Digital accessibility help and training

Teaching online - remote delivery

With the move to remote teaching delivery, all teaching staff need to be aware of the importance of:

- Compliance with accessibility regulations;
- The impact of the change to online teaching on reasonable adjustments for disabled students to ensure compliance with the Equality Act 2010.

Existing guidance about teaching delivery in Inclusive Learning and Support Plans (ILSPs) is largely designed to apply to face-to-face teaching delivery. Therefore, some recommendations and guidance will need to be adapted to suit the online context. For example an ILSP may state:

- Allow student to record classes if required or to be accompanied by a note taker.

To implement this recommendation when delivering an online lecture you would need to ensure one of the following:

- A recording of the session is made available.
- A transcription of the session is made available.
- Detailed summary notes from the session are provided.

As staff may choose to deliver their teaching in different ways it is important to highlight your responsibility for ensuring accessibility of teaching and for making reasonable adjustments for disabled students where relevant. Also many students do not disclose a disability to the University and therefore do not have an ILSP. Therefore making all teaching and learning resources accessible will ensure that all students can access the information they need.

You can get support by joining the Digital Education Network and posting in the Inclusive Practice channel.

The University can provide advice and support for staff and students to enable them to overcome difficulties in using IT equipment, accessing information or to producing accessible materials.

Advice is available on the production of resources and teaching practices that are accessible to people with disabilities. Following inclusive practices shouldn't result in a significant increase in workload and can improve the quality of your resources for everyone. For guidance, see the regularly updated accessibility regulation webpages, the Creating accessible resources online course or book on to a Making Accessible Documents and PDFs training session. There is guidance on Creating accessible videos (captions and transcripts) and a number of checklists for popular software in the Training section of this page.

If you have resources that you are struggling to make accessible or need specific advice that is not covered in the other guidance materials, you can book a one-to-one accessibility advice session.

For students requiring specific accessibility support, Disabled Students’ Allowances funding may be available through Student Finance or your relevant Funding Council. The Lancaster University Disability Service can arrange an assessment for you.

Frequently asked questions

Lancaster University, along with many other areas of society, has adopted the social model of disability (i.e. disability is caused by the way society is organised, rather than by a person’s impairment or difference). The social model looks to remove barriers that restrict life choices for disabled people. When barriers are removed, disabled people can be independent and equal in society, with choice and control over their own lives.
It is a legal requirement that documents and course content should be accessible to people with disabilities. **You are obliged to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that your content is accessible to all.** Your students or other users of your online materials may be affected by any number of disabilities. You cannot make assumptions about an individual’s ability to access materials and you need to be aware that many people will not declare a disability.

Many people will use assistive technology to access information, but in order for the technology to work the information should be produced in line with recognised guidelines. If you produce well-laid out, standards-compliant content, you will be able to mitigate against many problems faced by disabled users, and at the same time raise the quality of your content for everyone else.

People with disabilities will have a variety of strategies for making your content easier to access, including use of non-standard software such as screen readers. If you create content to industry standards, the impact on a user who attempts to access your content in a non-standard way will be reduced. Typical strategies include:

- Increasing or decreasing size of text
- Resetting colours, fonts, font size
- Using Windows/Mac built-in assistive tools
- Using additional assistive software and technologies
- Changing profile settings (e.g. Moodle users)
- Removing the style sheet or using a personal style sheet on web pages
- Navigating using tab keys

It is really important that you know your students and are sensitive to the fact that they may have borderline disabilities or that they may choose not to declare any issues. Be aware that students’ condition(s) may worsen or improve over time. Test the accessibility of your resources if possible, or encourage your students to report issues.

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To help improve inclusion, there are some Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) considerations to take into account when teaching students. There are over 2000 students who have disclosed a disability and the following considerations will support these students and other students that have not disclosed.

1. Students may not be able to all be online at the same time. They may have to share computers and devices with other members of their family or household.
2. Students will have varied access to bandwidth, e.g. slow download speed in rural areas or competition in densely populated areas, connecting to hotspots may help some but cannot be relied upon.
3. Students may access data differently – some countries will use phone signals rather than wifi
4. Students may be in a different time zone which limits any synchronous ‘live’ teaching activities
5. Students may live in a country with digital restrictions to resources e.g. Youtube
6. Students may not be able to afford to pay the electricity tariff

Remembering these challenges and following guidance about bandwidth and advice about restrictions e.g. Advice about China will help.

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ISS provide online and classroom based training for producing accessible materials (see above). There are also a series of checklists for various applications which contain step by step instruction and videos (see Training section on this page). There is also guidance available for Creating accessible videos (captions and transcripts) - including captions, transcription and audio description. Ally help and training provides and overview and help for making accessible resources in Moodle modules. You can also contact ISS if you have any specific concerns about your resources.

There is a set of brief Home Office guidelines for key things to do and avoid when producing information for people with specific impairments. Although not an exhaustive list, these guidelines cover:

- Sight impairments (low vision)
- Sight impairments (blind / screen reader user)
- Hearing impairments
- Physical or motor disabilities
- Autistic spectrum disorders
- Specific learning differences (e.g. dyslexia)
PDF is the preferred format for documents produced in most applications, as it includes several features that support accessibility within the document. The core of this support lies in the ability to determine the logical order of content in a PDF document, independently of the content's appearance or layout, through logical structure and Tagged PDF. Applications can extract the content of a document for presentation to users with disabilities by traversing the structure hierarchy and presenting the contents of each node. For this reason, producers of PDF files must ensure that all information in a document is reachable by means of the structure hierarchy.

While Microsoft Office documents are generally accessible if best practices are followed and are an acceptable format to use, not everyone uses Office. Set up correctly, a Microsoft Word document will convert into an accessible PDF. Unless you have reason to do otherwise, your online documents should be in PDF format as these are readable across different platforms.

When scanning documents such as book chapters or journal articles, it is essential that the content is readable by assistive technology and is not just an image of the original document. Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software can be used to scan documents and embed the text content into the PDF.

We have created checklists for a number of software packages used at the University. See the list of checklists in the Training section on this page for advice on specific applications.

There are many third-party applications that are available to support your work, learning or teaching - some which are freeware or other apps which people will pay or subscribe to.

Two popular applications include Padlet and Prezi:

- Padlet, an online note-board, is in the process of improving its accessibility, but is not fully accessible as yet so please use with care.
- Prezi, is an online presentation tool, it does not meet accessibility requirements. You may prefer to use Microsoft Sway, and interactive online presentation tool. For further information, see Microsoft Sway help and training.

If you use a third party application not supported by the University, it is your responsibility to check if it is accessible for your students so they can view and understand the content.

These third party applications are beyond the control of University and we do not know their privacy and security levels. Do not use for confidential, restricted or personal information. See Storing information in the cloud for further information.

If you are looking to see if a third party tool is accessible, you may find searchBOX, an accessible content directory, useful.

There are several packages available to you via Information Systems Services (ISS) to help improve accessibility. These include:

- JAWS: Screen-reading software for Windows. Available on one specific computer within the library.
- Texthelp Read and Write: Dyslexia support software to assist users in developing skills in reading and writing. Available on all ISS Supported PCs via AppsAnywhere.
- Mindjet MindManager and Freemind: Mind-mapping software. Available on all ISS Supported PCs via AppsAnywhere and can be installed on personal devices.

For more information about the available software provision at the University, please visit the Software page.
We understand that the software installed on University PCs does not address everyone's requirements and you may need to use additional assistive software or use other similar applications. ISS can provide advice and support on a wide range of assistive software, not just the applications provided on AppsAnywhere.

If you are experiencing difficulties using your computer and believe that you could benefit from assistive software, please contact ISS.

Applications that we can help with include:

- Dyslexia support software (e.g. Texthelp Read & Write, ClaroRead)
- Mind mapping software (e.g. Mindjet MindManager, Mindview, Inspiration)
- Screen reading software (e.g. Jaws, Window Eyes, Supernova, NVDA)
- Screen magnification (e.g. ZoomText)
- Optical Character Recognition for the creation of accessible documents
- Speech recognition software

If you are experiencing difficulty using your computer due to an injury or impairment, ISS may be able to help. Advice is available on a range of assistive technology and equipment, including:

- Windows PC and Apple Mac advice
- Ergonomic equipment (e.g. keyboards, mice, screen risers)
- Ergonomic furniture
- Audio recording devices
- Handheld devices, such as portable scanners and handwriting capture
- Magnification and CCTV systems; desktop and handheld
- Automatic document readers
- Hearing Loop Systems and Radio Aids

ISS can provide advice and guidance to improve inclusivity and ensure that IT services are accessible for individuals with disabilities. IT applications, projects and services that are fundamental to the University's operations can be tested with a range of assistive software, including screen readers, magnification, text-to-speech, speed recognition and other common applications. A report indicating success and failure of key areas will be provided. This service is primarily for central university IT projects and services, however support can be requested by staff in other departments/divisions.