

PRESS RELEASE



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The Right to Read reception will be held on 2 March 2005 in the Milling Area at the National Assembly for Wales between 12.45 to 1.45pm.

The event will be hosted by Catherine Thomas AM with guest speaker, best selling author, Iris Gower. The Charters will be handed to Jane Hutt, AM, Business Minister and Minister for Children.

People with sight problems denied the Right to Read

One hundred and forty five thousand people in Wales (three million people in the UK) are being denied the right to read. New figures show that a staggering 96 per cent of books are never published in formats that people with sight problems or print reading disabilities can read like large print, audio or braille¹.

The Right to Read reception on 2 March, organised by RNIB Cymru², will highlight the shocking lack of accessible information and raise awareness of the need for more books to be made available. Campaign partners RNIB Cymru, the National Library for

the Blind (NLB) and the National Association of Local Societies for the Visually Impaired (NALSVI) have collected signatures over 2,200 signatures from across Wales in support of the campaign. The signatures will be handed to Jane Hutt, Business Minister and Minister for Children.

Joyce Chatterton, Director RNIB Cymru said: “People with sight problems can and want to read, but face a book famine. There has been a decline in the proportion of books being published in different formats for people who can't read standard print. The already scandalous situation is even worse for Welsh and ethnic minority languages with a minuscule proportion of published titles available in accessible formats.”

Andrea Gordon, an English Graduate from Swansea, has been blind since birth and loves reading. Andrea says “A lack of access to books has had a big impact on my professional development and my social interaction with other people. The hardest thing for me was not being able to read to my daughter when she a little girl. People who can't read standard print often don't even know where to begin and give up at the first hurdle. If I want a particular book I would not expect it to be available and sometimes may have to wait for months or even a year to get it in a format I can read.”

Andrea continued: “It's so basic, all I want is the same access as everyone else.”

Best selling author, Iris Gower, who is supporting the campaign and will be speaking at the Right to Read reception told us:

“I want my books to reach everyone. The Right to Read Campaign emphasises that reading should not be a privilege with books provided by voluntary organisations like RNIB Talking Books but a standard right for all. I was shocked to learn that less than 5% of information is available in accessible format – think of the audience of 3 million people in the UK that are being missed 95% of the time!”

The campaign is calling on government, publishers and authors to work in partnership so that more books can be made available in accessible formats. Over half of all Welsh MPs have signed an Early Day Motion in support of the campaign.

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For further information, interviews and photo opportunities, please contact Kate Hughes or Ceri Jackson on 029 2045 0440 or mobiles 07753 799922 or 07946 872935.

Notes to Editors

1. “Written Off”, November 2004, RNIB Cymru. For copies of the report, please contact the RNIB Cymru on 029 2044 9577. The report is based on research commissioned by RNIB on behalf of the Right to Read Alliance for the start of Right to Read Week 2004 (15-21 November). It was conducted by the Library and Information Statistics Unit at Loughborough University (Lockyer,S, Creaser,C, Davies,J Eric, Availability of Accessible Publications, November 2004, Library and Information Statistics Unit, Loughborough University.)
2. RNIB is the leading charity working in the UK offering practical support, advice and information for anyone with sight loss.

RNIB Cymru represents in Wales who cannot read standard newsprint, even with corrective lenses, through campaigning, support and services. Our pioneering work helps anyone with a sight problem – not just with Braille, Talking Books and computer training but also with imaginative and practical solutions to everyday challenges. Call the RNIB Helpline on 0845 766 9999 or visit www.rnib.org.uk

The report also reveals that certain interest groups are particularly badly served in terms of book choice. For example, there is almost no chance of getting hold of cookery, gardening or sport books in accessible formats. Only 1 per cent of cookery books are available in braille while a paltry 0.4 per cent of gardening books are available in large print .

3. The Right to Read Campaign was first launched in 2002, to tackle the shortage of books available to blind and partially sighted people and those with print reading disabilities. The Right to Read Alliance comprises: British Dyslexia Association, Calibre Cassette Library, ClearVision, Confederation of Transcribed Information Services (COTIS), LOOK (the National Federation of Families with Visually Impaired Children), National Association of Local Societies for Visually Impaired People (NALSVI), National Blind Children's Society, National Federation of the Blind, National League of the Blind and Disabled, National Library for the Blind (NLB), Royal National Institute of the Blind (RNIB), Scottish Braille Press, Scottish National Federation for the Welfare of the Blind, Share the Vision, Talking Newspaper Association of the UK (TNAUK), Torch Trust for the Blind, UK Association of Braille Producers.
4. The RNIB Talking Book Service is an audio lending library for people with sight problems. It consists of over 13,000 professionally recorded, unabridged audio titles. Over 30,000 books are sent to members across the UK each month.