



International Council on English Braille

ICEB Newsletter

Issue 10

March 2021

ICEB

Welcome to the March 2021 Issue of the ICEB Newsletter. Despite all our contributors being on time, we are sorry this issue is a bit delayed. We promise to do better.

Again there's a range of items from all across the ICEB family. Special thanks to each of our contributors. Our next Newsletter is due in June. If you've ideas or articles (ideally with photos) please send them to info@iceb.org. We look forward to hearing from you.

Unified English Braille

Code Maintenance Committee Update

Kathy Riessen, Code Maintenance Officer

Have you ever wondered how decisions are made to update the Rules of UEB?

The Code Maintenance Officer chairs the Code Maintenance Committee (CMC) on behalf of ICEB. The braille authority of each of the seven ICEB member countries has nominated one person to represent them on the committee and there are two invited experts, Joe Sullivan from Duxbury and Phyllis Landon the previous Code Maintenance Officer, making up a total committee of 9 people plus myself as chair. Revisions of the UEB Rulebook are decided by this committee after detailed and sometimes lengthy discussion mostly via an email listserv. The listserv also includes a number of observers from each country who add to the discussion their breadth of knowledge. We have a good mix of braille readers, transcribers and educators to give a rounded opinion. Each change is ratified by the ICEB Executive Committee before it is adopted.

Suggestions for potential revisions or new symbols are forwarded to the CMC via the various braille authorities. In April last year, after discussion and a vote, the word DeafBlind (with the interior capital) was approved to be added to the list of longer words which can

contain a shortform. Current discussion relates to the following charges of the CMC:

- Clarifying the effect of a medial capital on the “standing alone” rule. This particularly relates to the inclusion of the word DeafBlind on the Shortforms List.
- Clarifying sections 10.9.4 to 10.9.7, avoiding confusion with shortforms, and adding extra examples.
- Clarifying the **Rules for list construction** in Appendix 1 plus adding a rule around adding words containing an interior indicator or terminator.

Technical Codes Revision

A separate listserv was developed to specifically look at a revision of the Guidelines for Technical Material. These were originally written before the Rulebook was finalised and UEB has been in use long enough to have a greater understanding where clarification needs to be made in the documentation.

The decision making committee has the same structure as the CMC, however individual countries may choose to have a different representative for the Technical Codes Committee as for the Code Maintenance Committee.

So far, the committee has completed a revision of Section 3, Signs of Operation and Comparison. Currently under revision is Section 1.8, Omissions.

The Technical Codes Committee is currently chaired by the Code Maintenance Officer. The ICEB Executive Committee, after discussion, has now decided to appoint another chair for this project to work alongside the Code Maintenance Officer and share the workload.

Watch this space to hopefully see some exciting news on this front in the next edition.

UEB in Oceania

Editor's note: Ben Clare is an inclusive education adviser from Newcastle, Australia. He has worked with organisations and services for the blind throughout the Pacific for the past 15 years. Ben, who is himself blind, gives his first-hand account of how braille is being taught in Oceania and how, despite so many barriers and impediments, braille is increasing in popularity and availability.

Ben Clare writes:

The Pacific region, also referred to as Oceania, encompasses a large part of the Pacific Ocean, stretching from the Asian continent to the Hawaiian Islands and straddles both sides of the equator. Australia and New Zealand are among the most developed countries in Oceania but the region as a whole is among the least developed in the world, mainly due to huge geographical barriers making provision of basic services very difficult. Australia, New Zealand, France, the United Kingdom and the United States all possess colonies or territorial dependencies, existing alongside more than a dozen independent countries. All except the Kingdom of Tonga were once colonies of major European and American powers. Independent nations were established from the 1960s onward and they have continued their close ties with their colonial past through aid and other partnerships. The English-speaking Pacific comprises most of the region's independent nations.



All countries in the region experience major difficulties providing educational services to people with disability. There's a lack of funding for assistive equipment and a lack of training opportunities for specialist and support teachers.

In the English-speaking nations of the Pacific, Unified English Braille (UEB) is used and taught to students where possible. With no braille authorities in the region there's no formal adoption of UEB nor organisations to formally oversee the implementation or teaching of UEB. When Australia and New Zealand formally adopted UEB as a replacement to the code used in the United States, Pacific nations began accessing this code as teachers from Australia and New Zealand visited and began teaching UEB and bringing UEB books along with them. Because these nations rely on donations of braille materials, older, out-of-date books are often sent to Pacific nations.

The quality of braille teaching, leading to braille literacy depends largely on whether a centre based learning opportunity is available for students and the knowledge of those teaching the code. In Fiji for instance, the number of students who are blind learning braille is increasing. The Fiji Society for the Blind, based in the capital city of Suva, routinely offers braille instruction to blind children as soon as they are enrolled and to blind adults as well. A sizable group of blind people in the country have some braille knowledge.

A similar uptake of braille instruction is occurring in Samoa, this despite the absence of a formal service provider for blind people. The newly established national advocacy group, the Samoa Blind Persons Association, is taking the lead in providing braille instruction and inclusive education support services to blind and low vision students. These services are generally provided by uncertified but highly knowledgeable personnel, the vast majority being blind members of the Association who acquired their braille literacy skills in Samoa or overseas.

In countries such as the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Nauru and Tuvalu where services are scarce, braille literacy is minimal. This said, there are some opportunities for students to learn braille, mainly through blind volunteers who may have studied overseas and wish to assist others who are blind.

Producing braille is accomplished in several ways, ranging from the cheapest slate and stylus method to highly technological solutions involving computers, braille translation software and braille embossers. Equipment is sourced from and often donated by dealers in Australia, New Zealand and sometimes Malaysia and India where some assistive items are cheaper. Some Ministries of Education recognise the need for mass braille production and request and sometimes receive braille embossers, believing they provide a solution for non-braille users to produce braille quickly and efficiently. The complexity of braille formatting often means braille produced by those who do not possess knowledge of the code cause inferior materials to be made available to students. Tactile graphics are often purposely left out of exams. This is not communicated to examiners and adjudicators, resulting in the blind student being marked down for not attempting questions that contain graphics.

Mathematics is often ignored, both as a subject choice for students and the teaching of braille maths. This can partly be attributed to the complex nature of maths and the braille code used. People's understanding of UEB maths is minimal. Because of this, the entire subject is often bypassed, resulting in the blind student not having sufficient basic maths skills for daily life, let alone knowledge of the braille code.

The Perkins braille is increasingly available in the Pacific, especially in countries where resource centres exist. Perkins braille is expensive and most service providers and individuals are not in a position to purchase them. Most are donated by neighbouring

countries. Inaccurate record keeping and poor maintenance often mean a large number of machines are stored in one place and not evenly distributed to students and many of the machines are inoperable. In recent years, there have been several braille machine maintenance workshops held and efforts to distribute working brailers to students have been attempted. Often, slates and styluses are given to braille learners with varying degrees of success. Some students take to this equipment while others, especially those with spatial awareness difficulties do not perform as well.



Computer technology, mostly in the form of donated laptops running the free NVDA screen reader, is available but only where advanced resource centres exist or where a student has access to someone able to teach. Most of the blind students who make it through school and onto university do have access to a laptop but it's on an individual basis, certainly not through any supported program.



UEB Q&A

Transcribe the following fraction. What grade 1 indicators will you use?

$$\frac{x}{2} + \frac{x}{3}$$

Check the end of this newsletter for the answer.

Update from RNIB braille library

by James Bartlett, RNIB Reading Services Manager

RNIB replaced its online library service in February 2020. The new service enables customers to download DAISY books and excitingly, electronic braille files. During the first wave of the pandemic RNIB library provided several hundred customers with an Orbit braille reader. To make this successful, you really need a wide range of electronic braille books to read so we have been busy during the past year adapting the braille master files in our archive.

When you read a book electronically, you want to be able to read it fluently and continuously, you don't want to keep loading up different volumes one by one. To that purpose, we have been “devolumising” our individual volume braille master files and joining them up to make one easily readable braille book. This includes removing superfluous title pages, contents pages, page information lines and more. We provided braille library customers who had an electronic braille device with an SD card with 700 titles subdivided into folders by genre. The equivalent weight of this amount of physical braille would be a small hippopotamus but instead all on one tiny SD card. In the future, as we have more of our collection available in the devolumised format, we want to offer SD cards by genre e.g. romance #1, romance #2, etc.

I have to pause and say thank you to the incredible work done by a small team at RNIB and highlight the detailed expertise from James

Bowden, as we are seeking to automate our devolumisation process to be able to offer thousands more titles from our archives. It is important to stress that RNIB remains totally committed to providing physical braille.

From February 2021 we have changed how we support international braille library customers. Instead of loaning our physical braille books overseas, we are making our braille master files available to the relevant local national blindness library. We have already loaned some sample files to organisations and will be adding to this in the coming months.

At RNIB we are passionate about braille and investing in widening choice to our members and using this opportunity to build on our archive of digital braille files built up over 30 years.

Braille research

ICEB has its own Braille Research Committee. Its role is to be a source of knowledge about successful research projects about the teaching of braille in ICEB countries and elsewhere.

We are delighted that Dr Natalie Martiniello has agreed to chair this committee. We remember Natalie's excellent presentation at last October's ICEB General Assembly. Natalie has also agreed to become a co-opted member of the ICEB Executive Committee. Her expertise will be of great value to our work in enhancing literacy through braille.



Country Updates

New Zealand

In January this year the biennial Braille Music Retreat was held at the Homai Campus of Blind Low Vision Education Network NZ (BLENNZ). Braille music readers from around New Zealand came together to work on 12 choral pieces, as well as playing other music together, enjoying informal evening concerts, and meeting old and new friends.

One of the pieces was included in Radio New Zealand Concert's Good Friday Hymns broadcast on 2 April 2021. The piece was recorded in the enclosed swimming pool at Homai because it has perfect “cathedral-like” acoustics. The song, “All on an April Evening” sung entirely from Braille music scores, is at 21:30 mins, near the end of the programme on this link:

https://www.rnz.co.nz/audio/player?audio_id=2018789657

South Africa: Copyright and Marrakesh Treaty developments

by Jace Nair, CEO of Blind SA



The current stance by government is that the Marrakesh Treaty will only be ratified when the appropriate copyright legislation is in place.

After Blind SA launched a Notice of Motion at the Constitutional Court in May 2020, President Ramaphosa referred the Copyright

Amendment Bill back to Parliament on six areas of reservation. Section 19D which includes the copyright exceptions and limitations was not contested. The parties opposing the CAB also supports Section 19D and for the government to ratify the Marrakesh Treaty.

The existing Copyright Act of 1978 does not have copyright exceptions and limitations for the blind. The act is outdated. The CAB provides remedies for fair royalties and fair use. The CAB makes provision for creators, performers, composers and musicians to reap the benefits of their works.

Blind SA together with Recreate SA, SA Guild of Actors, Right to Know and a host of other civil society organisations have been campaigning for the re-enactment of the CAB. A well supported march from the offices of Department of Trade and Industries in Pretoria to the Union Buildings was held on 10 December 2020. Over four hundred blind and partially sighted persons and actors, musicians, composers, and activists participated. A Memorandum in braille was handed to the Presidency and National Assembly. Government has not responded to the Memorandum as yet. Blind SA is embarking on a social media campaign during March 2021 which is Human Rights Month in the country. Blind SA with the assistance of Section 27, a civil society organization from the legal space is contemplating litigating government later in the month.



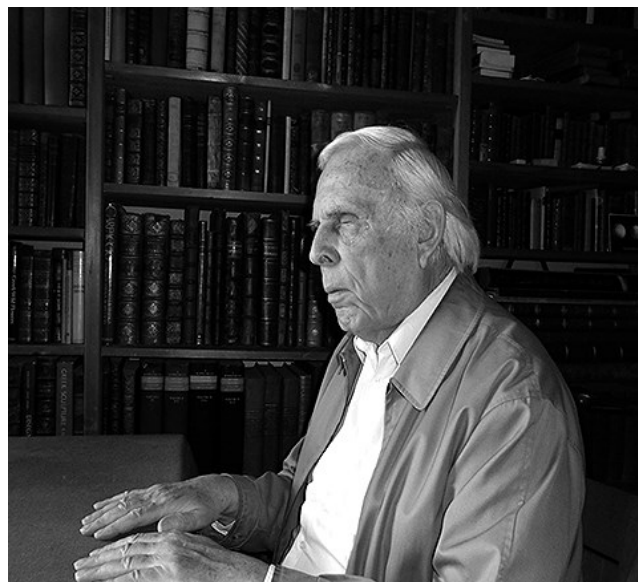
People

Memories of Bill Poole

(Reprinted from Format Matters, March 2021)

By Roger Firman, Chair of UKAAF

You will remember my writing on 18 January 2021 about the death of Bill Poole on January 17. We recalled some of his notable achievements and contributions in raising the profile of blind people and his long-established commitment to braille.



Fred Reid has written “He was born in Valletta (Malta) on 12 March 1935. The child was blind and his mother, Lilly Margaret Poole, brought him to England just before the War to obtain for him the best special education available at that time.

“He did obtain the privilege of special schooling, first at a ‘Sunshine Home’ nursery, then at Chorleywood primary department and finally at Worcester college for blind boys.

"At Worcester, he exhibited a special bent for Classics (ancient Greek and Latin) and it was to his advantage that the school was well endowed to develop his talents in this direction. On the other hand, it failed to support him in following his intellectual abilities. Instead, he was strongly advised to aim for employment in one of the very few professions then open to blind men and women: law, social work, physiotherapy or the clergy. A university degree in Classics, he was told should be avoided, as useless for entry into those professions.

“Never a man to be deterred by dragons in his path, Bill went his own way, entering Lincoln College, Oxford, in 1954, to successfully read for a degree in Classics and English literature.”

Factual information is of course important; however I often think it is the personal memories straight from the heart which speak much more directly.

People who knew Bill will have their own recollections and stories to tell, here I would like to share a few of these generously conveyed to me.

Richard West remembers Bill's “balanced judgement” when in meetings he would strive to bring together people with opposing views. He clearly wanted to get things right and would be cautious until he felt sure, UEB could be cited as such a case.

Pete Osborne recalls “I will remember Bill as a constructive and thought provoking challenge as a chair of RNIB Committees. He was the reason I got myself in to UK and international standards and he never failed to positively encourage my endeavours. I specifically recall a conversation where he prophetically spoke of the need to integrate braille and technology if braille was to have a secure future and the need for ‘the next generation’ to remember that braille has stood the test of time but will only survive if it moves with the times – quite something for someone who prided himself as a frame using expert.

“The rhythmic sound of him expertly taking notes on his frame will stick with me, as will his ability to recall those notes and press for the very best in access to information and braille in particular. We owe a huge amount to a global figure who both respected the history while challenging us to do more for the future of braille.”

An extremely heartfelt testament, I think.

In concluding, it is without doubt that many who knew Bill through his international work held him in the highest regard. I have heard it said, “When Bill Spoke, you listened”.

With thanks to NFBUK and to Fred Reid for allowing us to use portions of their material.

Calendar of Upcoming Events

CTEBVI Conference – Online from California, April 2021

The 61st annual conference from the California Transcribers and Educators of Blind and Vision Impaired (CTEBVI) will be held online from April 15-17, 2021. Bringing together blind and low vision students, their families and the professionals who support them, the conference will feature 80 professional workshops and a virtual exhibit hall. Registration is free via the website at

<http://www.ctevh.org/conference/>.

Tactile Reading Conference – Online from Norway, April 2021

After a very successful first conference in Sweden in 2017, the Tactile Reading Conference returns in 2021. The conference will focus on braille and graphics, including digital aids for braille reading and the use of 3D-printed material. Topics will include early intervention and education for children, youth, and adults within the field of tactile reading. Keynote speakers include Silvija Seres on “New technology, new opportunities”, Mr Ajai Kumar Mittal on the enduring significance of braille, and Dr Diane Wormsley on the bumpy road to braille literacy. The event will be held as a Digital Conference on the 29th and 30th April 2021. See www.statped.no/tactilereading2021 for more information.



Round Table Conference – Australia, May 2021

The Round Table on Information Access for People with Print Disabilities is an umbrella organisation for members throughout Australia and New Zealand with the mission to facilitate and influence the production and use of quality alternative formats for people with print disabilities. The 2021 Round Table Conference will be held online beginning with the Australian Braille Authority meeting on Saturday 15 May, the conference proper from Monday 17 to Tuesday 18 May, and a day of workshops on Wednesday 19 May 2021. More information is available at <http://printdisability.org/conference/2021-round-table-conference/>.

World Blindness Summit – Madrid, Spain, June 2021

The World Blindness Summit is the combined General Assemblies of the World Blind Union and the International Council for Education of People with Vision Impairment (ICEVI). Bringing together leading experts and organisations concerning visual disability from 190 participating countries, the World Blindness Summit will be held online from June 28 to June 30. Registrations are now open at <https://www.worldblindnesssummit.com/en>. Delegates and observers may also be involved in workshops and meetings beginning June 21.

Vision 2020⁺¹ – Dublin, Ireland, July 2021

Vision 2020 is the 13th International Low Vision Conference by the International Society for Low Vision Research and Rehabilitation. After being postponed in 2020, the Vision 2020⁺¹ Conference will take place on 11-15 July 2021 in Dublin, Ireland. Registrations and abstract guidelines are now available at <https://vision2020dublin.com/>.

STOP PRESS

ICEB Code Maintenance Officer Kathy Riessen writes:

We are delighted to announce the appointment of Dónal Fitzpatrick from Ireland as the new chair of the Technical Codes Committee. Each member country has appointed a representative to this committee who have specialised technical knowledge. Exciting times ahead!!