespread need for local information and culture. Produced in a format which is convenient and easy to handle and use...they represent an important link with the outside world. As a regular and acceptable feature of many blind people's lives they have considerable potential as a communication channel (Craddock 1985, p11).

Most importantly, they provide people who are visually impaired with a link to their community keeping them in touch with news in the area where they live. For those

people who are severely visually impaired and unable to read embossed print, they may also be the only way to provide them with information in a suitable format.

Magnifiers

Bearing in mind the findings of the RNIB needs survey (Bruce 1991) that a large number of visually impaired people are capable of reading normal print with some type of visual aid, widespread provision of reading aids is one way of increasing the resources available to visually impaired people. The most commonly used low vision aids are handheld magnifiers which 61% of visually impaired people in the RNIB's survey used (Bruce 1991, p76).This was closely followed by other types of simple handheld magnifying devices such as stand magnifiers. These simply enlarge print as they are moved across the page so have the advantages of being easy to use as well as being relatively inexpensive, costing between £30 and £60 (Gill et al, 1997). The disadvantages of providing them in a library are that they come in different magnification strengths so a variety of different magnifiers would be needed and they would not help everyone.

Secondly, magnification does not always improve clarity so "mere enlargement of the print is not always enough to make it legible. Magnification enlarges any defects in print, such as broken letters, 'grey' printing and smudgy outlines and cannot improve its relative blackness" (Shaw 1969, p7).

Third, magnification aids can be awkward or heavy to use for sustained periods especially if the reader is elderly or has additional disabilities that make it difficult to hold a book or the magnification aid in steady focus . Therefore, although they can improve access they are not the perfect solution and are unlikely to replace the need for large print since legibility is dependent on more than simply size.

A more complicated type of low vision aid is the CCTV which is a magnification device that offers a range of powers of magnification typically between 3 and 60 times for printed or hand-written media. It works by means of a magnified image which is projected onto a monitor and consists of a zoom lens and light source, a monitor and a viewing table. The main problem with providing these is the prohibitive cost. Few

individuals could afford one as they cost in excess of £1000 (Gill, et al 1997) which is an argument for an organisation such as a library to provide them, even though they may have difficulty in justifying the cost. Their main advantage over hand held magnifiers is the increased and variable magnification with the zoom lens, the comfort of a relatively normal reading position and the improved contrast of writing and background which increases the clarity of the image. Unfortunately, for the largest group of visually impaired users the elderly, they may also have an intimidating aura of being hi-tech or difficult to use which perhaps accounts for low usage in most libraries.

Reading machines

Besides these low vision aids there are also a variety of reading machines which convert printed materials into a variety of mediums, tactile or auditory. The Optacon was introduced in the 1970s and converts the visual image into tactile forms. The advantage is that it is light and portable, but it is also prohibitively expensive.

The Kurzweil reading machine (KRM) represented a significant advance in access to information for visually impaired people when it was invented in 1976. It was first installed in a UK public library in 1983 and cost £23,000 (Henry 1984, p196). When it was first invented it weighed up to 300 pounds but it is now 20-30 pounds in weight and thus much more portable. It works using a computer camera or optical scanner to convert printed material into a naturalistic speech output. Further, it can now be linked to a personal computer to perform as an interactive workstation to provide Braille conversion and speech access.

Although these reading machines represented a massive improvement in access to information when they were first invented, they are quickly becoming superseded by computer assisted aids. These hold promising prospects in the transmission and control of information. Their great advantage is that as a medium of information dissemination (either visual, tactile or auditory) they help visually impaired people to achieve equality in their access to information. Thus, books and facilities that are used by the general public can also be accessed by the visually impaired. Also, because there is a commercial need

to scan material into a computer the cost of these is much smaller than specialised equipment and they can be bought for as little as £150 (Porter 1997, p34-37).

Computers

Computers can also provide direct access to information on all kinds of subjects via access to the Internet. Moreover, if a whole newspaper is available electronically they can choose to read what they want from it: "electronic information gives independence and choice- two of the fundamental freedoms" (Porter 1997, p36). Unfortunately, the ability to find out information for oneself rather than through a intermediary is often denied because equipment is not provided.

Although computers have some clear advantages and a unique place to play in providing equal access to information this does not mean, however, that they provide the perfect solution. First, elderly people may not be keen to use something which they are unfamiliar with. As Collins explains:

> ...at least for the next two decades our primary customer base is made up of an age group who are just coming to terms with tuning televisions, who find video recorders a total mystery, yet when they lose a significant amount of vision we expect them to handle some very complex pieces of equipment as well as cope with their sight loss. (Collins, 1994, p76).

Second, they require sufficient support and training if they are to be used. Third, careful thought must be given as to the type of software provided if the visually impaired person is able to access the computer effectively.

This chapter has outlined the difficulties that visually impaired people may encounter when attempting to access information library services generally. It has attempted to show that different eye conditions have different visual effects which each make particular aspects of access difficult. The wide range of equipment that is available from simple magnifiers to sophisticated CCTVs has also been discussed. Before purchasing expensive devices it is important to consult potential users as to what they would like and where as most people especially if they are elderly will prefer low-tech devices. It is

therefore, unlikely that they will provide the perfect solution for everyone, although they can do much in helping to make more material accessible.

The next chapter will discuss the role of various organisations and agencies for the blind to set the background to service provision by libraries and to clearly outline the role of the public library in serving visually impaired people.

References

Bruce, I, McKennal, A. & Walker, E. <u>Blind and Partially Sighted Adults in Britain:the RNIB Survey</u> Vol 1 London: HMSO 1991.

Collins, J. "Understanding the problems of being partially sighted" in Hogg, F.N. (ed.) <u>Looking Ahead: a Practical Look at New Developments in Library and Information Services for Visually Impaired Persons, VIP</u> Ulverscroft :Leicester 1994.

Craddock, P. <u>The Public Library and Blind People</u> Library and information research report 36 British Library 1985.

Gill, J.M (et..al) <u>Low Vision Aids Available in Britain</u> Tiresias 1997.

Henry, M. "Services for the Visually Handicapped in Manchester City Libraries" <u>Audiovisual Librarian</u> 10 (4) Aut.84, pp195-199.

Herbert, D. <u>An Appraisal of Library Services for the Blind and Partially Sighted</u> Loughborough Thesis 1982.

King, S.P. "Looking Forward at the RNIB: RNIB Library Services of the Future" in Hogg <u>Looking Ahead: a Practical Look at New Developments in Library and Information Services for Visually Impaired Persons, VIP</u> Ulverscroft 1994 , pp52-62.

National Library for the Blind Information on NLB May 1998

Porter, P "The Reading Washing Machine" <u>Vine: IT to Assist Library Users with a Disability or Special Need</u> Issue 106, 1997, pp 34-37

Talking Newspaper Association of the UK "What does it take to make a newspaper talk?" (Leaflet) TNAUK, 1998.

Chapter 5

The Role of agencies and organisations in serving the Reading and Information Needs of Visually Impaired People

Introduction

Consideration of the role of the public library in provision of reading and information services to visually impaired people requires the perspective of the existing services provided by the various organisations and agencies for the blind and partially sighted.

Despite the difficulties (outlined in chapter three) that visually impaired people experience when attempting to access library and information services, they are not without support. This chapter attempts to look at the main reading and information services that exist to serve visually impaired people and to make some assessment on the effectiveness of provision.

The agencies in the UK that exist to serve visually impaired people can be roughly categorised into national state agencies, national voluntary agencies, regional associations, organisations for the blind and partially sighted, special schools, and a wide variety of local agencies including health and social services and local branches of national agencies. In the UK, library services to visually impaired people are largely the responsibility of the RNIB and NLB.

Royal National Institute for the Blind

The oldest and most well known of these two organisations is the Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB). It was founded in 1868 and currently stands at the centre of support services for all blind and partially sighted people in the UK. It is a large autonomous organisation providing over sixty services to blind and partially sighted people (RNIB1998). In the provision of library and information services the RNIB provides three separate services: the Talking Book library, the cassette library and the Braille library, to approximately 100, 000 people.

The Talking Book service is perhaps the most well known of these and reaches a larger number of visually impaired people than any other single tape service, providing Talking Books to over 63,000 people (RNIB, 1998).

The Talking Book library was founded in 1935 and provides a general interest service of fiction and non-fiction. It is a membership based library which both generates (by the help of volunteer readers) as well as lends its own material. Members are supplied with a RNIB Talking Book machines which are also serviced and repaired by volunteers, and 12% of visually impaired people own one of these (Bruce 1991, p89). Readers can make their selections from a printed catalogue and books are sent via a free postal service. Each book is then dispatched on receipt of the previously lent cassette.

The student cassette library (formerly the student tape library) provides a specialist recording and loan service primarily for students, although any reader can have access to it. Request materials form a large part of the library's stock. Students send in a list of titles they require and then these are transcribed by the library and the master copy is retained so it can be duplicated on request. As with requests in other libraries adequate time must be given before the copy is required if it is to reach the user in time, however co-operation between the three RNIB services means that to a large extent needs can be met effectively. The student cassette library and Braille library for example, co-operate to serve the needs of their members. For example, because transcribing material into Braille takes a considerable time and a student may require a book urgently the cassette library will therefore produce the book on cassette until it becomes available in Braille. Similarly, members of the Talking Book Library can borrow material from the Student cassette library if they require something that it does not have. These elements of co-operation thus ensure that maximum use is made of all produced materials.

The third service that the RNIB provides is a library of material in Braille and Moon. This is distributed by a free postal service. Many books are produced by the RNIB including specialist titles which are of limited demand. The RNIB is the largest Braille publisher in Europe and not only provides material for leisure and education but also for daily living including bank statements, knitting patterns and recipes. Unlike public

31

libraries, the selection of Talking Books is weighted in favour of non-fiction and standard fiction. Light fiction, particularly romances and westerns may seem to be under represented.

National Library for the Blind

Founded in 1882, the National Library for the Blind (NLB) is the only major lending library for those who read embossed print. It is a charitable organisation which provides its services free to anyone - they do not need to be registered blind or partially sighted. It lends books in Braille and Moon as well as a small amount of large print books, although they are currently phasing out large print lending and will concentrate on embossed print in future (NLB: Information 9/5/98). The library has a collection of 40,000 titles in Braille, including fiction and non-fiction for adults, children's books, and Braille music scores. The NLB also has the largest collection of Moon books in the world, including children's books, which are produced by its Moon branch.

Around 50% of this material is published and produced by the NLB and it has around 1000 new acquisitions every year. The rest are produced by the RNIB and the Scottish Braille Press. Material is supplied directly to readers via a free postal service and books are chosen from a catalogue produced in large print, Braille or on computer disk.

Although fears were expressed that the number of Braille readers would decline with the increase in tape services, these have so far been unfounded and the NLB has maintained its level of membership at 3600 active readers (30/4/98).

Problems of Centralisation

The nature of the RNIB's and NLB's library and information services with distribution via a free postal service has inevitably favoured centralisation to ensure a reasonably economical service. However this creates problems associated with operating at a distance.

First, there is limited contact with the people using the service which results in a lack of awareness of their needs. To keep in touch requires either frequent surveys such as the one carried out by Bruce (1991) or relies on readers writing in to suggest books that they want. The former is time consuming and is likely to include a majority of *registered* visually impaired people, thus the needs of those who are unregistered may be difficult to serve due to lack of knowledge and contact with them.

Secondly, there are problems caused by delays in the supply of information both from the transcription into suitable formats, and by the amount of time taken to reach them through the post. Transcription is a relatively slow process and its effect on information flow is linked to my first point. Although there will always be the need to transcribe specialist material, delays in the supply of material could be avoided if the individual needs of readers were better known, so that decisions relating to the selection of reading material could be made before its requirement by a member. In practice, even in a public library this is not easy to forecast, but it is simpler for the library staff to know the needs of its community because they have greater personal contact with them.

Thirdly, it can be argued that the regional location of collections can best serve the regional and cultural interests of people in a particular area. This is partly because a large national organisation will necessarily reflect general interests rather than provide specialised local interest collections.

Local associations for the blind

Local associations for the blind and partially sighted have an important contribution to make in particular geographical regions. They work with local authorities and their social services departments to provide a range of equipment such as Braille writers and tape recorders as well as providing general services to meet the welfare needs of blind people. Some of these local organisations act as administrators of local talking newspapers or provide collection points for Talking Books or books from local libraries. Local societies are autonomous although all of them have some contact with the RNIB (RNIB web page, 25/5/98 URL: rnib.org.uk/services/value).

Tape services

Together the RNIB and NLB and local agencies for the blind provide most services to
visually impaired people, a range of other tape services represent an increasingly
important source, however, particularly for blind people, and these must also be
mentioned. There are a wide variety of organisations offering tape reading services and a
majority of these are provided freely. They have done much to widen the choice of
material available to visually impaired people for recreation or work. These tape services
include Calibre, BLOT and the National Listening Library. These complement the
Talking Book service and have links with public libraries.

Talking newspapers are also providing an increasingly significant service to visually
impaired people. Since their beginning in 1970 when 20 blind people received the first
one (Craddock 1985, p10), growth has been enormous and 200,000 people are now
subscribers (TNAUK, 1997). The Talking Newspaper Association of the UK (TNAUK)
provides 200 national publications on tape, disk, via e-mail and a bulletin board service
for visually impaired people. As well as providing newspapers and magazines it provides
public service information from government departments and companies, and travel
timetables. Vitally, access to local news and information is provided by 530 community
based Talking Newspaper groups (TNAUK 1997) to help visually impaired people to
stay in touch with their community. As TNAUK is funded completely from donations an
annual subscription costs £20 but these are heavily subsidised by the charity.

Other organisations

A number of other organisations attempt to cater for blind and partially sighted people by
producing large print and taped versions of their products. For example, the Torch Trust
for the Blind is the main provider of religious products. The BBC has also made a
significant contribution by producing a weekly radio programme on Radio 4 called "In
Touch". This provides up-to-date information on a range of subjects including blind
issues and invites comment form visually impaired people across the country.

Finally, the Partially sighted society, although not a supplier of printed or audio-visual material, provides general welfare services to all blind and partially sighted people whether or not they are registered. This includes advice and information on all aspects of living and coping with major sight problems as well as assessment for and training in the use of low vision aids to increase independence and provide access to information in large print.

Co-operation between Voluntary Organisations

There have been increasing levels of co-operation between such organisations and agencies for visually impaired people. The RNIB and NLB co-operate to produce and lend material to their members and have worked together to produce a National Union Catalogue of Alternative Formats. They are also partners in 'Share the Vision' along with other organisations and libraries. This is discussed in more detail in the next chapter. Co-operation has also taken place with the agreement of a delimitation of functions so neither organisation duplicates or encroaches on the work of the other. This can be seen in the kinds of material which are provided in their libraries. While the RNIB concentrates on the provision of tape services, the NLB supplies material almost exclusively in tactile formats. Therefore although the RNIB also provides a library of Moon and Braille material, provision has some delimitation, with the RNIB concentrating on the provision of audio material and the NLB concentrating on supplying material in embossed print. The NLB does not encroach on the library services of the RNIB by supplying audio material and it is soon to limit its responsibility for provision further by phasing out large print lending and thus defining itself as a lending service for Braille and Moon material.

Similarly, there are charities like the TNAUK who although providing audio-visual material, confine this to the supply of magazines and newspapers rather than books. Therefore, the complete provision of reading material can be seen to be the responsibility of these three different organisations.

It is also clear that these library services seem more geared towards the provision of material for those with more severe visual impairment as they only supply a very small number of large print books. While audio material is suitable for most visually impaired people, on the whole partially sighted people tend to prefer large print or normal print than tapes. This could mean that these library services are not meeting the needs of all visually impaired people effectively since only a small minority of visually impaired people are Braille readers and audio material is neither liked nor easily usable by some partially sighted people, particularly if they have been normal sighted for most of their lives.

On the other hand, for those who are blind these organisations are the only place where they are able to find the range and choice of material to meet their reading and information needs. It is questionable though, whether provision could not be improved if supply was decentralised to a greater extent and distributed through local organisations for the blind or through public libraries.

It is noticeable that of the large number of visually impaired people in Britain, totalling approximately 1 million, the RNIB serves only one third of those who are blind and an even smaller proportion of those who are partially sighted. Similarly, the NLB serves an even smaller number. This raises the question of why such a relatively low proportion of visually impaired people have their reading and information needs served by national voluntary organisations.

One reason for this could be that because they are charitable organisations visually impaired people may attach some stigma to being provided for by a welfare service, when they simply want a good selection of books or cassettes. Secondly, perhaps as a large number of visually impaired people are not registered as blind or partially sighted they are not receiving enough publicity about the services that such organisations provide. The RNIB discovered for example, that 54% of blind and partially sighted people had not heard of the Talking Book service, particular unregistered visually impaired people (Bruce 1991, p99).

Thirdly, it is possible that the centralised method of distribution of materials is not popular. Visually impaired people may find it a nuisance to have to wait a length of time to receive materials. This suggests that providing such services to visually impaired people through libraries or local blind organisation may be a good way to encourage use of services provided by national organisations.

Historical perspective of public library services to visually impaired people

Library services for visually impaired people, particularly the blind have historically been almost exclusively provided by voluntary organisations such as the RNIB and NLB. Schauder and Cram (1977) suggested that post war British librarians were content to leave provision of information and library services for the visually impaired in the hands of charitable organisations. In the 1960s came a resurgence of interest when public librarians were made increasingly aware of the difficulties faced by visually impaired people. In 1960 came the formation of a sub committee of the Library Association's research committee on books for readers with defective sight. The outcome of this was that a grant of £10 000 was made to the Viscount Nuffield Auxiliary Fund (Shaw 1969, p8). This was to enable them to publish a list of books available in large print at this time and the grant was used to support them in publicising and to selecting titles.

The decline in involvement with visually impaired people can be traced in part to the introduction of free postal services of material for the blind in the 1970s the production and distribution of which favoured centralisation. This severed links between libraries and voluntary organisations serving visually impaired people at a local level and consequently aligned services for the blind with social welfare services rather than with public libraries. In view of the long standing national tape and Braille services and the fact that visually impaired people were thought to comprise a very small part of the population it is unsurprising that librarians placed low priority on services to visually impaired people.

In the 1980s, research carried our by Bell (1980) promoted professional interest in the provision of large print books. However, Craddock (1985) found that the prevailing

attitude of librarians at this time was that provision of services for the blind was the responsibility of social services with the public libraries' role being one of referral. Both Bell (1980) and Craddock (1985) concluded that visually impaired people could not expect much from the public library service and there was little evidence of liaison between libraries and agencies for the blind. In the late 1980s and early 1990s there were indications that this picture was beginning to change with the appearance of certain developments, although this is not to say that the impetus for change did not come from some librarians themselves. Three such developments can be identified.

First, the survey by the RNIB at this time (Bruce 1991) lead to the recognition that previous surveys had greatly underestimated the number of visually impaired people in society. In the past, the belief that visually impaired people were a small minority of the population and well catered for by the long standing national tape and Braille services meant there was little incentive for public libraries to provide services for them. However it was discovered that there were roughly three times the number of visually impaired people, (around 1 million) than had previously been estimated, even by the voluntary organisations (RNIB "Annual Review", 1997). Moreover, because of the demographic characteristics of the population and the nature of visual impairment this figure will continue to grow. Librarians and others serving visually impaired people increasingly recognise that they constitute a significant and growing minority in our society.

The second development is the increased vocalism of disabled people generally, in demanding equal rights which has increased awareness of providing services appropriate to their needs. As Machell (1996) notes:

> Local authorities have been prompted by equal opportunity legislation to examine their service...The policy of care in the community, where sick or disabled people are given help which enables them to live in their own homes ...has been a major factor in prompting library authorities to review their services. (Machell 1996, pxii).

The result of the increased recognition of the numbers of visually impaired people and their needs can be seen with the development of various co-operative projects between voluntary organisations serving the blind and partially sighted, and public libraries in order to improve and develop library services to visually impaired people at a local level.

The main projects are the 'Share the Vision' project which began in 1989 to support public libraries as localised access points for visually impaired people providing free postal services of RNIB Talking Books. The service is linked to a national database of all UK holdings of alternative format material. This means that items can be searched, and new borrowers can be added to the service, their files interrogated and their requests inputted at a local level.

There is also the PIP (Pilot Interlending Project) which was designed to create a partnership between national agencies and public libraries for interlending publications in alternative formats. Both these have raised awareness of library services for visually impaired people across the country.

Legislation

Although the drive for change to library services to the visually impaired has come in part form the direction of librarians themselves it is also a statutory duty for local library authorities to provide services to visually impaired people. The 1964 Public libraries Act made libraries legally obliged to provide a service to the general public, disabled or otherwise. More recently, the improvement for services is enforced by the DDA (1995). This makes it against the law to provide an inferior level of service to disabled people and service providers will have to change the way in which they provide their service to disabled people if otherwise they would be unable to use the service.

This law applies to people and organisations providing goods, facilities or services to the public whether paid for or free. Thus, this clearly includes public libraries. Unlike the 1964 Act, the library authority should not be able to get away with providing token services, for example just a few large print books, but the same range of services that they would expect as some one who is normally sighted. This means that visually impaired people should be able to access library buildings and have access to materials in alternative formats as well as information in a format which they can use.

The next chapter will discuss the results of surveys of public library service providers and users.

References

Bell, L.J. The Large Print Book and its User Library Association, 1980

Bruce, I, Mckennal, A. & Walker, E. Blind and Partially Sighted Adults in Britain: the RNIB Survey Vol. 1 London: HMSO, 1991.

Craddock, P. The Public Library and Blind People Library and information research report 36, British Library, 1985.

Machell, J. Library and Information Services for Visually Impaired People Library Association, 1996.

National Library for the Blind NLB Information, 9/5/98

Royal National Institute for the Blind "Introducing RNIB" (Leaflet) RNIB, 1998

RNIB web page, 25/5/98 (URL: www.rnib.org.uk/services/value.htm)

Scauder, D.E. & Cram, M.D. Libraries for the Blind: an International Study of Policies and Practices P. Peregrinus, 1977.

Shaw, A. Print for Partial Sight: a Report to the Library Association Sub-Committee on Books for Readers with Defective Vision Library Association, 1969.

Talking Newspaper Association for the UK "What does it take to make a newspaper talk?" (Leaflet) TNAUK, 1997

Chapter 6

Survey results

Postal Survey of public libraries

This chapter presents the results of two surveys of provision of services to the visually impaired: a postal questionnaire of public libraries; and an interview survey of public library users. The results of both surveys are supplemented with comments from librarians gathered in semi-structured interviews.

The main objective of this research was to assess the role of the public library in the provision of services to visually impaired people. Specifically, it investigates the present range of alternative format materials and equipment for the visually impaired. Central to this was the distribution of a questionnaire to a sample of library authorities throughout the UK.

It was recognised that for the questionnaire to provide an adequate overview and be representative , required a high response rate. It was also realised that due to the large number of questionnaires that librarians are given to complete and the current staff and resource shortages, a good response rate might be difficult to achieve.

The questionnaire (reproduced in appendix 2) was therefore designed for speed of completion which inevitably meant that this was at the expense of length and detail. In places the responses did not cover some contingencies, and ambiguities in the way some questions were interpreted were later revealed, despite a pilot study. Fortunately a fairly high response rate was achieved. Out of 107 questionnaires distributed, 62 were returned, representing a response rate of 58%.

Number of Visually Impaired People Using the Library Service

Questions 1 and 2 attempted to gain an idea of the proportion of visually impaired people using the library service within particular library authorities. It was anticipated that statistics would be difficult, if not impossible, to discover for a number of reasons.

Firstly, there are intrinsic difficulties of monitoring membership by this group. For example, as the majority of visually impaired people are over 75, they may disregard their sight problem when other disabilities are present. Many may not wish to draw attention to the fact that they are visually impaired. Therefore, they may need facilities and materials for visually impaired people but the library will have no knowledge of their sight problem.

Secondly, many libraries do not recognise visually impaired people as distinct from other disabled people so will have no record that their disability is to do with visual impairment.

Thirdly, even those libraries who do keep records of visually impaired users will often only have statistics relating to users of a particular service or services e.g. housebound services, Talking Book recipients or for claiming concessionary rates. Many others will not register as such. Any statistics given are unlikely to be comprehensive.

As anticipated, few library authorities (just 25%) could provide figures for library membership by visually impaired people. Some could only provide an estimate, and because of empirical difficulties in identifying visually impaired people (as discussed in Chapter 2) these may be inaccurate. Those who did respond to this question often recognised this for themselves and pointed out that many visually impaired users would not be registered as such with the library. From the figures available (some of which were estimates) visually impaired people were found to represent a very small proportion of total library membership. This did not vary significantly between different authorities (the smallest 0.01% and the largest 3.8% where figures were available) although one librarian estimated that visually impaired people comprised 20% of membership.

Because of the scarcity of statistics, there are limitations on the conclusions that can be drawn from these figures. They only represent the small proportion of library authorities able to give actual or estimate figures. They also represent a variety of usage by the visually impaired e.g. membership of Talking Books, housebound services etc.

This information does, however, enable some conclusions to be drawn. Firstly, in some library authorities, visually impaired people are recognised as a distinct user group within disabled people generally. Secondly, as a proportion of people served even in large library authorities, visually impaired people represent a very small minority.

Library holdings

The questionnaire confined itself to identifying the range of material stocked, the amount of holdings of particular types of material and the numbers of new acquisitions every year. The purpose was to find out to what extent libraries were responding to the reading and information needs of visually impaired people by providing material in alternative formats. Types of material were specified in the questionnaire so comparison could be made with provision made by charitable organisations such as the RNIB and NLB.

Categories

Table 1 Types of material provided by UK library authorities

Material	Number of authorities supplying	Percentage supplying
Large print books	60	97
Large print periodicals	19	31
Books in Braille	14	23
Books in Moon	5	8
Tapes/ Talking Books	62	100
Talking newspapers	22	35
BASE	62	100

Question 3 also asked for details of other material supplied which was not given on the list. This did not yield a high response but other material mentioned included Clearvision books, spoken word CDs, community information, local history on tape, music CDs, videos and Braille/tape transcription services.

Location of Stock

The purpose of question 4 was to discover whether the needs of visually impaired people had been considered in deciding on the location of materials suitable for them, in

particular, whether the decision to put material where it was would effect the visually impaired persons ability to access it.

Some evidence of consideration of their access needs was found, with 39% shelving large print books in a separate shelving area, three authorities siting material on the ground floor, five authorities recognised the importance of situating materials in well lit areas such as by windows, and two stated that it was situated in an 'accessible area'.

Only 8% of authorities seemed to give visually impaired people little consideration in the situation of their stock by shelving large print books with normal print books. Their aim no doubt, is to increase use of large print books generally, and indeed this probably serves to take away the image of large print books being for elderly or disabled people. This would however, also have the negative effect of making the books more inaccessible to the people for whom they are intended.

Library generated stock

Questions 5 and 6 attempted to discover whether any of the types of stock provided for visually impaired people were generated by the library. Just over 50% did this. Due to the lack of space, the questionnaire did not ask libraries whether these were produced occasionally or regularly, or to state what kinds of material they produced. Information on this was gained however, from leaflets which detailed this and from interviews in selected libraries. It was found that the main types of material that libraries produced were local history on tape, large print catalogues, taped library guides and magazines, pamphlets and newsletters. Three libraries provided a transcription service.

Comments on the provision of material

As table 1 shows, the vast majority of libraries provided large-print books and tapes/Talking Books. All respondents provided some type of alternative format material but this was unsurprising as this is a legal obligation under the DDA(1995). The types of material provided were commonly large print books and tapes, but as the former have

been in existence for over 20 years and the latter are often provided for general use, for an authority to provide these is not exceptional.

Encouragingly, many authorities provided a greater range of material. 34% of authorities were found to provide talking newspapers, compared to 17% in Craddock's survey (1985, p33). Talking newspapers are more often associated with visually impaired people than with the disabled generally so this is indicative of provision catering more specifically for those with sight problems.

Few libraries were found to stock material of particular relevance to blind people with little or no residual vision. Overall, 23% provided books in Braille, generally by acting as local agents for the RNIB and 8% also provided books in Moon. This is a surprisingly high percentage considering that it is not a generally well known medium and only a small minority of blind people are Moon readers.

Distribution of stock

Many visually impaired people are elderly and may be too frail, or not confident enough, to be mobile. Therefore, the only way in which they could use library resources is if they are brought to them through outreach services. Questions 7 and 8 asked about distribution of stock to those unable to get to the library.

From the information supplied, there was found to be few library authorities which provided a postal service of material suitable for visually impaired people. A total of 14 libraries reported that they did this, and some of these may have only been for special requests. This was surprising given that there is a free postal concession on some types of material to blind people and the fact that many libraries reported the provision of suitable material within the library.

All of the respondent authorities with mobile libraries provided material suitable for visually impaired people. This was mostly large print books often together with tapes or Talking Books. Other material included large print periodicals, talking newspapers,

music tapes/CDs, books in Braille and community/library information. Therefore, whether a visually impaired person might find suitable material on mobile libraries was variable. Some libraries only provided large print books which means that for those with more serious visual impairment nothing would be available. Also, unless the selection of large print books was exchanged regularly there would be the problem for users of finding something that they had not read before. This is partly a general problem of there being a very limited range of titles in large print because of their lack of commercial potential. Libraries are usually the only purchasers so there is little incentive for this to change.

Since for many visual impaired people mobiles would be their only point of access to library services it can be argued that as far as possible they should provide a full range of services. Only two authorities provided all the same types of material in their mobiles as they did in their static libraries.

Provision of equipment

As libraries are unable to turn all materials into large print for practical and economic reasons, the provision of low vision aids can make library stock more accessible at least to most partially sighted people. A problematic issue is to what extent it is the libraries' responsibility to provide low vision aids, in particular, whether the cost of such aids should be financed by the library. This was a greater problem in the past when equipment such as the KRM cost thousands of pounds. This presented a conflict between special needs and general need when there was disproportionate spending per reader. Low vision aids are now a great deal cheaper because of advances in modern technology.

Questions 9, 10 and 11 intended to discover the range of equipment provided, for how long they had been provided and whether there were any restrictions on who could borrow them. Information on the provision of magnifiers was considered important as supply involves consideration of visually impaired people in particular rather than within a general group of services for disabled people.

Numbers of libraries providing low vision aids

Most of the libraries surveyed (83%) provided low vision aids. This showed a substantial increase from the time of Craddock's survey when only 54% provided them (Craddock 1985, p39).

Table 2 Types of equipment provided by UK library authorities

Type of equipment	Number of authorities providing them	Percentage of authorities
Hand magnifiers	44	71
Stand magnifiers	8	13
CCTV	32	52
KRM	22	35
Optacon	3	5
BASE	62	100

Other equipment provided

The most commonly reported other equipment provided for blind or partially sighted people were various types of computer software to enlarge writing on screen or to produce other tactile or auditory output. Five authorities mentioned that this was provided. Other equipment specified in one or more libraries were magnifying sheets, Perkin's Braillers, eezee readers/writers and talking teletext.

Question 9 also asked the authority to state how many of each particular aid they supplied. Few provided this information, particularly for magnifiers. However, it was seen that for specialist equipment such as KRMS and CCTVs most provided one KRM and up to five CCTVs.

Comment on provision of low vision aids

Since Craddock's survey (1985) there has been a huge increase in the provision of low vision aids in libraries which seems indicative of a change in attitudes towards the responsibility of providing low vision aids in the public library. Most authorities, judging by such provision, agree that supplying such aids is their responsibility and this extended

to providing specialist equipment for those with little or no residual vision. The increase in provision of KRMs is particularly notable, from one machine provided in two authorities in 1984 (Craddock 1985, p40) to 22 authorities supplying at least one machine in 1998.

Length of time of provision of low vision aids

The purpose of question 10 was to investigate from what year most authorities began to equip libraries with low vision aids. It was felt that it might be possible to draw some conclusions about how proactive the particular authority was regarding this. For example, if low vision aids were introduced after 1995 it could prove indicative of the authority reacting to the implementation of the DDA rather than the thrust of change coming from themselves. Also if they began providing them around the same time as they became involved in co-operation with services or organisations for the blind (Q22) it could be deduced that co-operative projects were the catalyst behind increased provision.

The majority of respondents to this question had provided low vision aids for between 10 and 14 years. Twelve had provided them for 5 to 9 years. Six authorities had provided low vision aids for more than 14 years. This meant that only 11 authorities had begun providing low vision aids since the introduction of the DDA. This seems to indicate that provision of such aids in most authorities was not simply a reaction to legislation.

Restrictions on use of equipment

Question 11 was concerned with whether the library imposed any restriction on who could use or borrow equipment, for example confining use to those who are registered with the social services as blind or partially sighted.

It was found that ten authorities did have some restrictions. Six said that the restriction was that the visual aids could not be borrowed but only used in the library. Certainly aids such as the KRM and CCTV could not be borrowed, but aids such as magnifiers are suitable for individual use at home.

A distinction can also be drawn between visual aids intended for personal use and visual aids for general reference use. The provision of a magnifier for in-library use is necessary for most visually impaired people to be able to read reference material as most have extremely small print. A good case can be made therefore, for providing one in every library. It can be asked, however, whether the library has a duty to supply magnifiers for loan to users. Low vision aids such as hand magnifiers are suitable for individuals to purchase and if this is not feasible, can be provided by social services departments.

However, the advantage with supplying them at a library is that it gives visually impaired people the opportunity to see if they are suitable for them instead of trying to choose from the vast range available. Further, borrowing such aids from the library does not have the same stigma as receiving them from social services or a charitable organisation.

Quite a few libraries also sold magnifiers and this could play an important role in increasing knowledge of such aids and making them more easily available to those who need them. As Herbert (1982) notes:

> Certainly a public library has a number of advantages for the housing of visual aid
> equipment. It is an accepted and well known organisation used by people of all ages and
> abilities for a variety of reasons including education, recreation and information.
> Secondly its professional staff are skilled in analysing community types and the needs of
> their particular clientele." (Herbert 1982, p31).

Only one authority had the use of such equipment restricted to registered blind or partially sighted people. As significant numbers of visually impaired people are not registered this would mean it could not be used by all the people for whom it is intended.

Use of equipment

Question 12 concerned the levels of use of low vision aids and librarians were asked to rate how often they were used.

Table 3 Use of low Vision Aids

	1. Very frequent	2. frequent	3. rarely	4. never
Hand magnifier	3	21	11	0
Stand magnifier	0	0	5	0
CCTV	1	7	19	0
KRM	1	4	14	0
Optacon	0	0	1	0

Table 3 shows that the low use of equipment, particularly of hi-tech equipment more specifically for the blind, seems to be the experience of most libraries. Craddock (1985) similarly found that this was the case when he conducted his survey. This raises the question of whether provision of such equipment should be established as routine when use of it is often so poor. The experience of many libraries when installing such equipment is that despite publicity campaigns, poor use remains to be the case, or that after initial interest demand falls off (Craddock 1985, p57).

One reason for poor use, particularly for specialist equipment such as KRMs and Optacons is that as few blind people use or have reason to use the public library, the presence of such equipment, even if available locally would not be sufficient incentive to make them visit it.

Secondly, if such equipment is installed without sufficient consultation with prospective users it may not be appropriate to their needs and again will not be used. Those librarians interviewed claimed that users were consulted before installation. Bilston library consulted the Beacon Institute and special needs librarians, while Chesterfield library directly consulted potential users by questionnaire, interview and meetings. Consequently in both libraries, use of equipment was considered frequent.

Thirdly, if equipment has insufficient publicity many potential users will not know of its existence which again could account for low usage. A range of publicity methods aimed at relatives/carers as well as visually impaired people themselves would be necessary for it to work. Moreover, this publicity would have to be continual to have much impact. The location of equipment is also vital in determining whether it will be used. If it is hidden away people will not be aware of it, but conversely if it is in a prominent area it draws attention to itself and marks the user out as disabled. In either case it is unlikely to be used.

Finally, there may be interest in using such equipment but if there is insufficient training and support by staff, visually impaired people may be unable to use it. This may mean that staff training has to be significantly improved to enable the service to be provided. Liaison with related services may be necessary to monitor progress and usefulness.

Access to the library catalogue

The ability to use the library catalogue to find items is particularly important for visually impaired people as it is very difficult for them to browse since they would have to pick up individual books to see their titles, a process which is time-consuming and tiring.

Question 13 aimed to discover the percentage of libraries which provided the visually impaired person with independent access to the library catalogue. This would entail the provision of either large print or Braille cards if it was a card catalogue, or software giving audio or large print output. Of the libraries responding to this question just 26% provided independent access to the library catalogue for visually impaired users. This means that in a majority of public libraries in the UK visually impaired people do not have equality of access to the information contained in library catalogues, without the need for an intermediary. Moreover, even some of the libraries that did have such features to allow independent access did not have the features that would allow access for *all* visually impaired people. Blind people in particular, may find access denied if they did not have enough residual vision to read a large print monitor.

Access to library buildings

Question 14 asked whether the library had made any alterations to provide easier access specifically for visually impaired people. One purpose of this was to discover whether visually impaired people were recognised as a distinct group within disabled people generally when considering their particular access difficulties. Possible features were listed so that the respondent would consider a range of options. Overall, 88% of libraries had made some alterations with visually impaired people in mind.

Of the libraries who had made improvements regarding access *specifically* for visually impaired people, provision of more accessibly situated material was most often given by respondents (69%).

This was followed by improvements to lighting which 41% of respondents cited. This improvement is in fact, one of the most vital aspects of access for visually impaired people (see chapter 3).

In libraries where visually impaired people are denied access to the library catalogue, good signage is crucial to enable them to find the facilities and materials which they can use. Of the respondents, 22% claimed to have introduced signs with non-reflective surfaces, placed at eye level. Without such signs, it would be very difficult for most visually impaired people to find the areas containing material appropriate for them.

For blind people with little or no residual vision, tactile signs and tactile flooring are important (provided that they are able to read embossed print). Very few libraries provided either of these features. Tactile signs were provided by 3% of library authorities while 10% provided tactile flooring. Question 14 also left space for authorities to add to the list and include other access features for visually impaired people. Few added to this, but one authority provided embossed buttons on a lift, one had tactile labelling on Talking Books and two others cited features on their OPACS.

Policy

Questions 15 to 19 concerned policies and professional attitudes towards serving visually impaired people. Question 15 asked if any policy decision had been taken concerning the priority rating of services to visually impaired people. The purpose of this question was to see whether against the background of financial cuts, services to the visually impaired would be maintained.

Of the 60 libraries responding to this question, 18 confirmed that they did have such a policy. Two said that services would be maintained, four said that concessionary rates would continue to be given and nine said that such services were a priority and that they would continue to be developed, for example, providing IT projects to improve access to OPACs and introducing resource rooms.

Question 16 aimed to make some assessment of current professional attitudes towards provision of services to visually impaired people. Craddock (1985) found that general attitudes towards such provision could be split into four categories. There were those who did not think provision was the responsibility of the library service but primarily that of social services. There were those who considered that visually impaired people were adequately served within the confounds of general services to the disabled. Some recognised an obligation but were pessimistic about providing services because of lack of resources. Finally, the fourth group were those involved in special provision of services.

All but one of the respondents to question 16 affirmed that providing library and information services to visually impaired people was the responsibility of the public library. However the range of responses that Craddock (1985) found came from his invitation to add further comments about providing services to visually impaired people. It is possible that the way that question 16 was phrased in this survey encouraged an affirmative response. This is suggested by additional comments by some respondents. For example, some added that legislation made it an obligation, some said to a certain point, and four others "working with local and national organisations". Only one librarian

said that they could not give a straight answer to this question and that there were some services which public libraries cannot provide. This points to fact that some librarians responding in the affirmative were less convinced than others that public libraries were responsible for such provision.

Staff training

Questions 17 and 18 attempted to find out to what extent consideration of the needs of visually impaired people was of special interest and whether any staff had received training on serving this group. It was felt that such training would be indicative of an active concern on the part of that library.

Many visually impaired people are dependent on assistance to find their way around. Staff training is therefore important for service provision. However, if staff are untrained they are:

...unlikely to know about visual impairment or understand the difficulties faced by visually impaired people. This can lead to uncertainty or apprehension, often resulting in awkward situations and negative attitudes. (Machell 1996, p10).

A large number of authorities replied in the affirmative to both these questions, with 83% of respondents having a member of staff particularly interested in provision and 85% who had sent staff on a training course into serving the visually impaired (whether this included staff at all levels is, however,questionable). However, as with any training course, training needs to be continuous with refresher courses to remind and update knowledge. From interviews with librarians it was revealed that even though they had been on a training course into serving visually impaired people they were unsure of their needs and about ways of publicising services.

IT networking

Question 19 was considered to be important due to the recent interest in the general value and future role of the public library. It is widely held that "if the values of the

public library service are to survive into the next millennium, then the public library must embrace the new information and communications technologies (ICT) and exploit them for the benefits of all users" (Library Association, 1997, p54). This can be seen as the key to universal access and opportunity, therefore, there are important implications for the provision of services to visually impaired people. In the long term the 'People's network' appears to offer the prospect for visually impaired people to finally access services on an equal and independent basis, with the Internet and electronic document delivery playing a key role in this.

In order to make information available however, a computer with synthetic speech output or magnified screen and usually some type of interface hardware is required. Question 19 investigated whether these needs had been identified in any plans for library networking or whether visually impaired people would be cut off from this information and once again disadvantaged.

Encouragingly, 65% of responding authorities claimed to have considered visually impaired people in plans for IT networking. Some authorities who replied in the negative, however, added that it was too early to comment on this as plans had not yet been discussed. Two authorities stated that they would not be provided for because of the expense of adaptive equipment.

Co-operation

The relationship between the public library and other organisations represents the most important part of investigation. Questions 20 to 23 aimed to seek information on the main links libraries had established and what they felt this had achieved. Question 20 asked with which organisations libraries had contact. 75% reported links with such organisations. Respondents reported co-operation with a wide range of services, organisations and agencies for the blind and partially sighted.

Table 4: Co-operation with organisations

Name of organisation	Number of authorities co-operating
Local organisations and agencies for the blind/partially sighted	26
RNIB	24
NLB	7
Social services	17
Talking newspapers	7
NLL	2
Calibre	3
Blind Clubs	5

Question 21 was an open question to provide an opportunity for libraries to show where the main areas of co-operation existed. The replies were wide and varied. They showed that there were six main areas of co-operation. These were:

i) Referral

ii)Exchange or loan of material

iii)Projects/ working co-operation

iv)Publicity

v) Administration/ subscription for Talking Books

vi)Advice or guidance

Others mentioned were funding/ sponsorship of equipment (4), transport services to libraries (2), training of library staff (4), sharing information (4), avoiding duplication of services (1) and joint events (1).

Length of co-operation

Question 22 aimed to find out how long standing these co-operative relationships were. Overall, it was found that 15 authorities had become involved in co-operation with organisations since the introduction of the DDA. Fourteen had been involved for up to 10 years and nine had been involved for over 10 years (some for over 20 years).

All respondents noted positive results and a wide variety of responses were given to question 23. Increased awareness or understanding were most often named. This was of three types: awareness of services provided by voluntary organisations by librarians, awareness of visual impairment, and increased awareness of visually impaired people of services available for them (in libraries or by voluntary organisations).

Many librarians felt that the main outcome of co-operation was a more co-ordinated approach to provision so services to visually impaired people were not duplicated. This is similar to the co-operative approach among voluntary organisations.

Thirdly, ten authorities claimed that co-operation had resulted in better provision of services to visually impaired people often because of an increased awareness of their needs and a more co-ordinated approach.

Other authorities also named increased use by visually impaired people (2), better communication (3), production of material (2), provision of equipment (2), access to information (4) and staff training (3).

All respondents noted positive effects resulting from the co-operation and felt that library services to visually impaired people had been improved.

Co-operation between libraries

Question 24 asked whether there was any co-operation between libraries to provide service to visually impaired people. It was felt that the limited numbers of visually impaired people within an authority might lead to co-operation to share resources in a region and make up for any gaps in provision.

Overall, 30% of respondents were involved in such co-operation. Again positive effects were noted. The main types of co-operation were:

i)Exchange of information/ experiences

ii)Joint provision of stock

iii)Joint staff training

Other types of co-operation noted were projects, open days, paid subscriptions for Talking Books and joint meetings.

Few library authorities provided services to visually impaired people via co-operative relationships with other libraries, even though it is possible to borrow items in alternative formats from other library authorities via interlibrary loan. With finance being a major problem in library authorities, co-operation with other libraries is one way of maintaining services in the light of financial restrictions.

Other comments

Question 25 invited librarians to add any further comments about services to visually impaired people. None answering the questionnaire did this, although many included leaflets about their services to the visually impaired. From additional information gained from interviews, however, comments were made about plans for future development of services. At Bilston the librarian intended to work more closely with voluntary organisations, recognising the benefit of co-operation. Similarly at Chesterfield library the librarian commented: "improvements to services have been great but must continue to improve to obtain truly equal access".

User survey

The postal survey represented the main enquiry into library provision. To make some assessment into how satisfied visually impaired users were with such provision, a sample were interviewed at selected libraries. Given such a small sample, it cannot of course be representative of the thousands of visual impaired people in this country. However a number of broad conclusions can still be drawn.

Personal details

The interview (reproduced in appendix 3) given to users was divided into four sections. Section A was concerned with personal details of visually impaired users- whether they were male or female and what age group they were in. It was found that 76% of large print users were females. This was unsurprising as more females are visually impaired

than males. Bell (1980) also makes the point that by interviewing during working hours, a greater number of females would be encountered than males, although this seemed of little relevance here as nearly all the visually impaired users were over retirement age. This did not vary substantially whether the interviews took place in the morning or afternoon.

The next area surveyed was age. Most large print users were elderly and the youngest readers were in the 50-59 age range. This again was unsurprising given the demographic characteristics of visual impairment. The largest age group interviewed were in the 70-79 range which comprised 78%. No readers under 50 were encountered. This bias means that the sample was not representative of all visually impaired people.

Table 5 Age and sex of respondents

	Chesterfield			Wolverhampton			Bilston			% of readers
AGE	Male	Fem	Tot	Male	Fem	Tot	Male	Fem	Tot	
50-59	-	1	1	-	-	0	-	-	0	2
60-69	-	5	5	1	-	1	-	-	0	12
70-79	4	11	15	5	15	20	1	3	4	78
80+	1	2	3	-	-	0	-	1	1	8
TOTALS	5	19	24	6	15	21	1	4	5	50

Large print Books

Section B aimed to find out how satisfied library users were with the material provided for them. First they were asked whether they were able to read standard print, comfortably, with some difficulty , or not at all.

Table 6 Ability to read normal print

	Chesterfield	Wolverhampton	Bilston	Total %
Comfortably	10	3	1	28
With some difficulty	11	16	4	62
Not at all	3	2	-	1
Total	24	21	5	100 (50)

Question 5 asked whether they ever borrowed standard print books from the library. This was to see whether users reading large print were in fact visually impaired, or used the books to supplement normal print. Five of those encountered said that they did not have a problem with their eyesight but preferred large print. These were not interviewed further if this was the case. Two thirds of those who were visually impaired were able to read normal print but this was usually with difficulty. They struggled to read normal print books simply because there was insufficient choice in large print.

Question 6 then dealt with levels of satisfaction with the range of large print. Visually impaired users were asked to rate how satisfied they were with them. It was found that most users claimed to be satisfied with the range, rating themselves very satisfied (4%) or satisfied (74%). Only 18% rated the range as average and a further 4% said they were dissatisfied.

 Table 7 Levels of satisfaction.

Satisfaction	Chesterfield	Wolverhampton	Bilston	Total %
Highly satisfied	1	-	1	4
Satisfied	9	14	4	74
Average	3	6	-	18
Dissatisfied	1	1	-	4

However, although 78% claimed to be satisfied with the range of large print books, their later comments appeared to dispute this. Many complained that they found it difficult to find something which they had not read before and one lady said that the books she liked to read were now like "familiar friends".

Moreover, in question 7 which attempted to examine how levels of satisfaction might be improved, users were asked whether there were any kinds of books or particular authors that they would like to see more of and 96% answered in the affirmative. A range of responses were given. Forty seven percent requested more romances, particularly popular authors such as Catherine Cookson and Georgette Heyer. This was followed by

crime/mystery novels (18%), historical novels (12%) and Westerns 2%. A further 2% requested more non-fiction and 19% said that more of everything was needed.

In interviews, librarians were asked whether they considered any type of book in large print to be under represented. All responded in the affirmative and said that there was not enough non-fiction. They were however, trying to rectify this by purposely buying as much non-fiction as possible in an attempt to encourage publishers to publish more. This is a positive step by librarians indicating an understanding of the relationship between their purchasing power and the effects on supply. One librarian felt that this was a catch 22 situation, "unless publishers think there is a demand they won't publish, but unless they publish they can't prove the demand" (Librarian Chesterfield library 13/7/98). Few of the users interviewed, however, wished to see more non-fiction although two users said that large print books did not cover wide enough range of interests and requests were made for astrology/ New Age type books.

Although most large print readers fitted the stereotype of elderly women reading romances it is a question of equality to provide material to meet a range of users' interests. Publishers tend to concentrate on what they perceive to be the most popular types of fiction, namely romances and although this is what the majority of large print readers wanted to see more of, regular readers of, for example westerns, would soon exhaust stock of that particular genre. Moreover, readers of romances tended to state particular authors rather than the category romance. Individuals that discriminate by choosing particular authors of a genre would soon have read all the books by him/her. It is not surprising that large print readers at these three libraries were struggling to find something that they had not read before.

Satisfaction with Tapes
Given the limited range of large print books, large print readers were asked whether they ever borrowed tapes from the library. Only 10% (all at Chesterfield) were found to do this, although the range of tapes were complained about as well as the fact that they only had the most popular books. Most users questioned were disparaging about listening to books on tape "I can't bear to be read to" or "cannot get involved in the

story" were typical comments. Some of those who were not interested in listening to tapes were those with other disabilities such as poor hearing or arthritis. Given these findings, no users were found who received or would be interested in receiving Talking Books.

Use of equipment

Section C was concerned with use of low vision aids. These can be useful to increase access to print for those with poor sight. It was found that 97% of those using large print books used a low vision aid. For 94%, spectacles were used and 4% also used either a hand-held or A4 magnifier. None of them had borrowed these from the library although five people had purchased an A4 magnifier there.

Access

Section 4 concerned aspects of access. Questions 18 to 20 investigated distance and method of travel to the library. The aim of these questions was to discover how easily visually impaired people were able to obtain suitable material from a library and whether they were travelling outside their local area to obtain this. It was found that 79% travelled 1 mile or less to reach the library. 17% travelled between 1 and 2 miles and 4% travelled 3 miles or over. Therefore large print users were almost exclusively restricted to those within the community.

It was found that the most common way of travelling to the library was by walking there (65%) while 31% were given lifts, 3% had travelled on public transport and 1 % had travelled using their own transport.

Users were asked whether travelling to the library presented them with any difficulties because of its location. As the libraries in two cases (Chesterfield and Wolverhampton) were centrally situated this was not the case, although for the library in a suburban area (Bilston) two users said that as they were reliant on lifts from a neighbour/relative this restricted their ability to reach the library.

Access problems within the library were considered in questions 21-23. Users were asked whether they ever found it difficult to find something they wanted in the library because of their vision. The large print stock in all three cases were shelved in separate sections on the ground floor of the library and most users said they had no such problems finding what they wanted, although some experienced difficulties if they were shelved on the bottom shelf which they could not reach easily or if the library had moved the stock around.

Considering that lighting is so important for access for visually impaired people, they were asked in question 22 whether lighting in the library was adequate. All those questioned replied in the affirmative, although as no-one was actually reading their books in the library they may not have known whether this was the case. Alternatively, they may have been puzzled by the question and not realised that lighting was an important feature for access.

The final question in this section (Q23) concerned access to the library catalogue to find something that they wanted. None of the users questioned ever used the library catalogue and said that if they needed to find out where something was they asked at the enquiry desk. This confirms the view that few elderly visually impaired people would be likely to use special equipment.

Publicity

The final section of the interview aimed to find out how effectively librarians were publicising their services to visually impaired people. Book lists could be important to draw attention to new stock or list the whole stock of a particular genre. None of those questioned however, had ever seen a book list in the library, although 85% claimed that they would be interested in receiving one so they would know when new books by their favourite authors had been purchased.

Question 26 concerned whether they had become aware of library services suitable for them following publicity from the library. The only two ways that users claimed to know that there was such material was either if they had been long-term library members and had noticed themselves or if a friend had mentioned large print books.

In interviews with librarians, they were questioned about methods of publicity which they had used and its effectiveness. Wolverhampton and Bilston library had used exhibitions, connections with social services and local agencies, local radio, displays, posters/notices and local paper to market their services. The librarian at Bilston claimed that the local paper was the most effective method as it reached a large audience, primarily relatives, friends or carers of visually impaired people, so the message could be passed on. The least effective method was felt to be displays within the library as only those who were already library users would see them, and they would not attract new users.

Chesterfield library had used a similar range of publicity methods particularly talks to carers, health visitors and clubs and local services, posters/ notices, newsletters, local radio, local paper and through connections with social services. Again posters/ displays in the library were recognised as the least effective publicity method while word of mouth was seen as the most effective

Further comments

The final question to users was whether they had any further comments to help to improve library provision or services. Disappointingly, few were forthcoming on this, only more/ a greater range of large print books, more taped books, more paperback large print books and that libraries should not put large print books on the bottom shelf were specified. Their lack of vocalism was perhaps unsurprising given the fact that most were elderly and were found in previous studies (e.g.Bell 1980) to be uncomplaining.

Summary

It is clear that the situation regarding library and information services to visually impaired people is extremely variable. On the one hand there are libraries with minimal levels of provision, while on the other, there are authorities who are proactively seeking to improve the supply and range of alternative format materials, equipment, provide independent access to the library catalogue and have considered plans for IT networking.

This discrepancy seems to stem from the few individuals in an authority or particular library who are concerned with enabling blind and partially sighted people to gain independent and equal access in their use of the public library. Such individuals, as Line (1994, p174) puts it, are:

> ...anti-Darwinians, not content with seeing only the naturally fittest survive but trying to make the visually impaired equally fitted to live in society.

As far as large-print books are concerned visually impaired people still lack the amount and range of books that they require. There is evidence that some librarians are attempting to change this status quo by deliberately purchasing non-fiction to make up for the deficit and encourage publishers to publish more. Given the limited range, the finding that people who were not visually impaired were using large print books raises the question over whether they should be allowed to borrow them if they are depriving those who genuinely need them. The difficulty is that attempts to restrict use of such books to those who need them, may promote these books as intended for elderly or disabled people and set them apart as a special category, rather than assist and promote normalisation. There are also practical problems of deciding whether certificates etc. would be needed when few visually impaired people are registered as blind or partially sighted. These conclusions are discussed further in the final chapter.

References

Bell, L.J. The Large Print Book and Its User Library Association, 1980

Craddock, P. The Public Library and Blind People Library and Information Research Report 36. British Library, 1985.

Herbert, D. An Appraisal of Library Services for the Blind and Partially Sighted Loughborough Thesis, 1982

Line, M. "Concluding Paper: Looking Ahead" in Hogg (ed.) Looking Ahead: a practical Look at New Developments in Library and Information Services for Visually Impaired Persons ,VIP Ulverscroft, 1994

Chapter 7

Conclusions and Recommendations

General conclusion

This chapter will attempt to analyse the preceding chapter with the objective of producing a series of recommendations which would help to improve library and information services to visually impaired people. To reaffirm, the general aim of this project was to discover the present role of the public library regarding provision for blind and partially sighted people.

To understand the current situation regarding such provision the historical context is important. The public library has traditionally concentrated on the supply of reading and information materials in print. Reading and information services provided by charitable organisations have historically been aligned with social welfare and have impinged on library and information supply. Given this, public libraries have felt better able to respond to the needs of partially sighted people with the supply of large print books than the needs of blind people. In their dealings with the blind their role has been one of referral to voluntary organisations. Therefore, there has been a long-standing division between services provided to visually impaired people by the public library and services provided by the organisations and agencies for the blind. This has meant that library provision for visually impaired people has developed in an uncoordinated way and consequently there are gaps in overall provision which has hindered the continued development of effective services.

Libraries remain primarily providers of information and reading services for partially sighted people with a degree of useful vision. This is shown by their concentration on the supply of large print books. Relatively few libraries provide alternative format materials and they have no choice but to refer blind people to voluntary organisations. Public libraries were, however, found to be expanding on their traditional role by liaising with voluntary organisations for visually impaired people and by providing some services to blind people by acting as local access points.

Access to information and reading material

<u>Large Print Books</u>

There are a number of problems relating to access to stock in some public libraries. First, even if the library has large print books most visually impaired people are dissatisfied with the range, even though they may be pleased with the books themselves. Large print books still do not cater for a sufficient range of interests. In particular, there is a dearth of non-fiction.

There are a number of ways in which the range could be improved. First it may be possible to make greater use of existing materials by circulating them more widely through the system for example, by regularly circulating stock with other branches.

Secondly, librarians should try to buy more non-fiction. This is not easy because publishers still concentrate on titles they consider to be commercially viable. Librarians can, however, use their purchasing power to help improve matters by purchasing as much non-fiction as they can. Also, visually impaired people themselves could play a role in helping to improve matters by being more vocal in demanding such material. It was found that the users interviewed were uncomplaining even though they felt the range to be deficient. Librarians backed this up, claiming that users very rarely came to them to complain about the range or request a large print book they did not have.

From the case studies, it was noticeable that it was mainly the librarians rather than the large print users themselves who were dissatisfied with the amount of non-fiction available. This could mean that a purchasing policy which concentrates on the purchase of non-fiction may not be meeting user needs. This points to a need for greater communication between the librarians and visually impaired users, for example by interviews with large print users or discussions with user groups, if they are to be served effectively.

Information on visual impairment

There is a range of materials of interest to visually impaired people about organisations, equipment etc. that could help them but of which they may be unaware. Availability of such material could be improved by increasing the amount carried in the library and making it accessible in all libraries. Libraries could begin by supplying leaflets from voluntary organisations and periodicals such as the *In Touch* Handbook or *The Beacon* which is published by the RNIB.

Alternative format material

There are few public libraries which provide material in alternative formats suitable for blind people. Although all the libraries in this survey provided taped material, it is likely that this is inaccessible to most blind people because only two authorities specified that they used tactile labelling on audio material, the majority probably do not. Libraries could improve access to existing materials simply by labelling tapes in large print and Braille.

Library information can be made more accessible if more authorities produced library publications in alternative formats themselves. Promotional leaflets and user information should be produced in a range of material as a matter of course. Local associations for the blind and partially sighted may be prepared to transcribe material for libraries.

Access to bibliographic information

Many visually impaired people are deprived of access to bibliographic information which is particularly important as they cannot browse along the shelves in the same way as sighted people can. If such information is available on an OPAC, screen magnification or speech synthesisers linked to Braille embossers can enable the visually impaired person access to it, although this equipment remains expensive. Provision of booklists of materials in alternative formats may be one option to let visually impaired people know what is available.

<u>Access to the Internet</u>

The use of the Internet provides visually impaired people with a huge range of information. This is a fast developing area in public libraries with the immanent implementation of the 'People's Network'. Many library authorities have not considered the access needs of visually impaired people in this and so in some regions they will once again be deprived of equal and independent access to such information. Libraries should aim to supply access equipment so that all visually impaired people can access the Internet.

Mobility

Visually impaired people may find it difficult to get to the library and find their way around it. The obvious solution is to improve access to library buildings, increase mobile and housebound services and provide services by post.

The location of the library can be important if visually impaired people are able to use it. The most convenient buildings are accessible by public transport, have drop-off points nearby and have pedestrian crossings to get to them. The entrance to the library should be clearly marked.

Inside the building suitable material and equipment should be on the ground floor if possible with tactile flooring and/or clear signs in large and embossed print. Lighting should be consistent throughout the building with task lighting in the reference area. A large print or tactile map of the library should be situated near the entrance if the library is large and has many sections. Also the library should produce the map in hand out form in large or embossed print and on tape.

Mobile services may be the only way that some visually impaired people can access public library services so the full range of alternative format material should be available and hand-held magnifiers or magnifying sheets should be provided.

Providing postal services of material to blind people resolves the problem of them struggling to get to the library building. Some items are free under the 'Articles for the Blind' arrangement including embossed print and audio material. Other items could be supplied if the library would pay for postage but it is accepted that this may not be possible.

Equipment

Since the surveys by Bell (1980) and Craddock (1985) there has been a large increase in the number of libraries who supply equipment designed to help those with visual impairment. Such provision is important given the lack of material in accessible formats. Simple equipment such as hand-held magnifiers can help large numbers of partially sighted people access print and were found to be well used compared to other low vision aids. However, it can be easy for librarians to think that such equipment can solve all their problems while the experience of most libraries in this survey was that it was rarely used. Generally speaking, the more hi-tech the equipment is the less likely it is to be used be visually impaired people, particularly if they are elderly. To avoid specialist equipment being an expensive white elephant it is clear that market research to potential users is necessary or at least consultation with organisations or agencies for visually impaired people for advice on what to buy. The location of the equipment can have an important effect on levels of use and ideally it should be placed in a relatively private place with adequate signage or tactile flooring leading to it. Many blind people may think that the public library has little to offer them so publicity is essential and must be maintained.

Staff training on how to use the equipment is important so they can show the visually impaired person how to use it. It cannot be assumed that visually impaired people will know this for themselves or understand the benefits of such equipment.

Publicity

Many visually impaired people have poor knowledge of library services due to inadequate promotion. Libraries should ideally publicise services using a comprehensive and proactive marketing strategy. The publicity should be aimed at visually impaired people themselves and their relatives and carers and using as many different types of

media should be used as possible. Newsletters, local newspaper and talking newspapers, and local radio are likely to meet the widest audience, while leaflets and posters in the library are least effective, although they may reach visually impaired people by word of mouth. For specialised equipment its availability should be publicised continuously, without effective marketing its use will remain poor.

Training

If staff are poorly informed about visual impairment and the needs of visually impaired people they are unlikely to serve them effectively or plan the right services for them. Training is important but to be effective it has to be updated and should include all levels of staff.

To know the information and reading needs of visually impaired people is a prerequisite to providing library services for them. An effective means of finding out would be to have a user group of blind and partially sighted people to discuss what they need, or people from local organisations for visually impaired people. User surveys are also important. These should be sent in the users preferred reading medium and would be useful for suggestions for improvements which may not be obvious. Ideally knowledge of the needs of visually impaired people should be encompassed in the curriculum of library courses in the UK. To be effective, however, practical training would be necessary.

Co-operation

Those libraries involved in co-operative relationships with organisations for the blind and partially sighted noted a number of positive effects on library services. In particular, they help to resolve problems faced by the library authority in providing services to visually impaired people. Resources can be better utilised by co-operation with other local agencies. Local societies for the blind for example, will often spread costs by borrowing or sharing their equipment. They may help record details of special services or provide transcription services of texts not already available to meet the special requests from users. Some organisations and public libraries have reciprocal arrangements for access to alternative format materials and the use of reading aids and equipment. Organisations

can also share their expertise and provide information on how to improve information and library services or to train staff into serving a visually impaired person.

The effect is a more comprehensive service to visually impaired people which can only be beneficial. Libraries should therefore continue to develop or form partnerships with voluntary organisations and with other libraries to provide effective services at a local level.

General recommendations

The differing levels of provision of services to visually impaired people across the UK means that in some library authorities blind people can hardly be said to receive a library service from their public library. This could be alleviated by a set of standards regarding such provision. Although there is the difficulty that as the current level of service is so variable those who have good levels of provision may cease to develop services further. Machell (1996) together with the Library Association has produced a set of guidelines regarding provision of services to visually impaired people. The benefit of having guidelines on a national basis is that they could be adapted flexibly by local authorities within their particular needs and the financial constraints of implementation. However, this leaves it in the hands of interested individuals to bring about change.

Legislation may be more effective but unless the authorities have financial ability to implement improvements this will be difficult. There is a need for more effective co-ordination between voluntary organisations and libraries which is at the moment based on informal and often ethereal co-operative relationships. The implementation of a national body to provide advice and focus co-ordination of provision is necessary for improvements to continue.

As a minimum requirement libraries should at the very least have adequate lighting and provide material in alternative formats as well as magnifiers to help visually impaired people access other material. These should be available in all branch and mobile libraries as well as main libraries.

Some authorities may not be providing more than the minimum because they feel alterations will be unaffordable. This need not be the case as to provide a service to visually impaired people does not mean the purchase of lots of expensive equipment. Many libraries could make themselves more accessible simply by improving lighting and signage and by providing simple magnifiers. The problems of under-resourcing can be overcome in a number of ways. Firstly, as previously discussed, by forming co-operative relationships with voluntary organisations for blind and partially sighted people to help with transcription or the loan of equipment. Secondly, it may be possible to obtain a grant from the Equal Opportunities Department of the council to provide transcription facilities or improve access. Thirdly, commercial organisations such as Ulverscroft Large Print Books may fund specific services in return for publicity.

Providing reading and information services to visually impaired people is a question of equality. Due to disparate provision of information and library services in the past, provision of such services has not been effective and services have been duplicated. Visually impaired people have to put up with a lack of suitable material in alternative formats and in some library authorities it is questionable whether they receive a library service at all. For too long services to blind and partially sighted people have been left in the hands of those with a particular interest in helping them, both within voluntary organisations and public libraries. This means that levels of service are precarious and may not be maintained when those individuals move on. Service provision had improved immensely in areas where there are such proactive individuals while elsewhere provision remains minimal. It is clear that legislation or a set of library standards are required so visually impaired people can access a public library service which they deserve and for which they are paying.

References

Bell, L.J. <u>The Large Print Book and its User</u> Library Association, 1980

Craddock, P. <u>The Public Library and Blind People</u> Library and Information Research Report 36. British Library, 1985.

Machell, J. <u>Library and Information Services for Visually Impaired People</u> Library Association, 1996.

Bibliography

Barwick, M. "Project EXLIB: Expansion of European Library Services for the Visually Impaired" Ausiovisual Librarian Vol. 19 Nov. 1993, pp311-312.

Bell, L.J. The Large Print Book and its User Library Association, 1980.

Bruce, I, Mckennal, A. & Walker, E. Blind and Partially Sighted Adults in Britain: the RNIB Survey Vol. 1 London: HMSO, 1991.

Clark, L.L. (ed.) A Guide to Developing Braille and Talking Book Services IFLA pub. 30 Saur, 1984.

Collins, J. "Understanding the Problems of Being Partially Sighted" in Hogg, F.N. (ed.) Looking Ahead: a Practical Look at New Developments in Library and Information Services for Visually Impaired Persons, VIP Ulverscroft, 1994.

Craddock, P. The Public Library and Blind People Library and information Research Report 36. British Library, 1985.

Craddock, P. "Public Libraries and blind people: What kind of relationship?" Public Health Library Review 3 (1) Mar 1986, pp14-20.

Cullinan, T.R. An Epidemology of Visual Disability Health Service Research Unit Report No. 28 HMSO, 1977.

Dobree, J.H. & Boulter, E. Blindness and Visual Handicap: the facts Oxford University Press, 1982.

Fleming, B. "An Accessible Service" Library Association Record (96) Dec. 1994, pp671

Gill, J. M. (et...al.) Low Vision Aids Available in the UK Tiresias, 1997.

Hall, C. "See it and hear it" Libtech Feb 1998 Vol 3 (1).

Henry, M. "Services for the Visually Handicapped in Manchester City Libraries" Audiovisual Librarian 10 (4) Aut. 1984, pp195-199.

Herbert, D.A. An Appraisal of Library Services for the Blind and Partially Sighted. Loughborough Thesis, 1982.

King, S.P. "Looking Forward at the RNIB: RNIB Library Services of the Future" in Hogg, F.N. (ed.) Looking Ahead: a Practical Look at New Developments in Library and information Services for Visually Impaired Persons, VIP Ulverscroft, 1994.

Leach, A. "National Library for the Blind: Its Past, Present and Prospects" Health Library Review (1) 1984, pp1-7

Library Association New Library: the People's Network LA 1997.

Line, M. "Concluding Paper: Looking Ahead" in Hogg, F. N. (ed.) Looking Ahead: a Practical Look at New Developments in Library and Information Services for Visually Impaired Persons, VIP Ulvercroft, 1994, pp174-178

Livesey, S. & Fisher, S. "Included equal and Independent?" Libtech Aug. 1997 Vol. 2 (4) pp83-4.

Long, C. A. "Making information available to partially sighted and blind clients" Electronic Librarian vii Dec 1993, pp373-84 .

Machell, J. Library and Information Services for Visually Impaired People Library Association, 1996.

Massis, B. E. (ed) Serving Print Disabled Library Patrons London: McFarland, 1996.

Moss, J. Initial Demographic Study RNIB: London, 1985.

National Library for the Blind "Information for New Readers" (Leaflet) NLB, 1998

National Library for the Blind "Reading at your Fingertips- the Services of the NLB" (Leaflet) NLB, 1998.

Pedley, H. Large Print Provision for the Elderly: a Case Study of Two Nottinghamshire Libraries Loughborough Thesis, 1987.

Pinion, C.F. "Audio Services for the Blind and Partially Sighted in Public Libraries" Audiovisual Librarian 16 (1) Feb 1990 p2428.

Porter, P. "The Reading Washing Machine" Vine: IT to Assist Library Users with a Disability or Special Need Issue 106, 1997, pp34-37.

Rosen, L. "Enabling Blind and Visually Impaired Library Users" Library Hitech 35 9:3 1991, pp45-6.
Royal National Institute for the Blind "Blindness: the Facts" (Leaflet) RNIB, 1998.

Royal National Institute for the Blind "Can Everybody Reach You?" (Leaflet) RNIB/ LA, 1993.

Royal National Institute for the Blind "Getting in Touch with Blind People: a Guide for Information Providers" (Leaflet) RNIB, 1993

Royal National Institute for the Blind "Introducing the RNIB" (Leaflet) RNIB, 1998.

Royal National Institute for the Blind "Setting our Sights on Eye Health Annual Review 1996/97" RNIB 1997.

Schauder, D.E & Cram, M.D. Libraries for the Blind: an International Study of Policies and Practices P.Perigrinus, 1977.

Shaw, A. Print for Partial Sight: a report to the Library Association's Sub-Committee on Books for Readers with Defective Vision Library Association, 1969

Talking Newspaper Association of the UK " What does it take to make a newspaper talk?" (Leaflet) TNAUK, 1998.

Williams, S. "Library Services to the Blind in the UK and Ireland: a Comparative Study 5 years on" Journal of Librarianship Vol. 28 (3) 1996

Wood, N. "The Vision Shared" Audiovisual Librarian Vol. 18 pp178-82.

WEBSITES
Royal National Institute for the Blind,25/5/98 (URL: http://www.rnib.org.uk)
Talking Newspaper Association of the UK, 22/5/98 (URL: http://www.tnauk.org.uk)

Appendix 1

Glossary of acronyms

CCTV	Closed circuit television
DDA	Disability Discrimination Act (1995)
EXLIB	Expansion of european Library services for the visually disadvantaged
GUIs	Graphical user interface
ICT	Information and communications technology
IT	Information technology
KRM	Kurzweil reading machine
NLB	National Library for the Blind
NLL	National Listening Library
OPAC	Online Public Access Catalogue
PS	Partially sighted
RNIB	Royal National Institute for the Blind
TNAUK	Talking Newspaper Association of the UK
VIP	Visually impaired person/ people

Survey on Provision of Services to Visually Impaired People

Background
Name of library.................................

1. Total membership......................

2. Total membership by VI people.................

Material

3. What kinds of material do you provide for VI people?

			Quantity	acquisitions per year.
Large print books	NO [ ]	YES [ ]	....	....
Large print periodicals	NO [ ]	YES [ ]	....	....
Books in Braille	NO [ ]	YES [ ]	....	....
Books in moon	NO [ ]	YES [ ]	....	....
Tapes/Talking Books	NO [ ]	YES [ ]	....	....
Talking newspapers	NO [ ]	YES [ ]	....	....
Other (please specify).................................			....	....

4. Where is printed material suitable for VI people shelved?
....
....

5. Does your library produce large print or tactile library leaflets?
YES [ ]   YES, on request   [ ]   NO [ ]

6. Does your library produce any printed or audio-visual material for VI people?
YES [ ]   NO [ ]

7. Does your library provide a postal service of material for VI people?
YES [ ]   NO [ ]

8. Do mobile libraries provide material suitable for VI people?
YES [ ]   NO [ ]
If YES, what kinds?
....

Equipment

9. Does your library supply any of the following equipment?

	Quantity			
Hand magnifiers	YES [ ]	....	NO	[ ]
Stand magnifiers	YES [ ]	....	NO	[ ]
CCTVs	YES [ ]	....	NO	[ ]
KRMs	YES [ ]	....	NO	[ ]
Optacons	YES [ ]	......	NO	[ ]
Other (please specify)...				

10. How long have you provided low vision aids?......................

11. Are there any restrictions on who may borrow them? YES [ ]   NO [ ]
If YES what?

....

12. How often are the following items of equipment used? (Please circle)

	v. often	often	rarely	never
Hand-held magnifiers	1	2	3	4
Stand magnifiers	1	2	3	4
CCTVs	1	2	3	4
KRMs	1	2	3	4
Optacons	1	2	3	4

Access
13. Is it possible for VI users to access the library catalogue independently?
YES [ ] NO [ ]

14. Have any of the following been introduced to improve access *specifically* for VIPs?

Improved lighting	YES	[ ]	NO	[ ]
More accessibly situated material for the visually impaired	YES	[ ]	NO	[ ]
Signs with non-reflective surfaces placed at eye level	YES	[ ]	NO	[ ]
Tactile signs	YES	[ ]	NO	[ ]
Tactile flooring leading to issue desk, special equipment etc.	YES	[ ]	NO	[ ]
Tactile or large print floor plans	YES	[ ]	NO	[ ]

Others (please specify)

....

Policy
15. Has any policy decision been taken concerning the priority rating of services to VI people?
YES [ ]   NO [ ]
If YES please explain ....

16. Do you think that provision of information and library services to VI people is the responsibility of the public library? YES [ ] NO [ ]
If NO who should be responsible?...

17. Is there a member of staff responsible or especially interested in service provision to VI people?
YES [ ]   NO [ ]
18. Have any staff attended a training course on serving VI people?   YES [ ]
NO[ ]

19. Have the needs of VI people been considered in plans for the IT networking of your public library?
YES [ ]   NO[ ]

Co-operation

20. Has your library been involved in any co-operation with any services, agencies or libraries for the blind or partially sighted, to provide services to VI people?
YES [ ]   NO [ ]
If YES which ones?
....

21. What has been the nature of this co-operation?
....
....

22. How long has your library been involved in this type of co-operation?...........................

23.What has the co-operation achieved?
....
....
....
....

24. Has your library been involved in any co-operation with other public libraries or libraries in other sectors to provide services to VI people? YES [ ] NO [ ]
If YES, what has been the effect of this on provision of services?
....
....

25.If you have any further comments or clarifications of responses please attach them to this questionnaire.

Thank you for taking the time to answer this questionnaire. If you are willing to participate in a follow up case study, please write contact details below.

Section A
Background

1.Name of library...

2.(Note   MALE [ ]   FEMALE [ ])   (Messenger YES [ ]   NO   [ ])

3.Age Group   16-19 [ ]   20-29 [ ]   30-39 [ ]   40-49 [ ]

50-59 [ ]   60-69 [ ]   70-79 [ ]   80+   [ ]

Section B
Material

4.Are you able to read standard print?

Comfortably   [ ]   With some difficulty[ ]   Not at all [ ]

5.If YES do you ever borrow standard print books from this library?

YES   [ ]   NO [ ]

If NO what are your reasons for not borrowing them?

....

....

6.How satisfied are you with the range of large print books available in this library?

1.Highly satisfied   2.satisfied   3.average   4.disatisfied   5.highly dissatisfied

7.Are there any kinds of books or particular authors that you would like to see more of?

....

8.Do you ever borrow tapes from this library?

YES [ ]   NO[ ]   (GO TO 10)

If YES what kinds?..

What kinds of tapes would you like to see?

....

9.How satisfied are you with the range of tapes available in this library?

1   2   3   4   5

10.(If NO would you be interested in borrowing tapes from the library?

Why would n't you be interested in borrowing them?

....

11. Do you receive Talking Books?

YES   [ ]   NO[ ]

Section C
Equipment

12.Do you use any low vision aids?

YES   [ ]   NO [ ]

13.What low vision aids do you use?

Spectacles	[ ]	Contact lenses	[ ]
Hand magnifier	[ ]	Stand magnifier	[ ]
A4 magnifier	[ ]	CCTV	[ ]

Other..

14.Do you borrow/use them in this library?
YES   [ ]   NO   [ ]

15.How often do you use them when you visit the library?
....

16.Do you use any of the following when you come to this library?

Task lamps	[ ]	Magnifiers	[ ]
KRM	[ ]	CCTV	[ ]
Other	[ ]		

17.Would you like to see any of these in this library?
....

Section D
Access

18.How did you travel to the library today?
Walk   [ ]   Own transport [ ]   Public transport [ ]   Lift   [ ]

19.How far did you travel to get to the library? ....

20.Do you find it difficult to get to the library because of its location? YES [ ]   NO [
]
What problems?..

21.Do you find it difficult to find something you want in the library because of your vision?
YES   [ ]   NO   [ ]   SOMETIMES [ ]
What problems?..

22.Do you find lighting in the library adequate?
YES   [ ]   NO [ ]

23.Is it possible for you to use the library catalogue to find something that you want?
YES   [ ]   NO [ ]

Section E
Publicity

24.Have you ever seen any lists of large print books in this library?
YES   [ ]   NO [ ]

25.If YES how long ago did you last see one?

This week[]   1-2 weeks[]   1 month[]   2-3 months[]   3-6 months[]
6-12 months []   year+ []

26.How did you know that there was any suitable books, tapes or equipment for you in
this library?
Noticed yourself   [ ]   Friends [ ]   Advertising [ ] Newsletter [ ] poster [ ]

radio   [ ]   notices [ ]   Book lists [ ] other   [ ]

27.Any comments/ suggestions to help improve library provision or services?
....
....
....
....

28.Finally,are you: Registered blind   [ ]   Registered PS   [ ]
                       Blind,not registered   [ ]   PS not registered   [ ]

40198129