# Report of the Chair

**A subcommittee of the Round Table on Information Access for People with Print Disabilities Inc.**[**www.brailleaustralia.org**](http://www.brailleaustralia.org)

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# Introduction

This year has been an exciting one for the Australian Braille Authority. Our Executive farewelled long-time members and welcomed new ones. New projects were begun and ongoing ones finalised.

## Braille and First Nations Languages

In 2023, the ABA held a workshop on the topic of Braille and First Nations Languages. This proved to be a very popular topic among attendees and interest has spread to the wider braille community.

This year, the Braille and First Nations working group had its first meeting in February. The project is lead by Dr Sheelagh Daniels-Mayes, a First Nations braillist from Melbourne University, and Professor Rachel Nordlinger, a non-Indigenous linguist and teacher of Indigenous Language Studies at Sydney University. Its aim is to create a single braille code that will serve all indigenous languages, without sacrificing individual nuances.

This project will involve liaising with First Nations communities, educators and braille transcribers. Kim Barber is the ABA's representative for this project. Our primary role will be to endorse the code once it is finalised, to ensure that it is the official code used by braille transcribers across the country.

### ABA and BANZAT Catch-up

The aba and BANZAT had a catch-up in February this year. It was a very productive and exciting meeting. Ordinarily, contact between ABA and BANZAT only happens at Round Table, so it was a great chance to meet people who don't usually attend the conference.

The main focus of the meeting was the Trans-Tasman examination. As it is a shared project between Australia and New Zealand it makes sense to exchange ideas and pool our knowledge and resources.

We plan to have another meeting in November, once the marking period is complete.

### Trans-Tasman Proficiency Exam

Australia had an unusually high number of candidates sit the trans-Tasman Proficiency Exam this year, with five out of seven candidates achieving a pass and one a high distinction. The pass mark for the Trans-Tasman is 70%, so this is quite an achievement.

### Member Organisations

Our member organisations continue to hold the standard of best practice in the fields of accessible format production, research and development, and vision impairment education.

## In Memoriam

This year the ABA celebrates the life of Rebecca Maxwell; educator, inventor, advocate, published writer and poet, and finalist for the 2019 Blind Australian of the Year Award.

Rebecca was born in 1940 and became totally blind at the age of five, as a result of meningitis. As a young person, she moved from Adelaide to Melbourne in order to qualify as a teacher, at a time when achieving any kind of qualification was difficult for a blind person. She went on to qualify as a linguist and teacher of multiple languages. And she used braille as her primary medium in order to do so.

Rebecca invented a kind of braille shorthand known as the Braille User-Oriented Code (BUOC). Utilising linguistic concepts, "BUOC uses the existing Braille code but conceives of it in terms of the joy and comfort of touch and highly abbreviates it for reduction of bulk, ease of speed reading and notetaking." Currently ICEB is investigating an online presence for BUOC.

*Among other groups she was involved with, Rebecca founded the Australian Braille Literacy Action (ABLA). She* spent much time in Australia and internationally, running workshops and writing manuals to circulate BUOC to as many people as she could.

*Rebecca* independently published a collection of short biographies called "Blind and Busy: Life stories of people who use Braille", saying it was Australia's contribution to recognise the 200th anniversary of Louis Braille's birth. She is also known for coining the term "blindiferous" to describe what it means to be blind.

May she rest in peace.

To read the full tribute, including references, please see the attachment in your documentation.

## Structure and Accountability

The ABA is a subcommittee of the Round Table on Information Access for People with a Print Disability. Our purpose is to maintain and oversee the development of braille codes and standards and best practice across Australia. We also promote braille as the primary literacy medium for people who are blind, deafblind or who are severely vision impaired.

## ABA Executive Committee

At last year's meeting, we farewelled Josie Howse and Kathy Riessen. They took with them a wealth of knowledge and experience that is hard to replace.

Our current Executive is an exciting mix of touchreaders and sighted professionals working both in and outside the disability sectors to facilitate braille production in Australia and internationally.

* **Jordie Howell:** Jordie has returned to the Executive in her role as Immediate Past Chair. She is a proficient braille transcriber and proofreader, particularly in the field of braille music. Her involvement with the International Council on English Braille (ICEB) links the Australian Braille Authority to the wider world of international braille production and her calm presence at meetings is always welcome.
* **Kim Barber:** Kim is the Head of Braille and Large Print Services at the NSW Department of Education. She is also the Convenor of the Sydney Braille Forum, her department administers and marks the Trans-Tasman Proficiency Exam, andshe is the ABA's official representative for the Braille and First Nations Project. Kim also co-authors the ABA website with Janine Land.
* **Scott Erichsen:** Scott is our conduit to the world of access technology and innovations in refreshable braille. If there's a new piece of technology out, then chances are, Scott has managed to get his hands on it before anyone else. He is also a talented musician and proficient braille music reader and transcriber.
* **Melissa Fanshawe:** Melissa is a mathematics lecturer in the School of Education at the University of Southern Queensland. Years of personal and professional experience with vision impairment have made her a passionate advocate for access to braille. She recently hosted a podcast where she interviewed young people about their thoughts on the relevance of braille. At meetings, Melissa combines a bubbly personality with a willingness to volunteer for any task.
* **Ben Clare:** Ben is new to our Executive. He has years of experience teaching braille and access technology to students and teachers in the Pacific. He is passionate about the relevance of braille and bringing standardised braille certification to teachers and transcribers in the islands. Although we are the Australian Braille Authority, access to braille is a global issue and our meetings benefit from Ben's international experience. Ben is also the author of our Facebook page.
* **Janine Land:** Janine is another newcomer to our Executive. She is the head of Alternative Format Production at the South Australian School for Vision Impaired and has worked as a teacher of the vision impaired. While in this role, she gained knowledge and understanding of how students access material and she brings this insight to her work in alternate format production. Janine co-authors the ABA website along with Kim Barber, fixing broken links and keeping the Events page up-to-date.
* **Chelsea Bartlett:** Chelsea is a braille and large print reader. She currently works for the NDIA. In the past, she has worked as a braille transcriber and proofreader at SASVI. It is this experience that she brings to her role on the ABA Executive.

## Regional Braille Forums

At the time of writing, there is only one Regional Braille Forum in Australia—the Sydney RBF. The Queensland Braille Forum went into official recess at the end of 2023, after an extended period where no meetings were held. This happened due to COVID cancellations and a lack of personnel. It is hoped that the QBF will reform at some time in the future.

### Sydney Braille Forum

The Sydney Braille Forum is an integral part of the Australian Braille Authority; enabling members interested in the production, teaching or use of braille to come together to promote braille and to discuss braille related issues. Meetings have been in a hybrid form since the beginning of 2023, allowing for engagement of members outside Sydney while retaining the social advantages of face-to-face contact.

The annual Braille Competition Awards Night was held on November 15, 2023. The Awards Night is a highlight of the SBF calendar, allowing students, parents and teachers the opportunity to get together and socialise. Braille-related prizes are given to award winners thanks to the generous sponsorship of organisations such as the NSW Department of Education and Quantum RLV.

For more information, see the attached report.

## Communications

### ABA Website and Correspondence

In May 2023, Kim Barber and Janine Land took over co-authorship of the ABA website. At the time of writing, they can confirm that over 60 broken links are now fixed. They would like to thank Leona Holloway for her assistance with handover and training.

The website is an important resource for braille-related news, events, awards and opportunities. It also contains a directory of organisations and businesses that produce braille.

An important part of the website is the dissemination of Unified English Braille code resources to assist teachers, parents and transcribers in learning and understanding UEB and its use in Australia.

The ABA website also has a correspondence page monitored by Tristan Clare. Visitors to the website can contact the ABA directly to ask questions they may not find the answers to on the website. Questions are answered in as timely a manner as possible, however, this page attracts a lot of spam that has to be waded through so probably isn't the best place to come if you're looking for a fast answer.

For more information, please see the attached report.

### ABA Facebook Page

(<https://www.facebook.com/BrailleAustralia/>)

The ABA Facebook page continues to be an effective source of information for visitors and a source of positive publicity for our organisation. Page content is a combination of original input from the ABA, detailing upcoming events, and shares from other braille-related organisations.

In January, we publicised World Braille Day and subsequent events throughout the month through our own content and post shares on the topic.

Moving ahead, we will continue to utilise our social media presence to highlight Braille related topics and issues and further publicise ABA happenings. This will include the Round Table and ICEB events and the 2025 SPEVI conference.

For more information, please see the attached report.

### Ozbrl

Ozbrl is the official communication channel for ABA. Notices for upcoming meetings and workshops are posted here along with the call for registrations for the annual Trans-Tasman Proficiency Examination in UEB. Discussions and decisions on braille coding through ICEB are also held via Ozbrl.

As of February 2024, we have 142 subscribers. To join Ozbrl, send a blank message to Ozbrl+subscribe@groups.io

For more information, please see the attached report.

## Reports from Member Organisations

Reports from our member organisations are attached.

## Publications

ABA's publications are highly utilised by braille transcribers and producers, and our guidelines are a vital reference for study for proficiency in braille transcription. Publications include the Rules for Unified English Braille 2nd Edition, and the UEB Braille Training Manual.

### Chinese (Mandarin) Braille Guidelines

The full report on Chinese (Mandarin) Braille Guidelines is attached. Below is a short summary.

During Melbourne's great COVID lockdowns of 2020 and 2021, staff of the Statewide Vision Resource Centre determined that, as many primary schools offered Chinese (Mandarin) as their mandated foreign language, "Chinese and UEB Guidelines" would be a helpful addition to the existing collection of downloadables on the ABA website. After reaching out to the Transcriber community, we formed a working party that included two Braille Transcribers who are native speakers of Chinese, and a small number of other well-qualified and experienced Braille Transcribers from New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria. The draft copy of "Chinese (Mandarin) braille and UEB" has been reviewed using refreshable braille display, screen-reader, and print; and the Mandarin content has been reviewed by Chinese braillists who were not on the original team.

These guidelines have been a labour of love and a source of great joy for the members of our working party, and we look forward to sharing the document with our community via the ABA website.

## Trans-Tasman Proficiency In Unified English Braille

These open-book examinations, offered annually, test a candidate's working knowledge of the UEB code. They also set a high standard of braille production to which we believe all braille transcribers should aspire. For the 2023 examination, the focus topic was on artificial intelligence.

The examination consists of three parts.

**Part A:** Transcription of three print passages to braille in three different genres, totalling approximately 1500 words in all.

**Part B:** Transcription of a braille passage to print.

**Part C:** Proofreading, i.e. identifying the errors in a passage. A braille passage containing errors is provided, together with an error-free copy of the passage (in either print or uncontracted marked-up braille).

The examination package also includes instructions and marking criteria for each section. Touch readers completing the examination are provided with uncontracted mark-up braille format of Part A and Part C print materials and also a list of the mark-up codes which are used.

The marking guide is as follows:

* High Distinction: 95 marks or more
* Distinction: 90 marks or more
* Credit: 80 marks or more
* Pass: 70 marks or more
* Fail: Less than 70 marks

In 2023, there were seven candidates. One was successful in gaining a high distinction, one credit was awarded, and three candidates received a pass award.

## International Reports

### BANZAT

In January 2023 another "retreat" for adult users of Music Braille was held at BLENNZ. Musicians, many of whom are involved in community choirs, gathered to perform a range of choral works sung from Braille scores.

BANZAT is hosting the 8th General Assembly of International Council of English Braille which will be held from 25-30 May 2024 in Auckland. Maria Stevens, Mary Schnackenberg and Clive Lansink serve on the Executive Committee of ICEB.

### International Council on English Braille

ICEB consists of seven member countries: Australia, Canada, new Zealand, Ireland, South Africa, US and UK. Each month, the President Judy Dixon holds meetings of the executive via zoom to progress work and report on country activities relating to braille.

In May we will hold the eighth General Assembly in Auckland New Zealand, and it is exciting that we have an ICEB event close to home.

Each term the assembly passes resolutions on braille related topics. ICEB welcomes those who are interested in this work to join committees as observers and participate in the discussions. Please contact ABA if you are interested, as this is Australia's connection to ICEB.

### ICEB Code Maintenance Committee

The Code Maintenance Committee (CMC) has the important job of reviewing and updating UEB rules so that our code continues to meet the needs of braille readers as language usage evolves.

At the beginning of 2023, Kathy Riessen announced her decision to resign from the Code Maintenance Officer position. Matthew Horspool is the newly appointed Code Maintenance Officer. He is the Braille Subject Lead at UK Association for Accessible Formats (UKAAF) and General Manager at the Braillists Foundation.

Currently there are 15 Australian Observers on the CMC and Jodie Doolan is the Australian representative.

It is planned for a new edition of the UEB Rulebook to be ready for release at the upcoming General Assembly.

### ICEB Technical Committee

The UEB Technical Committee, chaired by Clive Lansink from New Zealand, is responsible for updating the Guidelines for Technical Material (GTM). Currently there are 22 Australian Observers on this committee and Jodie Doolan is the Australian representative.

In 2023, Clive opened discussions on two of the Technical Committee's priority areas: Grade 1 indicator use, and function names and spacing. Moredetailed information about these topics can be found in the full report which is attached.

### ICEB Technology Committee

A meeting of the ICEB Technology Group was held on 20 July 2023 where several topics were tabled. These included an update on the eBraille project and discussion of LibLouis questions.

* eBraille project: A summary of the EBraille project was presented at the meeting. The working committee have quarterly goals which are being met. EBRF is an international braille file that brings a lot of benefits from an EPUB file to braille, including markup, links for navigation, and tactual graphics. It is dynamic but can also be used for static braille production with a single or multi line braille display.
* libLouis questions
1. Spaces within a single number, such as an ISBN or phone number: how should they be treated?
2. Back-translation of the apostrophe, currently it produces multiple Unicode values that translate into either an apostrophe or single right quote. Consensus is that an apostrophe should always be produced.
3. Follow-up with manufacturers of braille displays and notetakers to ensure that LibLouis is being updated and maintained.

For more information, please see the attached report.

## Conclusion

My first term as ABA Chair has been quite a steep learning curve. This is only to be expected when taking on a new leadership role.

I took up the position at a time of great change for the Executive. For as long as I have been a part of the ABA Executive, Kathy Riessen and Josie Howse have been at meetings, offering their wisdom and guidance to us younger members. Now I find that I am one of the more experienced people. That's a daunting and exciting prospect.

I am grateful for the assistance of Sonali Marathe, Marjorie Hawkins and the rest of the Round Table Executive. Your patience with my newby questions is much appreciated.

Thanks also to the members of the current ABA Executive. Many of you are new, but you all helped out in some way. I'm particularly grateful to Jordie Howell for mentoring me through my first year as Chair.

I hope that next year will offer the chance to build on what has already been begun. It would be great to continue collaboration with BANZAT and to make progress with the Braille and First Nations Project.

# In Memoriam: Rebecca Maxwell

# By Skye De Vent

Vale Rebecca Maxwell (16 February, 1940 – 18 August, 2023).

Educator, inventor, advocate, published writer and poet. Finalist for the 2019 Blind Australian of the Year Award.

Becoming totally blind through meningitis at age five and being an avid reader, as a young person Rebecca moved from Adelaide to Melbourne to be *"trained as a teacher at a time when it was very difficult for a blind person to qualify for teacher training and to achieve success in her field as a linguist and teacher of English, French and Latin, using Braille as her medium."*

Utilising a collaborative approach, Rebecca invented a kind of Braille short-hand known as the Braille, User-Oriented Code (BUOC). Utilising linguistic concepts, *"BUOC uses the existing Braille code but conceives of it in terms of the joy and comfort of touch and highly abbreviates it for reduction of bulk, ease of speed reading and notetaking."*

Among other groups she was involved with, Rebecca founded the Australian Braille Literacy Action (ABLA). Rebecca coined the term "blindiferous" to describe what it means to be blind. Rebecca spent much time in Australia and internationally, running workshops and writing manuals to circulate BUOC to as many people as she could. Currently ICEB is investigating an online presence for BUOC. In 2009 Rebecca independently published a collection of short biographies called "Blind and Busy: Life stories of people who use Braille", Rebecca said it was Australia's contribution to recognise the 200th anniversary of Louis Braille's birth. May Rebecca (Becky) Maxwell, our dear friend, rest in peace.

## References:

*Blind and Busy: Life stories of people who use Braille,* narrated by Rebecca Maxwell.
Available in Braille from: [my.visionaustralia.org](http://my.visionaustralia.org) and in print from: <https://catalogue.nla.gov.au/catalog/4605170>

<https://tributes.theage.com.au/obituaries/488000/rebecca-maxwell/?r=https://tributes.theage.com.au/obituaries/theage-au/>

Blind Australian of the Year website: <https://www.blindaustralianoftheyear.com.au/about/>

Boroondara Writers Bulletin September 2023.

# Report from Sydney Braille Forum (SBF) 2023/2024

The Sydney Braille Forum is an integral part of the Australian Braille Authority; enabling members interested in the production, teaching or use of braille to come together to promote braille and to discuss braille related issues.

It is a forum that encourages both advocacy and discussion on a range of braille related issues as well as fostering social networking among its members. Dinner often follows to allow further informal conversations.

Meetings are held on Wednesday evenings. In 2023 we have been holding 'hybrid' meetings inclusive of both zoom and face-to-face and we have engaged many new members across the state. On November 15th 2023, the Braille Awards Night was held celebrating our students' achievements in Braille writing. This annual competition is designed to promote braille literacy among our students and is continuing to grow in popularity every year.

We had 40 students who participated in 2023, they could choose from a story starter or write a creative story of their choice. They were also asked to identify braille errors in a passage to encourage proof reading of their work. We had entrants from Department of Education, Catholic Education, and Independent schools. The Braille marking committee was fortunate to have volunteer touch readers who had been former participants in the competition.

It is wonderful to recognise our students' efforts to not only their parents, but also their teachers, ISTVs and wider school community raising an awareness of the importance of braille reading and writing skills for vision-impaired/blind students.

We were extremely fortunate to have very generous sponsors from DoE, DoE Braille and Large Print Services (who donated braille books as awards), Quantum RLV, Vision Australia, HumanWare and Guide Dogs NSW.

Our guest speaker for the awards night was R.A. Spratt who has a series books "The Peski Kids" which is inclusive of a visually impaired character who gets up to all sorts of mischief.

Our general meetings, for the first half follows a business agenda discussing events in the field, summary of ABA and Roundtable meetings, accessibility issues, new resources available and braille-related questions. In the second part of the meeting, we invite a guest speaker to discuss a topic of interest relevant to the group.

Our first guest speaker for 2024, will be Chris Papasavva, he will be discussing with us his journey to Perkins School for the Blind in the USA for his studies to become a braille repairer within Australia. We'll also have a close look at the internals of a brailler to see how they work to produce braille.

# 2024 ABA Report: Website and Correspondence

## Website

Kim and Janine are on a learning curve as they both take over the management of the Australian Braille Authority website. At this time, they would like to thank Leona for the handover, the assistance with online training and for the supplied training documentation. We can confirm that over 60 broken links are now fixed.

The website includes news, resources, upcoming or past events, awards and opportunities. It also contains a directory of organisations and businesses that produce braille.

An important part of the website is the dissemination of Unified English Braille code resources to assist teachers, parents and transcribers in learning and understanding UEB and its use in Australia. This includes foreign languages, phonetics, braille music and tactile signage and graphics. You can also find a list of Braille in public places. This is an important means of affording equity and independence for touch readers and also helps to raise awareness about inclusion and access. The site is inclusive of a page dedicated to news, this can be accessed at Australian Braille Authority ([brailleaustralia.org](http://brailleaustralia.org))

## Correspondence

The ABA website also has a correspondence page, monitored by Tristan Clare. Visitors to the website can contact the ABA directly to ask braille-related questions they may not find the answers to on the website. The most popular topics include braille signage standards, where to go to have braille documents transcribed and, on one memorable occasion, someone wanting the correct braille symbols of their children's birthdates for a tattoo. Questions are answered as quickly as possible, however, this page generates a lot of spam that has to be waded through, so the correspondence page is possibly not the best place for people who are looking for a timely answer to their question.

# Australian Braille Authority: Facebook Report

The Australian Braille Authority Facebook page, (<https://www.facebook.com/BrailleAustralia/>) along with our website continues to be an effective source of information for page visitors and positive publicity for our organisation.

As of 23 February 2024, the ABA Facebook page has 1176 followers, originating in several countries including Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, UK, USA and Canada with an average audience engagement of 236 per month and an average of 4 new followers every 28 days.

Page content is a combination of original input from the ABA, detailing current events including the Trans-Tasman Certificate in Braille Proficiency and the Sydney Braille Forum annual Braille competition, Australian Braille Music Camp, etc. and shared content from like-minded organisations around the world. We also share information from the Round Table organisation related to conference paper submission, registration deadlines and other events of interest.

In January, we publicised World Braille Day and subsequent events throughout the month through post shares and our own content which included a brief statement on the importance and continued relevance of Braille and a song generated through AI to further bring attention to the day.

Our page followers are relatively engaged, reacting to posts and sharing our original content on their own organisational and/or personal pages, resulting in extra positive publicity of the ABA and Braille literacy in general.

We do not post meeting minutes or happenings on our page but through agreement with the ABA Executive, we may post resolutions and updates resulting from our monthly meetings if deemed useful to our audience.

Moving ahead, we will continue to utilise our social media presence to highlight Braille related topics and issues and further publicise ABA happenings. This will include the Round Table and ICEB events and the 2025 SPEVI conference.

# Ozbrl Email List

Ozbrl is the official communication channel for ABA. Notices for upcoming meetings and workshops are posted here along with the call for registrations for the annual Trans-Tasman Proficiency Examination in UEB. Discussions and decisions on braille coding through ICEB are also held via Ozbrl. Members discuss braille related queries and exchange Textbooks if one agency has already transcribed a given publication.

As of February 2024, we have 142 subscribers.

This year, topics have included:

* Reminders for the 2024 Round Table conference, the ABA national meeting and ICEB Eighth General Assembly,
* Book requests,
* Information pertaining to new braille music translation software,
* Formatting footnotes and high level maths,
* Braille formatting and coding queries,
* Braille notetaker and braille display questions,
* Braille embosser drivers, braille signage and braille research.

To join Ozbrl, send a blank message to Ozbrl+subscribe@groups.io

You will receive a confirmation message that needs a reply to validate your subscription.

# Statewide Vision Resource Centre: Report for ABA 2024

SVRC Transcribers are back on site at Statewide Vision Resource centre as per Department of Education guidelines and they are currently overwhelmed with late requests. The Transcription Team completed 1,197 braille and tactile diagrams and 1,482 e-text requests with a total of 2,679 alternative format requests in 2023.

The Victorian Visiting Teacher Service planned restructure in term three last year caused havoc for the visiting teachers and resulted in delayed transcription requests in fourth term 2023. SVRC is considering setting transcription request timelines for schools, particularly end of year requests to relieve the pressure on the transcription team and to encourage schools to take greater responsibility for ensuring their students have the resources to begin the new school year. Do other states put deadlines around textbook requests for the following year? If so, what are the timelines and expectations around extremely late textbook requests?

There is also an unusually high number of requests for hardcopy braille learning materials for late primary and secondary students. Is this trend a result of the middle primary years having limited opportunities to develop braille skills during the COVID lockdown years?

The School of Special Educational Needs: Sensory- Vision in Western Australia sponsored two SVRC teachers to travel to WA to present on our wonderful Ozzie Dots Program. We look forward to the continued development of a strong partnership with SSEN – Sensory.

The Ozzie Dots update is that the books AR, BB, CC, EA, ED, EN, ER, FF, GG, GH, IN (within words), ING, OU, OW, SH, ST, TH and WH are now available; and "endings" such as, MENT, NESS, OUND are currently being illustrated. Coming next are Shortform Words that include some of those handy contractions/words such as BRAILLE, BLIND, QUICK, LETTER; followed by Shortform words beginning with "a" and "be" such as ACROSS, ABOVE and BELOW, BENEATH etc.

To support the teaching and learning of contractions, existing Lego blocks are configured with 3D printed braille. Young students can manipulate the Lego pieces on a large board to form words. This contraction kit is currently being trialled by one of our visiting teachers and will hopefully be available to all later this year. SVRC completed 88 requests for 3D models.

The three photos are a close up of a child moving Lego pieces with added braille contractions on a large Lego board.

  

Staff are busy transcribing VCE (Year 12) Units 3 & 4 texts including Chemistry, Maths Methods, Psychology, English, English Language, Latin, Legal Studies, Theatre Studies and VET Workplace Skills. This year we have number of brailling students sitting NAPLAN: Year 3-3, Year 5-6, Year 7-4, Year 9-6.

SVRC's catalogue of book titles is slowly edging towards 10,000! Excitedly, we are on schedule to reach the fantastic target of 10,000 before the end of this year! Our students can access this rich and extensive catalogue of books to support their reading both at school and home.

Recent projects have included:

* UEB Chinese Guidelines – being launched at the 2024 Round Table Conference
* 3-D prints to support understanding of tactile graphics
* Preparing for the SVRC Ozzie Dots Learning in WA

We continue to create 3-D printed kits and the catalogue is available on our website which is constantly evolving as visiting teachers and school staff submit new requests for their students. SVRC staff are still actively involved with the global ANZAGG Group which is a design and development of 3D printing.

The Visiting Teacher Service (VTS) Community of Practice (CoP) continues to thrive with three sessions offered per term via ZOOM. The CoP continues to be well attended and all presentations are recorded. Any documentation is uploaded onto our VTS Digital Hub for future reference. Term 1 2024 topics are: VCAA VCE Special Provision, Quantum – Orcam, Ballyland App and SPEVI.

# Annual Braille Report from VisAbility 2024

VisAbility's Braille Service operates as a part of the Accessible Information Service (AIS). We provide braille transcription and tactile graphics to individuals (clients and non-clients) and to organisations. From time to time we also respond to requests from the community for information about braille and how to provide access to written and visual information.

We continue to receive government funding through DSS's Print Disability Services Program (PDSP). This enables us to provide braille conversions to braille-readers of all ages Australia-wide. This is free to those who don't receive any other government funding. (It also is applied to other non-braille accessible conversions completed by other members of the AIS).

Our two braille production specialists, Samantha Harratt and Leone Carroll (both of whom work part-time) have produced over 5000 pages of braille in the past 12 months. This has included Uni and TAFE lecture notes including Maths, braille music, braille calendars, songbooks, festival programs, business cards, novels, braille games, novels and short stories for our braille classes, client requested novels and non-fiction, recipes and menus. Less than 1% of our converted documents were provided electronically as brf.

We enjoy providing assistance with tactile images and have produced more than 20 tactile floor plans and tactile images to accompany braille texts last year. At this stage our tactiles are produced mainly using PIAF.

We have had a number of exciting discussions with authors of children's books who are keen to make their books accessible for young braille readers.

The VisAbility Library services include access to braille books. Many of our older braille books are currently in general brf format. More recent transcriptions are being converted to braille e-book formatting. Most of our braille is embossed on demand, some is returned to us and held for future use. We have about 20 titles in embossed braille on our shelves. The AIS are members of the Accessible Books Consortium (ABC) to facilitate sharing of resources.

Our three volunteer transcribers continue to work remotely. They transcribe novels and non-fiction books to be uploaded to our library service as well as assisting with certain other requests.

We can be contacted at braille@visability.com.au

# ABA Report for NextSense

2023-24 has been an eventful year for NextSense. Staff and students at our North Rocks site prepared for a move to new premises. Due to unforeseen delays, the move did not happen on schedule and, at the time of writing, we are close to setting a new moving date.

## Accessible Information Service

Our Accessible Information Service had a successful year producing educational material in braille, e-text and large print for students in independent schools across the country. We also produced external examination materials, tactile diagrams and dual media for early readers. We are in the process of developing multi-format resource packs for students of all ages.

## UEB Online Competency Examinations

NextSense is pleased to announce the launch of four online competency examinations in Unified English Braille: UEB Literary, UEB Introductory Mathematics, UEB Advanced Mathematics, and UEB Extension Mathematics. The exams have been developed in response to requests from UEB Online subscribers for a pathway to braille competency certification for study and employment purposes.

In the tradition of the UEB Online training programs, the exams are fully accessible, self-paced, and may be completed at any time of the year from any location. The content of each exam follows the content taught in the corresponding UEB Online training programs. An administration fee of AUD70.00 is charged by NextSense for each competency exam. Candidates will require a PC or laptop and internet connection to register via the UEB Online website.

<https://uebonline.org/>

## NextSense Institute CPE Update

NextSense continues to be a leader in the area of continuing professional education in vision impairment. Below is a list of past and present events and courses in our CPE calendar. If you would like further information, please visit our CPE page at <https://www.nextsense.org.au/professional-education/scheduled-courses>

### 2023 Highlights

* VISCON 2023: 145 in-person and 45 online attendees in a hybrid format came together to hear from national and international teachers and academics.
* Qld Braille Progressions: 20 in-person and 15 online attendees in a hybrid format came together to learn from Alison Jones and Christine Casey from Education Queensland.
* Blind and Low Vision Masterclass Series: Post-School Transition to Higher Education & Employment for Students with Visual Impairments...All things considered: 50 online attendees joined Dr Karen Wolffe to consider this fascinating topic.

### Coming up in 2024

* The CVI practice framework: An approach for working with children who have cerebral visual impairment in an education or habilitation/rehabilitation context with Dr Nicola McDowell
* Braille Music Introductory Course: This introductory course into Music Braille is designed to give vision support teachers an overview of music transcription.
* Exploring Multisensory Communication for Blind, Low Vision and Diverse Needs Inclusion: This 3 day event provides a range of workshops for teachers, therapists, families and students.
* Let's Get Thinking! Executive Functions, Divergent Thinking, and TVI Influence through Instruction and Graphic Literacy for Students with Visual Impairments: These two days will focus on understanding the thinking skills of students, and how we can support our students with VI to engage with and understand visual information in the classroom.
* Blind and Low Vision Masterclass Series: Still negotiating with Richard Orme to provide a tech-based series!

## NextSense Institute Podcast

We are back after a hiatus talking about advocacy. Hear from legends such as Chris Edwards, Robyn McKenzie, Ben Clare, Elise Lonsdale and Michael Corrigan.

# NSW Department of Education Vision Education 2023/2024 update

## Student support

More than 800 students who are blind or have low vision are enrolled in NSW public schools. The department provides:

* 148.1 FTE positions for Itinerant Support Teachers Vision (ISTV) across 25 itinerant teams
* 1 class for students who are Deafblind
* 1 class for students who are Blind or visually impaired

Students across NSW public schools use a variety of alternate formats, informed by their personalised learning and support plan, developed in collaboration with the student and their families and carers. These alternate formats provide access to the curriculum and support learning.

Early Intervention services and post school transition planning in NSW public schools is a student centred, school based collaborative process. The department provides a wide range of resources to support these services.

The department has developed the Inclusive Practice hub with the purpose of providing strategies to support students with disability, including students who are blind or have low vision. The hub includes evidence-based practices, best practice tips, curriculum considerations and other resources for teachers.

## Braille and Large Print Services

The NSW Department of Education has a Braille and Large Print Service, currently supporting the development of resources in alternate formats for over 450 students across NSW public schools.

## Training pathways

For 2024, the Department is offering an Inclusive Education scholarship, the scholarship supports investigations into innovation, exemplary practice, evidence-based practices, and professional development that supports the learning and wellbeing of students with disability and additional needs.

Scholars are sponsored up to $15,000 towards their degree and offered a permanent teaching position, for temporary and casual teachers, upon successful completion of studies. Scholars must successfully complete a practicum.

## Opportunities

* We are interested in the experience of other jurisdictions to share and implement innovative responses.
* Collaboration resources developed by the DoE NDIS team, to support our work with external agencies.
* Streamlining the Access Request process for students with sensory disability.

# Vision Australia Braille Report to ABA, March 2024

In the last 12 months the Vision Australia Transcription team have produced over 100,000 braille pages and 800 tactile diagrams.

Notable braille jobs include information and ballot papers for various elections, NDIS materials, popular sporting fixtures, festival guides, menus, business cards, student materials and exams, library books, council materials such as bin labels, various museum and gallery information, and pieces for musical theatre.

The transcription team continue to grow their range of tactile products using the UV Printer, 3D printer and laser cutter. We have worked with the QLD Eye Institute to produce tactile artworks for the Last Seen exhibition, the Art Gallery of NSW for their Archibald and Kandinsky exhibitions, and the National Museum of Australia to produce tactile maps of their exhibitions. We continue to provide bespoke tactile items for individual clients, including board games, photos, educational tools and resources and lots and lots of tactile maps.

In Library news, as of February 1, 2024, the library holds in its collection 7,076 braille titles, 764 print braille titles, 5,724 music braille titles and 1039 Feelix kits. In total there are 13,564 braille titles in the collection.

Between 28/2/23 and 31/1/24 the library catalogued 136 braille titles, 21 print braille titles, 265 music braille pieces and 151 Feelix kits. 24 of the braille titles were for children and young adult level reading. The majority of the braille titles were acquired in response to suggestions for the collection made by library members. Others were from the Miles Franklin Award list and continuations of popular series.

99% of the braille children's and young adult collection is now in Unified English Braille. Work continues to replace often borrowed and enduring titles such as the Harry Potter series with UEB versions.

The LEGO braille collection now has 85 kits available for loan and is very popular with our young members.

The small collection of uncontracted braille for adults has increased to 35 titles. Titles are chosen from the most popular genres such as mystery and romance, to have the broadest appeal.

Our braille resources continue to receive great feedback, including the following from avid users:

'Client says she is very happy with her books. She loves to read and says it has helped her to improve her reading skills and has also helped to lessen the loneliness and sadness she feels when she can get lost in a story. The client asked our librarians for some tips on how to slow down her reading as she reads the books so fast and then has to wait for the next book to arrive.'

'The Braille Library is an absolutely wonderful service that has been patient, understanding, and catered to my very detailed and frequent requests in a timely and convenient manner. If I ever make requests for new books, different books, or comment that I did not like a certain book, adjustments made to my preferences are made immediately and I get to read all of the stuff I like to read.

I have a very large braille library personal collection but the ease of use and extremely high level of service provided by the braille library and library team members makes the experience enjoyable and I love always having something great to read.'

# SPEVI and ABA

May 2023: Frances Gentle represented SPEVI Inc at the AGM of the Australian Braille Authority during the Round Table Conference in Sydney. At this meeting, Ben Clare was elected as member of the ABA Executive, and Melissa Fanshawe re-elected.

## SPEVI supported Survey LEGO Braille Bricks

LEGO Braille Bricks were recently introduced in Australia through Vision Australia. In April 2023 SPEVI circulated a survey to Australian practitioners, on behalf of John Ravenscroft, Professor of Childhood Visual Impairment at the University of Edinburgh. The purpose of the study is to understand the impact of using LEGO Braille Bricks with children with significant visual impairment in relation to braille literacy, physical skills, creative skills, and social-emotional learning skills.

## SPEVI Maths Facebook

SPEVI Facebook page, moderated by Pranitha Moodley and Melissa Fanshawe and administered by Charlie Roberts, entitled '[Educators supporting students with V.I. in Maths'](https://www.facebook.com/groups/249692019429833/). The Facebook group Educators supporting students with V.I. in Maths continues to grow and has more than 200 members. This group is private and was started 3 years ago for teachers, support staff and parents to connect, collaborate and learn from each other. It is a SPEVI promoted page that was started for Maths discussions, to post questions and offer ideas of support for students with vision impairment. Charlie Roberts has continued to keep the discussions around calculators and software operations using screen readers and braille displays active and he continues to offer the EduVis 2023 Pat Roberts Accessible Calculator Benefit bursary to students with a vision impairment.

## SPEVI Position Statement on Braille

Following concerns about a lack of understanding in governments and education departments about the importance of expert, quality braille education, raised by the membership, the SPEVI Inc Committee of Management is delighted that Jo Minnis from SASSVI has taken the lead of a working group that is developing a SPEVI Statement around Braille Literacy.

## Celebrating recognition of Ben Clare's contributions

We have the honour to share the news that Ben Clare, SPEVI Inc's Vice-President and Secretary, this past year received two prestigious awards.

On 23 September 2023 Ben was announced as 2023 recipient of the coveted Blind Citizens Australia (BCA) David Blyth Award. Ben was recognised by BCA for his significant contribution and more than 20 years of dedication to improving the lives of people who are blind or have low vision.

On 3 December 2023, International Day of People with Disability (IDPWD), Ben was awarded the prestigious Lesley Hall Award for Lifetime Achievement in the 2023 Australian National Awards for Disability Leadership.

"The Lesley Hall Award for Lifetime Achievement (is) awarded to an individual who has shown commitment to the disability rights movement and worked over time to achieve significant outcomes for disabled people.
Ben has worked for over 20 years throughout Australia & the Pacific. He worked and volunteered to teach children braille literacy and how to use computers with JAWS and NVDA. Ben advocates for and provides advice on disability inclusion and inclusive education to government bodies" (source: Disability Leadership Institute).

# SA School and Services for Vision Impaired Accessible Format Production 2023/2024 Report for the Australian Braille Authority

2023/2024 has been another busy time for AFP.

At the beginning of Term 2, two of our AFP team went to Sydney for the Round Table on Information Access for People with Print Disabilities 2023 Conference. This was my first visit to the conference in a team leader capacity and representing SASSVI. The responsibility was a bit daunting. I joined the ABA Executive committee which is fascinating and I am enjoying learning so much.

The braille music training and development mornings with Lucy Mortimer, who is a braille music expert, continued this year. Members of AFP and the wider SASSVI community attended these sessions which are hugely important for learning and standardising braille music methodology. We are starting to write this up as a comprehensive document for future reference and to help with training.

At the end of Term 2 we sadly said goodbye to Alice and wished her well with her new adventures in Alice Springs.

At the beginning of term 4, we welcomed Dan Birkin who is very keen and picking up braille and formatting skills at breakneck speed.

Our method of producing electronic files for braille users especially for year 11 and 12 students has been revised and recorded. This ensures that the most suitable file type and formatting is used when creating a document for the student to use on their device of choice.

This year, for our high school students, we transcribed 5 SACE exams, 3 Braille and 2 Large Print. To date we have only translated braille exams but from this year the SACE team asked us to do the large print as well, which is very good news for our low vision students.

A large portion of our work at the moment consists of creating braille and large print readers for our younger students. The library has invested in a new set of decodable readers and we are very busy creating large print versions for our beginner and younger readers.

I have implemented a strategic plan for AFP to go to SASSVI leadership and the SA Department of Education (which will help with placing us in their system). This outlines our aims for the year, the direction we are going in and succession planning. Along with this I am implementing a strong focus on documenting our processes and methodology, this will help us maintain consistency in all our work. This will also help train future team members and with succession planning.

By the end of 2023 we had created 211 textbooks and novels and 392 worksheets to help our students with their learning across the state.

We are a cohesive and highly skilled team, who, with improvements in technology and programs are giving better access for low vision and blind students to the educational information they need to study at the same level as their sighted peers.

Janine Land, South Australian School and Services for Vision Impaired

# Queensland Department of Education Braille Report

Statewide vision Impairment Services, part of the Queensland department of Education, offer a range of supports including braille technology, alternative format textbooks, accessible learning materials and braille-related advice and support to schools and teachers throughout the state of Queensland.

Highlights from the past year include:

* Delivery of online and in-person professional development workshops on topics including: the Queensland Braille Learning Progression, basics of the braille code, teaching early braille reading, inclusion of braille users in mathematics, production of accessible documents, production of tactile graphics, production and design of tactile books for young learners, Duxbury software and the use of refreshable braille displays
* Publishing of the Queensland Braille Contraction songs which assist in the memorisation of groupsigns and other contractions within the Unified English Braille code
* The launch of phase 1 of the Blindness and Vision Impairment Toolkit: an online resource which provides a starting point for teachers to learn about vision impairment, specific eye conditions, and appropriate adjustments to support students to access and engage in learning
* The inaugural SWEL (skills and wellbeing for excellence in learning) camp which was held over 3 days in August and attended by 9 junior high school students from across the state who had opportunity to receive specialist training in braille technology, braille and tactile mathematics, screen reading software, tactile map reading and a range of fun and social activities which incorporated braille.
* Drafting of a resource to facilitate accessible teaching of mathematics for students who are blind or have low vision, especially for students who use braille
* Publishing of two braille literacy teaching programs: I Can Do Braille (covering the alphabet and alphabetic wordsigns) and Hands on Literacy (focused on high frequency contractions for early readers)
* Facilitation of Braille days, for clusters of braille-using students in specific geographic areas, in conjunction with local advisory visiting teachers (blindness and vision impairment) and school-based staff
* Visits to schools in every region of the state to provide training and advice related to braille teaching, production or technology.
* Production of 25,613 pages of braille across a range of subjects and codes including advanced mathematics, braille music and Japanese to support the learning of Queensland students.
* Total of 1,418 braille books and 12 new tactile book/kit titles produced.

For further information or to access our freely available Blindness and Low Vision Toolkit, braille songs, teaching programs and other resources visit:

<https://education.qld.gov.au/students/students-with-disability/supports-for-students-with-disability/blindness-and-vision-impairment/supports-at-school-for-students-with-vision-impairment>

# DOTTED BEATS ORGANISATION REPORT 2024

## Dotted Beats Background:

Founder/Director Lee Strickland created Dotted Beats Pty Ltd in January 2021 in Brisbane to help meet the demand for specialist music support working with clients who have Blindness, Low Vision, or Deafblindness.

### Services offered May 2023 – May 2024:

Dotted Beats (DB) directly supports 16 clients, 13 of whom are blind, 2 who have low vision and 1 who is deafblind. The services range from braille music theory lessons, instrument and vocal lessons, deafblind communication development, accessible music software lessons, communication and early braille literacy support through music, post-school learning support within TAFE and university, employment skills and work experience opportunities within the music industry. Last year DB started Band Jams for young adults who want to join a band and aspire to professionally perform. Two bands have been formed, As Am I and Clear Vision who have both received multiple paid gigs in the last year. DB plans to start monthly band jams for older adults later in the year to provide better access to music, a sense of community and shared musical creativity for this cohort. This service will be open to both long-term braille users and for those who have lost vision later in life.

Currently two blind adults work under the banner of DB providing digital music composition lessons. It is the aim of DB to employ more staff from the community later in the year to help run two one-day programs designed for students transitioning from senior school and those who are recently post-school. These programs will support the continued learning of braille literacy, numeracy, technology skills and employment skills within the music and arts industry.

## Variety Braille Music Camp 2024

The Variety Braille Music Camp is planned and presented by Dotted Beats Pty Ltd. This is the third year the camp has been running and is held at St Joseph's College Nudgee, Boondall in Brisbane. The camp ran from 9th to the 13th April this year. Lee approached Variety in 2021 to present the idea of a music camp for both children and adults in the blind community to support the exposure to and learning of braille music theory, accessible music computer programs, musical creativity and collaboration, performance experience, self-advocacy and life-skills for children and adults in the community as well as help train teachers of students.

This year, in addition to Braille Music Theory lessons, campers had the choice of participating in Reaper, Braille Music Editor, Garage Band or Logic computer workshops where they learnt how to use keyboard shortcuts and accessible midi keyboards to compose, edit and record music.

Campers also had the choice of four music workshops: Introduction to Audio Engineering, Guitar Ensemble, Percussion workshop and a Beatboxing workshop. There were also Band Steams where campers could choose to participate in either the RnB Band, Gospel Ensemble, Musical Theatre/Concert Band, Pop Rock Band or the World Fusion Band.

There were 32 students and 20 adults who attended the camp from every State and Territory around Australia. The ratio of teachers and workshop providers was made up of 14 teachers who are blind and 9 who are sighted. In addition to the daily program, camp also had student lead group discussion time to talk about "what is working/what is not and what can we as educators do better?" as well as a choice of attending a disco night or Sound Healing Workshop. The Saturday matinee concert was another success with campers getting to present what they had learnt in their music and band workshops over the three days.

Dotted Beats would like to acknowledge and thank Variety the Children's Charity Queensland for making this camp possible along with all the teachers and volunteers who provide their time and expertise. There would be no camp if it weren't for the teachers!

# Chinese (Mandarin) Braille and UEB

The **Australian Braille Authority Guidelines for Foreign Language Materials** are a series of documents providing advice on how to apply the UEB rules for the transcription of foreign language material.

These guidelines are available for free download from the [ABA foreign languages webpage](https://brailleaustralia.org/unified-english-braille/languages/) <<https://brailleaustralia.org/unified-english-braille/languages>/> and currently include:

* French
* German
* Italian
* Japanese
* Latin
* Spanish

During Melbourne's great COVID lockdowns of 2020 and 2021, staff of the Statewide Vision Resource Centre determined that, as many primary schools offered Chinese (Mandarin) as their mandated foreign language, "Chinese and UEB Guidelines" would be a helpful addition to the existing collection of downloadables on the ABA website.

After reaching out to the Transcriber community, we formed a working party that included two Braille Transcribers who are native speakers of Chinese, and a small number of other well-qualified and experienced Braille Transcribers from New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria.

Meeting via Zoom during 2021 to 2022, we developed the first draft of "Chinese and UEB", which staff of the Statewide Vision Resource Centre (SVRC) continued to work on during 2023 and 2024.

The team included:

* Doreen Liew, Sonali Marathe – NextSense
* Zhi Jin, Emma Hall, Sarah Kelly, Deb Lewis – Statewide Vision Resource Centre (Victoria)
* Kathy Riessen – South Australian School and Services for Vision Impaired, former UEB Code Maintenance Committee Chair

Since then, the draft copy of "Chinese (Mandarin) braille and UEB" has been reviewed using refreshable braille display, screen-reader, and print; it has travelled to Taiwan, and returned with a nod.

These guidelines have been a labour of love and a source of great joy for the members of our working party, and we look forward to sharing the document with our community via the ABA website.

I'd like to acknowledge and thank the team that I had the privilege to work with on these guidelines.

**Deb Lewis
Transcription Manager, Statewide Vision Resource Centre**

# BANZAT report to the Australian Braille Authority

With leadership from BLENNZ, BANZAT supported The Braille Challenge during the year. Fifty-four ākonga (students) in the age range from preschool to 21 agreed with their resource teachers vision personal Braille targets, most of which were achieved. Appropriate prizes were given to ākonga for their achievements.

Over the last few months Blind Low Vision NZ (member organisation) and Blind Low Vision Education Network NZ have worked closely to ensure the smooth transition of production of educational materials from Blind Low Vision NZ to Blind Low Vision Education Network NZ

In January 2023 another "retreat" for adult users of Music Braille was held at BLENNZ. Musicians, many of whom are involved in community choirs, gathered to perform a range of choral works sung from Braille scores.

Maria Stevens, Mary Schnackenberg and Clive Lansink serve on the Executive Committee of ICEB (the International Council on English Braille). Maria is the Public Relations Officer and Mary edits the ICEB Newsletter.

Clive Lansink chairs the Technical Committee of ICEB which has responsibility for updating the Guidelines for Technical Materials.

BANZAT is hosting the 8th General Assembly of ICEB which will be held from 25-30 May 2024 in Auckland.

One candidate completed the Trans-Tasman Certificate of Proficiency in UEB in the 2023 year.

Following a successful bid from our fundraiser, we received a grant from the New Zealand Lottery Grant Board to run a training course for Braille producers. At the time of writing this report the course will shortly commence and we look forward to sharing outcomes in our next report.

**Maria Stevens
Chair BANZAT**

# International Council on English Braille (ICEB)

ICEB consists of seven member countries: Australia, Canada, new Zealand, Ireland, South Africa, US and UK. Each month, our President Judy Dixon holds meetings of the executive via zoom to progress work and report on country activities relating to braille. I have been the representative for Australia for the past four years and thoroughly enjoyed the connection with braille enthusiasts across the globe.

The most active committee of ICEB is the UEB Code Maintenance Committee which Jodie Doolan will report on separately.

In May we will hold the eighth General Assembly in Auckland New Zealand, and it is exciting that we have an ICEB event close to home. It would be wonderful to see Australia host a general assembly soon as it is coming up to our turn, not having held one since 2008.

Each term the assembly passes resolutions on braille related topics. In 2020 the eight topics were:

* UEB Support in Digital Braille Tools: making sure braille codes are updated to UEB
* Availability of Braille during Times of National and International Crises
* Affirming the Importance of Braille for Adults and Older Adults with Acquired Visual Impairment
* Preserving Music Braille Presently Available Only as Hardcopy: digitising braille music
* Documenting Shorthand Braille Codes in an Online Resource
* The Marrakesh Treaty
* The World Braille Council: revitalising this organisation
* Updating the New International Manual of Braille Music Notation

ICEB welcomes those who are interested in this work to join committees as observers and participate in the discussions. Please contact ABA if you are interested, as this is Australia's connection to ICEB.

To hear about the progress of the resolutions and more braille related information, please tune in to the ICEB General Assembly from May 25-30. You can keep abreast of ICEB activities by visiting [www.iceb.org](http://www.iceb.org) following ICEB on social media, or subscribing to the one-way ICEB Announce list: iceb-announce+subscribe@groups.io

# ICEB Code Maintenance Committee

The Code Maintenance Committee (CMC) is led by the Code Maintenance Officer. This committee has the important job of reviewing and updating UEB rules so that our code continues to meet the needs of braille readers as language usage evolves.

At the beginning of 2023, Kathy Riessen announced her decision to resign from the Code Maintenance Officer position. This follows from a very productive period with a series of significant Rulebook updates delivered in 2022. We are very grateful to Kathy for her outstanding leadership and the time she has devoted to the role.

Matthew Horspool from the United Kingdom is the newly appointed Code Maintenance Officer. He is the Braille Subject Lead at UK Association for Accessible Formats (UKAAF) and General Manager at the Braillists Foundation. You may well know him from his excellent livestream coverage of the 2020 ICEB General Assembly and the 2022 ICEB Midterm Executive Committee meeting.

Currently there are 15 Australian Observers on the CMC and Jodie Doolan is the Australian representative.

## CMC Activities

The first meeting of the CMC under Matthew's leadership was a strategic one. It was a joint meeting with the ICEB Executive and considered questions such as: To what extent should UEB rules be influenced by reading science research? Discussion was centred around research that relates to the following charge.

* CM-24: Review rules 10.10 Preference and 10.11 Bridging to clarify contraction rules for prefixes and suffixes in general and also specifically relating to chemical, medical and technical nomenclature.

The second meeting of 2023 was to set priorities for the CMC in the lead up to the Eighth General Assembly in Auckland. It is planned for a new edition of the Rulebook to be ready for release at this upcoming assembly. As a minimum it was suggested that the new Rulebook will:

* incorporate all of the updates published on the ICEB website,
* include an index compiled by Phyllis Landon, a former CMC chair, and
* provide braille examples in Unicode.

CMC discussions since this meeting have largely addressed minor Rulebook corrections associated with the approved updates. There has also been discussion on expanding Appendix 2: Word List to confirm contraction rules with some difficult examples (CM-15); and to possibly include symbol construction rules as an appendix to a future edition of the Rulebook (CM-Q).

# ICEB Technical Committee

The UEB Technical Committee, chaired by Clive Lansink from New Zealand, is responsible for updating the Guidelines for Technical Material (GTM). Currently there are 22 Australian Observers on this committee and Jodie Doolan is the Australian representative.

At the 2022 Midterm Executive Committee meeting there was lively discussion during the Technical Committee session with many perspectives shared on a number of priority areas.

In 2023, Clive opened discussions on two of the Technical Committee's priority areas:

## Grade 1 indicator use

* UKAAF's Proposal to ICEB on Choice and Placement of Grade 1 Indicators for technical material was distributed to listserv members.
* Incorporating comments by Australian members, the proposal was updated to allow students to deviate from the guidelines, particularly if the number of grade 1 indicators is not known when they begin to write.
* There have been extensive discussions on the proposal and numerous braille examples shared. A summary of the proposed guidance is given below:
1. For each symbols-sequence, allow one grade 1 symbol indicator, or use a grade 1 word indicator if more than one grade 1 symbol indicator is required.
2. If the symbols-sequence contains words, allow two grade 1 symbol indicators where doing so will result in the words appearing in their usual contracted form.
3. However, use a grade 1 passage indicator (with grade 1 terminator) if the entire expression contains three or more symbols-sequences which require either a grade 1 symbol or grade 1 word indicator.

Note that point 3 above has not been agreed upon. It was proposed by Jodie Doolan along with some more clearly defined passage definitions for the Rulebook.

## Function names and spacing

Background: refer GTM 9.3, "Where the function name is preceded or followed by a letter, a space may be needed, to remove ambiguity as to where the function name begins and ends."

* James Bowden suggested always writing the "sin" function uncontracted to avoid confusion with s to the power of.
* While the consistent presentation of function names as either contracted or uncontracted is appealing, Josie Howse raised the point that making an exception for "sin" introduces confusion about when and where to apply grade 1 mode.

# Australian Braille Authority

## International Council on English Braille Technology Committee Report, 2024

A meeting of the ICEB Technology Group was held on 20 July 2023 where several topics were tabled, outlined as follows:

## Update on the eBraille project

A summary of the EBraille project was presented at the meeting. The working committee have quarterly goals which are being met. The goal was to have the first specification released by the end of 2023.

EBRF is an international braille file that brings a lot of benefits from an EPUB file to braille, including markup, links for navigation, and tactual graphics. It is dynamic but can also be used for static braille production with a single or multi line braille display.

It will conform to the size of the display that you have.

### Acronym: GRIN:

Graphics reflowing (of text across displays); internationalisation; navigation.

The EBraille file uses Unicode which is international versus a BRF file which is often ASCII. There are forty international organisations on the project including APH, James from RNIB, representatives from BANA, National Braille Association, Viewplus, Duxbury, HumanWare, NILS in Canada, etc.

There will be a converter to translate older file types (BRF) into EBraille files.

Additionally there will be ways to downgrade EBraille to a BRF file.

### Liblouis questions

These were initially raised at the ICEB Mid-term meeting in 2022:

1. Discussion re spaced digits:
If you have two separate numbers on the same line, LibLouis will include a dot 5 and make both into 1 numeric string.
The proposal is to include dot 5 only if it is a no-break space character, (unicode 00a0)
This would bring LibLouis more into line with what Duxbury does, and hopefully we would encounter the spaced digits only when we actually want them.
2. Query: When backtranslating, typing a dot 3 for an apostrophe, what should it backtranslate to?
Currently LibLouis produces a mixture of Unicode 0027 (apostrophe) and 2019 (right close quote).
The consensus is that we definitely want an apostrophe in this instance.
3. ICEB Resolution 1 2022
Follow up with manufacturers re LibLouis updating and maintaining, making sure latest translation engine is used, etc.
Further discussion on follow up letter to tech manufacturers.

## 2024

In February, James received a request from Duxbury Systems for suggestions for improvements and new features for DBT, and asked the group at large for comment.

Forthcoming suggestions included refinement of braille input with JAWS when using braille keyboards, as well as notifications for passing the beginning of new pages. Also suggested was the ability to import T-page and P-page numbers when using the BRF importer.

**LibLouis**
In March 2024, LibLouis 3.29.0 was released.

Noteworthy changes include many improvements for UEB, better support for Belarusian and Ukrainian literary braille, a major upgrade for Turkish and miscellaneous enhancements for Kannada, Danish, Dutch, Esperanto and Malay. There is also a new table for classical Greek for Spanish braille readers.

Changes specific to UEB are as follows:

### Updates to UEB Contracted thanks to Anthony Tibbs:

* Final letter groupsigns will not be used immediately following capital indicators (e.g. when the first letter of the groupsign is capitalized, or the groupsign follows a capitalized passage) per UEB Rule 10.8.2

### Updates to UEB thanks to James Bowden:

* Back translating braille dot 3 now results in the ordinary apostrophe U+0027 rather than U+2019
* Dot 5, used for "spaced digits" is only applied if a no-break space U+00a0 is used in the input. It fixes an issue with British postcodes which should be treated as two separate items. It also means that if someone wants spaced digits, numbers have to be joined together with no-break spaces deliberately.