

**A DETAILED REPORT ON THE FIELD TRIP TO THE NATIONAL
LIBRARY FOR THE BLIND, STOCKPORT, ENGLAND, U.K.
23RD JUNE TO 13TH JULY 2005.**

By

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Leaving Nigeria on Monday 20TH June, 2005, I was met by John Bush, Chairman, ANWAB U.K., at Heathrow Airport, London. Mr. And Mrs. Bush accommodated me for two nights.

The following day, I participated in an informal meeting of the ANWAB UK committee with the following persons in attendance: Messrs. John Bush, Solomon Odeleye, Rodney Little and John Simpson, Mrs. Simpson and Mrs. Prest. I gave a brief account of the work I do in the library, the students I teach and also spoke generally about the staff of ANWAB Nigeria.

On Wednesday the 22nd of June, John gave me an estimated daily allowance of fifteen pounds for my transport to and fro NLB, Lunch and other miscellaneous expenditure and I left for Stockport by train. I arrived Stockport by late afternoon and headed straight for the Oakfield Lodge Guest House, at Marple which had earlier been arranged for me. The following day, Miss Loraine, the proprietress of the guest house, kindly got her son to drive me to the National Library for the Blind (NLB) and show me the closest point to get on and off the bus. There, I was given a name tag for easy identification. Liz, a member of the NLB staff attached to me, spent the next two days showing me around the various departments of the library and introducing me to other staff. A timetable of my daily schedule was prepared.

On Monday the 27th of June, I started my morning at the Electronic Services Department where newspapers and magazines are produced on the website for readers. They help readers with the use of JAWS, the speech software that enables blind people to access the computer and also send out information on visual impairment. Staff here say that they find it easier to produce dictionaries and encyclopaedia using electronic medium rather than Braille because of the size. I observed here that the Braille books on the shelves were not displayed on the website, which I consider as a disadvantage to people who do not know how to read and write Braille and cannot afford the software in order to gain access to the website. The explanation to this was that if they did, it would give access to people who were not their users, but that they intend putting the books on the digital Access Information System (DAISY) for every one who wished to listen.

The latter part of the afternoon was spent at the Learners Department where I was told about the various programmes to choose from at the umbrella conference.

On Wednesday the 29th of June, I went into the embossing department. The first two embossers I saw there, the Percy and the Fred embossers, were said to cost 130,000 (one hundred and thirty thousand) pounds each. Each of these embossers produces an average volume in 3 minutes unlike the Index Everest which does the same work in 50 minutes. I was shown the Stitching machine which staples embossed magazines, the Punching machine which is used to punch produced volumes by pressing a pedal with your foot and also the Spiral machine which does the spiral binding. I was shown the Index Everest embosser which here is used to produce children's books and labels for books. I was also in the scanning room where books are scanned and edited before production.

Later in the day, I went to the department called the Learners' Project. Here, I was told the various ways that visually impaired people learn to read. One of these methods is through Braille which we are all used to but teaching is done on the Internet rather than having people come into the library. Another method is by Moon which is preferred by adults especially who were used to print reading before they got blind and probably find Braille tedious. One other method used for teaching the blind to read at the NLB is through the use of the Para-Braille. This is a system used to help blind people moving from grade one to grade two Braille. Here grade two is written at the top of every page while grade one is at the bottom of every page. If the reader is not sure of what he read at the top of the page, he or she would refer to the grade one Braille at the bottom of the Braille page. I was also at the DAISY department. There is not much difference between this department and the Electronic Services department, except that the Electronic Services Department produces newspapers and magazines while the DAISY production produces books on the Library shelves. This system is also very useful for those who are not Braille literate because it gives them equal opportunity with those who are Braille literate.

My next 3 days were spent in Manchester for the umbrella library conference from 30th June to 2nd July. At the conference, various speeches were presented on the importance of a library, the role of a librarian, types of libraries, publishing etc. There were exhibitions on published books, software & companies that deal with libraries, movement of libraries, computers, etc. We also interacted with various publishers. I had a day off after the Conference and spent Sunday 3rd and Monday 4th in London with friends.

I resumed back at the NLB on Tuesday the 5th of July where I spent the whole day at the Bibliographic Service Department which is also a part of the Library and Information Services Directorate. This Department receives phone calls from readers on a daily bases and ensures that readers get books requested for. It is this department that looks after the books on library shelves and makes sure that they are in good condition, i.e., not torn, old or worn-out. They also deal with postage of books at the post-room. This is a large room where books come in and go out. When the books come in, they scan the back before putting them on the shelves

and those going out too go through the same process making it easier to know if requested books are in or out on loan. This Department also deals with cataloguing and stock keeping.

I spent the following morning, Wednesday, 6th July, at the Marketing Department where I learnt about the marketing of NLB books. This Department is also concerned with publicity and fund raising. The Electronic Service Department is also involved in marketing which it does through the Internet. In the afternoon, I was in the gateway project. The gateway project is a project that was set-up by all the chief librarians of public libraries in England and another organisation called "Share the vision" which is a combination of all the voluntary organisations that provide reading materials for visually impaired people. This provides a help desk for public libraries to enable people phone in and make enquiries on people with visually impairment if other public libraries cannot help. Another motive for the Gateway Services Project is to have a unified way of making sure that all the public libraries work more closely. For instance, with the Gateway Project, you do not need to register in more than 1 public library to be able to borrow books from other public libraries. They also help to provide training materials for public libraries to help their staff know better how to help a visually impaired person in the library.

The morning of Thursday, 7th July, was spent at the Reveal Web office. Reveal Web is a catalogue of titles which was set-up for easy accessibility of titles. It holds details of over 10,000 titles in various formats, including, large print, electronic, Braille and audio. It covers everything from Harry Potter to a History of house appliances and there is always something for every reader no matter the age and interest. Reveal Web will also show you which organisation has the books you are interested in and how to contact them. If you want to find materials quickly, easily and independently, Reveal Web has been designed with ease of use putting in mind both visually impaired and the sighted user. Reveal Web Works with assistive technology and is a simple way to find a specific title or browse for a subject. The book jacket information which is a summary found in every book is attached in Reveal Web to help choose the right book you want.

In the afternoon, I went to the Readers Development Department. Here, as the name implies, they help their readers to develop their reading skills and try to stop them from reading narrowly. They are also after the welfare of there readers in terms of there reading interest and make sure they do not run out of books to read. They make personal bookshelves for each of their readers according to their interest and send a list of titles to each person. So as soon as a reader has finished with a book, the Development Services Department looks through the personal bookshelf of the reader and sends the next book on the person's list.

On Friday, 8th of July, I went with some members of NLB to visit and attend a seminar at the Manchester central library, which has a unit for the visually

impaired known as the Visually Impaired Department. This unit is on the 2nd floor of the Library in Saint Peters' square with 4 members of staff. The Central Library is open from Monday to Saturday. The objectives of the V.I.P. Unit are:

To provide a wide range of equipment and services to enable the visually impaired enjoy the benefits of Manchester's comprehensive library services which include computers with Internet access, reading aids, training and a wide range of accessible information.

To ensure that all computers used by visually impaired persons (V.I.P.) have access to the Internet and Microsoft word applications. They also have a software called Supernova which is used to enlarge or convert text into speech. They also offer CCTV for magnification and variable colour contrasts as well as Kurzweil 1.000 and Kurzweil reading edge to convert print into synthetic speech.

To give training on the use of any of the computer equipment or reading aids to the visually impaired. Training is offered on a 1 to 1 bases.

The unit provides public information in accessible formats and a collection of information on visual impairment issues. There is access to the newspaper enterprises through the Internet site which offers access to a range of publications such as the daily news papers and weekly magazines. We also learnt that people living within the city of Manchester could join the Poster Cassettes Service which enables them to receive spoken words (taps) by post free-off charge. After the seminar, people generally chatted and looked through the V.I.P. unit until the end of the day.

On Monday 11th July, I was at the Cataloguing Department. Here, every item of information held at the NLB for members of the library is recorded to there own bibliographic standard (Reveal Web Bibliographic Cataloguing Standard). This means that bibliographic information is kept for every Braille book, audiocassettes, CDs, Large Print, Moon and Para-Braille, etc. This catalogue information is stored on the computer on a catalogue database. The cataloguing standard used is basically MARC 21 (An Internationally Recognised Standard) that has been adjusted to suit the NLB's needs. The classification system used is the Dewey decimal system.

Basically, the Marc 21 standard uses numbered fields for designated content. For example, the title field is No. 245. This standard is quite comprehensive with its field numbers ranging from 001-999. Obviously, it is not necessary to use all fields for a record, only a small proportion of fields from the standard will be needed. The information most commonly recorded about an item of our stock would include: ISBN: cataloguing sources code, dewey nos., author, title, edition of item, publishing details, sources (name of no.), Reveal, age range, original version note subject headings and general headings. Extra information added, if available, might

include sequel information, details of award given to the book, a list of contents and much more.

The bibliographic data of new item of stock is taken from many on-line sources. Cataloguers at NLB mainly get there data from the British National Library which updates a CD-ROM monthly that contains all there stock in bibliographic form. Other sources of data are National American & Canadian data bases (on-line) and the International book find on-line. NLB pays for all these sources. Once the bibliographic data is downloaded or copy and pasted, NLB cataloguers adjust the data to Reveal Web standard.

I visited the Fund Razing Department on Tuesday, 12th July. This department is split into three sub-departments.

1. Marketing: This deals with awareness campaign & publicity.
2. Donor Development: This deals with raising of funds from individuals which is always done by post and keeps a funds raising data.
3. Fund-Raising: This is a source of fund raising from charitable foundations, lottery appeals, corporal donations and welfare individuals. They also receive project grants from the government.

The financial year for instance starts in April and the target for this year is Two million pounds [2,000,000.00] In the first four Months, they raised over a quarter of a million. One of the ways they raise funs is by pilling-up their work into projects so that if, for instance, someone gives assistance, he or she would know what the money is used for. They also illustrate using case studies, i.e., some of their readers would talk on how they have been assisted and these are attached to the appeal proposal sent out. One other way of raising funds is through the community. It might be a Church, a School or other organizations that would invite NLB for a programme at which the library would be represented by one or more persons from the Fund Raising Department. The representatives would give information to the gathering on NLB's work at the end of which the community concerned would raise funds.

Later in the afternoon, I went to the Operations and Development Department. Books are transcribed here into Braille for the library. The department also sources for new developments in technology that can be useful to the library. They transcribe not only books, but also newsletters, magazines, book lists etc. They also transcribe college prospectuses and newsletters for the community. This is done not only in Braille, but also in large print and on audiotapes, etc if requested for. The department has a scanner that scans a book in five minutes. To get work done, the department seeks the services of volunteers & prisoners. For instance, NLB has over fifty volunteers.

In conclusion, the purpose of this field trip was to expose me to the advanced methods of keeping a library. I did learn a variety of things including ways of dealing with customers who use the library directly or indirectly. I learnt about the different methods in which visually impaired persons access information that is not solely dependent on Braille. I learnt about the different technical and electronic ways of keeping data in relation to a library. It is interesting to note the great level of public awareness that has been generated by the NLB regarding the needs of visually impaired people in the community.

Regrettably, these benefits enjoyed by NLB users cannot be extended to their Nigerian counterparts. Factors responsible for this in Nigeria include lack of commitment, sufficient awareness, sophisticated technology, lack of dedication and very low income level of people in Nigeria.

I must admit that the trip was extremely worthwhile as it afforded me the opportunity to learn that there other ways of doing things. What is important is finding the necessary supportive services that can enable blind people to make progress. It is my hope to be able to bring to bear the knowledge that I have gained in my work at ANWAB. Rome was not built in a day and it will require a lot of funding in order to bring ANWAB to the status of any organisations for the blind in the U.K. or America. I appeal to any one going through this report to come to the aid of ANWAB and blind Nigerians in general. If given the opportunities like our British counterparts, I am sure that we can all succeed and make a great difference to the lives of blind people in Nigeria.

I want to use this opportunity to express my profound gratitude to the Ulverscroft Foundation and especially Mrs. Joyce Sumner for undertaking to sponsor this trip. I look forward to further opportunities for greater exposure for other colleagues of mine. My sincere gratitude also goes to John bush, the Chairman of ANWAB UK and the management of ANWAB Nigeria for considering me worthy to be nominated for this project. May Almighty God continue to guide and bless you as you tirelessly help the blind in my country, Nigeria.