



Availability of accessible publications

2011 update

Executive summary

Background

Whether studying for an exam, keeping professional skills up to date, learning a new recipe, or relaxing with a good read, books are essential to our education, work and leisure.

However, blind and partially sighted readers face a dramatically limited choice of titles. The number of accessible titles – by which we mean books that are available in the three key formats of large print, braille and unabridged audio – is still unacceptably low in comparison to the range that sighted people enjoy.

RNIB believes that blind and partially sighted people have the same rights to access the rich world of books as anyone else. We are committed members of the Right to Read Alliance, which seeks to ensure that everyone can read the ‘same book, the same time, at the same price’. RNIB has been working hard with key industry partners to make this a reality and we wanted to understand how far we had progressed towards reaching this objective.

We commissioned two new pieces of research from the LISU, a research and consultancy unit at Loughborough University. The first provides us with the big picture. Based on titles published between 2006 and 2010, our ‘Availability of accessible publications: 2011 update’ aims to provide an up-to-date estimate of the availability of accessible publications. It also aims to assess the impact of accessible eBooks and ereaders since 2004, when this study was last completed.

An eBook is a book in an electronic text format. They can, depending on the eBook

and device used, be read as electronic large print, audio (using a synthetic voice), or braille using an electronic braille display. There are exciting developments in the digital world, and we have set ourselves an ambitious strategic target:

‘By 2014, blind and partially sighted people are able to read the 1,000 most popular books each year, using commercial audio books or eBooks.’

The second report, ‘Accessibility of top 1000 titles of 2010’, shows how we’re doing against our strategic aim to make the most popular titles accessible. It also shows what impact accessible eBooks and ereaders have made since the study was first completed in 2009.

We’re aware that one thousand titles remains a small number compared to the stock of a bookshop or library. However, the improving availability for this most popular range of titles shows what is possible. RNIB needs to know where the gaps are, so that we can plan future work to increase the range of accessible titles.

Our definition of accessible books rests on readers’ preferred format. Large print is not an accessible format to someone with no useful sight; braille is not accessible to someone who cannot read it. We found it useful to break down titles by format to help us understand the bigger picture. However, we only defined books as fully accessible if they were available in the three key formats of large print, braille and unabridged audio, to reflect the diverse and individual needs of blind and partially sighted readers.

Summary of key results

Many people who have lost their sight still can't read in formats that are accessible to them, even when including those who use eBooks. We have a long way to go before blind and partially sighted people can read the full range of books that everybody else takes for granted.

- Just 7 per cent of all books are available in braille, audio and large print, including titles available in these formats using eBooks

However, UK publishers and the eBook industry have worked with RNIB to make progress in recent years, especially with recent popular titles and when including accessible eBooks.

- In 2010, 54 per cent of the top 1,000 titles were available in braille, audio and large print, including titles available in these formats using eBooks

The publishing sector has been revolutionised by eBooks in recent years. Where publishers and the eBook industry have incorporated accessibility in their design, they increase the choice of titles for blind and partially sighted people. We are working hard to open up these new technologies to more people so that the progress we have made can be enjoyed more widely.

Starting with the most popular books, but with a strong sense of the bigger picture, we are committed to changing this. It is not acceptable in our information rich and technology driven age that just seven per cent of books are fully accessible to blind and partially sighted people – especially as many don't currently use eBooks. People who have lost their sight should be able to choose from a greater selection than this, like anyone else can. However, by working constructively with publishers, the eBook industry and blind and partially sighted readers, we will open up a new world of books for all to enjoy.



The full reports

Accessible publications 2011

This report is available from 24 October 2011 at rnib.org.uk/accessiblepublishing or by emailing ebooks@rnib.org.uk to request a copy.

Accessibility of top 1,000 titles of 2010

This report is available from 10 October 2011 at rnib.org.uk/accessiblepublishing or by emailing ebooks@rnib.org.uk to request a copy.

