

Talking technology:

Finding working solutions
to making the curriculum
accessible.



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At Runshaw College, when we are discussing with the student ways of enhancing curriculum access, technology is one tool in our armoury of interventions that we may consider. It can play a vital part in helping to promote their independence. However, as this case study of one particular student illustrates, it is not always a straightforward process. The use of technology - as with any other strategy one might employ – requires constant reflection and adaptation in order to successfully meet the objective of removing or minimising barriers to learning.



Pre-enrolment

Rowan was accepted on the A level programme at College in 2012 to study chemistry, biology, classical civilisation and government and politics. Prior to his enrolment on the course, a meeting was arranged with Rowan and his parents to discuss his learning requirements and negotiate an appropriate package of additional learning support. At this meeting, it was established that Rowan experienced difficulties with literacy skills and had been assessed at school as requiring a reader and a scribe. Mum indicated that she provided reading and scribing support at home. After discussing various options available, it was agreed that Rowan would benefit from having a note taker in class, text reading software and training on speech recognition software. It appeared to be an appropriate and simple solution.

Week 1

He started College with note takers in place from the first day. He was issued with and shown how to use Edu Apps' My Study Bar (MSB) (from Jisc TechDis). This is free software (including text reading and voice recognition) that can help with literacy difficulties.

However, within the first week of his course it became apparent that there were problems. Rowan explained:

“I can't read the notes you are making”



“I can't use the resources the tutors are giving me in lessons”

“I need a scribe to do my written answers”

He was obviously still experiencing significant barriers to learning. We needed to review and revise the plan. A meeting was swiftly arranged with all interested parties, including Rowan, the dyslexia coordinator, his learning support advisor, his note takers in class and his tutors.

We established that in an ideal world Rowan would benefit from;

- all notes in electronic format from the note takers,
- all worksheets, handouts, PowerPoint presentations, articles and textbooks in electronic format.

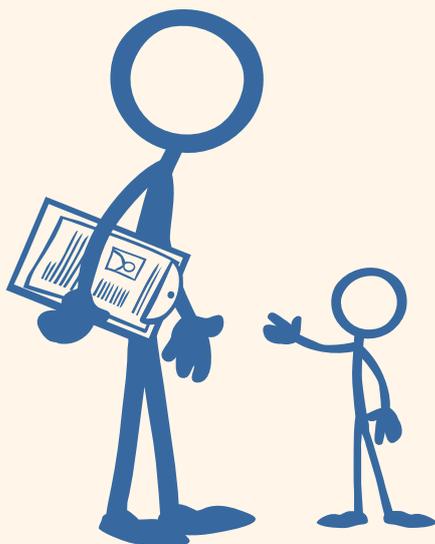


We would require help from tutors in sourcing the appropriate electronic materials. This was an ambitious and potentially lengthy process. We needed an immediate and workable solution. The College had already been working on improving the VLE provision and the use of Moodle was an important tool in enabling greater accessibility to many electronic resources for Rowan.

Week 2

In the first instance, he was provided with electronic notes from his note takers. Lecture notes and worksheets from tutors were accessible on Moodle. We commenced voice recognition training.

We worked on converting resources such as textbooks to digital format. Initially it was just optical character recognition (OCR) enabled PDFs for speed, to enable us to get resources to Rowan quickly so that he could keep up with the curriculum. He was also able to use text reading software with documents in this format. Although not perhaps as high a quality as Epub format, they were quick and easy to produce. In addition, digital copies we received from publishers were also provided in a PDF format. We also considered that for Rowan to access examinations or, indeed, documents related to everyday life such as driving license applications, he would need to be familiar with PDFs rather than other electronic formats.



I feel that, for the first time, I am being helped to learn.

A few weeks into the course

Feedback from Rowan highlighted issues with the text reading software's ability to recognise subject specific words. We moved over from MSB to commercially produced software in an effort to resolve this. Using glossaries compiled by his note takers we have been able to gradually build a dictionary into the software that has meant he can use it without problems when he encounters subject specific terms and technical phrases. In addition, the British Dyslexia Association guidelines on preparing resources for text reading were disseminated to staff.

Class tutors began to direct Rowan to accessible A level resources online. For example, his chemistry teacher recommended <http://www.s-cool.co.uk/a-level/chemistry> for revision. We began exploring ways of obtaining core textbooks in an accessible format and discovered 'Load to Learn' which is a free service providing accessible textbooks and images to learners who find standard print difficult to read. By taking on board student feedback we continued to offer improved resources. With better quality PDFs from the Load to Learn service, we were able to build in bookmarks and better navigation - for example, providing more detailed contents pages.

Progress to date

Rowan is currently using voice recognition software at home for his essays and for completing practice exam questions. He is also using text reading software to proof read his work.



“In the short time that I have been at College I have learned more than I ever thought possible, just with being able to access books for the first time.”

Future aims

This is a continuing iterative process, gaining feedback from Rowan and adapting practice as necessary. Rowan aims to be able to complete some exams independently by the end of this academic year. In addition, we are gradually introducing ways that Rowan can work more independently in lessons without note takers. He will be trialing portable OCR plus text to speech and a digital recorder, for example.

We are exploring ways in which we can enhance our service to all students by expanding our e-book provision in order to facilitate a truly inclusive learning environment.



“It is such a relief to be able to access books. I feel like less of a dyslexic person and more included with everyone else in class who has read the books.”



Contact us:

www.thedyslexia-spldtrust.org.uk

www.runshaw.ac.uk



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