

Case study: Assistive technology

Library Services/IT Services
University of the Arts London

About the organisation

Organisation:	UAL
Department:	Library Services/IT Services
Size:	6 libraries in 6 colleges, central IT Service
Industry Sector:	Higher Education

Background

UAL has 6 colleges of very diverse character, spread over London (Camberwell College of Arts, Central Saint Martins, Chelsea College of Arts, London College of Communication, London College of Fashion and Wimbledon College of Arts). Although they all have their own libraries, the IT and library management is coordinated to try and achieve consistency of service.

Being an arts university, the main focus of many of our students is their practice and they often find producing essays and written work challenging. We concentrate our services and Assistive Technology (AT) on making this easier for our students.

Our Assistive Technology

The Library and learning zones (IT areas within the libraries) have Macs and PCs (centrally managed by IT Services) which all have our traditional AT installed (Read&Write and ClaroRead Text to Speech software, Inspiration and MindView mind mapping software). More than half of the computers are Macs which have good built-in Text to Speech, magnification and dictation software. We don't install specialized magnification software or JAWS as routine, as it is rarely required, but we can provide it at short notice.

We subscribe to SensusAccess (a format conversion tool) <http://www.arts.ac.uk/study-at-ual/library-services/our-services/support-disabled-dyslexic-students/create-an-accessible-copy/> which is on the library pages, but is paid for by the disability service and supported by IT Services. This is available to all students and is also used by staff when transcription from hard copy text is required.

We have added some freeware to the AT mix on our Macs and PCs – Xmind mind mapping software and Zotero referencing software (the app and the browser and Word extensions).

Bookable rooms and Dragon

Only one of our libraries has a separate room where students can use Dragon. This isn't ideal, but at the moment we are constrained by the spaces we have available. We loan Mac laptops, so students can use the built-in dictation software in quiet areas of the college.

Software for the students' own Macs/PCs

We have licences of Audio Notetaker that can be installed on the students' own machines, which presents its own challenges of promotion, training and management.

Assistive Hardware

Assistive hardware is available for loan from the enquiry desk. The image below shows hardware available at London College of Communication.



Assistive hardware available at LCC, image credit Paul Rogers

Promoting AT

We have tried different approaches to promote our AT.

Web Content

We categorize our web pages by the tasks that the AT supports:

<http://www.arts.ac.uk/students/assistive-technology/>. There is a page for reading and writing, one for planning, organising and referencing and one for converting documents. We hope that the tools will be used by students needing task based support, not just those with disabilities and specific learning difficulties. Students whose first language isn't English, for example, can benefit from the AT.

We have recently created a range of AT LibGuides (<http://arts.ac.libguides.com//AT>), which sit on the library web pages and are linked to from the AT pages. We hope these will encourage greater use of our AT by making what we have available more visible.

Apps, inbuilt and freeware

We have tried "bring your own device" events in recognition of the large number of useful and effective free and built-in tools that are on the students own phones, tablets and laptops (particularly their Macs). This approach didn't bring in the students as we had hoped, in spite of publicity on the library and university social media and digital screens, so we are now considering how to include AT in course content, or academic support sessions. We did get a good range of staff attending the sessions, which was an unexpected benefit. We have a 10 top apps web page alongside our traditional AT, which includes the built-in facilities on Macs and phones

Training materials and support

Our AT coordinator and the Assistant Librarian (Access and Inclusion) train the library staff, dyslexia tutors and disability advisers on our AT and on the Mac built-in accessibility features, so they can promote the software to our students. We have bought a subscription to Wyvern training portal which has task based accessible training videos and factsheets on how to use our AT packages.

Because our AT is the result of a collaboration between the disability office, IT Services and Libraries we have a problem with assigning responsibility for helping students who are using the AT. This is something we discuss in our Access and Inclusion meetings that have attendees from the libraries, IT, academic support and the language centre.

Further information

If you would like to collaborate on ideas or have any comments please contact Barbara Denton, Assistive Technology Coordinator b.i.denton@arts.ac.uk

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