



LEEDS  
BECKETT  
UNIVERSITY

---

Citation:

Dobson, VJ (2018) Removing barriers for students with print disabilities: A case study of Leeds Beckett University Library's Alternative Formats Service. ALISS Quarterly. ISSN 1747-9258

Link to Leeds Beckett Repository record:

<https://eprints.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/id/eprint/4592/>

Document Version:

Article (Accepted Version)

---

The aim of the Leeds Beckett Repository is to provide open access to our research, as required by funder policies and permitted by publishers and copyright law.

The Leeds Beckett repository holds a wide range of publications, each of which has been checked for copyright and the relevant embargo period has been applied by the Research Services team.

We operate on a standard take-down policy. If you are the author or publisher of an output and you would like it removed from the repository, please [contact us](#) and we will investigate on a case-by-case basis.

Each thesis in the repository has been cleared where necessary by the author for third party copyright. If you would like a thesis to be removed from the repository or believe there is an issue with copyright, please contact us on [openaccess@leedsbeckett.ac.uk](mailto:openaccess@leedsbeckett.ac.uk) and we will investigate on a case-by-case basis.

# Removing barriers for students with print disabilities: A case study of Leeds Beckett University Library's Alternative Formats Service

## Background

Students with print disabilities have difficulty accessing printed text. This is most often due to a visual impairment or a specific learning difficulty (SpLD) which affects their ability to read printed text, or a physical impairment which affects their ability to manipulate printed material. Academic information is often provided in the form of printed books, which presents a barrier to these students in accessing the information they need for their studies.

E-books can help to address this if they are accessible and compatible with assistive software, for example for reading text aloud. However e-book accessibility is variable. Representatives from Leeds Beckett Library were part of an [award winning](#) national project team which [audited the accessibility of e-books](#) provided to the UK Higher Education sector with the aim of guiding improvements (NAG 2017, eBook Accessibility Audit Project Team 2016). The team continues to work with providers to support accessibility developments, but there is a long way to go before all e-books are fully accessible. In addition, titles are not always available as e-books.

## Leeds Beckett University's Alternative Formats service

Leeds Beckett University has over 28,000 students, including over 1,500 with a print disability. The University is based across two campuses - one in Leeds City Centre and one in Headingley. Leeds Beckett University library offers an Alternative Formats service which provides reading list titles for students with print disabilities in an accessible format, i.e. a digital version which can be navigated and read using assistive technology.

The usage of this service continues to increase. In the academic year 2015/16 358 files were provided, which increased to 1,176 files in 2016/17. This is accounted for by an increase in the number of users of the service from 23 to 37, as well as increase in the average number of files requested for each user from 16 to 32.

The Alternative Formats service is only available to eligible students who are assessed as needing it by the University's [Disability Advice team](#) (Leeds Beckett University, 2017). When the Disability Advice team determine that a student is eligible for the service, this is added into their Reasonable Adjustment Plan (RAP) - an individualised document detailing the tailored additional support they require, which is shared with relevant staff across the University.

The Library has a dedicated [Learning Support Officer \(Disability and Dyslexia\)](#) (Leeds Beckett University Library, 2017), who receives a copy of every Reasonable Adjustment Plan. Where eligibility for the Alternative Formats service is indicated, the Learning Support Officer begins the process of requesting the student's reading lists from their academic team. This can be time consuming, especially when it involves chasing up non-responding academic team staff, which can delay the student getting access to their library resources on time, disadvantaging them in relation to other students.

When reading lists are received by the Library Disability Support team, the next step is to obtain the listed items in an accessible format. The Alternative Formats service operates a dual service model. For students who cannot access printed text at all, the service aims to obtain all of their reading list items in an accessible format. For those with disabilities who can access printed text to some extent, the service aims to obtain reading list items categorised as 'Essential' or 'Required' by the module tutor, but not those suggested for wider reading.

The Alternative Formats service provides books in different ways, depending on availability and the needs of the individual student. If the book is available as an e-book which the student is able to use, the Library Disability Support team would send the student the link to access the e-book. Where an accessible digital version is not available, the next option would be to check availability on the [RNIB Bookshare UK Education Collection](#) (RNIB, 2017a) - an online repository of books in accessible formats, available to download by registered institutions for students with print disabilities provided the institution owns a copy of the book.

Many publishers have engaged very positively with the service and donate their files to the RNIB Bookshare collection to make them available to print-disabled learners. RNIB Bookshare work with over 340 publishers, and those marked with an asterisk on RNIB's list of [publisher partners](#) (RNIB, 2017b) upload files directly to RNIB Bookshare meaning print-disabled learners can access the resources they need more quickly.

RNIB Bookshare has also launched a new 'Direct publisher feed' system, through which publishers can send files, either individually or in bulk, directly from their content management system to RNIB Bookshare. This process also allows publishers to automatically send newly published titles to RNIB Bookshare. Publishers with a direct automated upload feed include British Film Institute (BFI), Macmillan, Manchester University Press, Palgrave Macmillan, Pearson, SAGE and St Martin's Press. Other publishers are lined up to follow soon (RNIB, 2017b, 2017d).

If a book published by one of RNIB Bookshare's existing 'Publisher Partners' is not available immediately to download, it can be [requested from them through RNIB](#)

[Bookshare](#) (RNIB, 2017c), and once obtained it will be added to the collection, with the advantage that it will then be available for other applicable print-disabled learners. RNIB Bookshare are typically able to fulfil 80% of these requests and the turnaround time is typically six weeks (RNIB, 2017d). However, in our experience at Leeds Beckett University, if we request a file via RNIB Bookshare from a major publisher already working with them, we often receive it within two to three days (Thornton, 2016). As of November 2017 we have 223 closed requests within RNIB Bookshare.

The number of books available through RNIB Bookshare is continually increasing. As of November 2017 around 55,000 files are available. RNIB Bookshare has made the process of supplying accessible books to print-disabled students at Leeds Beckett University vastly easier, faster and more efficient. The percentage of titles required in an alternative format which we were able to obtain via RNIB Bookshare increased from 12% in 2015/16 to 25% in 2016/17.

Unfortunately some [publishers do not engage with RNIB Bookshare](#) (RNIB, 2017e). For these publishers it is necessary to contact them directly in order to obtain a reading list title in an accessible format for each print-disabled student. This is inefficient for both the requesting institution and the publisher, who will have to deal with multiple requests.

Nonetheless, several of these publishers are very helpful and responsive, and provide an accessible version of the book quickly. This is great as it means that the student can access the resources they need when they need them, meaning they are less disadvantaged in relation to their non print-disabled peers.

Other publishers take a very long time to reply or may even never reply at all. Some require the student to sign a form confirming their agreement to terms and conditions before they will supply each file. This can cause several issues. Firstly, as sometimes occurs when the publisher's permissions department is based overseas, the terms and conditions they want the student to agree to may not be applicable under UK law. Another issue is that the agreements can be very long and complex with lots of legal jargon. Considering the students need books in an accessible format because they have a print disability, reading and processing a complex legal agreement is often difficult for them.

Other publishers make certain restrictive stipulations, for example that the file can only be supplied to one named student and must be deleted when their studies have finished. This means it must be requested again next time it is needed for another student, which is inefficient for both the publisher and the requesting institution.

If publishers are unable to supply a requested title in an accessible format, the Library Disability Support team may manually scan the book to produce an accessible version, if the student particularly wants to read it and it is reasonably short.

“The organisation producing the accessible format may do so under the remit of the [Copyright and Rights in Performances \(Disability\) Regulations 2014](#) without specifically requiring permission from the publisher.” (RNIB, 2017d).

Leeds Beckett University has ‘volunteer’ status with RNIB Bookshare, so in these cases we would then share the scanned book with them, making it available to other print-disabled learners (RNIB, 2017f). As of November 2017 there are 86 titles live on RNIB Bookshare which were created in-house by Leeds Beckett University.

Files obtained via the Alternative Formats service are shared securely with students via their institutional Google Drive account.

## Praise a publisher

As outlined above, the accessibility of eBooks produced by publishers, their willingness to engage with RNIB Bookshare and their responsiveness and helpfulness when dealing with requests for items in accessible formats makes a huge difference to accessibility for students. Ultimately, these factors determine whether print-disabled students can access the information they need for their studies, or whether they are disadvantaged in comparison to their peers.

In an attempt to identify and thank the publishers who do accessibility well, Alistair McNaught - Subject Specialist (Accessibility and Inclusion) at Jisc, sought input from library and disability staff via mailing lists about their experiences with different publishers. This initiative was also intended to highlight examples of good practice in terms of accessibility in the hope of inspiring other publishers to perform equally well. The results are published in a [post](#) on the Jisc blog (Jisc accessibility and inclusion, 2017). Publishers such as Sage, Oxford University Press, Cambridge University Press, Taylor and Francis, Open University Press / McGraw-Hill education and Palgrave Macmillan were highly praised. Also honourably mentioned were Kortext, Jessica Kingsley and McGraw Hill. Key themes emerging from the positive feedback were responsiveness i.e. fast responses to requests for books in an accessible format, engagement with RNIB Bookshare, and willingness to listen and learn - attempting to understand and address accessibility issues. As Alistair writes in the blog post:

“Delivering files that are 100% accessible to 100% of people 100% of the time is unrealistic. What matters is that a supplier is actively engaged and that their product improvement plans includes accessibility” (Jisc accessibility and inclusion, 2017).

To build on this work, Alistair will be circulating a new [feedback form](#) (McNaught, 2017) to relevant mailing lists, which will have an increased focus on specific areas in which providers could improve their accessibility.

# Conclusion

Print-disabled students need books in accessible formats to avoid being disadvantaged in relation to their peers. Leeds Beckett University offers an Alternative Formats service to support our print-disabled students, providing books as e-books, obtaining them in an accessible format either via RNIB Bookshare or directly from the publisher, or manually scanning them to produce an accessible version. Publishers can help with this by engaging with RNIB Bookshare, making their accessible format request service fast and simple to use, and prioritising the accessibility of e-book files so they are accessible to print-disabled students at source.

**Word count:** 1,826

## References

eBook Accessibility Audit Project Team (2016). **E-book Audit 2016** [Online]. Available from: <<https://sites.google.com/site/ebookaudit2016/home>> [Accessed 02 November 2017].

Jisc accessibility and inclusion (2017) Praise a publisher month. **Accessible Organisations**, 27 July [Online blog]. Available from: <<https://accessibility.jiscinvolve.org/wp/2017/07/27/praiseapublisher/>> [Accessed 29 August 2017].

Leeds Beckett University (2017) **Disability Advice** [Online]. Leeds: Leeds Beckett University. Available from: <<http://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/studenthub/disability-advice/>> [Accessed 26 September 2017].

Leeds Beckett University Library (2017) **Disabled and Dyslexic Users** [Online]. Leeds: Leeds Beckett University. Available from: <[http://libguides.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/using\\_the\\_library/disabled\\_and\\_dyslexic\\_users](http://libguides.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/using_the_library/disabled_and_dyslexic_users)> [Accessed 26 September 2017].

McNaught, A. (2017) **Alternative Format experiences** [Online]. Available from: <<https://goo.gl/forms/2WDeORs45MS2eof83>> [Accessed 03 November 2017].

National Acquisitions Group (NAG) (2017) **The NAG Award for Excellence** [Online]. Available from: <<http://www.nag.org.uk/about/nag-award/>> [Accessed 16 November 2017]

RNIB Bookshare @RNIBBookshare (2017a) **Thanks Alistair, great to see top publishers being commended & fab to see @RNIBBookshare mentioned; another 2,000 files added this week!**, 27 July [Online]. Available from: <https://twitter.com/RNIBBookshare/status/890602520036364288> [Accessed 29 August 2017].

RNIB Bookshare @RNIBBookshare (2017b) **August ended with over 40,000 titles in our education collection. Thank you to all our content providers. #bookschangelives #accessiblebooks**, 1 September [Online]. Available from: <https://twitter.com/RNIBBookshare/status/903524462997504001> [Accessed 26 September 2017]

Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) (2017a) **RNIB UK education collection** [Online]. London: RNIB. Available from: <<https://www.rnibbookshare.org/cms/>> [Accessed 26 September 2017].

Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) (2017b) **Publisher partners** [Online]. London: RNIB. Available from: <<https://www.rnibbookshare.org/cms/partners/publishers/publisher-partners>> [Accessed 26th September 2017].

Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) (2017c) **Request a book** [Online]. London: RNIB. Available from: <<https://www.rnibbookshare.org/cms/get-started/find-books/request-book>> [Accessed 26 September 2017].

Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) (2017d) **Publisher frequently asked questions** [Online]. London: RNIB. Available from: <<https://www.rnibbookshare.org/cms/publisher-faq>> [Accessed 26 September 2017].

Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) (2017e) **Publishers to contact directly** [Online]. London: RNIB. Available from: <<https://www.rnibbookshare.org/cms/publishers-contact-directly>> [Accessed 26 September 2017].

Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) (2017f) **University Partners** [Online]. London: RNIB. Available from: <<https://www.rnibbookshare.org/cms/partners/university-partners>> [Accessed 26 September 2017].

Thornton, R. (2016) **Report on RNIB Bookshare For the Yorkshire Copyright Group** [Online]. Available from: <<https://docs.google.com/document/d/11YeQUg3VQFYStaBKdp8XJXy4uFdIRjccJsaRVkK-g/edit?usp=sharing>> [Accessed 8 November 2017].