



Books for All project: provision of accessible learning materials for students with diverse needs

The context for the use of ICT for Inclusion

Books for All aims to provide students with learning materials in accessible, alternative formats. It is a powerful combination of policy initiative, innovation, development work and shared purpose among teachers and support staff. It also aims to provide pupils who have a range of additional support needs (ASN) with textbooks, fiction books, worksheets, exams and other curriculum resources in alternative accessible formats. The title Books for All is intentional, as it does not only focus on learners who are blind or have visual impairment, but on all learners who are print-disabled. Nor is DAISY regarded as the only or even the most important accessible format. The area of work reflects all five features: ICT as a key tool to promote equity; access as an entitlement; training of both generalist and specialist providers; promotion of R&D and – more importantly – outcomes generated; and data collection and monitoring.

The policy context

The following are of relevance:

- United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006)
- Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 3
- Equality Act 2010, in particular Section 20 (6), Requirement to provide information in an accessible format and Guidance on reasonable adjustments, duty to provide auxiliary aids and services
- Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004/9
- Education (Disability Strategies and Pupils' Educational Records) (Scotland) Act 2002
- Representation made to the Copyright Licensing Agency (CLA) representing Publishers Licensing Society in order to secure an agreement to amend guidance, based on legislation to extend copyright exemption to print-disabled people (definition available on request).

The use of ICT

An important element is to use or develop free or very low-cost tools to provide access to accessible format books and other materials wherever possible. This involves identifying user needs from the community with whom strong partnership working has been nurtured over many years, achieving mutual trust.

Sample outcomes include:

- The Scottish Voice: high-quality female and male voices available to every PC and Apple computer in every compulsory school setting
- Providing PDF as one accessible format option to allow free access using the inbuilt accessibility tools – which for many learners are the most suitable (for others they are not, but Books for All assumes variability)
- WordTalk made available as a free download for PC users using Microsoft (MS) Word, providing a free text-to-speech reader for MS Word versions prior to MS Word 2010 (Microsoft's own SpeakText command now provides an acceptable, though not as functional, alternative for MS Word 2010 users)
- AMIS access for DAISY reader users

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- Alternatives for smartphone/tablet users.

Key outcomes and benefits

Pupils get the books they need at the same time as their peers in the accessible format they require. Production of the accessible versions makes best use of the user community, by building on partnerships.

The project takes an integrated synthesised approach to cover all aspects of delivering accessible alternative formats to pupils who need them.

This entails:

- a secure, password-protected database allowing teachers and others to find out whether identified curricular resources are already available in the required alternative format (efficient use of public funds, saving time and freeing up resources);
- training for teachers and others on how to produce resources in accessible formats and maintain product quality;
- identifying requirements for intermediate formats (not a single intermediate format);
- establishing workflows that include different approaches to suit individual circumstances;
- a structure for delivery of training so that student teachers and all teachers would be familiar with key skills; more specialised training would be offered for teachers supporting students with different ASN, e.g. teachers of students with dyslexia.

Main challenges and obstacles

In this example, an assumption prevailed – one that is shared by many countries – that ‘accessible format’ only applied to learners who are blind or have visual impairment. Books for All challenged that way of thinking. Convincing the range of stakeholders that current practice was inefficient, ineffective and would in the medium term be considered as discriminatory against students with disabilities (and indeed the wider public) has taken time and needs to continue.

Staff training was addressed by establishing detailed multi-level sessions, tackling three levels of potential user: beginner (those who wanted to find and use materials – all teachers learning how to incorporate structure and tagging into MS Word versions); intermediate (those who would be comfortable making simple accessible materials, e.g. PDFs based on structured Word documents); and advanced (for more specialist approaches, e.g. centres producing their own materials on a larger scale). Fundamental to the work was a commitment to sharing.

Attaining and maintaining quality is an on-going challenge.

Raising awareness that accessible information is a requirement under equality legislation requires continued explanation, as most are unaware of what this means in practice.

Additional information

Nisbet, P.D. and Aitken, S., 2007. *Books For All: Accessible Curriculum Materials For Pupils with Additional Support Needs*. Report to: Scottish Executive Education Department. Web only publication available online at:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/06/05081600/0> (ISBN 978 0 7559 1535 4).

<http://www.ictandinclusion.org.uk/Home/> – annual two-centre event on ICT and Inclusion, providing continuing professional development (CPD) and in-depth supplier and tutor/teacher-led sessions. This low-cost initiative takes place at different venues each



year and brings together suppliers, trainers, teachers and therapists. Suppliers, national centres and local teachers deliver a mix of plenary and short workshop sessions to cover a range of up-to-date approaches and techniques.

<http://www.callscotland.org.uk/Home> – homepage covering a wide range of activities carried out by Scotland's main source of expertise on assistive technology and augmentative and alternative communication, with particular focus on ICT for inclusion with learners.

<http://www.books4all.org.uk/Home> – homepage of the Books for All project website.

<http://www.wordtalk.org.uk/Home> – download and support site for WordTalk users.

<http://www.adapteddigitalexams.org.uk/Home> – 1 in 3 secondary schools in Scotland now uses digital exams for pupils with ASN as one of the options to help them access their formal examinations.

<http://www.thescottishvoice.org.uk/Home> – the two Scottish voices, Heather and Stuart, are available to any pupil in Scotland on their desktop computer (PC or Macintosh). Users with disabilities can have a free copy for home use, as can Scottish National Health Service patients. This part of the project represented a major partnership undertaking, involving the Scottish Government, CereProc (an international voice banking and speech generation company whose products are available in many countries of the world), local authority individual partners and CALL Scotland.

In isolation, the examples represent innovation in practice that started with identifying user problems before going on to address these for both the individual and at a more strategic level. Taken together, the examples demonstrate the benefits of taking a more integrated approach – encompassing advice (by phone, website, face-to-face support), options to try things out (such as equipment loans of specialist assistive technologies or augmentative and alternative communication systems), CPD/training and collaboration on policy and practice development at various levels of government, and user-focused research and development.