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# ALIS Wales

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ALIS Wales – Accessible Libraries and Information Services Wales – is a group of higher education information service and library professionals across Wales liaising and consulting with one another on inclusive practice and sharing common experiences. We exchange information on initiatives within our institutions as we continually upgrade and develop our services and open our doors even wider and longer to an increasingly diverse set of users. The geographic distribution of our institutions has encouraged us to concentrate on monthly videoconference meetings, with fewer but more personal quarterly meetings. By taking this approach we try to ensure that everyone is given the opportunity to be included and involved, and to encourage close collaboration with our members across Wales. As a newly reconstituted group in Wales we have a dynamic website, which ensures regular exchange of information through our members' area, and we are increasingly making contact and meeting up with similar groups across the UK.

We discuss the challenges facing us in the future to try and ensure that any inequalities in provision are consistently identified, and responses approached pragmatically, by involving the appropriate stakeholders within our institutions. We make efforts in training and raising awareness, and generally focusing on an improved and more acceptable experience for our users.

A common topic of discussion over the past 18 months has been difficulties experienced over the provision of accessible publications, the problems faced by libraries and the different practices of publishers and database-providers. This common concern has been debated with groups such as Scottish Confederation of University and Research Libraries (SCURL) Special Needs, CLAUD (Librarians in Higher Education networking to improve library access for disabled users in the South and South-West of England) and the OPEN ROSE Group, where the difficulties of non-availability of both accessible and timely copies of texts for our visually impaired users has been gaining considerable notice.

It is clear the situation needs considerable improvement if our responsibilities to disabled users are to be met, and it was heartening to read the article in the *CILIP Library + Information Gazette* dated 24 August – 6 September 2007, written by Nicholas Joint, entitled 'UK copyright law: a curse not a blessing'. The article identifies that 'it is hard to see how libraries today can readily fulfil their duties: libraries are as 'disabled' by the lack of commercially produced accessible reading materials as the print-impaired themselves'. It isn't difficult to support the call that we should adopt a similar system to the American Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) framework, where 'The principle underlying the IDEA approach to the supply of accessible text is that commercial publishers should, as a matter of legal obligation, deposit digital files of educational materials, directly into a central, national repository of accessible materials.' (p.5)

At a recent meeting of the International Group of Publishing Libraries at the National Library of Wales, one publisher commented that 'Reading is a privilege and not a right', and it can only be said that with attitudes such as this it is not surprising that the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) is meeting resistance to change from publishers. Whether this is a commonly held view isn't clear to me, having not heard the opinion expressed before, but if that is the case then a lot of headway needs to be made to encourage engagement by publishers to embrace a modern-day attitude, as a reflection of a wealthy, civilised and inclusive society.

Do read the article by Nicholas Joint if you can; it contains both useful information and a well-described outline of the situation being faced by libraries and their visually impaired users. It is a convincing and persuasive article, although many of us may need to be neither convinced nor persuaded. Let's hope that through the work we undertake across the UK in higher education libraries, and through supporting such agencies as the RNIB, Revealweb and Gateway, to name a few, this untenable situation is improved significantly and with some haste. Joint's article reflects views that we have also been expressing across higher education, with fervour, throughout this year and last.

On a final point, in the past we have relied on the Disability Rights Commission to guide us on the disability agenda and on current developments. It is our hope that the progress made by the DRC over the past seven years continues its momen-

tum under the new leadership of the Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR) and that the raising of public awareness of discrimination and acceptance of diversity in our society is maintained in the new commission when so much more clearly needs to be done.

The focus of ALIS Wales this year has been on accessible publishing, and is a topic that we will take forward into 2008. A list of the members of the ALIS Wales group, with contact details, can be found at [www.alis-wales.ac.uk](http://www.alis-wales.ac.uk).