

ability

Accessible IT at work

Issue 79 Autumn 2010



Easier-to-use mobiles

- What's new in training
- Smarter switches
- Apple's game changer
- Rethink at Access to Work



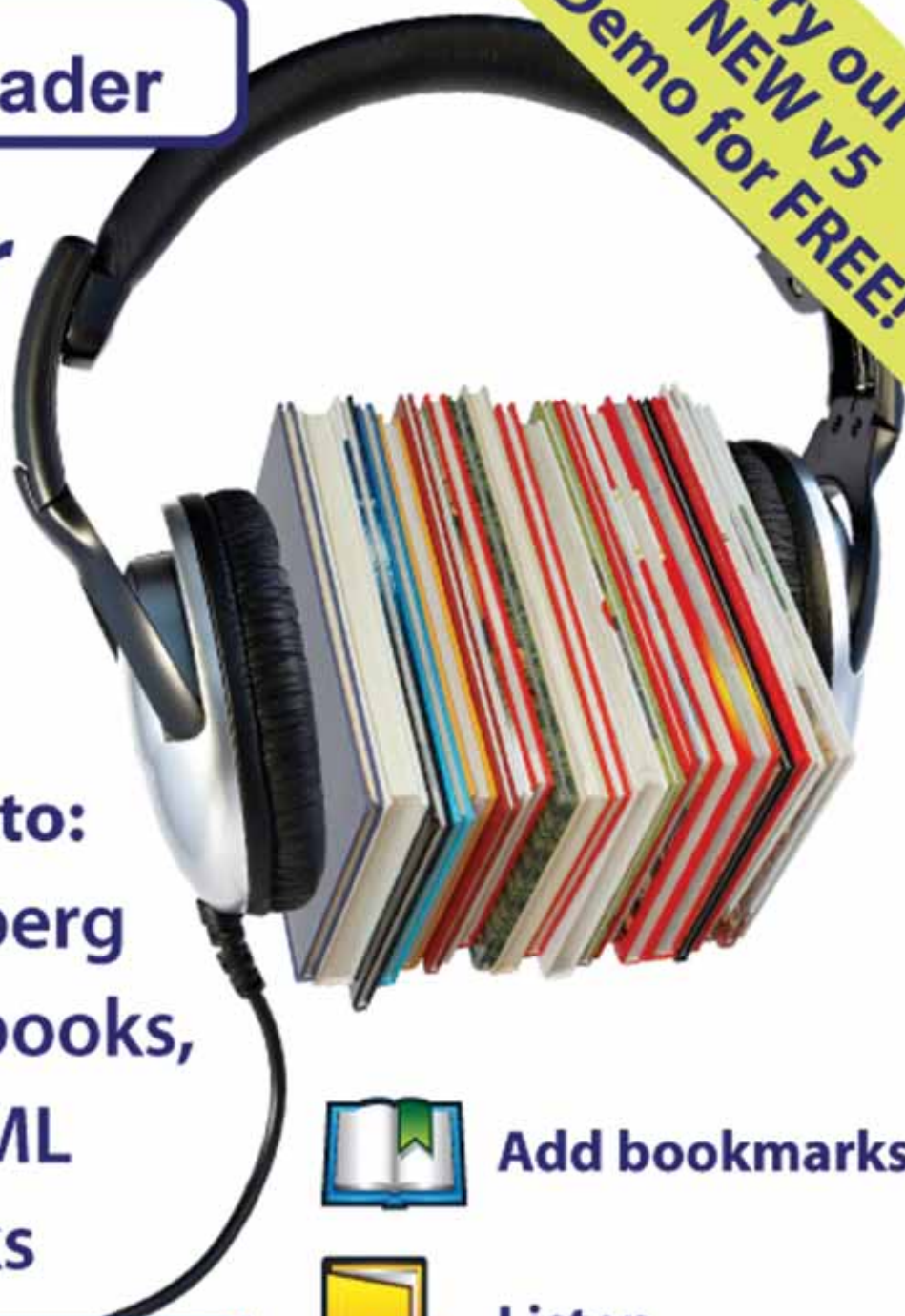
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Contacts

Editor and Publisher

John Lamb
john.lamb@abilitymagazine.org.uk

Production Editor

Mandie Beckley
mandie.beckley@abilitymagazine.org.uk

Circulation Manager

Jeremy Mumford
jeremy@abilitymagazine.org.uk

Contributors

Alistair Brown
Kevin Carey
Georgina Firth
Dan Jellinek
Ron Kirby
Dave Sawdon

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John Lamb Media Ltd
Pellingbrook House
Lewes Road
Scaynes Hill
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In a cost cutting climate regulation saves money now, says Kevin Carey



John Lamb asks whether government cuts will undermine accessibility

Tipping the balance

On October 1 the Equality Act replaced the Disability Discrimination Act and eight other pieces of legislation to do with discrimination. The change is likely to make it easier for disabled people to claim reasonable adjustments such as an accessible website from companies selling goods and services.

It will no longer be necessary to show that the company's practice makes it 'impossible or unreasonably difficult' to access the service. The test will be whether the practice places the disabled person at a substantial disadvantage.

In addition, the Act says that organisations cannot wait until a disabled person wants to use their services, but must think in advance about what people with a range of impairments might reasonably need.

It should also be more straightforward to claim technology to use at work.

The Equality Act makes clear that an organisation required to make a reasonable adjustment is not entitled to ask a disabled person to pay any of the costs of complying with the Act.

Although the new law should make it easier to bring cases to a tribunal, the Government wants people to make use of alternative dispute resolution as a quicker and cheaper means of resolving disputes than the courts.

That dispute resolution may be required sooner rather than later, because on the same day as the Act came in, the Department for Work and Pensions made radical changes to Access to Work, the scheme that funds employees' assistive technology.

The number of products that will be funded by Access to Work was dramatically cut as part of a review of the office equipment that employers might be reasonably expected to pay for.

Desktop computers, voice activation software and ergonomic chairs and desks are among scores of pieces of equipment that will no longer be paid for by the Government in a move that, in effect, redraws the definition of a reasonable adjustment.

It is true there has been no change to the Access to Work budget yet, although it is hard to believe that the cut backs won't produce massive savings.

And it is certainly not unreasonable to expect employers to supply things such as voice recognition software that are cheaply available or come free with a computer system.

On the other hand the new regime may reduce the employment prospects of disabled people by making it more expensive to employ them. It may deter companies from hiring disabled people altogether and lead to accusations of discrimination.

It is a delicate balancing act: weighing organisations' obligations against what it is reasonable for the state to pay.

Wherever the arguments come to rest, it is vital that those who need assistive technology should get it regardless of who foots the bill. ■

Why UK web standard got the green light

Your last edition of *Ability* (issue 78, Summer 2010) was interesting as always, but it contained an important error.

The article about the forthcoming BS8878 standard for web accessibility says: "Work on an earlier version was stopped at the beginning of 2009 when the European Standards Agency (CEN) halted development of web standards in a bid to get common ones across Europe.

"The ban was lifted after it became obvious that member states would not be able to 'harmonise' their standards."

But this was not the reason.

The standardisation rules state that a member may not continue the development of a national standard for an area if a European standard is under development for the same area – this makes very good sense as everyone benefits from harmonisation.

In this case CEN was concerned that BS8878 may have conflicted with the output of standards mandate 376 or may have introduced unique national requirements in the UK (ie something other than WCAG 2.0).

Once it was understood that BS8878 was only providing guidance and that it referenced WCAG 2.0 for the technical requirements, it became clear that the so-called standstill procedure did not apply and the work could continue.

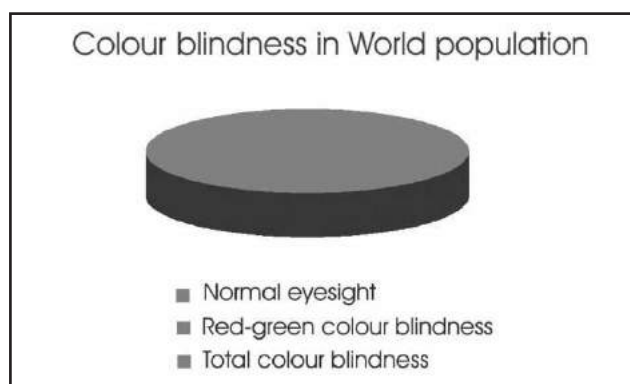
Just about everyone working in this area believes that harmonisation of the technical requirements for web accessibility is essential and is achievable.

It would be good if you could correct the error because "it became obvious that member states would not be able to 'harmonise' their standards" is a very negative and potentially damaging message – and it's wrong.

Dave Sawdon

*Technical Relations Manager – North
IBM Executive Staff / Technical Relations
Europe*

Colour blindness in World population



One way of getting the accessibility message across

Volunteer is out of work

I have been a member of IT Can Help and RNIB for over two-and-a-half years now, but have had little work related to visiting clients and helping the blind or partially sighted with their computer problems.

I have the time but no work through these two organizations so I am appealing to you to let your readers know about these services.

Alistair Brown

You have done us proud

The article on assisted living (Collaboration is the key to assisted living, *Ability* issue 78, p13) is an excellent feature. It reads really well. Many thanks from me and all those involved as volunteers in the project. You have done us proud.

Experts working across the field of disabled and older people have called for a national overall coherent plan to develop fully integrated systems and services which meet their needs.

Without such a plan this fragmentary situation would worsen year by year for the

10 million Britons over the age of 65 [of whom five million are disabled] and for the seven million disabled people of working age.

Ron Kirby

Phoneability

Sunseekers' wheelchair

Here's an idea: why aren't there wheelchairs in place at resorts that have the

following:

- Tank tracks, so much easier to get across the sand
- Inflatable sides with secure self righting additions so that these chairs can wheel directly into the sea or pool
- Parasol slot or cotton covers so there's protection from the sun
- An alarm button or whistle just in case
- Get rid of the horrid sweaty plastic seat and replace with cool hard wearing mesh that's breezier in hotter climates?

On honeymoon this year in the Maldives I saw one woman in a wheelchair. I followed up the idea that then formed with a few people with similar confines and the suggestion went down a storm. They're now waiting for something to happen.

So, we wrote to all the wheelchair manufacturers and have only had one 'courteous' reply. The mission seems somewhat dead now. Perhaps you can help.

We want no money or fame from this, just a better deal for those confined to wheelchairs. It seems so unfair that they miss out on nice holidays or even just feeling less of a burden to friends and family that they could go on holiday with, purely because they cannot walk.

There is money to be tapped in the disability market for holiday companies and they seem to be overlooking this. The holiday companies could purchase a couple of these chairs and place them at resorts for use by visitors.

Georgina Firth

BrainstormHour

HAVE YOUR SAY

Ability welcomes letters and articles on all issues relating to IT for disabled people in work, education and daily life.

Contributions can be sent to the editor, John Lamb, at john.lamb@abilitymagazine.org.uk

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Access to Work cuts list of approved technology

Access to Work, the £80m-a-year scheme that provides technology and other help to disabled workers, has drastically cut the range of products it will fund.

JobcentrePlus, the organisation that administers Access to Work, has sent letters to assessors detailing items that will no longer be covered by grants.

Desktop computers, voice activation software and ergonomic chairs and desks are among equipment that will no longer be paid for by the government, but will become the responsibility of employers to provide.

"Clearly this is an extensive list and will remove from grant eligibility a huge proportion of equipment that we fund currently," says one letter from a JobCentrePlus manager.

"This forms part of a current and ongoing reshaping of the programme and there will be other changes to come."

The current, overall budget for Access to Work will not be affected by the change, says Pat Mangan, national Access to Work manager. Savings will be used to increase the numbers of people that can be helped.

"This is not about cutting spending," Mangan told *Ability*. "All we are doing is reviewing our services. Our list of standard equipment has not been changed for five years. There is nothing on the list that we

think employers shouldn't provide."

However, some who work with disabled people are concerned that the change may damage their employment prospects.

"The Access to Work scheme has always been focused on helping those with a disability into or to stay in work," says Nigel Lewis, chief executive of AbilityNet.

"I worry that this change to Access to Work funding, making the employer purchase the equipment for a disabled person, will deter employers from recruiting disabled people who, with a small adjustment to their computer environment, could be just as productive as any other individual."

The decision to withdraw support for voice activation or voice recognition software and voice recorders has also been questioned by organisations representing dyslexics.

"We are not changing the rules. We are not saying we won't support dyslexics," said Mangan. "Voice activation software costs £64 per package and in most cases is already available on computer." She pointed out that there were procedures for challenging individual decisions.

The new policy, unveiled ahead of the chancellor's cuts announcement, follows the Labour government's expansion of Access to Work with an extra £8m targeted



Nigel Lewis, AbilityNet's chief executive

at people with cognitive disabilities and mental health problems.

Items no longer paid for by Access to Work are:

- Analogue hearing aids
- Chairs (except for specialist items)
- Desks/extendors/bridges/desk raisers, armrests, gel rests, drawer pedestals
- Perching stools, footstools
- Backrests/wedges/back friend/cushions/swivel pads
- Desk top computers, printers, scanners, Screens, screen raisers, keyboards and overlays, mice, monitor arms
- Laptops, lapstands
- iPads, iMacs
- Voice activated software, voice recorders
- Internet connections and rentals for home working
- Fax machines, copiers
- All telephony, headphones, mobile phones
- GPS devices/sat navs
- Document holders/writing slopes
- General office equipment such as staplers, hole punches etc. ■

Briefs

BBC unpacks toolkit

The BBC is developing an Accessibility Toolkit that will allow disabled visitors to BBC websites to adjust pages so that they are easier to read. The toolkit has various themes for people with specific conditions such as dyslexia, ADHD and asperger's. The toolkit will be launched in October and the BBC plans to make the technology publicly available to non-profit organisations.

BCS names finalists

Five organisations have reached the finals of the British Computer Society's Digital Inclusion Awards, which will be presented on November 11. They are:

- ITV SignPost: website that features children's stories
- Proctor and Gamble: an accessible website for 750m consumers
- Mobelite: an accessible communication platform
- Digital Outreach: increasing internet use among older people

- Westminster Council: getting Westminster residents online by 2012

UBS backs *Ability*

Investment bank UBS has renewed its support for *Ability* by committing to a further year's sponsorship of the magazine. Over the past year *Ability* has worked with the bank's disAbility Network Steering Committee to help it get a better understanding of what assistive technology is available for disabled employees.

Apple changes the game with iPhone and iPad

by Dan Jellinek, *E-access Bulletin*

Apple's iPhone and iPad devices are "game-changing" in offering built-in accessibility functions for people with disabilities, delegates heard at this year's E-Access '10 conference in London.

Kiran Kaja of the RNIB Digital Accessibility Team told a mobile phone workshop hosted by *Ability* that while accessibility applications are available for other smartphones – such as the 'Eyes Free Shell' for Google's Android phone – the iPhone 3GS is a game-changer because its accessibility features are built in across all its functions.



iPhone stacks up for disabled users

Using the standard touch-screen you can move your fingers along and the phone reads what is underneath them; and if you swipe down with two fingers it reads from that point to the end, Kaja said. A double-tap with three fingers will magnify the screen.

"A lot of people say they can't use a touch-screen, but when I show them this it really changes their perspectives," he said.

"People have started asking why they should pay extra money for accessibility on mainstream devices. So slowly we are seeing changing expectations.

"When Symbian [an operating system for mobile phones] was released in 2000, it was two or three years before assistive technology was developed for it, so phones could be out of date before assistive

technology appears. With the iPhone, I could use it the same day as my sighted friends."

Accessibility features that are built in by the manufacturer are also more stable than added extras like screen-readers running on top of an operating system, Kaja said.

Apple's new 'iPad' table computer – which functions much like a huge iPhone – was also singled out for praise by Robin Spinks, principal manager, Digital Accessibility at RNIB.

The iPad's size meant it was a "revolutionary" improvement for partially-sighted users, who could use it at a normal distance like a more visible smartphone, with applications and the keyboard feature all viewed larger, Spinks said.

Used as an electronic book reader, the iPad can also magnify text, and it featured the same built-in access functions as the iPhone 3GS such as the double-tap with three fingers to magnify the screen, he said. "One of the advantages of Apple's much-criticised 'walled garden' approach is that it can build in accessibility to all functions."

Further accessibility features are likely to be added to smartphones in future that make use of the built-in gyroscopes and accelerometers found in most modern phones, said Kiran Kaja. "They are mainly used by games developers now, but could also have uses for people with disabilities," he said.

Early examples include the free 'Dasher' app that allows the user to tilt and move the phone with one hand to select items, a feature of use to many people with impaired mobility. ■

<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/dasher/id315473092?mt=8>

Briefs

DDA study shows firms are slow to change

The Department for Work and Pensions has published a study of changes that organisations made in response to the Disability Discrimination Act. Only 32% had improved their communications such as making their websites more accessible, providing special phone systems or making print available in large print or Braille. Many smaller employers did not understand a key phrase in the Act – reasonable adjustment – which refers to adjustments that it is reasonable for organisations to make to accommodate disabled people.

http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/report_abstracts/rr_abstracts/rra_685.asp

RNIB introduces iSite

The RNIB has installed an accessible intranet called iSite for use by its blind and sighted staff. Developed by a company called Content and Code, iSite provides a central hub for sharing information. It provides discussion forums and a corporate directory. The system can display very small and very large resolution screens and has pre-defined page layouts.

www.rnib.org.uk

Eye tracking ereaders

Researchers at the German Research Centre for Artificial Intelligence (DFKI) have created a tool for electronic books that tracks a user's eye movements and uses them to control the device. Text 2.0 can detect when a reader dwells on a word and triggers voice output, a translation or an image. Developed with eye gaze firm Tobii Technology, the software can also insert a bookmark when a reader looks away or even fade out words when someone is skim reading.

www.tobii.com

Vaizey to unveil action plan

Civil servants in the Department for Business Innovation and Skills were putting the finishing touches to a government e-accessibility action plan as *Ability* went to press.

The plan, due to be unveiled on October 12, is the first of three projects from a Forum composed of organisations involved in e-accessibility and set up by Ed Vaizey, minister for Culture, Communications and Creative Industries, in July.

The Forum's action plan will have five work streams. It will focus on the legal framework surrounding e-accessibility, look at the affordability and availability of assistive technologies, consider how to improve website services, make broadcast content more accessible and promote awareness of e-accessibility.

The second task for the Forum is to help transfer a European Directive on Communications Networks Services into UK law by May next year. The Directive obliges member states to ensure disabled end-users have equivalent access and choice of communication services.

The Forum also has a remit to help business to exploit the opportunities of e-accessibility. At a recent conference called E-Access 2010, Vaizey cited Apple, Microsoft and Google as examples of companies that had designed products that

have accessibility built-in but are also designed for the mainstream.

"Too many people are currently excluded," Vaizey told delegates at the E-Access conference. "I want to see that change. The Government will make sure that we have a clear and supportive regulatory framework that legislates where necessary.

"But legislation can be a blunt instrument. I challenge you to develop new ways of making it easy for those with disabilities to be productive employees, confident consumers and engaged citizens."

The Government sees accessibility as a key plank in its efforts to get more citizens online – a quarter of the population has never been near a browser. Dotcom entrepreneur Martha Lane Fox is spearheading Digital Britain, a campaign to boost the online economy.

She has already ruffled feathers with a challenge to the government to "close down publicly funded websites that consistently fail to meet its own web accessibility guidelines".

Ed Vaizey is looking into the implications of such a move. March 2011 has already been set as the deadline by which all government websites must comply with accessibility standards.

Organisations involved with the Forum



Martha Lane Fox, heading Digital Britain

include OneVoice, a coalition of organisations involved in accessibility, which has submitted its own plans for campaigning, promotion and professionalism.

One member, the British Computer Society, which set up the IT charities AbilityNet and IT Can Help in the 1980s, has now made accessibility a key issue.

The organisation not only plans to use its influence to move the topic higher up the public agenda but is eating its own lunch by making BCS products and services more accessible.

"Our vision is that everyone, whatever their capability, should be able to sit in front of any screen and be confident that they can access all available information and services," says BCS president Elizabeth Sparrow. ■

Visit *Ability's* website

www.abilitymagazine.org.uk for latest news of the e-accessibility plan.

Briefs

Reading skills

Texthelp has launched software to help primary school children improve their reading fluency skills. Fluency Tutor V2 allows children to listen to text, record themselves reading and send the results to a teacher for marking. The software also has quizzes to test a child's understanding of a reading exercise. The latest Key Stage 2 test results reveal that one in five pupils are not

reaching the expected level in English.

www.texthelp.co.uk

Lion King captioned

November will see a special staging of Disney's *The Lion King* musical by Stagertext, a charity that subtitles performances in theatres and arts venues for people with a hearing impairment. The event celebrates 10 years of work by Stagertext, during which time it has captioned over 1500 performances.

www.stagertext.org

Signs of sickness

SignTranslate, a web-based communication tool that allows medical staff in hospitals and GP surgeries communicate with deaf sign language users, has won an award from internet domain names company Nominet. Medical staff can call up live British Sign Language interpreters via webcam. The Nominet award judges praised the project for its good use of technology to address a real need very effectively.

www.signtranslate.com

Games could help stroke survivors communicate

Computer games may help stroke survivors learn how to communicate again.

Motion sensing devices, such as the Nintendo Wii, Microsoft Xbox 360 and Apple's iPad, could be used in the rehabilitation of people who have survived a stroke but have problems speaking.

Therapists try to teach stroke survivors to communicate through gestures that other people can understand, but they can be difficult for patients to learn.

Researchers at City University London are working on a prototype system that could enable people who have aphasia after a stroke to practice gesturing and get feedback on how well they are doing.

A team from the university has been given a £300,000 grant to develop an affordable, computer-based technology to help stroke survivors, who have limited spoken or written output, learn how to 'gesture' independently at home.

Working with the Stroke Association, the team plans to test the prototype with people from 30 of the Stroke Association's



Stroke Clubs in the London area.

"Computer-based treatments have been shown to improve verbal language skills in previous studies, but this is the first time that gestures will be addressed," says Jane Marshall, Professor of Aphasiology at City University London.

"With 45,000 new cases in the UK each year, we hope that our work will help a wider range of aphasic people to regain communication skills." ■

www.city.ac.uk/news/archive/2010/08_aug/190810.html

Freedom reads rivals the riot act

US screen reader company Freedom Scientific flexed its legal muscles with a flurry of lawsuits over the summer.

The company is suing rival GW Micro over alleged patent infringement.

Freedom Scientific, maker of JAWS, claims that a place marker for internet pages displayed in the Internet Explorer and Firefox browsers in GW Micro's Window Eyes version 7 infringes a Freedom Scientific patent.

The move follows legal action last year against another rival, Serotek, about the use of the word freedom to describe a feature in the company's screen reader.

"Freedom Scientific invests more in research and development than any other company in the blindness technology

industry," explains Dr. Lee Hamilton, president of the company.

"Along the way, Freedom Scientific files patents to protect the investment it makes in developing new technologies," Hamilton added.

The company has also bought a suit against the Foundation for Blind Children for using its trademarks without authorisation after it ended a contract with Freedom Scientific.

It also has the US government in its sights, claiming legal fees incurred when the company protested about the way a Veterans Association contract, which Freedom Scientific failed to win, had been handled. ■

www.freedomscientific.com

IT helpers need more customers

Technologists who have volunteered to provide free help to disabled people with computer problems are struggling to find enough customers for their services.

One would-be helper – Alistair Brown – says he has been registered for two-and-a-half years with both RNIB and IT Can Help, but has had little call for his expertise (see Feedback p5). "I have the time, but no work," he says.

In response, IT Can Help, which runs a national network of over 200 volunteers, has launched a campaign of posters, leaflets and advertisements to try and find more people who need assistance.

"I just can't put my finger on why we don't have more clients," says Paul Toms, who has organised the IT Can Help campaign. "I think people may be suspicious that the service is free. Much of the difficulty is getting people to phone in the first place."

"The only way forward is to tell people about IT Can Help as often as possible."

One reason for the low take up may be that volunteers do not have the skills that are required.

One large IT volunteering programme called IT4Communities has found problems matching people, according to one of its founders Gail Bradbrook.

"Sixty per cent of registered volunteers are programmers and they are generally inactive, presumably because the volunteering opportunities of IT4C don't quite fit their skill set," Bradbrook says. ■

help@itcanhelp.org.uk



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Firm looks for testers with autism

Some 60 autistic people in Scotland are to be trained and employed as software testers.

A company called Specialisterne Scotland, a spin off from a Danish project, has been set up in Glasgow to train people in specialised testing work and offer their services to IT companies and organisations that use IT.

Specialisterne plans to create up to 60 new jobs, 75% of which will be for people with an autism spectrum disorder, over the next four years.

The company is operated under licence from Specialist People Foundation in Denmark by CEiS, Scotland's largest social

enterprise development company.

The work – testing software and websites for companies – taps into the characteristics and skills people with autism possess, such as accuracy, precision and attention to detail.

Thorkil Sonne, founder of Specialisterne and the Specialist People Foundation, set up the project in Denmark in 2004 after his son, Lars, was diagnosed with autism at the age of three.

The Danish firm now employs more than 50 people and has a turnover of £1.5 million.

Gerry Higgins, chief executive of CEiS, said: "Specialisterne Scotland has the

potential to change lives for the better by providing mainstream employment at the market rate."

A software tester working for Specialisterne can expect a starting salary of about £20,000, but this could rise to more than £30,000 for testing analysts.

The business has been set up with more than £1.1 million of funding, including £700,000 from the Scottish Government's Scottish Investment Fund. The project has also received £407,000 from the Big Lottery and £30,000 from Glasgow City Council. ■

<http://specialisternescotland.co.uk>

Students struggle to access grant forms

Students have had difficulty applying for the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) this year, say support staff, because application forms for the grant are not available in some accessible formats.

The forms are usually distributed as online forms, in print and in a PDF format but university disability advisors report that they have been unable to get documents in formats such as Word that work with screen readers.

The Student Loans Company (SLC), which administers the DSA, says it is

unable to make the forms available in PDF or Word formats that will work with screen readers because of a lack of time and staff to do the work.

"The reason behind the forms not being understood by the screen reader lies in the authoring software that is used to typeset the form," says David Armstrong, Planning and Distribution Executive at the SLC.

"The software doesn't define the documents background structure/hierarchy. So, when the screen reader attempts to interpret it, it will just read

each block of text but not know how each of the elements laid out on the page are related to each other."

The documents are not available in Word because they have been created using software that cannot produce text in that format.

The SLC says it will be training staff in how to produce accessible PDFs in the autumn.

"We fully believe that our existing provision has adequately anticipated the needs of our disabled customers," Armstrong concludes. ■

Web gets new typefaces

The web will become more readable thanks to a deal brokered by the Worldwide Web Consortium (W3C) with the companies that own the rights to hundreds of typefaces.

The type industry has agreed a Web Open File Format (WOFF 1.0) that will allow web developers to access their typefaces. So far, a lack of standards and availability of licences has restricted

designers to a small number of pre-installed typefaces such as Arial, Verdana and Times New Roman.

Now a large number of other typefaces used in print media will become available through the scheme.

Many of these fonts are easier to read by people who have sight and cognitive impairments. ■

www.w3.org/Fonts/woff-faq

get online week™

Get Online Week, 18-24 October, is aimed at the over 10 million people in the UK who still don't use computers and the internet. There are 3,000 events planned across the UK, with a target of getting 80,000 people online. For further information go to www.getonlineweek.com

Three quarters of Home Access grants are still up for grabs

There are still 8,000 grants available under the £24m Home Access assistive technology programme.

Some 29,000 low income families have been sent letters with information about the 12,000 grants available for computer equipment that disabled pupils can use to study and access the internet at home.

Leading disability charities including AbilityNet, Whizz-Kidz and the National Autistic Society have urged families to apply as soon as possible to be sure of getting a grant.

The assistive technology scheme will end either when the 12,000 mark has been passed or when the money runs out, probably by January 2011.

"It is my belief that this is the biggest assistive technology contract awarded arguably anywhere in the world," says Ian Litterick, (pictured) chairman of iansyst, the company that is procuring the assistive technology.

"The fact that the children have the equipment at home means so many more children are going to have an opportunity for learning."

Successful applicants will receive a laptop, assistive software, hardware, free internet access and support for a year, worth up to £2,000.

Alternative equipment on offer to children with physical or learning difficulties will include switches, touch screens and adapted mice.

Children with a severe learning or literacy difficulties will be offered symbols or picture software to support writing, reading or curriculum access.

The programme will also fund so-

called 'cause and effect' software for improving targeting skills, hand-eye coordination and aiding children with learning difficulties, together with associated access devices.

Children with a visual impairment can obtain specialist hardware and software to access screen content, while sound amplification hardware will be offered to those with a hearing impairment.

The scheme is open to children at state schools in years 3 to 9 who have a Statement of Special Educational Needs, receive a Disability Living Allowance, or whose school can certify they have assistive technology needs. Their parents must be in receipt of at least one from a list of seven possible benefits.

Evaluations of each applicant's needs

are carried out over the phone by a team of trained assessors. The equipment that children may already use at school will be taken into account, although the scheme is not meant to replace technology that should be supplied at school.

The scheme should have started several months ago, but was

delayed when assistive technology suppliers struggled to satisfy government requirements that sensitive personal information should be kept securely.

Application forms can be obtained by phoning 0333 200 1004 or visiting <http://www.homeaccess.org.uk/>.

What is available from Home Access?

SOFTWARE

- **Text to speech software:** for learners who prefer to have pages of text read

out loud.

- **Text prediction:** (similar to 'texting' on a phone) which helps to speed up writing.
- **Mind mapping:** helps children to structure, visualise and classify ideas.
- **Screen magnification:** this enlarges the content on the computer screen and is particularly useful for learners with impaired vision.

HARDWARE

- **Adapted keyboard:** useful for children with sight or physical difficulties. Alternatively, the package could include a compact keyboard for a child with limited movement.
- **Keyboard stickers:** enables visually impaired children to see the keyboard characters more easily.
- **Specially designed mouse:** for children who may find it difficult to hold and move a standard mouse.
- **Assistive technology for children with severe needs**
- **Screen reader software:** provides full speech access to every part of the computer, including documents, menus, dialogue boxes, tables and web pages.
- **Impaired hearing hardware:** provides a direct connection between a learner's hearing aid and a computer by giving them a direct input shoe.
- **Switch access hardware:** useful for learners unable to use a mouse or a keyboard.
- **Touch screen hardware:** useful for learners who can't use a standard keyboard, mouse or trackball.
- **Symbol software:** for children with poor literacy or learning difficulties.
- **Special access methods:** such as mouth-controlled joysticks, a head-controlled mouse or light-operated mouse and keyboard combinations.



The visual basics

Ability visits St Dunstan's to learn how the charity, which was founded nearly 100 years ago, provides for the IT needs of blind service people

From Janis Sharp's office, perched high up on St Dunstan's fourth floor, the view along the Sussex coast to Brighton is spectacular, but it is not one that many of those served by the charity are able to fully appreciate.

Because for more than 60 years St Dunstan's – named after a medieval English cleric – has been helping service people who have lost their sight live as independently as possible.

In well-equipped facilities at Ovingdean, near Brighton, and at Sheffield, dedicated staff nurse injured military personnel, assess their needs, recommend assistive technology and train them how to use it.

Few people stay at the centres permanently. Most attend for short periods of a few weeks while they undergo rehabilitation, pursue their studies or take a vacation.

Sharp, who is IT manager at the centre in Ovingdean, was clearing her desk in preparation for retirement when *Ability* visited her in July.

The scene from her window in the landmark 1930s building is the thing she will miss most about leaving, she says, jokingly, as we talked about her work for the charity.

"IT has just grown and grown and grown," she says. "What I've noticed is that there used to be most interest among the younger ones in creating documents.

"Now it's the older ones wanting to get online. It all began 10 years ago when the BBC started saying 'for more information go to www...'"

She began her career at St Dunstan's teaching typing, a discipline that is obvious in her insistence that keyboard skills are the best way to make effective use of a computer.

She works hard at persuading trainees who attend courses at her centre to master accurate touch typing, arguing that this is the key to computing for blind users: hunt and peck is definitely second best.

"We try to teach touch typing without speech output – people come to know they have made a mistake from the position of their hands – hearing the letters can be misleading: only later do we introduce voice feedback."

There are some 500 computer users among the 3,000 people St Dunstan's supports, many of whom have passed through the hands of Sharp's seven-strong team of trainers.

Some trainees must learn how to use IT for the first time, but the priority for many older people with age-related sight loss and who may already have a computer is to pick up the short cuts they need to continue working online.



Brighton block: St Dunstan's centre at Ovingdean, East Sussex

Not that Sharp has a very high opinion of web accessibility. Pages with too many links and constantly changing layout make using them very difficult. She cites one St Dunstaner who was told

to press a key 128 times to reach the link he wanted.

"We suggest people do shopping by phone, although we do encourage them to write in and report problems they are having with websites," she explains.

Individual training

Training is one-to-one, tailored to each individual and comes with an agreed outcome. Courses typically last a week and are residential.

Trainees start with keyboard skills to help in assessing each person's dexterity and their ability to memorise sequences of commands.

Keyboards are selected and marked up with rubber 'bump-on' stickers that make finding a key easier.

The next step is to introduce specific applications. Most trainees begin with emailing; more popular than word processing these days, says Sharp.

St Dunstan's preferred software is the simplified interface called Guide, the screen reader Hal, and its bigger brother Supernova which combines a screen reader and magnifier with Braille support. Users are also offered instruction in the

Zoomtext magnifier and JAWS screen reader.

"Guide has really taken off as the software of choice as it's just so straightforward. However, the younger ones will outgrow it. The trouble is people start simply but then things begin to become more complicated."

Staff are also able to instruct people in free products such as the Webbie web browser and the Thunder screen reader. "There is no real reason for our selection," says Sharp. "We just don't want to support too many different products."

On the hardware side, St Dunstan's uses off-the-peg equipment; sometimes recycled from other users. CCTV magnifiers, scanners and reading machines are provided on permanent loan. But not computers, which users, other than those who are war blinded, must provide for themselves.

Although Sharp does field enquiries from trainees, most requests for support are passed on to suppliers such as Dolphin and charities such as RNIB.

"We are the first step, we give people equipment and the skills that go with it and then encourage them to find out what's available locally," says Sharp.

However, the IT centre does pass on advice via articles in the St Dunstan's magazine and also hosts a twice-yearly computer club meeting at Ovingdean during which enthusiasts spend two days talking technology.

Many St Dunstaners, as they call themselves, were injured in the line of duty, but increasingly old age is the cause of their vision impairment: over half the charity's beneficiaries are past retirement age.

Originally, St Dunstan's, which was set up in 1913 by newspaper magnet Arthur Pearson, only looked after those injured while serving in the armed forces.

But in 2000 its remit was widened to include all ex-service personnel provided they had lost vision in both eyes.

The change has greatly increased demand for places; so much so that this year St Dunstan's will be opening a third site in Llandudno in Wales.

In a sign of the times, IT will also undergo an overhaul. Computer training is to be integrated with general rehabilitation, recognition of just how important assistive technology is in the lives of St Dunstaners. ■

Training mission

St Dunstaner Stephen Shepherd has an ambition to help train other visually impaired students.

Shepherd (58), who served as a Corporal in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers for nearly 10 years, was a computer novice when he first came to St Dunstan's.

With the help of St Dunstan's IT Department he learnt to touch type and use a computer with audio software. In 2009 he gained nationally recognised IT and computer qualifications to get back into work, having been unemployed since losing his sight as a result of diabetic retinopathy.

After undergoing training at St Dunstan's Steve enrolled on an ITQ Level 2 course at Derby College in April 2009, and used screen reader software to access material for each lesson.

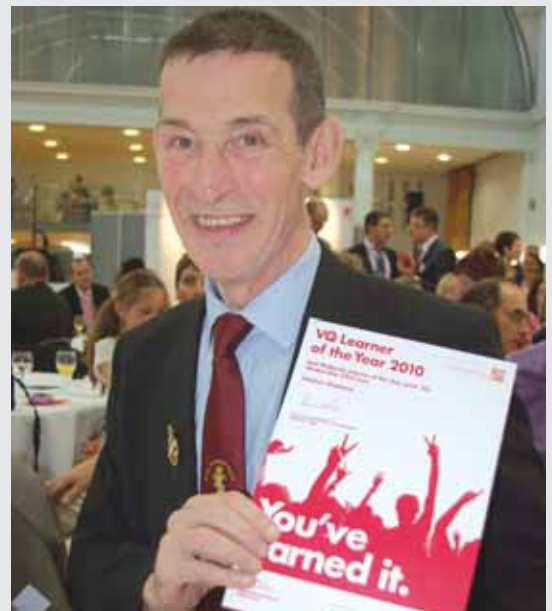
He successfully completed the course two months ahead of schedule. "It just goes to prove that disability need not be a barrier," said Shepherd. "I won't say it was easy and there were barriers but the important thing is to remain positive and find out what help and support is available."

He added that his achievement would not have been possible without the assistance of John Davis, his support worker at Derby College and IT instructors at St Dunstan's for providing him with a breakthrough foundation in computer skills.

He is now enrolling on a further course to achieve an Access to the Blind computer certificate and a Computer Literacy and Information Technology (CLaIT) Plus qualification that will allow him to train others.

Shepherd currently volunteers with partially sighted people and hopes his qualifications will help him find paid employment. "The computer at home is now my lifeline since I lost my sight, as it enables me to better communicate with people," he said.

www.st-dunstans.org.uk



Trainer Stephen Shepherd with his Vocational Qualification

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Training may be a Cinderella service but users are determined to get to the ball. We look at the issues around learning how to use assistive systems and provide some pointers on where to go for instruction



Learning how to change screen magnifier settings

You have installed the program, pressed run and the opening page of the shiny new piece of assistive software hovers tantalisingly in front of you. What next? For many users a frustrating struggle that at best ends in failing to get the most out of the program and at worst can mean a quick stab at the uninstall button.

What's missing is someone who has the knowledge to take a user through the features, an understanding of their disability and the patience to help them practice how to use the program: in other words a trainer.

However, training has always been a Cinderella activity in IT. Organisations pay lip service to training, but when the crunch comes it is clear they regard it as an optional extra, a nice to have that can always be dropped in favour of a bit of 'manual bashing' and learning by trial and error.

That is the thinking of many institutions and employers already under pressure in the downturn to make savings. But according to both trainees and training organisations we spoke to said that is a false economy.

No substitute

There is no substitute for face-to-face training so far as learning a new skill is concerned, according to Margaret Malpas, training director and joint chair of the British Dyslexia Association.

She acknowledges that the recession has had a huge effect on training, with organisations reducing their training staff and cutting the amount of instruction they provide for employees or beneficiaries. "There is no doubt that the cost of training is an issue, but it's a drop in the ocean compared with what the technology costs," asserts Malpas, whose organisation puts on over 500 training events per year.

"It may cost £250 to train an individual, but you can easily get a 25% increase in productivity straightaway."

Disabled users suffer from a triple whammy. First they have to learn about mainstream systems, then the assistive elements that sit on top of them and finally how to use the two together.

Professional trainers emphasise the need to prepare far more complex courses than may be needed by non-disabled users.

Disabled trainees need a number of additional elements in their training. For example, individual coping strategies to help them use

a computer and instruction on how their assistive technology integrates with mainstream products.

"If you are providing someone with a software package, you need to provide the training to go hand in hand with it: it gets them going quicker," says Carl Ward, head of training at Microlink Cilnet. "One of the things I am very keen on is training in context."

Microlink Cilnet, which has 40 trainers on its books, caters for both students and employees and has carried out training at organisations that include Lloyds Banking Group, BT and disability charity Leonard Cheshire.

Many users who may have acquired assistive software through schemes such as Access to Work or the Disabled Students Allowance don't know how to use it. Some have been put off using earlier versions of a product that has since improved.

"So it is a matter of persuading them to have a go," says Ward. "Lots of people have the software but are reluctant to use it."

In one case a vision impaired student had been using Dolphin's SupaNova package, but relied on the mouse and magnification to make it work. "I encouraged her to let go of the mouse and get into the shortcut functions," observes Ward.

Training for many disabled users starts at a young age. The ability to master assistive technology is vital for school children if they are to learn effectively. At New College Worcester, Peter Brynton focuses on technology's role in enabling children to study.

"We have a system that involves teaching them just what they need to get over individual problems rather than give them three months training. Our techniques are more to do with effective study than anything else."

A lot of training is to do with keeping the college's blind students up to date with changing technology. "As soon as you've got your head round one gadget someone has invented another," Brynton points out.

The introduction of Windows 7 meant that pupils had to learn new shortcuts. "We teach children to cope with that rate of change: they have to grin and bear it."

Others involved in training emphasise the need to provide more than just instruction to help users get the most out of technology. "Training also needs to include tailoring of the software to fit the user and business needs allowing integration with bespoke systems,



A student at New College Worcester gets to grips with a BrailleNote

templates and standard documents,” says Andy Tippet, managing director of the Speech Centre.

“In so many cases success is about the ability to provide easy access to their systems, not just loading the assistive software and showing someone what to do ‘out of the box’.”

Proper training is terribly important because disabled people face special barriers, says Adam Hyland of training company Eden Skills, who joined his company after his experiences as a student.

“When the founders of Eden Skills went through university we didn’t get the best out of our technology because most of the training was done by technicians who were not disabled and therefore didn’t relate to a disabled person, so the training was ineffective,” he points out.

Claro Learning, a training company based in the West of England, emphasises the role of assessors in determining who gets what training and how much. “There are a range of different opinions among assessors about the value of training and how much a student needs,” says Jeremy Fox, Claro Learning’s managing director. “Some people think it is critical, others are not so sure. If you send a load of boxes and instructions to a student with dyslexia the system is likely to stay in the box.”

The technology route

When so many programs come with elaborate help features, videos and demonstration routines, increasingly software itself promises to train users. If novices get stuck they can always turn to a forum or Facebook group for advice. However, it is not always so simple: built-in tutorials may not be accessible or particularly well-designed.

The British Computer Association for the Blind (BCAB) has developed its own tutorial CDs for products such as JAWS, Hal, Outlook Express, Internet Explorer, Word and Windows XP. The discs, known as the ‘Get to Grips with’ series cost £20 but are free to members.

In addition, BCAB runs EyeT4All days to encourage blind and partially sighted people to take their first steps with computers and access technologies. Earlier this year the organisation was

commended for its efforts in an awards scheme run by Nominet, which issues URLs.

“Our mission is to promote computing to people with a visual impairment,” explains BCAB’s Steve Plumpton. “I find there are a lot of people who get the software, struggle with it and then give up.

“Training is very important to help people, but it must be affordable. The problem is that professional trainers need to charge £250 per day.”

One way round the cost of training, Plumpton believes, is to make software easier to learn how to use. He welcomes the arrival of simpler software such as the Thunder and NVDA screen readers and the Guide interface.

Online training is also a way of cutting out the cost of face-to-face instruction. Training company Concept Northern has developed an e-learning website called www.concept-live.co.uk to train users with learning difficulties in assistive technology.

The site offers courses in the most popular software for users with dyslexia and vision impairment together with interactive exercises costing around £100 each. Students receive a certificate when they have successfully completed their course.

One option increasingly attractive to cash-strapped customers is remote learning using the free Skype voice over IP (VoIP) service combined with remote control software that allows an instructor to demonstrate software to a trainee and to watch how the trainee gets on.

Online training sessions can be even more face to face using a webcam. Video conferencing allows trainers to talk to students, demonstrate procedures on screen and watch students going through their paces.

Robin Christopherson, of AbilityNet, reports that short training videos of five or 10 minutes are increasingly popular with the IT charity’s clients. “More and more we are asked to create content in bite-size chunks: that is the way training is going,” says Christopherson. “A 45 minute or one hour training video is regarded as too long.”

However, there are many who still believe that face-to-face training is best. “I remain to be convinced [about remote training],” says Fox of Claro Learning. It isn’t necessarily cheaper and is best used for revision,” he says.

In the context of the £20,000 available to students for non-medical help, the £750 to £1,000 cost of training in IT is negligible, Fox maintains. “If you don’t do it, you are wasting government money. You need to put the student in the position in which they not only know how the IT works but are proficient enough to make them inclined to use it.”

Training the professionals

Training care, medical and technology professionals is a key step to improving assistive technology skills overall. Christopherson of AbilityNet points out that with technology changing so quickly it is vital for these professionals to keep up.

BDA Employers' Conference London, 2 November 2010 "Seeing It Differently"

This conference concentrates on visual aspects of dyslexia, new ways to support dyslexic employees and the business case for reasonable adjustments.

Speakers inc: Prof John Stein, Prof Arnold Wilkins, Richard Tennison (BT) and John Fingleton (OFT).

For more information on this and on BDA training courses, see our website www.bdadyslexia.org.uk or book via conference@bdadyslexia.org.uk or tel 0845 251 9004 Ref: Ability

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E-learning Assistive Technology

Concept Live is an online training resource for assistive software. This easy to use yet comprehensive site has been designed by certified trainers for persons with additional support needs. Users can enjoy learning their assistive technology at a time, place and pace that suits them.

With a full host of features to make learning easier www.concept-live.co.uk is ideal for:

Users with a short attention span ←

If a person struggles to keep concentration during training sessions, they can log on at any time and spend however long they want learning online.

Busy users! ←

If a user just doesn't have time to receive enough training, they can use Concept Live to catch up when they can. Each user receives a life time account which they can access whenever they want.

Refresher courses ←

Sometimes, for whatever reason, users forget features of their software. By logging on to Concept Live users can refresh their memory and get more out of their software.

Site Features:

Easy to use

The website is easy to navigate and each course is clearly accessible. Users can easily track their progress so they can carry on where they left off.

Simple to understand

The courses have been designed to be easily understood. By using simple exercises and instructions users are guided through the features of the software.

Interactive tutorials

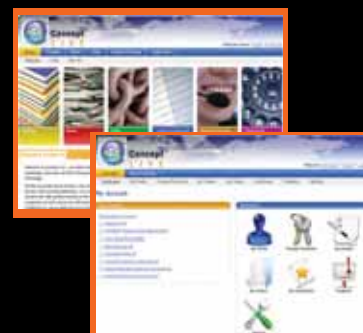
Many of the courses have interactive tutorials designed to simplify the learning of the assistive software and add a bit of fun to the learning process.

Personal notes

Users can keep personal notes in a handy sidebar text area. These notes can be viewed whenever a user logs on. Users can add reminders, things to do or course notes.

Certificate

On completion of a course the user can take a small exam covering various features of the software. After passing this exam the user will receive a certificate of proficiency in the software.



www.concept-live.co.uk | 01355 573173 | info@concept-live.co.uk

"The first hurdle for an occupational therapist or occupational health worker is to know what's out there," he maintains.

"The major area of movement is in the mobile space: devices that can do 95% of what bespoke technology could do five years ago. There is a learning curve that occupational therapists need to climb."

AbilityNet offers courses on hardware, software, mobiles and bespoke devices such as communication aids. But it is not just the latest technology that professionals need to know about.

One of the organisation's more popular courses is called low cost, no cost. It explores free or cheap technology and shows students how to adjust mainstream systems such as Windows.

The number of courses available for professionals is growing, especially in higher education. Middlesex University has just started a two-year master's degree in digital inclusion, the first such course in Europe. Aimed at those already working in the disability field, students will spend their time learning about the social, ethical and legal aspects of digital inclusion and carry out a project at their workplace.

Not to be outdone, Coventry University offers both a foundation degree and master's degree in assistive technology. The

courses are aimed at health and social care workers. The university also offers an online training tool, developed in partnership with the College of Occupational Therapists and the Health Design & Technology Institute.

North of the border, CALL Scotland, based at the University of Edinburgh, trains about 400 teachers and support staff annually. The institution offers some 50 different courses and road shows, run at schools or on site.

One of CALL Scotland's main thrusts is to keep Scottish teachers up to date with the Additional Support for Learning Act in Scotland, which includes a code of practice for supporting disabled pupils. "In these straightened times and with the legal challenge it's really important that students and staff can get access to learning materials," says Sandra O'Neill, CALL Scotland's training services coordinator.

The BCAB, in partnership with the RNIB and the Institute of IT Training (IITT), has developed a trainer certification scheme to raise the standard of access technology training. The scheme, which is administered by RNIB and has produced 50 certified trainers, is soon to become a membership association. ■

TRAINING PROVIDERS

Abilitynet: training for all groups – www.abilitynet.org.uk

Ace Centre Oxford: courses for carers and parents of children with complex needs – www.ace-centre.org.uk

Age UK: various programmes for senior users – www.ageuk.org.uk/

British Computer Association of the Blind: remote training materials – www.bcab.org.uk

British Dyslexia Association: 500 workshops for parents, teachers, tutors and employers – <http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/>

British Healthcare Trades Association: runs BTEC in healthcare and assistive technology course – www.bhta.net

CALL Scotland: training for teachers and support staff www.callscotland.org.uk

Cheltenham Assessment Centre: assistive technology training for students – <http://www.chace.ac.uk/>

Claro Learning: independent learning for students in higher education – www.clarolearning.com

Concept Live: online training resource for assistive technology – <http://www.concept-live.co.uk/>

Dolphin Computer Access: supplier with variety of in house training programmes – www.yourdolphin.com

Enable Ireland: Irish charity that runs national assistive technology courses – <http://www.enableireland.ie/>

Eden Skills: courses for people in schools, colleges, universities and employment – <http://www.edenskills.co.uk>

Hands-Free: face-to-face and remote training for education and employment – <http://www.hands-free.co.uk>

HDTI Coventry: degree level courses in assistive technology – <http://wwwm.coventry.ac.uk>

Institute of IT Training: information about training suppliers – <http://iitt.vbnlive.com>

JISC Techdis: educational advisory service, working in the fields of accessibility and inclusion – www.techdis.ac.uk

Microlink Cilnet: training for students and people in employment – www.microlinkcilnet.com

Middlesex University: MSc in digital inclusion – www.mdx.ac.uk

New College Worcester: residential school for young people who are blind or partially sighted – <http://www.newcollegeworcester.co.uk/>

RNIB: holds list of accredited trainers – www.rnib.org.uk

RNID: textphone training – www.rnid.org.uk

Royal National College for the Blind: further education for blind and partially sighted – www.rncb.ac.uk

Speech Centre: training from basic to advanced level – www.speechcentre.co.uk

Technical Officers Association: runs training programme for technical officers – www.toa.org.uk





U Can Do IT: free training for disabled users – www.ucandoit.org.uk



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Speed diallers

How mobile phones designed for older and disabled people are racing ahead

“Who do you think you are: Stirling Moss?” The police were said to ask when they stopped a speeding motorist.

These days the legendary grand prix driver may move a bit more slowly but he hasn't stopped racing and he hasn't lost a lifetime enthusiasm for technology. Recently he has been trying out mobile phones designed for older users.

“As we get older our calls are just as important as when we were younger,” says Sir Stirling. “I find my mobile phone is essential.”

The 80-year-old talks and texts on an Emporia model most evenings. His handset has large buttons, amplified sound and a high visibility screen. “The ergonomics of many things is not that good but at least the mobile phone is getting better,” he says.

Sir Stirling, whose house is full of gadgets, many of which he designed himself and who sends and receives emails on his home computer, complains that old people are always thought to be stupid. “That's not the case at all,” he says.

Smartphones have captured the headlines with clever applications for disabled people, but many users, particularly older ones, are turning to much simpler handsets.

Specially designed mobiles with features such as emergency alarm buttons, hearing aid compatibility, fall alarms and high-visibility screens capable of displaying large type have taken off in the UK over the past year.

Models are not only better designed but more readily available as mainstream retailers such as Boots, Argos, Carphone Warehouse and phone operator Orange have started distributing them.

Even the *Daily Mail* newspaper recently offered its readers a cut-price big button mobile.

And in the future mobiles aimed at what the industry calls the senior market are likely to play an important part in mobile health applications.

Phones will be equipped with interfaces that gather data on a user's vital signs from sensors and relay them to doctors and health centres.

Simplicity is the watchword in designing phones for older and disabled people.

“Building an easy interface is not just about big buttons, users have to like the product and be able to use it easily,” says Eveline Pupeter-Fellner, chief executive of Austrian phone maker Emporia.

“You have to go to the user and ask them what they want.”

Most of the phones on display at a recent conference called Senior Market Mobile, sported much reduced sets of features: cameras, games and internet access were notable by their absence.

Instead the handsets are designed to overcome disabilities that particularly affect older people such as vision impairment (82% of users) and loss of hearing (29%), as well as problems with gripping and handling (42%).

“Our mission is to enable senior people to continue their life in a free and comfortable way. Older people are a very diverse group with many different requirements,” says Chris Millington, UK managing director of Swedish firm Doro.

Suppliers also pay much more attention to the look of their products and the services that surround them.

Orange, for example, is developing special billing and customer care arrangements for its older customers. Other companies stress the need not to talk down to older or disabled customers or to try and sell to their relatives.

Senior Market Mobile organiser Simon Rockman is convinced mobile phone network operators are missing a trick. Demand for phones may have slowed, but senior users represent an untapped market, he says.

There are over 20m people over 50 in the UK. Not only are they more loyal than ordinary phone users, but many have problems using ordinary phones.

Over three quarters of UK seniors currently have access to a mobile phone, according to research commissioned by Doro.

However, half of them feel intimidated and hesitant about using new consumer technologies. When asked how they actually use their current mobiles, 73% said it was primarily just to make telephone calls. ■

How to phone home: turn to the next page for a comparison of the key features of leading models available on the British market.



COMPARISON OF MARKETING LEADING UK MOBILES

	Price	Handset type	Large buttons	High visibility buttons	High visibility screen	Emergency call button	Hearing aid compatible	Speaker phone	Phone book capacity	Text messages	Fall sensor	High volume ring	High volume earpiece	Standby time and Talk time	Weight
AMPLICON www.ampliconphones.co.uk															
PowerTel M6000	£99.99	bar	•	•	•	Up to 5 nos	M4/T4	•	500 n&n	•	•	Up to 110dB	30db	S/by: 170hrs. T/t: 120mins	100g
PowerTel M4000	£84.99	bar	•	•	•	Up to 5 nos	M3/T3	•	100 n&n	•	•	Up to 100dB	25db	S/by: 240hrs. T/t: 180mins	100g
PowerTel M5010	£69.99	bar	•	•	•	Up to 5 nos	M3/T3	•	250 n&n	•	•	Up to 100dB	23db	S/by: 170hrs. T/t: 120mins	100g
Bea-fon www.bea-fon.com															
St10	£66.95	bar	•	•	•	Up to 5 nos		•	100 n&n	•	•	Up to 60dB	In testing	S/by: 300hrs. T/t: 240mins	80g
S20	£79.95	bar	•	•	•	Up to 5 nos		•	500 n&n	•	•	Up to 95dB	In testing	S/by: 350hrs. T/t: 250mins	85g
S50	£129.95	slider	•	•	•	Up to 4 nos	M3/T3	•	300 n&n	•	•	Up to 100dB	In testing	S/by: 280hrs. T/t: 180mins	120g
Binatone www.binatone telecom.co.uk															
Big Button BB100	£39.99	bar	•	•	•	up to 3 nos	M3	•	500 n&n	•	•	Up to 70dB	35dB	S/by: 200hrs. T/t: 240mins	106g
Big Button BB200	£49.99	bar	•	•	•	Up to 6 nos	M3	•	500 n&n	•	•	Up to 70dB	35dB	S/by: 170hrs. T/t: 240mins	105g
Big Button BB500	£79.99	clamshell	•	•	•	Up to 6 nos	M3	•	500 n&n	•	•	Up to 68dB	35dB	S/by: 150hrs. T/t: 240mins	100g
Doro www.doro.com															
PhoneEasy 332	£90	bar	•	•	•			•	900 n&n	•	•	Up to 83dB	30dB	S/by: 660 hrs. T/t: 240 mins	88g
PhoneEasy 338	£100	bar	•	•	•		T3/M3	•	50 n&n	•	*	Up to 83dB	30dB	S/by: 566 hrs. T/t: 204 mins	97g
PhoneEasy 341	£80	bar	•	•	•			•	300 n&n	•	•	Up to 83dB	30dB	S/by: 566 hrs. T/t: 204 mins	97g
PhoneEasy 345	£115	bar	•	•	•		T3/M3	•	300 n&n	•	•	Up to 83dB	30dB	S/by: 566 hrs. T/t: 204 mins	97g
PhoneEasy 409	£110	clamshell	•	•	•		T3/M4	•	300 n&n	•	•	Up to 83dB	35dB	S/by: 533 hrs. T/t: 192 mins	99g
PhoneEasy 410	£130	clamshell	•	•	•		T3/M4	•	300 n&n s	•	•	Up to 83dB	35dB	S/by: 533 hrs. T/t: 192 mins	99g
HandePlus 326i	£100	bar	•	•	•			•	20 n&n	•	•	Up to 83dB	30dB	S/by: 533 hrs. T/t: 192 mins	111g
HandePlus 334	£115	bar	•	•	•		T3/M3	•		•	•	Up to 83dB	30dB	S/by: 566 hrs. T/t: 204 mins	95g
HandePlus 334 iUP	£140	bar	•	•	•		T3/M3	•		•	•	Up to 83dB	30dB	S/by: 566 hrs. T/t: 204 mins	95g
Emporia www.emporia.at															
Emporia ELEGANCE	£129.99	bar	•	•	•		M3	•	100 n&n	•	•	Up to 85dB	•	S/by: 300hrs. T/t: 240 mins	92g
Emporia LIFEplus	£99.99	slider	•	•	•	Up to 5 nos	M3	•	200 n&n	•	•	Up to 85dB	•	S/by: 250hrs. T/t: 180 mins	138g
Emporia TALKpremium	£79.99	bar	•	•	•		M3	•	100 n&n	•	•	Up to 85dB	•	S/by: 200hrs. T/t: 170 mins	110g
Geemarc www.geemarc.com															
CL 8200	£88.99	bar	•	•	•		T4/M3	•	500 n&n	•	•	Up to 100dB	Up to 25 dB	S/by: 180 hrs. T/t: 150 mins	100g
CL 8300	£88.99	bar	•	•	•			•	40 n&n	•	•	Up to 100dB	Up to 45 dB	S/by: 180 hrs. T/t: 150 mins	120g

* = Receive-only SMS n&n = names and numbers S/by = Standby T/t = Talk time

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- 2 networks in 1 handset
- Handsfree

And many more...

bea-fon

www.beafon.com

info@beafon.com

The Bea-fon handsets are available at:

see hear talk

www.seeheartalk.co.uk



www.matobshop.co.uk

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www.silverphone.co.uk



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Web: www.QEDonline.co.uk

Tel: 023 9258 0600



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sight village

London 2010

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Nearest Underground - High Street Kensington

Tuesday 2nd November 10.00am - 4.30pm

Wednesday 3rd November 10.00am - 4.00pm

For people who are blind or partially sighted, professionals working in the field and employers, QAC Sight Village exhibitions are essential sources of information and hands-on experience with technology, support services and daily living equipment.

Sponsored by:



Sight Village is organised by Queen Alexandra College.
A National College for People with Visual Impairment and/or Other Disabilities.
Raising funds for QAC Registered Charity No. 1065794

www.qacsightvillage.org.uk

At the flick of a switch

Switches are designed to be simple to use, but the technology inside them is getting increasingly complex

Talk about switches and the big, colourful, easy to hit Big Mack button with its ability to record and play back short messages most likely springs to mind.

The Big Mack is one of a family of digital sensory technology products designed to engage learners by providing instant cause and effect.

However, it is just the tip of an increasingly sophisticated iceberg of devices, many of them at the cutting edge of technology, that are designed for people with severe limitations on their ability to move.

Switches come in a huge range of different sizes and shapes, designed to cater for most types of movement, some of them very small indeed.

Most switches are operated by a lever or pressure applied by someone's head or one of their limbs in a single movement. Thumb switches, pneumatic pressure switches, tilt switches, proximity switches and even 'wobble' sticks also exist.

The principal of a switch may be simple – activate on, activate



AbleNet's Impulse switch is operated by electrical activity in the muscles

off – but its power comes from the equipment – wheelchairs, communications aids, phones, computers and environmental controls – that it can operate.

And wireless technology is making it much easier for people to hook up to these gadgets. Not only is it more convenient to set up equipment, but users have much greater freedom in how they position devices. They can even move from room to room without having to disconnect wires.

Short range radio in action

The Impulse Bluetooth switch is just one example of how switch

Why scanning is like a sushi bar

Assistive technology developers have come up with a huge variety of alternatives to the standard keyboard for controlling computers, phones and other electronic devices.

Users can choose from voice recognition, eye gaze systems, head pointers, roller balls and much more. But a significant group of people with particular learning and mobility difficulties cannot use these systems.

They rely on scanning through a list of options and selecting them by means of a switch. Some users can handle several switches at once, which means that they can make selections and initiate actions more quickly.

However, typically a user selects from a list of options that are presented to him or her at a predetermined rate. The options, such as letters, symbols, sounds or functions, can be displayed as a single line, a grid matrix or in other configurations.

"It's a bit like a sushi bar," say David Colvin and Simon Judge in their comprehensive guide *Switch Access to Technology*. "You can't reach all the dishes from where you sit, and you have to wait until the one you want turns

up in front of you."

Each item is highlighted in some way and selected by operating the switch. Visual or audible feedback lets users know that they have made a successful selection. In some systems switches are used to move the highlighting, while others scan automatically.

Selections are made by simply pressing a switch or dwelling on an item. With two switches it is possible to make more complex selections.

The speed at which an automatic system scans items and how long it pauses on each one is vital as is the length of time a user dwells before a selection is made.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

- *Switch Access to Technology* by David Colvin and Simon Judge, published by the Ace Centre www.ace-centre.org.uk
- Royal Hospital for Neuro-Disability site on scanning www.switchscanning.org.uk
- CALL (Communication Aids for Language and Learning) Centre <http://callcentre.education.ed.ac.uk>

makers are exploiting short range radio transmissions. Impulse uses an electrode to measure minute muscle contractions and send them back to a computer, allowing users to control systems with very small movements.

The device, distributed in the UK by Inclusive, gives a person the ability to type and make mouse movements by using any muscle they choose.

"Computer access unencumbered by wires and visual limitations is now possible for persons with the most severe physical limitations, as long as they have even faint muscle control somewhere on their body," says Jen Thalhuber, chief executive of AbleNet, the company that developed Impulse.

The mouth-operated Integra Mouse is the ultimate in low mobility switches. It duplicates all the actions of a mouse by detecting changes in pressure in a user's mouth cavity. It is activated by puffing and sipping on a pipe.

As with many switches the Integra Mouse is usually used in conjunction with an on-screen keyboard. Keyboards displayed on a computer screen allow users to type and scan through the menus of a mainstream program such as Word, carrying out all the actions that can be performed from a physical keyboard, including shortcuts.

Switch driver software allows switches to be used with commonly used application programs including the Microsoft Office suite. Some programs will detect what application is being

used and configure switches appropriately.

Advanced switches have their limitations, however. Bluetooth connections may be fast and convenient, but connections can be dropped and there are also issues with powering up wireless Bluetooth devices.

Equally, systems such as Impulse require careful calibration because users who can only move a few muscles often generate much larger electrical fields when they do so.

Setting the standard

Standards are essential to allowing users to connect switches to devices and to interact with the software on them. Websites, for example, that ignore accessibility guidelines and fail to allow easy tabbing can make life very difficult for switch users.

The cost of assistive technology is always an issue. Switches start at £20, rising to £1400 for the Impulse and to more than £1800 for the Integra Mouse. "However, the majority of devices are at the lower end, it is only the more specialised ones that are more expensive," says Nadine Ferris, sales manager at supplier QED and a trained music therapist.

Ferris points out that suppliers work closely together. "A lot of companies that sell communications aids will collaborate with one another and recommend each other's products to make sure the customer gets the right solution. "The key thing is to match the switch with the needs of a client." ■

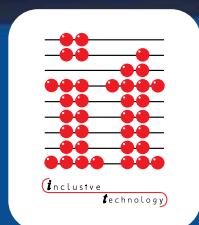
New Simply Works Wireless Range

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Featuring the it-Switch

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A new generation of access technology



Inclusive Technology

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ICT Company of the Year



Coda eases job hunting

Career Opportunities with Disadvantage Awareness (Coda) Online is an online tool aimed at making the job application process easier for prospective disabled employees.

The majority of job vacancies require applicants to provide complicated CVs or application forms, barring people with learning disabilities who may find small print and complicated text difficult.

Coda Online allows people with learning difficulties to create a CV by answering a questionnaire.

The service is the result of a two-year development process involving organisations from across Europe led by the UK disabled charity United Response.

Easy-read and audio versions of the tool are also available and there is the opportunity for users to upload videos and sound files if they wish.

"We know that there are many jobs that people with learning disabilities would excel at – and we hope that Coda Online will be a driving force in giving them the chance to prove it," says Diane Lightfoot, director of communications at United Response.

www.codaonline.com

www.unitedresponse.org.uk

Texting at a stroke

Only a third of people aged over 65 actually use the text function on their mobile phones, according to phone maker Doro.



Chris Millington, UK managing director of Doro, the Swedish phone company

People who have a sight impairment or limited dexterity find it particularly difficult to send and open up messages.

The company has launched the £90 PhoneEasy 332gsm, which allows users to open up text facilities with a single keystroke.

"Our research shows that many mature mobile phone users find it exceptionally hard to navigate the small buttons and tiny text within the menus of mainstream mobiles," says Chris Millington, managing director of Doro UK.

"We've consequently made sure that the texting function on this handset is as easy-to-use as possible.

"Text messages are the single most personal form of communication, second only to voice, and this phone will better enable the senior user to join the 'text revolution' and remain better connected."

www.doro.com

Environmental interface

Hathaway Technologies has developed an improved interface for existing environmental control systems called Subvenio.

The intuitive interface enables disabled people to control automated systems for changing channels, making telephone calls or paging a carer using simpler controls.

Subvenio, which is Latin for assist, allows users to control appliances via a PC using a mouse, a switch, head movement, or voice recognition.

Release two of Subvenio incorporates the ability to send text messages and integrates with internet phone service Skype.

Users can create floor plans and insert their own appliances without the need for an engineer to visit their home.

The software runs on the Microsoft XP, Vista and Windows 7 operating systems
<http://hathawaytechnologies.com>

Fresh look for Dragon

Nuance, the speech software company, has refreshed its Dragon NaturallySpeaking voice recognition software.

NaturallySpeaking 11 is smarter and

faster, according to Nuance, than its two-year-old predecessor.

The program, widely used by people who have cognitive or physical difficulties writing with a conventional keyboard, claims 99% accuracy.

The latest version incorporates a new Sidebar showing tips as well as many commands. The company says it is easier to discover, remember, and access important Dragon features and options.

"Although we remain impressed with NaturallySpeaking, version 11 is more of a point upgrade than a major step forward," said one reviewer.

"Visible changes help you to use NaturallySpeaking more effectively, particularly in terms of navigating your PC, but the underlying engine is improved only marginally."

The Premium version costs £119.99, while the standard product is priced at £69.99.

www.nuance.co.uk

Human help with internet

Care products and services website BeMyCareBroker.com has recruited a team of helpers to assist people who have difficulty using the internet to access its site.

BeMyCareBroker.com, which began its commercial service at the beginning of October, features more than 40,000 care product and support service providers and allows people to research, compare and purchase items online.

A team of 'care brokers' takes calls and assists people who are unable to use the internet, in finding care products and services from companies and organisations listed on the site.

<http://populate.bemycarebroker.com>



Walking aids to stand on firmer footing

A new type of tip for walking sticks will do for the crutch, walking stick and zimmer frame what Dyson has done for the vacuum cleaner, claims its maker.

The £12.99 Flexyfoot, invented by British product designer David Goodwin, is intended to replace the ferrule or rubber tip on walking aids with an alternative that gives better grip.



The product uses suspension technology to improve grip and shock absorbency. Bellows in the Flexyfoot pivot to maximise the surface area that is in touch with the ground.

At the same time air in the bellows is progressively pressurised to absorb impact and shock that would otherwise be transferred to the user.

There are a range of bellow heights with different levels of absorbency (for different activities) and four collar sizes to fit the most common walking aids.

Flexyfoot bends and can rotate by 360 degrees, meaning users can easily turn on their walking aids.

Goodwin designed Flexyfoot because his sister, who has MS, and his 95 year old mother complained to him about the difficulties and discomfort of using their walking sticks. They also found the rubber feet wore down much too quickly and were difficult to change.

He commented: "It's a substantial opportunity. Four million ferrules are sold in the UK annually, but the market is very staid and most aids are very institutional."

www.flexyfoot.com

Mindjet maps to Microsoft

Mind mapping software that helps people organise their ideas graphically is widely used by students and office workers with learning difficulties such as dyslexia.

The programs allow users to create visual information maps start with a central theme, and then add branches with ideas, notes, images, tasks, hyperlinks and attachments.

Developers are now integrating their products more closely with mainstream software.

For instance, version 9 of Mindjet's £199 MindManager tool boasts better links with Microsoft Office, especially Outlook, and Microsoft SharePoint to make it fit better into the way most people work with documents

It has an Office 2010-style ribbon interface too, combined with multiple task panes and a Backstage menu with many of the same features as the Office applications.

Mindjet claims the updated version of MindManager will help workers inundated by an overwhelming amount of content, communication and information that stifles productivity and creativity.

www.mindjet.com

Making music with Skoog

Children who cannot use traditional instruments may soon be making music of their own with an invention developed at the University of Edinburgh.

The Skoog – a colourful, squeezezy cube that is sensitive to the slightest touch, but



A student tests the Skoog to see what it can do

can also resist strong handling – allows children who are severely disabled to play music.

Sensors within the instrument's soft, tactile surface are linked to a computer, which converts the way the Skoog is touched into the sound of different instruments, such as flute, trumpet or marimba.

As a result, users can play a variety of sounds on the Skoog and alter pitch, timbre and volume with a very small range of movement.

A single user Skoog is £500 plus VAT. skoogmusic.com/

Guide stays In Touch

When Dolphin Computer Access introduced version 6 of the company's simplified interface for blind users Guide, it added support for Flash, the software that adds video and animation to web pages.

The change was introduced so that vision impaired users could continue to listen to *In Touch*, the BBC radio programme presented by Peter White, on the Listen Again service.

"The BBC used to use RealPlayer technology, which is what [Dolphin Guide] version 5 was using. And it changed to using Flash technology," explains Mary McMahon, the managing director of Dolphin Computer Access North.

"So that's what we did with version 6; we got version 6 up to speed with Flash. Then we had to go back and fix version 5 for all the people who already had version 5."

Version 6, which has spoken menus, now has higher web page magnification, a typing tutor and a new wizard for getting users up and running with email. Games are also available with the package, which is also available on Dolphin's Pen USB stick.

www.yourdolphin.com

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AbilityNet is a totally independent national charity, working directly with thousands of people every year to find accessible IT solutions, no matter what their age or disability. We know from practical experience what works and what doesn't, and the real problems people face. As a result we now help and support a wide variety of professionals who wish to extend their knowledge or solve difficult issues. For informed, impartial advice it makes sense to contact AbilityNet.

AbilityNet's one-stop shop includes free information and advice; individual assessments, installation, training and support; accessible IT kits for public access centres; courses, seminars and practical workshops; accessible web design and audit service; consultancy.

For further information please contact:

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(*Minicom accessible)

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Diary of events

DISABILITY NORTH EXHIBITION

20 – 21 October

Metro Radio Arena, Newcastle

Information equipment and advice for disabled and older people.

Fees: Free

Further information: Tel: 0191 284 0480, text: 18001 0191 284 0480, email: events@disabilitynorth.org.uk or visit www.disabilitynorth.org.uk

THE ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION (ATIA) CONFERENCE

27 – 30 October

Renaissance Schaumburg Hotel and Convention Center, Schaumburg, Chicago

The ATIA conference with 150 conference sessions and an exhibition of new products features three educational events under one roof.

Fees: Full price is \$525 for three days

Further information: www.atia.org

BRITISH DYSLEXIA ASSOCIATION EMPLOYER'S CONFERENCE – SEEING IT DIFFERENTLY

2 November

Waterloo, London

This one-day conference focuses on the visual perception aspects of dyslexia and assesses the costs and benefits of providing reasonable adjustments for employees. Professor John Stein, from the University of Oxford, will be the conference keynote speaker and will present on the topic of visual processing and dyslexia.

Fees: £249 plus VAT. 10% discount for members.

Further information: conference@bdadyslexia.org.uk

QAC SIGHT VILLAGE LONDON

2 – 3 November

Kensington Town Hall

This exhibition showcases technology, support and services for people who are blind or visually impaired. Sight Village, run by Queen Alexandra's College in Birmingham, has grown into a series of exhibitions round the country.

Fees: None

Further information: www.qac.ac.uk/sightvillage-london

DYSLEXIA EXPLORED- LONDON 2010

5 – 6 November

London Irish Centre, Camden

A two-day British Dyslexia Association conference in London to explore the latest research and best practice for supporting and assessing individuals with dyslexia and other specific learning difficulties.

Fees: One day: £150 standard, £125 members. Two days: £250 standard, £225 members.

Further information: conference@bdadyslexia.org.uk

NADP AUTUMN CONFERENCE: SUPPORTING DISABLED LEARNERS INTO PLACEMENT AND WORK

12 November

MacDonald Burlington Hotel, Birmingham

The conference will cover aspects of supporting disabled students both into higher education and into the workplace including a presentation from Access to Work.

Fees: Members £165, non-members £190

Further information: www.nadp-uk.org/events

RECENT ADVANCES IN ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY AND ENGINEERING (RAATE)

29 November

University of Warwick Conference Centre

RAATE 2010 is a UK conference focused on the latest innovations and developments in assistive technology.

The conference will be of interest to everyone who uses, works with, develops or conducts research on assistive technologies.

Fees: £125 inc VAT.

Further information: www.raate.org.uk

LEARNING DISABILITY TODAY LONDON EXHIBITION

8 December

Business Design Centre, London

Learning Disability Today is celebrating 10 years of working to improve the lives of people with learning disability, at the biggest Learning Disability Today exhibition yet.

Fees: £35. Free for people with learning disabilities, unwaged and family carers.

Further information: www.learningdisabilitytoday.co.uk, tel: 0844 880 5061 or email info@pavpub.com.

Contacts

Ability magazine

Editorial, advertising and other enquiries: john.lamb@abilitymagazine.org.uk www.abilitymagazine.org.uk

AbilityNet

Charity advising disabled people, employers and others on assistive IT. 0800 269545 www.abilitynet.org.uk

Directgov

Government site with help on employment, training, education, financial support, transport, rights and other issues for disabled people. www.direct.gov.uk/en/disabledpeople/index.htm

Employers' Forum on Disability

Claims to be the world's leading employers' organization focused on disability as it affects business, including recruitment and retention of disabled staff and serving disabled customers. www.efd.org.uk

Emptech

A database that provides information resources on assistive technologies, which are designed to help those with specific disabilities work and study. Emptech includes product descriptions, links to manufacturers, suppliers' addresses, as well as other related resources. www.emptech.info

IT Can Help

Volunteers offering disabled people free local help with computers. 0800 269545 www.itcanhelp.org.uk

Leonard Cheshire

Disability care charity providing support services for people with physical disabilities and learning difficulties. 020 3242 0200 www.lcdisability.org

Shaw Trust

Charity that champions the abilities of disabled people, enabling over 60,000 people per year experiencing all types of disability to make the most of their skills, abilities and employment opportunities. 01225 716300 www.shaw-trust.org.uk

Suitability

Services to help employers fill vacancies and disabled people to get jobs. Part of charity Leonard Cheshire Disability. 0845 671 7173 www.lcdsuitability.org.uk

Remploy

Employment services for disabled people and employers, plus other business services, including IT equipment recycling. www.rempoy.co.uk

U Can Do It

A charity that provides computer training for blind, deaf and disabled people in their own homes. 020 7730 7766 www.ucandoit.org.uk

... and the living's been easy

Kevin Carey argues that in a cost cutting climate regulation saves money now

In such turbulent times as these, it is difficult to write a piece in July that will still be relevant when you read this, drowning in blood as the cuts axe falls; but I will try.

First, one axe that I confidently predict will not fall is that of Martha Lane Fox who, as Digital Champion, recommended in her Manifesto for a Networked Nation that any Government website that is not fit for purpose (accessible, usable etc) should be switched off.

Looking for commitment

As just about none of them are – even those in the Directgov site – this would cause absolute chaos. It does, however, underline my point in the Summer 2010 edition (*Ability*78) that nothing serious will happen in accessibility until the Government commits to some 100% on-line services. Only then will civil servants stop running away.

Even though Ed Vaizey's refusal to regulate television audio description makes little difference in practice, as the Ofcom recommendation for 20% has been superseded by most major broadcasters, it is still troubling because it underlines a major fallacy of the coalition that all regulation is bad and costly.

You only have to think of the current hassle over mobile phone chargers to know that some regulation is both good and cost saving. There was a similar ideological block when railways were beginning but we soon got over that.

The superior west coast standard of Brunel had to give way to the more widely used, narrower gauge, just as Betamax gave way to VHS. Airport shops are still turning a tidy penny on mains plug/socket converters.

So I'm sitting in the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills discussing



Kevin Carey is director of HumanITy, a UK charity formed to foster digital inclusion for disabled and other disadvantaged people. www.humanity.org.uk

the use of public money to overcome 'wild west' digital incompatibility so that people with disabilities can access data through the use of generic and access technology.

Proportional regulation

And later I'm sitting somewhere else in BIS being told that regulation of IT, even in the context of public procurement, just won't do; and I mention the success of regulation in television, with just about no push-back from the industry and propose we think about proportionate regulation for accessibility.

I cite USA 508 and Apple and am told, by somebody from the disability sector, not to exaggerate the impact of 508 on Apple and am forced to reply that without it we would not have talking iPhones or iPads.

Apple didn't incorporate text-to-speech into devices out of the kindness of their heart but out of the need to sell their lovely computers to state education purchasers.

The fact that this accessibility feature has become viral is a wonderful bonus which only goes to show that you can pile 'em high and sell 'em dear even with the extra expense of text-to-speech.

Initial impetus

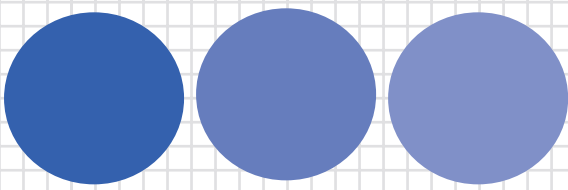
But the moral of this tale is still that regulation rather than maximising shareholder value was the initial impetus for accessibility. So this is an excellent time to goad Microsoft into competitive overdrive.

The problem with the cuts regime is that, as I have noted before, this is not the time to spend now to save later, so we need to be very clear that we are not asking for Government to comply retroactively with accessibility standards but to stick strictly to a policy of forward compliance.

Martha's strictures sound great but they would have been more realistic if she had specified that no new site or major upgrade can be switched on without its being tested and shown to be fit for purpose.

What we have to show is that regulation saves money now. This is not going to be easy but, as I said at a recent seminar: "If you can't solve the problem, don't draw the salary," a remark which, not surprisingly, was met with stony silence.

During the past 15 years it's been summertime and the living's been easy, not only financially but also intellectually. The sector needs to get a move on but shows no sign of it; but there will come a point, not long from now – if it isn't happening already – when nostalgia won't be affordable as we make our own cuts. ■



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