**ICEB Mid-term Executive Meeting, 17th – 21st April 2018**

**Country Report: Ireland**

Four main organisations are working in the field of Visual Impairment in Ireland: The National Council for the Blind (NCBI), ChildVision (The National Education Centre for Blind Children), Irish Guide Dogs and Fighting Blindness, each with their own emphasis in relation to client groups and research interest. However, as four organisations are a lot for a country as small as Ireland, these organisations work together as VISPA (Visually Impaired Service Provider Alliance) to pursue overarching goals and continue to work as the National Vision Coalition as an umbrella lobby group.

In terms of Irish legislation there is good news, as Ireland has finally ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities this year - albeit as the last of the 27 EU member states.

The EU commission ratified the Marrakesh treaty in 2017 by issuing a Directive (to govern implementation inside the EU) and Regulations (to govern international co-operation outside of EU but with EU members). It is currently prepared for being written into Irish law by October 2018.

This legislation will inform the work of INBAF’s three founding members as authorised entities and hopefully ameliorate existing copyright procedures.

**Braille Provision in Ireland – 2018 update**

There are three main braille transcription centres in Ireland:

1. Reading Services (formerly National Braille Production) at ChildVision transcribe educational material covering all primary and secondary subjects for all children with visual impairment in Ireland.
2. The NCBI’s Media Centre transcribes leisure reading and commercial material.
3. The braille unit at Arbour Hill Prison (Irish Prison Service) transcribes commercial material.

Local student support and transcription services at universities and government departments would link in with the three above, however production there appears to be sporadic and would focus more on electronic formats.

Two libraries for the Blind provide hardcopy braille: NCBI’s media centre and the Childrens’ Library at ChildVision. Both also buy in books from other transcription centres abroad.

ChildVision continues to offer a yearly “Learn Braille” Course for sighted learners which is based on the UEB updated Birmingham Braille Course material and accredited by the Irish Qualifications Framework (QQI) at level 5.   
This course has a yearly intake of 15-20 students and has been very successful at creating a “braille network” of graduates with braille skills in different areas/schools in Ireland.

All medicinal packages sold in Ireland have to display the name of the product in Braille. This was due to EU  Council Directive 2004/27/EC – Article 56(a).  In 2008, the NCBI Library and Media Centre commenced training delegates from Pharmaceutical companies in Ireland on the production of Grade 1 Braille for medicinal products. In the last ten years we have trained over 100 delegates in the production of Braille. Each delegate receives a certificate which is approved by the Medicines Board in Ireland.

The three main braille producing organisations founded INBAF, the Irish Braille and Alternative Format Association in 2012 and joined ICEB in the same year.

**INBAF’s work from 2016-2018**

Since the 2016 GA, INBAF’s work took place in different working groups, who, in turn asked experts in the different areas to work together with INBAF members and delegates:

**UEB Steering Committee / UEB Implementation**

This committee was set up in 2013 to oversee the implementation of UEB in Ireland at the request of the Irish Department of Education and Skills. The timetable for implementation, particular sequences of implementation in line with State Examinations and training needs were discussed, resolved and communicated by this group. However, no additional resources for UEB or its implementation were made available by the DES, so that the initial ambitious plan to implement UEB in three steps to all school levels had to be revised in year 2 of the implementation to allow for training and braille production to catch up. These issues notwithstanding, UEB has, as of September 2017, now been implemented successfully at all primary and secondary school levels. Even students, who could have finished their schooling in SEB have now expressed in interest in doing same in UEB, so that the switch to UEB at all State Examinations levels will be done earlier than expected. This work has been a hugely successful undertaking in Ireland and we are grateful that we could learn from the expertise of our partner countries in the ICEB network.

**Irish Braille Working Group / UIB Implementation**

As reported at the GA, the updated Irish Braille code (UIB) has been implemented hand in hand with UEB, and making use of UEB’s punctuation and technical signs. Since the presentation on UIB to the GA in 2016, the implementation process has been monitored and reviewed. A further step was taken last year in introducing Irish shortforms for the first time ever to an Irish braille code and those changes have now been implemented in the latest Duxbury template.

**Maths braille working group**

This group worked through the Irish primary and secondary maths curriculum, looking at the order of occurrence and importance of signs used in order to compile UEB Technical Material guidelines for braille readers, teachers and transcribers.

Those were published in 2017 and are available on the INBAF website (www.inbaf.ie)

**Music braille working group**

This group aims at improving the knowledge about music braille and to facilitate teaching opportunities for anyone interested in same. An introductory event in November 2016 was well attended. However, due to the largely varying interests of participants, the follow-up work seems to become individualised rather than lend itself to a group approach. The working group remains linked in to ICEB as observers on the music committee.

**Events**

Further events organised by INBAF were two UEB and Electronic braille information days in Dublin and Cork in December 2016 and March 2017, which linked updated UEB/UIB information with showcasing the Perkins Smart Brailler, the Canute prototype and other devices.

Now in its eleventh year, a yearly recurrent event is the INBAF Braille Reading Day. This event brings together all primary and secondary students who read braille from all around the country. Each student reads a piece of braille at their level and receives positive feedback on same from the invited VIP “judges”, usually a childrens’ book author and a proficient braille reader. Alongside the reading sessions run arts and crafts and library activities and this day has become both a social event and a day of celebrating braille.

**Anticipated developments**

As observed in braille production requests, at events and in professional life, braille displays are now broadly used in Ireland. With them develop new format requests and updated transmission methods, i.e. download facilities. This development is already reflected in individual organisation’s work practices, but could require input from INBAF’s side.

With slightly increasing numbers of braille readers in the Irish education system, INBAF will continue to advocate for braille and other alternative formats. To be linked into the ICEB network of experts has been a tremendous support to our work and we look forward to continuing our participation at committee and executive level.

Ilka Stäglin

INBAF Chairperson