

Format Matters

The magazine of the
UK Association for Accessible Formats
Issue 36 November 2020
Because format quality matters

In this edition:

News from the Isle of Man

7th General Assembly of ICEB

Marrakesh Treaty Ratified



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Contact us

UKAAF and 'Format Matters' contact details

UKAAF

Web: www.ukaaf.org

Email: enquiries@ukaaf.org

Tel: 0345 60 85223

Fax: 0345 60 85224

Postal address:

UKAAF

Unit 42 John Baker Close

Llantarnam Industrial Park

Cwmbrân NP44 3AW



@UKAAF

'Format Matters'

Jim McCafferty

Editor, 'Format Matters', UKAAF

242 Causewayside

Edinburgh

EH9 1UU

Tel: 0131 667 4337

Email: formatmatters@ukaaf.org

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Jim McCafferty

What a difficult year this has been for all of us! At the time of writing there is talk of part of Scotland being put in the highest level, which will mean even more restrictions. UKAAF, though, has kept going, business as usual, and we have all had to get used to using Zoom.

Recently I attended the Annual General Meeting of my local District Scout Council. Historically the Scout Association has not been renowned for providing material in accessible formats. For the first time ever I received support papers in a format I could read, and I have already thanked those concerned for this.

I participated in the ICEB General Assembly, and there is a report of this elsewhere in the magazine. It

was interesting and informative, and already plans are underway to host both the mid-term Executive in 2022 and the eighth General Assembly in 2024.

I hope that you enjoy this issue of your magazine. If you have anything to share then please do send your contribution to me.

Equally, if you have any comments on the content of this issue, or suggestions for topics to be covered in future issues, then I definitely want to hear from you.

The festive season will be very different this year, but I hope that you all have a happy and enjoyable time, and I look forward to being with you again in 2021. ❀

UKAAF Appoints new Chair, Roger Firman

Music braille specialist steps up as Chair

Focus will be on post-Covid strategy, extending membership and embracing new communications channels.

The UK Association for Accessible Formats has announced that Roger Firman has been named as its new Chair. Roger replaces Richard West who served as UKAAF Chair since 2014.

Roger is CEO at Golden-Chord, a personalised transcription service for music, music-related and other materials in braille. He understands the practical needs of visually impaired musicians first-hand, and his deep understanding of this side of working with accessible documentation will give a unique perspective to his work leading UKAAF into the post-COVID world.

Amongst Roger's early priorities was the ICEB (International Council

on English Braille) 7th general assembly which took place in October. UKAAF was significantly involved in the event as the host country. The event took place virtually. Longer term goals include widening the current membership, building alliances with other charities, extending the use of webinars and exploring new communications channels.

Commenting on his appointment, Roger said, "Obviously, I'm delighted to have been elected, but overriding everything else right now is the coronavirus pandemic, which is affecting all of our lives but I'm particularly conscious of the impact on UKAAF members. Physical distancing has unique problems for blind and partially sighted people, and for many of us it will cause great social isolation, which deeply concerns me." ❀

RNIB announces closure of their Giant Print and Moon Libraries

by Alison Long

They will close on 31 January 2021 and customers have been communicated with.

Essentially technology is changing the way we read and this has led to a shift in how Library users read books. A rise in the use of digital devices, which allow readers to optimise font size and colour to suit their own needs, means that operating a traditional giant print and Moon Library is no longer sustainable for RNIB.

RNIB is adapting its services to the changing needs of its customers and advances in technology – numbers of those using the giant print and Moon Library have significantly dwindled as other services have become more popular.

Customers can still order bespoke books through the free Personal Transcription Service and will have the opportunity to keep books from the library collection. We will also continue to offer accessible books and reading materials in other formats. These are available through RNIB's own free Online Reading Library, which is the largest of its kind in the UK, our braille Library and Talking Books service. Schools and families will be able to get customised large print books from Guide Dogs Custom Eyes service. ✳

International Council on English Braille (ICEB)

Report of the Seventh General Assembly

18–22 October 2020

by Jim McCafferty

Introduction

Some readers will recall that UKAAF, in collaboration with RNIB, had agreed to host the above and that it should have been a face-to-face event, scheduled to have been held in London in May. Due to the Coronavirus pandemic this was rescheduled for October, and was held online via Zoom. The following seven countries participated in the General Assembly: Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Each participating country was allowed four delegates, and the UK was represented by James Bowden, David Williams, Margaret Bradshaw and me. In this report I will briefly summarise each day's events: Assembly documents are available from the ICEB website, www.iceb.org, or on request from any of the UK delegates.

Sunday 18 October (Day One)

All were welcomed by Lord Colin Low of Dalston, CBE, President of UKAAF, Richard West, past Chairman and by Mandy White, RNIB, and Chair of the organising committee. This was followed by a warm welcome from the ICEB President, Christo de Klerk (South Africa). Doctor Aubrey Webson, Ambassador to the United Nations for Antigua and Barbuda, himself Visually-Impaired, delivered the keynote address. He advocated closer links between braille and technology, as this would serve to enhance the communication needs of Visually-Impaired people.

Delegates from all participating countries then introduced themselves, and this was followed by the presentation and adoption of the minutes of the sixth General Assembly, held in Baltimore in 2016.

Mary Schnackenberg (New Zealand), then gave her first report of the Nominations committee, detailing those put forward to serve on the ICEB Executive committee, following close of business on 22 October. The President's report was then introduced by Christo de Klerk, followed by country reports from participating nations. Finally In Memoriam, where those who had sadly passed away since the last General Assembly and who had made a significant contribution to the evolution of braille were remembered.

Monday 19 October (Day Two)

The report of the Music committee was presented by its Chair, Jordie Howell (Australia). Four interesting papers were also presented, including those from Roger Firman (current Chair of UKAAF) and Clare Gailans, and Doctor Sarah Morley Wilkins from the UK.

The ICEB Constitution and bylaws report was introduced by its Chair, Ntshavheni Netshituni (South Africa). In addition the following reports were presented and approved: Treasurer's report (Jen Goulden, Canada) and Publicity (Leona Holloway, Australia).

Tuesday 20 October (Day Three)

Here the theme was Braille and Technology, and papers presented included those from James Bowden and David Williams from the UK. Both the Technology report (introduced by James Bowden) and that for Code Maintenance (introduced by Kathy Riessen, Australia) were also presented and discussed.

Wednesday 21 October (Day Four)

The theme was Braille Literacy and Learning, and papers also included topics such as the use of assistive technology and Mathematics. The second report of the Nominations committee was presented by Mary Schnackenberg, and those duly proposed and seconded were elected to serve on the ICEB Executive committee until 2024. For a full list please refer to ICEB's website, www.iceb.org, or contact any of the UK delegates. Tribute was paid to Phyllis Landon (Canada) and to Leona Holloway, who have stepped down.

Thursday 22 October (Day Five)

Eight resolutions were presented and, after discussion and some amendments, were approved. For a list of those please either refer to

the ICEB website or contact any of the UK delegates. Judy Dixon (USA), the incoming President, then looked ahead, to the mid-term Executive in 2022 and to the eighth General Assembly in 2024.

During short breaks throughout the Assembly, held between sessions, audio “postcards” from around the UK were presented. Additionally there were short pieces about the introduction of braille Lego and about Judy Dixon’s fascinating collection of braille slates which she has amassed over many years.

Finally, representatives from each country thanked the hosts, particularly Mandy White and her organising committee for what was a very memorable and useful General Assembly. The concluding words were left to Mandy and Roger, who thanked delegates and observers for their attendance and participation. Thanks was, especially, given to Matthew Horspool for organising and overseeing the live streaming of the General Assembly. ✱

UK Ratifies Marrakesh Treaty

by Alison Long

The World Intellectual Property Office (WIPO) has announced the ratification by the UK Government of the Marrakesh Treaty. This Treaty aims to improve access to copyright-protected books for people who are blind, visually impaired or print disabled and it will come into force on 1 January 2021.

The Marrakesh Treaty creates exceptions to copyright to allow copies of books to be made in an accessible format, and allow those copies to transfer across borders, thereby improving access to books for blind and partially sighted people. Once the UK leaves the EU it would have no longer been part of the Treaty until it ratified it of its own accord so it is great that the Government has taken this important step now. ✱

Sad news

Dear friends and colleagues,

It is with great sadness that I share news of the death of Mr A.K. Mittal, Secretary General of World Blind Union, and President of the All India Confederation of the Blind.

Ajai Kumar Mittal (known as A.K.) has been an enormous contributor to the field of vision impairment education and the rights of children to braille literacy. One of his current contributions has been to establish an ICEVI-WBU project to promote braille for children who are greatly disadvantaged and marginalised due to the severity of their disabilities.

It is hard to believe that a man of such compassion, intelligence and human spirit could be taken by the pandemic. I will miss his friendship and wise counsel and his presence along life's journey.

Please join the ICEVI and WBU communities in expressing our sincere condolences to A.K.'s loved ones and colleagues. Let the bells ring out in honour of his passing.

Sincerely,

Frances Gentle

President, International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment (ICEVI);

Co-President, South Pacific Educators in Vision Impairment (SPEVI) Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children. ✱

Forthcoming Events

Meetings

The UKAAF Board meets every six weeks, either in phone conference or face to face. Please contact any Board member if there is an item you would like to have raised at the next meeting of the Board.

'Format Matters' dates for 2021

Issue 37:

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Issue 38:

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Friday 2 July;

Publication date:

Tuesday 3 August.

Issue 39:

Copy date:

Friday 22 October;

Publication date:

Tuesday 23 November. ✱

Members' News

Manx Blind Welfare Society

by David Wilson

[David Wilson is the Resource Officer for the Society and has worked with the organisation for 16 years. (Editor).]



The Manx Blind Welfare Society is located in the Isle of Man, which is a self-governing Crown Dependency located between England and Ireland in the Irish Sea. The Isle of Man is not part of the United Kingdom and is not a member of the European Union. The island is 32 miles long and 14 miles wide and has a population of around 85,000 people. The island claims to have the world's oldest continuous Parliament, which is

called Tynwald. As many will be aware the island is also world famous for its annual TT motorcycle road races.

The Manx Blind Welfare Society is a Manx registered charity which has been in existence since 1936 and was established by an act of our island's Parliament, which is fairly unique amongst island charities. The Society operates from a purpose-built centre on the outskirts of the island capital, Douglas. The centre was opened in April of 2003 and has provided an excellent base of operations with its fully accessible design. The Society employs seven full time staff and six part time staff. We also have in excess of 250 volunteers working across all areas of the organisation. Manx Blind Welfare Society is financially independent of

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Government and relies on the generosity of the island population.

The Society has around 500 members currently on our books, which is a combination of those who are registered sight impaired, seriously sight impaired and those who may not be registered but who are suffering from serious visual impairment. There are no charges or fees for membership and, with the exception of a small charge towards the subsidised lunches, we make no charge for any of our services.

From within our centre the Society operates an audio book lending Library with nearly 1,700 books available. The Society took the decision some years ago to look for a replacement format for the existing cassette books, as they were becoming difficult to obtain and many of the titles were getting towards the end of their useful life. After around 18 months of

investigations and various trials, we opted to move to an MP3 based system using readily available USB sticks. We initially found it difficult to get approval from publishers to use their titles as we needed to use a system that had no type of Digital Rights management or encryption. We also needed permission to convert the disc-based media to an MP3 file to then be copied to the USB stick. This was to enable us to use purpose designed simple to use players. We currently have agreements in place with three large UK publishers. We also have a recording studio from where we produce a weekly recorded news service, which uses the same players and USB sticks.

Manx Blind Welfare Society has facilities to produce alternative formats in the form of large print, braille and audio. We also have the ability to convert braille to standard text. We use a combination of software and hardware to produce

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the various formats. A ViewPlus SpotDot braille embosser gives us the ability to easily produce braille and standard print on the same document, directly from Microsoft Word. Dolphin Easy Converter is also very useful for producing quick large print and audio copies of documents. We don't currently have a great demand for the transcription services. This may be related to the fact that the island has only recently introduced Equality legislation. We expect the demand to increase over the next few years.

We have an extensive inventory of assistive technology which is available to our members. Well in excess of over £100,000 worth of technology is currently on loan to members in our community. We also have a very well stocked resource zone within our building which has a great selection of equipment on display. We do not

sell any equipment and there are no charges for our members to use any of it. All equipment is issued on a loan basis.

Some of the many other services operated by the Society include: regular weekly Lunch Clubs, Escorted Holidays, Sporting Clubs including shooting and bowling, advice and assistance, home visiting services and awareness training to individuals and organisations.

Manx Blind Welfare Society is delighted to have recently become an affiliate member of UKAAF, and is looking forward to improving and developing our service with the guidance and excellent resources which are now available to us.

Take care and stay safe. ✱

Is the tech sector getting more focused on accessibility at last?

by Tim Nelms

[UKAAF's Tim Nelms finds grounds for both optimism and pessimism for members in the latest Level Access study on "The State of Digital Accessibility 2020: The Technology Sector".]

What's notable here is that the company was actually founded by engineers with disabilities, so when it looks in-depth at a problem like digital accessibility in the tech world, there's a fair chance what will come back will be pretty credible.

There's certainly a lot to chew over in the finished study. For instance, a majority (53%) of technology sector buyers are seeking out accessible products for use in their organisations; compared with other industries, technology firms are more likely to write code-level tests to validate accessibility requirements (38% vs. 21%); 67% are seeking to conform to WCAG 2.1.; 88% of development teams

say they think about accessibility before building begins, for instance.

However, there's a lot in here that's disappointing. While the majority of respondents agree that testing by people with disabilities is important, the majority don't do it, for one.

Next, Time to develop an accessible product, or remediate an inaccessible one, emerges as a common challenge, while only 19% have more than 10 members working primarily on accessibility – and only 34% have had active, in-house accessibility programmes for longer than three years.

People feel compelled to be inclusive

My conclusion out of all this is that we are making progress, but not quickly enough. What the report shows is whilst some organisations have been taking accessibility seriously for a long time, there are a lot for whom it is quite a new initiative.

I think that speaks to the maturing of the discipline and the need for greater awareness of accessibility. Also, it's clear that sensitivity to regulation and possible legal

Members' News

problems are big drivers of even starting such initiatives; 38% of the sample say they are anticipating legislative and regulatory evolution.

The other factor cited in the report was that people feel compelled to be inclusive; we can genuinely say the primary driver for companies is altruistic, that developers want to do a better job at supporting their fellow citizens with disabilities.

The good news is that digital technologies are maturing to the point where they are fit for consumption by everybody. In 1995, when people were starting to build the World Wide Web, we hadn't thought a great deal about how people who were visually impaired were going to navigate to a web browser, but nowadays, thank goodness, Apple, Google and Microsoft all enable their products with accessible features so that you can navigate around with voiceover and screen readers.

Maybe the good takeaway here is that in parallel with the overall digital transformation the world has been going through in the last 20 or 30 years, I think we forget that

there's a similar digital transformation happening for disabled people. They're taking enormous advantage of new mobile phone and web technologies to get through life, and there's no doubt that digital technologies are having a transformative effect on people with disabilities.

Part of UKAAF's challenge is to become more focused and orientated around digital technologies and that will be a big factor in our next 10 years to ensure that they're a focus of our activity, too.

[Tim Nelms is a UKAAF Board member, where he works closely on developing and sustaining partnerships with vendors and other standards bodies. He is also VP International at Crawford Technologies, a solutions and services company focused on document accessibility, output management, enterprise content management, and archiving.]

If you would like to see the full Level Access report yourself, then go to www.levelaccess.com ✱

We need a meta format!

by Tony Dart

Before starting the UK's first digital library for the blind in 2005 (The Seeing Ear) I searched high and low for some kind of electronic editor to automate, or at least aid, the task. I couldn't find one. I wasn't even really certain exactly what I needed. Ten thousand plus transcribed books and fifteen years later I know – I need a meta-format editor And a standard.

A meta-format is an in between format. It is the format that is in between the scanned copy of the book and the finished work in its alternative format. It holds all the information necessary to create the alternative formats, and can itself be edited. It is the indispensable base document of the alternative format producer.

Transcribing from a variety of input sources – OCR'ed scans, PDFs, miscellaneous digital documents –

to a rigorously standardised meta-format has huge benefits for production. It makes training much easier (particularly of volunteers) and helps ensure quality standards. One of the primary goals of The Seeing Ear was to develop a manual specifying the various named parts of a book so that transcribers could mark the documents to a set standard.

Microsoft Word has proved to be a pretty good editor as it is widely known and can do most things needed. It allows meta-files to be created by using the Styles feature – a heading or a page number or body text is marked by applying the appropriate style. The resultant file looks pretty weird visually for two reasons – one is that it is much easier to see if a page number has been marked up as a page number if it comes up big and purple on the page, and the other is

Members' News

psychological – it is really, really hard to get a sighted person to understand that they should not be trying to get the text to look good on the screen and in so doing tweak the size or spacing of the text!

Microsoft Word files are actually XML files, like DAISY. This makes it fairly simple to write a small script or two in a programming language to run through the XML and convert it to something else. For years we used Perl, and now have standardised on Python as the scripting language, taking the Word meta-file and converting to other formats, including a “blind-friendly” version of a Word document.

Some years ago we had problems with our Daisy files due to bugs in handling graphics. Once these were sorted out we then re-ran the conversion scripts against the meta-files and re-wrote all the Daisy transcripts automatically in about three days – around 7,000 books. I like meta-files!

Having seen the benefits that accrue by producing books to a set standard, and then transcribing from that standard to the desired user format, I am convinced that the industry would likewise benefit from adopting this approach. More importantly, the user would benefit from more consistent books produced more quickly and cheaply. Transcription becomes less of a black art and more a question of following rules. For input, we need to recognise an arrangement of characters on a page as something specific – a heading, a picture, a piece of body text – and then need to mark it as such according to the standard. Output then becomes the formality of applying the rules of best practice to the standardised input. An industry-wide standard is essential! ✱

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Disclaimer and how to submit articles

If you have a piece of news that you would like to share with other members of UKAAF, you should submit that using no more than 100 words; it will fit nicely into 'Market News'. If you'd like to submit an article, then please use no more than 500 words. Articles should contain material of interest to transcribers and others involved in the production of accessible formats; promotional material may be submitted as advertisements. We do reserve the right to edit submissions to fit the current issue.

The copy deadline for the next issue is: Friday 12 February 2021.

If you're submitting copy, please supply us with the following information:

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Is there any artwork to accompany your submission?

If so, is it attached?

Submitting an article doesn't guarantee inclusion in the magazine. When considering whether to include an article, we'll take into consideration:

- whether the subject has recently been covered in a previous issue
- whether it is too similar to another article in this issue, and

- whether it is time sensitive and can be held over until the following issue if the current issue has enough content.

All contributors will be informed of the decision as soon as possible after the content of an issue has been decided.

We reserve the right to edit any material supplied.

All submissions in your preferred format should be sent to the Editor – contact details are at the end of this article

The magazine brings to your attention details about equipment, materials and services that we feel will be of interest to you. Please note that this is **for your information only**. We are **not** endorsing them or making any recommendations. Equally, reviews are **personal** comments by the writers of the articles.

Please remember: if you would like to submit an article or send details of any forthcoming events which may be of interest to UKAAF members, send them in your preferred format to the Editor by Friday 12 February 2021.

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Editor contact details:

Jim McCafferty
Editor, 'Format Matters', UKAAF
242 Causewayside
Edinburgh
EH9 1UU

Tel: 0131 667 4337

Email: formatmatters@ukaaf.org

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- Accessible Images – Roger Firman
- Audio – Peter Boshier
- Braille – Matthew Horspool
- Editorial Working Group for 'Format Matters' (a PR Task Group) – Jim McCafferty
- Electronic Documents – Jeff Mills
- Exams – Sue Day
- Large Print – David Scott
- Moon – David Scott
- Music – Clare Gailans
- Research Liaison – Vacant
- Quality Assessment Scheme (QAS) – Vacant

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