UK Country Report for
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(UK Association for Accessible Formats)

## Introduction

The braille groups of UKAAF have continued working hard and have achieved a number of successes in various different areas.

With the implementation of Unified English Braille (UEB) now complete, the structure of the main braille groups within UKAAF has been revised to two: one concentrating on coding, the other concentrating on more general matters.

The 17th and final issue of our termly newsletter, UEB update, was despatched in September 2017. UKAAF continues to host the email list called UEB-Ed. It is a community where you can ask questions about the UEB code and, particularly while UEB was new to people, was a very active international resource. Though traffic has significantly slowed, the email list is still available for those wishing to ask UEB questions.

The focus of work has shifted from resources for implementing the switchover to UEB, to more general braille advice documents, of which several have been published on the UKAAF website.

## Documents Produced

The following new documents have been published:

* Braille dot dimension standards: We were often asked about the dimensions of braille by a diverse range of people, from students to graphic designers to artists, and found we did not have an agreed answer to give them. So we undertook research looking at international standards and what embosser manufacturers used and now have an agreed standard we can give people.
* Embossing, binding and labelling: This is general guidance for good practice when embossing and binding braille publications. Topics include the weight, size and type of paper and the most suitable labels for different kinds of publications. The section on binding describes the different methods of binding and when it is most appropriate to use them.
* Reading Electronic Braille: this document gives details about reading files containing electronic braille using a screen reader and braille display or a braille note taker. It gives the typical settings and (very usefully) what happens if you have the wrong settings. It also describes how to view braille on a computer screen for sighted readers when it is presented as a BRF file.
* Formatting guidelines: The guidelines for the basic layout of braille documents in the UK was enhanced with an appendix giving further examples, and more detail in areas such as headings, tables of contents, poetry, forms and footnotes.
* Maths AutoCorrect: Generating mathematical symbols using Math AutoCorrect or Unicode contains advice on correctly creating mathematical symbols using either the MS Word Math AutoCorrect function or Unicode. It contains a comprehensive table of approximately 100 different mathematical symbols and how to generate them.
* List of mathematical signs: this document is a summary of all the mathematical symbols available in UEB. It gives the print symbol, the braille symbol, a word description of the symbol and a Unicode reference. We are very grateful again to ICEB for checking our work and for very helpful suggestions, particularly with arrows.
* Maths practice exercises: these are the practice exercises which we used as part of our UEB technical training courses in 2016, they give a series of examples of mathematical expressions in print and in UEB.

All these documents, and more, are available to download from [www.ukaaf.org/braille](http://www.ukaaf.org/braille)

## Welsh

The Welsh group of UKAAF has worked with Duxbury Systems to add more shortforms to the updated Welsh braille code, known as Unified Welsh Braille (UWB). In 2020, the updated Welsh Braille Primer was published by RNIB.

## Work in Progress

We also continue to work on:

* Expanded word list: based on the additional words in our former publication, British Braille (2004), we hope to publish an expanded word list giving nearly 800 extra words and how to contract them in UEB. Several words have proved difficult to decide and we are very grateful for the help and advice particularly from Phyllis Landon and FM D'Andrea. When we asked FM to check our work thus far, we were encouraged to find that there were only 9 words where the UK and USA differed. We continue to run through the remaining problem words and hope to publish a first version soon.
* UK Duxbury template: in collaboration with Duxbury Systems, the aim is to produce a revised template for the Duxbury Braille Translator, which will give improved layout of braille according to accepted UK conventions. This includes headings, bulleted lists, tables of contents, end markers and much more. The template was included with DBT 12.2 SR1 as a work in progress. All comments are welcome.
* We are also considering several questions related to mathematics, in particular layout questions and the use of grade 1 indicators, especially where there is more than one "correct" way to write the same expression.

## Music

The Music groups of UKAAF have also been active and have produced the following publications:

* Braille music and UEB: in consultation with Jordie Howell, the Braille Music group of UKAAF have created guidelines about how UEB interacts with the braille music code, for example when to use UEB signs and when to use signs from the braille music code. For example, this applies to brackets, which may appear in ordinary text, lyrics, or music lines.
* Revised guidelines for Modified Stave Notation: though not specifically braille, these revised guidelines produced by the UKAAF Music group give up-to-date information about MSN (the large print equivalent for music).
* Podcast series: introducing braille music, along similar lines to the podcasts about changes to the braille code, each podcast episode concentrates on an aspect of using braille music, e.g. solo instruments, vocal music, keyboard music and so on.

Music documents can be downloaded from [www.ukaaf.org/music](http://www.ukaaf.org/music)

The Music group and RNIB have also undertaken some work looking at BrailleMuse, an automated server to produce braille music, the OpenScore project and the MuseScore score writing program. Successive versions of MuseScore have made significant progress improving accessibility and it has been good to see enhancements to the BrailleMuse software and GoodFeel braille music translator. The UK is also an active member in the DAISY braille music project and contributed to the various DAISY surveys. We were honoured to host one of the DAISY meetings in London.

## ICEB

We are particularly grateful to our ICEB colleagues around the world for all their input whenever we have submitted questions on all kinds of topics: from contraction of particular words, to clarifications or requests to amend certain rules, to requesting additional mathematical signs. We appreciate the efforts of the Code Maintenance Committee in particular for progress on several of the Charges and the outcomes of these deliberations have been welcomed in the UK.

In particular the UK would like to express thanks for all the work undertaken in connection with the complex issue of the apostrophe versus single quote. It was clear from the responses we received from the survey that people (especially braille readers) very much valued the opportunity to contribute to the discussions and be consulted.

## Other News

Members from the UKAAF Braille groups have continued to judge the UK entries for the annual Onkyo Braille Essay Contest and we are pleased to report more winning entries.

The UK also continues to run the Gardner's Trust Braille Music Literacy Awards each year. The awards provide opportunity for people under the age of 19 to have their braille music reading skills assessed. In recent years we were pleased to have candidates up to level 3, but sad that no-one entered the higher levels.

UKAAF continues to hold conference-style annual meetings which have been well attended. Each year, the conference has taken a different theme, for example education, employment or web accessibility.

The Braillists Foundation (www.braillists.org) was established by braille readers to promote social inclusion and independence for blind and visually impaired people by creating and supporting projects to progress the development and use of braille and other tactile media. Until recently, the Braillists held face-to-face meetings, but since the UK lockdown in 2020, the Braillists has held several moderated online community calls weekly, for braille readers, including braille tuition for beginners.

The Braillists Foundation continues to publish BrailleCast (www.braillecast.com), a monthly podcast showcasing the many ways braille touches our lives. This includes topics ranging from interviews with special guests to focussing on a particular new technology or event.

RNIB has worked with LEGO Foundation on LEGO Braille Bricks, a playful tool to teach braille. The toolkit comprises LEGO bricks with studs corresponding to braille letters and a website containing educational activities and information on learning through play. Each LEGO brick has a printed character to ensure inclusivity. The kits will be distributed free of charge to schools.

Over the last few years, the Bank of England has introduced polymer notes, replacing our paper notes. The £10 and £20 have tactile markers (resembling the braille letter G). The Bank of Scotland has issued similar notes with tactile markings.

We also continue to follow with interest the development of various new braille technology products, in particular the Canute, Orbit Reader 20 and BrailleMe.

Orbit Reader 20 was launched in the UK in October 2018 and continues to be popular amongst braille readers. RNIB launched the Reading Services platform earlier this year, with an expanding range of electronic titles, in audio and electronic braille which can be downloaded. Due to the lock-down, the RNIB postal braille library was temporarily close. So instead of offering readers a postal service, RNIB produced an expanded SD card of books to go with the Orbit Reader and this was extremely popular.

The past years have been busy ones and I would like to thank my colleagues in RNIB, UKAAF and ICEB for all their help, support, advice and expertise.

Lastly, but by no means least, I should like to acknowledge the immense contributions of Stephen Phippen and Sally Zimmermann, both of whom contributed hugely in the areas of braille development and accessible music, and who both retired in 2019. We are greatly indebted to their wisdom and expertise and long experience in the field. We wish them both a very happy retirement.