Library and Information Commission

And

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REVEAL
The National Database of Resources
in Accessible Formats

A Briefing Paper

A work in progress report on the project to develop the
National Union Catalogue of Alternative Formats (NUCAF)
as an accessible database of resources for people
with visual impairment and print handicap in the UK.

By

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1. Introduction

1.1 For this project a study was carried out by UKOLN and a report submitted at the end of 1999. The study remit was to:

- Review the future role of NUCAF, explore how it could best be developed, and define its aims and objectives.
- Produce a technical specification for metadata requirements in order to maximise the utility of the database for independent end users and library/agency staff. Within this, define the requirements for expanded and descriptive cataloguing entries to enable visually impaired people to browse a single, easy-to-use source of information.

2. Library and information services for visually impaired people

2.1 The present level of library and information services for the visually impaired population of the UK, apart from the specialist services in the voluntary sector, is inadequate and in no way integrated with the facilities available to people without sight problems. The British Library (BL) neither collects or records systematically the production and publication of material in formats accessible to visually impaired people. Local authority and academic library service provision is variable and often very limited. Recent initiatives and legislation on social inclusion have prompted improvements but it takes time to build up services to effective levels. Even within the voluntary sector, services have developed on a piecemeal basis and vary greatly in size and specific groups of user served; dependency on donation income and volunteer labour also limits their work.

2.2 Fragmentation and lack of co-operative partnerships to maximise the usefulness of limited resources remains a major problem, together with a lack of knowledge of overall provision. People know about libraries and bookshops, whether or not they use them, but visually impaired people may only know about one service provider and there is no standard way of directing someone to other providers and a wider range of material.

2.3 There is an increasing need to collaborate internationally. The National Library for the Blind (NLB) and the Canadian National Institute for the Blind now have a formal partnership agreement and the possibility of collaboration in other countries is being explored.

3. Alternative format materials

3.1 Visually impaired people have the same need for information and intellectual stimulation as the rest of the population. Their difficulty is in accessing the intellectual content as they are unable, to varying degrees, to read standard print even with normal spectacles as a result of congenital and medical conditions, accidents and the ageing process.

3.2 Very few people are completely blind and the amount and nature of residual vision, together with personal preferences, dictates the most appropriate alternatives to standard print for a particular person. A user may prefer different formats to access specific types of material (e.g. braille for fiction and audio for newspapers). The physical environment (whether one is at work, at home or on a train) may also affect choice of format.

3.3 With only around 5% of the hundred thousand new British titles published each year converted into one or more accessible formats, a union catalogue is needed to identify which titles have been converted, into which formats and where they are held. Recognising that existing catalogues covered little of this material, the Royal National Institute for the Blind

(RNIB) developed the National Union Catalogue of Alternative Formats (NUCAF). At present it is neither comprehensive in its coverage of sources of material nor complete in its recording of their holdings and direct access to the catalogue is limited. Despite these limitations, it provides a good base on which to build an improved service.

3.4 A wide range of people would benefit from being able to access the database. Visually impaired users range from child to adult, cover the whole range of intellectual ability and require material for work, study and recreation, and might also suffer from an additional impairment or multiple handicap. There would be use by individuals having long term relationships with visually impaired people (teachers and parents of children with impairment, children of parents with impairment and carers of those with multiple handicap). A range of agencies (doctors, dentists and health professionals, banks, advice centres, electricity, gas and water companies, tourist offices, schools and academic institutions, government departments, and service providers of various kinds) would either use the database or refer people to it.

4. Ownership and maintenance of a national database

4.1 NUCAF is owned and managed by RNIB. All additions and amendments to the database are made by RNIB bibliographic services. Records are downloaded from BL BNB files to act as base records, but all other data must be keyed in. In-house development of a system intended for internal use means that electronic data transfer is very limited at present and likely to remain so. None of the few access routes is easily or routinely available to the end user.

4.2 This is contrary to the current trend towards collaborative services that provide a seamless, single entry point service to users in a distributed or virtual arrangement. Visually impaired people need a national database to maximise the effectiveness of limited provision and to enable access to the full range of materials. A national database needs to be an independent entity with a range of access routes, and links into relevant systems and other databases that support visually impaired people. The new database will be known as REVEAL.

4.3 Such a resource should logically be placed within a national library, though the BL lacks the operational and specific data expertise built up by the specialist organisations. However, a partner body could carry out the work with the responsibility remaining with the BL. The data would be part of the BL database, probably in the BNB files.

4.4 The NLB and the RNIB, the largest specialist organisations in this area, are planning to deliver a joint library service. Assuming that this becomes permanent, this would be the logical base for a national service, especially if the joint service were to eventually incorporate many, if not all, of the other organisations as partners of varying types.

5. Funding

5.1 The provision of services to visually impaired people at present is through voluntary sector organisations or is supported at varying levels by other publicly funded bodies such as schools and public and academic libraries. The RNIB developed NUCAF as part of their range of services and currently provides its only financial support.

5.2 The new database would be more comprehensive, involve more producers, support more functions and be available much more widely to producers, service providers and users. Investment in equipment and staff will be necessary in the initial set up stages and financial support will then be required annually for running the service.

5.3 It is inappropriate to ask the voluntary sector to continue to fund REVEAL at the much higher level of activity envisaged. Since the proposed service benefits a section of the population nationally and supports government initiatives on education, employment and disability, government should be asked to fund the setting up and maintenance of REVEAL. This may be best achieved by channelling ring-fenced funds through the BL, who contract the service out to the RNIB and NLB where the expertise on visual impairment exists.

6. Aims and objectives

6.1 The new national database and its supporting service need to have clearly defined aims and objectives. The database has to act as a variety of tools in order to replicate services already in place for standard print publications.

- Union catalogue: facilitate loan arrangements between users, both individual and institutional, and material holders.
- In Print catalogue: enable individuals and institutions to order material.
- In Production (or scheduled for production) catalogue: help reduce duplication of transcription and widen the range of titles selected for production.
- Copyright agreement register: ideally publishers approached only once for permission for all non-commercial producers to transcribe a title into the various accessible formats.
- National bibliography: record definitive details of accessible format material within its remit.

7. Access

7.1 Visually impaired people and those working to support them are currently restricted to a few narrow avenues of access to NUCAF. There is indirect access via the customers services department at RNIB, and limited access for some library professionals through the NUCAF subsets (VIDE and ALP) and the NUCAF files on the Unity and V3. Online union catalogues. REVEAL should be far more widely accessible to end users and library professionals.

7.2 Web based system. This is the most flexible option, with customised access to the database for database management staff, alternative format producers, inter-lending services, and the end user. It can provide safeguards on data accuracy and consistency, offer a range of data display variations and facilitate user service functions through password systems, user registration and customised screens. However provision of Internet access is variable; individuals and small voluntary organisations have least access now and for many of them, this situation is unlikely to change in the near future.

7.3 CD-Rom products. For use where Internet provision is either not available or is not practical (housebound and mobile public library services, patients' libraries in hospitals, small voluntary sector producers of alternative formats, individual users) and to reduce pressure at online service points.

7.4 Electronic files. As an integral part of the national inter-lending mechanism, database files would be downloadable into the union catalogues of regional library systems and co-operatives and the national bibliography.

8. The database

8.1 The national database would contain records for material that is in production or available from a range of holding institutions. A range of people would have access to the database – database staff, producers and holding institutions of varying types, and end users – with different access permissions for display, creation and amendment of records.

8.2 The database would comprise a Union file (alternative format materials held by specialist non-commercial organisations), and an In Production file (items which are currently in process or have been selected for future production). A Notifications file would enable specialist non-commercial producers to input details themselves, with database staff controlling movement of records from this file to either the Union or In Production files. The database would also include a Copyright Register to record copyright permissions agreed, and a Collections Register, indicating the subject and format strengths of individual organisations.

8.3 While the primary function of the database is to cover production in the specialist non-commercial sector, widening access to the commercial sector (particularly large print and spoken word recordings) would greatly benefit visually impaired people. Realistically this will only be achieved through collaborative effort. Thus an In Print file could be compiled with data supplied by a book trade organisation. A Library Stock file might be compiled with data supplied by the regional union catalogues, though given the variation in notification practice, coverage would be variable.

8.4 The database should conform where possible to relevant national and international standards in data structure, import and export and also in indexing, coding and authority control. In addition to basic bibliographic data, records in the database should include contents summaries, abridgement notes, narrator and cast notes for audio materials, series and character information, genre indexing, target audience, format type and level, serials information, holdings and locations, and availability (loan/hire/sale) status and details.

9. Conclusions

9.1 The report concluded that NUCAF should be developed into a national database of resources in accessible formats, using a web-based system supported by CD-Rom products and files exported to other library and information service databases. The database should concentrate on items published and in production by specialist, non-commercial organisations, and should additionally maintain a copyright permissions register. It should be the responsibility of the British Library but hosted and maintained under a partnership agreement by the proposed joint library service of the NLB / RNIB.

9.2 The need for a distinctive name was identified and a mission statement proposed:

REVEAL: the national database of resources in accessible formats is an integral part of a network that links local, regional, national and international resources in serving the library and information needs of visually impaired and print handicapped people in the UK. REVEAL provides a resource that can be used by anyone with a need to identify, locate and obtain expressions of knowledge, intellect and creativity in accessible formats. REVEAL is available through a range of access methods to ensure the widest possible outreach to visually impaired and print handicapped people in the UK.

9.3 It is recommended that the database use the UKMARC format, with the minimum of additional fields (from MARC21 where possible) for data that cannot otherwise be accommodated. Subject indexing should continue to use the RNIB terms, and LCSH headings should be included when they occur in the source record for the original item. A single set of genre terms should be defined based on the existing alternative schemes.

9.4 Further work is needed to develop the strategic recommendations into a service management structure, investigate development and maintenance costs, and compile a system specification. A bid to fund this has been submitted to the BL Co-operation and Partnership Call.

The development of NUCAF into REVEAL

1. What does NUCAF contain?

1.1 The NUCAF database is a key tool for finding out what titles are available in accessible formats and how they may be obtained. It currently contains some 80,000 records from around 230 organisations. Around 5,000 records are added annually at present.

1.2 Titles listed in the database consist largely of the 'traditional' accessible formats of tactile and audio materials from producers who serve visually impaired people in particular. The largest category is Braille material, for which there are over 40,000 records. There are also more than 1,000 records for Moon, the other tactile medium. Audio materials are split into cassettes, which may be two or four track (over 24,000 records) and Talking Books, which require specific playback equipment (more than 11,000 records). In addition, there are around 500 records for large print material and around 70 records for electronic texts.

1.3 The range of items listed on NUCAF is wide. In fiction there are classic and modern titles, including a range of genres, for both adults and children. Non-fiction titles range from cookery books to computer manuals; they include items of a specialised academic nature, items in a range of foreign languages and Braille music scores. In addition, there are items that do not normally feature in library catalogues, e.g. an instruction leaflet for a washing machine.

1.4 At present, NUCAF does not include commercially produced large print or audio publications, public library holdings of large print and audio materials, or local talking newspapers and magazines. Apart from RNIB Access Books, it does not cover electronic texts.

2. What will REVEAL contain?

2.1 Because of the lack of systematic acquisition of data from specialist non-commercial organisations other than the RNIB itself, gaps have occurred in the coverage of NUCAF. A recent report by Brazier, Dane and Leeves [1] has identified that more than eighty-five thousand records need to be added to the database. Following this report, a plan has been proposed to acquire the missing data.

2.2 The plan identifies the organisations with significant amounts of missing data and how this might be obtained and whether they would require cataloguing support. Some further organisations have been identified as important potential sources of additional data. As very few of the specialist organisations carry the full set of data elements recommended for the new database, records acquired from them may need to be supplemented with these elements.

2.3 In addition to upgrading the union file for the specialist non-commercial area, in the longer term REVEAL will be looking at partnerships to produce records for commercially produced large print and spoken word. So it will be seeking to work with book trade suppliers to create an In Print file. REVEAL will also be looking to working with regional library systems to create a Library Stock file of large print and spoken word. For this it will be important that libraries notify regional library systems of their holdings of these materials; while libraries are now being asked to notify all formats, this was not always the practice in the past and retrospective conversion and notification is likely to prove a large task.

1. NUCAF Retrospective Conversion Project Phase 1 – Investigation: a report to the LIC/STV Steering Committee for Project One, by Helen Brazier, Karen Dane and Juliet Leeves, November 1999.

SERVICE OVERVIEW

The web site would contain the following

National Database of Resources in Alternative Formats	This will be composed of several files
Links to similar sites overseas	e.g. Louis, NLS, CNIB Visucat, Miracle
Copyright register	Records copyright permission status for titles
Collections register	Records details about specialist collections of alternative formats in the UK

The national database would consist of the following files

Union file	Material produced and held by specialist organisations
In Production file	Material selected for production and in production by specialist organisations
Notifications file	Additions, withdrawals, and selection for production data supplied by specialist producers and holders
Also desirable are:	
In Print file	Material published commercially and currently in print
Library Stock file	Material published commercially and held in public libraries

The web interface would allow the following access

Notification Entry screen	For specialist producers and holders to notify additions and withdrawals
Database Search screen	For end users to search the database on selected files or across the range of files For end users to initiate a request for an item For producers to search the database across the range of files as an aid to new title selection
Database Management screen	For database staff to add, delete and amend entries

The national database management service would

Create records for alternative format material using details supplied through manual methods by producers and holders
Enhance records for alternative format materials that are supplied by producers and holders through the web site Notification Entry screen and electronic transfer of records
Control record quality
Pass requests for items on to the appropriate producers and holders
Maintain the Copyright Permissions register
Maintain the Collections register

The national database union file should be available via

Its own web site
CD-Rom products for libraries, schools and end users
Downloaded files on union catalogues, and file subsets for educational institutions if required

Recommendations Summary

Ownership and management
- The British Library be asked to acknowledge and accept responsibility for recording this material as part of the national bibliography

- The national database of resources in accessible formats should be established as an independent resource

- The proposed joint RNIB/NLB library service should maintain the national database

Funding
- Via the British Library, government should fund the setting up of the national database of resources in accessible formats

- Via the British Library, government funding should maintain the service

Aims and objectives
- The database and its associated services must combine the functions of a union catalogue, a stock selection resource, an inter-lending tool, a sales and hire catalogue, a copyright permission register and an in-production file, and form part of the national bibliography.

- The database must provide data rich bibliographic records.

- The database must support known item searching and target area searching through adequate and appropriate indexing.

Bibliographic coverage of materials

Phase 1

- The database should record monographs, serials and ephemera in tactile, audio, enlarged print and electronic media.

- The database should concentrate on material produced by specialist non-commercial organisations

Phase 2

- The option of an in-print file supplied by a book trade database service should be investigated

- The option of a locations file for mainstream library stock supplied through the regional library systems should be investigated.

Master copies

- The database should record masters and copies

- Consideration should be given to setting up a deposit scheme for masters

Access

- A variety of access routes must be provided to the database

  - Web based OPAC

  - CD products

  - Downloaded files

  - Links to the database site from other sites

- Web facility for producers to transmit details of:

  - New titles

  - Withdrawn titles

  - In Production titles

- Web facility for end users to generate requests for items

Mission statement and name

Promotion

- Produce a range of clear promotional material, appropriate to different target audiences – end user, service provider, producer or referrer.

- Organise events to promote the database

Name

REVEAL: the national database of resources in accessible formats

Mission statement

REVEAL: the national database of resources in accessible formats is an integral part of a network that links local, regional, national and international resources in serving the library and information needs of visually impaired and print handicapped people in the UK. REVEAL provides a resource that can be used by anyone with a need to identify, locate and obtain expressions of knowledge, intellect and creativity in accessible formats. REVEAL is available through a range of access methods to ensure the widest possible outreach to visually impaired and print handicapped people in the UK.

Record import

- Set up a reporting system for producers and holders to notify the database of

  - Intention to produce

  - Addition to stock

  - Withdrawal from stock

- The reporting system should accommodate both electronic and paper-based methods

- Supporting information should be provided to producers and holders

- Individual set-up negotiations should be held with each producer or holder in order to achieve the maximum co-operation and successful implementation

User generated requests

- Design the web platform to accept requests from end users

- Design a management routine for forwarding requests or supplying items re quested

Data elements

Basic Bibliographical details

- Title, author(s), publisher, date of publication, edition, series, and subject.

Search Support

- Subject indexing, fiction genre and form indexing, target audience, format type.

Decision Support

- Annotation or content summary, target audience, series and character information, serial frequency, abridgement notes, narrator or cast notes for audio materials, format type and level, number of units comprising the title, serial holdings information.

- Also desirable: sample passages, serials article indexing

- Policy decision needed on acceptability of warnings in content notes

Support ILL and Loans

- Holdings, locations, loan status

Support sale and hire

- Availability status (hire, sale, subscription) and charge, producer/hirer/retailer

Support production selection

- Statement of intention to produce, format, producer, copyright permission details.

Standards

Record format

- Use the UKMARC format with the minimum of additional fields.

Subject indexing

- Use RNIB chain indexing and review inclusion of BIC Subject Categories

- Use UKMARC field 655 at present

- Retain LCSH headings where present in the record for the original item

Genre indexing

- Define a set of genre and form terms based on the existing alternative schemes

- Use UKMARC field 655 for genre and form indexing and for fiction topic indexing