

# ability

BETT and  
SEN Fringe  
highlights

Assistive technology at work

Issue 80 Winter 2010

## Special educational needs

- Europe's plans for inclusive tech
- Getting a job on Facebook
- Mind mapping software surveyed
- Assessing the assessors



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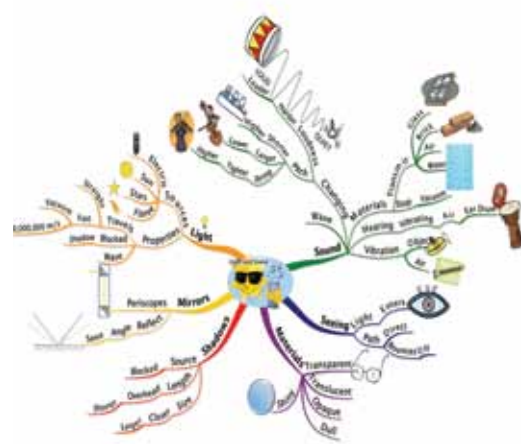
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Kevin Carey looks forward to an age when those who find solutions are rewarded





John Lamb finds plenty to shout about at this year's BETT exhibition

## Turning the sound up in Olympia

If it's January it must be BETT, the bustling education technology show where suppliers literally shout their wares through amplified headsets and visitors need a lot of stamina to get round even half the exhibition stands.

No better time then to take stock of where assistive technology is going. On the page opposite Peter Abrahams dusts off his crystal ball for a peek into a future that includes new aids to communication such as emotion mark-up language for describing a user's state of mind.

Closer to home there is certainly no shortage of bright ideas from the minds of UK developers, whatever their emotional state. The big stories remain the quest to make mobile technology accessible and the integration between TV and the internet.

Visitors to BETT will be able to try out new communications aids from Lightwriter, Pretorian, Techcess and Tobii. Activity here has been spurred by renewed efforts to get more communicators into the hands of English children. Communications Champion Jean Goss estimates it would only cost £6.5m to provide an aid for each of the 6,200 children who need one.

Goss's project is small potatoes compared with the £23m that has just been spent providing 9,000 disabled children with home computing under the Home Access scheme.

The initiative, the biggest boost to assistive technology in education for a long time, has had a charmed life, dodging a change of government, cuts and the closure of the agency that ran the programme to reach the finishing straight.

The news from Europe is also positive with a pledge to introduce a European Accessibility Act in 2012 that would boost the uptake of assistive products and services and create a more level playing field across the continent.

All of this is cheering news at an otherwise gloomy time of year. Even long standing developers such as Dolphin have been cracking a smile. The Worcester software company has rebadged its Lunar, Hal and SuperNova programs for vision impairment as SuperNova v12 and added a bunch of upgrades for good measure.

BETT also sees the arrival of some newcomers including Strategic Transitions, a Canadian company on a mission to take over the market for literacy software on a laudable platform of good value for money. The firm's ebullient chief executive characterises his competitor products as Swiss army knives with features no one uses.

Meanwhile, even the normally staid Equality and Human Rights Commission is flexing its muscles and looking at ways of fostering greater awareness of web accessibility. Its thoughts include the development of an elearning program that would give web developers a qualification in accessible web design.

If you are wending your way to Olympia where the BETT show takes place don't be surprised if you spend more time there than you bargained for: provided you've got the staying power. ■

# Digital by default

Peter Abrahams asks what shape assistive technology will take in five years' time

ICT accessibility is important today, but will it be important in five years' time and what will it look like?

The trend from off-line to digital information, services and products will be complete.

Anyone on the wrong side of the digital divide will find it very difficult to carry on as a member of society.



The 'recently old' will make their voices heard in 2015

They will lack access to basic government-supplied services, most commercial services such as insurance, banking, many retail outlets, and all social networks.

There will be pressure from a new group, 'the recently old'. This group will have been using digital channels for some years and will be furious if they cannot continue to do so because of illnesses or old age. It would not be overstating it to say that access to digital information will be considered a basic human right.

Most decision makers will be aware of the need for accessible ICT. This greater awareness will be driven by legislation that will have been extended to explicitly include ICT.

At present, several acts are going through the US Senate, while Mandate 376, which will require organisations to specify accessibility when they buy ICT, is progressing

through the European Union.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has been ratified by most member states; other rules and regulations are also being passed by governments.

By 2015, legislation across the world should be clear and have sufficient teeth so that it cannot be ignored. Professionals will know about the legislation and the importance of accessibility.

The only question is; will this increased awareness always ensure that the systems are made accessible? There will still be a conflict between using the latest whizzy technology and the need to ensure accessibility.

There will be new forms of assistive technology: direct brain connections, wearable devices that will enable certain people to more easily control their ICT environment.

There will be a continuing improvement in the power available to assistive technology. For example, text-to-speech today tends to be fairly flat, with more power it will be

possible to include emotions and clearer pronunciation and intonation.

It is impossible to predict all the new user interfaces that will be in use in five years time but 3D and interactive gestures will be commonplace.

Emotions will be supported with the Emotion Markup Language (EML) that is currently being developed by the W3C. EML will be added to text so that a text-to-speech engine can vocalise text with the right intonation or an avatar could make a suitable gesture or facial expression.

Vendors already recognise the need for solutions in specific niches. One, Xenos Axxess, is a tool to create accessible transaction reports, for example bank statements, from non-accessible print streams.

Even if the decision makers decide that ICT systems should be accessible it will not be possible if professionals such as designers, coders, content creators and testers lack the necessary skills. In the future skilled implementers will be available and willing to keep their skills honed because of demand for them. ■

## TECHNOLOGY FIVE YEARS' FROM NOW

■ Accessibility will not be optional: everyone who provides digital content, services or products will need to make sure that they are accessible.

■ There will be moral, legal and financial imperatives for this to happen. In particular there will be pressure from users to be on the correct side of the digital divide as a human right.

■ Awareness will be much higher both at the user and the supplier end.

■ Skill levels in assistive technology will have increased and should be sufficient for the demand.

■ New user interface technologies will need to be accessible.

Ensuring this happens will be the major challenge to the accessibility community.

*Peter Abrahams is Accessibility and Usability Practice Leader at Bloor Research*

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# Captioned telephony makes a welcome come back

Deaf users of relay services for making and receiving telephone calls have received a major boost with the relaunch of a captioned telephony service in the UK.

Significan't has introduced a real time captioning service called WebCapTel, in which operators transcribe speech into text using voice recognition software and display it on the screens of desktop and mobile devices.

"Remote Captioning services are the best solution (for) instant communication access for deaf and hard of hearing people who may not be able to use sign language or prefer to speak direct to the called party," says Significan't managing director Jeff McWhinney (pictured).

A similar service run by Teletec was discontinued three years ago. Now Significan't is urging people to sign up for its replacement by

emailing [ask@signvideo.co.uk](mailto:ask@signvideo.co.uk).

Captioned telephony should help overcome a big shortage of experts to relay speech to deaf people. Only 22 people are registered as text to speech reporters, according to



Significan't, catering for an estimated population of 400,000 deaf and hard of hearing people.

"[I am] very happy to hear we now have a modern telephony system back in the UK," says Tina Lannin, a deaf blogger, "Now I don't

have to ask an interpreter to make phone calls for me and I have my independence back."

Captioned telephony is one of three types of relay service. Text relay, run by BT, is the oldest service and involves typing, while video relay involves an interpreter using sign language.

Only text relay is currently subsidised. ■

[blog.signvideo.co.uk](http://blog.signvideo.co.uk)

## Home Access closes its doors

The £24m Home Access programme to provide ITC for disabled children has ended, bringing the curtain down on the biggest assistive technology programme in the UK.

Some 9,000 families with a disabled child were approved for free laptops, software and peripherals between September and November in a last minute rush to beat the deadline for applications.

In all, some 12,000 applicants received systems worth up to £2,000 including a battery of specialised software, switches, touch screens and adapted mice.

Children with severe learning difficulties received symbols or picture software to support their

writing and reading. They could also take advantage of 'cause and effect' software for improving coordination.

Those with a visual impairment were offered screen readers, while amplification hardware was made available to pupils with difficulty hearing.

The programme survived delays in drawing up complex contracts with small suppliers and the closure of Becta, the agency that organised Home Access, which was a casualty of government cuts.

However, Access to Work means that some of the country's most disadvantaged children now have a computer to work on at home, greatly improving their opportunity to learn. ■

## BRIEFS

### Phone firms fail Ofcom test

Phone companies have been rapped for failing to support disabled customers in a mystery shopper exercise mounted by telecoms watchdog Ofcom. Only a third of staff mentioned a service for disabled people without prompting. Nearly one in five people enquiring on behalf of blind people were told there were no special services for disabled customers.

[www.ofcom.org.uk](http://www.ofcom.org.uk)

### Recite Me raises £100,000 funding

Gateshead company Recite Me has won £100,000 backing from venture capital firm Northstar Ventures to develop software that allows people with reading difficulties to adjust the appearance of a website and have text on screen read out to them. The assistive technology can be accessed from any internet device including smartphones and tablet computers. The product will have consumer and business versions.

### The Buzz targets deaf children

The National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) has launched a website for deaf young people aimed at reducing social isolation and improving their emotional well-being. The Buzz website was developed after a consultation with almost 1,500 deaf young people which revealed that 90% want more opportunities to meet other deaf people. Susan Daniels, chief executive of NDCS says there are 1.6m children in the UK experiencing hearing loss and many are vulnerable to isolation and poor self-esteem.

[www.buzz.com](http://www.buzz.com)

# Fix the Web is on its way

Fix the Web, a campaign to correct inaccessible websites with the help of volunteers, has launched with the support of leading disability organisations.

People who have problems accessing a site are being encouraged to report it to volunteers with the technical expertise to take up the issue with the site owner.

So far Citizens Online has recruited 258 volunteers and received reports from 94 disabled people concerning 302 websites.



**Leonie Watson of web design firm Nomensa**

At the time of writing Fix the Web activists had contacted 34 website owners, half of whom had made changes. Sites run by Facebook, the BBC, and Vegan Society are among those that have made adjustments.

However, the campaign is keen to encourage disabled people to report more of the 81% of sites that the World Wide Web Consortium Web Content Accessibility Guidelines says are inaccessible.

The project aims to have 10,000 volunteers dealing with 250,000 websites within two years, according to founder Gail Bradbrook of Citizens Online, who came up with the idea.

Those involved with Fix the Web, which is financed by the internet

charity Nominet Trust, emphasise the commercial cost of having an inaccessible site.

"I do most of my shopping online, especially at Christmas, as it's more convenient. I'm surprised by how many retailers just don't get accessibility," says Leonie Watson, who is blind.

"If their website isn't accessible with my screen reader, I won't spend my money there. It's basic business logic really – more accessibility, more people, more potential revenue."

To help people flag up problems, Fix the Web, which has even had to make changes to its own site, has produced a tool bar to speed up the reporting process.

"Accessibility is not black or white," says a spokesperson. "A site may satisfy one group and exclude another. One day a site may be accessible, the next day it is not. We are trying to be as collaborative as possible. We are not going to point a gun at anyone's head."

Accessibility consultant Graham Armfield from Coolfields Consulting volunteered last summer. His first assignment was the Doodle.com site.

Two blind users had reported that the site was inaccessible to screenreader users. After investigation he contacted Doodle.com to tell them about the problems and reasons why the site was inaccessible.

"Doodle.com acknowledged they were aware of some issues and were planning to work on solutions during December," Armfield told *Ability*. "So hopefully the site will be more accessible after that."

"Fix the Web won't deliver an accessible web overnight, but I believe it is a great opportunity for people to help improve the internet one step at a time."

If you want to find out more visit [www.fixtheweb.net](http://www.fixtheweb.net)

# Britain's global web standard

BSI, the British standards organisation, has published a lay person's code of practice for web accessibility.

BS 8878 is designed to help non-technical managers ensure that their websites are as inclusive as possible.

The code of practice provides guidance on how web owners can assess the impact different technologies can have on their customers, their legal responsibilities and even provides text they can use in statements about accessibility.

It also gives pointers on involving disabled people, using automated tools to assist with accessibility testing and how to manage existing (more technical) guidelines.

The document is aimed at chief executive officers, managing directors, head teachers and ICT managers.

BS8878 is available from <http://shop.bsigroup.com>, price £100. ■

# Retailers stock up on assistive technology

Large retailers are adding assistive technology to their shelves. Boots is the latest to begin stocking products aimed at disabled people.

The company now sells a range of phones from Amplicom including the PowerTel M4000, a £70 mobile phone that has big buttons and is hearing aid compatible.

Most within the assistive technology industry seriously underestimate the degree of change underway, according to David Silver of consultancy Years Ahead.

"We believe that hearing loss shouldn't prevent anyone enjoying the benefits of mobile phone technology," says Stuart Madden of Boots Hearing Care. ■

[www.bootshearingcare.com](http://www.bootshearingcare.com)



## Prima Vista makes Braille music

Prima Vista Braille Music Services had developed a website that allows blind people to listen to music on their screen readers and download Braille music.

Sighted musicians can download, print and play music at home immediately, but visually impaired musicians have to request Braille music and wait for transcribers to produce it manually and send it to them. But the company, founded in Leeds by musician and software developer Lydia Machell, has developed software that for the first time converts music on the fly into Braille format.

Musicians can download the music and print it out or read it on their Braille keyboards at a cost of between £2 and £5 per download.

Music publishers have granted Prima Vista access to their copyright files in return for a royalty payment on sales.

"I feel very strongly that blind or partially-sighted people should have the same access to music as everyone else, and equality legislation now also dictates that they should have everything available to them that sighted people can use and enjoy," said Lydia Machell. ■  
[www.primavistamusic.com](http://www.primavistamusic.com)



**Prima Vista's  
Lydia Machell**

## RADAR to track Access to Work

The disability group RADAR will be looking into the future of Access to Work as part of a review of employment support services for disabled people.

In 2010 the £80m per year Access to Work scheme provided funds for assistive technology and other support for over 37,000 disabled people in work.

However, disability professionals have raised concerns about a tightening of the rules about what items qualify as reasonable adjustments and the funds available to larger employers.

"By our very quick estimates, approximately 80-90% of the people who have received equipment from Access to Work over the past two years would now not be eligible for support," one university support officer told *Ability*.

Liz Sayce, chief executive of RADAR, will review the Government's Work Programme for getting people off welfare and into

work, planned to start this summer, and the new Work Choice scheme.

She has been asked to recommend ways the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) could make improvements to the services.

One change made last autumn was the introduction of a quick online questionnaire that allows disabled jobseekers to print off a letter to a prospective employer saying they might be entitled to Access to Work funding.

The DWP has been accused of reneging on an earlier pledge to allow jobseekers to approach potential employers with definite funding in place. ■

*The DWP's Reasonable Adjustment Specialist Team led by Gayle Mooney has won the Civil Service Diversity and Equality Award for its work in providing reasonable adjustments to employees and managers in the department. In its first year the team helped 1,000 people.*

[www.dwp.gov.uk](http://www.dwp.gov.uk)

## BRIEFS

### Blowing a Speechbubble

The ACE Centre has developed a website called Speechbubble, with details of over 100 communication aids. Users can create side-by-side comparisons, and search for suppliers' contact details. The ACE Centre is keen to point out that Speechbubble is not an assessment tool, but a handy point of reference.

[www.speechbubble.org.uk](http://www.speechbubble.org.uk)

### Goss calls for AAC hubs

Jean Goss, the Communications Champion appointed to review augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) for young people, among other things, has called for the setting up of regional AAC 'hubs' that include a full range of assistive technology, including communication aids.

Goss estimates it would cost £6.5m to provide a communication aid to each of the 6,200 children in England who need one. She calculates that if even one in 10 children was able to get a job as a result, it would add £310m to the economy over their lifetime.

[www.thecommunicationcouncil.org](http://www.thecommunicationcouncil.org)

### NHS scraps direct payments

The NHS has withdrawn plans to make direct payments to its students claiming equipment through the disabled students allowance (DSA) after protests from suppliers and support staff that claimants might be confused or not hand over the money.

The Student Loans Company, which was lambasted last year for failing to deliver systems to students, has had a trouble-free run this academic year, say those involved in the scheme.

# Europe acts on accessibility

**T**he European Commission plans to introduce a European Accessibility Act to increase the quantity and quality of the £25m-worth of assistive products and services sold in Europe each year.

The Act, which could become law by 2012, would use standards, public procurement and state aid rules to make all goods and services accessible to people with disabilities.

"More standardisation would improve economies of scale and traders could more easily offer their products and services across borders," says the EU.

"This would produce positive knock-on effects for Europe's economy. In the US, stepping up the use of public procurement has been very successful in making public infrastructure more accessible in a cost-effective way. The approach can serve as model for the EU."

The proposed legislation is a key part of a 10-year strategy to help 80m disabled Europeans, which was unveiled by European Commission vice-president Viviane Reding in the autumn.

In addition to the accessibility initiative, the strategy calls for accessible websites and sets 2015 as a deadline for all public websites to be open to disabled people.

However, the campaign group European Disability Forum (EDF) wants the Commission to go further on websites by introducing a directive that would be binding on governments.

The EDF says the market is not delivering e-accessibility in Europe and legislation would be in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which Europe will shortly ratify.

Reding also promised better access to copyright material to make sure disabled Europeans can exercise their citizenship rights.

The EU has already signed a memorandum of understanding on access to documents by people with print disabilities, such as dyslexia and visual impairment.

The memorandum will spur the production and cross-border distribution of works published in alternative formats: audio-books and Braille, for example.

Reding also wants to see the EU direct its funding to carers. She believes that member states need to improve their cooperation on support for disabled people.

Awareness raising and better data about the situation of people with disabilities are also part of the EU's strategy.

The EU blueprint was the main topic of debate at a

conference in Brussels held to mark the European Day of People with Disabilities in December.

Delegates discussed the idea of a European disability card that would give owners access to the same benefits in every member state. There were also pleas for the free movement of disabled students to enable them to study abroad more easily.

Those attending the conference heard about the opportunities to improve access to leisure and cultural facilities.



The EU buildings in Brussels

St Dunstan's, the British charity for blind ex-service people, proposed a law to give visually impaired people equal access to museums.

"We need to exploit the empowering potential of new technology. Exhibition design that is inclusive of the needs of disabled people has to become the norm, not the exception, as it is today," says Carol Borowski, Chair of the European Blind Union's Culture & Education Commission.

"Across Europe, we need significantly more opportunities for visually impaired people to experience art and culture through audio description, authentic objects for handling, tactile models and tactile images."

## Research push bears fruit in Seville

The European Commission has earmarked more than £94m for research into accessible and inclusive ICT since 2007. Researchers taking part in one of its biggest programmes, a £15m assistive technology programme called Aegis, gathered in Seville in the autumn to take stock as the four-year development effort reached its half-way mark.

"The underlying objective is to put together people from all over the world involved in accessibility," Miguel Gonzalez Sancho, deputy head of ICT for inclusion at the Commission told *Ability*.

"Overall we are satisfied with how things are going: it is one of the biggest projects around."

Aegis, which stands for Open Accessibility: Groundwork, Infrastructure, Standards, is an ambitious project aimed at embedding accessibility into mainstream technology of the future.

Named after the Roman god Zeus' shield, Aegis is one of the EU's biggest undertakings in this area with 20 organisations collaborating on some 30 projects. It is half-funded by organisations taking part in the programme.

Participants range from big IT companies such as Oracle, Research in Motion and Vodafone to top universities including Cambridge University and the Fraunhofer Institute.

"Aegis is trying to do for IT systems what access regulations have already done for buildings," explains Aegis technical manager Peter Korn.

In a six-step approach, Aegis is defining accessibility and building a set of stock user interfaces, says Korn.

The researchers involved are also producing tools for developers and devising platforms that can run assistive technology applications.

### Combining the building blocks

These building blocks are being brought together to produce applications that will be used by disabled users.

"One of the key goals of the Aegis project is to develop a complete framework for building accessibility into IT," Korn told the conference of academics and developers.

"Earlier, every application had to have its own set of assistive technology applications. The focus of third generation access is to provide everything that's needed by means of application programming interfaces."

Karel Van Isacker of the European Platform for Rehabilitation presented a damning and as yet unpublished survey of ICT usage in Europe.

He estimates that less than 50% of people with disabilities in Europe have assistive technology. And of those who are using it, at least half have a problem.

There are some 40,000 different assistive products used in Europe and logged in a database called Eastin. However, they suffered from lack of user awareness and high purchasing costs.

There was a mismatch between end user needs and those offered by assistive technology, said Van Isacker.

Ways of making assistive technology available to disabled people vary across Europe. In some countries medical experts recommend access aids. Other countries adopt a social model in which assistance is covered by national legislation. In a third group of poorer countries individuals are responsible for themselves.

"Ignorance is bliss but an abyss for impaired end users," said Van Isacker.

Many applications have already been developed by Aegis researchers.

They include a low cost system for converting text formats into the Daisy talking book standard, an open source screen reader called SUE and magnification software for the latest GNOME Shell desktop interface.

Aegis developers have opted for free open systems based on the Linux operating system rather than proprietary software.

And although some of the work in face tracking, eye tracking and gesture switches is at the cutting edge of applications technology, the main thrust is to develop cheap, open source tools.

Dr Evangelos Bekiaris, coordinator of Aegis, acknowledged that Linux is not as widely used as Microsoft Windows, but says the important thing is that low-cost assistive technology is available. "It will persuade those who produce technology for other platforms to improve their products and cut their prices," he said.

Gregg Vanderheiden, director of the Trace R&D centre at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, who advises the EU on scientific matters, outlined his idea for a global public inclusive infrastructure (GPII) that would enable anyone to access the internet.

The professor advocated a worldwide broadband infrastructure, run by a public trust that would give users access to a store of existing assistive technologies made available to them when they wanted to go online.

"What if you had automatic personalisation interfaces that would change to accommodate every individual?" Vanderheiden asked.

He described a system that would take advantage of cloud computing to record users' preferences for assistive technology and deliver software and services to them on demand.

At present less than 20% of those who need assistive technology actually have it, Vanderheiden says. The GPII, run by a public trust, would make it cheaper and easier for disabled people to access technology.

In addition, it would lower development costs, increase the number of solutions for different disabilities and enable new types of assistive technologies, said Vanderheiden.

"It's like building a road system that does not provide transportation but greatly enhances the ability of car companies and others to do so," he said.

Vanderheiden is still pitching his ideas to policymakers. "Making people aware there is a fix is the toughest part," he said. ■



**Dr Evangelos Bekiaris, coordinator of Aegis, is looking for improvements and price cuts in products**





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**2011**

# sight village

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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.

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](http://www.qacsightvillage.org.uk)**

# Finding a job via Facebook

## How Remploy is making technology work for its disabled clients

**R**employ, the organisation that finds employment for disabled people, has been working overtime on its own CV in recent years.

The company is remaking itself as a provider of employment services using cutting edge technology to help its clients prepare for work and find jobs.

Founded after the Second World War to provide work for service people disabled in the conflict, Remploy has closed nearly a third of its factories in the past 18 months as part of a five-year modernisation programme.

Instead of creating more jobs making furniture and other products, Remploy has harnessed Facebook, video production and computer-based training to improve the confidence and skills of disabled jobseekers.

Its employment advisors regularly visit employers armed with Apple iPads loaded with video CVs so that they can see potential employees talking about themselves.

Next year, Remploy will launch an online job finding service that will allow employers to upload vacancies and instantly match them with candidates who have the appropriate skills.

Developers are also working on innovations such as virtual reality mock-ups of branches and job interview situations that will allow clients who can't travel to experience them online.

"We are utilising technology to enhance what we offer and provide a complete online service," says Paul Collum, Remploy's innovation and design manager who is behind the new developments.

The online jobs service was tested during December and is expected to go live in April as Remploy seeks to double the number of people it puts in work from 10,000 to 20,000 annually.

One of its key features is a profiling system that tests a candidate's skills in areas such as reading, writing, numeracy, behaviour, levels of attention and concentration as well as motor skills.

The profile feature was developed with the help of specialists in learning difficulties at the University of Bangor in Wales.

"We are looking at the barriers to employment before someone actually gains work," explains Collum.

Last autumn, Remploy used Facebook to create a virtual job advisor to discuss issues connected with job hunting. Those who make the virtual advisor their friend can ask for advice via private messages and one-to-one chat.

"People give information more quickly and are more upfront online," says Collum.

Over 90 people have used the virtual advisor so far and five people have gained employment as a result,

including one who was offered a job at the Second Life virtual world. Remploy is now looking to find more people work in Second Life.

Collum insists that online services will not replace the network of 20 employment branches and 54 factories that Remploy already runs. They are complimentary, he says, helping people to look for jobs at home.

Virtual advisor, for example, is mainly used in the evenings and at night: times when branches are

often closed.

Another initiative involves training learning-disabled people to concentrate better with the aid of an electroencephalograph machine that reads brain activity. Trainees are asked to manipulate a ping pong ball on a jet of air by thinking about it.

The effort of keeping the ball aloft improves concentration. The Mattel Mind Flex is already widely used in America, especially by parents hoping to improve their children's life chances.

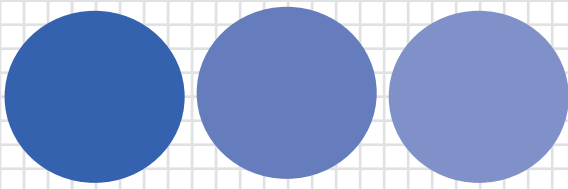
A centre in Sheffield has been equipped with technology for blind workers so that they and their potential employers can familiarise themselves with technology.

The facility has been kitted out with Optelec magnifiers, Intel readers, the Guide computer interface, as well as JAWS and SuperNova screen readers.

However, despite the emphasis on virtual recruitment, Collum is adamant that it is Remploy's long-established relations with employers that are still the best passport to a job for its clients. ■



**Trainee Jessica Senior at Remploy's Sheffield Centre for blind people**



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●●● 0800 018 0045  
[www.dyslexic.com](http://www.dyslexic.com)  
[www.its4students.co.uk](http://www.its4students.co.uk)



A preview of BETT, the UK's main showcase for special needs technology

## SEN swims in the mainstream

Ian Litterick, founder of assistive technology company iansyst (stand F119), is keen to see assistive technology in all classrooms.

"Integrating assistive technology into the mainstream classroom is a massive step towards a greater acceptance of disabilities, as SEN students are not set apart from their peers when using it," he says.

This year the company has added three products to its catalogue, each designed to tackle different learning difficulties.

EB Wordbanks (£59 plus VAT), is a writing tool developed with Claro Software, which provides words and phrases relevant to the topic in hand.

AttenGO (£195 plus VAT for single licence) is an online training program for people with attention

deficit disorders, while DysCalculium is the UK's first online tool for screening adults who have problems with maths, sometimes known as dyscalculia.

Users can choose appropriate words as they write with EB Wordbanks, which is a grid that sits over an application such as a word processor, email or internet browser.

Children who have problems writing can create their own lists of words to choose from and also have them read aloud as they write.

Attention deficit disorders can affect people of all ages. AttenGO is an online product that helps to improve focus and memory by means of a series of 25 minute exercises carried out at a computer.

The Canadian developer says that

25 minutes four times per week will show results after six months.

DysCalculium (licence for 20 screenings £199 plus VAT and support from £148) – software for screening adults displaying signs of dyscalculia – was developed in partnership with Loughborough University and Tribal.

The software asks a series of questions and produces a profile of each person's performance in 11 areas.

"We are decades behind in tackling dyscalculia," says Abi James, iansyst managing consultant. "Culturally in the UK we accept poor maths, but between 5% and 10% of the population has problems with numbers." ■

[www.iansyst.co.uk](http://www.iansyst.co.uk)

## Students serve as model learners

A school specialising in pupils with dyslexia and other learning difficulties hopes to serve as a model for the use of assistive technology.

Stanbridge Earls School in Hampshire has teamed up with Oxford University's Kellogg College to study the degree to which technology can help pupils with learning difficulties.

The special school has opened a sixth-form boarding house in which pupils are equipped with £2,000 laptops running personalised

assistive software such as Dragon NaturallySpeaking and TextHelp Read and Write Gold (stand SN70).

Those involved in the project want to develop a model to present to the Department for Education of the best way to teach special needs children.

"We call it levelling the playing field, allowing students with a high IQ to get their ideas down on paper," says Stanbridge Earls deputy head Rob Bailey.

"We are hoping to show just how productive our children can become:

the change in performance is already quite marked." ■

[www.stanbridgeearls.co.uk](http://www.stanbridgeearls.co.uk)

[www.conted.ox.ac.uk](http://www.conted.ox.ac.uk)



Getting to grips with technology

## Intel Reader passes exam

Bulky, fixed reading machines are of limited value to active students but portable devices that can scan, recognise and read out text on the go are now coming onto the market.

Southampton-based Keytools

(stand SN3) is demonstrating the £649 Intel Reader, a handheld reading system for people with sight impairment or learning difficulties.

The Intel Reader, made by the well-known chip company, has a

camera driven by an Atom processor that converts printed text to digital text, which it then reads aloud.

The reader can be used to listen to printed text on the spot, but it also has a portable capture station to make it easier to scan documents. ■

[www.keytools.co.uk](http://www.keytools.co.uk)

new

## Tellus 4 Communication Aid with Eyegaze



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Tobii S32 – a unique, recorded speech device for young communicators.

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- Popular features include its durable design, light weight, great sound, toy interface, 60 hours recording time, and several months runtime on batteries.
- Record messages and sounds directly on the Tobii S32 or via the Tobii SymbolMate software.

Visit **www.tobiiS32.com** for more information.

# WordQ and SpeechQ mix typing and reading

BETT sees the arrival in the UK of WordQ and SpeakQ literacy software from Canadian distributor Strategic Transitions.

WordQ, developed by Quillsoft, is a writing prediction program that suggests words based on previous compositions, together with suggestions for words with a similar meaning and examples of words that sound similar.

The software, which is available for Windows XP, Vista, Windows 7 and Mac OS X operating systems, reads aloud text in the style in which it was written and allows users to build their own vocabularies.

SpeakQ, only available in PC versions, is voice recognition software that plugs in to WordQ (users must have WordQ to start with). It allows users to mix typing and speaking so that they can type words they know and speak those they don't.

The software offers suggestions for words a user has difficulty pronouncing and it can be trained without reading.

Strategic Transitions aims to be world number one in sales of literacy software, says company president JJ Serre, who claims his competitors have been milking people who have

difficulties reading and writing.

"They have a Swiss army knife type of software which doesn't help because most of its knives and spoons are never used," he told *Ability*.

WordQ and SpeakQ are being distributed in the UK by Assistive Solutions (stand SN13), which is offering the software with the ABBYY Finereader optical character recognition system for scanning text.

WordQ costs £149 plus VAT, while SpeechQ is priced at £89. The two can be bought together for £199. ■

[www.strategictransitions.com](http://www.strategictransitions.com)  
[www.assistiveitsolutions.com](http://www.assistiveitsolutions.com)

## Three into one does go for Dolphin

Dolphin Computer Access (stand SN5) has merged its three software packages for people with vision impairments into a single suite.

SuperNova version 12 incorporates the existing Hal, Lunar and SuperNova products. The new package is available in four editions: magnifier (formerly Lunar), reader magnifier (formerly LunarPlus), screen reader (formerly Hal) and the complete access suite.

Developers have added a clutch of updates to SuperNova. Speech and Braille access to Microsoft Office 2010, iTunes 10 and Adobe Reader have received performance and usability improvements.



**Dolphin's font smoothing makes big text clearer**

SuperNova also comes with updated documentation for using the software with Microsoft Office 2010 applications. Dolphin has also added updated tables to SuperNova's Braille output and input.

The software can also be viewed on several screens at once, allowing users to have different screens open on their desks or to give a

presentation with magnified notes on a laptop and an unmagnified image on a projector screen.

A single image can also be displayed across several screens. The mouse pointer will move from one screen to another, but buffer software prevents this happening accidentally by introducing a 'soft barrier' between screens.

Dolphin has developed True Fonts, software that smooths out the jagged edges that occur when characters are blown up on screen.

A boxed version of the access suite costs £835 plus VAT. Registered blind, visually impaired or dyslexic purchasers can obtain the software for £695. ■

[www.yourdolphin.com](http://www.yourdolphin.com)

## Optelec opts for retro reader

Reading machines that recognise text and convert it into speech continue to become easier to use.

Optelec has introduced a portable reader that offers low vision and blind people instant text recognition and audio playback.

ClearReader+, which has a retro

look, allows a visually impaired person to listen to any kind of printed material using fast text-to-speech recognition technology.

Portable and battery powered, the ClearReader+ assistive technology device can be used anywhere. It can be operated with just five controls.

The ClearReader+ is a single unit with an arm containing a camera that swings out. Once reading material has been placed under the arm, a button click can operate the camera.

The device can be customised to read text at different speeds, in up to 12 different languages and up to 23 different voices. ■

[www.optelec.co.uk](http://www.optelec.co.uk)



## Nuance wins at transforming the lives of young people

Nuance, a leading provider of speech solutions, won the 'Technology Provider of the Year 2010' category with its Dragon NaturallySpeaking software at RADAR's 'People of the Year' Awards. This latest accolade reflects the company's commitment to developing and supporting desktop speech solutions that transform personal and professional lives.

Commenting on why Dragon was chosen for this award, Liz Sayce, CEO, RADAR, said: "Dragon has provided disabled people with the independence and freedom to search the internet, keep in touch with family and friends, and pursue their education or work interests and activities. RADAR applauds Nuance's determination to bring the benefits of Dragon to as many influential people as possible, to heighten awareness of what for many is an essential life-line to the connected world."

For many years, people from all walks of life have used Dragon on the PC to be more productive, save time and capture their ideas at the speed of thought – at home, in the office, the courtroom, the classroom, the exam



room, and even on the road. Globally, Dragon's power and performance has been reflected in the hundreds of awards and accolades it has already won, recognising the multiple benefits it brings to PC and Mac users of all abilities.

One student who has been a Dragon NaturallySpeaking user for two years is Felicity Knowles from Poppleton, York. She says the software helped her get to university. "Dragon has made the whole learning process more accessible to me, allowing me to concentrate on the actual content of my answers, rather than worrying about getting down what I wanted," she said.

Nuance recently announced lower prices for a number of its products as part of a new education licence programme. Dragon NaturallySpeaking for PC and Dragon Dictate for Mac are available as £499 classroom packs consisting of a licence for up to five installations and covering an unlimited number of users. Schools can mix Dragon Dictate for Mac and/or Dragon NaturallySpeaking for PC software in up to 100 installations under Nuance's schools licence, which is priced at £895.

**For further information, please email [education@nuance.com](mailto:education@nuance.com)**

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ref: AB0111*

# Class Acts

Seven organisations have reached the final of the BETT awards. We profile the products and talk to the people who developed them

**O**n the shortlist for the BETT awards is a team from the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) Regional Support Centre, Scotland North & East that have saved people with literacy difficulties over £800,000 in six months.

The group, which works from Edinburgh's Telford College, has put together a bundle of 15 free, open source tools called MyStudyBar that helps students to research, plan and structure their work and to get across written and spoken messages.

Programs in the package assembled by JISC cover mind mapping, screen adjustments, word prediction, text-to-speech, speech recognition, magnification and screen reading, among other applications.

The software is available in versions for Windows XP and Vista/Windows 7. The Vista/Windows 7 variant makes use of the operating system's speech recognition feature.



**Racing driver Sir Jackie Stewart backs MyStudyBar**

The website for MyStudyBar – <http://www.rsc-ne-scotland.ac.uk/eduapps/mystudybar.php> – contains a counter that calculates the money saved by people downloading the software.

The counter assumes that a similar bundle would cost £115 to buy commercially. At the time of writing the tally stood at over £800,000.

Endorsed by former racing champion Sir Jackie Stewart, who is president of Dyslexia Scotland, MyStudyBar has already won a clutch of awards.

It is one of a number of open source applications put

together by JISC under the EduApps banner. The latest development is Create&Convert, a program that converts files into the Daisy talking book standard and which is designed to help institutions meet their obligations under the Equality Act 2010.

"People have tended to think that open source software is not as good as commercially available products," says JISC elearning advisor Craig Mill. "We are proving them wrong."

Among the short-listed organisations is the Nisai Virtual Academy, an online college using technology to teach students unable to attend conventional classes.

Over 500 disabled and excluded pupils regularly log in to the Academy's personalised services for live lessons delivered via audio and text links.

Each student has a personalised workspace where he or she accesses classes, assignments, timetables and individual course sites.

The Nisai Virtual Academy was recently described as a world leader in personalised learning by Rob Abel, chief executive of the IMS Global Learning Consortium.

"It's a totally new way of learning which is more supportive," says Simon Nadin, marketing executive at Nisai. "Pupils working online in small classes are not distracted as they might be in a classroom."

Assistive technology is often rejected by fashion conscious youngsters because it is too clunky compared with mainstream products.

One company that has been doing its best to provide cool stuff is AssistiveWare, whose Proloquo2go communications aid is now available on iPod Touch, iPhone and iPad devices.

Dutch company AssistiveWare and its UK representation Therapy Box are both up for a BETT gong for a product that has regularly been among the top selling iPhone apps.

Therapy Box has been selling Proloquo2go for 12 months in the UK, relying on word of mouth to get the message across. "We wanted to make this kind of technology affordable, socially acceptable and cool," says Swapnil Gadgil, co founder of Therapy Box.

"Our customers appreciate being able to use a mainstream product and not being set apart by using this software."

Proloquo2go allows users who have difficulties

speaking to hold conversations by composing speech using symbols or an on screen keyboard. Messages are output by Acapela British voices.

With a vocabulary of more than 7,000 words represented by 8,000 symbols, the program has some innovative features including access to recently spoken items over various time periods.

At £800 for an iPhone or iPad and software, Proloquo2go costs considerably less than conventional alternative and augmentative communication devices.

Therapy Box has recently taken the Apple platform a step further by developing Predictable: software that provides word prediction, scanning, switch access and voice output. The product has been designed for people with conditions such as cerebral palsy and motor neurone disease who are not intellectually impaired.

"Communication starts with text-to-speech, but it doesn't end there. Predictable allows you to send a message and update your Facebook status as well," says Gadgil.

Computer-based games may be one answer to the UK's comparatively low level of literacy and numeracy.

Charity Catch Up has developed a series of game-based teaching programs that have so far helped an estimated 80,000 struggling learners with their studies.

For readers, Catch Up has produced three collections of games with up to 25 in each.

The third collection, for eight to 14-year-olds at National Curriculum reading levels one to three, has reached the final of the BETT awards.

The games portray a series of worlds that develop pupils' skills in such activities as blending phonemes, recognising words and reading whole paragraphs.

"A lot of research is going into how to make the best use of technology in the Xbox era," says Sue Walker, head of training for the company. "The games are carefully sequenced and are much more visually appealing for older children, who may regard traditional reading material as babyish."

Texthelp is another company that has a long track record of developing software for improving literacy.

Now Fluency Tutor, a product introduced at BETT 2010, is competing this year in the tools for learning and teaching category. The web-based Fluency Tutor is designed to assess and improve the reading and comprehension levels of students between five and 12.

The solution is designed to be straightforward to use and can be accessed both at school and at home. Pupils listen to illustrated passages, have a go at reading themselves and take quizzes that assess their comprehension.

Fluency Tutor will encourage pupils as young as five years old to master reading and develop their fluency and comprehension levels while reading.

Sound Shuffle from TTS demonstrates that electronic teaching aids don't have to be expensive. The £15 switch adaptable recorder stores up to four minutes of stories, messages and sound effects. A single large button allows users to play back recordings in sequence or at random.

The device can be mounted on a wall and is equipped with a headphone socket.

Sound Shuffle "is Ideal for 'jabberwocky' style stories, unpicking number sequences and puzzles or for setting fast paced PE activities," says the maker TTS.

While most finalists have entered software to aid learning, BETT Awards judges also considered the merits of software to help children play.

Inclusive Technology's HelpKidzLearn is a collection of free software for young children and those with learning difficulties to play online.

The software is split into five sections: early years, games and quizzes, stories and songs, creative play and 'find out about'.

In addition to online gaming, HelpKidzLearn provides practical information for parents on tasks such as setting up a switch.

Many young users struggle with the normal Windows desktop. MyZone, also from Inclusive Technology, is a user interface that helps children and adults with learning difficulties access programs and files more easily.

MyZone, which is a finalist in the tools for learning and teaching category, can be accessed with mouse, roller ball, touch screen or switches.

A setup tool gives teachers control over the settings and links in a user's zone. Many titles are automatically picked up and assigned an icon.

"The breadth and quality of special educational needs software is definitely improving," says Alison Littlewood, Inclusive's marketing manager.

"Some teachers are absolutely fabulous about using resources but we do provide support for other teachers who are not so confident." ■

## THE BETT FINALISTS

### TOOLS FOR LEARNING AND TEACHING

- Inclusive Technology: MyZone
- Texthelp Systems: Fluency Tutor

### SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS SOLUTIONS

- Catch Up: Catch Up Literacy Digital Games 3
- Inclusive Technology: HelpKidzLearn
- JISC Regional Support Centre Scotland North & East: MyStudyBar
- Nisai Virtual Academy Ltd: Nisai Virtual Academy
- Proloquo2Go: AssistiveWare and Therapy Box
- TTS: Sound Shuffle



## Who uses MyStudyBar?

(Hint: They all do)



MyStudyBar, a collection of 15 portable software applications that can help students with literacy difficulties overcome barriers to learning.

Download your FREE copy at [www.eduapps.org](http://www.eduapps.org)

(MyStudyBar is useful for big people too!)

JISC advance

RSC  
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Scotland North & East

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## **versatile** mains controller



Across the road from the main BETT show in the Hilton Hotel, the Special Needs Fringe features some of the more innovative companies in assistive technology. Here is a taste of what they have to offer

## Switched on Pretorian

Pretorian Technology (stand S02), the British trackball, joystick and switch company, is showing two new products: Energise 3 and Smooth Talker.

Energise 3 (from around £150 plus VAT) is a mains controller that allows switch users to control up to two electrical appliances with one or two switches.

The controller has sockets for two mains plugs and two wired switches.

Users can also communicate with the device wirelessly from a distance of up to 10 metres via a Switch 125 talking to a built-in Simply Works receiver.

Six selectable modes enable the user to choose how, and for how long, appliances will be turned on.

Four modes give independent switch and appliance activation: two modes provide co-operative control of both appliances.

Smooth Talker (from around £110 plus VAT) is a switch operated communicator that delivers a series of pre-recorded messages up to two minutes long through a pair of speakers.

The device can also be connected to two toys or appliances activated by Smooth Talker's big red button.

Pretorian says Smooth Talker is the only communicator on the market that can activate two toys or appliances at the same time.

[www.pretorianuk.com](http://www.pretorianuk.com)

## Tobii S32 on track for children

Tobii (stand S07), the Swedish maker of eye tracking systems, has recently added a range of communication aids to its line up.

Last year the company came out with an augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) device called Tobii S32.

The system can play back pre-recorded messages, sounds or infrared signals, activated by touching a sheet of printed symbols, pictures or scenes.

The messages and sounds are recorded either directly onto the Tobii S32 or via the accompanying software for manipulating symbols called Tobii SymbolMate.

More recently Tobii has announced new vocabulary software called Sono Primo, which is designed to help children improve their communication through a series of situations with pre-programmed vocabularies, social scripts and visual scenes.

Sono Primo uses pre-recorded children's voices rather than synthetic speech because Tobii's researchers say that children learn better that way.

Sono Primo requires Tobii Communicator 4.5 and a MyTobii P10, Tobii C8 or Tobii C12. Tobii Sono Primo also runs with Tobii SymbolMate and a Tobii S32.

Sono Primo is free with a Tobii communication device. [www.tobii.com](http://www.tobii.com)

## Techcess puts communication first

2011 is the National Year of Communication; highlighting the importance of speech, language and communication.

And alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) developer Techcess is closely involved with the drive to help children express themselves.

At the SEN Fringe Techcess (stand S08) is displaying Tellus 4, a replacement for its earlier Tellus 3 communicator.

The new model (£5,900 plus VAT) is a large format PC-based communications aid running Windows 7, which, according to Techcess boss Martin Green, represents better value than its predecessors.

The Tellus 4 comes with a 13.3 inch wide screen, an internal web camera for head tracking and an integrated desktop stand, among other new features.

It is supplied with Mind Express symbol-based communication software and the Eurovocs Suite for text-based communication.

Also on show from Techcess is the Zingui communicator, which comes in two versions: a basic model with recorded speech only and the Plus version with both digitised speech and synthesised text-to-speech.

Zingui has a 8.3 inch touch screen, Mind Express software and on board recording that allows teachers to customise existing vocabularies and add new pages.

With a standard battery, a basic Zingui model costs £3,266 plus VAT or £3,331 with a longer life battery. Zingui Plus (with Realspeak or Acapela voices) costs £4,225 or £4,290, depending on the battery.

[www.techcess.co.uk](http://www.techcess.co.uk)

## Churchill's latest Lightwriter

Toby Churchill became disabled and lost his speech in the 1960s following an attack of encephalitis while studying as an engineering student.

Dissatisfied with the communication aids





# special needs fringe

available at the time, he designed the first Lightwriter, a portable device for turning text into speech, for his own use.

The latest Lightwriter SL40 (stand S09) has a keyboard, two displays (one for each correspondent) and a forward-facing loud speaker.

The communication aid remembers the words and phrases users type and predicts the ones they are most likely to enter next.

The SL40 (£3,300 excluding VAT) also has a SMS texting feature that operates in the same way as from a mobile phone. It can also be used to make voice calls in conjunction with the SL40 Connect.

[www.toby-churchill.com](http://www.toby-churchill.com)

## Inclusive keeps in touch

Inclusive Technology (stand S10) will show the Inclusive One Touch, a touch PC designed for education.

The robust PC has an extra tough screen with adjustable height and tilt that uses capacitive touch screen technology for light touch access.

The machine also features an integrated webcam and microphone, front-facing USB ports, quiet operation and low power consumption.

The Inclusive One Touch PC (from £845 to £979, excluding VAT) comes with a collection of free educational software including MyZone – a configurable

desktop from Inclusive that provides a personal workspace for each pupil.

It is possible to create 'zones' for each learner that hold their programs, activities and games.

Pupils can enter their zone using touch, a mouse or switches. Each screen can have up to 12 icons to choose from.

MyZone includes 12 simple games including Colouring In, Making Music, Tops Middles and Bottoms and Make a Pizza.

In a recent development, Inclusive Technology has merged with Quality Enabling Devices.

Inclusive supplies hardware and software for learners with special educational needs, while QED provides assistive technologies and living aids and is strong in the health sector.

Nadine Farris, previously sales director of QED, will now act as business manager for QED as well as assisting Inclusive on the expanded range of products. ■  
[www.inclusive.co.uk](http://www.inclusive.co.uk)



Using MyZone on Inclusive's One Touch



MindManager® maps provide an intuitive way for students and educators to engage using a visual framework that fosters clarity, innovative thinking and communication.

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You create maps in MindManager by starting with a central theme or goal. Then provide more detail by adding subtopics with notes, images, tasks, hyperlinks and attachments containing related ideas and information.



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MIND MAPPING SOFTWARE																	
Company/Product		Single user price (ex. VAT)	Online Version	Download/Disc	Brainstorm mode	Export formats	Outline view	Expand/collapse branches	Toolbar	Multiple attachments to branches	Internet connection	Spell check	Clipart	Drag and drop	Split Screen	Text to Speech	Change Background Colour
Claro Software		www.clarosoftware.com															
Claroideas V/2		From £18	No	Both	Yes	W, PPT, PDF, I	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Inspiration		www.inspiration.com, UK distribution by Tag Learning www.taglearning.com															
Inspiration 9		£59.99	No	Both	Yes	W, PPT, WP, PDF, HTML, V, P	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Webspiration		Free (\$39.99 per year for classroom version)	Yes	N/A	Yes	W, PPPT, WP, PDF, HTML, V, P	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Kidspiration 3		£47	No	Both	Yes	W, PPT, WP, PDF, HTML, V, P	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Matchware		www.matchware.com															
Mindview 4 (business)		£199, £89 (DSA)	Yes	Both	Yes	W, HTML, PPT, P, Q, EX PDF	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Mindview 4 (standard)		£149, £99 (education), £59 (DSA)	Yes	Both	Yes	W, HTML, PPT, P, Q, EX PDF	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Mindview 3 (Mac)		£129, £99 (education), £59 (DSA)	No	Both	Yes	W, HTML, PPT, PDF	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
MeisterLabs		www.mindmeister.com															
Mindmeister		Basic version free Premium \$59 per year Academic edition \$29.50 per year	Yes	N/A	Yes	W, HTML, PDF, RTF	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
MindGenius		www.mindgenius.com															
MindGenius 3		£57(education) £147 (business)	No	Both	Yes	W, P, EX, PPT, PDF, HTML, V	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Mindjet		www.mindjet.com															
MindManager 9		£49	No	Both	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mind Catalyst		£10.58 per month	Yes	N/A	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
NovaMind Software		www.novamind.com															
NovaMind Express		\$49	No	Both	Yes	W, OPML, TXT	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
NovaMind Pro		\$149	No	Both	Yes	W, OPML, TXT, PPT, K	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
NovaMind Platinum		\$249	No	Both	Yes	W, OPML, TXT, PPT, K	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Spark Space		www.spark-space.com															
Spark-Space 4.0 Education		£69 (available in versions for different age groups)	Yes	Both	Yes	W, VG, JPEG, BMP	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Spark-Space 4.0 Professional		£299	Yes	Both	Yes	W, VG, JPEG, BMP	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
ThinkBuzan		www.thinkbuzan.com															
iMindMap elements		£49	No	Both	Yes	I, PDF	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
iMindMap professional		£99	No	Both	Yes	W, PPT, O,OO, IF, PDF, Web, HTML	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
iMindMap ultimate		£149	No	Both	Yes	W, EX, C, PPT, P,OOO, IF, PDF, Web, HTML,WAV	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
XMind		www.xmind.net															
Xmind		Free (£35 per year for Pro version)	No	Download	Yes	W, PPT HTML, PNG, GIF, JPEG, BMP, PDF	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
W – Word: PPT – PowerPoint: PDF – Portable Document File: I – Image: WP – Web page, HTML – Hypertext Markup Language: V – Visio: P – Project: RTF – Rich Text Format: OPML – Outline Processor Markup Language: TXT – Text: K – Keynote: VG – Vector Graphic: JPEG – Joint Photographic Experts Group: BMP – bit map: O – Outlook: OO – Open Office: IF – Image file: EX – Excel: C – Calc: W – WAV: GIF – Graphics Interchange Format																	



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[www.speechtek.com/europe2011](http://www.speechtek.com/europe2011)

# Engineering eaccess

How assessors keep the wheels of assistive technology turning

**A**ssessment is the engine room of assistive technology and assessors are its stokers: shovelling hard to keep up a good head of steam. Without people to observe, measure and match clients with appropriate systems the whole elaborate support mechanism for assistive technology would grind to a halt.

Government schemes such as Access to Work, the Disabled Students Allowance, not to mention the inclusion programmes run by schools and employers, could not function without professionals who understand both the technology and the needs of disabled people.

An army of several thousand professionals is involved in assessment, training and consultancy in the UK. Not surprisingly, in view of the complexities of the field, many of them focus on particular technologies, disabilities or support programmes.

"I specialise in education," says John Liddle, a freelance assessor currently working as a quality assurance manager for the Home Access programme. He oversees the assessment of disabled children entitled to free computers at home. "And if you said to me go and do Access to Work I would have to do a bit of checking, but I could manage. I am able to go into most environments and be comfortable.

"The field of assistive technology is vast, ranging from alternative and augmentative communication to dyslexia, visual impairment, mobile technology and online tools. It is difficult to keep up," he says. "You can be confident in quite a few areas but not an expert in all of them."

Most assessments are initiated by a third party such as an occupational therapist, a company, education authority or JobCentre. The organisation has already decided in principal to fund assistive technology.

Liddle is quick to point out that assessors are there to advise what kind of assistance is needed, rather than as gatekeepers deciding who shall have assistance.

Although much of the work involves technology that will be paid for by a grant, sometimes assessors are called on to recommend a support package or work out a lifetime cost for technology as part of a court compensation claim.

Assessors rarely go to a session without some idea

of the needs of the person they are assessing. They will have a statement of special educational needs or a medical report to guide them.

Typically they spend half a day or more explaining technology and watching how their clients interact with their computers. Liddle dismisses what he calls briefcase assessments that do not involve hands on work.

"The first thing is a conversation: chatting about what it is the person wants to do and what they know about technology. I'll talk to the professionals, university staff, for example, who work with them."

"I am not just a man with a van who has everything. I don't suggest a client tries out everything and gets exhausted in the process."

Assessors have to be subtle in their approach to assessment.

"We try some basic tasks and work out where the problems lie," explains Liddle. "We might hide a reading task in a Dragon NaturallySpeaking reading script or take note of the fact someone is using 10 mouse movements when

control P would do it."

Although assessment and training delivered online is a cheaper alternative to personal visits, most assessors can be found loading up their cars on a working day with a selection of software and hardware for their clients to try.

However, remote assessment is increasingly common. Home Access is carrying out assessments by means of half hour telephone conversations based on information from schools. Liddle was also involved in an early experiment by AbilityNet in assessing users online.

"Remote assessments can help by allowing you to dip in and out of an assessment that might be too exhausting for someone to do all at once. I've got a passion for them because they do work. They give you the opportunity to have prolonged trials so you know something really does work before you go ahead and recommend it."

Liddle points out that the way assessments are delivered has changed in recent years. There is a trend towards using freelance staff rather than keeping assessors on the payroll.

But it can be a lonely furrow to plough, so he and a group of nine fellow freelancers have set up the AT



**John Liddle of Accessible Futures**



Professionals Group to pool their know-how, liaise with suppliers and provide a voice for independent operators.

"Each of those individuals or sole traders, has a job to keep their knowledge up to date, to have access to the latest AT, to deliver high quality to work and to do business development so that they have work next week," explains Liddle.

"Sometimes doing all that while doing the day-to-day work can be challenging. For this reason a group of us have decided to form the AT Professionals Group."

All of which is reassuring to those who rely on professional assessors to keep them on the right technology track. ■

[www.atprofessionalsgroup.com](http://www.atprofessionalsgroup.com)

## Supporting disabled students

Lizzie Sherwood is a technical needs assessor at Exeter University. Here she talks about her work with dyslexic students



**Q How long have you been working with disabled students and why did you choose this career?**

**Lizzie Sherwood:** I started teaching severely disabled students over 30 years ago and in 1995 my eldest daughter was diagnosed with severe dyslexia, which led me to consider different types of support.

I completed a reading recovery course followed by a Postgraduate Certificate in Literacy and Dyslexia through the Dyslexia Institute (now Dyslexia Action), validated by the University of York. I have been working on a self-employed basis with disabled students at universities since 2000, initially at Bristol University and then at Bristol, Exeter and Camborne School of Mines. I have also been a member of academic services at Exeter University for four years.

**Q In what ways do you think dyslexia impacts the lives of young students?**

**LS:** Many students with dyslexia experience severe frustration as they are often bright and knowledgeable, asking good constructive questions to improve their knowledge further, yet they are restricted by the dominant paper-based examination system.

Although some schools now offer alternative ways of presenting information to students, the current timed examinations at the end of most courses often fail to reflect students' true understanding of topics. This can negatively impact on students' self-esteem and confidence.

**Q How important is it that each student is assessed individually?**

**LS:** Absolutely vital. Each child should be recognised

as unique and their needs assessed accordingly.

When my daughter moved up to secondary school, the number of formally assessed individuals with dyslexia was larger than the school expected.

They were all put into one class so that staff could be alerted to the fact that a child from a particular class had a specific learning difficulty (SpLD). This did not work because firstly, the children were so vibrant, enthusiastic and loud, and secondly, they were all so different!

**Q What benefit do you feel the DSA brings to a student's life?**

**LS:** For many of the students I see, access to university without DSA support would be prohibited by the cost of study skills support, note-takers and mentors. While many students can afford a basic computer, they cannot afford the higher specification machines required to run newer versions of Texthelp's assistive software or Dragon Dictation software.

**Q How have educational establishments benefited from the DSA programme?**

**LS:** Exeter University is unique in its service because it is willing to start support as soon as a student has a cause for concern. If a student has already applied for DSA but is still waiting for a needs assessment, this is backdated to when the report is written.

However, if a student has not applied for DSA or is not eligible, we use the University Access to Learning Fund. Our Mental Health Mentoring Team won *The Times* Higher Education Award for the best service a few years ago and has since expanded. We also have dedicated support staff to cater for students with dyslexia, dyspraxia and autism.

**Q Are assessors loyal to particular technology brands or open to new technologies?**

**LS:** There is a degree of loyalty to brands but as long as a program works effectively and reliably I would always give it a go.



## A round-up of new ideas from the Sight Village London technology exhibition

### Getting the message from Step-Hear

The Equality Act is pushing organisations such as banks, colleges and hospitals into taking a closer look at technologies that can give equal access to their services.

Geemarc Telecom has been getting more interest in Step-Hear, an Israeli product designed to orientate and guide vision impaired people in public places.



Step-Hear consists of base stations loaded with up to three messages of a maximum 10 minutes duration. Users carry an activator with three announcement buttons.

The activator vibrates and beeps when it is within range of a base unit. Announcements can then be activated by pressing the buttons.

Step-Hear is already used to tell passengers about train departures and arrivals. It has also been integrated with automated teller machines.

Installations of Step-Hear require careful thought about the positioning and range of speakers to avoid confusing users.

The Step-Hear system compliments the range of telephones and assistive listening devices for the hard of hearing and vision impaired provided by Geemarc Telecom.  
[www.geemarc.com](http://www.geemarc.com)

### Cobra strikes for Pamtrad Customs

Pamtrad Customs has released in the UK version nine of the £550

Cobra screen reader from German software firm Baum. The new version, which supports Windows XP, Vista and Windows 7, is faster than its predecessor and boasts a tool for accessing the internet using the Mozilla Firefox browser.

The screen reader's ability to decipher hard-to-read web pages and displays using screen character recognition makes the package useful for telephony applications or where multiple screens are used.

Cobra, which can cope with mobile phone screens, reads live text in Java, flash and bitmap images using OCR software. The software can also split areas on a Braille display to show specific pieces of live information and it supports more than one Braille display to make training easier.

"There has been a lot of interest in Cobra since its release two years ago," says Pamtrad. "Unfortunately it has taken till now for it to evolve enough to be fully effective. It has been extensively tested and except for a few minor planned improvements it is ready for the shelf."

Also on display was the new iZoom screen magnifier and reader. The software's patent-pending ClearPoint font smoothing helps to maintain text quality at high magnification, says the company.

In addition, iZoom's smart align feature means users don't have to scroll horizontally when reading across.

The package, which is designed to be loaded onto any PC from a thumb drive without licensing or installation issues, costs £250.

[www.pamtrad.co.uk](http://www.pamtrad.co.uk)

### Magnifier glows organically

At the lively TechReady stand staff were enthusing over the SenseView portable video magnifier, which now sports organic light emitting diodes (OLEDs).

It is the first time that OLED displays have been used in a CCTV

product (up to now they have been confined to high end smartphones).

OLEDs, says TechReady, produce a sharper image that can be seen at an angle with less distortion. The 4.3 inch screen SenseView Lite costs £385 (excluding VAT) and has focussing that allows it to be held above an object rather than on it.

[www.techready.co.uk](http://www.techready.co.uk)

### Guide Dogs Go Walkies

The Guide Dogs organisation embraces technology as keenly as it does its canine helpers.

At Sight Village the organisation unveiled an iPhone app to build awareness of and participation in Guide Dogs' Go Walkies fundraising events. The app shows dog owners new and interesting routes for walking their dogs, and provides information on local Go Walkies events.

As well as helping to discover new trails, the GPS function on the app will allow users to log and share their favourite walks with other dog walkers. In addition, it will provide weekly dog care tips from celebrity vet Marc Abraham.

[www.gowalkies.org.uk](http://www.gowalkies.org.uk)

### Clip together Braille display

Braille displays are bulky items at the best of times, but Blazie Engineering is now distributing CEBRA, a display that can be taken to pieces.

Developed by Austrian company Ninepoint, CEBRA consists of 20 character Braille modules that can be clipped together to provide up to 80 character displays.

The aluminium units, which can be connected to a PC or cell phone via USB or Bluetooth, are flexible enough that they can be joined together at right angles. Users can also clip navigation units on either end of each module.

NOVEM, an ultra flat Braille keyboard from Ninepoint can also be hooked up to CEBRA.

[www.blazie.co.uk](http://www.blazie.co.uk)

# Ability is about *seeing things differently.*



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### For further information please contact:

AbilityNet • PO Box 94  
Warwick • CV34 5WS

\*Tel: 01926 312847 • Fax: 01926 407425

(\*Minicom accessible)

Email: [enquiries@abilitynet.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@abilitynet.org.uk)

<http://www.abilitynet.org.uk>

Charity no. 1067673

## AbilityNet

Adapting Technology ■ Changing Lives



# Diary of events

## BETT 2011

**12 - 15 January**  
**Olympia, London**

BETT is one of the biggest tech shows in the UK, attracting over 600 educational suppliers and 30,000 visitors. Special educational needs software and hardware can be seen in the Olympia exhibition halls and at the nearby Special Needs Fringe at the Olympia Hilton, two minutes away from the main show.

**Fees:** Free

**For further information:**  
[www.bettshow.co.uk](http://www.bettshow.co.uk)

## SPECIAL NEEDS FRINGE

**12 - 14 January**  
**Olympia Hilton Hotel, London**

Sited just round the corner from BETT, the Special Needs Fringe is companion event organised by Inclusive Technology. The Fringe is an oasis of calm compared with the main show. It features the leading specialists in assistive technology and a seminar programme. The show opens at 9:30am, half an hour before BETT.

**Fees:** Free

**For further information:**  
[www.inclusive.co.uk/exhibitions](http://www.inclusive.co.uk/exhibitions)

## ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE AND EXHIBITION

**26 - 29 January**  
**Caribe Royale Convention Centre, Orlando, Florida, USA**

The Assistive Technology Industry Association's (ATIA) conference and exhibition in Orlando provides networking opportunities with disability professionals and consumers. Attendees can choose from a wide variety of educational sessions and try AT products and services showcased by leading suppliers.

**Fees:** Standard registration from January 3 is \$525 for three days

**For further information:** Contact the ATIA office via e-mail at [info@atia.org](mailto:info@atia.org) or visit [www.atia.org](http://www.atia.org)

## SPECIAL NEEDS SUPPORT EXHIBITION

**2 - 3 February**  
**Crowne Plaza Hotel, Bahrain**

This first exhibition of assistive technology in the Gulf is intended to educate the public about issues related to disability, to focus the public's view on those with special needs and help the parents of

disabled children with financial aid for their children's treatment. It is organised by the Federation of Gulf Cooperation Council Chambers, the Gulf Disability Society and ProVision Events.

**Fees:** None

**For further information:**  
visit [www.snse-expo.com](http://www.snse-expo.com)

## CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE (CSUN) 25TH ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

**16 - 19 March**  
**Manchester Grand Hyatt Hotel, San Diego**

The annual CSUN conference is the largest event in the world covering assistive technology. Organised by CSUN's Centre on Disabilities, the show runs over four days.

**Fees:** Not available at time of going to press

**For further information:**  
<http://csunconference.org> or email [conference@csun.edu](mailto:conference@csun.edu)

## NADP SPRING CONFERENCE 2011

**25 March**  
**Hesperia Hotel, London**  
**1 April**

**Radisson Blu Hotel, Liverpool**

The theme of the National Association of Disability Practitioners is physical and sensory impairments. Presentations will focus on:

- Technology to support learners with print impairments
- How to cope with 'invisible' disabilities as an undergraduate
- Building Design and Access

**Fees:** Booking before 28 January: member £135, non-member £160. Booking after 28 January: member £165, non-member £190

**For further information:** email [info@nadp-uk.org](mailto:info@nadp-uk.org) or visit [www.nadp-uk.org](http://www.nadp-uk.org)

## SIGHT VILLAGE SCOTLAND

**5 April**  
**Hilton Hotel, Edinburgh**

**6 April**  
**Hampden Park Stadium, Glasgow**  
Queen Alexandra College's well-attended series of exhibitions aimed at those with vision impairments and people who work with them takes place in Scotland.

**Fees:** None

**For further information:** email [sv@qac.ac.uk](mailto:sv@qac.ac.uk) or visit [www.qac.ac.uk](http://www.qac.ac.uk)

## Contacts

### Ability magazine

Editorial, advertising and other enquiries:  
[john.lamb@abilitymagazine.org.uk](mailto:john.lamb@abilitymagazine.org.uk)  
[www.abilitymagazine.org.uk](http://www.abilitymagazine.org.uk)

### AbilityNet

Charity advising disabled people, employers and others on assistive IT.  
0800 269545  
[www.abilitynet.org.uk](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://www.emptech.info)

### IT Can Help

Volunteers offering disabled people free local help with computers.  
0800 269545  
[www.itcanhelp.org.uk](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://www.lcdsuitability.org.uk)

### Remploy

Employment services for disabled people and employers, plus other business services, including IT equipment recycling.  
[www.remploy.co.uk](http://www.remploy.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](http://www.ucandoit.org.uk)

# A shift to individualism

Kevin Carey looks forward to an age of rewards for those who find solutions

**B**y the time you read this, the axe will have fallen. I have no doubt that this will include:

- A decimation of public sector grants to charities, a fall in their voluntary income but a greatly increased burden of need because of public sector cuts.
- A radical scaling down of public sector rehabilitation contracts and other state funded facilities for people with disabilities, replaced by niggardly personal budgets.
- Huge cuts in public sector employment impacting on the selection criteria for private sector employment.
- Massive de-regulation to cut costs.

The party's over. For many disabled people it's been a pretty half-hearted and even grim party. Looking back over the years since Alf Morris's Disability Act, we've got many more rights now but our enjoyment of them is pretty exiguous.

I have said before (*Ability* 78 Summer 2010), there is little point asserting rights and that the public sector must ensure that we enjoy them – that era is over – but I want to put a more constructive argument.

After more than two centuries of industrial modernity, including organising to fight two world wars, we are moving back into a period of economic and social organisation that resembles that entrepreneurial period spanning the 17th and 18th centuries.

It does not look like that now with all the targets and box ticking but that was always a rearguard action by bureaucrats.

We will soon rediscover that risk has its market and human price, that ensuring and insuring against anything and everything



**Kevin Carey is director of HumanITy, a UK charity formed to foster digital inclusion for disabled and other disadvantaged people**  
[www.humanity.org.uk](http://www.humanity.org.uk)

is disproportionate and that much of what we take to be prudential governance is actually a sham.

The social networks are leading the way. The 21st century will be one where arrangements are made on the basis of trust and friendship – yes, of being nice to people rather than forever telling them what they're not doing right.

It will be an age of rewards for those who find solutions rather than for those who identify problems.

We will have to do a complete about face and see government and business as entrepreneurial allies rather than enemies.

We will have to convert our whingeocracies into entrepreneurial designers, manufacturers and sellers of goods and services that provide solutions; and the charities that don't adjust to this new environment will crash!

This is not to diminish the catastrophe of the cuts but no matter how long we stay in shock, there has to be a moment when we begin to rebuild.

Naturally, and properly, campaigners will try desperately hard to hold the line, to hang on to what we've got, and if they manage to do that they will have done brilliantly; but it won't be enough.

There's no macro social justification any longer for big government except to handle climate change. With more than half our population coming through higher or further education, we don't need the Government to hold our individual and collective hands from conception to cremation.

So where does this leave the social construct of disability? My guess is that there aren't going to be any rules and, consequently, much less fighting about definitions. People will find life fulfilment through the networks they establish rather than through the enforcement of rights. The Disability Living Allowance really may be the last benefits hurrah.

We will have to spend far more time and money thinking about developing self confidence in people with disabilities and in their carers.

This plays to the individualism strand of ideology that first fought against the medical model but I suspect that the collective strand, the assertion of rights based on some form of physical or mental group identity, will be hard to abandon.

In spite of appearances, nothing happens all of a sudden but there will be a steady shift towards individualism and we should welcome it. Solidarity is a matter of what we do, not what we are. ■

# Job Vacancies at Hands Free Computing



## Do you want to make a difference to people's lives?

Hands Free Computing is an expanding company with offices in West Sussex and Sunderland. We assist people with disabilities in the workplace, in particular those with dyslexia and RSI as well as healthcare professionals who need more effective means of report writing and creating patient notes.

We have several full time roles for self motivated individuals who want to work in a fast paced innovative environment.

## Training Executives

We require two Training Executives to deliver training to our diverse range of clients in the South of England. Applicants who live in other regions should still apply however as we will have further vacancies in other regions soon.



You should have excellent verbal and written skills, be organised and able to work under pressure. A good working knowledge of Microsoft Office is required and it will be useful to have experience of working with Dragon NaturallySpeaking, other assistive software or NHS systems as well as a PTLLS qualification.

Salary: £18,000 - £22,000 plus car, private medical insurance and other benefits.

## Technical Assessors

Due to continued expansion we are looking for Technical Assessors throughout the UK to assess the needs of people with a disability in the work place. The role is varied and includes travel.

The ideal candidate will have a background in assessing the needs of people with disabilities. However, those from a teaching/training background or a technical IT role that wish to broaden their career will also be considered.

Salary: £20,000 – £25,000 plus car, private medical insurance and other benefits.

If you are interested in applying for either of these roles, please forward your CV to Jo Bundy requesting an application form and job specification.

**E-mail: [jo.bundy@hands-free.co.uk](mailto:jo.bundy@hands-free.co.uk) Tel: 0845 899 0880 [www.hands-free.co.uk](http://www.hands-free.co.uk)**

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# Breaking the bonds of illiteracy

*Overcoming writing difficulties to achieve true potential...*

**W**e now live in a digital, global environment. As one study put it, 'Many of the world's most developed countries have shifted from an industrial economy to a knowledge economy – one that is based on the production and distribution of knowledge and information, beyond the production and distribution of things.' The outcomes from such a shift are that assumptions about how people think, learn, create, communicate and work, individually or together, are fading away. Almost 50% of citizens in many developed nations function at literacy levels that challenge their ability to remain economically viable in the modern workforce.

Literacy is to education and lifelong learning what nourishment is to humanity and lifelong health. Thinking, learning, intuition, imagination and innovation have become the currency of the new knowledge economy. Literacy, the ability to access, process and share information, has moved to the forefront. In its digital, multifaceted form, literacy has become a leading component for personal, organisational and national success, impacting individuals and societies worldwide.

## More than 15% of the population struggles with literacy...

The global economic implications are substantial. The need to improve literacy levels, worldwide, has become urgent. 'A 1% increase in adult literacy produces a permanent 1.5% increase in the gross domestic product,' according to the OECD.

## Clinical discoveries and technological innovations...

Quillsoft – the legacy of research and development projects at Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital in Toronto, Canada – was founded by Dr Fraser Shein in December 2000. Holland Bloorview is Canada's largest children's rehabilitation hospital and a University of

Toronto teaching hospital. Clinical discoveries and technological innovations by Holland Bloorview's scientists and engineers have benefited children worldwide. Two such technological innovations, WordQ and SpeakQ software, now available in the UK, were developed by Dr Shein and an extensive research team to assist individuals who struggle with writing and reading.



## Think. Write. Go...

WordQ is a software tool used along with standard writing software to help users create original content while giving them the ability to prevent, find and fix errors themselves. WordQ suggests words when users have trouble spelling and offers examples for easily confused words. It also provides spoken feedback to help edit and proofread while they work. A special text-reading mode helps users by reading aloud text, including emails, web pages and instant messages. Productivity and self-confidence are recaptured, while writing, clarity and independence are enhanced. Using integrated word prediction, text-to-speech and easy speech recognition, WordQ – combined with its companion plug-in SpeakQ – is the world's first (and currently only) fully integrated writing support.



## Say more with SpeakQ...

SpeakQ plugs into WordQ and adds speech recognition that is tolerant of mild accents and speech difficulties. It works exceptionally well for those who have trouble writing and reading. They can benefit from a combination of word prediction, speech output and speech input

to generate context relevant text when challenged with spelling and word forms. Hearing everything read back ensures that irregularities in grammar, punctuation and spelling stand out, making editing and proofreading a part of the learning process.

SpeakQ features a simple training interface where the computer speaks aloud and the user repeats, so no reading is required. They can then dictate directly into any document and the software will repeat what it hears, ensuring comprehension. A handful of hot keys are used to activate functions and there are no verbal commands, so the focus rests solely on dictation.

Quillsoft recognises that many people struggle with literacy and accessibility. WordQ and SpeakQ have become powerful, lifelong learning tools to aid in that struggle. They are forgiving by design and unobtrusive to the writing process, making it possible for individuals to overcome their writing difficulties and achieve their true potential.



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