Journal of Librarianship and Information Science

A new outlook: services to visually impaired people in UK public libraries
Margaret Kinnell and Claire Creaser

The online version of this article can be found at:
http://lis.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/33/1/5

Additional services and information for *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science* can be found at:

Email Alerts: http://lis.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts

Subscriptions: http://lis.sagepub.com/subscriptions

Reprints: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav

Permissions: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav

A new outlook?:
services to visually impaired people in UK public libraries

MARGARET KINNELL and CLAIRE CREASER

Margaret Evans is Pro Vice-Chanclleor, De Montfort University, with responsibility for strategic planning and resources. Prior to this she spent 21 years at Loughborough University in the Department of Information Science, where latterly she was Dean of the Science Faculty and Project Head of the Library and Information Statistics Unit.

Claire Creaser has been the Statistician at LISU since 1994. Prior to this appointment, she gained experience in the fields of insurance, and educational research. While at LISU she has been responsible for the annual survey of library services to schools and children, developing the Tailormade Statistics benchmarking service for public library authorities, and the development and maintenance of extensive databases of academic and public library statistics, as well as making major contributions to LISU's reguar annual publications, one-off surveys and consultancies.

Address: Claire Creaser,
Library and Information Statistics Unit,
Loughborough University,
Loughborough, LE11 3TU
Tel: 44 (0)1509 222179
Fax: 44 (0)1509 223072
E-mail: c.creaser@lboro.ac.uk

Reports results of a questionnaire survey of UK public library services, undertaken at the end of 1999 by the Library and Information Statistics Unit (LISU), Loughborough University, to benchmark UK practice against international good practice and the recognized standards set out in the Library Association National Guidelines. The study was conducted against the background of the statutory duty of UK public library services to provide for blind and partially sighted users under the 1995 Disability Discrimination Act. The full objectives of the survey were: to build on and extend the findings of the 1997 Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) Survey of public library authorities; to assess progress in UK authorities since the 1997 Survey; to assess developments in the new unitary authorities; to monitor the progress of public library services against the Library Association's Guidelines; and to place particular emphasis upon measuring service to users and the integration of public library services with those of other agencies. Data were gathered from 141 UK public library authorities (67.79 % response rate). Presents a number of recommendations, highlighting the actions required to ensure greater equity of provision and to bring UK services up to a common high standard in this area, covering: policy statements; budgetary provision; staffing; partnerships; service evaluation; materials provision; equipment; provision and access; and promotion.

INTRODUCTION

Public library mission and services to visually impaired people

Concern for disadvantaged groups has always been key to the mission of public library services, and amongst the most disadvantaged in the population are those with a visual impairment. It has been estimated that there are around 1.7 million visually impaired people in the UK. (Bruce, McKennell and Walker, 1991) Many are elderly; all face the difficulty of accessing information and enjoying print in a text-dominated world. Of the 354 153 who had actually registered as blind or partially sighted in 1996, from the one million or so entitled to do so, 90% were aged 65 or over. (Brophy and Craven, 1999) The role of public libraries in supporting such a varied group of users, of whom only around a third have registered as visually impaired, is clearly a key issue. Many specialist organizations offer library services, including The Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB), Calibre Library, Talking Newspapers Association (TNAUK) and ClearVision, but public library services have a statutory duty to provide comprehensive and efficient library services to everyone in the community. Public libraries therefore have a primary responsibility to ensure that they meet the library and information needs of all visually impaired people.

The Disability Discrimination Act of 1995, which is now in its final stages of implementation, has acted as a powerful catalyst for change by every service provider in the way that they offer services to individuals with either physical or mental impairment. Section 3 of the Act – Access to Goods, Services and Facilities – stipulates that it is unlawful to refuse to serve a disabled person through circumstances relating to their disability (for example on account of a person's guide dog requiring access), or to offer a sub-standard service or a service on different terms. In 1997 the Government established a Disability Rights

Task Force and in 1998 published a White Paper proposing the Disability Rights Commission whose duty will be to monitor policy and procedural changes to help disabled people access services.

From October 1999, services are being required to make a range of policy and procedural changes to help disabled people access their services. Thus the Act has important implications for the delivery of library services. Public library authorities have been concerned to ensure that they meet individual needs in accordance with its requirements, and to ensure that these service priorities are recognised at a time of resource constraint. The context of the Best Value initiative is also significant. Local authority services must demonstrate their effectiveness and efficiency, and ensure that their services meet the needs of their communities. Reponsiveness in identifying needs and developing and delivering services to match them, within tight financial limits, is now expected of all services.

In order to support library services in developing more effective access for visually impaired people, the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) made available a grant of £200 000 in 1998 through the Library and Information Commission (LIC). The LIC, in partnership with Share the Vision (STV), identified a number of research areas which could better inform, enlighten or empower public library services in meeting visual impairment needs. Share the Vision was set up in 1989 as an RNIB project with grant aid from the Department of National Heritage (forerunner of the DCMS). It later evolved into a partnership company involving the RNIB, the National Library for the Blind, Calibre, TNAUK, the Society of Chief Librarians, the Library Association, the British Library and the Scottish Library and Information Commission. By working with the STV, the LIC was therefore able to ensure that the agendas of all the interested professional, charitable and voluntary groups associated with delivering library services to visually impaired individuals were taken account of when defining the research that was required.

Previous studies

There had been a number of relevant studies prior to the LIC/STV research programme. (Needham, 1983; Craddock, 1985; Basu, 1991; Craddock, 1996; RNIB, 1997) These had variously surveyed practitioners, identified good practice in the UK and internationally, and provided recommendations for services. Some of the best practice, for example, could be found in the USA, where services are delivered through an extensive network headed by the Library of Congress's National Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS). This consists of over 160 regional and sub-regional libraries, and the NLS also produces around 2000 books in alternative formats each year, catalogues them, maintains a union catalogue, disseminates policy and aims to support a uniform quality of service throughout libraries. Examples of good practice are given by Fitzpatrick (1990) and Hagle (1982). In Canada there is also

interesting work ongoing in partnering Canadian public libraries with special services for blind and visually impaired people. (Griebel, 2000) This offers a model for the integration of public library service work with that of specialist agencies, through a sharing of resources, staff development and a team-based approach to service delivery.

The LISU survey

In order to benchmark UK public library services against international good practice and the recognized standards set out in the Library Association National Guidelines, (Machell, 1996) and to understand if services had moved on since the 1997 RNIB survey, it was decided to commission a study of current provision. Updating the understanding of the context within which these services were being provided was also part of the remit of the research. The Library and Information Statistics Unit (LISU) at Loughborough University undertook the study at the end of 1999. The research team comprised Margaret Kinnell (Evans), Claire Creaser and Liangzhi Yu (who designed and administered the questionnaire and undertook the literature survey). The full objectives were:

- To build on and extend the findings of the 1997 RNIB Survey of public library authorities
- To assess progress in UK authorities since the 1997 Survey
- To assess developments in the new unitary authorities
- To monitor the progress of public library services against the Library Association's Guidelines for services to visually impaired people
- To place particular emphasis upon measuring service to users, and the integration of public library services with those of other agencies

The study and its principal findings will be described here, with conclusions that relate not only to UK experience but also draw on practice from elsewhere. The data were gathered using a postal questionnaire survey of all UK public library authorities: 208 in all, of whom 141 responded. This followed extensive consultation with the partners in Share the Vision and a survey of the literature. The study was co-ordinated with the other participants in the LIC/STV programme, with questions added in order to support their investigations. A complete account of the study can be found in the final report to the LIC. (Kinnell, Yu and Creaser, 2000)

THE CONTEXT FOR LIBRARY SERVICE PROVISION

Defining impairment

The ways in which visual impairment are defined and recorded mean that many people with difficulty in reading print do not register this fact; some may not even acknowledge that they have a problem. A person wishing to register their need will be referred to an ophthalmologist who assesses their visual loss and decides on eligibility,

then sends in a form to the local authority Social Services department. A social worker visits the person to confirm their wish to be added to the register. However, the RNIB's statistics, quoted in the Introduction, indicate that a significant percentage of those with a problem choose not to register and claim their entitlement to statutory care and those services provided by the RNIB and other charitable and voluntary organizations. The implication for library services is that they should not simply rely on the official estimates of blindness and visual impairment in the local population when designing services. More of their users and potential users will have problems, of varying degrees, than will be recorded.

Information and reading needs

Of particular significance is also the fact that reading is a key activity, for both information and leisure purposes, even for those with a severe impairment. The RNIB statistics have identified about 36% of those who are blind and 75% with partial sight being able to read clear, large print, although around 69% of blind and partially sighted people read less after becoming visually impaired. (Bruce, McKennell and Walker, 1991). It should be noted that the medical definition of 'blind' allows for some, very limited, sight. (Kinnell, Yu and Creaser, 2000, 6) A survey of audio book users found that 63% spent more than two hours reading per day for leisure, indicating just how important reading was to them. (Chartres, 1999) It is of concern therefore that reasons for non-reading given in an earlier survey (Bell, 1980) included non-use of libraries, dissatisfaction with the range of materials available and a lack of awareness of reading opportunities through library services.

Although the results of studies on visually impaired people's reading needs do not always agree, there were three clear areas of consensus:

- Visually impaired people do read a great deal, with reading forming a considerable proportion of their leisure time
- There is general dissatisfaction with the range of materials available
- Many visually impaired people are not sufficiently aware of the services provided for them.

Reading and information services

One problem for the user is that reading and information needs are met by a wide range of statutory, voluntary and commercial organizations. The first access point for those registering their need is the Social Services Department (SSD), which provides information about the welfare of disabled people, including providers of information and reading materials in alternative formats. Some SSDs provide needs assessments and refer on to appropriate services. Most SSDs used to pay for individual subscriptions to the Talking Book Services at the RNIB, but many now transfer this responsibility to public library authorities. The NLB,

Calibre (a postal lending service of books on audio cassettes), ClearVision (providing standard children's books interleaved with Braille sheets) and The Talking Newspaper Association of the UK (providing 200 titles and the umbrella organization for 500 local groups) are the major additional providers.

In addition to providing their own services, the voluntary sector has been at the forefront of campaigns for accessible information, including See it Right, Get the Message, Better Web Design, Copyright Exemption. (Unlike many other developed countries, the UK does not grant automatic copyright exemptions for producing alternative formats.) One of the RNIB's latest initiatives has been guidelines for children's publishers. Commercial organizations, too, have produced significant material. Major large-print and audio publishers (e.g. Chivers, Cover to Cover, Ulverscroft, the BBC, EMI) usually lend commercially-produced titles from their libraries as well as selling them through retail outlets. (Chartres, 1998) Information relating to services is also available in non-print formats, e.g. British Telecom offers an enquiry service for visually impaired people through its Talking Pages and a number of banks provide large print or Braille banking information. The Disability Discrimination Act now makes this mandatory on all services, and it is anticipated that information from commercial providers will continue to improve.

Access technologies, especially the Kurzweil reading machine and CCTV, have greatly assisted the provision of reading and information in recent years. The most radical change was with the widespread use of computers, when visually impaired people could easily convert print into electronic text and read it from the screen with either transitory Braille or through synthetic speech. It is also possible to link different converters such as scanners, reading machines, embossers and tape recorders, so that a converted text can be permanently recorded in the desired format. (Gallimore, 1999; Long, 1993; Porter, 1997) The internet has made it possible for visually impaired people to simultaneously access information, and has dramatically improved their equality of access, bringing both 'independence and choice – two of the fundamental freedoms'. (Porter, 1997, 36) Many initiatives are devoted to exploiting ICT for visually impaired people, detailed information on the following projects from the EU Telematics for the Integration of Disabled and Elderly People (TIDE) programme is available from the RNIB Web site. (RNIB, 2000):

- Access, Information and Navigation support in the Labyrinth of Large Buildings. The project provides appropriate technological support for navigation, physical access and information provision within buildings. Mobility studies have shown that many people do not venture out due to difficulties in accessing unfamiliar places, and this work is intended to support access to libraries and other buildings.
- Communication and Access to Information for Persons

with Special Needs. Major achievements of the project to date are the definition and implementation of the European Interchange Format (EIF) using the ISO Standard Generalized Markup Language (SGML) to enable the exchange of electronic newspapers; description of the legal context for full access to public domain documents; development of specialized devices to allow access to electronic information.

- Horizontal Action for the Harmonisation of Accessible Structured Documents. A consortium from the UK, Belgium and Sweden is increasing the quantity of documents accessible to the print disabled, with emphasis on lobbying publishers and suppliers.
- Secure Document Delivery for Blind and Partially Sighted People. Ensuring security of delivery to take account of copyright rights and obligations is an important means of supporting electronic access for VIP. The SEDODEL consortium has developed and will validate a system to support secure delivery.

The UK has also been a major contributor to the EU project, Testing Systems, using Telematics for Library Access for Blind and Visually Handicapped Persons, which investigated how libraries could apply new information and communication technologies in services. A great demand was noted for direct access to library catalogues and models were tested for delivering such catalogues for normal searches and for interlending. The project deliverables include a range of work packages delivered online to support libraries with the Universities of Graz and Linz in Austria used as demonstrator sites to validate these.

Voluntary organizations have again played one of the most proactive roles in deploying technology for the benefit of visually impaired people. The RNIB, for example, has consistently promoted accessible Web design, and in 1998 launched their Pilot Internet project to address the needs of visually impaired children. (RNIB 1999a) The NLB launched its accessible Web site in 1997-8 as a forum for visually impaired people and to promote the Library (Brazier and Jennings, 1999) and in 1999 TNAUK started a project to provide electronic text versions of local and national news at 45 of its local Talking Newspaper groups. (TNAUK, 1999)

Issues in providing reading/information services

Reading materials and information are provided to visually impaired people by a wide range of organizations, with the voluntary sector remaining as the major player, because of its long-standing commitment in this field. There are three key issues which impact on public library service provision:

Fragmentation
Resources are fragmented across various uncoordinated organizations, each having its own agenda in selecting titles and producing formats. Visually impaired users may have to contact several organizations to achieve reason-

able access to materials. The NLB and RNIB partnership is now under way, and the project REVIEL (Resources for Visually Impaired Users of the Electronic Library) (Brophy and Craven, 1999) proposes a nationally accessible library model, but it is still too early to predict their impact.

Exclusion
There is unwitting exclusion of a large proportion of visually impaired people from library and information provision. This is because many organizations, particularly the voluntary sector, largely identify their user group through registration with SSDs or from medical certificates; some also rely on SSDs for referral.

Segregation
Provision is largely segregated from the mainstream. This is manifested in the division between the sighted society whose reading and information needs are met by public or academic libraries in an integrated service environment and the visually impaired section of the community whose needs are mainly served by voluntary organizations. This has serious implications for the level (and perhaps quality) of service provided:

- Visually impaired people cannot normally have their needs met by a one-stop contact
- New services developed by the mainstream operation (e.g. learning support) may remain unknown to blind and partially sighted people
- There is over-reliance on voluntary workers' goodwill
- Visually impaired people may not benefit from the professional skills of librarians.

UK PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICES TO VISUALLY IMPAIRED PEOPLE: CURRENT PROVISION

Services up to 1997
Studies from 1983 to 1997 have shown that while there was some improvement over that period, (Craddock, 1985; Craddock, 1996; Chartres, 1997) many of the criticisms levelled at public library services in the early '80s remained up to the time of the LISU survey. These can be summarized as:

- Public libraries were largely on the periphery of provision for visually impaired people. Few libraries identified them as a special group.
- Policy had not been developed with the special needs of blind and visually impaired people in mind.
- Most libraries had collections of music and spoken word cassettes, but compared with what was available to sighted people, the range of reading and information for blind and visually impaired people was very limited.
- A few libraries were involved in both producing and supplying sound recording of materials. This demonstrated the considerable, unrealized, potential for public

libraries to produce and promote reading materials in alternative formats.

- Many libraries had created links with other agencies, but these appeared largely to be for liaison rather than explicit cooperation.

The 1999 Survey questionnaire was therefore designed to identify how far services had progressed across these and other areas. A comparison of the major findings of the surveys up to 1997 is given in Table 1.

1999 survey findings

There was a response rate of 67%, with more responses from the English counties (79%) and unitary authorities (70%). The findings are therefore based on a sufficiently large and representative sample to have validity, although self-selected to a degree.

Policy statements

VIP as a distinct group in policy statements remained low, at 5%. The proportion of library authorities with specific policies covering all disabled people was 15%, and a further 43% included policies for disabled people within broader library policy statements. Comparison with earlier surveys should be used with care, as different questions were used. Of real concern, though, is the fact that a significant minority (42%) of authorities did not have a written policy statement at all for VIP. Having such a policy statement – or not – made an impact on spending on specialist materials, relationship building with external agencies, and the provision of specialist equipment. Those authorities which had a written policy were more likely to focus on meeting a wider range of these special needs. For example, the 21 authorities with a special policy, or which included this in more general policies for disabled people, provided an average of nine (out of a total of 22 listed) different special services. Those with a VIP policy incorporated in other areas provided an average of six different services. Those with no policy provided an average of five.

A clear policy statement, which will be shared with staff, members and visually impaired people in the community, is a planning tool, a means of promotion, and a key performance indicator.

Budgetary provision

There was considerable variation in the ways that library services interpreted their services, and consequently in the budgetary allocation. Some had a special budget, when in effect the budget just covered provision of materials in an alternative format (e.g. large print), while others regarded themselves as having a special budget allocation if they covered all services. Most authorities did not have a specific budget allocation for VIP services, and the percentage appeared to have declined slightly since the 1997 survey.

The Library Association National Guidelines emphasise that resource allocation for service development is nec-

essary (Machell, 1996, 3) but specific guidance to authorities has not been given. This contrasts with guidance given on other important areas of library provision, where there have been recommendations on deploying a percentage of the budget relative to that proportion in the user population. (Library and Information Services Council (England) Working Party on Library Services for Children and Young People, 1995, Rec. 8) However, it would be difficult at present to pursue this approach in relation to VIP services. Few authorities were able to provide data on the numbers of visually impaired people who were members of the library, or who lived in their communities. This is clearly unsatisfactory, given that expenditure to support the needs of disabled people and specific groups within the broader category is an important indicator of performance.

Staffing

Several authorities reported staff in more than one category, and some authorities were unable to identify full-time individual posts or staff hours dedicated to VIP services. The result was similar to the 1997 Survey which found that 62% of authorities employed special services staff as a part of a team responsible for VIP services. The National Guidelines recommend that a designated professional member of staff at senior level be responsible for service development and that there should be 'sufficient staff on the establishment' to ensure services operate effectively. (Machell, 1996, 11) Given the variable responses, it was however not possible to discern a base-line figure, as the range was so great.

There was a clear relationship between staffing practices and service levels. More formal contacts and working relationships were achieved with external organizations. It was of concern that one-third of staff had received no basic visual awareness training (a worsening of the position since 1997), and few non-specialist staff were being trained in areas such as the use of assistive technology and equipment.

Partnerships

The percentage of authorities having close, ongoing relationships with other agencies had fallen since 1997. The proportion having no relationships at all with other agencies had also decreased, because the number of authorities having occasional contact had increased. The pattern that was emerging therefore appeared to be increased but occasional formal contact and referrals from other agencies. Compared with international examples, e.g. the USA, Canada, Denmark, Sweden, there appeared to be poorer coordination and a danger of fragmentation of effort.

Service evaluation

A large minority of 27% (37 authorities) reported not formally evaluating their VIP services and of those who were, some were doing so only as part of a more general evaluation process. Fewer than 20% of respondents used the National Guidelines to inform their evaluation, and while

Table 1   Comparison of the major findings of the 1983/84, 1991, 1997 national surveys

Areas surveyed	British Library 1983/84 (*Craddock, 1985*)	Share the Vision 1991 (*Craddock, 1996*)	RNIB 1997 (*Chartres, 1997*)
Service provision	96% provided services to homes; 74% to hospitals; 76% to day care centres	92% served visually impaired people through general or special services	94% provided house-bound services; 62% provided special services
Policy	policies for all disabled people: 97%; policies for visually impaired people specifically: 7.9%		policies for all disabled people: 50%; policies for visually impaired people specifically: 5%
Budget allocation			with special budget for visually impaired people: 28%; with special budget for all disabled people: 26%
Provision of alternative format materials	spoken-world cassettes: 86.2%; talking newspaper: 17.1%; books in Braille: 8.6%; books in Moon: 2.6%		spoken-word cassettes: 100%
Provision of reading aids		CCTV: 35%; Kurzweil reading machine: 23%; computerised Braille input/output devices: 7%	CCTV: 50%
Production of sound recordings	Local history: 2.6%; Guides: 3.3%; Talking books: 2.0%; Talking newspapers: 1.3%	12%	
Provision of postal services	spoken word: 8.6%; Talking newspaper: 4.6%; Braille or Moon: 1.3%	23%	10%
Co-operation with Social Services	66.5%		89%
Co-operation with Health Services	32.2%		54% (with hospitals)
Co-operation with Talking newspapers	38.8%	25%	
Co-operation with NLB	19.7%	12%	
Co-operation with RNIB TBS	referral: 15.1%; paying subscription: 7.9%		paying subscription: 18.9%
Concessions	exempt from overdue charges: 39.5%; concessions on requests: 32%; Concessions on borrowing audio cassettes: 61.2%		extended loan period: 33%; exempt from fines: 50%; free borrowing of audio cassettes: 90%

Notes:

In the 1983/84 British Library survey, blind people are defined as people who for most purposes cannot see to read or who would require the assistance of special low vision aids. In other surveys, no specific definitions are offered.

These results are not strictly comparable because of the different wording of questions in each of the surveys

Figures are percentages of all library authorities who responded to the survey.

Table 2 Provision of specialist reading equipment

	Number of authorities	% of respondents	Average number	Maximum	Number included
Cassette player/recorder	94	68%	17.2	300	71
CCTV/ low vision reading machines	79	57%	2.2	8	67
Kurzweil reading machine	43	31%	1.4	4	33
Computers adapted for VIP	36	26%	9.6	74	23
Software adapted for VIP	34	25%	1.8	8	21
Optical scanner	22	16%	2.6	12	16
Braille embosser	22	16%	1.4	6	20
Separate reading room	11	8%	2.3	6	9

Based on data from 138 authorities

users were consulted in some areas, there was little consistency between authorities. Consultation on the selection of reading materials, which in the 1997 Survey had happened in two-thirds of authorities, had fallen to 44% in the 1999 Survey. Only 40% of authorities held management information on visually impaired users to enable them to contact users on service development and evaluation. Exempting from charges and ensuring they could benefit from postal and housebound services were the main motivations for holding these data.

Materials provision
Over the last four years, provision of talking books and large print materials as reported in the CIPFA Public Library Statistics Actuals (CIPFA, 1999) has increased, although the lack of formal policies to inform selection strategies is of concern. The 1999 Survey asked for details of the size of holdings in alternative formats, but fewer than half the respondents were able to supply this information, even for large print and talking books. It was also concerning that 51% did not notify regional library bureaux of their holdings, presumably because there was a lack of policy-making in this area. The percentage of authorities catering for the minority language needs of their communities appeared to be lower than was the case in the 1997 Survey, in which 50% provided large print and/or spoken word materials. Whether this was due to a lack of availability or to selection decisions was unclear.

The availability of adult fiction and biography was good, but non-fiction, especially scientific, technical and medical, and reference materials was less so.

Equipment
While it was difficult to assess the levels of equipment required for the user population, it was clear that most authorities had insufficient equipment available, although there were notable improvements in provision since 1997. Even central libraries still had relatively little specialist reading equipment, and rural users had minimal access in smaller branch and mobile libraries. Technology has now made it easier than ever for visually impaired people to access information, and it is essential that public libraries offer the state-of-the-art technology to ensure equality of information provision for all the community.

Provision and access
The take-up of general services by visually impaired people was difficult to ascertain. Services are open to all and are not monitored for their use by visually impaired people. This is an area where a more in-depth follow-up study of users and non-users, to be undertaken by LISU, should help in obtaining more reliable and objective results. Authorities themselves also need to undertake user/non-user surveys on an ongoing basis, as part of effective service management. The data from this Survey did indicate a patchy response to the special requirements of visually impaired people. See Table 2. There was good coverage through housebound services and basic access to buildings (guide dogs allowed, automatic doors). Less consideration had been given to the need for appropriate access through signing and guiding, assistive technology and the design of procedures to enable visually impaired people to join and borrow materials on the same basis as fully sighted people. Special assistance had to be requested from staff. See Table 3.

There was also a concentration of resources in central and main libraries, with rural provision less good.

Promotion
This was not considered to be essential by all authorities,

Table 3   Special services provided for visually impaired people

Services provided	Number of authorities	% of respondents
Guide dog allowed	129	93%
Outreach service for the housebound	128	93%
Automatic door(s)	97	70%
Retrieval of materials from stacks	74	54%
Accessible information about the library service	52	38%
Catalogues of materials in alternative formats	51	37%
Specially coloured/sized signs	43	31%
Training in use of special equipment	42	30%
Audio recording of library materials	36	26%
Access to Internet with assistive technology	27	20%
Brailling of library materials	26	19%
Typeset enlarging of library materials	23	17%
Access to CD-ROM/online database with assistive technology	22	16%
National/regional databases incorp. alternative format materials	21	15%
Tactile signs	19	14%
Accessible enrolment forms	13	9%
Orientation programme	9	7%
Specially designed shelf marking	8	6%
Directory of accessible Web sites	8	6%
Directory of Braillists	7	5%
Accessible reservation forms	6	4%
Transportation	4	3%

Based on data from 138 authorities

which was of concern. Promotion was largely through personal contact at the library and through local groups and other agencies. The study did not probe the effectiveness of each method, an aspect that could be usefully developed in further work.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the work undertaken prior to the Survey reported here, there was evidence that public library services needed to focus more on meeting the needs of visually impaired people. Inconsistency of provision was a major problem. The recommendations from the study highlight the actions required to ensure greater equity of provision, and to bring UK services up to a common high standard in this area. International examples had indicated that UK services lacked the necessary coordination and resourcing. As the emphasis of the LISU research remit was to suggest per-

formance indicators, these were prominent in the recommendations and can be seen in full in the final report. (Kinnell, Yu and Creaser, 2000) Below, we offer a summary:

Policy statements
All public library authorities should provide clear policy statements and plans for the provision of services in their Annual Library Plans. It should be specific about the needs of visually impaired users in the community, even if it is a sub-set of a policy and plan for disabled people.

Budgetary provision
Spend per thousand (whole population) on visually impaired services should become a required statistic. This should include spend on materials, equipment and membership subscriptions for VIP users of specialist services provided by voluntary agencies. Spend per capita of the estimated user group is recommended as an additional indicator, to inform the development of effective services.

Staffing

FTE specialist staff per thousand (whole population) to meet the needs of visually impaired people should be a required statistic. A training strategy for the library service should include targets for the training of all staff in basic visual awareness and for those elements of the service that are essential for the delivery of an effective service to visually impaired users. The strategy, with medium and short-term targets, should form part of the Annual Library Plan.

Partnerships

Mechanisms to improve collaboration should be identified by the relevant organizations. Share the Vision has a key role to play in supporting the development of partnerships, through its communication of good practice and support for initiatives.

Service evaluation

The National Guidelines should form the basis for evaluating visually impaired services. Users and non-users should be contacted (whilst ensuring compliance with Data Protection regulations) and their library needs identified. They should also be targeted for user satisfaction surveys.

Materials provision

A materials selection policy, with targets, should form part of the Annual Library Plan and should include provision for adequate materials to meet the non-fiction, information and minority language needs of the user population. The categories of alternative format materials per 1000 population should take account of large print and talking newspapers.

Equipment

The National Guidelines should form the basis of strategy on equipment provision and access to IT for visually impaired people. Targets should form part of the Annual Library Plan and statistics per 1000 people served should be a required statistic, to reflect the increased importance of equipment for reading support and IT as the means to enabling information access.

Provision and Access

An audit of access for visually impaired users should be undertaken by library authorities, to identify specific shortcomings. User and non-user surveys would inform this audit and facilitate specific actions to meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

Promotion

A promotional strategy for visually impaired users should form part of the authority's marketing strategy.

In order to ensure that each of these recommendations is implemented, it will be necessary for Government to include policy and planning for disabled people, including VIP, in their requirements of library authorities. From our survey it was evident that this was the most significant issue, with Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales appearing to be lagging furthest behind. The English counties had the highest number of specially written policy statements, but even here this only accounted for 20% of respondents. Without clear policy statements and a shared commitment to progress in delivering services for VIP, it will be difficult for library managers to achieve the necessary resourcing and development of partnerships that are essential.

REFERENCES

Basu, Santi (1991) *Public library services to visually disabled children*. Jefferson: McFarland

Bell, Lorna (1980) *The large print book and its user*. London: Library Association

Brazier,Helen and Jennings,Simon (1999) How not to make a meal of it, *Library Technology*, **4,**(1), 10-11

Brophy, Peter and Craven, Jenny (1999) *The integrated accessible library: a model of service development for the 21st century*. British Library Research and Innovation Report 168. Manchester: Centre for Research in library and Information Management

Bruce, Ian, McKennell, Aubrey and Walker, Errol (1991) *Blind and partially sighted adults in Britain: the RNIB survey*. London: HMSO

Chartres, Stephen (1998) *The leisure reading habits of visually impaired people using audio reading services: customer survey, April 1998*. Royal National Institute for the Blind, unpublished report

Chartres, Stephen (1999) RNIB Talking Book Service. Royal National Institute for the Blind, unpublished report

Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (1999) *Public library statistics: 1998-99 actuals.* London: CIPFA

Craddock, Peter (1985) *The public library and blind people*. London: The British Library

Craddock, Peter (1996) *Project Libra: the provision and use of reading aids for visually impaired and other print handicapped people in UK public libraries*. Library and Information Report 91 London: The British Library

Fitzpatrick, Vicki (1990) The sole source: the Library of Congress National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped. *Health Libraries Review*, **7,**(2), 73-85

Gallimore, Alec (1999) When special becomes everyday. *Library Technology*, **4,** (1), 13,16

Griebel, Rosemary (2000) *Partnering services between public libraries and library services for the blind: a Canadian experience. 66th IFLA General Conference, Jerusalem 13-18 August, 2000, IFLANET,* accessed 29 Aug 2000

Hagle, Alfred (1982) Information access by blind and physically handicapped persons. *Advances in Librarianship*, **12**, 247-275

Kinnell, Margaret, Yu, Liangzhi, and Creaser, Claire (2000) *Public library services for visually impaired people: Report to the Library and Information Commission.* Loughborough: Library and Information Statistics Unit

Library and Information Services Council (England) Working Party on Library Services for Children and Young People. (1995) *Investing in children.* London: HMSO

Long, Carol A. (1993) Making information available to partially sighted and blind clients *Electronic Library*, **11,** (6) 373-384

Machell, Jean (1996) *Library and information services for visually impaired people: national guidelines.* London: Library Association Publishing

Needham, William (1983) *Improving library services to physically disabled persons: a self-evaluation checklist.* Littleton,Colorado: Libraries Unlimited

Porter, Paul (1997) The reading washing machine. *Vine*, 106, 34-37

Royal National Institute for the Blind (2000) How RNIB can help. URL: *http://www.rnib.org.uk/services/welcome.htm.* Accessed August 29 2000

Royal National Institute for the Blind (1999a) About the Pilot Internet Project. URL: *http://www.rnib.org.uk/technology/about.htm.* Accessed Dec 20 1999

TNAUK (1999) Spreading the net with SIGHTLINE URL: *http://www.tnauk.org.uk/frames.htm.* Accessed Dec 20 1999