

UN-GAG(ed)

The University of Northampton General Accessibility Group Newsletter

October 2007

What is GAG?

We are the University's General Accessibility Group (GAG), a group of individuals from different departments that share accessibility expertise during our termly meetings. We aim to support all staff and students with technical challenges faced surrounding accessible learning and teaching issues.

What is 'accessible' information and why is it important?

Accessible information simply means making it available to as wide an audience as possible. As well as university and home-based students and staff, this includes global web visitors too. Accessibility includes



Accessible for all

considering:

- The technology that people use, e.g. Apple Mac or PC;
- Do they have the 'right' software, i.e. operating system and/or applications;
- Connection speed, i.e. is it fast connection or dial-up? Have minimum file sizes been used to aid quick download?
- Where in the world they are based - is our information easy to understand by our overseas visitors?

- Is our information easily available to those who may have disabilities or specific learning differences?
- Can information be navigated and read by a screen-reader?

Meeting some of the above requirements is challenging but universities are obliged to ensure their information is accessible to all in accordance with the Disability Discrimination Act, Part 4 (formerly SENDA).

What is a screen-reader?

Often known as an assistive technology, a screen-reader reads information from a computer out loud and is commonly used by people who are blind. Screen-readers can be customised to read different languages. Common screen-reader packages are JAWS and Window-Eyes.

A screen-reader can be used on any computer, as long as the electronic information has been designed with accessibility in mind. A key feature of an accessible website is that it uses cascading style sheets (css)

to separate content from style. An accessible electronic document, e.g. Word, will be properly structured so that a screen-reader user can navigate to the document's different sections without having to read the whole document from start to finish. Last year we had five blind/visually impaired students who made use of screen-reading software and around 400 dyslexic students who sometimes used other reading aloud software.

Contact Angela Ashpole on extension 2250 if you would you like a JAWS demonstration.

What have GAG achieved so far?

- Raised accessibility awareness institution-wide via 2 Conferences (2002 and 2004)
- RNIB 'See It Right' packs distributed to Departments and Schools (2004)
- Corporate website meets Web Content Accessibility Guidelines AA standard including online forms and also publicises our university's Accessibility Statement
- Accessibility Guidelines are available to all including external visitors via the Equality & Diversity course on NILE
- Various learner software applications now available to students as well as height-adjustable desks
- Online virtual tours
- 'Creating Accessible Word Documents' training developed and delivered
- University PowerPoint template accessible
- Ensured that a small number of laptops have been made available to loan to [DSA] students
- Delivered accessibility presentations at many university events
- Organised Accessible PDF training for key staff, resulting in an accessible Open Day brochure (and this Newsletter as an example of good practice!)
- Provided accessibility guidance across the university, for example:
 - Distance learning material
 - Producing quick access to NILE for screen-reader users
 - Student Code
 - Testing 'Hot Potatoes'; an online language dictionary; assessment feedback and an improved email application for students

What are our future plans?

'Creating Accessible Word Documents' embedded into Staff Orientation Programme as mandatory.

Institutional Word template containing embedded styles to reflect our university's standard.
Develop training for

creating accessible PDFs including forms
Provide **web choice** of background colour and fonts for users.

Quick tips: improve the accessibility of your documents

File name - Use a simple file name, one that's meaningful and use a hyphen to separate words rather than a character space, e.g. my-document is much better than my document. Why? Because when reading via the web the address translates the character space as %20, so my document.doc becomes my%20 document.doc

Use styles - Why? Because it makes it easy for authors to produce an automated table of contents; it takes seconds to produce a large print version and it helps screen-reader users to navigate electronic information.

- **NILE Equality & Diversity course** – guest login: nile.northampton.ac.uk
- **W3C** - www.w3.org/
- **See It Right** - www.rnib.org/xpedio/groups/public/documents/publicWebsite/public_seeitright.hcsp
- **What is SENDA?** - www.techdis.ac.uk/index.php?p=3_12_21
- **GAG members:** Doreen Addicott, Chris Allum, Angela Ashpole, Paul Crofts, Pam Dimmock, Lee Fairhurst, Rachel Fitzgerald, Rob Howe, Steve Martin, Emma Smith

Want to know more?
Then contact GAG through one of the above or check out the guidelines on NILE.