**Braille Profiling Project**

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# Braille Profiling Project

Research debrief, 14th June 2011

Prepared by Amy Phillips, RNIB Marketing and Lucy Beesley, Frank Research

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## Executive summary and key points

**Braille customers are a distinct group of customers who differ in profile to the average RNIB customer:**

* They are younger than average (61 years vs 70 years for all customers)
* The vast majority are blind as opposed to partially sighted (RNIB customer profile is around 50% blind and 50% partially sighted).
* They are much more likely to have had their sight condition since birth or childhood (67% vs c.37% for RNIB members).
* They are much heavier users of computers and new technology (two thirds have internet access vs around a third of all customers).

**Braille is highly valued among RNIB Braille customers for the independence it provides them. For many, there is a strong emotional connection to braille and they genuinely feel that they would be lost without it.**

* 87% agree they would be lost without Braille
* 81% agree they are passionate about the use of braille

**Views on the future and availability of Braille are more polarised.**

* 48% agree they can usually get the information they want in Braille. 39% disagree.
* 43% agree that new technology will take the place of Braille in the next few years. 46% disagree.
* 55% agree that they don't mind paying to get things transcribed into Braille. 28% disagree.

**Braille tends to be used more for reading than writing (although the majority of customers use it for both these purposes at least once a week).**

* Braille is relied on most for reading factual books and newspapers and magazines.
* Fiction books are most likely to be read via audio (usually on a Daisy player).
* Private correspondence is most often read to them by someone else.

**Three types of RNIB Braille customer have been identified:**

**1. Contented advocates** (approx 50% of RNIB Braille customers).

* The largest customer group and in some ways the 'silent majority'.
* They tend to be older women living with partners and close to extended family. They have very stable personal lives, enjoy a range of hobbies and activities and are contented and happy with life in general.
* Many have been using braille since childhood and they have a very established and positive relationship with it. They really enjoy using it and will actively try to use it when they can for both reading and writing.
* Technology is quite daunting for them and they are the least likely group to be using a computer. However, with support and guidance they may be willing to give things a go.
* Altruistic in nature, they want other blind and partially sighted people to share this positive relationship with Braille.
* They are aware of and use a wide range of Braille services from RNIB and other providers and generally have no complaints about them!

**2. Passionate Fighters** (approx 30% of RNIB Braille customers)

* Avid users of braille and fighters for braille related issues.
* Younger than the contented advocates, Passionate Fighters are a mix of men and women.
* They are characterised by their often pessimistic / slightly discontent outlook on life. However, they are not defeatist and are confident in making their voice heard on an issue.
* Braille plays a key role in their lives and it would be truly “devastating” for it to be taken away. However, they have less of a rose-tinted view of braille compared to Contented Advocates – more of an association with having to fight for access.
* In addition, they are not just happy with documents to be in braille, they have to be well produced, accurately produced, arrive on time and arrive regularly!
* They are confident users of technology (e.g. Talks for mobile phone, Jaws for laptop) and can see it’s value in making their life easier and working alongside braille.

**3. Take it or leave its** (approx 20% of RNIB Braille customers)

* Covering a mix of ages but with a bias towards men, Take it or leave its often have had a limited connection to Braille. Perhaps they were not motivated to learn it as a child or there were more appealing alternatives available at the time.
* They have a limited desire to change things in their lives and are much less passionate about Braille. They actively enjoy using braille alternatives (e.g. radio, podcasts, audio books, Jaws) and make a positive choice to use them.
* Therefore, for them, braille tends to be used very practically - usually for reading and writing labels or notes. They often struggle with reading speed / ability so are put off reading more in braille.
* They have already seen (and understand) IT has progressed and feel that it is inevitable that it will develop further to replace paper braille in the future.

## Introduction and background

One of RNIB’s key strategic priorities is to support independent living for blind and partially sighted people.

Braille is a fundamental tool to enable independence for many blind people, and provides a gateway to the rights of education, work and social and cultural inclusion.

RNIB recognises that the world is changing quickly and the way in which we access information continues to rapidly evolve.

RNIB therefore, wanted to explore the context of braille reading today and identify the characteristics and needs of different market segments. This report outlines the findings of both the quantitative and qualitative research.

## Overarching objectives

* To understand the place that braille has in people's lives today (in comparison with other ways of communicating)
* How is braille used in conjunction with other ways of reading and writing?
* How have braille users' needs and reading/writing behaviour changed over time?
* How do they think this might change in the future?
* To identify, profile and estimate the broad size of different braille user groups
* Based on their overall reading/writing needs, their usage of braille, and other reading/writing method, alongside their attitudes to braille, reading in general, technology and life in general

## Secondary objectives

* To understand current usage and attitudes towards contracted and uncontracted braille
* To gauge the current awareness, understanding and the broad appeal of digital braille.
* To gauge the current awareness, understanding and the broad appeal of UEB (Unified English braille).
* Finally, to gather emblematic case studies/user stories that can be used in marketing and fundraising communications.

## Methodology

The research study started with a quantitative survey with 150 RNIB braille customers. This was conducted in March 2011 by RNIB's telemarketing team.

* The customer sample was taken from Ascent and covered all customers, deduped, who had bought a braille product (books/music, products, magazines or courses) or borrowed a braille product from NLS.
* Customers must have said 'Yes' to being contacted and are 'Active' on our database (i.e. not deceased, gone away etc).
* Respondents were screened to ensure that they were blind or partially sighted themselves and 18+ years of age.

Statistical analysis was conducted on the quantitative data in order to identify 'different types' of braille user.

* Factor analysis to distil questionnaire data down to 8 key 'factors'.
* The data included in the factor analysis included; attitudes to braille, attitudes to life in general, frequency of and confidence in using braille.
* Further analysis then 'clusters' respondents based on their scores on these factors.
* Several solutions were worked through but a 3 cluster solution offered the most meaningful solution.

This stage of quantitative research was then followed by qualitative depth interviews with RNIB braille customers who have expressed an interest in more research during the quantitative survey. The qualitative interviews were conducted by Frank Research in April / May 2011.Six qualitative in-home depth interviews were conducted, two from each of the main, broad sections.

**Methodology - important caveats**

This is a relatively small piece of research and although robust has a couple of important caveats:

* The work is only based on RNIB braille customers - it is not necessarily representative of the total population of braille users in the UK.
* The segmentation is based on 150 interviews. This is a relatively small sample size for this type of work, although intuitively makes a lot of sense. Therefore, it’s best to focus more on the overall patterns and less on the exact percentages shown. In addition, estimates of the size of each group are only indicative.
* Qualitatively, RNIB had budget to speak to 6 customers (2 per segment). Therefore, although the research uncovered a lot of rich information from these, which verify a lot of the quantitative work, ideally RNIB would have done more.

## 1. Quantitative findings - RNIB braille customers

### 1.1 Braille market size - what we know

* There are estimated to be 18k registered BPS people (5% of the registered population) who read braille (NW1000, Stage 1, 2005/6).
* 7.5k BPS individuals used RNIB's braille services (RNIB, Dec '10)
* There are 6k working age BPS people who can actually 'read' braille (NW1000, Stage 2, 2006)

### 1.2 Demographics of RNIB braille customers

* 62% of braille customers are female. This is similar to RNIB customers overall.
* With an average age of 61, braille customers are younger than the average RNIB customer. See table 1.

Table 1 - Age (base: n=150 RNIB braille customers, not all respondents disclosed information)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 30-49 | 15% |
| 50-64 | 39% |
| 65-74 | 23% |
| 75+ | 18% |

### 1.3 Sight condition of RNIB braille customers

* It was found that braille customers have a range of sight conditions. Retinal pigmentosa is the most common overall, affecting one in five. See table 2 for detailed breakdown.
* Virtually all, 98%, are blind, as opposed to partially sighted. More than half (55%) have no light perception at all.
* It was also found that two thirds (67%) have been blind since birth or early childhood
* 41% of braille customers stated they had another sight condition, this included damaged optic nerves, congenital cataracts, mirfan syndrome, stickers syndrome and those who had been given too much oxygen at birth

Table 2 - Sight Condition (base: n=150 RNIB braille customers)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Retinal pigmentosa | 20% |
| Glaucoma | 14% |
| Retinal detachment | 11% |
| Result of accident or injury | 7% |
| Cataracts | 7% |
| Macular degeneration | 6% |
| Diabetic retinopathy | 1% |
| Don't know | 9% |
| Prefer not to answer | 3% |
| Other | 41% |

### 1.4 Technology usage among RNIB braille customers

* 73% of braille customers have a computer or laptop and 66% have access to the Internet. This is higher than the figure for the average RNIB customer.
* Emailing, general surfing and reading/writing docs are the most common uses although downloading podcasts, audio/e-books and interacting with others online (via forums/social networks) are becoming more common. See table 3 for a breakdown of the data.
* 33% of RNIB braille customers stated they used their computer for ‘other’ reasons. This included: using the diary and address book features of their computers, listening to music, online shopping, watching ‘on-demand’ TV, and using online banking

Table 3 - Computer Uses (base: n=112 RNIB braille customers who have a computer / laptop)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Emailing | 82% |
| Reading/writing docs | 80% |
| Surfing Internet | 76% |
| Listening to radio | 41% |
| Visiting news websites | 38% |
| Downloading audio or e-books | 20% |
| Participating in forums | 20% |
| Downloading podcasts | 18% |
| Social networking | 18% |
| None of these | 2% |
| Other (please specify) | 33% |

### 1.5 Braille usage among RNIB braille customers

* Braille tends to be used more for reading than writing, although most braille customers use it for writing at least once a week

Table 4 - Frequency of using Braille for reading and writing (base: n=150 RNIB braille customers)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Reading** | **Writing** |
| Never | 1% | 5% |
| Less often | 0% | 5% |
| Once every few months | 5% | 5% |
| Once a month or so | 7% | 13% |
| Once a week or so | 13% | 25% |
| Every day/almost every day | 75% | 46% |

* Writing labels and lists (86%) and private correspondence (39%) are the most common uses for writing in braille. This is usually with a Perkins brailler (85%). See 1.6 for Braille vs. other formats.

### 1.6 Braille vs. other formats

* RNIB braille customers relied on braille the most for factual books and for newspapers and magazines (see Table 5). This was supported by the fact that the majority of customers use audio for fiction books, usually with a Daisy player.
* Asking someone else to help is the most popular way of reading private correspondence.

Table 5 - main methods for reading fiction and factual books, newspapers or magazines and private correspondence (base: n=150 RNIB braille customers)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Fiction books | Factual books | Newspapers or mag. | Private correspondence |
| Audio | 65% | 28% | 30% | 2% |
| Hard copy braille | 27% | 50% | 41% | 27% |
| Digital braille | 1% | 1% | 1% | 0% |
| Electronic text | 1% | 3% | 5% | 15% |
| Someone else | 0% | 1% | 2% | 47% |

### 1.7 Past, current and future braille usage

* On balance, RNIB braille customers feel they are using braille slightly less than they used to (39% less than they used to vs. 23% more than they used to – see table 6)

Table 6 - current vs. past Braille usage (base: n=150 RNIB braille customers)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| A lot more than I used to | 14% |
| A little more than I used to | 9% |
| No difference | 37% |
| A little less than I used to | 22% |
| A lot less than I used to | 17% |

* However, table 7 shows the majority feel that they will continue to use braille at the same level as they currently do.

Table 7- intention to use Braille in the future (base: n=150 RNIB braille customers)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| A lot more than I currently do | 10% |
| A little more than I currently do | 7% |
| No difference | 71% |
| A little less than I currently do | 9% |
| A lot less than I currently do | 1% |
| Don't know | 2% |

### 1.8 Attitudes to braille

* When asked about their attitudes to braille, RNIB braille customers shared a number of consistent views, however some were polarising
* Most customers are passionate about braille and feel they would be lost without it – this was shared by the majority of respondents
* Similarly, the majority do not consider it to be old-fashioned and don't think it is promoted enough.
* However, they have quite polarised views when it comes to the future of braille; whether it is getting too complicated or superseded by new technology
* Opinions are also split on current braille availability and whether they mind paying for braille (see section 2 for how this differs by segment group).

### 1.9 Focus on UEB

* It was found that there are currently mixed levels of knowledge about UEB. 50% of braille customers say they have heard of UEB and know what it is.
* Of these around six in ten would consider reading books in UEB if it meant they had access to a wider selection of titles.
* 32% of braille customers had not heard of UEB.

Table 8 - awareness of UEB (base: n=150 RNIB braille customers)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Yes - heard of UEB and know what it is | 50% |
| Yes - but don't know what UEB is | 15% |
| No - don’t know what UEB is | 32% |
| Not sure what UEB is | 3% |

### 1.10 Digital braille

* Most braille customers are currently not using digital braille and may need some persuasion or incentive (i.e. lower prices) to invest in this technology.
* The ownership of refreshable braille displays reflected this, with 16% of braille customers owning a braille display (see table 9 for ownership of refreshable braille displays)

Table 9 - ownership of refreshable braille displays (base: n=150 RNIB braille customers)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Yes – I own a braille display | 16% |
| No – but I have used one in the past | 6% |
| No - but I've heard about them | 49% |
| No - I've never heard of them | 29% |
| Not sure | 1% |

* Of the 16% of braille customer who own a refreshable braille display, many would consider reading books on their display.
* Three in ten customers have never heard of them.
* Currently, the majority of braille customers (83%) do not intend to get a refreshable braille display in the next couple of years (see table 10)

Table 10 - intention to get a refreshable Braille display in next couple of years (base: n=150 RNIB braille customers)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Yes, definitely | 5% |
| Yes, possibly | 9% |
| No, probably not | 22% |
| No, definitely not | 62% |
| Not sure | 3% |

* Table 11 shows the main reasons given to not get a refreshable braille display. It was mainly felt that they are too expensive (51%) or that they wouldn't use it enough (44%)

Table 11 - data on why customers don't intend to get a refreshable Braille display in next couple of years (base: n=89 who definitely do not intend to get refreshable braille display)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Too expensive or costly | 51% |
| Wouldn't use it enough | 44% |
| Don't know enough about them | 29% |

### 1.11 Contracted vs. uncontracted

* Virtually all braille customers (88%) use contracted (Grade 2) braille. Just 9% say they use both formats and 3% say they only use uncontracted braille (Grade 1). See table 12.

Table 12 - Braille formats used (base: n=150 RNIB braille customers)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Uncontracted (Grade 1) | 3% |
| Contracted (Grade 2) | 88% |
| Both | 9% |

## 2. Braille user segments identified

### 2.1 Qualitative methodology

Two in-home interviews were carried out within each segment. The interviews took place in April / May 2011.

All respondents were recruited from the Quantitative research stage:

* 2x Contented Advocates – c.50% of the customer base
* 2x Passionate Fighters – c.30% of the customer base
* 2x Take it or leave its – c.20% of the customer base

### 2.2 Methodology - important caveats / notes

* Please note that in this section, much of the detail is based on the two qualitative interviews with each segment. Key points have been backed up with quantitative statistics where available.
* Index or 'I' figures are worked out by comparing the % for that segment against the average for all RNIB Braille customers. An index of over 100 means that segment is more likely to do or say this when compared to all Braille users questioned. The bigger the number the bigger the difference. An index of 100 means that segment is just as likely as average to say or do this. An index of less than 100 means that segment is more likely to do or say this when compared to all Braille users questioned. The lower the number the bigger the difference.

## 3. Contented Advocates

### 3.1 Profile and overview

* They tend to be older women living with partners and close to extended family – with very stable personal lives
* Contented and happy with life in general
* They have a wide circle of blind and sighted friends
* Active and interested in the world around them. Enjoy a wide range of hobbies and interests including walking, poetry, going to church and volunteering
* Have worked and had successful careers, often where braille use is key (e.g. braille shorthand typist) or where they have had a supportive employer

### 3.2 Key statistics

Table 13 – Contended Advocates, Key Statistics

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **%** | **Index (against all RNIB braille customers)** |
| Female | 78% | **114** |
| Retired | 60% | 105 |
| Working | 15% | 107 |
| Unemployed | 15% | 83 |
| Housewife/husband | 8% | **133** |
| BPS since birth | 69% | 103 |
| I feel content with my lot (agree) | 73% | **111** |
| I feel well supported by others in my life (definitely agree) | 71% | **108** |

### 3.3 Braille history and current uses

* Contended Advocates had been using braille since childhood resulting in a very established and long term relationship with braille. Reflected in that 82% are very confident using braille (i=109)
* Braille has associations across every part of their life. Has a strong, positive and emotional link for them e.g. keeping favourite childhood braille books for sentimental reasons
* Want other blind and partially sighted people to share this positive relationship with braille e.g. they have taught braille in schools, donated braille books to National Library
* Have used braille consistently – there has been no time of their life when they haven’t wanted or been able to use braille
* Want braille to remain relevant as they can see the benefits it can bring – to do this they attend Sight Village exhibition to find out more about what is ‘out there’ and enjoy being able to talk to other blind and partially sighted braille users
* They were very altruistic and know not all blind and partially sighted people have had the same positive experiences with braille as they have.
* Interested in the integration / sharing of braille e.g. living in a retirement complex and sharing Perkins machine with a friend who couldn’t afford a new one
* They are using braille for the majority of their reading and writing and have done so since they first learnt braille – this is something they enjoy doing. 76% use braille for reading everyday (i=101). 37% use braille for writing everyday (i=79).
* Using Grade 2 braille for all reading and writing, only use Grade 1 when noting down a name or on some medicines

### 3.4 Attitudes to braille

* Very positive attitude to braille and enjoy using it.
* Will chose braille over other communication options, in the majority of cases
* Contented with the services they use (see 3.6) and how the services support their use of braille
* No complaints and love braille! 56% rate RNIB braille services as excellent or very good (i=106). 30% definitely agree they can always get the info they want in braille (i=167)

### 3.5 Use and attitude to technology

* Modern technology in general is not their natural territory – it isn’t their first port of call. 63% use a computer (i=86) but it is also worth bearing in mind that 40% disagree they love the challenge of new technology (i=133)
* When it comes to technology that supports braille and the use of braille there was some use of screen-readers / braille Lite 40 when working, however, this came with a lot of support and was organised / set-up / maintained by someone-else
* Starting to grow in confidence and take small steps to ‘master’ specific audio technologies where there is a real benefit e.g. Milestone player bought to listen to audio books in hospital and can now put audios on an SD Card – provided the respondent with a much easier and more practical way to enjoy audio out of the home
* All technology (e.g. both general technology in audio, computers etc. alongside specific braille technology in digital braille) feels daunting but when supported with a personal recommendation, they were more open to embracing it
* Overall, see technology in general as something that can support and work alongside paper braille as a means to communicate (often in the very few areas where paper braille has weaknesses e.g. portability, size of volumes)
* They would never see audio technology or developments in computing / digital braille as something that could replace paper braille. This was also supported in the quantitative study where 63% disagree that new technology will replace paper braille in the next few years (i=137)

### 3.6 Use of braille services

#### Magazines and newspapers

* Contented Advocates were most aware of braille services available and using the biggest range of services from both RNIB and other providers
* They were reading and enjoying a selection of magazines and newspapers which they had heard about through recommendations from friends and groups they are a member of e.g. church groups, social groups etc.
* Respondents were subscribing to a range of newspapers and magazines e.g. Torch Times, Christianity Today, Home Help, Madam
* They enjoy reading them in braille and look forward to each edition – braille is also their main method for reading them. See table 14 for main methods of reading newspapers and magazines.

Table 14 – Contented Advocates main methods for reading magazines and newspapers

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Main methods for reading mags and newspapers (CAs)** | **%** |
| **Hard copy braille** | **69%** |
| Audio | 50% |
| Someone else | 8% |
| Electronic text | 7% |
| Digital braille | 3% |

#### Books

* Contented Advocates were not reading a lot of non-fiction books – some had some braille cookery books and reference books they have had for years but not using anything new
* For fiction, they enjoy listening to audio books (see table 15) – it is felt that audio books are more relaxing to sit down and listen to a novel, they are also much more practical when it comes to size and portability vs. large paper braille volumes
* Minority use of the National Library for a specific title to join in with a book club, but on the most recent occasion a respondent had used the Library they couldn’t find the title wanted. Felt disappointed but appreciate that not everything can be included.

Table 15 – Contented Advocates main methods for reading books

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Main methods for reading books (CAs)** | **Fiction**  **%** | **Factual**  **%** |
| Audio | **95%** | 46% |
| Hard copy braille | 66% | **78%** |
| Electronic text | 8% | 8% |
| Someone else | 3% | 10% |
| Digital braille | 1% | 0% |

#### Transcription services

* Using transcription services (both of RNIB and a minority using alternative suppliers e.g. InsideOutTrust) for materials they want to be able to read independently and absorb information
* The transcription services were used for documents such as course they wanted to study for church, agendas / newsletters for groups / societies they are members of, instruction manuals
* A minority have just discovered WebDocs (by chance when husband was browsing RNIB online) and thinks it is “amazing” and plans to tell other blind and partially sighted people about it
* Very open to using the transcription service in the future and for a range of documents they want to “interrogate” themselves.
* The transcription service is important for them, as hard copy paper braille is their main method of reading for all types of material, including private correspondence, see table 16 below.

Table 16 – Contented Advocates main methods for reading private correspondence

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Main methods for reading private correspondence (CAs)** | **%** |
| **Hard copy braille** | **64%** |
| Someone else | 60% |
| Electronic text | 21% |
| Audio | 8% |
| Large print | 8% |
| Standard print + magnifier | 3% |

#### Buying other braille related products

* Braille plays a role in every part of their life, and they are happy to buy a range of products to help including; pocket organiser, address book, watch, CD labels to braille
* Contented Advocates were also making their own products / adapting existing products e.g. using an old pocket organiser binder and made it into a birthday book, using see-through CD labels on household good so they are less imposing on husband

### 3.7 Braille issues / initiatives - UEB

* Overall, Contented Advocates were positive to the idea of UEB (one recalled hearing about it in Read On). 50% are aware of UEB and know what it is (i=100). 15% have heard of UEB but don’t know what it is (i=100)
* They felt UEB was especially positive for younger generations learning braille – they want braille to continue and for other people to have positive experiences with it and feel that UEB has the potential to do that
* Would be very interested to see a sample of UEB and gauge the differences. There was some low level worry that they may not be able to learn UEB, due to the current form of braille they use being so engrained
* However, they don’t have any problems accessing the information in braille they want to, so the introduction of UEB wouldn’t directly benefit them personally

### 3.8 Braille issues / initiatives - digital braille

* Within the Contented Advocate segment, 13% currently own a refreshable braille display (i=81)
* For the qualitative sample seen in this study, one respondent had used a BrailleLite 40 at work, but felt she had never used it to its full potential due to her issues with technology in general terms
* They had a neutral response to digital braille overall. Doesn’t especially motivate or engage them, however, could see how younger blind and partially sighted people could use it and how it could be positive for them
* Struggle to see how it would be relevant for them in their current life stage – a general feeling that it was more associated to working life – and couldn’t imagine a situation where digital braille could be used in their day-to-day lives

### 3.9 Contracted vs. uncontracted braille

* All Contented Advocates were using Grade 2 braille and would chose to use Grade 2 whenever possible
* Grade 2 was chosen because it is what you learn to read / write in as soon as you have mastered Grade 1, it was felt to be easy and faster to read
* With Grade 2 braille, the material comes in shorter / smaller volumes which is important for portability and saving space (especially important when down-sizing in older age, or living in retirement flats)
* Grade 1 is only used very occasionally if noting down a name / address or if occasionally they don’t know the contraction e.g. newer words / slang / compound words

### 3.10 Paying for services

* In general, Contented Advocates were happy to pay for braille services. 42% definitely agree they don’t mind paying to get things they need transcribed into braille (i=150)
* This was shown by the range of magazine subscriptions they happily paid for and the range of braille products they bought from RNIB
* Contented Advocates also saw braille equipment as an investment e.g. buying a new Perkins machine

## 4. Passionate fighters

### 4.1 Profile and overview

* This segment was a mix of men and women - more likely to be of working age. (see table 17 for key statistics)
* Passionate Fighters were often pessimistic / slightly discontent with life, however, they are not defeatist and are happy to put up a (vocal) fight when needed
* They were very interested in current affairs. Love BBC News (especially when they do a newspaper review) and Radio 4 for discussions
* Passionate Fighters were confident in making their voice heard on an issue and quick to act – happy to write to MPs to campaign about changes to DLA, contact company directors if there are problems with etc.

### 4.2 Key statistics

Table 17 – Passionate Fighters key statistics

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | % | Index (against all RNIB braille customers) |
| Female | 68% | 108 |
| Male | 32% | 86 |
| Retired | 49% | 86 |
| Working | 10% | 71 |
| Unemployed | 24% | 133 |
| Housewife/husband | 7% | 116 |
| BPS since birth | 68% | 101 |
| Things could be a lot better for me (agree) | 48% | 137 |
| I believe things often happen to you in life that you have no control over (agree) | 43% | 134 |

### 4.3 Braille history and current uses

* Within the qualitative sample, both respondents had learnt braille from a young age
* Their relationship with braille had deepened and they had come to rely on braille more, due to deteriorating eye sight and working lives
* Braille plays a key role in their lives in terms of access to information, as such it would be “*devastating*” for it to be taken away
* Passionate Fighters feel braille is the key to their independence which is crucial - they tended to have a smaller circle of support or live alone
* Less of a positive / rose-tinted view of braille compared to Contented Advocates in section 3 – they had more of an association with having to fight for access to braille / information in general
* Passionate Fighters were using paper braille for most of their reading and writing – however, do use audio technology and digital braille alongside paper braille
* Braille (in all its forms) was vital for their independence – labels on food, household goods, CDs etc, alongside bills and personal administration in braille
* Passionate Fighters welcome braille being included on more things e.g. medicines, signage when out of the home, communication from local council – this is something that they take a keen interest in and have campaigned on in the past

### 4.4 Attitudes to braille

* Passionate Fighters were avid users of braille and fighters for braille related issues
* They tended to feel that when other people are aware of their eye-sight situation they should be offered a range of braille options / large print / audio options without the onus always being them having to ask or worse still, campaign and chase for it
* As a segment they are thrilled when they get “*things*” in braille without asking (e.g. refuse collection calendar) but then disappointed when these services are dropped which they feel often happens
* Passionate Fighters are not just happy with documents to be in braille (unlike Contented Advocates) – the braille documents have to be well produced, accurately produced, arrive on time and arrive regularly
* 39% definitely disagree they can usually get the info they want in braille(i=243)

### 4.5 Use and attitude to technology

* As a segment they are more confident users of technology in general and can see its value in making their life easier and working alongside paper braille.
* 90% use a computer (i=123). 61% definitely agree they love the challenge of new technology (i=180)
* Using braille lite 40 at work and also taking it home to work from home and use for personal things, functioning more as a laptop
* Passionate Fighters are using technology (in particular audio technology and technology for their gadgets) and investing in applications / software to make it even more helpful e.g. Adding the software Talks for mobile phone, adding Jaws for screen reading onto their laptop
* Interested in new developments in technology in general and in digital braille, in particular the ways that it can increase access to information / independence / but cannot see it taking over / replacing paper braille – “*Electronic text has a real value, but you can’t beat the interrogation of braille and the words being under your fingers*” Passionate Fighter

### 4.6 Use of braille services

#### Magazines and newspapers

* Passionate Fighters were getting the majority of their news from BBC TV / Radio (which they are very interested in and enjoy hearing about)
* They especially enjoyed reading magazines with a practical application – especially those that can help them be well informed and make better choices e.g. subscription to Money Matters which is “*devoured*” as soon as it arrives
* Also a subscription to a TV listings magazine so they can sit with it on one knee when watching TV, this kind of opportunity is important as it allows them to have the same experience as sighted people

Table 18 – Passionate Fighters main methods for reading magazines and newspapers

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Main methods for reading mags and newspapers (PFs)** | **%** |
| **Hard copy braille** | **63%** |
| Audio | 47% |
| Electronic text | **22%** |
| Someone else | 9% |
| Digital braille | 0% |

#### Books

* Passionate Fighters were using Talking Books service and take a keen interest in the range of titles. They especially noted and welcomed the addition of Booker Prize audio books / Richard and Judy audio books – again, gives blind and partially sighted people the same access as sighted people at the same time
* To impress them even further, they would like to see more Talking Books that meet their (usually specific) hobbies e.g. Ornithology, Kenyan Music

Table 19 – Passionate Fighters main methods for reading books

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Main methods for reading books (PFs) | Fiction  % | Factual  % |
| Audio | 90% | 57% |
| Hard copy braille | 68% | 78% |
| Electronic text | 20% | 19% |
| Someone else | 8% | 8% |
| Digital braille | 7% | 8% |

#### Transcription services

* Passionate Fighters tended to have a more limited use of transcription services – instead, they preferred to get involved in the very early stages of the document’s production (e.g. with utility company, local council etc) to ensure it is sent to them in braille initially, as such they have fewer transcription needs
* When they have had documents transcribed (particularly for work) they have found they “*leave a lot to be desired*” in terms of accuracy e.g. overlapping lines of text, missed words, wrong contractions. Passionate Fighters have raised these problems with RNIB and quoted embosser number (when supplied with the document) in an effort to correct the problem in the future

Table 20 – Passionate Fighters main methods for reading private correspondence

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Main methods for reading private correspondence (PFs)** | **%** |
| **Someone else** | **80%** |
| Hard copy braille | 70% |
| Electronic text | **38%** |
| Large print | 10% |
| Audio | 3% |

#### Buying other braille related products

* Passionate Fighters in general bought fewer braille products compared to Contented Advocates due to their greater use of audio technology and technology in general e.g. electronic note takers, mobile phones with Talks, and laptops are used in place of braille diaries, address books etc

### 4.7 Braille issues/initiatives - UEB

* Generally a negative perception of UEB was held by Passionate Fighters. However, for most this is based on gossip / whispers they have heard about UEB.
* 56% of Passionate Fighters are aware of UEB and know what it is (i=112). The Quantitative study also showed that 12% have heard of UEB but don’t know what it is (i=80)
* In general, they feel UEB is trying to “*fix something that isn’t broken*” and this is creating a feeling of anger around the issue – current form of braille works for them (any problems with access to material / availability of material is not due to the code, rather is the fault of the producer e.g. the utility company)
* Passionate Fighters feel RNIB are not interested in blind and partially sighted people’s opinions on this topic, instead making decisions in meetings while “*eating cucumber sandwiches*”

### 4.8 Braille issues / initiatives - digital braille

* For Passionate Fighters, digital braille is positive as it is “*yet more access*” to information and can help with further independence. Within this segment 29% own a refreshable braille display (i=181)
* They have some experience with using digital braille at work. Using it in the office is felt to be the most suitable and useful role for digital braille
* Can imagine continuing to use it in the future and enjoy the flexibility it can give you – can use it as a laptop to read documents out of the home

### 4.9 Contracted vs. uncontracted braille

* Like Contented Advocates, Passionate Fighters were using Grade 2 braille in the vast majority of cases
* Grade 1 was felt to be too long and result in material that was too bulky and impractical
* Although Passionate Fighters felt that they were occasionally unable to access materials they wanted (e.g. books about specialist topics) if these materials were in Grade 1 they would take too long to read.
* Also Passionate Fighters felt that if RNIB / National Library / other producers of braille were able publish materials in Grade 1, then Grade 2 would be easier to produce and they would fight for this to happen

### 4.10 Paying for services

* Passionate Fighters were happy to pay for magazines / books / other services that would carry a cost for an equivalent object / service (e.g. printed magazine carries a cost; a braille magazine should carry a cost). These objects were also a “*choice”*.
* However, paying for transcription was more emotive. It was felt that having a document in braille wasn’t a choice – often it is a necessity and the only way they can access that information. They also feel they are more educated on costs of producing braille and “*once everything is set-up, you’re away!*”
* Therefore, Passionate Fighters felt that transcriptions should be free or carry only a minimal cost (e.g. cover postage only)
* 51% disagree they don’t mind paying to get things they need transcribed into braille (i=182)

## 5. Take it or Leave its

### 5.1 Profile and overview

* Within this segment there was a range of ages, and in general terms they are more likely to be men.
* The Quantitative study showed a mix of employment status and household situation. (Nb. the two qualitative respondents were both unemployed and not actively looking for work. One was living in sheltered accommodation with a support worker for 3 days a week, the other lived with family)
* In general Take it or Leave its had a limited desire to change things in their lives – they were not motivated by having new experiences / progression in any field

### 5.2 Key statistics

Table 21 – Take it or Leave its Key Statistics (Please note that statistics for take it or leave its are based on a very small base size (n=28). Treat with caution. %s are indicative only)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **%** | **Index (against all RNIB braille customers)** |
| **Female** | **32%** | **51** |
| **Male** | **68%** | **183** |
| **Retired** | **61%** | **107** |
| **Working** | **14%** | **100** |
| **Unemployed** | **18%** | **100** |
| **Housewife/husband** | **0%** | **-** |
| **BPS since birth** | **57%** | **85** |
| **I try to avoid changing things in my life if I can (definitely agree)** | **43%** | **165** |

### 5.3 Braille history and current uses

* Within this segment there was a more limited connection to braille since childhood – within the qualitative sample they were either not motivated to learn braille / improve their braille skills or there were more appealing alternatives to braille available at the time e.g. developments in audio
* Only 29% of Take it or Leave its definitely agree they are passionate about the use of braille (i=47). Furthermore, 68% use braille less than they used to (i=174)
* They actively enjoy the alternatives to braille (e.g. Audio) and when they decide to use them it is as a result of them making a positive choice to use then, rather than a negative choice against braille
* This segment were less passionate about braille and view it as a purely functional tool in a specific range of applications – it was mainly used for writing, including labelling CD’s / DVD’s, labelling other household goods, occasional notes that only they would read
* Limited use for reading as they tended to struggle with reading speed / ability so are put off reading more often – with the qualitative sample they were also living with family or have access to a support worker who can read bills / paperwork as needed
* 60% of this segment use braille for reading everyday (i=80). 46% use braille for writing everyday (i=100)
* They have had longer periods of time when they have either stopped using braille or used it very little

### 5.4 Attitudes to braille

* For the Take it or Leave it segment, braille is useful, but less important - they are the least passionate about braille. Only 50% definitely agree they’d be lost without braille(i=68)
* For the occasions they use braille (labelling, minority for note writing) then it is very useful and they couldn’t imagine an alternative in that specific application
* However, when there is a viable alternative to braille then they are very interested in using it and don’t actively seek out ways to use braille more often

### 5.5 Use and attitude to technology

* Take it or Leave its are interested in technology in general (one of the only areas that they are interested in progression in) and enjoy using it. 75% use a computer (i=123)
* Technology is important for both functional applications (e.g. emails for communication) and for enjoyment (e.g. podcasts)
* Due to younger age, they have already seen (and understand) how technology in general has progressed and feel that it is inevitable that it will develop further to replace paper braille. 86% agree new technology will replace braille in the next few years (i=200)

### 5.6 Use of braille services

#### Magazines, newspapers and books

* Within the qualitative sample, they were not currently reading any newspapers, books or magazines in braille – reading speed is too slow for that to be enjoyable or practical. Table 21 shows the quantitative breakdown for reading methods for reading fiction
* Reflecting their interest in audio technology / developments in computing technology, they were using audio books or CCTV unit to read in large print on a computer screen
* No interest / desire to read books, newspapers or magazines in Braille

Table 22 – Take it or Leave it main methods for reading fiction books

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Main methods for reading fiction books** | **%** |
| Audio | 100% |
| Hard copy braille | 39% |
| Electronic text | 12% |
| Digital braille | 0% |

#### Transcription services

* Not using any transcription services and couldn’t imagine having a need for them in the future
* This segment use alternatives they already have in place for documents not in braille (screen-readers, CCTV unit for computer, or family / support worker etc. to read documents for them)

Table 23 – Take it or Leave it main methods for reading private correspondence

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Main methods for reading private correspondence** | **%** |
| **Someone else** | **82%** |
| Hard copy braille | 39% |
| Electronic text | 29% |
| Large print | 11% |
| Audio | 7% |
| Standard print + magnifier | 4% |

#### Buying other braille related products

* Only buying materials to label with e.g. clear CD labels to use with Perkins machine
* Buying a bigger range of audio related products – electronic note taker, portable audio player – and additions for their computers / mobile phones

#### Alternatives to braille

* The Take it or Leave it segment were listening to a lot of radio for news, discussion, dramas and music
* They also had huge collections of CDs, audio adaptations of dramas / TV series and DVDs. Built up over time and a treasured possession.
* Listening to podcasts online and use YouTube

### 5.7 Braille issues / initiatives - UEB

* 43% of this segment are aware of UEB and know what it is (i=85). 18% have heard of UEB but don’t know what it is (i=119)
* In theory for this segment, UEB is a positive idea. In the qualitative research there was spontaneous mention of having “*one standard braille*”.
* Take it or Leave its tended to struggle with modern contractions / technical codes and a unified code would simplify braille for them
* This segment were also out of practice in reading longer amounts of text / words that they don’t write (e.g. most often reading labels they have written) so learning a new style of braille wouldn’t be too different to brushing up on Grade 2
* However, they don’t have the motivation to learn and feel that technology will eventually replace braille

### 5.8 Braille issues / initiatives - digital braille

* 7% own a refreshable braille display (i=44). 43% have never heard of a refreshable braille display (i=154)
* Within the qualitative sample, one respondent had tried digital braille (at Sight Village, was “*made*” to attend) but had struggled due to there being an extra row of cells and the confusion this caused – “*is this an ‘S’ or something else? They are very nice if you are an expert braille reader, but I’m not*”
* Very confident and skilled users of screen-readers (Jaws especially) and don’t require portability that digital braille readers offer
* Less interesting despite their focus on technology – the passion for braille isn’t strong enough to make digital braille appealing

### 5.9 Contracted vs. uncontracted braille

* Using Grade 2 when writing their labels around the home, and notes – not always sure if they are using correct contractions, but generally only read by them so not a problem and doesn’t matter about the accuracy of what they write
* When they read braille (very occasionally) they also prefer Grade 2. They already feel they are slow readers and Grade 1 only would only slow them down further
* Materials being available in Grade 1 would not encourage them to use braille or braille services more often

### 5.10 Paying for services

* Happy to pay for audio services (Talking Books, purchasing CDs etc) and to invest in audio technology and gadgets for their home computers
* Braille however, is less emotive and they are much less likely to invest in it and pay for services – especially when there are more appealing / free alternatives. 50% disagree they don’t mind paying to get things I need transcribed into braille (i=179)
* Also, those living alone are starting to struggle for money and expect that to get worse if / when there are changes to DLA so spending money on braille services will be even less of a priority

## 6. Implications for current braille issues

### 6.1 UEB

Currently mixed levels of knowledge about UEB. Many are not strongly opposed to it but don’t really see the personal benefit!

50% of braille customers say they have heard of UEB and know what it is. Of these around six in ten would consider reading books in UEB if it meant they had access to a wider selection of titles.

Qualitatively, all respondents would want to see a sample of UEB in comparison to Grade 2. This would allow them to gauge the differences in feel between the two types and then would be able to make a more informed judgement on UEB.

Contented Advocates can see the benefit for younger people learning braille now, but don’t currently have any problems accessing information so wouldn’t have a personal need for UEB.

Passionate Fighters often have (or perceive that they have) problems accessing information, however, they regard RNIB with some cynicism and that UEB wouldn’t help them. Take it or Leave its struggle with reading braille (Grade 2) and don’t regard themselves as ‘expert’ braille users. However, as a segment they lack the motivation / interest to learn UEB.

### 6.2 Digital braille

Most customers are currently not using digital braille and may need some persuasion or incentive (i.e. lower prices) to invest in this technology. 16% of braille customers currently own a refreshable braille display. Of these, around two thirds would consider reading books on their display.

Currently, the majority of braille customers (83%) do not intend to get a refreshable braille display in the next couple of years. The main reasons given are that they are: too expensive (51%), they wouldn't use it enough (44%), don't know enough about them (29%)

Qualitatively, digital (or refreshable braille) was appealing to the most tech savvy respondents who were in employment (Passionate Fighters). Those not in employment couldn’t see a domestic application for digital braille; can RNIB offer them some scenarios where digital braille could help them?

For some (Contented Advocates) the technology in a domestic situation was also daunting, some explanations of the support available could ease any worries

### 6.3 Contracted vs. uncontracted

Virtually all braille customers (88%) use contracted (Grade 2) braille. Just 9% say they use both formats and 3% say they only use uncontracted braille (Grade 1).

Qualitatively, contracted is preferred because it's quicker, easier and less bulky. Most could not see the benefit of having more material in uncontracted braille as it would take them too long to read.

### 6.4 Paying for braille services

Opinions on paying for braille transcriptions are currently very polarised. Around half of braille customers would consider paying (mainly contented advocates), whereas around three in ten (mainly passionate fighters and take it or leave its) would not.

## 7. Recommendations

These recommendations are the views of the researchers.

### 7.1 Contented Advocates

* In general, Contended Advocates are just that; happy about the braille services they use and believers in braille. There is not a huge amount that could make them happier!
* To further involve them, RNIB need to engage the emotional / sentimental side of their relationship with braille
* Consider engaging them as gurus / experts for other less confident / able / knowledgeable BPS people
* Ensure there is a RNIB presence at events like Sight Village where Contented Advocates can be talked through developments / work with braille – especially important if they are to use more braille related technology e.g. refreshable displays
* Educate Contented Advocates around the strengths / home based applications of technology e.g. Milestone player for portability, potential role for digital braille out of the office
* Offer them creative braille products

### 7.2 Passionate Fighters

* Passionate Fighters often see the glass as half empty and need to be helped to see the positive options for braille and braille services.
* Engage them in debate and show their opinions are being listened to, especially on controversial topics (avoids gossip / whispers about RNIB) e.g. a forum to discuss UEB
* Engage them in campaigns, help them see that they aren’t a lone voice and that RNIB is supporting and co-ordinating action
* Take account of information needs – as a segment they value being informed and keeping their independence
* Ensure accuracy of braille produced by RNIB – overlapping lines, missed words etc.

### 7.3 Take it or Leave its

* Take it or Leave it respondents had the most opportunity for growth in braille and braille services, and the most to gain from it – however, their interest and motivation was the lowest of all segments. Until they have the confidence to read braille and greater writing confidence, then there is not a lot that could be done to help them in terms of braille.
* RNIB could work to increase their confidence in reading via support workers or pro-active family members
* Show how braille could improve their current life e.g. more independence on days when support worker isn’t around
* Provide products to support daily living e.g.labelling

## Conclusion

The segments identified in this piece of profiling research, show the diversity and breadth within users of braille. There are of course users of braille who will fall on the edge of these segments, adding to the rich spectrum of attitudes identified in this research.

The topic of braille is highly emotive due to the important role it plays for the majority of users. As has been identified in this report, the role of braille can vary from all-encompassing to a minor and specific application.

Contented Advocates embrace every element of braille and related services, approaching it with a positive mind-set and with an enthusiastic and open attitude. Passionate Fighters approach problems with access to braille and related issues with energy and determination to correct difficulties. Their experience in using their voice to campaign on issues makes the segment a powerful force. The Take it Leave it segment use braille for limited and specific applications, often due to issues around confidence, ability and the negative influence of wider life issues.

For the majority of users of braille spoken to in this study, in the qualitative fieldwork particularly, felt very protective of braille and its future. Developments in contractions, including UEB, and potential changes to services were viewed with hesitance. For many technology was starting to play a role in their lives. Audio technology was a key use of technology, providing users with portability and a relaxing medium for the spoken word. Computers and gadget based technology was growing, especially for younger braille users / those in employment.

It was felt that with enough communication, involvement for braille users and factual / practical information there would be feeling of positivity and optimism for the future of braille and the role RNIB would play within that future.

Appendix 1 - Quantitative Interview Questions

Hello, my name is ………………. and I'm calling from RNIB. Please can I speak to <name of customer>.

We are conducting some research about the way that people use Braille today and were wondering if you were available to answer a few questions? It should only take 15-20 minutes.

If no.. (If now is not a good time perhaps I could arrange another time to call you)?

Before we start, can I just double check a couple of things?

**Are you blind or partially sighted yourself?**

Yes - blind

Yes - partially sighted

No - THANK AND CLOSE

**Are you over 18 years old?**

Yes

No - THANK AND CLOSE

**Do you currently use Braille?**

Yes

No - THANK AND CLOSE

Thank you very much for agreeing to take part.

**Section 1 - Current behaviour**

[This section is designed to get a more holistic understanding of how Braille fits in with other methods of reading and writing.]

In which of the following ways do you read **leisure books such as novels or autobiographies**?

And which would you consider to be your main method for reading books for leisure?

*Note to interviewer: Audio includes any form of* ***listening*** *to books regardless of the technology or format they use. Some examples include; RNIB talking books through a Daisy player or audio books downloaded and listened to on their computer.*

Audio

Braille - as a hard copy book

Braille - on a refreshable Braille display

Large print as a hard copy book

Large print on screen (via a computer screen or e-book reader)

Ordinary print books with a magnifying device

A friend/carer reads to me

Other (please specify)

I never read books for leisure

In which of the following ways do you read **factual books. For example, cookery books, gardening or travel books?**

And which would you consider to be your main method for reading factual books?

Audio

Braille - as a hard copy book

Braille - on a refreshable Braille display

Large print as a hard copy book

Large print on screen (via a computer screen or e-book reader)

Ordinary print books with a magnifying device

A friend/carer reads to me

Other (please specify)

I never read factual books

IF USE AUDIO BOOKS @ Q1 or Q2

In which of the following ways do you listen to your audio books?

And what is the main way in which you listen to your audio books?

CD player

Daisy player

Laptop or computer

Ipod/MP3 player

E-book reader (e.g. Kindle or iPad)

Mobile phone/iPhone

Boombox

Playaway

Other

In which of the following ways do you read or access **newspapers or magazines**?

And which would you consider to be your main method for reading newspapers or magazines?

Audio (including using software such as Jaws)

Podcasts

Braille - as a hard copy document

Braille - on a refreshable display

Large print on screen (e.g. via websites)

Large print hard copy newspapers or magazines

Ordinary newspapers/mags with a magnifying device

A friend/carer reads to me

Other (please specify)

I never read newspapers or magazines

In which of the following ways do you read or access **private correspondence** such as bills, letters or medical appointments?

And which would you consider to be your main method for reading private correspondence?

Audio (including using software such as Jaws)

Braille - as a hard copy document

Braille - on a refreshable display

Large print on screen (e.g. on your computer or laptop)

Large print hard copy documents

Ordinary sized print with a magnifying device

A friend/carer reads them for me

Other (please specify)

I never read this type of thing

**Which of the following best reflects your working status?**

Retired

Working full time (30hrs+ per week)

Working part-time

Studying

Unemployed - seeking paid-employment

Unemployed - unable to work

Housewife/househusband

IF WORKING OR STUDYING @ Q6

In which of the following ways do you read or access **documents that you need for work or studying**?

And which would you consider to be your main method for reading or accessing **documents that you need for work or studying**?

Audio (including using software such as Jaws)

Braille - as a hard copy document

Braille - on a refreshable display

Large print on screen (e.g. on your computer or laptop)

Large print hard copy documents

Ordinary sized print with a magnifying device

A friend/colleague reads to me

Other (please specify)

I never read or access documents for work or study

**Section 2 - Technology use**

[This section is designed to get a sense of the current and future use of technology among Braille users. Section 1 will also help us with this.]

**Do you use a computer or laptop?**

Yes - at home

Yes - at work

Yes - somewhere else

No

**Do you have access to the Internet either through a computer or another device such as a mobile phone or PDA?**

Yes

No

Not sure

IF USE A COMPUTER @ Q8

**How confident would you say you are at using your computer or laptop?**

Very confident

Fairly confident

Not very confident

Not at all confident

IF USE A COMPUTER@Q8

**Which of the following things do you use your computer or laptop for?**

Emailing

Reading or writing documents

Surfing the Internet

Downloading or streaming audio or e-books

Downloading or streaming podcasts

Visiting news websites

Listening to the radio

Social networking (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Linkedin)

Participating in forums

IF DO NOT USE A COMPUTER @ Q8

**Do you intend to get a computer or laptop within the next couple of years?**

Yes definitely

Yes possibly

No probably not

No definitely not

**Section 3 - Braille history and usage**

[This section is designed to get more detailed information on Braille usage. Particularly contracted vs uncontracted.]

**When did you first start to learn Braille?** If you can't remember exactly, then just give your best estimate!

Less than 1 year ago

1-2 years ago

3-4 years ago

5-9 years ago

10-20 years ago

More than 20 years ago

Really can't remember

**And how old were you when you first learnt Braille?** If you can't remember exactly, then just give your best estimate!

I learnt it at school or college

In my 20s

In my 30s

In my 40s

In my 50s

In my 60s

In my 70s

In my 80s

In my 90s

Really can't remember

**Which types of Braille do you currently use?**

Uncontracted (formerly known as Grade 1) only

Contracted (formerly known as Grade 2) only

Both

IF USE BOTH @ Q15

**Which of the following most applies to you?**

I learnt uncontracted Braille (grade 1) before contracted braille (grade 2)

I learnt both of them at around the same time

Can't remember

IF USE UNCONTRACTED BRAILLE @Q15

**How often do you use uncontracted Braille (Grade 1) for reading the following things?**

Labels and lists

Leisure books such as novels

Factual books such as cooking, gardening or travel

Newspapers

Magazines

Private correspondence (letters, bills, etc)

Work related documents

Study materials

Every day/almost every day

Once a week or so

Once a month or so

Once every few months

Less often

Never

Never (but I did in the past)

IF USE UNCONTRACTED BRAILLE @Q15

**How often do you use uncontracted Braille (Grade 1) for writing the following things?**

Labels and lists

Private correspondence (letters, etc)

Work related documents

Studying

Every day/almost every day

Once a week or so

Once a month or so

Once every few months

Less often

Never

Never (but I did in the past)

IF USE CONTRACTED BRAILLE @ Q15

**How often do you use contracted Braille (Grade 2) for reading the following things?**

Labels and lists

Leisure books such as novels

Factual books such as cooking, gardening or travel

Newspapers

Magazines

Private correspondence (letters, bills, etc)

Work related documents

Study materials

Every day/almost every day

Once a week or so

Once a month or so

Once every few months

Less often

Never

Never (but I did in the past)

IF USE CONTRACTED BRAILLE @ Q15

**How often do you use contracted Braille (Grade 2) for writing the following things?**

Labels and lists

Private correspondence (letters, etc)

Work related documents

Studying

Every day/almost every day

Once a week or so

Once a month or so

Once every few months

Less often

Never

Never (but I did in the past)

**Question on feelings about using uncontracted Braille for reading books?? Can't think of a decent way of wording!**

**Section 4 - Attitudes to Braille**

[This section is designed to get a better understanding of user's attitudes towards Braille. How much they value it, what they think about the future of Braille, what type of user they feel they are, etc.]

**How confident are you in using Braille?**

Very confident

Fairly confident

Not very confident

Not at all confident

**Overall, would you say that you use Braille….**

A lot more than I used to

A little more than I used to

No difference

A little less than I used to

A lot less than I used to

**Why do you say that?**

Open-ended

**And thinking about the next few years, do you think you will use Braille…**

A lot more than I currently do

A little more than I currently do

No difference

A little less than I currently do

A lot less than I currently do

**Why do you say that?**

Open-ended

**To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

I would be lost without Braille

I don't think Braille is promoted enough

New technology will take the place of Braille in the next few years

Braille is getting too complicated these days

I can usually get the information I want in Braille

I am passionate about the use of Braille

Braille is old-fashioned

Definitely agree

Tend to agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Tend to disagree

Definitely disagree

Don't know

**Section 5 - Specific Braille issues**

[This section is designed to help us understand some of the specific issues identified; digital Braille, UEB, etc.]

**Do you currently own a refreshable Braille display? Interviewer notes:** If respondent is not sure what this is - "These are small devices that you typically connect to your computer. The text on your computer is then transmitted to the display so that you can read it in Braille".

Yes

No - but I've heard about them

No - I've never heard of them

IF YES @ Q28

**Would you consider reading books for leisure on your refreshable Braille display?**

Yes, definitely

Yes, possibly

No, probably not

No, definitely not

IF NO @ Q29

**Why do you say this?**

Open ended

IF DON'T ALREADY OWN A REFRESHABLE BRAILLE DISPLAY (NO @ Q28)

**Do you intend to get a refreshable Braille display in the next couple of years?**

Yes, definitely

Yes, possibly

No, probably not

No, definitely not

ASK ALL

**Have you heard of Unified English Braille (UEB)?**

Yes - heard of it and know what it is

Yes - but don't know what it is

No

Not sure

**Section 6 - Attitudes to life**

[This section is used to establish which consumer segment they fall into (e.g. passive vs proactive, content vs discontent) and their general outlook on life.]

**I am now going to read you some statements. For each pair of statements I read out can you tell me which one you think best applies to you?**

I believe your life is a result of what you make of it

I believe things often happen to you in life that you have no control over

I feel basically content with my lot

Things could be a lot better for me

**To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

I try to avoid changing things in my life if I can

I like being around other people

I love the challenge of keeping up-to-date with new technology

I feel well supported by others in my life

I am comfortable asking others for help when I need it

I focus on what I can do rather than what I can't do

I lead an active lifestyle

Definitely agree

Tend to agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Tend to disagree

Definitely disagree

Don't know

**Section 7 - RNIB**

**RNIB offers a range of different services for Braille users. For example, books to loan or buy, magazines, Braille related products and training courses. Based on your own experiences, how would you rate RNIB's current Braille services?**

Excellent

Very good

Fairly good

Fairly poor

Very poor

Don't know

**If RNIB could do one thing to improve its services to Braille users what would this be?**

Open ended

**Section 8 - Classification**

**Are you?**

Male

Female

**Which of the following statements applies to your household?**

I live with my spouse/partner

I live with other family members

I live in sheltered accommodation

I live on my own

Prefer not to answer

**Do you mind telling me your age?**

Response in years

Prefer not to answer

**What is your particular sight condition?**

Macular degeneration

Glaucoma

Retinal pigmentosa

Cataracts

Retinal detachment

Diabetic retinopathy

Result of accident or injury

Other/not known

Prefer not to answer

**How long have you had this condition?**

Since birth

Number of years: (enter no. of years)

Prefer not to answer

**Which of the following describe what you are able to see?**

No light perception

Can tell by the light where the windows are

Can see the shapes of furniture in a room

Can recognise a friend if close to their face

Can recognise a friend at arm's length away

Can recognise a friend across a room

Can recognise a friend across a road

Prefer not to answer

**Which of the following ethnic groups would you say you belong to?**

White

Mixed background

Indian

Pakistani

Bangladeshi

Chinese

Other Asian background

Black Caribbean

Black African

Other ethnic group

Prefer not to answer

Lastly, would you be willing to take part in a follow-up interview on the subjects covered today? If so, an independent research company working on behalf of RNIB would contact you directly to arrange an appointment at a convenient time for you.

## Appendix 2 - Qualitative Interview Questions

**1. Set up and Thanks**

* **Thank respondent** for agreement and help already given on telephone survey
* Check if they would **like carer or family member / friend** present
* **Reassurance** about use of personal data – confidential and non-attributed
* MR reassurance: **independent, confidential**
* Explanation about **recording**. Clarify time
* **Any questions?**

**2. Introduction and Context** (10 mins)

* **First name, household** (people and pets)
* How do you like to **spend your time**? (especially probing on any mentions of **Reading**, **Writing** or use of **Technology**)
* **Probe on Technology - do you they have a computer/Internet access? (Anything else they are using to go online?) If so, what do they use them for? Do they enjoy new technology? Confident users? Any mentions of using for reading, writing, podcasts, radio, TV, etc?**
* **Probe on reading - do you read for pleasure or practical purposes, or both? What type of books - fiction, non-fiction, etc? Newspapers / Magazines?**
* What would be your **ideal weekend**? Who would it be with?

**3. Exploration around the Context of Personal Sightloss Journey** (10 mins)

* What is your **current eyesight situation**? How would you describe it? Severity etc.
* At what age **did you lose / start to lose your sight**? Probe for if it was a gradual loss, sudden loss or been present since birth
* **How did you feel about it at the time**? Probe for fighting spirit vs. resignation
* Do you think your **feelings about it have changed**? Explore resilience, optimism and confidence
* How easy did you find it asking for help?
* What **sources of information / support** have you found most valuable?
* Are you personally **involved with any support organisations**? Probe for perception / level of support / attitude to RNIB
* **Where and when were you taught Braille**? Do you have / have you had any on-going support with Braille?

**4. Context on Communication / their use of Braille** (20? mins)

* What methods of communication **have you used in the past / do you currently use?** Probe: Audio, Braille, Large print, Standard print with a magnifying device, Electronic text (either heard via a screen reader or magnified), Someone else reads to me **.**  Probe: for reading books (fiction vs. non-fiction), magazines and newspapers, reading and writing private letters and correspondence, work documents, etc.
* What **role does Braille play for you personally**? Probe on preference for certain type of information, certain time of day, specific mood.
* **How does Braille compare** to other methods of communicating? What are the pros and cons?
* **How often do you use Braille for reading/writing?**
* **If use Braille for writing.** What do they use it for? Just labels and lists or other documents? What writing technology do they use? Perkins Brailler/Writing machine, Braille Dymo, Braille frame?
* Has the **role of Braille changed over time** for you? Why / Why not?
* What **prompted the change** (change in lifestyle, technology use, change in sight situation, loss of sensation in fingertips, etc?) / Why has it **remained constant**?
* How would you **describe your relationship with Braille**? In the past and currently?
* How reliant are you on Braille? What activities do you rely on it most for? Explore e.g. fiction books less so maybe?
* What does Braille provide you that other forms of communication don’t?

**5. Focus on type of Braille used** (10? mins)

* **Which type or grade of Braille do you currently use most often?** Grade 1 (uncontracted), Grade 2 (contracted) or both? *(N.B. Everyone is taught Uncontracted Braille, previously Grade 1)*
* If mainly Grade 2, do you use Grade 1 Braille for anything? If so, what? If not, why not?
* Would you consider reading books in Grade 1 (uncontracted Braille)? Why?/Why not? Probe: What if more titles were available? Does it make a difference between fiction and factual books?
* Have you always used this type of Braille? (if not, probe on **when / why they learnt contracted Braille after learning uncontracted Braille**)

**Unified English Braille**

The Unified English Braille (UEB) project aims to "unify" English braille. This means both creating a single braille code for all English-speaking people around the world, and also to unify the literary and technical codes into one.

The benefits of this include the opportunity to share resources between countries that share the same language, but currently do not share the same braille code.

**Have you heard about UEB?** Do you think it would be useful? Why/why not?

**Would you consider reading books in Unified English Braille** if it meant you had access to a wider selection of titles? Why/why not?

**6. Digital Braille** (5 mins)

* **Have you heard about digital Braille and refreshable Braille displays?** If respondent is not sure what this is - "These are devices that you typically connect to your computer. The text on your computer is then transmitted to the display so that you can read it as Braille dots".
* If **YES**: **Where did you first hear about it? Have you ever used a refreshable Braille display?** If so, where and when. Probe on their attitude to using it again in the future.
* If **NO**: What is your reaction to Digital Braille?
* **Would you consider buying a refreshable Braille display?** Why/why not (expense, don't have a computer, etc).
* **Would they use a digital Braille display even if wouldn’t buy one?** E.g. via access to work, disabled students allowance etc.
* Would they/have they used a refreshable Braille display to read books? Why/why not?

**7. Role of Braille in the future (**5 mins – only if not covered already)

* **Do you feel the role that Braille plays in your life** / your usage of Braille will change in the future?
* IF **YES** – Why? **What will prompt the change?** Probe if it’s positive / negative change. How will it change? (e.g. change in format, change in code, change in types of information read, change in frequency of using it)
* If **NO** – Why not?
* Do you feel that your attitude to Braille will change in the future?
* IF **YES** – Why? What will prompt the change? Probe if it’s positive / negative change
* If **NO** – Why not?

**Really Important: Current Braille Services**

* **Which Braille related services do you currently use?** Probe: transcription services, subscribing to/buying Braille magazines or newspapers, library services (borrowing books in Braille), buying other Braille related products, training courses, etc.
* **What is your opinion of RNIB's Braille related services?** Pros/cons? What could we do better? (probe on any mention of Close Braille)
* What are their attitudes towards paying to get the things that they need in Braille format?
* Do you use the Braille services of any other providers? If so, who and how do they compare?

**8. Sum-up**

* **Anything else you want to say on the topic of Braille**? Any other thoughts or comments you wanted to share about your life and Braille?

**9. Thanks and Close**

### About RNIB’s research

RNIB is a leading source of information on sight loss and the issues affecting blind and partially sighted people. Our Research and Knowledge Hub contains key information and statistics about blind and partially sighted people including our Sight Loss Data Tool, which provides information about sight loss at a local level throughout the UK. You’ll also find research reports on a range of topics including employment, education, technology, accessibility and more. Visit our Knowledge and Research Hub at: **rnib.org.uk/research**