Too little, too late

Provision of school textbooks for blind and partially sighted pupils

Research report
Sue Keil, Delyth Parris, Rory Cobb, Angela Edwards and Richard McAllister
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Executive summary

Introduction

This research reveals major shortcomings in the current system of provision of school textbooks for blind and partially sighted pupils in the UK. The study investigates in detail how provision of school textbooks in braille and large print is organised and identifies reasons why blind and partially sighted pupils do not always have equal access to school textbooks in alternative formats. Practical ideas for improving the system are proposed.

Background to the study

It is estimated that there are around 18,700 children in England and Wales between the ages of five and 16 with a visual impairment of sufficient severity to require specialist education service support (Keil and Clunies-Ross, 2002). In Northern Ireland there were just over 600 blind and partially sighted pupils in the 2005/06 academic year (DENI, personal communication, 2006).

Most (59 per cent) are educated in mainstream schools, or mainstream schools additionally resourced for blind and partially sighted pupils (Keil and Clunies-Ross, 2003; Keil, 2003). Specialist support for pupils in mainstream schools is usually provided by local authority Visual Impairment (VI) or in Northern Ireland Vision Support (VS) services via peripatetic advisory teachers of pupils with visual impairment, with in-class and curriculum support provided by teaching assistants (TAs). The specialist teacher is often referred to as a QTVI (qualified teacher of pupils with visual impairment). QTVIs working with pupils at additionally resourced mainstream schools are generally based at the school, along with other support staff. Depending upon the degree and nature of their visual impairment, a pupil may use non-sighted or sighted methods – or a combination of both – for accessing the curriculum.

Prior to the study detailed in this report, there was some evidence that blind and partially sighted pupils do not have the same access to school textbooks in accessible formats (such as braille and large print) as their sighted peers do to standard print texts (Franklin et al, 2001; Wythers, 2006). Delays in providing textbooks for pupils to use in class might occur for one of several reasons, including a shortage of “off the shelf” textbooks in accessible formats, production delays, high purchase price of accessible texts and a lack of coordinated information about availability of books and documents in braille and large print, (Jennings, 1998, 1999; Hopkins, 2001a, 2001b; Keil and Clunies-Ross, 2002; Sorensen, 2005; Lockyer and Creaser, 2006; Wythers, 2006). However, although research relating to the availability and provision of school textbooks in alternative formats had been carried out in Scotland (Sorensen, 2005) there remained a
lack of detailed research evidence about the availability and provision of school textbooks in alternative formats in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. In order to address this deficit, in 2006 research was carried out by RNIB with the following aims:

1. To establish the methods used by Visual Impairment (VI), or in Northern Ireland, Vision Support (VS) services and schools to obtain textbooks in alternative formats.

2. To identify issues related to the sourcing, funding and local production of school textbooks in alternative formats.

To meet these aims, the study asked the following research questions:

a. To establish the formal and informal sources from which VI/VS services and schools obtain school textbooks in alternative formats.

b. To identify the sources from which VI/VS services and schools fund the provision of school textbooks in alternative formats.

c. To identify the methods and technology used by VI/VS services and schools to produce textbooks in alternative formats.

d. To ascertain who undertakes production of textbooks in alternative formats, and what training is provided for them.

e. To ascertain what quality standards are used in the production of textbooks in alternative formats, and what, if any, external quality standard guidelines are referred to.

f. To establish whether there are delays in providing pupils with textbooks in alternative formats, and if so, the reasons.

g. To identify any other issues or implications, such as allocation of specialist teacher or TA time for production of accessible texts versus time spent in direct curriculum support.

Methodology

Two main methodological approaches were used; a national questionnaire survey of VI/VS services and schools in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and case studies of four VI services in England and two in Wales. Face to face interviews were also carried out with 16 blind and partially sighted young people in the case study services, and with a further five young people in Northern Ireland.

A total of 120 completed questionnaires were returned. 97 were from VI services and schools in England, 13 from Wales and ten from Northern Ireland. For England, 97
completed questionnaires were returned representing 76 local authorities (LAs) in total. This gives a response rate for LAs of 51 per cent.

For Wales, 13 questionnaires were returned representing 14 local authorities, which gives a response rate for LAs of 64 per cent.

For Northern Ireland, 10 questionnaires were returned representing 80 per cent of the Education and Library Boards.

The majority of responses were from local VI service staff, and most respondents were qualified teachers of pupils with visual impairment (QTVI). While some had a mainly managerial role as head of sensory or visual impairment service (vision support in Northern Ireland), others worked as peripatetic teachers covering a number of mainstream schools and several were based permanently in mainstream (or in the case of one respondent, special) schools. Nineteen per cent of respondents were non-teaching support staff.

Summary of main findings

Diversity of approaches to organising and funding accessible textbook provision
A range of approaches to organising the provision and funding of braille and large print textbooks to pupils in schools was identified. In some VI services organisation and funding was centralised and included a central resources department with dedicated staff responsible for both sourcing books from external providers and producing them in house. In others there was partial delegation of budgets to resourced or mainstream schools, each of which was responsible for the funding and provision of accessible textbooks for all blind and partially sighted pupils who attended the school. A few VI services had a coordinating role, but the VI budget was fully delegated to schools, which could choose whether or not to buy into VI service provision. Within each of these models, in many schools the day to day responsibility for obtaining and/or producing braille and large print textbooks for the pupils they supported was handed over to teaching assistants (TAs).

External provision of accessible textbooks
The majority of services and schools were still obtaining at least some of their accessible textbooks from external sources. Only 34 per cent of questionnaire respondents said that all or most of their large print textbooks were produced in house and 24 per cent said this was the case for braille.

However, the shortage of available textbooks in accessible formats was a problem for many respondents, 92 per cent of whom said they experienced difficulties in obtaining off the shelf large print textbooks “frequently” or “quite often”, while 85 per cent said this was the case for braille textbooks. The non-availability of accessible textbooks was
also an emergent theme in the case studies. Maths and science were particularly problematic for questionnaire and case study respondents.

**In-house production of accessible textbooks**

In the vast majority of LAs there was some local production of accessible textbooks. Only four per cent of survey respondents said that there were no local production arrangements for large print books and only seven per cent said there was no local production of braille books.

In all of the case study services a considerable amount of in-house production took place, either by staff employed centrally by the VI service or by TAs working in mainstream schools. 65 per cent of questionnaire respondents said that TAs working with individual pupils carried out local production of large print books, and for braille books this figure was 52 per cent. Between 40 and 48 per cent said that designated staff employed centrally by the VI service or in resourced schools were responsible for in-house production of accessible textbooks.

**Reasons for in-house production of accessible textbooks**

- **Modifications can be tailored to the needs of the pupil.** There was almost unanimous agreement that an important reason for local production of accessible books was that modifications could be tailored to the needs of the individual pupil. An overwhelming 98 per cent of survey respondents said this was a “very” or “quite” important reason for local production of large print textbooks and 95 per cent said this was the case for braille.

- **Delays in obtaining accessible textbooks from external suppliers.** Having to wait too long for braille textbooks made to order by external providers was said by 94 per cent of survey respondents to be a “very” or “quite” important reason for producing them locally. For large print textbooks the figure was 88 per cent.

- **Delays in getting book titles from teachers.** In the questionnaire survey, 82 per cent of respondents had said that a “very” or “quite” important reason for producing large print books locally was that schools failed to provide titles in time for them to be obtained from external providers. Thirty two per cent of respondents said that delays by subject teachers in providing book lists was the most significant barrier to providing large print books on time, and 26 per cent said this was the case for braille books. This was also an emergent theme in the case studies. TAs spoke of having to chase and “nag” teachers. Planning meetings between teachers and TAs did not take place in a number of the schools visited.
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Problems with producing accessible textbooks in house
A theme that emerged from the case studies and supported by findings from the questionnaire survey was that in-house production, under the current system, carries with it a number of problems. These are the complexity of modifying some textbooks, the time it takes, as well as issues of quality control.

- **Complexity of modification.** The sheer complexity of modification was seen as a particular challenge. This was touched upon in the questionnaire findings, but came out particularly strongly in the case studies. Many books proved impossible to reproduce into an accessible format by scanning, which meant that support staff often had to resort to manual cutting, pasting and enlarging by photocopying. Maths, modern foreign languages, and science textbooks were particularly difficult.

- **Quality control of locally produced textbooks.** Around two thirds of survey respondents said that the quality of locally produced braille and large print texts was assessed by qualified staff within the service or school. Around a third used pupil feedback, usually in combination with other methods. Around one in 20 conceded that the quality of braille and large print text was not assessed. In view of the fact that between a half and two thirds of questionnaire respondents said that braille and large print texts were produced by TAs working with individual pupils in mainstream schools, it is difficult to see how stringent quality control measures can be assured. The issue of quality control was also raised by peripatetic teachers working in two of the case study LAs, who expressed concerns about the standard of provision for pupils who received less frequent monitoring by a specialist teacher.

Effect on pupils
Despite the considerable lengths to which teaching and support staff often went to ensure that pupils received their braille and large print textbooks on time, the majority of survey respondents considered that the pupils they supported experienced delays on some occasions, even if this happened rarely.

- **Frequency of delays.** More frequent delays were associated with books obtained from external providers than those produced in house. 58 per cent of respondents said that their pupils “frequently” or “quite often” experienced delays in receiving large print textbooks from external providers and for braille textbooks the figure was 51 per cent. Nevertheless, 25 per cent of respondents said that their pupils “frequently” or “quite often” experienced delays in receiving their large print textbooks on time, even though they were produced in house. For braille textbooks produced in house the figure was 17 per cent.

- **Pupils’ educational progress and social inclusion.** Of greater significance is the impact that respondents felt delays had upon their pupils’ educational progress and
social inclusion. 53 per cent of respondents considered that delays had a large effect on pupils’ social inclusion, while a further 39 per cent felt they had some effect. 38 per cent of respondents felt that delays in textbook provision had a large effect on their pupils’ education progress and 54 per cent felt it had some effect.

How staff dealt with absence of accessible textbooks. In the absence of an accessible textbook, staff had to resort to one of several methods in order to ensure that the pupil could still participate in the lesson. The most widely used methods were to provide text on a page-by-page basis, or for a TA to sit with the pupil in class and read the text aloud to them. The second approach in particular, singles the pupil out as different to the rest of the class and is therefore not consistent with inclusive practice.

Views of pupils. Pupils themselves seemed less concerned about delays than about the appearance of the final product. Several of the pupils interviewed said they did not like having their textbooks reproduced by enlarging onto A3 paper. The main reasons were that the photocopied pages were unclear and difficult to read, they were cumbersome and heavy to carry, or they made the pupil feel different.

Solutions

A message that came out very strongly from the questionnaire survey and from our interviews with case study respondents was that the current arrangements for provision of braille and large print textbooks are inadequate and that there is a need for them to be improved. Even people who felt that they had a satisfactory system in place locally to ensure that their pupils were not disadvantaged, had suggestions for ways in which the national system might be improved.

Electronic format. The solution preferred by most respondents was for textbooks to be available in an electronic format, either direct from publishers or via an intermediary agency, so that copies could be produced locally. As was pointed out however, the file would need to be in a format that enables easy adaptation. The advantage of having a central agency holding the file would be that people would only have to go to one location to obtain it, rather than having to trawl different sites or go direct to individual publishers.

Central production agency. A number of respondents however – and notably, eight of the ten respondents from Northern Ireland – wanted to see introduced a central agency for the production of accessible textbooks. In view of the large number and range of standard print textbooks, and the delays that people seemed to experience when obtaining books from external suppliers, it would seem that measures would have to be taken to ensure that a central agency could cope with demand.
Conclusion

It is evident from the findings from this research that current arrangements for the provision of accessible textbooks, despite the strenuous efforts of specialist teaching and support staff, is far from perfect. There is evidence to suggest that many blind and partially sighted pupils experience delays in receiving their textbooks and that this can have a negative effect on their educational progress and social inclusion.

There is a clear need for the current system of accessible textbook provision to be revised and brought up to date in a way that makes the most of digital technology. The evidence from our research shows the current system to be complex, inefficient and outdated. It leads to inconsistency in quality. The inefficiencies inherent in the system are inconsistent with principles of inclusion and in the view of many teachers, have a negative impact on blind and partially sighted pupils in terms of their educational progress and their social inclusion. The situation can be summed up in the words of three survey respondents:

“Accessing large print textbooks is one of the most difficult areas of our work and children are missing out…”

“Pupils are less independent, affecting self-esteem, having to play continual ‘catch-up’ with classmates…”

“…Having accessible materials benefits self esteem, social inclusion and independence”

Recommendations

Following consultation with members of the research steering group, the following actions are recommended:

1. A national, standardised, electronic file format for all educational materials to be agreed, which would enable their easy modification into accessible formats.

2. The establishment of a central agency that could function as a repository for standardised electronic files of all educational materials. Through the central agency, files to be available to schools and specialist (VI/VS) services for in-house production of accessible texts and to other approved providers for external production.

3. It is recognised that not all schools and VI/VS services will have the facilities or expertise to produce all titles in house. Therefore, the establishment of a coherent system of accessible textbook modification and production is recommended, either through a national transcription centre or several approved providers. The role of the
transcription centre/provider(s) would be to modify educational materials at the request of schools and VI/VS services and produce hard copy versions at a reasonable price and within a short turnaround time.

4. RNIB to work alongside other agencies in the development of best practice guidelines for the production of all educational materials in accessible formats. The aim is to ensure consistent quality of educational materials in alternative formats, whether they are produced in house by schools and VI/VS services, or on a more formal basis by other providers of accessible materials.

5. RNIB to work with DfES and with VI/VS services as appropriate, to help mainstream schools meet their responsibilities under SENDA and the new Disability Equality Duty with respect to the provision of accessible curriculum materials including textbooks. Mainstream schools and class and subject teachers need to be educated about the time necessary to produced complex texts in accessible formats. Action to be undertaken by schools might include:

- Ensuring ample planning time is allowed between teachers and TAs so that TAs are given book titles in good time for them to obtain or produce accessible versions.

- Time off for staff training is available to TAs, particularly those employed by individual mainstream schools with responsibility for in-house production of accessible texts.

RNIB will be working with government, the publishing industry and the teaching profession to establish the best way of turning these recommendations into reality.
1. Introduction

1.1 Number of blind and partially sighted pupils

It is estimated that there are around 18,700 children in England and Wales between the ages of five and 16 with a visual impairment of sufficient severity to require specialist education service support (Keil and Clunies-Ross, 2002). In Northern Ireland there were just over 600 blind and partially sighted pupils in the 2005/06 academic year (DENI, personal communication, 2006). Approximately 50 per cent have additional disabilities and at least 30 per cent have complex needs including severe or profound and multiple learning disabilities. Most (59 per cent) are educated in mainstream schools, or mainstream schools additionally resourced for blind and partially sighted pupils (Keil and Clunies-Ross, 2003; Keil, 2003). Specialist support for pupils in mainstream schools is usually provided by local authority Visual Impairment (VI) or in Northern Ireland Vision Support (VS) services via peripatetic advisory teachers of pupils with visual impairment, with in-class and curriculum support provided by teaching assistants (TAs). The specialist teacher is often referred to as a QTVI (qualified teacher of pupils with visual impairment). QTVIs working with pupils at additionally resourced mainstream schools are generally based at the school, along with other support staff. Depending upon the degree and nature of their visual impairment, a pupil may use non-sighted or sighted methods – or a combination of both – for accessing the curriculum.

1.2 Delays in provision of accessible textbooks

There is some evidence that blind and partially sighted pupils do not have the same access to school textbooks in accessible formats as their sighted peers do to standard print texts. For example, findings from RNIB’s “Shaping the Future” research (Franklin et al, 2001) indicated that blind and partially sighted pupils in the UK did not always get their school textbooks in an accessible format. One third of secondary and a quarter of primary school pupils were reported as “usually” having to wait for textbooks in the format they needed. Wythers (2006) also found evidence of pupils not always receiving their curriculum materials in time for the lesson. Wythers (2006) also found evidence of pupils not always receiving their curriculum materials in time for the lesson.

There are several reasons why delays might occur. For example, Keil and Clunies-Ross (2002) identified concerns about a shortage of “off the shelf” braille textbooks, production delays, high purchase price of braille texts and a lack of coordinated information about availability of braille books and documents. Difficulties in obtaining braille materials due to factors such as time spent in searching for providers, and delays in production, have also been found by other researchers (Jennings, 1998, 1999; Hopkins, 2001a, 2001b). Wythers (2006) found that these problems applied to both braille and large print books. The problems inherent in obtaining information about what
is available were also highlighted by Wythers (2006), who points out that books in alternative formats are:

“…produced, lent and sold by more than 230 organisations, including voluntary sector organisations, HM Prisons and schools who are not linked with other library provision.” (Wythers, 2006, p. 38)

### 1.3 Information about availability of accessible textbooks

In an effort to improve the coordination of information about books in alternative formats, in 2004 the Share the Vision Project set up “Revealweb”, an online catalogue which includes the catalogues of RNIB, National Library for the Blind (NLB) and other organisations that supply (on loan or for sale) books in a range of formats. Another source of information about the availability of accessible texts and other curriculum materials is VI Forum, an email group organised by BECTA. The group is used by specialist teachers, teaching assistants and other professionals working with blind or partially sighted children and young people to exchange information and ideas. Many VI services and schools use VI Forum to facilitate the sharing and exchange of books in accessible formats.

### 1.4 Availability of braille and large print textbooks

Evidence that very few children’s book titles are produced in alternative formats comes from two separate research studies commissioned by RNIB. (Lockyer, Creaser and Davies, 2004) estimated that over the five-year period from 1999 to 2003, only 13.1 per cent of children’s fiction was published in one or more accessible formats. Lockyer and Creaser (2006) found that few Key Stage 3 and 4 English, Mathematics and Science textbooks were available in accessible formats and that reference books were particularly poorly represented. At Key Stage 3, Mathematics had the highest percentage (14.7 per cent) of titles available although the range of formats was limited. 14 per cent were available in braille, 2.3 per cent in giant print and none in large print or audio. The availability of Key Stage 4 texts varied according to exam board, with those boards that did not specify the edition of the book having a higher percentage than those that did. The boards also varied in the number of texts that they recommended. The authors noted that English Literature texts for GCSE were the most widely available, but that English Language textbooks were poorly represented with only 5.9 per cent of Key Stage 4 titles available in alternative formats. They concluded that:

“The estimates of the availability of school textbooks established by this research demonstrates the lack of educational resources for blind and partially sighted children in England, Wales and Northern Ireland…” (Lockyer and Creaser, 2006, p. 21).
That there is a demand for braille and large print textbooks is evident from the lists of books sought by teachers and support staff that are posted on the VI Forum at the end of July, in preparation for the next academic year. In July 2006 for example, one third of emails were about requests for, or offers of, accessible textbooks for the next academic year (thanks to Janet Lees of Bedfordshire VI service for drawing our attention to this).

1.5 Quality of braille and large print textbooks produced in house

Sorensen (2005) has estimated that at secondary school level, an average pupil in Scotland will require over 750 texts to complete six years of study. Her research indicated that in Scotland, for large print in particular many authorities relied to a large extent on in-house production. Sorensen raises questions about the quality of texts that are produced in house, pointing out the complex and time consuming nature of the task and the lack of people with the skills to produce complex texts at secondary level. She found that in some authorities, the lack of suitable production facilities and staff with sufficient time and expertise meant that materials were often produced by teaching or support staff on an ad hoc basis and that many authorities relied on enlarging by photocopying onto A3 paper. Wythers’ (2006) study of VI services and schools in London and the South East of England found examples of support staff retyping textbooks (one school took 18 months to retype a geography text onto CD-rom), enlarging texts and diagrams to A3 and in one example, enlarging a maths textbook by writing it out by hand.

1.6 Role and responsibility of schools in provision of accessible textbooks

Wythers (2006) also found that a key factor in ensuring the provision of accessible textbooks on time was planning, with the onus frequently on support staff to take the initiative in this respect. She observed that:

“The importance of teacher planning was revealed as a major issue which directly affects the availability of resources in the right format in time for the lesson. There appears a distinct lack of consistency of purpose both within and between schools in how they approach the organisation of their resources for VI students…” (Wythers, 2006, p.37)

A study by Blatchford et al (2006) of the deployment of support staff in schools also identified lack of planning time as an issue. They found that 75 per cent of teachers in their survey did not have allocated planning time for the support staff they worked with in the classroom, and that 77 per cent had received no training to help them work with support staff in classrooms.
Under the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (2001) (SENDA), schools and LAs in England, Wales and Scotland have an accessibility planning duty. This includes increasing the extent to which disabled pupils can participate in the school’s curriculum, and to information that is provided in writing to non-disabled pupils (DRC, 2002). In the context of the current study, this means providing information to blind and partially sighted pupils in braille, large print or audio-tape. This duty will also apply to Northern Ireland when the SENDO (the equivalent to SENDA) legislation comes into effect in September 2006. A survey of school plans and strategies carried out on behalf of DfES as part of a project to develop guidance for schools and LAs on implementing the Disability Discrimination Act suggested however, that most schools and LAs thought this section was focused on information for parents (DfES, 2006, p.45). The authors noted that an analysis of the school accessibility plans showed that:

“In general there was greater clarity in relation to improving the physical environment of the school than to improving access to the curriculum, and greater clarity in relation to improving access to the curriculum than to the provision of information in alternative formats. It appeared that improvements to the physical environment were more likely to be implemented and improved provision of information for disabled pupils less likely…” (DfES, 2006, p. 51)

New DfES guidance for schools to help them improve access for disabled pupils makes clear that the duty does apply to the provision of information in alternative formats. In a section under “working with support services” the guidance states that:

“Schools working with pupils who use more specialised formats, for example braille, need to ensure that materials are provided in time to be translated before any lesson…This time needs to be built in to plans for the development of new materials.” (DfES, 2006, p. 46)

1.7 Possible solutions

1.7.1 Central production of accessible texts

In her review of provision of accessible materials for blind and partially sighted pupils in Scotland, Sorensen (2005) compared arrangements in Scotland with those in Spain, Denmark, Sweden, the Czech Republic, the Republic of Ireland and Canada. She found that although there are some variations between the different countries, all are based on a central organisational model. Turnaround time for production of an accessible text would also appear to vary from country to country. For example in the Czech Republic this was cited as one week for an electronic version and two months for braille. In Sweden, new materials were said to take about four months to produce while in Canada the time given varied from two to six months, depending upon the complexity of the
text. Details of turnaround times for the other countries were not given in the report. Sorensen concluded that the current disparity in the availability and quality of accessible texts in Scotland could be resolved by the establishment of a fully funded and coordinated national centre for the production of materials in alternative formats. It was suggested that this centre, which should be funded by the Scottish Executive, could also act as a coordinating centre for materials currently being produced on an outreach basis.

1.7.2 Provision of electronic files

Wythers’ (2006) research also identified the need for a central or regional agency to coordinate the provision of accessible textbooks. However, this was envisaged as a central electronic bank of texts and diagrams, which would allow for customised books to be downloaded on a cost only basis. The advantage put forward for this system was that by allowing for customised books to be downloaded a wide range of individual needs would be met. It was also suggested that sections of textbooks could be downloaded where the pupil did not require the complete text. It was noted that the involvement of educational publishers would be crucial to the scheme’s success.

Wythers’ proposal anticipates to some extent a project currently being introduced in the United States. At present, there are laws in a number of states requiring publishers to provide digital versions of their educational materials to third party, authorised agencies to convert into braille and other formats for students who are blind or partially sighted, or with a diagnosed “print disability”. This system is however regarded as unsatisfactory for a number of reasons, including the time and cost involved in converting the files to accessible formats, not least because different publishers use different formats in their digital production and distribution. The result is that students have continued to experience delays in obtaining their textbooks in alternative formats. Under the National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard (NIMAS) project all electronic files of educational materials would be produced in a standardised, universal file format that would allow easy conversion to alternative formats such as braille and large print. The standardised electronic file would then be held by central, authorised agencies (trusted intermediaries), which would convert the text into alternative formats such as accessible digital, braille or large print versions at the request of schools. (NIMAS, 2004) The first phase of this project is due to come into effect in 2007 and will require publishers to deposit mandated texts in NIMAS (Daisy 3.0) with the American Printing House for the Blind (APH) as trusted intermediary.
1.8 Aims of the current study

The research studies detailed in this section have provided an important insight into difficulties associated with the timely provision of accessible textbooks for blind and partially sighted pupils. However, there remains a lack of detailed research evidence about the availability and provision of school textbooks in alternative formats in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. In order to address this deficit, the aims of the current study are:

1. To establish the methods used by VI/VS services and schools to obtain textbooks in alternative formats.
2. To identify issues related to the sourcing, funding and local production of school textbooks in alternative formats.

To meet these aims, the study asked the following research questions:

a. To establish the (formal and informal) sources from which VI/VS services and schools obtain school textbooks in alternative formats.
b. To identify the sources from which VI/VS services and schools fund the provision of school textbooks in alternative formats.
c. To identify the methods and technology used by VI/VS services and schools to produce textbooks in alternative formats.
d. To ascertain who undertakes production of textbooks in alternative formats, and what training is provided for them.
e. To ascertain what quality standards are used in the production of textbooks in alternative formats, and what (if any) external quality standard guidelines are referred to.
f. To establish whether there are delays in providing pupils with textbooks in alternative formats, and if so, the reasons.
g. To identify any other issues or implications. (For example, allocation of specialist teacher or TA time for production of accessible texts versus time spent in direct curriculum support.)
2. Methodology

Two main methodological approaches were used: a national questionnaire survey of VI/VS services and schools in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and case studies of VI services in England and Wales.

2.1 Questionnaire survey

In April 2006 questionnaires were mailed to all VI/VS services in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and resourced and special schools taken from the RNIB database that were known to support blind and partially sighted pupils of secondary school age who were able to access the national curriculum. As the focus of the research was on provision of standard school textbooks, special schools that are designated for blind and partially sighted pupils with additional complex needs including severe or profound learning difficulties were excluded from the survey.

Two copies of the questionnaire were included with each mailing along with a covering letter. It was requested that where appropriate both copies were completed. One by a member of staff with a strategic overview of accessible textbook provision (such as the head of a VI/VS service or a VI resourced or special school). The other by a member of staff with day to day responsibility for the provision of textbooks in braille and large print. Recipients were invited to produce further copies of the questionnaire if they had several members of staff who met these criteria. A stamped, addressed envelope was enclosed with each mailing.

2.2 Case studies

With the aim of obtaining more detailed, contextual information about the provision of accessible textbooks in VI services of different sizes and operating under different organisational and funding arrangements, case studies were carried out of four VI services in England and two in Wales. The services were located in LAs in different parts of England and Wales.

The aim of the case studies was to obtain factual information about how the services organised provision, and what (if any) barriers they encountered in ensuring that pupils received their textbooks on time.

Information was obtained through face to face interviews with key staff. The number of staff interviewed depended upon the size of the service. However, in each service the head of service or team leader was interviewed and at least one QTVI and teaching assistant. In those services that employed a resource technician or officer with
responsibility for the production of accessible texts, this person was also interviewed. Interviews were also carried out with between two and four secondary aged pupils from each case study LA.

2.3 Pupil interviews

In order to gain an insight into their views and experiences of accessible textbooks provision, a total of 21 blind or partially sighted secondary aged pupils were interviewed. 16 of the pupils were seen in the context of the case studies carried out in England and Wales and a further five pupils from Northern Ireland were also interviewed. Where possible each pupil was interviewed alone, but in a minority of cases the TA insisted on also being present. This is likely to have affected the quality of information obtained from the pupils concerned.

2.4 Methods of analysis.

Quantitative analysis of the questionnaire survey responses was undertaken using SPSS for Windows, with open-ended questions coded post hoc.

As previously stated, the main aim of the case studies was to describe a description of the VI services concerned. For consistency, the descriptions were organised in accordance with the question themes in the interview schedules. However, in order to identify any emerging themes a cross-case analysis was also undertaken for both the staff and pupil interviews. This method of analysis was selected rather than single-case reports to ensure anonymity of the participating VI services and schools (Yin, 1994, p. 144). A manual content analysis was used to identify key issues within each theme by cross-referencing across the individual case studies. The pupil interviews were also presented separately from the case studies in order to ensure the anonymity of the respondents.

2.5 Ethical procedures

RNIB research department follows the ethical guidelines set by the Social Research Association (SRA). In addition, specific procedures for the current project were followed as detailed below:

1. Permission was obtained from LA staff and from parents of pupils as appropriate prior to interviewing any individual pupil.

2. RNIB researchers who carried out interviews with pupils had been cleared by the Criminal Records Bureau.
3. All adults and children who took part in the research did so on the basis of informed consent and were free to withdraw from the study at any stage if they chose to do so.

4. Information provided by all local authority (LA) staff and pupils whether by interview or written questionnaire will be treated as confidential by the RNIB research department and the anonymity of the respondents concerned will be maintained in any written report(s) arising from the research.

2.6 Steering group

The research was informed throughout by a steering group composed of individuals from within and outside RNIB. Members of the group who were from within RNIB included specialist staff who work directly with educational professionals and pupils, staff involved in the production of braille and large print materials for children and young people, and staff who have been involved in the Right to Read campaign.

Individuals from outside RNIB were the head of a local authority VI service and the librarian from a special school for blind and partially sighted pupils.
3. Findings from the questionnaire survey

3.1 About the respondents

A total of 120 completed questionnaires were returned. 97 were from VI services and schools in England, 13 from Wales and 10 from Northern Ireland.

Questionnaires had been mailed to 169 addresses in England, 26 addresses in Wales and 10 addresses in Northern Ireland, which gives an overall response rate of 59 per cent. However some local authorities returned more than one questionnaire while in a few cases a single questionnaire was completed on behalf of several unitary authorities whose VI services belonged to a consortium. It is therefore more meaningful to consider the response in terms of local authority VI services, as detailed below:

For England, 97 completed questionnaires were returned representing 76 LAs in total. This gives a response rate for local authorities of 51 per cent.

For Wales, 13 questionnaires were returned representing 14 LAs, which gives a response rate for local authorities of 64 per cent.

For Northern Ireland, 10 questionnaires were returned representing 80 per cent of the Education and Library Boards.

Table 1: Type of setting represented by respondents from the three countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Type of setting represented by respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LA VI service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Ireland</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As can be seen from Table 1 the majority of responses were from local VI service staff (although three respondents from England representing VI services, were based in mainstream or resourced schools). Just over seven in 10 respondents from England represented the LA VI service. For Wales the proportion was seven in 10 and for Northern Ireland it was eight in 10.

### Table 2: Where respondents from the 9 LA regions in England were based

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local authority region</th>
<th>Where respondent is based</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LA VI service</td>
<td>VI resourced school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorks and Humberside</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Midlands</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Midlands</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North East</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merseyside</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not known</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>71</strong></td>
<td><strong>22</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All 10 local authority regions in England were represented, with the highest number of responses coming from the London and Yorkshire and Humberside regions. Six respondents did not give information about the LAs they came from.
3.2 Job role of respondent

As detailed in Table 3, the vast majority of respondents (80 per cent) were qualified teachers of pupils with visual impairment (QTVI) or, in a very small number of cases, qualified teachers of pupils with hearing impairment. While some had a mainly managerial role as head of sensory or visual impairment service (vision support in Northern Ireland), others worked as peripatetic teachers covering a number of mainstream schools and several were based permanently in mainstream (or in the case of one respondent, special) schools.

Nineteen per cent of respondents were non-teaching support staff and one person did not give details of their job role.

3.2.1 Peripatetic teachers of pupils with visual impairment

The biggest single group of respondents were peripatetic, qualified teachers of pupils with visual impairment (QTVI). 32 per cent of respondents were peripatetic teachers, although one person combined the role of peripatetic teacher with that of resource technician.

3.2.2 Heads of services

28 per cent of respondents were heads or team leaders of visual impairment/vision support or sensory services – although a few represented very small services in which as the only QTVI they combined the role of head of service and peripatetic teacher.

3.2.3 Heads of resource bases

A further 16 per cent were the heads or coordinators of bases in mainstream schools additionally resourced for blind and partially sighted pupils.

3.2.4 School based teachers of pupils with visual impairment

Four per cent of respondents were specialist teachers working in schools. Four were QTVIs working in mainstream (but not additionally resourced mainstream) schools and a fifth was the deputy head teacher of a special school for blind and partially sighted pupils.
Table 3: Job role of respondent (n = 120)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job role</th>
<th>Country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>England (n)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualified teachers of pupils with VI</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peripatetic QTVI</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head/team leader of sensory or VI service</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head/coordinator of VI resource base</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School based QTVI</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support staff</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource technician/officer/assistant</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching/curriculum access/support assistant</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not known</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2.5 Resource technicians

11 per cent of people (13) who responded to the questionnaire were employed as dedicated resource technicians. Their job roles varied slightly, with most describing themselves as resource technicians or resource officers. Other job titles included reformatting assistant, and braille transcriber. The majority of resource technicians/officers (11 out of 13) were employed centrally by VI services. One person was employed by a mainstream resourced school, and one was based in a special school for blind and partially sighted pupils.
3.2.6 Support staff
Eight respondents worked directly with pupils as teaching or curriculum support assistants, while a further two people described themselves as curriculum support officer or manager. All 10 respondents (eight per cent in total) were involved directly in the provision of accessible textbooks for blind and partially sighted pupils.

3.2.7 Differences between the three countries
A slightly higher proportion of heads of services responded on behalf of LAs in England (31 per cent), compared to Wales (23 per cent) and Northern Ireland (one person). Most of the Northern Ireland respondents (70 per cent) were peripatetic teachers, compared to 28 per cent of respondents from England and 31 per cent from Wales who were peripatetic QTVIs.

England had the highest proportion of resource technicians responding; 12 per cent compared to eight per cent of respondents from Wales and none from Northern Ireland. England however, had the smallest proportion of teaching/support assistants; only four per cent of respondents, compared with 15 per cent of those from Wales and 20 per cent (two out of the 10) respondents from Northern Ireland.

3.3 Characteristics of pupils supported by survey respondents

3.3.1 Number of pupils
90 of the 120 respondents gave the number of pupils for whom they provide accessible textbooks. Between them, the 90 supported 2,748 blind and partially sighted pupils, although some people said that the number of pupils varied.

Several respondents did not provide details of the number of pupils, pointing out that their role was to provide indirect support through advising teaching assistants (TAs) and schools on sources of accessible texts, or giving training in production methods.

3.3.2 Key Stages
Almost all respondents said they had responsibility for pupils at Key Stages 3 and 4 (92 per cent and 88 per cent respectively) while 76 per cent had responsibility for pupils at Key Stage 2. A small number of people also supported younger primary aged pupils (Key Stage 1), and at the other end of the age range some worked with pupils studying for post-Key Stage 4 qualifications. All those who represented Wales and Northern Ireland said that they supported pupils at Key Stage 3.
3.3.3 Print sizes
We also asked survey respondents to tell us in what large print sizes they provided accessible textbooks. The findings are detailed in Table 4. Of those who did provide large print, the most commonly used print size was between 18 point to 24 point. 87 per cent of the 114 people who responded to this question said that they were responsible for providing accessible textbooks in this print size.

The second most commonly used print size was between 26 point and 36 point, with 61 per cent of respondents supporting pupils who accessed this size of print. Over one in three (35 per cent) provided textbooks to pupils who accessed a print size of over 36 point, while just over half (53 per cent) were responsible for providing the most widely commercially available large print size of 14 point to 16 point.

Table 4: Print sizes used by pupils for whom respondents are responsible for providing accessible textbooks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Print size</th>
<th>Respondents providing texts (n = 114) %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18 point – 24 point</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 point – 36 point</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 point – 16 point</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 36 point</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The wide variation in print sizes required by different pupils is perhaps exemplified by the following two quotes:

“[Pupil uses] 18 point – 24 point with CCTV (otherwise would need about 48 point).”

“My pupils access normal sized print with or without a magnifier.”

3.4 Locating braille and large print textbooks from external providers
The first stage in obtaining an “off the shelf” textbook from an external provider is to find out whether or not the book is currently available in the required format. As detailed in Tables 5 and 6, VI services and schools use a range of sources to obtain this information.
3.4.1 Braille

As can be seen from Table 5, the most widely used source of information overall for braille textbooks was RNIB, with two in three (66 per cent) of respondents citing this source. Ranked second was National Library for the Blind, with just under three in five (59 per cent) citing this source, and ranked third was Revealweb (55 per cent). Just over two in five (41 per cent) said that they used National Blind Children’s Society (NBCS) to help them locate braille textbooks.

Table 5: Sources of information used by VI services and schools in England, Wales and Northern Ireland in order to locate “off the shelf” school textbooks in braille

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information source</th>
<th>England (n=95) (n)</th>
<th>Wales (n=13) (n)</th>
<th>NI (n=9) (n)</th>
<th>All (n=118) (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RNIB</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NLB</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revealweb</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBCS</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI Forum</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other source</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A: All braille produced in house/locally</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A: HM Prisons are source of braille texts</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A: No pupils accessing braille textbooks</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A sizeable three in 10 (29 per cent) of respondents however, gave a “not applicable” response to this question. The main reason for this response was that the respondent was not currently supporting a braille user, or the child was not yet ready for textbooks in braille. This applied to 18 per cent of respondents overall, and in fact accounted for nine out of the 10 respondents from Northern Ireland. (One of the nine, although not currently supporting a braille user, had cited the sources they would use in the event of braille textbooks needing to be located.) Seven per cent said that all or most of the braille needed was produced in house or by another local VI service. Five respondents who had given a “not applicable” response said that they obtained braille textbooks from HM Prison Service – this may be meant to imply that they had a single, reliable source and therefore did not need to seek out sources of braille texts.

22 per cent of respondents gave details of other providers of information about where to source braille textbooks. These included:

- ClearVision
- The internet (Gutenberg and Seedlings were two websites mentioned)
- Living Paintings Trust
- Other VI/VS services
- Special schools for blind and partially sighted pupils
- Inside Out Trust

3.4.2 Large print

A different picture emerges for locating textbooks in large print. Overall there was very little difference between the top four providers of information. 66 per cent of respondents cited Revealweb as a means of locating large print textbooks. The National Blind Children’s Society is used by 63 per cent. NLB is a source of information for 59 per cent of people who responded to our survey and RNIB by 56 per cent.

Although VI Forum had a lower ranking for large print compared with braille books, in fact a similar proportion of people said they used VI Forum to locate large print texts (49 per cent) compared with those who used it to locate braille texts (43 per cent).

There was some difference between countries in terms of rank order. More respondents in Wales used NLB and NBCS to locate large print books (eight and seven, respectively) than used Revealweb (five). However with such a small number of respondents for Wales it is not possible to tell if this difference is significant.
3. Findings from the questionnaire survey

Table 6: Sources of information used by VI services and schools in England, Wales and Northern Ireland in order to locate “off the shelf” school textbooks in Large print

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information source</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>England (n=94)</th>
<th>Wales (n=13)</th>
<th>NI (n=10)</th>
<th>All (n=117)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(n)</td>
<td>(n)</td>
<td>(n)</td>
<td>(%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revealweb</td>
<td></td>
<td>64</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBCS</td>
<td></td>
<td>62</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NLB</td>
<td></td>
<td>57</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RNIB</td>
<td></td>
<td>56</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI Forum</td>
<td></td>
<td>49</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other source</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A: Most/all LP produced in house</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A other reason</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Seven per cent of respondents said that this question was not applicable, as they produced most if not all of their large print textbooks in house. Four people (three per cent) gave another reason for a “not applicable” response; for example because the respondent only supported braille users.

23 per cent of respondents gave details of other providers of information about where to source large print textbooks. These included:

- The internet (Gutenberg and Amazon were two websites mentioned)
- Other VI/VS services
- Special schools for blind and partially sighted pupils
- Inside Out Trust and HM Prison service
3.5 External providers of textbooks in braille and large print

Once a school or VI/VS service has found out whether or not a textbook in the required format is available to purchase or borrow, the next step is to obtain a copy. In some cases this will involve purchasing a copy “off the shelf” but where a version in the required format is not currently available, there is a choice between producing it in house, or ordering a “bespoke” version to be produced by an external organisation. The aim of our next question therefore, was to identify the providers of braille and large print textbooks that are used by our sample of respondents.

3.5.1 Braille

91 people answered the question about providers of textbooks in braille. These were 80 respondents from England, 10 from Wales and one person from Northern Ireland. See Table 7.

Table 7: Providers of textbooks in braille (n = 91)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provider</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RNIB</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HMP</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NLB</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other VI services or schools</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBCS</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All/most braille textbooks produced in house</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other provider</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The most frequently used providers of braille textbooks were RNIB (65 per cent), HM Prison Service (64 per cent) and National Library for the Blind (63 per cent). Just under two in three of the people who responded to this question obtained braille textbooks from these organisations. However, over half of the respondents (57 per cent) said that they obtained books from other VI services or schools, and a quarter (24 per cent) produced most or all of their braille textbooks in house.

One in 10 people listed other external providers of braille textbooks. These were:

- Scottish Braille Press (three respondents)
- Local voluntary group (two respondents)
- Exam boards (one respondent)
- ClearVision (one respondent)
- Local library (one respondent)
- Seedlings website (one respondent)

3.5.2 Large print

As can be seen from Table 8, the picture was slightly different for large print textbooks, with one in three respondents (34 per cent) stating that they produced most or all of their textbooks in house.

Table 8: Providers of textbooks in large print (n = 106)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provider</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other VI services or schools</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBCS</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NLB</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RNIB</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All/most LP textbooks produced in house</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HMP</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other provider</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Just over half (53 per cent) obtained their large print textbooks from other VI services or schools, and the same proportion said that NBCS provided them with large print texts. Just under half (48 per cent) purchased large print textbooks from NLB and just over two in five (42 per cent) used RNIB.

Whereas HM Prison Service provided braille textbooks to 64 per cent of respondents, only 25 per cent obtained their large print textbooks from this source.

Other providers of large print textbooks were:

- One - Exam boards
- One - VI forum
- One - VI service LP library
- One - voluntary organisation
- One - Franklin Watts
- One - no information given

3.6 Difficulties in obtaining “off the shelf” textbooks in braille and large print

Respondents were asked to indicate the frequency with which they experienced difficulties in obtaining textbooks “off the shelf” in braille and large print (16 point and above). As noted in 3.4.1 and 3.4.2, around three in 10 people did not seek to obtain braille textbooks and one in 10 did not seek to obtain large print textbooks from external providers. For this question therefore, we have excluded people who gave a “not applicable” response on the grounds that they either produced all their accessible textbooks in house, or currently had no requirement for (respectively) braille or large print textbooks. As one person who had given a “not applicable” response to this question explained:

“Most of the blind children in our authority are young – we adapt pages of relevant textbooks/workbooks as appropriate. This will become more relevant in the next few years.”
3. Findings from the questionnaire survey

Table 9 therefore represents the experiences of those respondents who obtained some or all of their accessible textbooks from external providers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency in experiencing difficulties</th>
<th>Braille (n = 74) %</th>
<th>Large print (16 point or above) (n = 103) %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite often</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very often</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More than nine in 10 (92 per cent) of respondents “frequently” or “quite often” experienced difficulties in obtaining large print textbooks from external providers.

Our respondents did not fare much better in obtaining textbooks in braille. More than eight in 10 (85 per cent) experienced difficulties in obtaining braille textbooks “frequently” or “quite often”.

Only a very small proportion (three per cent for braille and two per cent for large print) never encountered difficulties in obtaining accessible textbooks from external providers.

A number of respondents volunteered further comments about the difficulties they experienced in obtaining large print textbooks and most related to the shortage of available texts, as the following quotes illustrate:

“My job would be SO much easier if publishers could produce large print versions of textbooks.”

“Time is wasted hunting for materials.”

“[Obtaining large print texts is] ... almost impossible. The government is negligent in not considering the needs of VI kids when promoting new initiatives.”

“It is a nightmare getting hold of books and finding out who has them.”

“Textbooks are impossible to find, unless other services have adapted them.”

“New publications are particularly difficult to source.”

“Commonly used schools’ texts are rarely available.”
As a consequence, many schools and services had given up on attempting to obtain books from external sources and were now producing them in house instead:

“Colleagues say that they have immense problems in locating appropriate resources and therefore invariably produce them in house.”

“I no longer even try to get them!”

“We did have difficulty so we now often produce our own.”

Owing to the small number of respondents for Wales and Northern Ireland the figures have been amalgamated for all three countries. However, it may be worth noting that of the nine respondents from Wales who answered this question, eight said they experienced difficulties “frequently” or “quite often” in obtaining braille textbooks in English and all nine said this was the case for large print books. Here is what some Welsh respondents had to say:

“[English and Welsh “not applicable”] we produce our own. However, dictionaries a problem, English and Welsh.”

“[For large print English had ticked “frequently” and “not applicable”] … so we produce our own: scan diagrams, re-type in correct font or scan if possible”

Of the nine Northern Ireland respondents who answered this question, eight experienced frequent difficulties in obtaining large print texts, and for one this happened quite often. As this Northern Ireland respondent commented:

“Very difficult to access large print textbooks. We do not have resource bases available to make the books. Have tried to approach publishers but no success.”

The one Northern Ireland respondent who needed to access braille texts said that they encountered difficulties “quite often”.

### 3.7 Subjects for which it is particularly difficult to obtain off the shelf textbooks in braille and large print

In a separate question, we asked whether there were any subjects that were particularly difficult to obtain in braille or large print. Two thirds of respondents (66 per cent) said there were subjects that posed particular difficulties. When we asked people to provide details of these subjects a wide range of subjects and Key Stages were identified. 55 people provided details of subjects for which they had particular difficulties in obtaining braille textbooks and 67 provided details of subjects for which large print texts were a problem.
3. Findings from the questionnaire survey

The subject that was cited most frequently was maths. One in two (51 per cent) said they had difficulties in obtaining maths books in braille and just over two in five (42 per cent) said maths books in hard print were hard to find.

The second most difficult subject to obtain was science. Two in five (42 per cent) experienced difficulties in obtaining science books in braille and one in three (34 per cent) had problems with large print science texts.

Around one in four had difficulties in obtaining both braille (22 per cent) and large print (24 per cent) modern foreign language (MFL) texts, while just under two in five gave geography as a problem (18 per cent and 19 per cent respectively).

These are just a few of the subjects that respondents said were particularly difficult to obtain and in fact three in 10 people said that they had problems with locating large print textbooks in most subjects and Key Stages. Overall, Key Stages 3 and 4 were the most problematic, but several people who were responsible for pupils in the younger and older age groups said they had difficulties in obtaining Key Stage 1 and 2 and AS and A Level texts respectively, in accessible formats.

Several people commented that they found all Key Stages and subjects equally difficult to access, and as observed by the respondents below, one of the difficulties was the wide range of textbooks available and the frequency with which schools changed the texts they were using:

“…because schools do not use same textbooks as each other or year after year.”

“Schools have access to a very wide range of texts.”

“Subjects may be available but schemes may vary school to school and teachers want pupils to have same material.”

3.8 Text books produced in house by VI services and/or schools

As reported in an earlier section of this report, 34 per cent of respondents said that all or most of their large print textbooks were produced in house and 24 per cent said the same for braille textbooks. This section explores in more detail the arrangements made by VI services and schools for local production of braille and large print textbooks.

Most respondents gave a range of arrangements in their local authority or school for local production of accessible textbooks. Overall however, for both braille and large print, the highest proportion of respondents said that textbooks were produced in mainstream schools by teaching assistants working with individual blind and partially sighted pupils. 65 per cent of respondents said that this arrangement operated in their
area for the production of large print textbooks and 51 per cent that TAs produced braille textbooks for the pupils they supported.

Just under half of our respondents (49 per cent) said that large print textbooks were produced centrally by designated staff employed by the VI service, and for braille textbooks the figure was very similar at 45 per cent.

**Table 10: Arrangements for local production of braille and large print textbooks**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local production arrangements</th>
<th>Braille (n=97) %</th>
<th>LP (n=114) %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream schools by TAs working with individual VI pupils</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centrally by designated staff employed by VI service</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI resourced school(s) by designated staff for pupils at the school(s)</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outreach from VI service or school outside LA</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI special school by designated staff for pupils at the school</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-house by peripatetic teachers</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No local production arrangements</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

41 per cent said that designated staff employed in additionally resourced mainstream schools produced large print textbooks for the pupils in the schools, while for braille, 45 per cent said this was the case.

A small number of respondents (around one in 15) had a special school for blind and partially sighted pupils within the local area, where braille and large print textbooks were produced in house for pupils at the school. Other local production arrangements cited by our sample of respondents, and representing a number of different LAs, included:

- in-house production by peripatetic teachers (four per cent for braille and three per cent for large print books)
3. Findings from the questionnaire survey

- outreach from a VI service or school in another LA (seven per cent for braille and four per cent for large print)
- volunteers (such as parents or retired VI service staff) or local societies or voluntary organisations (three per cent braille and two per cent large print)

Seven per cent of respondents said that there were no local arrangements for the production of braille textbooks and four per cent said there were none for large print.

This respondent explained the reason that there were no local production arrangements:

“Do not have the time.”

The issue of time taken to produce texts in house was in fact, mentioned by several respondents:

“Very difficult with our limited staffing to produce the quality and quantity of textbooks.”

“Time taken to produce textbooks is enormous; many are only used for a few years before a new textbook is used by schools – textbooks have a short life span.”

“People do not realise how time consuming it is to produce a book – particularly if it is one with diagrams, e.g. geography, science, maths. I am employed full time to produce braille and large print for our school and I often have a teaching assistant to help, also teachers do some of their own resources, yet still I struggle to produce everything required. I am also supposed to provide resources for all of the LEA, according to my job description!”

“[Large print production in mainstream schools by TAs is] very time consuming work!”

Four people (from four different authorities) commented that sections of books rather than the whole book were produced locally, although whether this was due to time or funding restraints, or for some other reason is not known:

“Chapters produced as they were needed by TA working in school with VI pupil.”

“VI service and TAs working with VI pupils produce sections as necessary.”

“Local production mainly small scale – parts of books, worksheet.”

“Parts of texts in braille and large print are produced in mainstream schools by TAs, but not whole books.”
3.8.1 Differences between countries
The pattern of response was the same for England and Wales in that the majority of respondents from both countries said that most in house production of braille and large print texts was carried out in mainstream schools by TAs, or in resourced schools by designated staff. However, three out of 13 respondents from Wales (representing eight out of 14 Welsh LAs) said that large print textbooks were produced centrally by the VI service and only one out of 11 (representing a single LA) said this was the case for braille books.

Only eight of the 10 Northern Ireland respondents answered this question for large print books, and only two provided information about local production of braille books. For large print books:

- Five of the eight said that production was carried out by TAs in mainstream schools, as this respondent described:
  
  “[Large print produced in mainstream schools by TAs] ... chapters/pages not whole texts – otherwise I arrange through ELB HQ reprographics.”

- One said it was done centrally by the VS service

- One said it was undertaken by staff in a special school for blind and partially sighted pupils

- One respondent said there were no local production arrangements for large print books, noting that the member of staff within the ELB with responsibility for production of texts was currently on sick leave.

For braille books:

- One said they were produced by TAs in mainstream schools

- One said there were no local production arrangements for braille books

3.8.2 How the quality of braille and large print materials produced in house is assessed
A question that is of some importance, given the number of textbooks that are produced locally by TAs and VI/VS service staff, is what quality control standards are in place. To obtain an understanding of what methods are used in services and schools, respondents were asked to describe how the quality of locally produced braille and large print materials was assessed. Their responses were coded post hoc and the main categories to emerge are detailed in Table 11.
3. Findings from the questionnaire survey

Table 11: How VI services and schools assess the quality of locally produced braille and large print materials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method of assessment</th>
<th>Braille materials (n = 77)</th>
<th>Large print materials (n = 95)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>By qualified staff in the VI service or school</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupil feedback/able to access</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local or regional guidelines or system</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback from schools</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not assessed</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not know</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: as several respondents gave more than one method the totals exceed 100 per cent

The most commonly used method of assessing the quality of both braille and large print materials was for qualified, specialist staff in the VI service or school to check them. 68 per cent of people said this method was used in their service or school to check braille materials and 63 per cent that it was used for large print.

“Checked by central support staff (proof read).”

“By me – QTVI with 33 years experience. Teacher of braille employed by service also has overview…”

“Proofread by qualified staff who have not produced materials.”

“Checked at central base and by QTVI using resources - any problems with layout/quality reported and changes made.”

“Assessed by the VI team, through discussion, and adults in team trialling out tactile materials for understanding etc before they’ve viewed them; feedback from class teachers and pupils.”
“This service aims to produce high quality large print materials that can be used more than once. Materials are produced centrally in our office and are approved by colleagues before being sent into schools.”

Almost one in three people used pupil feedback, or the fact that the pupil was able to access the material as a means of assessing quality of both braille and large print. Some people cited this as one of several methods but a few gave it as their only means of assessment.

“Informally – whether child can access it.”

“VI coordinator [resourced school] liaises with pupils.”

“No formal assessment method. We try to involve student in saying what is and isn’t helpful.”

“We produce them the best we can given time and staffing. We ask children and SSAs about the books.”

“Self assessment. Team assessment. Pupil assessment!”

“Overseen by VI teacher, also assessed by pupil – if pupil understands it, it’s acceptable.”

Few people made reference to a formal set of guidelines or a formal system to assess quality – just under one in 10 (nine per cent) for braille materials and one in 20 (five per cent) for large print. This figure may be an under representation however, as it is possible that qualified staff who carried out quality checks did so in accordance with formal criteria, but that this information was omitted by respondents when answering this question.

“Guidelines are followed and teaching staff assess.”

“Materials produced to regionally agreed standards.”

“Against criteria that have been proposed as good practice.”

“TAs produce materials according to general guidelines. No external quality control.”

A small number of respondents – one in 20 for braille and for large print – said that materials produced by their service or school were not assessed for quality at all, and two people did not know if any assessment was carried out. One peripatetic teacher had acknowledged of assessment for quality of braille and large print:

“*It’s not! [assessed]”*
3. Findings from the questionnaire survey

In response to an earlier question about whether or not they experienced difficulties in obtaining off the shelf large print books, the same person had commented:

“Schools do it on my advice – but [I] struggle to get some schools to do it - over reliance on photocopy enlargement.”

Other responses included querying a need for a quality assessment as there was an assumption or expectation that materials provided by this source would be of high standard:

“Those done at reprographics are of good quality.”

“The braille is expected to be perfect.”

This same respondent (a resource technician) noted that quality of large print materials was assessed through:

“Proofreading and professional layout.”

In contrast, another respondent noted that quality assessment was:

“Not as good as it could be – because of staff time constraints.”

3.9 Who pays for braille and large print textbooks that are purchased from external providers and produced in house?

Looking first at textbooks purchased from external providers, as detailed in Table 12, overall the most common source of funding was the VI service central budget. Just over two in three (67 per cent) respondents gave this as a source of funding. Ranked second was the school through the delegated SEN budget, with just under three in 10 (29 per cent) citing this source, while only one in five (21 per cent) said that funding came from the school but through specific funding such as the pupil’s statement.

This ranking applied to England and Wales. However, it is notable that none of the nine Northern Ireland respondents who answered this question said that funding for textbooks came from the VS service’s central budget. For Northern Ireland:

- eight said that the school provided funding through for example, the pupil’s statement
- two said that the school provided funding through the delegated budget
- one said that funding was provided by the ELB
Table 12: Funding for braille and large print textbooks purchased from external providers (n = 111)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of funding</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VI service via central budget</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School via delegated budget</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School via specific funding, e.g. statement</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other LA/ELB funding</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: some respondents gave more than one funding source

Other LA funding:

- Four - partial delegation to resourced provision [2 x England, 2 x Wales]
- One - “re-organisation rep”
- One - formula funding separate from school budget
- One - LA will fund specific students
- One - no information given

As detailed in Table 13, the rank order for funding of textbooks produced in house by the VI service or school was the same as that for books obtained from external providers, with the VI service central budget cited by the highest proportion of respondents. This was followed by the school via the delegated SEN budget, and the school through specific funding such as the pupil’s statement.

However although the rank order was the same for both methods of providing accessible textbooks, the actual proportion of respondents who said that funding for texts produced in house came from the central VI service budget was lower (58 per cent) than the 67 per cent who cited this source for texts obtained from external providers.

As for the externally provided texts, none of the nine Northern Ireland respondents cited the VS service central budget as a source of funding for books produced in house. Six of the nine said this came from the school via specific funding such as the pupil’s statement, three said it came from the school through the delegated budget and one person said that the ELB provided specific funding to cover Teaching Assistant time.
3. Findings from the questionnaire survey

Table 13: Funding for braille and large print textbooks produced in house (n = 113)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of funding</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VI service via central budget</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School via delegated budget</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School via specific funding, e.g. statement</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other LA/ELB funding</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: some respondents gave more than one funding source

Other LA/ELB funding:

- Four - partial delegation to resourced provision [2 England, 2 Wales]
- One - formula funding separate from schools budget [England]
- One - generic SEN budget [Wales]
- One - ELB funds TA time [NI]

3.10 Reasons for producing braille and large print textbooks locally

There are a number of reasons why a VI/VS service or school may choose to produce braille and large print textbooks locally rather than purchasing them from external providers. We asked respondents to our questionnaire to rate by level of importance some of the reasons we thought might influence this decision and the findings are presented in tables 14 and 15.

As some people gave a rating for some but not all questions, the percentages for each question are based on the actual number of respondents who answered that particular question. It should be noted that for braille textbooks only four respondents from Northern Ireland gave ratings, although all 10 rated the items relating to large print texts.
Table 14: Level of importance given by VI services and schools to reasons for producing braille textbooks locally

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Level of importance</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very important</td>
<td>Quite important</td>
<td>Not very important</td>
<td>Not at all important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modifications can be tailored to the needs of individual pupils (n = 91)</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have to wait too long for textbooks made to order by external providers (n=84)</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers fail to provide titles in time to obtain from external providers (n=83)</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information about what is available from external providers is hard to find (n=83)</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More cost effective due to high purchase price of off the shelf copies from external providers (n=80)</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More cost effective due to high purchase price of copies made to order by external providers (n=76)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 15: Level of importance given by VI services and schools to reasons for producing large print textbooks locally

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Very important</th>
<th>Quite important</th>
<th>Not very important</th>
<th>Not at all important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Modifications can be tailored to the needs of individual pupils (n=108)</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers fail to provide titles in time to obtain from external providers (n=104)</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have to wait too long for textbooks made to order by external providers (n=101)</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information about what is available from external providers is hard to find (n=103)</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More cost effective due to high purchase price of off the shelf copies from external providers (n=99)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More cost effective due to high purchase price of copies made to order by external providers (n=95)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.10.1 Modifications can be tailored to the needs of individual pupils

For both braille and large print the highest rating given by the greatest number of respondents in each of the three countries was that modifications can be tailored to the needs of the individual pupils. Overall, 83 per cent said this was a “very important” reason for producing large print textbooks locally and 82 per cent gave this rating for braille textbooks. Only four per cent said this was a “not very” or “not at all” important reason for producing braille textbooks locally and only two per cent rated this reason as “not very important” for large print textbooks.

All four respondents from Northern Ireland who answered this question in relation to braille textbooks rated this item as “very important” while eight out of 10 people from Wales did so. Two people from Wales however, gave said this was “not at all important” a reason for producing braille textbooks locally.

For large print textbooks, 12 out of 13 respondents from Wales and six out of 10 from Northern Ireland gave this item a “highly important” rating. None of the Welsh or Northern Irish respondents gave it a “not very” or “not at all important” rating.

One respondent (from England) commented that although the “key problem” was “available materials that meet the need of particular children” a partial solution was:

“…CCTV magnifier (state of the art ones) are addressing some of these needs for children with some vision.”

3.10.2 Too long a wait for textbooks made to order by external providers

It might be argued that texts obtained on a made to order basis from external providers could also be tailored to the needs of individual pupils. However, 56 per cent of respondents said that another “very important” reason for producing braille textbooks in house was the length of time they had to wait for external providers to produce made to order versions. 47 per cent said this was a very important reason for producing large print textbooks locally. In total, 94 per cent of people who responded to this question said that the length of time taken by external providers to produce made to order textbooks was a “very” or “quite” important reason for in-house production of braille texts and for large print this was the case for 88 per cent of respondents.

Similarly, nine out of 10 respondents from Wales and three out of the four from Northern Ireland said this was a “very” or “quite” important reason for producing braille texts locally. For large print, 10 out of 12 people from Wales and eight out of 10 from Northern Ireland gave this reason a “very” or “quite” important rating.
One person commented that:

“[The] Need for quick response demands local production but we also use “off the shelf” material if available.”

3.10.3 Class or subject teachers fail to provide titles in time

A third reason that was rated highly by the majority of respondents was the failure of teachers to provide book titles in time for the texts to be obtained from external providers. For 51 per cent of respondents this was a “very important” reason to produce braille texts, and for 49 per cent it was an “important” reason to produce large print texts in house. For both braille and large print, only one in 20 rated this reason as “not at all important”, with one respondent, who worked in a resourced school claiming that teachers never failed to provide titles on time. Unfortunately, they did not explain how they had managed to solve this problem, although another respondent noted wryly that:

“We nag them!”

Again, for both braille and large print texts the majority of respondents from Wales and Northern Ireland gave “very” or “quite” important ratings to this item. However, one respondent from Wales said that for braille and for large print textbooks this reason was “not very important”. Two people from Northern Ireland said that for print texts this reason was not very important.

3.10.4 Information about what is available from external providers is hard to find

In an earlier section of this report (3.4, tables 5 and 6) it was seen that a range of agencies are used by VI/VS services and schools to locate “off the shelf” braille and large print textbooks from external providers. It would appear that despite the introduction of Revealweb, many people still experience difficulties in finding out what books are available in accessible formats. This may perhaps explain why a range of agencies is used rather than a single, central information source. 39 per cent of people who answered this question said that a “very important” reason for in-house production of braille texts was the difficulty in obtaining information about what is available from external providers, and 37 per cent said this was a very important reason with respect to large print texts.

Obtaining information about what is available appears to have been a particular problem for respondents from Northern Ireland, with three out of four people giving this a “very” or “quite” important rating with respect to braille texts and nine out of 10 for large print. Five out of the 10 people from Northern Ireland in fact said that difficulties in finding out what is available from external providers was a very important reason for local production of large print texts.
There is some indication that obtaining information may also have been more of a problem for respondents from Wales compared to those from England. Five out of 12 respondents from Wales said that this was a “very important” reason and a further seven said it was “quite important” with respect to large print texts. Seven out of nine people gave information difficulties as a very or quite important reason for producing braille texts locally. However, as advised previously, with such a small number of respondents from Wales this result should be treated with extreme caution, as the finding may not generalise across all services and schools in Wales.

3.10.5 Purchase price of braille and large print textbooks

A quite common complaint made by VI services and schools is that the purchase price of braille and large print books is higher than that of the standard print versions. This disparity is likely to be wider when schools submit a bulk order for standard print textbooks, therefore benefitting from a reduction in the overall price. We were therefore interested to see what (if any) effect purchase price might have on the decision by services and schools to produce accessible textbooks in house rather than buy them from external providers. From the responses to two questions, it would appear that although not a major issue, the high purchase price of off the shelf and made to order accessible texts is a consideration for many services and schools, with in-house production often proving (or at least appearing) to be more cost effective. Two people however, pointed out that when salaries were taken into account, the cost of producing textbooks in house did not make this a cheaper option.

“Not necessarily true if take into account salaries.”

“Not true if you include salary costings!”

61 per cent of respondents rated as a “very” or “quite” important reason for in-house production of braille and large print texts the high purchase price of having them made to order by external providers. 58 per cent said that the high purchase price of off-the-shelf braille textbooks was a “very” or “quite” important reason for in-house production, and 59 per cent said this was the case for large print texts.

There was some indication that this reason was accorded higher importance for respondents in Wales and Northern Ireland compared to those in England. As with the previous item however, caution is needed due to the small numbers involved

Whereas 55 per cent of services and schools from England said that the high purchase price of both braille and large print texts was a very or quite important reason for producing the books locally, the proportions were higher for respondents from Wales and Northern Ireland. For braille texts, eight out of 10 Welsh respondents and all four
Northern Ireland respondents gave this a very or high important rating. For large print texts nine out of 12 people from Wales and six out of eight from Northern Ireland did so.

3.10.6 Other reasons for producing braille and large print textbooks locally

Other reasons considered to be very important or quite important reasons for local production of braille textbooks were:

- Five people said that the books were simply not available
- One person - speed of production
- One person - only part of the textbook is required
- One person – the pupil they supported was not yet competent in Grade 2 braille

For large print texts other reasons were:

- Five people said that the books were simply not available
- Two people - speed of production
- One person - only part of the textbook is required

One person also held the view that large print books produced by other providers were not as high a quality as those produced in house, while a second person commented that for younger braille readers externally produced books could sometimes be difficult to read, for example if the braille was on both sides of the page.

3.11 Time spent by staff working in VI/VS services and schools to provide braille and large print textbooks

One of the complaints made to RNIB has been that providing accessible textbooks takes up a lot of support staff time. We therefore attempted to quantify this by asking respondents to our questionnaire how much of their time was spent in providing accessible textbooks (including obtaining books from external providers and producing them in house).

More than half of our respondents (55 per cent) spent at least a quarter of their time in providing accessible textbooks to their pupils, either by coordinating their provision, obtaining them from external providers or by directly producing the texts. Over one in three (36 per cent) spent 50 per cent or more of their time in providing accessible texts.
Table 16: Time spent by VI/VS services and schools in England, Wales and Northern Ireland in providing accessible textbooks (n = 106)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time spent providing accessible textbooks</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 10%</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10% to 24%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25% to 49%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50% to 74%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75% plus</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The amount of time spent clearly depends on the job role of the individual respondent. Not surprisingly, the 13 people who worked as resource technicians or officers (including one person who combined this role with that of a peripatetic QTVI) spent at least 25 per cent of their time in the provision of accessible textbooks. More than one in two (seven) resource technicians or officers spent 75 per cent or more of their time on providing accessible textbooks.

Similarly, seven out of the eight TAs and curriculum access or support assistants spent over 25 per cent of their time on this task, with three people spending 75 per cent or more of their time on textbook provision.

Conversely, almost half (12) of the 26 heads of service or VI team leaders who responded to this question spent less than 10 per cent of their time on the provision of accessible textbooks, although interestingly, one in five (five) said they spent 75 per cent of more of their time on this task.

Like the heads of services, peripatetic QTVIs spent less time on direct provision of accessible textbooks; two in five (13) spent less than 10 per cent of their time, and only two people spent more than 75 per cent of their time on doing so.

Unlike the heads of services and peripatetic QTVIs, most heads and coordinators of mainstream resource bases also tended to spend a considerable amount of time on accessible textbooks provision. Almost two in three (12) resource base heads spent at least 25 per cent of their time on this task while three of the 19 respondents spent more than 75 per cent of their time on this task. Likewise, three out of the four school based QTVIs spent a half to three quarters of their time on accessible textbooks provision.
Some people commented that the time they spent on provision of accessible textbooks varied, for example:

“Normally under 10% but at the moment I am doing A level maths in braille and I have a trainee technician so more like 50 to 74%.”

“25% to 49% ... This fluctuates according to schools’ needs and confidence in adaptation.”

“[75%] Hard to assess as once the textbook has been adapted it is kept/filed. New courses = new textbooks = time.”

Several QTVIs and heads of services noted that although they personally spent a relatively small amount of time on provision, other staff – most notably TAs and technicians – spent considerably more of their time on this task:

“Plus additional TA time – approx 9 hours pw.”

“Under 10% of MY time, but designated LSA spend 75% plus.”

“My time under 10% but it is a big part of TA's job.”

“As an individual about 10%. As team about 25%.”

“[10%-24%] More time is devoted to this by trained TAs.”

“[Under 10%] Much of this work is now undertaken by schools and classroom assistants.”

The head of a small VI service had indicated that they spent under 10 per cent of their time on this task, but added the further comment that this was:

“Really hard to judge – but it is a waste of time.”

Several respondents in fact, remarked upon the amount of time spent on provision of accessible texts:

“Full time resources technician plus other TAs/teachers – a lot!”

“High level of time is provided by my staff.”

“LP textbooks are not available from external providers and very time consuming to produce in house.”

“It is taking longer and longer due to the difficulty obtaining text.”

As this person remarked:
“It is a constant source of frustration. Schools are amazed that publishers can’t produce a large print version.”

3.11.1 Countries
Some differences were found between countries with respondents from Wales tending to spend a greater amount of time in providing accessible texts and those from Northern Ireland spending less time on this task. Whereas almost six in 10 respondents from Wales said they spent 50 per cent of their time or more on providing accessible textbooks, fewer than one in 10 (one person) from Northern Ireland spend this amount of time. This difference may be explained by the job roles of the respondents concerned. For example, the Northern Ireland respondent who spent between 50 and 74 per cent of their time on textbooks provision was one of only two respondents from that country who was employed as a specialist support assistant. As noted previously in this report (3.8.1) five out of eight respondents from Northern Ireland had said that production of accessible textbooks was carried out by teaching assistants in mainstream schools.

Of seven Wales respondents who spent more 50 per cent of their time on accessible textbooks provision:

- Three were heads or coordinators of mainstream resource bases
- One was a resource technician/officer
- One was a teaching assistant
- One was a peripatetic QTVI
- One was the head or team leader of a VI service

3.12 Impact on pupils

3.12.1 Frequency of delays
Respondents were asked to rate how often blind and partially sighted pupils supported by their service or school experienced delays in receiving their school textbooks in accessible formats as the same time as their classmates received their standard print copies. See tables 17 and 18.

For both braille and large print books, the frequency of the delay depended upon whether the text was produced in house or obtained from an external provider.

Of the people who responded to this question, just over half (51 per cent) considered that their pupils experienced delays “frequently” or “quite often” in receiving braille
textbooks obtained from an external provider, while fewer than one in five (17 per cent) said that this was the case for braille books produced in house.

Just under three in five (58 per cent) respondents considered that their pupils experienced delays “frequently” or “quite often” in receiving large print textbooks obtained from an external provider, while one in four (25 per cent) said that this was the case for braille books produced in house.

**Table 17: Frequency of delays experienced by blind and partially sighted pupils at Key Stages 3 and 4 in receiving braille textbooks at the same time as their classmates**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of delays</th>
<th>Books from external provider (n=86) (%)</th>
<th>Books produced in house (n=98) (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite often</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 18: Frequency of delays experienced by blind and partially sighted pupils in receiving large print textbooks at the same time as their classmates**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of delays</th>
<th>Books from external provider (n=86) (%)</th>
<th>Books produced in house (n=98) (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite often</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The finding that delays were considered to occur more frequently when textbooks were obtained from external providers may of course, reflect the fact that respondents were reluctant to portray their in-house provision in a less favourable light. However, given the “high importance” ratings that were given in a previous question (3.10) to delays in obtaining accessible texts from external providers, and in finding out what is available off the shelf it is more likely that these responses reflect a real difference in time taken to provide books in house compared to purchasing them from an outside source.

Perhaps more importantly, fewer respondents said that their pupils never experienced delays in receiving books produced in house compared with those obtained from external providers:

- Only one in 20 (6 per cent) respondents considered that the pupils they supported never experienced delays in receiving braille or large print books produced in house.

In comparison,

- one in four (25 per cent) said that their pupils never experienced delays in receiving braille texts from external providers, while

- just under one in five (18 per cent) said this was the case for large print texts.

One reason for delays in providing books produced in house may be difficulties in obtaining titles in time from class teachers, as noted by this resource technician:

“Always due to lack of teacher cooperation combined with lack of staff (me!).”

Nevertheless, regardless of whether the books were produced locally or from an external provider, the responses to this question indicate that the majority of teachers and support staff who replied to this question considered that some delays in receiving accessible textbooks were experienced by the pupils supported by their service or school. While many said that this happened only on an occasional basis, a sizeable proportion considered that it happened frequently, particularly when books were obtained from an external provider.

For both braille and large print texts whether produced in house or obtained from an external source, a higher proportion of respondents from Wales and Northern Ireland said that delays occurred “frequently” or “quite often” compared with respondents from England. This was particularly apparent for Northern Ireland, with no respondent giving a “never” response to delays in provision of large print books (only one person responded to the question about braille books). However, due to the very small number of respondents from Wales and Northern Ireland such differences should be viewed with extreme caution.
3.12.2 Alternative provision made while awaiting delivery of accessible textbooks

Given therefore, that there are occasions when blind and partially sighted pupils have to wait to receive their textbooks in an accessible format, what alternative provision is made during this period to enable them to access the curriculum along with their classmates?

The solution used by the majority of respondents was to provide text on a page-by-page basis. Nine out of 10 (91 per cent) respondents opted for this method to ensure that their pupils were still able to continue with the lesson. Two people said that text was provided either page by page or chapter by chapter. One respondent added the caveat that this solution would be used in the event of a delay ever happening, implying that this was not usually the case.

The second most widely used option was for a teaching assistant to sit with the pupil in class and read the text aloud to them. Just over eight in 10 (83 per cent) used this approach, although as this respondent pointed out, this was a:

“Last resort! Rarely [used] in second school.”

Table 19: Alternative provision made for blind and partially sighted pupils while awaiting delivery of braille or large print textbooks (n = 109)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of provision</th>
<th>Respondents using this type of provision %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Text is provided in an accessible format on a page by page basis</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA sits with pupil in class and reads text to him/her</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend/classmate sits with pupil in class and reads text to him/her</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupil is given alternative work to do in class</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupil uses LVA or CCTV</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: as several respondents gave more than one type of provision the percentage column total exceeds 100 per cent
A less frequently used alternative used by just under three in 10 (29 per cent) was for the pupil’s friend or classmate to read the text aloud to them.

Other solutions were for the pupil to be given alternative work to do in class, which one in 10 (11 per cent) respondents said sometimes happened, while just over one in 20 (six per cent) said that their pupils used low vision devices such as hand held magnifiers or CCTVs to enable them to read the standard print version of the textbook as detailed in the following quote:

“Sent to library to use CCTV or pupil is asked to use hand held magnifier.”

- Two people said that a tape or CD was sometimes available for the pupil to use.
- In one service/school the pupils would be given alternative work to do that was related to targets outside of class.
- One person said that text would be written in large print on the board for the pupil to read.

One person, who had ticked three of the options listed, commented that:

“None are acceptable.”

Two respondents explained that these options were rarely used as there were few delays in getting accessible textbooks to their pupils:

“This rarely/never happens as we adapt work in house.”

“Adults’ lunch times, breaks etc are given up in preparation of materials so as far as possible they are ready.”

No differences between the three countries were in evidence, with the majority of respondents from Wales and Northern Ireland using the first two options: provision of text on a page by page basis, or having a TA sitting in class with the pupil and reading aloud the text. No respondents from Wales and Northern Ireland however, said that a solution was to provide the pupils with alternative work to do in class.

3.12.3 Effect of delays on pupils’ educational progress and social inclusion

The teachers and support staff who responded to this questionnaire were asked to indicate on a rating scale of one to three, the effect that in their experience, delays in receiving accessible textbooks had on blind and partially sighted pupils’ educational progress and social inclusion. It should be noted that the responses to this question
reflect the opinion of the individuals concerned as opposed to any form of objective measure of educational or social effect on pupils.

**Table 20: Respondents’ view of effect on blind or partially sighted pupils of delays in receiving accessible textbooks**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>Social inclusion (n=106) %</th>
<th>Educational progress (n=104) %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Large effect</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some effect</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No effect</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 20, most people felt that delays had an effect both on pupils’ social inclusion and on their educational progress.

**Social inclusion.** 53 per cent of respondents considered that delays had a large effect on pupils’ social inclusion, while a further 39 per cent felt they had some effect. Delays in provision of texts require alternative provision to be made. This can lead to the pupil being treated differently to his or her peers, which may have an adverse effect on their social inclusion. It is notable that in the previous section (3.12.2) 83 per cent of respondents said that when there was a delay in provision of an accessible textbook one form of alternative provision was for a TA to sit in class with the pupil to read aloud from the standard print version. One person observed that pupils are particularly self-conscious and sensitive to being marked out as different during adolescence:

“[Pupils are] Especially aware of their visual impairment at KS3.”

Other respondents noted the effect of delays in receiving their textbooks on time on their pupils’ social inclusion:

“It just adds to the feeling of being different.”

“We are extremely aware of the above issues and try to cushion the effect it has on the pupils; the major implication is the pupil’s loss of independence and the effect on how peers view the VI child.”

“Pupils are frustrated and feel disadvantaged.”
“Delays in obtaining texts adds to students’ already significant stress and is highly discriminatory.”

**Countries.** For effect on social inclusion, there was the same pattern of responses from Wales as detailed in Table 20. Northern Ireland however was almost equally divided between whether delays had a large effect or some effect on their pupils’ social inclusion. As stated previously, the very small number of respondents from Wales and Northern Ireland means that any differences between the countries should be treated with extreme caution.

**Educational progress.** 38 per cent of respondents considered that delays in textbook provision had a large effect on their pupils’ education progress and 54 per cent felt it had some effect.

There were some differences between the countries with most respondents from Wales and Northern Ireland saying that delays had “some effect” on pupils’ educational progress while none said that it had “no effect”.

Several people pointed out the close links between social and emotional factors and a young person’s educational attainment:

“Accentuates pupil’s feeling of being different – low self esteem [leads to] poor performance.”

“Pupils are less independent, affecting self esteem, having to play continual “catch-up” with classmates resulting in more work for VI pupil.”

Others described the direct effects of delays in receiving accessible texts on pupils’ educational progress:

“If accessible text not available pupils fall behind and find it too much of a struggle and switch off.”

“It is important that pupils have access at same time as peers – so don’t get behind with work. Also kept in same class as peers – no need to withdraw.”

Two people cautioned that individual differences should not be overlooked:

“Ability of pupil should also be considered when rating effect.”

“Depends on the pupil’s eyesight and intelligence.”

**No effect.** Very few respondents considered that delays had no effect at all. Only eight per cent felt that delays had no effect on pupils’ educational progress and the same proportion considered that pupils’ social inclusion was not affected. From respondents’ comments it would appear that those who had chosen the “no effect” rating had done so
either because delays in receiving accessible textbooks rarely occurred, or because of the efforts of staff to minimise any effects:

“Not very often a problem. Schools understand importance of having texts available on time.”

“If a pupil has support the lack of resources can be worked round.”

“We attempt to minimise the effect at all cost.”

One person, while holding the view that delays in provision had no long lasting educational or social effect on their pupils, nevertheless acknowledged that:

“Use of page-by-page large print or large A3 pages can be inconvenient and irritating.”

3.13 Main barriers to providing accessible textbooks on time

In order to identify the main barriers to services and schools in providing their pupils with braille and large print textbooks on time, we presented respondents with a list of possible reasons for delays and asked them to place these in rank order, with 1 as the most significant and 10 as the least significant barrier.

This caused difficulties for many respondents, who confused the terms “ranking” and “rating”. Detailed analysis of this question is therefore not presented. However, it is appropriate to concentrate on the most significant barrier that was identified.

For both braille and large print books there was general agreement about what constituted the three most significant barriers. These were that the book has not been available to buy in an accessible format – this was given the highest ranking or rating by the highest proportion of respondents. The second highest score for both braille and large print was the difficulty experienced by respondents in obtaining an electronic version of the book to produce locally, and the third most significant barrier was delays in obtaining lists of book titles from mainstream teachers.

3.13.1 Most significant barriers to providing braille textbooks on time

The findings relating to braille books are detailed in Table 21.
### Table 21: Most significant barriers to providing braille textbooks on time (n = 76)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barrier</th>
<th>England (n)</th>
<th>Wales (n)</th>
<th>NI (n)</th>
<th>All (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Book has not been available to buy</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties in obtaining electronic version of books to produce locally</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delays in obtaining book lists from teachers</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delays in production of books from external provider</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book available to buy but purchase price too high</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough support staff time to produce locally</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delays in delivery of off the shelf books from external provider</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of appropriately trained staff to produce locally</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of appropriate equipment to produce locally</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Findings from the questionnaire survey

**Braille version of the book is not available to buy**
For the 76 people who responded to the question about provision of braille textbooks, the most significant barrier to ensuring that blind and partially sighted pupils received their textbooks at the same time as their classmates had their standard print copies was simply that a braille version of the book was not available to buy. 50 percent of respondents gave this item the highest rating or ranking. As one person observed:

“Book not available full stop – to buy, beg, borrow, copy etc.”

Difficulties in obtaining electronic version of books to produce locally. Difficulties in obtaining textbooks in an electronic format so that braille versions could be produced locally presented significant barriers for 42 per cent of respondents. As this person observed:

“With braille-note and electronic files other issues are not a problem.”

Conversely, this person took the view that:

“Electronic version does not help in production of tactile diagrams – which school books are full of.”

Delays in obtaining book lists from teachers. Delays in obtaining book lists from mainstream class or subject teachers also presented significant barriers for many people. This item was given the highest ranking or rating by 26 per cent of people.

Books from external providers – production delays and high purchase price. Delays in the production of braille textbooks obtained from external providers posed significant barriers to some people. Eighteen per cent gave this the highest ranking, while 17 per cent said that the high purchase price of braille books obtained from external providers was the most significant barrier. The prohibitively high purchase price of some accessible texts is illustrated by the following quote:

“We were once charged £800 by RNIB for braille transcription of a music textbook for KS3 pupil for one year of her course!! (1 book).”

**Countries**
Respondents from Wales also agreed that for braille the fact that the book was not available to buy in an accessible format, and difficulties in obtaining an electronic version of the book presented significant barriers. Only one person from Northern Ireland answered this question for braille and they also considered that the most significant barrier was that a braille version of the book was not available to buy.
3.13.2 Most significant barriers to providing large print textbooks on time

The findings for large print books are detailed in Table 22 below.

**Table 22: Most significant barriers to providing large print textbooks on time (n = 100)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barrier</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>England (n)</td>
<td>Wales (n)</td>
<td>NI (n)</td>
<td>All (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book has not been available to buy</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties in obtaining electronic version of books to produce locally</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delays in obtaining book lists from teachers</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough support staff time to produce locally</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delays in production of books from external provider</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book available to buy but purchase price too high</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of appropriately trained staff to produce locally</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delays in delivery of off the shelf books from external provider</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of appropriate equipment to produce locally</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Large print version of the book is not available to buy. As for braille books, the most significant barrier to ensuring that blind and partially sighted pupils received their textbooks at the same time as their classmates had their standard print copies was simply that a large print version of the book was not available to buy. 62 percent of respondents gave this item the highest ranking or rating. One respondent observed that:

“Commercially produced books take no account of individual need in terms of sight conditions.”

Difficulties in obtaining electronic version of books to produce locally. Difficulties in obtaining textbooks in an electronic format so large print versions could be produced locally presented significant barriers for a high proportion of respondents. 54 per cent gave this item the highest ranking or rating. This person observed that in their experience:

“Publishers are not always forthcoming. Perhaps understandably, they are reticent to provide information about “new” textbooks.”

Another noted simply that for large print books:

“Electronic files are the answer.”

However, as this person described, their efforts to obtain resources already in electronic format had not always been easy:

“I am having more problems with schools buying resources that are in electronic format and on-line resources, but have high security so cannot adapt them easily. I have managed to negotiate with some electronic publishers so we don’t have to print off and rescan/retype, but it is often difficult.”

Delays in obtaining book lists from teachers. Delays in obtaining book lists from mainstream class or subject teachers also presented significant barriers for many people. This item was given the highest ranking or rating by 32 per cent of people. As this respondent had commented in response to an earlier question about the time spent on accessible textbooks provision:

“Schools are often poor in asking for books in enough time for simultaneous accessibility by VI students.”

While half of all respondents from Wales also agreed that delays in obtaining books lists from mainstream teachers was a significant barrier none of the Northern Ireland respondents gave this item a significant score.
Other significant barriers to timely provision of large print textbooks. Lack of support staff time to produce large print textbooks locally posed significant barriers to 16 per cent of people.

The same proportion (16 per cent) gave the highest ranking or rating to delays in the production of large print textbooks obtained from external suppliers.

The high purchase price of large print textbooks obtained from external providers was the most significant barrier for 12 per cent of respondents. None of the Northern Ireland respondents gave a high rating or ranking to this item. As most Northern Ireland respondents considered the non-availability of accessible textbooks a significant barrier, by definition the high purchase price is unlikely to have been a major consideration for them.

3.14 Possible solutions to help improve accessible textbook provision

An important aim of this research was not only to identify what, if any, difficulties there may be in the provision of braille and large print textbooks to blind and partially sighted pupils, but also to find out what teachers and support staff would like to see done to bring about improvements. Respondents were therefore presented with six possible ways in which the provision of accessible textbooks might be improved and asked to rate each in terms of how helpful this would be to them.

As can be seen from Table 23, the majority of respondents (89 per cent) considered that it would be “very helpful” if electronic versions of all textbooks were easily available while only a tiny minority felt this would be “not very helpful” (one per cent) or “not at all helpful” (one per cent). For each of the three countries this was considered a very helpful solution by the majority (and in the cases of Wales and Northern Ireland, all) of respondents.

A very high proportion of respondents (82 per cent) also agreed that it would be “very helpful” if there were a central agency that holds an accessible version of textbooks in electronic format. Again, only a small proportion (four per cent) considered that this solution would be “not very” or “not at all” helpful. As with the previous proposed solution, there was agreement between the three countries. Nine of the 10 respondents from Northern Ireland considered that a central (Northern Ireland) agency that holds accessible versions of textbooks in an electronic format would be very helpful and one person thought it would be quite helpful. 10 of the 12 Welsh respondents said that this would be “very helpful” and two considered that it would be “quite helpful”.
3. Findings from the questionnaire survey

Table 23: Ratings given by VI/VS services and schools in England, Wales and Northern Ireland to proposed solutions for improving the provision of accessible textbooks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposed solution</th>
<th>Rating %</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very helpful</td>
<td>Quite helpful</td>
<td>Not very helpful</td>
<td>Not at all helpful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic versions of all textbooks to be easily available from publishers (n = 113)</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central agency that holds accessible version of textbooks in electronic format (n = 103)</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional production of textbooks in accessible formats (n = 99)</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central agency with responsibility for production of accessible textbooks (n = 102)</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional coordination of textbooks in accessible formats (n = 101)</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central agency responsible for coordination of accessible textbooks (n = 101)</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In fact, the majority of respondents from all three countries considered that all of the suggested solutions would be either “very” or “quite” helpful, although there was slightly less concurrence from respondents in England, particularly relating to regional production.

- Around one in four respondents from England considered that regional coordination or production of accessible textbooks would be “not very” or “not at all” helpful.
- One in six were of the view that a central agency with responsibility for the production of accessible textbooks would be “not very” or “not at all” helpful.
- Approximately one in eight thought that a central agency for the coordination of accessible textbooks would be “not very” or “not at all” helpful.
Despite the apparent overall consensus about the solutions to difficulties in providing accessible textbooks, as the next section shows, there was less agreement about the preferred solution to current difficulties experienced by schools and VI/VIS services.

3.15 Preferred solution for provision of accessible textbooks

Having asked respondents how helpful they would find each of the six proposed solutions, respondents were then asked which (if any) they would most like to see introduced.

As Table 24 shows, not only was there a greater spread of responses compared to the previous question, there were also some differences between respondents from England, Wales and Northern Ireland. While for most respondents from England and Wales the preferred solution was better availability of textbooks in electronic format, their counterparts in Northern Ireland favoured a central (Northern Ireland) or regional agency with responsibility for the production of accessible textbooks.

3.15.1 Electronic versions of textbooks

Overall, the solution preferred by the greatest number of respondents was for electronic versions of all textbooks to be easily available from publishers. 29 per cent of respondents said this was the solution they would most like to see introduced. A further 24 per cent would prefer to see a central agency that holds an accessible version of textbooks in electronic format, while eight per cent wanted “electronic versions” of textbooks without specifying the source. In total therefore, 61 per cent of respondents favoured a solution that would mean that whether provided by the publisher or an intermediary, electronic versions of textbooks could be more easily available.

However, as previously noted, while the majority of people from England and Wales favoured the electronic file solution this was not the case for Northern Ireland respondents. Only one out of the 10 from Northern Ireland said that their preferred solution was a central agency that holds an accessible version of textbooks in an electronic format, and none said that electronic versions from publishers was their first choice.
### Table 24: Solution preferred by VI/VS services in England, Wales and Northern Ireland for improving the provision of accessible textbooks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preferred solution</th>
<th>Country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>England (n = 88)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic versions of all textbooks to be easily available from publishers</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central agency that holds accessible version of textbooks in electronic format</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central agency with responsibility for production of accessible textbooks</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional production of textbooks in accessible formats</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic versions (unspecified source)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional coordination of textbooks in accessible formats</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central agency responsible for coordination of accessible textbooks</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>88</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Respondents who favoured the electronic file solution volunteered a range of comments to support this stance. Some for example, emphasised the importance of being able to modify a text to meet the requirements of individual pupils:

“If we could access electronic formats of textbooks then we could produce books to the correct specification for the child to access.

“Pupils’ needs are so varied but availability of electronic versions would allow bespoke copies to be produced.”

“We do all of our adapting “in house”, by a team of dedicated VI people. We know the pupils’ needs, so it may not just be a case of “put it into pt24”. Different pupils prefer different font styles and spacing, for example. Some pupils with learning difficulties in addition to their VI may have work further differentiated at this point. Pupils with a cortical visual difficulty may prefer pictures separate to text. In terms of braille, many of our pupils are between G1/2 so it is more effective for the pupil if we produce our own…”

“Publishers need to provide electronic versions to VI services, so that books can be produced to a particular child’s preferences, eg paper colour, font style and size”.

“Due to individual needs and few pupils having the same requirements, electronic versions of texts allow our service to “tailor make” books for each pupil and in a fraction of the time it takes to re-write a whole book.”

Others spoke of the need to produce books frequently or at short notice, which some felt a central production agency would be unable to cope with:

“Due to constantly changing nature of the curriculum I feel that electronic versions provide a more flexible format and one that can be easily stored and updated…”

“Electronic formats for KS 3 and 4 would mean we could more quickly modify textbooks not in braille/LP.”

“All authorities should employ professional resource staff – the range of pupils’ sight problems/textbooks/worksheets that a central agency would not be able to keep up – work often has to be done in a few hours.”

Both views are summed up by the following respondent:

“My experience is that the vision difficulties of children with visual impairment are extremely varied and individual regarding font size, spacing, colour, coloured paper etc and braille skills (eg back to back braille, braille grade, etc). There is a requirement to provide most large print and braille resources at fairly short notice. It is difficult to see how a suitable variety of formats could be provided centrally quick
enough. Therefore the most effective way forward would probably be the provision by all publishers of their textbooks in electronic format so that adaptation locally to a style suitable for individual students is possible. This approach would be suitable where an experienced Technical Team is able to provide sufficient back-up to the individual Teaching Assistants in mainstream schools.”

It is notable that the previous two respondents had emphasised the need for skilled resource technicians to produce textbooks in house. The following respondent felt that a disadvantage of the electronic file option would be the staffing difficulties that could result:

“The availability of books to purchase off the shelf is the ideal – this will never happen! Electronic format would make it easier but result in a range of additional difficulties – lack of technicians, equipment, time etc to produce books.”

As already reported at the beginning of this section, one in four people said they would prefer to see a central agency that holds an accessible version of textbooks in electronic format. Three people suggested that one way in which electronic files could be accessed would be to download them from a central website. A central agency would have several advantages, for example:

“A central/regional agency would also be very useful, as this would be an effective and forceful lobbying body to meet/negotiate with publishers.”

“One central location would improve current situation where have to trawl through several places – time consuming. Electronic version for modification would suit perfectly.”

“If there was a central agency and source of braille and LP books it would save an enormous amount of time which could then be spent on teaching the curriculum – a far more valuable pursuit!”

While this person was keen for such an agency to be set up as soon as possible:

“Central (Wales) agency that holds accessible version in electronic format. YES PLEASE – bring it on!!”

3.15.2 Central or regional agency with responsibility for the production of accessible textbooks

Ranked third overall was a central agency with responsibility for production of accessible textbooks. This question was phrased slightly differently according to country. Questionnaires for England simply used the term “central agency” while for Wales a central (Wales) agency was proposed and for Northern Ireland a central (Northern
Ireland) agency. No such distinctions were made for the questions relating to regional production or coordination.

Overall, 19 per cent of respondents said they would like to see a central agency with responsibility for the production of accessible textbooks. A further 12 per cent would prefer to see a regional rather than a central production agency. However, there were differences between the three countries. A central production agency was the first choice for:

- 16 per cent of respondents from England
- eight per cent (one out of 13) of respondents from Wales wanted a central agency
- 60 per cent (six out of 10) of respondents from Northern Ireland wanted a central agency

Regional production of textbooks in accessible formats was the preferred solution for:

- nine per cent of respondents from England
- 23 per cent (3 out of 13) of respondents from Wales
- 20 per cent (2 out of 10) of respondents from Northern Ireland

Central or regional production of textbooks in accessible formats was therefore the solution that the majority (eight out of ten) of respondents from Northern Ireland would like to see introduced, as these Northern Ireland respondents commented:

“A central resource base in NI would be extremely beneficial to source textbooks and for their production.”

“This is something which would be greatly welcomed by all teachers of the VI working within our Board Area and certainly one which I would wholeheartedly endorse and support.”

“We need at least one central agency in NI and for publishers to produce all books in LP.”

Another Northern Ireland respondent, who favoured regional production of textbooks, observed somewhat pessimistically:

“Clearly all would be very helpful – though realise all unlikely! Production more reassuring than coordination.”
Apart from the respondents from Northern Ireland, few people commented directly about the benefits of central or regional production of textbooks. However, a concern expressed both by advocates and opponents of this approach was that a central agency might not be able to cope with the volume of work:

“[Central production agency] unworkable – too many different textbooks eg history /MFL/maths.”

“Central agency with responsibility for production of accessible textbooks [as preferred option], providing they could do all requested.”

“With central agencies/regional production, would there still be the problem of producing books on time?”

3.15.3 Central or regional coordination of textbooks in accessible formats
The least favoured solution across all three countries was central or regional coordination of textbooks in accessible formats. Only five per cent of people overall gave as their preferred choice regional coordination of accessible textbooks, and only three per cent said they would most like to see a central agency responsible for the coordination of accessible textbooks.

3.16 Respondents’ own views on how the provision of accessible textbooks might be improved
In an open question, respondents were invited to volunteer their own views on how the provision of accessible textbooks might be improved. Many of their comments reiterated views expressed previously, for example about the costs or benefits of proposed solutions such as electronic files or central or regional production. Several people concentrated on the need for better coordination of materials and information:

“A regional library of textbooks in a variety of formats. Liaison between regional libraries of this kind. Central service where we could access all formats. Electronic format would be better than nothing.”

“It seems to me that each “centre” that supports pupils with VI is duplicating work that is being done all round the country. Revealweb’s aims were laudable but it has not fulfilled its initial promise – if a central resource is to be effective then it needs to be regularly added to and someone must maintain an accurate database. Far better to have all textbooks made available by the publishers in an electronic format so that a central or regional resource can produce material in a format appropriate to a pupil’s specific needs.”
Too little, too late

“A gathering of information of commonly used textbooks across the country. These can then be produced. Also a way/forum where VI services can share textbook needs for the future and work together to locally produce these books.”

“Somehow it all needs to be coordinated – if all producers used the same translation software, had the same page layout settings on their computers etc it would help. But maybe the only way to get uniformity is for government to set up a main agency – but then this would lack the personal touch. A difficult situation really.”

A number of people felt it was time that publishers took more responsibility, perhaps even being required by legislation to take into account the needs of blind and partially sighted readers. For example:

“It is about time that all curriculum texts are available in alternative formats. The context of the curriculum is pretty well set now. Publishers have to be more flexible and accountable. The RNIB could be the key player in coordinating as the Central agency.”

“Better understanding from publishers about accessibility for all students, especially with curriculum texts/revision books.”

“A centrally held system, properly funded, national. Publishers should allow e-versions to be available to print/modify; or should publish all textbooks in a larger print size…”

“…An agreement/understanding with major publishers re access to new textbooks could be useful.”

“Surely most publishers could provide electronic versions free of charge or with a small fee! We have had some success in having text only FOC from publishers.”

“All textbooks required by students should be available in large print!!”

“It would be helpful if all books, when published, are also produced in LP and braille as well as being made available electronically.”

“All books produced in N36 – N48 or whatever size print by LAW at no extra cost.”

“Follow the American legislation which states schools can only use textbooks that the publishers have made available electronically.”

These discouraged individuals felt that any of the solutions suggested in the questionnaire options could only be an improvement on the current situation:
“Any improvement would be welcome.”

“Any provision would be an improvement as there are very, very limited braille books produced in this area. As the curriculum changes then textbooks change and it is difficult to keep up.”

### 3.17 Final comments

Finally, respondents were invited to add any final comments about the provision of accessible textbooks. As with the previous question, many of the comments reiterated views expressed previously. To avoid repetition therefore, in this final section we have concentrated on a limited number of quotes that in our view seem to sum up the main points, or that introduce new issues.

The wide range and variability of textbooks used by schools was one issue that had been raised by several respondents:

“Problems arise as all schools tend to use different textbooks or just ‘dip’ into various textbooks. There is no uniformity even within authorities let alone nationally. Perhaps there are too many textbooks. Also at KS4 textbooks will be tailored to different exam boards.”

“Textbooks should be used uniformly throughout England/Wales for the core subjects in schools. Too many different publishers/schemes causes a lot more work!”

“The range of titles required is huge, usually on short time scales. Often the need for same title is never required from year to year therefore always re-doing on an ‘as need’ basis.”

The general non-availability of textbooks in braille and large print had also been raised by a number of respondents, and was repeated in this final section:

“As a small team we struggle to produce or purchase textbooks because there seems to be only a very limited supply available and it is very difficult to have a book made to order as not many agencies do this and it ends up very expensive. ...It is a big problem.”

“Accessing large print textbooks is one of the most difficult areas of our work and children are missing out. As a service we feel quite isolated in this problem. We feel there is need for central coordination to facilitate services talking to each other.”

Others pointed out that the problem lies not only with accessing textbooks in braille and large print, but other materials as well:
“Textbooks are not the only area. We have greater problems with revision guides and past papers. Past papers in braille are an issue due to high purchase costs.”

“In addition to textbooks we have to spend many hours modifying the Modified KS2 SATs papers; the non-statutory modified test papers for Years 3, 4 and 5; KS2 Sats Revision package (optional for schools – no modifications at all available); KS2 SAT Attack books; KS1 Reading List books.”

Three respondents questioned whether the current situation flew in the face of disability rights legislation, although each saw the responsibility lying with a different body:

“Surely publishers could automatically produce text in a variety of formats…not to do so flies in the face of Disability Rights legislation re information.”

“The government should have a responsibility under DDA to ensure braille and LP books are available. VI services in general cannot do this with current levels of funding and it is not the most economic way of doing it.”

One of the three wanted to see:

“Legislation to force schools to spend their DDA funds on access to the curriculum.”

Whatever their views about what might constitute the ideal solution, the following respondents were united in the view that this is an issue that RNIB had been right to take up:

“I would like to say how extremely important this is. I really appreciate your campaign. Well done!”

“Delighted that RNIB is spearheading this work. The need for coordinated action is vital.”

“Thank you for coordinating this.”

“This is needed urgently!”

“This would be a fantastic thing for the RNIB to champion. It would make a HUGE difference to the lives and learning potential of ALL VI pupils.”

And echoing the previous person, perhaps we should leave the final comment to this respondent:

“…Having accessible materials benefits self esteem, social inclusion and independence!”
4. Case study findings

When planning this research study we were aware that both within and between the three countries, there were likely to be a number of different models of accessible textbooks provision. This premise has been supported by the findings from the questionnaire survey, which indicate that although VI services and schools share common issues of concern about the provision of accessible textbooks to blind and partially sighted pupils, there is variation in the way this provision is organised. While in many LAs the day-to-day responsibility appears to lie with TAs working with individual pupils in mainstream schools, some VI services and resourced schools employ staff specifically to produce accessible materials in house. Others appear to rely primarily on texts purchased from external providers, either “off the shelf” or made to order.

The six case studies detailed in this section of the report provide us with an opportunity to explore in further detail how VI services of different sizes, operating under different funding arrangements and located in different regions across England and Wales organise the provision of accessible textbooks for the pupils they support.

The aim of the case studies – four of which are in England and two in Wales – is to describe different models of provision. No judgement of either the form of provision or of the individuals concerned is intended. Nevertheless, staff and pupils who took part in the case study interviews did so on the understanding that these would be conducted on a confidential basis. In order to protect their identities therefore, a broad brush-stroke approach has been used to describe each of the six case study services. A separate, cross case analysis has been used to identify any emergent themes. For the purposes of ensuring the anonymity of individual participants, and to avoid unnecessary repetition, these are discussed in section 6. The perspectives of the pupils from the six case study services who were interviewed are reported separately in section 5.

4.1 Case study 1 (England)

4.1.1 Background
The England 1 Visual Impairment service is based in a large local authority that is largely rural in nature with three major towns making up the main districts of urban population. These towns have some areas of economic deprivation. The school population is approximately 70,000 with a small number of pupils identified as having English as an additional language.

4.1.2 How the VI service is administered and funded
The VI service forms part of the Sensory Service. It is centrally organised with a single
office base, which also houses other SEN services. All the peripatetic staff travel from this central office.

Funding is delegated to schools and calculated according to a two-tier criterion based on pupils’ visual acuity. Pupils assessed as having a visual acuity of 6/24 and above (ie the more severe levels of visual impairment) are funded at the higher level, which includes daily non-teaching support. Pupils below this acuity identified as having a less severe visual impairment are also funded albeit at a lower level. Although many of the pupils have statements, this does not carry additional funding as all blind and partially sighted pupils are included in the two-tier system. However, the service can also apply to the Local Authority for top up funding in special cases such as the need for specialist resources for a braillist. The service retains a small budget.

4.1.3 VI Service staffing
There are four full time or equivalent specialist teachers employed by the service, with one post shared by two part time teachers. All are qualified teachers of visually impaired pupils (QTVI). One acts as team leader with additional management responsibilities for a mobility officer and a part time technician. She also has a considerable caseload in her role as a specialist teacher of the visually impaired.

All four teachers are peripatetic with one specialising in working in special schools.

A technician is available to the service for half a day a week from central SEN services. The service does not directly employ teaching assistants, who are appointed by the individual schools, and therefore has no control over non-teaching staff.

4.1.4 Number and characteristics of blind and partially sighted pupils
The service provides support for blind and partially sighted children and young people of all abilities from 0 – 16 or longer if necessary. The current caseload is approximately 220 pupils, 16 of whom are educated in out of county placements. Just over half the pupils (55 per cent) are able to access the national curriculum. Of these, just over one in three (44 pupils) are of secondary age. There are seven braillists in the LA, four at secondary stage and two at primary.

4.1.5 Where blind and partially sighted pupils are educated
59 per cent of blind and partially sighted pupils are educated in their local mainstream school. There are no VI resourced schools in the LA.

Three out of the four secondary aged braillists are educated out of county. The fourth is being educated in his local mainstream school.
The policy of the LA is that all pupils should be included in their mainstream school wherever possible. Pupils may be placed out of county if there are problems with provision in the local school, or if pupils have complex needs and specialist care is required. Occasionally parental choice is for a residential placement and the county support them, depending on the circumstances.

4.1.6 Staff interviews
Interviews were undertaken with the following members of staff:

The team leader who acts as head of service.

One peripatetic specialist teacher of pupils with visual impairment. She has approximately 55 pupils on her caseload, who are mostly of primary age with some preschool as well as a small number in a special school. She also supports a brailist in Key Stage 3.

One teaching assistant who is employed by a comprehensive school primarily for one to one support for a Key Stage 3 brailist. She shares this work with a colleague who is also employed full time with the same pupil. Her role includes in-class support, preparation of curriculum materials as well as in-class support for a number of pupils with other types of special educational needs. She forms a part of the whole school SEN support staff and is employed by the school. She was also able to give information on the process of producing curriculum materials for a large print user.

4.1.7 Organisation of provision of textbooks in braille and large print
The service is responsible for helping to organise the provision of books in school however it does not hold a budget for this as all monies are devolved to the schools. Books largely have to be produced in house as so few are available nationally, although all parties agree that schools will generally pay for books as necessary if textbooks are available for purchase. For instance, one school has paid for a maths scheme to be brailled by the prison service. At times the head of service is involved in the organisation of books for large print users, but there is no central resource of curriculum textbooks, only braille and large print reading books. The service does retain a small budget, to provide for certain key books such as reading books in large print from external providers.

Overall, the peripatetic teachers are in charge of coordinating textbook provision in the schools where they provide pupil support but in practice much of the work is done by the TAs. The QTVIs do not produce books themselves but liaise with the school to advise on the ordering and purchase of both braille and large print books from external providers where necessary.
4.1.8 Planning for the provision of large print and braille books
The planning for textbook provision is generally the responsibility of the TAs. They liaise with the subject teachers and talk to them informally at the beginning or end of lessons. If there are particular problems with books that need to be ordered, they refer to the specialist teacher.

Few books are ordered externally as the subject teachers use only selected pages. In religious education for instance the teacher used material from five different books so only the pages used were prepared in braille. Generally, staff feel that the system works well as teachers have planned what they are going to cover about a week before hand and this is enough time to produce the pages needed in all subjects.

4.1.9 Purchase of accessible textbooks from external providers
The head of service has links with several external providers. The most helpful are NLB from whom they borrow regularly and there are no particular delays. They purchase books from NBCS and Joseph Clark School. She uses RNIB to check if books are available but finds Revealweb difficult to navigate.

Specialist teachers and TAs both spend time trying to find books from various external providers. They find NLB helpful and efficient if the book is available but there are often long waiting lists for some books. They use Joseph Clark School for both braille and large print. They find NBCS helpful and have on occasion used the HM Prison Service. Although they do attempt to use Revealweb to find information about books they find it time consuming and difficult to use.

The TA felt that books were so difficult to obtain that she did not waste time in trying to find them. Last year the only books that were easy to obtain were braille reading books from the NLB. Other providers of braille books did not meet her pupils’ needs. On occasion she has obtained and borrowed books from another VI service.

4.1.10 In-house production of textbooks
Generally, teachers do not produce textbooks in large print or in braille. All accessible materials are prepared by the TAs. There is generous provision for TAs to prepare braille and large print materials. For instance there are two full-time TAs for one brailist who also provide in-class support for other pupils with SEN. Other non-teaching SEN support staff in this particular school may also enlarge the necessary pages for large print users if VI support staff are not available.

Schools have the necessary equipment funded by the service through the top up system. Items of expensive equipment such as a braille embosser are prioritised through an access technology bidding system, which comes from central funds. In house training is
available for all staff in the use of equipment for the production of materials, and on occasion producers of the equipment may provide this. An informal checking system on the quality of the books is in operation.

Staff meet up with colleagues from other VI services in the region and share information and also copies of books.

4.1.11 Production of large print textbooks
In general, large print textbooks are prepared by TAs. They take responsibility for the process and liaise with subject teachers. If the book is not available in large print they produce the relevant pages by enlarging to A3 on the school photocopier and binding them.

Although TAs have the titles of the textbook the class will use, they generally just produce the relevant pages for the lesson.

If the whole book is to be used they will try and obtain it from external sources, as large print books are sometimes easier to acquire than braille. They find geography and maths the most difficult to produce with English the easiest as many reading books are available in large print.

4.1.12 Production of braille books
The TA has two lessons a day (half a day) in which to prepare curriculum materials. She asks subject teachers for work about a week in advance, certain subject teachers respond quickly while others often give the work to be prepared at the last minute. At times subjects such as geography, maths and science take a large amount of time and work. These are the most difficult to produce.

She usually prepares two or three pages from the textbook or very often handouts or work sheets. She retypes the relevant sections from the textbook or scans them on to the computer. She takes all decisions about how to modify the text and pictures. Text is then embossed from the computer. If there are diagrams she redraws them and produces them on the raised diagram machine. The work is then stapled together for the lesson (this is the pupil’s preference). The production equipment works effectively and the IT department are helpful.

The braille user always has access to the lesson but the diagrams are not always produced if they are too complex or not useful. Generally, the braillist gets most of the learning materials at the same time as his peers. When the work set is very visual as in geography he gets probably 70 per cent and is then reliant on his classroom support to further explain the work. The TA finds history and RE easy to produce.
4.2 Case study 2 (England)

4.2.1 Background
Case study 2 is in a small unitary authority (UA), which separated from the rest of the county following local government re-organisation (LGR) in 1996.

Although geographically quite small – it takes about half an hour to drive from one end of the UA to the other – this is a quite densely populated urban authority. There are a lot of schools in the UA to serve the relatively large population.

There are areas of extreme affluence, but also some areas of economic and social disadvantage within the area.

It is also a quite ethnically diverse authority, with families from some Eastern Europe and African countries moving in recently. There are also a number of Asian families in the area.

4.2.2 How the VI service is administered and funded
Prior to LGR the VI service had been part of the LA VI service, which covered the whole county. Following LGR and the formation of a separate UA the authority established its own VI service.

The VI service is centrally organised and with a single office base, which is located in a special school designated for pupils with physical, medical and profound difficulties aged 3–14 years. It was previously located in a mainstream school resourced for pupils who are blind or partially sighted, but this was closed because parents were choosing to send their children to their local mainstream schools.

The service is centrally funded. There has been some talk of transferring the budget to the special school. The head teacher would then manage the earmarked funds, which are needed to run the peripatetic part of the service. However, this proposal is speculative at present.

4.2.3 VI service staffing
Three members of staff are employed by the VI service.

The head of service is also the only QTVI. Approximately 0.75 of a day per week is spent in the two special schools in the borough and the remaining 4.25 days are on peripatetic work (either office based or visiting schools).

The service also employs two peripatetic Specialist Support Officers. One works on a full-time basis and the second works four days per week.
4. Case study findings

Both are based in the VI service at the special school, along with the head of service. Both are qualified braillists and have completed the RNIB Partners in Learning training course. Both are deployed in a similar way to the head of service – that is, they provide some one-to-one support with individual pupils in mainstream schools, as well as providing additional support to TAs who work directly with blind and partially sighted pupils in schools.

SSO 2 spends more of her time in the VI office where she is involved in preparing resources for pupils in the mainstream schools.

All TAs in mainstream schools are employed directly by the schools.

4.2.4 Number and characteristics of blind and partially sighted pupils

The VI service supports all blind and partially sighted pupils who are educated within the borough including those who travel in from neighbouring areas outside the UA.

Approximately 70 pupils are supported by the service, including several under the age of five. Of these there are 16 primary and five secondary aged pupils who can access the national curriculum, including one braillist, who is of primary age.

4.2.5 Where blind and partially sighted pupils are educated

All 21 pupils who can access the national curriculum are being educated in their local mainstream school. 35 pupils who are unable to access the national curriculum attend special schools within the UA.

There are no specialist resourced or special schools for blind and partially sighted pupils within the borough. This is in response to parental choice to send their children to their local mainstream school, and is consistent with the UA’s policy of inclusion where possible.

The VI department is able to support all placements – mainstream and special. This was attributed to the fact that it is a small UA and very compact geographically. Time is therefore not wasted in travel to the different schools.

4.2.6 Staff interviews undertaken

The head of service who is also a peripatetic specialist teacher of pupils with visual impairment.

Two specialist support assistants who are employed by the VI service to provide peripatetic support to blind and partially sighted pupils and to TAs in mainstream
schools. They also play a coordinating role in the provision of accessible textbooks and other curriculum resources.

Two teaching assistants, both employed by the schools in which they work.

TA1 supports a Key Stage 4 partially sighted pupil in a mainstream selective school. She is responsible for sourcing and producing all the pupil’s accessible textbooks and other curriculum materials. This is a full-time role, which is job shared with a second TA.

TA2 is the Learning Support Manager at a large mainstream comprehensive school, where she supports one partially sighted pupil at Key Stage 3.

4.2.7 Organisation of provision of textbooks in braille and large print
Responsibility for provision and funding of accessible textbooks lies with schools, not with the VI service. Funding is from the schools’ delegated budgets. Some books are however, provided by the VI service – for example, it may produce or purchase a particular text if it decides that it would be a good central resource that would be used by several students.

Parents will also buy books from these providers and then reclaim the cost from the school as some providers of textbooks have a lower purchase price for parents than for schools.

Within the school responsibility tends to lie with the TAs. Sourcing and providing accessible materials and textbooks is part of the TA hours and written into the statement. The VI service however starts off the process with new schools and TAs by helping them to source books. The three members of VI service staff also provide training to TAs, often by attending courses themselves and then disseminating what they have learnt.

The VI service – and in particular the head of service – also plays a key coordinating role by keeping track of information about new sources of accessible textbooks, new developments and new technology. This information is then “sifted” and passed on to schools.

The VI service has a small library of accessible books, many of which had belonged to the VI resourced school. Some books produced by mainstream schools within the UA are also held in the library. VI service staff facilitate inter-school sharing of resources by encouraging secondary schools to give them the details of books produced in house by the school. These can then be loaned to other pupils in other schools.
4. Case study findings

4.2.8 Planning for the provision of large print and braille books
This is the responsibility of TAs and the VI service emphasises to TAs the importance of advance planning at their inset. The TA follows up with class teachers to find out from them in advance what titles will be required.

4.2.9 Purchase of accessible textbooks from external providers
As previously indicated, the VI service provides TAs and schools with detailed information about sources of accessible textbooks.

As detailed below (4.2.10) TA2 does not provide large print textbooks for the pupil she supports either from external providers or produced in house as he uses a low vision device (LVD) to access print. Before the LVD was purchased, the school librarian was the person responsible for sourcing accessible books externally.

TA1 first checks through the book lists from external providers such as NBCS and Joseph Clarke service to see if a large print version is available, but in practice finds that with the exception of English books there are very few large print textbooks that can be obtained off the shelf. The VI service helps to keep her up to date with what is available and from which provider, and she will phone them if any further help or information is needed.

Having checked through the lists and found a book is not available she will go ahead and produce it in house.

4.2.10 In-house production of textbooks
Sometimes books cannot be obtained via external sources. The school must then make its own provision. The VI service loans out CCTVs as one alternative, but many secondary pupils do not want to use them. A second alternative is for the pupil to use a low vision device such as a MagiLink, which is used by the pupil supported by TA2. In most cases textbooks are produced in house in schools. This is done by TAs who modify the books by scanning. The equipment to do this is held in individual schools. As teachers change books frequently it is not always feasible to produce the whole book.

The task of modifying can be daunting for schools, particularly in subjects such as geography and science, and can also be extremely time consuming. Some TAs may therefore just enlarge on the photocopier.

TA1 is one of two part-time TAs who provide dedicated support to a partially sighted pupil who uses large print in 24 point. Before the second TA was appointed, due to time constraints TA1 tended to produce large print books by enlarging by photocopying onto A3 paper. Now there are two people employed and more time available, where possible
they scan books and produce as A4 booklets. However, some books still require enlarging, such as Spanish or French textbooks, which can be very busy with lots of pictures and the text in various fonts. The option in such cases, is a laborious and time consuming process of enlarging by photocopying, re-typing some text, manual cutting and pasting and then photocopying the final product onto A3 paper and binding it into a book.

Scanning is not however, a “quick fix” solution as not everything on a page always scans. For example, some text may not be replicated – some of the text layout may be awry or a sentence may not reproduce accurately. Pictures and diagrams may also need to be modified. So a lot of proof reading and revising layout is needed.

TA2 supports a Key Stage 3 pupil who uses large print in 18 point. This is in addition to her main role as learning support manager at the school and the pupil does not have a single, dedicated TA.

When the pupil first came to the school the TAs enlarged his work by photocopying onto A3 paper. However, soon after starting at the school he was given a MagniLink, which is an autofocus device that attaches to his laptop computer. The MagniLink can be directed at the board, or at a book, and the page will appear on his computer screen and the size adjusted to suit his needs.

The MagniLink was introduced by the head of the VI serviced and following an initial trial with the pupil to ensure he liked it and could get on with it, the LA paid for him to have one of his own for use at school.

At present therefore, the pupil accesses all his textbooks via his MagniLink. An added advantage is that pages can be saved onto his computer (although the text is produced as a picture and cannot therefore be modified).

4.3 Case study 3 (England)

4.3.1 Background
The local authority in which England 3 is located is geographically large with a mixture of urban and rural populations. The urban areas include a wide range of different ethnic groups. The LA is divided into three areas and the schools visited were all grouped in one area.

4.3.2 How the VI service is administered and funded
The VI service is part of the Education Inclusion Service for pupils with sensory impairment.
Funding is wholly delegated to schools in terms of funding for pupils. In practice this means that the LA pays for 50 per cent of the service’s work as statutory or “core work” while the other 50 per cent of the service’s work has to be earned as income from schools in terms of payment for QTVI input. This is charged at an hourly rate.

The “core work” involves two visits per year to every child with a statement, following which a report is written which recommends appropriate teacher and TA support levels. The LA also pays for a functional vision assessment and an environmental audit for all pupils put forward by the service as requiring these. The service also helps schools to put together bids for equipment for individual pupils. Schools bid to the LA on the basis of all these service recommendations for funding to pay for the provision that has been identified. School bids are much more likely to succeed if they include recommendations from the VI service.

**4.3.3 VI Service staffing**

The Manager of the Education Inclusion Service responsible for VI and HI provision has overall management of the VI service. Her background is in hearing impairment.

The service employs 10 peripatetic teachers. Nine are QTVI and the tenth was in training at the time of the interview. One is team leader of the VI service.

The service employs no TAs, as under delegation these are all employed directly by the schools. The service also employs three technicians. One specialises in the production of modified materials in large print and braille, while the other two are ICT technicians who advise on support for individual pupils. The technicians are all paid for by the LA as part of its core work.

**4.3.4 Number and characteristics of blind and partially sighted pupils**

There are approximately 200 blind and partially sighted pupils within the LA, 190 of whom are supported directly by the VI service peripatetic staff.

There are 35 braille readers in the LA, 20 of whom are of secondary school age.

**4.3.5 Where blind and partially sighted pupils are educated**

There are no resourced schools within the LA and all 190 pupils supported by the VI service attend local mainstream schools.

Although the LA and VI service feel that the needs of all pupils can be successfully met in local schools, some parents expressed a preference for a residential school for blind and partially sighted pupils. Eight secondary and two primary aged braillists are therefore educated in out of county residential schools.
4.3.6 Staff interviews undertaken
Interviews were carried out with the following staff members:

Manager of the Education Inclusion Service responsible for VI and HI provision.

The VI service team leader who is a QTVI with a caseload of pupils including several primary aged braillists.

Two specialist teachers of the visually impaired. Both are advisory teachers with area caseloads of blind and partially sighted pupils including some with complex needs.

Teacher A supports a wide range of pupils, including five braillists.

Teacher B is the longest serving VI teacher in the service and is regarded as the specialist on issues such as braille code and tactile diagrams. She supports four pupils on a regular basis, including two braillists.

Two teaching assistants, both employed by the schools in which they work.

TA1 provides one-to-one support to a Key Stage 4 blind pupil on a full time basis and has done so throughout his school career since nursery school. The school also buys in six hours support each week from the VI service. She transcribes many of the pupil’s textbooks herself.

TA2 works as part of a team of TAs in a mainstream secondary school, where she supports three partially sighted pupils at Key Stages 3 and 4. She sees planning, sourcing, obtaining and producing textbooks for her pupils as part of her role, in conjunction with two other TAs in the school.

One resource technician who is employed on a full-time basis by the LA to produce adapted materials for any pupil in a school that buys in support from the VI service.

4.3.7 Organisation of provision of textbooks in braille and large print
Under delegation, schools have responsibility for materials and are provided with the funding to obtaining these. They can choose how to use this funding. In most cases, day-to-day materials are produced on site by TAs who have been trained by the service but most schools also buy into the LA service which provides more substantial or complex materials through the central transcription service in the format recommended by the visiting VI teacher.

If a school decides not to buy into the service, they are provided with information about external sources that they can approach directly. If a school wishes to make use of the central transcription service without buying in the service, the head of service will try to persuade them of the benefits of doing so. So far, none have refused, although one or
two schools buy in the minimum amount of time (one hour a week) to gain access to the transcription service when the LA has recommended three hours. In most cases, schools come round to understanding the benefits of VI teacher input.

4.3.8 Planning for the provision of large print and braille books
Responsibility for planning operates at different levels. The service is keen that schools understand that they are ultimately responsible for meeting the needs of their pupils. TAs employed by the school play an important role in identifying what books are needed, usually on an ongoing basis in lessons rather than through formal meetings with teachers. They decide in conjunction with VI teachers whether the required materials should be produced by the TA and/or VI teacher at school level, or passed on to the service technician. This is dependent on the complexity of the material involved, the amount of it (often it is easier to produce relevant extracts rather than a whole book) and the time scale. Responsibility for checking the availability of books in alternate formats lies with the VI teachers who can do it themselves or pass it on to the technician. The main sources of external materials are NLB and prisons.

4.3.9 Purchase of accessible textbooks from external providers
If a school decides to source its own materials it has to pay for these. If materials are provided through the LA, schools are expected to pay up to £290 per pupil per year but beyond this amount they are effectively free as part of the overall service package.

It is part of the VI teacher’s role to check if a book is available already before a decision is made to produce it in house. In the experience of teacher C there is never enough time to get textbooks brailled by external agencies (she has waited six months in the past), so schools and services have to produce the relevant sections themselves.

Teacher B finds science textbooks the hardest to get and English set texts the easiest. Generally she finds it easier to obtain large print than braille. She usually asks the service technician to check on the availability of a book before she produces parts of it herself or asks a TA to do so, but the time it takes for externally sourced books to arrive often rules them out. She finds the biggest problem but feels that this affects the staff rather than the pupils. She produces a lot of braille resources herself relying on a colleague to make sure it is done to a high standard.

TA1, like teacher B, produces a lot of braille resources herself. The one subject she can usually source externally is English because most of the titles are available to borrow from NLB. Apart from these, she has only managed to obtain one actual braille textbook (for geography) in four years of secondary school. She has occasionally used audio-tape as an alternative to braille for English texts.
TA2 finds it easy to provide any standard text-based large print materials but more difficult to provide specialist materials such as languages or science. She has tried to buy in materials from external sources but like teachers B and C has been let down by production delays.

### 4.3.10 In-house production of braille and large print textbooks

#### School based production

It is part of the role of the visiting QTVI to monitor the quality of any materials produced in house by school-based TAs. QTVIs are trained in this by the service resource technician and relevant team members and pass their knowledge on to TAs in the schools they visit. The service provides a lot of training for its staff in areas such as tactile diagrams as well as a two-day training course for TAs. Any TA working with a braillist gets trained in Grade 2 braille by their QTVI and takes an external qualification (not specified). QTVIs also train TAs in specialist braille codes such as music and science.

TA1 provides full-time support to a Key Stage 4 braillist. Books can be sent for brailling to the central transcription service run by the LA, but in practice she transcribes most of the pupil’s books herself.

For local production she has a PC with Jaws software and an embosser, plus a Hotspot fuser and German film. She has to braille maths and German books on a Perkins and only does the pages that are needed to save time.

She has a braille qualification but this did not include specialist codes. She has had some training in maths braille but has to find out most aspects of maths and science braille for herself, using relevant documents available within the field.

TA2 supports three partially sighted pupils at Key Stages 3 and 4 in a mainstream secondary school. She only produces worksheets herself and sends whole chapters and books off to the central transcription service. She identifies the standards she should be working to from pupils’ IEPs and goes to her VI teacher for specialist advice.

#### Central production

Central production is carried out by the braille and large print technician, who produces materials for around 50 pupils including 10 braillists. About 50 per cent of her workload is for secondary aged pupils. Requests for materials come to her from VI teachers, not direct from schools. She checks her own database to make sure she has not already produced this book for another school. She then checks external sources through Revealweb, VI Forum and NLB. For braille, she has the option of sending a book out to a prison if she does not have the capacity to do it herself - this is mostly for maths and geography. In this case, she would provide the braillon and the prison would do the work for a nominal fee. However, for most books it is quicker for her to produce it herself than...
to wait for it to come from elsewhere. She has an extensive range of equipment, including a high speed scanner, PC with braille translation software, embosser, Hotspot fuser and thermoform machine. She uses the braille primer, specialist braille code documentation, agreed exam specification documents etc to guide her work.

To her knowledge, pupils do not suffer from the late provision of materials because she does most of these a chapter at a time and goes to considerable lengths to make sure work is ready on time. There is no point doing chapters which pupils are not going to use, so working a chapter at a time makes sense. Schools use different books so the value of transcribing a whole book is limited. Secondary subject books take longer because they are more complex.

4.4 Case study 4 (England)

4.4.1 Background
The VI service for case study 4 is in a local authority that although relatively small in geographical terms, is densely populated. While one side of the local authority is urban with a diverse population there is also a large suburban/rural border area.

There is a wide range of affluence and social and economic disadvantage. The LA includes in its population a high level of asylum seekers. It is culturally diverse with a large number of people for whom English is a second or third language.

4.4.2 How the VI service is administered and funded
The VI service is centrally organised with a single office base located within a teacher’s centre. All the peripatetic staff travel from this central office. The service is centrally funded.

4.4.3 VI Service staffing
The service employs five specialist teachers, including the head of service. This equates to a full-time equivalent of 4.2 staff. At present however, one member of staff is on sick leave, which has reduced the full-time equivalent to 3.3 specialist teachers. All are peripatetic and each has their own caseload of pupils.

The service also employs a resource technician who has the major responsibility for the provision of accessible texts.

Although the majority of teaching assistants who support blind and partially sighted pupils in the LA are employed directly by schools, the service also employs six TAs, whose hours equate to four full-time equivalent. The six TAs are attached to the VI service as opposed to individual pupils and can all read and produce braille. They are
employed predominantly to support braillists, as well other blind and partially sighted pupils with specific or high level needs and work under the direction of a QTVI.

### 4.4.4 Number and characteristics of blind and partially sighted pupils

The VI service provides support to blind and partially sighted children and young people from birth until they leave school. The current caseload is approximately 126 pupils, 18 of whom are in Years 8 to 11. There are four braillists of secondary age and one of primary age.

### 4.4.5 Where blind and partially sighted pupils are educated

Most blind and partially sighted pupils are educated in their local mainstream schools. There are no resourced or special schools for blind and partially sighted pupils in the LA. There is a high proportion of single sex and Catholic schools in the LA and the service considers that arranging provision around each pupil means that pupils and parents have the same choices as fully sighted pupils about the school they attend.

Braillists and pupils with a high level of need have daily teaching support from a QTVI.

### 4.4.6 Staff interviews

Interviews were undertaken with the following members of staff:

**Head of Service.** One teaching assistant who is employed directly by the VI service to support braille users and large print users with more intensive support needs, within the school setting. She currently provides direct support two pupils (one in reception and one in Year 13) as well as supporting school based TAs.

One resource technician/TA who is employed by the VI service on a full-time basis. Her role is to provide resources for school based TAs and also to show them how to make texts accessible. She also provides touch typing training to Year 6 pupils.

One peripatetic specialist teacher of pupils with visual impairment with 25 pupils on her caseload, including two braille users and four who use “significant amounts” of large print. She also mentors newly qualified members of the team and those in training as well as working closely with TAs who work with blind and partially sighted pupils by providing training, giving advice and being a point of contact.

### 4.4.7 Organisation of provision of textbooks in braille and large print

Provision of braille and large print books for all pupils in the LA is seen as the responsibility of the VI service. Books provided by the service are also funded by the service.
4. Case study findings

Because of the cost of purchasing books externally, most are borrowed or produced in house. The service had found that once a pupil had finished using a particular text there was very little that could be done with it other than to share it with other services via the VI forum. Pupils have very different needs so a book commissioned in a particular font size may not be appropriate for other pupils. Books also become out of date very quickly.

The VI service works with the schools to provide a designated resource area within the school setting for the duration of the time that the pupil is at the school. The school reclaims the area when there is no longer a requirement for the resource provision. For example, in one school a room that had previously been used to store gym equipment was converted into a resources room for the TA. This room housed the necessary equipment such as an embosser, brailler, scanner etc and enabled staff to prepare documents in the correct format on site.

In addition to the equipment in schools, a range of equipment is held centrally by the VI service to enable in-house production of books.

The VI service resources technician is responsible for organising and coordinating the provision of accessible texts. TAs based in mainstream schools will contact her for help in obtaining a braille or large print textbook. She has set up a database of contact details of external providers and plans to work on a VI service website that can be accessed by all TAs so that they can download useful tools and packs.

4.4.8 Planning for the provision of large print and braille books

For pupils who receive intensive support from QTVIs and VI service TAs, emphasis is on informal communication with subject teachers. This might for example, involve slipping a reminder about the next term’s book titles into a teacher’s pigeonhole or meeting informally with the teacher to discuss the pupil’s requirements. Often just one or two chapters or sections of a book will be used by the teacher, so liaising with the subject teacher is important to establish which these will be. For braille users, having established what is going to be required, a decision will then be made as to whether braille is the most appropriate format for this particular purpose or whether audio tape or electronic format would be best.

For pupils who receive less intensive support and are supported by school based TAs the responsibility for planning lies with the school and the TA.

4.4.9 Purchase of accessible textbooks from external providers

Following a request for a particular text, the resource technician finds that Revealweb is a good place to begin searching to see if a text is already available. VI Forum is also used quite frequently. She also has a database of sources of accessible texts. As previously
noted however, (4.4.7) the emphasis tends to be upon borrowing books or producing in house rather than purchasing whole books because of the costs involved.

4.4.10 In-house production of textbooks
Most in-house production is done by individual TAs working in schools. The VI service technician will produce a book on occasions, for example, if the TA is newly qualified and lacks the appropriate skills. The TAs and technician all work under the supervision of a QTVI.

The majority of a TA's time is used on producing accessible materials and for this they will have access to a range of equipment on the school site including, as appropriate, embossers, scanners, colour laser printers and heat pens.

It is VI service policy that where possible, accessible books should as far as possible resemble the original print copy. This is considered important for the pupil's self esteem. The books are tailor made to suit an individual pupil's needs. Although there are no written production standards the VI service has high standards in terms of presentation and for large print, uses high quality paper and printers.

For pupils with high levels of support from a specialist teacher and/or a VI service TA the standards can be assured. For pupils with less intensive support, TAs are advised by the specialist teachers on production of accessible texts and will ask the resources technician for advice or help if they are unsure about anything.

4.5 Case study 5 (Wales)

4.5.1 Background
The VI service serves five unitary authorities (UAs) in Wales. Much of this large area of Wales is densely populated. The former mining areas in the valleys and one of the UAs are designated as areas of social and economic deprivation, although the region also includes more prosperous rural and urban areas.

4.5.2 How the VI service is administered and funded
The VI service is centrally organised with a single office base in the lead authority. An advisory centre in one of the other UAs provides a central resource base for the production of materials, a library, offices and rooms for internal staff training.

The service was formed through a consortium of unitary authorities in 1996. Funding provided by each individual unitary authority is based on the total pupil population.

The head of service is the budget holder and this is funded centrally from the lead UA.
4. Case study findings

4.5.3 VI service staffing
The head of service manages a team of 34 staff including teachers, teaching assistants and technical and administration staff.

There are eight specialist QTVI teachers employed by the service, with one in training. This includes the deputy head of service, four advisory teachers, and three support teachers.

Further specialist staff includes a mobility officer and a typing tutor who is also the ICT coordinator.

The service also employs 20 teaching assistants. While most TAs are peripatetic, six are based in schools supporting pupils with a significant sight loss.

Office based staff include two administrators, a resources coordinator and part time resources clerk.

4.5.4 Number and characteristics of blind and partially sighted pupils
The VI service provides support for visually impaired children and young people of all abilities from 0–19.

There are approximately 288 blind and partially sighted children and young people currently on the database, including six secondary age braillists and one at Key Stage 2.

Pupils receive support whether or not they have a formal statement of SEN.

If they have a severe visual loss they receive teaching and learning support as necessary. A significant number with less serious visual problems receive termly or annual assessment and monitoring visits. Of these, nineteen are monitored in out of county placements.

No pupils speak Welsh as a first language although one pupil has some support in a Welsh medium school.

4.5.5 Where blind and partially sighted pupils are educated
Most pupils are educated in their local mainstream school. Altogether, excluding those in the Foundation Stage (KS1/U5s) and preschool approximately 56 per cent of pupils (130) are educated in their local school.

A further 78 pupils are supported in four special schools. There are no pupils educated in VI resourced schools.
Of the six braillists at secondary level, two are educated in their local mainstream school. One braillist with additional needs is educated in an SEN unit and fully accesses a differentiated curriculum thorough braille. Three are educated in out of county placements in special schools for blind and partially sighted pupils.

The policy of the service is to include pupils in their local school. The arrangements for out of county educational placements are governed by social need and parental choice.

4.5.6 Staff interviews

Interviews were carried out with the following members of staff:

The head of service whose role is a full time manager.

One specialist advisory teacher who has a peripatetic role, overseeing and ensuring curricular access for 80 pupils at Key Stages 3 and 4 who are educated in mainstream schools across the five UAs. Part of this role is to ensure that equipment like the IT system for the production of materials in individual schools works properly.

One teaching assistant, who works for three and a half days in a secondary school and for one and a half days in a special school. In the secondary school she supports three pupils. Two are braillists and one is a large print user. Her role is largely preparation of braille and large print materials.

One resources coordinator, who manages all resources for the VI service including braille and large print books and curriculum materials as well as low vision aids.

4.5.7 Organisation of provision of textbooks in braille and large print

The service has a central reprographic department, which is staffed by a full time resource coordinator and a part time resources clerk. The head of service is responsible for developing, funding and managing the reprographics department and ensuring that everyone is trained in the use of equipment.

The resources coordinator is responsible for organising the service’s database of books in the library (over 6000) and their distribution in schools within the service. She sources books from external providers on behalf of staff. She also modifies and enlarges materials. She has a part time resources clerk to help with photocopying and enlarging. Between March 2005 and March 2006 the service enlarged 341 books.

The majority of the books are produced in the central office but in some cases TAs produce the work in schools.
The specialist teachers are responsible for the organisation of curriculum materials for the pupils they support. This involves liaising with teaching staff to find out if books are needed, directing support staff to follow up enquiries and advising them to contact the resources officer to see what is available.

If a book is not available through the VI service, library or external agencies, then it may be produced in the central office or alternatively the TA in the school may produce it. In some cases part of books or worksheets are produced by the school’s subject teacher or a non-teaching member of staff.

4.5.8 Planning for the provision of large print and braille books
When a pupil transfers to KS3 much time is spent by the specialist teacher in emphasising to schools the need to plan ahead. In some schools good liaison with the SENCO results in better forward planning by the staff in general.

Each academic year the specialist teacher begins the process in the summer term to find out which books are needed for the following year. When he knows a title he contacts the resources coordinator who lets him know almost immediately whether the book is available. If the book is not available the first chapter will be produced for the individual pupil by their TA.

The TA informs teaching staff regularly and informally that she needs information about books to be studied for the following year or term. She attends planning meetings, and checks weekly if there are any other books needed. Some teachers are more organised than others.

The resources coordinator is involved in the planning process through ensuring that specialist teachers and TAs systematically fill in a request form. This form details the date the book is needed by, the kind of modification needed including special adaptations of diagrams etc. She prioritises the work load according to the date when it is needed in school.

4.5.9 Purchase of accessible textbooks from external providers.
The VI service sometimes purchases books from external providers if they are unavailable elsewhere.

The resources coordinator checks Revealweb, NLB, the local library, and occasionally publishers for copies of books in braille or large print. She has been successful in obtaining one set of books from publishers (Heinemann) in accessible format and with no cost involved. If they are not available for loan then occasionally she will ask for the book to be purchased. The head of service will ask for an estimate of how much it will cost to produce in house and if it is cheaper to buy it then the money is made available.
The resources coordinator does not find any subjects particularly easy to obtain but the most difficult are science and maths, in particular where newer editions are in use by the school. Braille is easier to order as if it is available the book arrives quickly.

4.5.10 In-house production of braille and large print textbooks

Central production
The resources coordinator very occasionally produces books in braille. The equipment and technology is available in the office to produce textbooks using braille maker software; generally however the books are produced in schools by the TA supporting the braillist.

If a modified large print has to be produced the resources officer scans each page using Paper port software to simplify pages and erase pictures. The software is linked directly to the photocopier so the system works effectively once the book has been modified. The master copies are then stored to be used again if necessary. The book is set out according to individual visual needs. The book is printed on to A4 paper, bound and given to the member of staff. Some books are enlarged on A3 on the photocopier.

The service has a policy for the production of modified large print to ensure that the books are of good quality. The resources coordinator makes spot checks to ensure good quality adaptations.

School-based production
As already noted, most books in braille are produced in schools by the TAs supporting the braillists. The TA interviewed supports two secondary aged braillists. She scans in the book and spends time setting and modifying it. For the last academic year there were ten books to produce for history for instance, all resulting in 6 or 7 volumes in braille. She produces them on an embosser using braille maker software in the VI office in the school. She also produces books in Welsh and IT. Occasionally she uses the Perkins brailler to transcribe Welsh second language materials into Grade 1 Welsh braille.

She finds the production of IT books difficult as there are so many tables and diagrams to modify. Also she finds history difficult as she has to modify the visual resources with full text description otherwise they are not accessible.

For large print books the TA first checks with the resources officer to see if the book is available for the partially sighted students she supports. Usually she produces the book herself. She does this either by retyping the book or scanning the books on to the
4. Case study findings

computer. She then produces the book in Arial font, size 20 in bold and produces an A4 size book often in a number of volumes.

She ensures that the pages are numbered properly so the pupil can find his way around the book. Sometimes if something is needed urgently she will produce part of the book in A3 size, on the school photocopier. During the last academic year she has produced seven English books as well as five history books.

4.6 Case study 6 (Wales)

4.6.1 Background
The Wales 6 VI service is in a Unitary Authority, in what is largely a rural region, with two of its towns having some areas of economic deprivation. A substantial number of pupils are educated through the medium of Welsh in five Welsh medium schools. There are a number of pupils supported by the English as an Additional Language team.

4.6.2 How the VI service is administered and funded
The Visually Impaired Service is part of the Sensory Service, which is managed by the SEN Education Officer for secondary schools who is also the budget holder. The service is centrally organised with a single office base. All the peripatetic staff travel from this central office, which also houses other SEN services.

The service is centrally funded although money is also delegated to schools through the statementing process. Schools are responsible for the purchase of some curriculum materials. The head of service has also been successful in obtaining grants from WAG for IT equipment to enable two braillists in KS2 and 3 to access the curriculum.

4.6.3 VI service staffing
In addition to the head of service, there are two full time specialist teachers employed by the service. Both are qualified and experienced specialist VI teachers and are deployed as peripatetic advisory teachers. One primarily works through the medium of Welsh.

The service also employs a TA/mobility officer.

The service does not employ any other teaching assistants. Schools are responsible for employing TAs when one to one support is necessary.
4.6.4 Number and characteristics of blind and partially sighted pupils
The service provides support for blind and partially sighted children and young people of all abilities from 0–19.

There are approximately 85 blind and partially sighted children and young people currently in the LA, three of whom are braillists. One braillist is at Key Stage 3, one at Key Stage 2 in a Welsh medium school, and one is a preschooler.

Pupils receive support whether they have a formal statement of SEN or not and receive support through the medium of Welsh as necessary.

4.6.5 Where blind and partially sighted pupils are educated
The policy of the UA is to educate all VI pupils in their local school. 69 per cent of blind and partially sighted pupils are educated in their local mainstream schools within the authority. There are no pupils educated in VI resourced schools. 11 pupils are supported in special schools and seven at home. There are eight pupils on the database in out of county provision but their main impairment is not visual.

4.6.6 Staff interviews
The following staff were interviewed:

The Head of Service. The two specialist teachers of the visually impaired, who provide weekly to half termly, termly or yearly monitoring or support to the blind and partially sighted pupils on the VI service database.

One TA/Mobility Officer who has a dual role providing part time mobility support as well as peripatetic TA support for seven pupils. Four of these are at secondary stage and include one braillist whom she supports for Welsh and IT. She is the only TA employed by the VI service and is office based, working throughout the LA under the direction of the teachers. She prepares materials and provides in class support to help either teachers or other support staff.

One TA who provides one to one support to a Key Stage 2 braille user in his local primary school, working through the medium of Welsh. Her role includes production of materials and in class support. The service felt there were issues with the provision of curriculum materials through the medium of Welsh with a Year 6 pupil transferring to Key Stage 3 provision in September.
4.6.7 Organisation of provision of textbooks in braille and large print
The service is responsible for helping to organise the provision of books in school. The specialist teachers are fully involved in planning the provision through sourcing from external providers or producing books in the office or in school. They organise the purchase of books for use in secondary schools but the school generally pays for these. They also produce books at home in their own time particularly when one-to-one support assistants are absent for long periods as happened recently.

4.6.8 Planning for the provision of large print and braille books
When planning the provision of braille books in secondary school the specialist teachers have formal planning meetings with the SENCO. The SENCO then liaises with all contact staff to ascertain which books are needed.

TA1 is involved both formally and informally in the planning of the production of curriculum materials. Where teachers are well organised as in the Welsh department she meets half termly with the head of department and they discuss what needs to be prepared. Curriculum materials are generally homemade and so are not available from outside sources. Other teachers are not as well organised so informal planning takes place at the beginning and end of lessons as the need arises.

TA2 plans the work to be covered with the teacher. She then contacts RNIB Cymru to find out if they have the book available in Welsh braille.

4.6.9 Purchase of accessible textbooks from external providers
The head of service has a budget, which covers the purchase of books from external providers. However the service is also encouraging schools to pay for some books. It is developing a good partnership with schools to develop this further.

Specialist teachers organise the purchase of textbooks from local providers. They use RNIB Cymru and another VI service for sourcing Welsh medium books and Revealweb, the County Library and NLB for English medium books. They have purchased braille books from HM Prison Service but the prisons can only cope with straightforward braille text in English. They cannot produce maths braille or diagrams for instance and so all this has to be produced in house.

TA1 sometimes contacts RNIB, the county library or NLB but as books are rarely available she often does not bother. She finds individual reading books both in English and Welsh easier to obtain. All subjects are difficult to acquire in braille as there is great difficulty in matching the correct editions with books used in class. French is particularly poor. If the right book in braille is found to have been produced there are often no copies available (for instance, in NLB).
TA2 is looking primarily for Welsh medium, first language books. She finds that books are generally not available and although RNIB Cymru is willing to produce the textbook, this will take at least six weeks. She finds English books from NLB quite easy to obtain when she orders them, although these are mostly reading books.

4.6.10 In-house production of textbooks

Production of braille textbooks

TA1 retypes and modifies the book if it is not available from external sources. She then uses the embosser in the high school for production, as the office machine is broken.

She uses a Perkins brailler for producing Welsh textbooks and sheets as the pupil uses Grade1 Welsh braille. She finds geography and science more difficult to produce and English and history easier. There is sufficient time to produce the curriculum materials and the braillist always has his book on time.

TA2 is at present preparing KS2 and KS3 curriculum materials for present and future use in secondary school. She prepares all work in the primary school where she is based. She types in the text on to her PC and then uses Duxbury to produce all materials in Grade 2 Welsh braille. She embosses and binds books for use in class. She also produces some materials in English Grade 2. She finds Welsh and English language materials easier to produce but science and maths difficult.

Both TA1 and TA2 use Duxbury software and consider that the production system works well.

Production of large print textbooks

When the TA1 produces textbooks in large print she usually works in the VI service office rather than in schools. She often retypes the text, enlarges diagrams and then reduces it on to A4 size. She usually produces work in N18 size. If the picture is unclear she will put in a written description. She uses the photocopier and binds the books.

English language materials are the easiest to produce she finds, as she can scan in the material and alter it on screen. Other subjects with much visual material are more difficult. In particular she finds Science books are the most time consuming, because she has to retype and redraw diagrams and re-label them.

Welsh second language curriculum materials are also often problematic as booklets are produced by individual teachers and are often very visual and the original copy is blurred. She puts in a description if they can’t see the picture but her command of the Welsh language is limited.

She finds that the in-house system works quite well and finds the large print materials easier to produce than braille.
4. Case study findings

4.7 Overview of the six case study services

The six case studies described in 4.6 illustrate how the provision of accessible textbooks is organised by VI services of different sizes and with different staffing and funding arrangements.

Three of the VI services were situated in very large LAs (in one case, a consortium of five UAs) and covered a wide geographical area. Three were in small local or unitary authorities, two of which were predominantly urban in character and the third serviced a mainly rural population.

Although all six VI services were centrally located, in two of them most or all of the VI service budget had been delegated to mainstream schools. In one of the two, schools had the option whether or not to buy in specialist teaching support and resources from the VI service.

In four services, all or most TAs were employed directly by schools. This was the situation in the two delegated authorities. In no service were all TAs employed centrally, but two of our VI service case studies (one in England and one in Wales) were “bucking the trend” somewhat by employing a central team of TAs. A further two services employed one or two TAs to fulfil specific roles.

Three services employed a centrally based resources technician or coordinator. A fourth employed two TAs as specialist support officers whose role included assisting with the coordination of information about sources of accessible texts, production of some textbooks and other curriculum materials, and advising and supporting school based TAs. A similar function was carried out by the resource technicians, none of whom had sole responsibility for in-house production of braille and large print textbooks in their LA.

Four VI services combined purchase or borrowing of externally produced textbooks with in-house production while in the other two the emphasis was on in-house production. Nevertheless, in all six services a high proportion of books were produced in house and much of this was carried out by TAs working in mainstream schools. Although specialist teachers were involved in the planning and provision of accessible texts, this varied from service to service and again, on a day-to-day basis much of this fell to individual TAs. It would appear that the equipment available to TAs in schools varied from service to service. Two heads of services in particular, emphasised the role of the VI service in ensuring that schools and pupils were provided with high quality equipment to enable both the production of and access to braille and large print reading materials.
5. The young people’s perspective

This section provides findings from interviews with young blind and partially sighted people, giving an insight into their experiences and views of accessible textbooks provision. We begin by describing the young people who took part in the study, and then discuss the key themes to emerge from our interviews with them.

5.1 The young people

In total, 21 young people were interviewed. 16 attended schools supported by the case study VI services and a further five attended schools in Northern Ireland. All attended mainstream schools.

Of the 10 young people from England, three used braille, while two out of the six young people from Wales were braille readers. All five young people from Northern Ireland used large print.

Brief details of each of the 21 young people are given below.

5.1.1 Braillists from case study schools in England

Braillist 1 is a Key Stage 3 Year 8 pupil. He uses a laptop computer to access the curriculum and uses braille for reading.

Braillist 2 is a Key Stage 4 Year 10 pupil. He uses braille for all his school work and prefers hard copy materials. He uses a braillenote for writing and note taking in lessons.

Braillist 3 is a Key Stage 4 Year 10 pupil. He uses a laptop computer to access the curriculum and uses braille and also audio tape for reading.

5.1.2 Braillists from case study schools in Wales

Braillist 4 is an AS student. His reading format is always braille. He uses a laptop with speech and an embosser to produce his work. He occasionally uses a Perkins brailler. He prefers braille to speech.

Braillist 5 is a Key Stage 3 Year 8 pupil. He uses an electronic braille machine for most of his work and occasionally uses a Perkins brailler for maths work. He uses and prefers to use braille for reading all textbooks and curriculum materials.
5.1.3 Large print users from case study schools in England

Large print user 1 is a Key Stage 4 Year 11 pupil. He uses a laptop and a globe magnifier to access the curriculum. His reading format is print size N18 or Arial 16 on the computer. He prefers his reading materials to be enlarged to N18 although he can manage with his magnifier generally well.

Large print user 2 is a Key Stage 3 Year 9 pupil. Her reading format is Arial N24 bold, on cream paper. She sometimes uses a dome magnifier and a CCTV, but her preference is for her reading materials to be in large print.

Large print user 3 is a Key Stage 3 Year 8 pupil. He uses a laptop computer and a MagniLink Autofocus device that attaches to his laptop. His reading format is N18, black on white. However, all his textbooks and many of his curriculum materials are accessed using his MagniLink. This can be directed at a book, and the page will appear on his computer screen and the size adjusted to suit his needs.

Large print user 4 is a Key Stage 4 Year 10 pupil. He uses a laptop computer with attached CCTV and a magnifier. His usual reading format is N20. He prefers to use a magnifier to read a standard print size textbook. If the print is too small he will ask his teaching assistant to read it aloud to him.

Large print user 5 is a Key Stage 4 Year 10 pupil. He uses a laptop computer and a hand magnifier. His preferred reading format is N24 print.

Large print user 6 is a Key Stage 3 Year 8 pupil. He uses a laptop computer with CCTV attached. His preferred print size is N24 print but he can manage a smaller print size with his CCTV. Most of his textbooks are provided in his preferred print size.

Large print user 7 is a Key Stage 3 pupil in Year 9. She uses a laptop computer to write, a large desktop CCTV and a portable CCTV. She prefers to read through Jaws and other audio formats rather than large print.

5.1.4 Large print users from case study schools in Wales

Large print user 8 is an A2 student in Year 13. He uses a magnifier and a laptop computer with Supernova to access the curriculum. He generally uses N18 print or larger.

Large print user 9 is a Key Stage 3 Year 8 pupil. He generally accesses the curriculum through N18 print. He uses a laptop computer with Supernova. He prefers books to be enlarged to N18 in preference to using his magnifier.

Large print user 10 is a Key Stage 3 Year 12 pupil. He attends a mainstream school with a sensory resource base. He uses his laptop computer with Supernova and uses N18 print to access the curriculum.
Large print user 11 is a Key Stage 3 Year 8 pupil. She uses a hand magnifier and portable CCTV to access both close and distance work on the board and her textbooks. Her reading format is print size N24 and she prefers to have her work enlarged in preference to using her magnifier and her CCTV.

5.1.5 Large print users from Northern Ireland

Large print user 12 has just completed her GCSEs. She uses an overhead projector linked to a computer to access some subjects, and for others she has her reading materials enlarged on the photocopier onto A3 paper.

Large print user 13 is studying for A levels. He is able to read some standard print textbooks but any sections that are difficult to read are enlarged on the photocopier onto A3 paper.

Large print user 14 is studying for A levels. He used to use a CCTV for reading, but now prefers to have books enlarged on the photocopier onto A3 paper. He also uses a hand magnifier.

Large print user 15 is a Key Stage 3 pupil in Year 9. She reads N18 print with black writing on a white background. Her reading materials are enlarged on the photocopier onto A3 paper, or produced by her teaching assistant on the computer in enlarged format.

Large print user 16 is a Year 7 pupil. She is provided with enlarged books, and sometimes her reading materials are enlarged on the photocopier onto A3 paper. From September 2006 she will be provided with a laptop computer, which will be used to run an E-Book system. She trialled this using a biology textbook and has found the system much better to read than textbooks.

5.2 Low vision devices versus large print

It is clear from the brief descriptions given above, that different methods were used to enable the young people to access large print. While most relied primarily on hard copy enlarged textbooks and other reading materials, a minority used low vision devices (LVDs) such as CCTVs and magnifiers to enable them to read standard print materials. Some used a combination of methods.

Of 10 young people from England and Wales who used both large print and low vision devices:

- Four would prefer to use large print.
Four were happy with either (although one of the four had a slight preference for the LVD).

One preferred to use his low vision device.

One did not like either, preferring audio.

Two pupils explained why they preferred large print. One simply did not like using a CCTV, finding it difficult and fiddly to operate, while her magnifier was ineffective for use with standard print (N12). She also found large devices such as the CCTV much less reliable and flexible, observing that:

“If I use CCTV I can’t use the book at home.”

The fact that he did not have a low vision device or a computer at home was also a disadvantage for one of the pupils who had expressed a preference for his LVD. This meant that all materials that were not hard copy large print could only be accessed at school.

The second pupil who preferred large print to their hand magnifier and portable CCTV found these devices too slow. She felt that not having her books enlarged prevented her from finishing her work on time, with the result that she was often behind with her work.

5.2.1 Northern Ireland respondents

The five Northern Ireland respondents tended simply to have their reading materials enlarged, although one noted that he now used large print in preference to a CCTV, which he had found awkward to use. He did however note that it was:

“…an old version of CCTV….There are new types out now which are portable and you sit them on the book. These are much better.”

Another pupil, as noted in 5.1 (large print user 16) was looking forward to having her textbooks accessible as e-books, which could be read directly from her laptop computer.

5.3 Delays in receiving accessible textbooks

During their interviews the young people were asked to think back nine or ten months to the start of the school year in September and recall whether there had been any occasions when they were still waiting for an accessible textbook although the rest of the people in your class had their copies.
Of the five braillists:

- Two said they always got their books on time – both were provided with sections produced in house by their TA as opposed to the whole book.
- One thought this had happened but was unable to give any examples and it is probable that he was thinking of worksheets rather than books.
- One was able to recall a single occasion when a book was delayed by a few weeks. However, the solution had been for the TA to braille parts of the book that were being used in class in time for each lesson so there was never an occasion when he did not have access to the text at the same time as his classmates. “To be honest, it was absolutely fine.”
- One said this happened frequently at the beginning of the school year, when he had to wait for his textbooks whereas the rest of the class already had their copies. This year he had at least a fortnight’s wait for books for two subjects. Sometimes he would have no books for his research work. The cause of the problem was usually that the teacher had failed to give the book to his TA who had therefore had insufficient time to adapt it into braille. He claimed that having to wait did not worry him as he was used to waiting for his books. However, as he has become older the work has become harder, and he has had to catch up more quickly.

Of the 11 large print readers from England and Wales:

- Seven could think of occasions when they had experienced delays, although four of the eight said that these happened only very occasionally.
- Four said they never experienced delays.

Delays could sometimes mean that the pupils got behind with their class work. Interestingly, nobody cited this as a significant problem, all claiming that they managed to catch up later.

The young people who had experienced delays reacted in quite different ways. One for example, who said that he not always receive his maths and English textbooks at the same time as his classmates received theirs, claimed that he was not bothered about having to wait. Overall, he felt things were fine and this did not cause him any problems.

A second young person said that although this did not happen frequently, there had been occasional lessons when she has had not had a textbook. She recalled being told by the teacher to “listen”, which left her feeling “a bit left out in the cold.”

A third respondent could recall many occasions, particularly at the beginning of the year, when textbooks in large print had not been available. His English textbooks had taken
some weeks to arrive so in class he had to listen while his classmates looked at their books. Eventually the books arrived in sections as the TA produced them on the school premises.

He attributed the delay to the subject teachers being disorganised and unsure which book they were going to use, combined with the books taking a long time to produce. He spoke highly of his TA, commenting that without her support in producing the books he would not have full access to the curriculum.

5.3.1 Provision by page or chapter

One reason that pupils did not experience delays in getting their textbooks was because they were produced in house on a page by page or chapter by chapter basis. In analysing the interviews we were therefore interested to see what pupils felt about receiving their textbooks in this way, when their peers had access to the whole book.

Most pupils were quite happy with this system, or failed to comment about it. A bigger issue for many, as discussed in 5.4, was getting their pages in A3 format. Two pupils however, one a braille and one a large print reader, who currently received their books on a page by page basis expressed a preference for receiving the whole textbook.

5.3.2 Northern Ireland respondents

Four out of the five young people from Northern Ireland said that they had experienced delays. The one young person who did not experience delays used standard print books that were read with the help of a LVD.

All four who experienced delays were referring to books that were enlarged by being photocopied in the school. The problem would therefore appear to be linked to poor planning, with subject teachers not giving information about what would be needed in time for the TA to produce it for the lesson.

One young person noted pragmatically that:

“There is nothing ready for you really. You just have to sit around and wait while the copying gets done.“

Another also claimed that she did not “really mind having to wait”, although she admitted that “…sometimes I fall behind in my work.”

A third young person described having to wait as frustrating, and noted that even a five or ten minute wait could meant that she was behind at the end of the lesson:
“I then have to get caught up when I am at home. This is annoying because it gives me more work to do.”

This young person explained why large print textbooks could help solve the problem of last minute photocopying:

“This would mean during class the teacher could say we will be using this or that in the book rather than have to say to the classroom assistant to go and photocopy the bits I need. This is especially true if they don’t know about it in advance. This is sort of time consuming and it holds me, and sometimes the whole class, back. It can also be a bit frustrating, not only for me but also sometimes for the whole class.”

## 5.4 Enlarging onto A3 paper versus a large print textbook

It would appear that for many partially sighted pupils, in-house production of large print textbooks entails photocopying the original book and enlarging it onto A3 paper. We asked the young people who we interviewed how they felt about this system.

This question was not relevant to all of the large print users as some used LVDs to access their textbooks. Of the 11 large print users from the case study services in England and Wales, however five gave reasons why they did not like having their textbooks as enlarged A3 pages. Three main reasons were given. These were that the photocopied pages were unclear and difficult to read, they were cumbersome and heavy to carry, or they made the pupil feel different. Here is what the pupils told us:

One pupil, who whose textbooks were always provided as A3 enlargements observed that on some occasions, when the quality of the original work was poor the copy would be insufficiently clear. He particularly liked the way the mock exam papers were prepared on A4 paper with really well contrasted print. Having initially stated that he did not mind having his work on enlarged sheets, he subsequently admitted to sometimes feeling the odd one out as other pupils in his class had textbooks. He would have liked to have an enlarged book in English.

A second pupil commented that he did not like having his books enlarged to A3 as they were difficult to carry and took up too much space on the desk. Sometimes he had enlarged medium size books and these were much better. He would very much like the same size books as everyone else but with the print enlarged.

Another pupil admitted that really did not like having his work enlarged to A3. It made him feel “very different” and he thought the other pupils were looking at him and making comments. He would prefer to have the same size sheet and to have the same as everyone else.
The fourth pupil said that when she had work sheets enlarged to A3 they were too big for the desk. She would prefer work enlarged to her preferred print size on A4 paper.

We will leave pupil number four to tell us in her own words, what she thought about A3 enlargements:

“I can’t stand A3! I absolutely hate it! ... It’s not that I’m embarrassed or uncomfortable with walking around with it. [A4 is] a lot more easier to carry around. And it’s a lot more ‘normal’ shall I put it, to what everyone else uses. The whole point of people modifying things is to make things as normal as possible. And I find that A4 is a lot easier to manage as well. A4 is a lot more normal than A3, which is a lot of sheets blown up and stuck together and cut here and all that. And it would be really good if all my textbooks, the languages and things, were all like that….”

5.4.1 Northern Ireland respondents
As noted in 5.2.1, the five Northern Ireland respondents tended to have their textbooks as A3 photocopies as opposed to externally produced large print versions. While one of the five was quite happy with this arrangement, the other four expressed similar views to their counterparts in England and Wales. Here is what they had to say:

This young person’s view of A3 sheets was that:

“It’s just there are so many of them. As well as that you can’t see what is on them until you open them. The sizes of the sheets are very awkward because of the size of the desks.”

A view that was reiterated by a second respondent, who would prefer to use textbooks because

“...they are easier to handle and use. Photocopies are harder to handle because the pages are so big. These are also difficult to use on our desks....Sometimes there is an issue with the photocopies. Often in textbooks the diagram can go right to the end of the page but sometimes with the copies you don’t get everything you need on the page…”

A third young person would also have preferred to use large print textbooks. This would prevent delays when the TA had to do last minute photocopying during the lesson. It would also ensure good quality, accessible text, whereas with A3 photocopies:
“The main problem is getting it in a clear font. Even when it is enlarged it has to be black writing on a white background with a very clear contrast. Some of the books we had were perhaps white text on an orange background. Even our English exams are very bad in this way. For example they might give you a leaflet and ask you to write about it. This was very difficult for me as very often I couldn’t read it…”

The poor clarity of A3 photocopies was also a problem for our fourth respondent, whose preference was:

“I would like big books for all subjects. This might make all the work easier for me as I wouldn’t have to rush my work as much.”

5.5 Summary

The 21 young people from England and Wales whose views have been used to inform this section were all being supported by the case study VI services described in section 4 of this report. It is important to emphasise that although some of what the young people have said may be seen as negative or critical, this should in no way be seen as a reflection of the quality of support provided by the services and staff concerned. The overall impression received from our interviews with the young people was that they were very satisfied with the support they received and appreciated the efforts being made by their specialist teachers and TAs. Nevertheless, the interviews have given some young people an opportunity to describe in their own words what it feels like to be at the receiving end of particular policies and practices – both those that may be seen to work well and those that perhaps do not work so well. Where any problems have been identified, on most occasions it is the wider system of accessible textbooks provision that is at fault rather than what is being done at local level. This is discussed in further detail in the following section.
6. Discussion of findings

As described in the introduction to this report, the aims of this research study were: to establish the methods used by VI services and schools to obtain textbooks in alternative formats, and to identify issues related to the sourcing, funding and local production of school textbooks in alternative formats.

A message that came out very strongly from the questionnaire survey and from our interviews with case study respondents was that the current arrangements for provision of braille and large print textbooks are inadequate and that there is a need for them to be improved. Even people who felt that they had a satisfactory system in place locally to ensure that their pupils were not disadvantaged, had suggestions for ways in which the national system might be improved. Those who considered that their current arrangements were satisfactory were often devoting considerable staff time and resources to ensure that this was achieved.

In the remainder of this section we will look at the key issues that emerged from this research, and consider some possible solutions to the current situation.

6.1 A diversity of approaches

The findings from the questionnaire survey, which were given added substance by the case studies, indicated that there is a range of approaches to organising the provision and funding of braille and large print textbooks to pupils in schools. Some examples identified were:

- Central organisation and funding by the VI service, including a central resources department with dedicated staff responsible for both sourcing books from external providers and producing in house.

- Some central organisation and funding (for example, of equipment) with the VI service having a coordinating role.

- As above, but within the same LA there may be partial delegation of the VI budget to additionally resourced mainstream schools. Each resource base is responsible for the funding and provision of accessible textbooks for all blind and partially sighted pupils who attend the school.

- Central VI service with a coordinating role, but full delegation of funds so that schools can choose whether or not to buy into VI service provision.
Within each of these models, there are many schools that on a day to day basis hand over to TAs the responsibility for obtaining and/or producing braille and large print textbooks for the pupils they support.

It was also evident from both the questionnaire survey and the case study findings that most VI services and schools provide accessible textbooks through a combination of means. That is, purchasing or borrowing from external sources (formally through the commercial or voluntary sectors and informally from other VI services and schools), and producing them in house.

Funding of accessible textbooks also appears to come from more than one source, often within the same LA. 67 per cent of survey respondents said that funding of textbooks purchased from external providers came from the central VI service budget and 50 per cent said it came from the school, either through the general delegated budget or through specific funding such as the pupil’s statement. For textbooks produced in house, 58 per cent said funding came from the central VI service budget while 63 per cent said it came from the school via the delegated SEN budget or the statement. Some insight into these different types of funding arrangement is provided by the case studies. For example, in England 1, where the SEN (VI) budget has been delegated to schools, the service retains a small budget, to provide for certain key books such as reading books in large print from external providers (See 4.1.7).

6.2 External providers

As reported in 3.8, only 34 per cent of respondents said that all or most of their large print textbooks were produced in house and 24 per cent said this was the case for braille. This means that the majority of services and schools are still obtaining at least some of their accessible textbooks from external sources.

In an earlier phase of this research project, Lockyer et al (2006) had found that of the very large number of different textbooks available, very few are available commercially in accessible formats. This was certainly the experience of many of our questionnaire respondents, 92 per cent of whom said they experienced difficulties in obtaining off the shelf large print textbooks “frequently” or “quite often”, while 85 per cent said this was the case for braille textbooks. The non-availability of accessible textbooks was also an emergent theme in the case studies. Maths and science were particularly problematic for questionnaire and case study respondents, which also echoes the findings by Lockyer et al (2006). A number of people however, observed that books in all subjects and Key Stages were almost impossible to find.

With so few books available “off the shelf”, this indicates that most of those that are obtained from external providers are either made to order or borrowed. From the questionnaire survey it would appear that books are obtained from a variety of
6. Discussion of findings

providers, with RNIB, NBCS and HM Prison Service as three key sources of made to order books. However a drawback identified by three of our case study services was that the standard of the books produced by some of the prisons could be variable. The solution was to give very precise instructions about what was required, and to carry out careful proof reading. It was also noted that for braille, some prisons were unable to cope with more complex tasks such as the maths code or diagrams. On the other hand, it was acknowledged that the HMP charged very little for this service. The quality of books produced by RNIB on the other hand, were deemed to be of high quality but they could take a long time to arrive.

6.3 In-house production

From the questionnaire survey and case study findings it is apparent that in the vast majority of VI services, at least some textbooks are produced locally. Only four per cent of survey respondents said that there were no local production arrangements for large print books and only seven per cent said there was no local production of braille books.

If a substantial proportion of materials are being produced in house, the question is, who is responsible for producing them locally? In all of the case study services a considerable amount of in-house production took place, either by staff employed centrally by the service or by TAs working in mainstream schools. As detailed in Table 10, paragraph 3.8 of this report, 65 per cent of questionnaire respondents said that TAs working with individual pupils carried out local production of large print books, and for braille books this figure was 52 per cent. Between 40 to 48 per cent said that designated staff employed centrally by the VI service or in resourced schools did so.

There was almost unanimous agreement that an important reason for local production of accessible books was that modifications can be tailored to the needs of the individual pupil. An overwhelming 98 per cent of survey respondents said this was a “very” or “quite” important reason for local production of large print textbooks and 95 per cent said this was the case for braille. Looking at print size alone, it would seem that a high proportion of services and schools support partially sighted pupils who access print sizes larger than the commercially produced large print and giant print sizes of N18, and N24. 61 per cent of teachers and support staff said they had pupils who accessed print of between N26 and N36, and 35 per cent said they supported pupils who used above N36 print.

The wide range of individual pupil requirements in terms of print size, font style, spacing and background and print colour was referred to by survey respondents with reference to electronic versions of textbooks (3.15.1) and this also came out in the case studies. One resource technician for example, described how an aspect of her role was individualising materials for different children, such as N48 print, coloured paper, double
Too little, too late

Spaced print or customised braille. The need to customise texts to meet such a range of requirements, combined with the very large number of different textbooks used by schools (which often used only part of the book) was seen as a reason why having a wider choice of off the shelf books was not on its own the solution to the accessible textbooks problem.

As noted in the questionnaire findings (3.10.2) it might be argued that texts made to order by external providers could also be tailored to meet the needs of individual pupils. However, delays in obtaining books from external suppliers would appear to make this a less feasible option. Having to wait too long for braille textbooks made to order by external providers was said by 94 per cent of survey respondents to be a “very” or “quite” important reason for producing them locally. For large print textbooks the figure was 88 per cent. It is notable that around a quarter of survey respondents said that their pupils frequently experienced delays in receiving their braille and large print textbooks that came from an external provider (this includes both off the shelf and made to order books).

A theme that emerged from the case studies and supported by findings from the questionnaire survey was that in-house production, under the current system, carries with it a number of problems. These are the complexity of modifying some textbooks, the time it takes, as well as issues of quality control.

Time and complexity are to a large extent, interrelated. Although the sheer volume and fast turnover of books needed was identified by some people as an issue in terms of staff time, the sheer complexity of modification was seen as the greater challenge. This is touched upon in the questionnaire findings (3.8), but came out particularly strongly in the case studies. For example, as detailed in 4.2.10, one case study interviewee, a TA supporting a partially sighted pupil in a mainstream school, described the laborious process of modifying a Spanish language textbook. The book was extremely “busy”, containing pictures, captions and writing in different fonts including some handwriting and had proved impossible to reproduce by scanning. A TA supporting a braillist in another VI service said that she found the production of IT books difficult due to the number of tables and diagrams to modify. History she also found difficult as she had to modify the visual resources with full text description otherwise they were not accessible.

Scanning, although an improvement on simply enlarging by photocopying as it allows modification, is not the solution. Apart from being unsuitable for certain types of book, as reported by one case study TA (4.2.10), it can also go awry and require layout and text adjustments on screen. Another case study TA had noted that braille texts produced by the central transcription service by scanning were sometimes not transcribed properly. Sorensen (2005) had also noted that with the exception of English novels, most textbooks do not scan well. This is because of pictures and symbols used in science and
maths that do not scan well, or the excessive use of colour, cartoons and speech bubbles in MFL.

There appear to be several ways in which services and support staff deal with the problem of insufficient time. As reported by individual survey (3.12.2) and case study (4.6.7) respondents, teachers and support staff will sometimes produce books in their own time to ensure that pupils receive them without a delay.

Another approach is to produce books on a page by page or chapter by chapter basis. As reported in 3.12.2, this also happens to be the method used by 91 per cent of questionnaire respondents to ensure their pupils continue to have access to the curriculum while awaiting delivery of their braille or large print textbooks.

A third solution for large print texts may be simply to enlarge them by photocopying onto A3 paper. In fact, this method appears to be the favoured approach by those supporting the five Northern Ireland young people who we interviewed (5.2.1). Photocopying onto A3 was also sometimes used by case study respondents (see 4.1.11, 4.2.10 and 4.5.10). Although there are many occasions when this method may be quite appropriate, this may not always be the case. One case study respondent for example, noted that the task of modifying can be both daunting and also time consuming for schools, particularly in subjects such as geography and science. Some TAs would therefore opt for the easier method of enlarging the book on the photocopier. A similar observation was made by a peripatetic teacher responding to the survey who felt that some schools over-relied on enlarging by photocopying rather than obtaining accessible books from external providers (3.8.2).

This finding raises some concerns about the quality of the final product. As noted in the pupil interviews (5.4) several young people commented on the poor quality of A3 photocopies. Some pupils also found these heavy, bulky and generally hard to handle.

This last point leads on to the issue of quality control. As detailed in 3.8.2, around two thirds of survey respondents said that the quality of locally produced braille and large print texts was assessed by qualified staff within the service or school. Around a third used pupil feedback, usually in combination with other methods. One survey respondent had admitted that quality control was not as good as it could be due to staff time constraints and around one in 20 conceded that the quality of braille and large print text was not assessed. In view of the fact that between a half and two thirds of questionnaire respondents said that braille and large print texts are produced by TAs working with individual pupils in mainstream schools, it is difficult to see how stringent quality control measures can be assured. One case study TA had described the difficulties she experienced with the maths and science braille codes. Much of her knowledge was self taught through reference to the relevant documents, but was made more difficult by her lack of subject knowledge. The issue of quality control was also raised by peripatetic
teachers working in two of the case study LAs, who expressed concerns about the standard of provision for pupils who received less frequent monitoring by a specialist teacher. As noted in the introduction to this report, issues of quality control had also been raised by Sorensen (2005) and Wythers (2006).

### 6.4 The role of schools

Of relevance to the previous discussion is the role of schools in the provision of accessible textbooks. Schools have a duty under SENDA not to treat disabled pupils less favourably than non-disabled pupils and to make reasonable adjustments so that disabled pupils are not put at a substantial disadvantage. Yet there is some evidence from the research to suggest that schools are sometimes part of the problem when it comes to timely provision of accessible textbooks.

In the questionnaire survey, 82 per cent of respondents had said that a “very” or “quite” important reason for producing large print books locally was that schools failed to provide titles in time for them to be obtained from external providers (3.10.3). 32 per cent of respondents said that delays by subject teachers in providing book lists was the most significant barrier to providing large print books on time, and 26 per cent said this was the case for braille books (3.13.1 and 3.13.2). This was also an emergent theme in the case studies. TAs spoke of having to chase and “nag” teachers, with planning meetings by no means the norm. One person recounted an example of her previous role as a school based TA, when teachers would see her and hide in broom cupboards because they had forgotten to give her book lists! A specialist teacher noted that some teachers left their planning until the summer holidays so were unable to provide book lists until the beginning of the new academic year. On other occasions when a teacher had been better organised, the book had been produced in time but the curriculum was then altered and it was no longer of any use. According to case study respondents, delays in getting book titles affected provision of books that were both externally and internally produced.

The research did not come up with a solution to this problem, although as discussed in 4.4.8, one peripatetic teacher suggested that informal methods of communication could sometimes be more effective than formal ones. This requires however, opportunities for building up a relationship through regular contact, which is not always possible if a pupil is monitored on a fairly infrequent basis. It also requires time. As one TA working in a mainstream school described, she has no planning time with teachers and is not paid to work after school so in reality has few opportunities to meet them. This is consistent with the finding by Blatchford et al (2006) that the majority of teachers in their survey had no allocated planning time with support staff. The issue of planning had also been identified in Wythers’ (2006) study, leading her to the conclusion that there was a need for policies to be put in place to ensure that the curriculum resources required for each
term or half term were formally identified in advance.

It is also worth commenting on another issue to emerge from the case studies, although this was not explored in the questionnaire survey. That was the employment and training of TAs. Two of the case study VI services were unusual in that they employed a core team of TAs. A more common model is for TAs to be recruited and employed directly by schools to support individual pupils. A key role of the VI services was to provide training and on-going support to TAs in mainstream schools. However, as one head of service observed, all training had to be in house and the cost borne by the service as schools were unwilling to pay for external training courses from the school budget. This is an issue that may warrant further research.

6.5 Effect on pupils

Despite the considerable lengths that teaching and support staff often seem to go to, to ensure that pupils received their braille and large print textbooks on time, the majority of survey respondents considered that the pupils they supported experienced delays on some occasions, even if this happened rarely. As reported in 3.12.1, more frequent delays were associated with books obtained from external providers than those produced in house. Nevertheless, 25 per cent of respondents said that their pupils “frequently” or “quite often” experienced delays in receiving their large print textbooks on time, even though they were produced in house. For braille textbooks produced in house the figure was 17 per cent.

Of greater significance is the impact that respondents felt delays had upon their pupils’ educational progress and social inclusion. As discussed in 3.12.3, 53 per cent of respondents considered that delays had a large effect on pupils’ social inclusion, while a further 39 per cent felt they had some effect. 38 per cent of respondents felt that delays in textbook provision had a large effect on their pupils’ education progress and 54 per cent felt it had some effect.

A matter of particular concern is the methods that staff had to resort to in the absence of an accessible textbook, in order to ensure that the pupil could still participate in the lesson. The most widely used methods (3.12.2) were to provide text on a page-by-page basis, or for a teaching assistant to sit with the pupil in class and read the text aloud to them. The second approach in particular, singles the pupil out as different to the rest of the class and is therefore not consistent with inclusive practice.

In fact, survey and case study respondents made reference to the effect on pupils’ independence and upon their self esteem and it is evident from the comments made by teachers and support staff, and reported in 3.12.3, that the effect on pupils was a matter of considerable concern.
Pupils themselves seemed less concerned about delays than about the appearance of the final product. This might of course, reflect the fact that the pupils interviewed for the case studies were subject to very few delays. However, in view of the discussion in 6.3 about the provision of books on a page by page basis, and of enlarging by photocopying onto A3 paper, it is important to review what the young people felt about this.

As discussed in 5.3.1, two pupils - one a braille and one a large print reader – whose books were currently provided on a page by page basis, said they would prefer to have the whole textbook. Five out of 11 pupils from England and Wales, (5.4) and four out of five from Northern Ireland (5.4.1) said they did not like having A3 copies. The main reasons were that the photocopied pages were unclear and difficult to read, they were cumbersome and heavy to carry, or they made the pupil feel different. It is unclear whether this had ever been communicated to their support staff, or whether by keeping quiet pupils gave the impression that they were satisfied with this provision. As one TA had noted of a partially sighted pupil she was supporting:

“I must say that [pupil] is very resilient, and is the type of child who would struggle with small print rather than ask for help…”

Perhaps other pupils share this stoical attitude, or perhaps they simply do not question the arrangements that are made for them.

6.6 Solutions

This research has identified a number of problems associated with the current system of provision of large print and braille textbooks. In the final part of the questionnaire findings section of this report (3.14 and 3.15) we looked at what VI services and schools saw as possible solutions to this problem. The views that they expressed reflect the views of the case study respondents, and in this final section of the discussion we summarise the main points.

The solution preferred by most respondents was for textbooks to be available in an electronic format, either direct from publishers or via an intermediary agency. As case study respondents pointed out however, the file would need to be in a format that enables easy adaptation. The advantage of having a central agency holding the file would be that people would only have to go to one location to obtain it, rather than having to trawl different sites or go direct to individual publishers.

A number of respondents however – and notably, eight of the ten respondents from Northern Ireland – wanted to see introduced a central agency for the production of accessible textbooks. In view of the findings reported earlier however, about the large number and range of standard print textbooks, and the delays that people seem to
experience when obtaining books from external suppliers, it would seem that measures would have to be taken to ensure that a central agency could cope with demand.

Looking at the problem from a different perspective, an approach used by some survey and case study services has been to encourage their partially sighted pupils to access their standard print textbooks using low vision devices. Although this approach might work for some young people it is by no means a solution for all.
7. Conclusion

It is evident from the findings from this research that current arrangements for the provision of accessible textbooks, despite the strenuous efforts of specialist teaching and support staff, is far from perfect. There is evidence to suggest that many blind and partially sighted pupils experience delays in receiving their textbooks and that this can have a negative effect on their educational progress and social inclusion. Efforts to ensure that pupils are able to participate in lessons alongside their sighted peers can mean that less than ideal provision is made, such as enlarging by photocopying onto A3 paper, which may not meet the needs of all pupils. A3 pages can also be cumbersome to use and single pupils out as different from their classmates. Alternative approaches such as providing texts on a page by page basis, or for the TA to read the text aloud to the pupil in class, single the pupil out as different and are inconsistent with inclusive practice.

The fact that support staff have to spend so much of their time and go to such lengths to source or produce braille and large print texts suggests that this may not always be cost effective. It would certainly seem to be stressful at times!

However, it is clear that this is a complex issue that needs to be addressed in a number of ways. Delays in getting accessible textbooks can certainly be attributed to a national shortage of braille and large print versions. However both the number and range of standard print texts and the requirement for accessible texts to be tailor made to meet individual need means that having more textbooks – even if they could all be obtained from a single agency – would not on its own be the solution. It is also notable that the turnaround time of hard copy accessible texts by central production agencies in three of the countries identified by Sorensen (2005) ranged from two to six months. For many schools and services (partly because of the difficulties in obtaining titles from subject teachers in good time) two or more months would be an unacceptable period to have to wait for delivery.

Certainly if an agreement could be found with publishers to make all textbooks available in a standard electronic format – perhaps via a central agency along the lines of the NIMAS model in the USA – this would go a long way towards solving the current problem. This could meet the needs of two main groups of people: those who would prefer to have an electronic version to enable them to produce books in house, and those who would prefer to obtain the braille or large print version from an external provider. This assumes that electronic files from publishers would also help to speed up production by external providers.
However, there are other factors that also need to be considered. It is apparent that the failure of mainstream class and subject teachers to take responsibility for their blind and partially sighted pupils by providing titles of books to support staff in good time is a significant bottle-neck in the system. Ways need to be found to deal with this problem, perhaps by educating teachers and schools about the time necessary to produce complex texts in accessible formats. Another approach may be to reiterate to schools their responsibilities under SENDA, which will be strengthened by the introduction of the new Disability Equality Duty.

In addition, if provision is to continue to be through in-house production, it is suggested that further consideration should be given to the matter of quality standards. This may be best addressed through the drawing up of best practice guidelines to guide the production of materials in accessible formats. Staff training is also a matter for further consideration, particularly if in-house production is to continue to be carried out by TAs employed by individual mainstream schools.

In conclusion, there is a clear need for the current system of accessible textbook provision to be revised. In this age of digital technology, education providers should be asking themselves whether it is appropriate for secondary school age pupils to be provided with textbooks that have been produced “Blue Peter” fashion, by means of manual cutting and pasting and enlarging by photocopying. This is not a criticism of support staff, who often have no alternative but to resort to such measures, and who frequently display considerable ingenuity and commitment in their efforts to provide their pupils with textbooks that they are able to access. The evidence from our research shows the current system to be complex, inefficient and outdated. It leads to inconsistency in quality. The inefficiencies inherent in the system are inconsistent with principles of inclusion and in the view of many teachers, have a negative impact on blind and partially sighted pupils in terms of their educational progress and their social inclusion. The situation can be summed up in the words of three survey respondents:

“Accessing large print textbooks is one of the most difficult areas of our work and children are missing out…”

“Pupils are less independent, affecting self-esteem, having to play continual “catch-up” with classmates…”

“…Having accessible materials benefits self esteem, social inclusion and independence!”
8. Recommendations

Following consultation with members of the research steering group, the findings from this research have been used to develop broad recommendations for changes to the current system of accessible textbook provision. As the detail as to how these recommendations might be implemented are outside the scope of this report, further detailed discussion and negotiation between government and members of the voluntary and special education sectors will clearly be necessary.

The following actions are recommended:

1. A national, standardised, electronic file format for all educational materials to be agreed, which would enable their easy modification into accessible formats.

2. The establishment of a central agency that could function as a repository for standardised electronic files of all educational materials. Through the central agency, files to be available to schools and specialist VI/VS services for in-house production of accessible texts and to other approved providers for external production.

3. It is recognised that not all schools and VI/VS services will have the facilities or expertise to produce all titles in house. Therefore, the establishment of a coherent system of accessible textbook modification and production is recommended, either through a national transcription centre or several approved providers. The role of the transcription centre/provider(s) would be to modify educational materials at the request of schools and VI/VS services and produce hard copy versions at a reasonable price and within a short turnaround time.

4. RNIB to work alongside other agencies in the development of best practice guidelines for the production of all educational materials in accessible formats. The aim is to ensure consistent quality of educational materials in alternative formats, whether they are produced in house by schools and VI/VS services, or on a more formal basis by other providers of accessible materials.

5. RNIB to work with DfES and with VI/VS services as appropriate, to help mainstream schools meet their responsibilities under SENDA and the new Disability Equality Duty with respect to the provision of accessible curriculum materials including textbooks. Mainstream schools and class and subject teachers need to be educated about the time necessary to produce complex texts in accessible formats. Action to be undertaken by schools might include:

- Ensuring ample planning time is allowed between teachers and TAs so that TAs are given book titles in good time for them to obtain or produce accessible versions.
Time off for staff training is available to TAs, particularly those employed by individual mainstream schools with responsibility for in-house production of accessible texts.

RNIB will be working with government, the publishing industry and the teaching profession to establish the best way of turning these recommendations into reality.
References


Revealweb online catalogue: www.revealweb.org.uk


VI Forum archives: http://lists.becta.org.uk/pipermail/vi-forum/-


## List of abbreviations

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>APH</td>
<td>American Printing House for the Blind</td>
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<tr>
<td>BECTA</td>
<td>British Educational Communications and Technology Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCTV</td>
<td>Closed circuit television</td>
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<tr>
<td>DDA</td>
<td>Disability Discrimination Act</td>
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<tr>
<td>DENI</td>
<td>Department of Education Northern Ireland</td>
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<tr>
<td>DfES</td>
<td>Department for Education and Skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>DRC</td>
<td>Disability Rights Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>ELB</td>
<td>Education and Library Board (Northern Ireland)</td>
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<tr>
<td>IEP</td>
<td>Individual education plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>IT</td>
<td>Information technology</td>
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<td>KS</td>
<td>Key Stage</td>
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<tr>
<td>LA</td>
<td>Local Authority (England and Wales)</td>
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<td>LGR</td>
<td>Local government re-organisation</td>
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<td>LP</td>
<td>Large print</td>
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<td>LVA</td>
<td>Low vision aid</td>
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<td>LVD</td>
<td>Low vision device</td>
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<td>MFL</td>
<td>Modern foreign languages</td>
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<tr>
<td>NBCS</td>
<td>National Blind Children’s Society</td>
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<tr>
<td>NIMAS</td>
<td>National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard (USA)</td>
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<td>NLB</td>
<td>National Library for the Blind</td>
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<tr>
<td>PC</td>
<td>Personal computer</td>
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<tr>
<td>QTVI</td>
<td>Qualified teacher of pupils with visual impairment</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEN</td>
<td>Special educational need(s)</td>
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<tr>
<td>SENCO</td>
<td>Special educational needs co-ordinator</td>
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<tr>
<td>SENDA</td>
<td>Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (2001)</td>
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<tr>
<td>SENDO</td>
<td>Special Educational Needs and Disability (Northern Ireland) Order 2005</td>
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<tr>
<td>SSA</td>
<td>Specialist Support Assistant</td>
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<tr>
<td>TA</td>
<td>Teaching assistant</td>
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<tr>
<td>UA</td>
<td>Unitary Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td>Visual impairment/visually impaired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VS</td>
<td>Vision Support (term used in Northern Ireland)</td>
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This report is available in print, braille and audio CD. To request your copy please contact Sue Keil on 020 7391 2369 or email research@rnib.org.uk

This research report is accompanied by a 20 page campaign report, Where’s my book? Tackling the textbook deficit faced by school pupils with sight loss (RNIB 2006). To request your copy call Customer Services on 0845 702 3153. This report is part of the Right to Read campaign aiming to improve access to books and reading for all those who have a sight problem or a print reading disability.

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