

UKSG webinar Q&A

'Inclusion zone: A case study in digital accessibility'

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Questions that came during the presentation:

“Q: Are publishers thinking about providing accessible alternatives to complex diagrams/charts presented as images in academic books and articles? For example, a complex climate chart in an image format in a pdf that requires an awful lot of alt text (probably written by an expert) to be interpreted by a screen reader?”

- **Julie/James:** Yes, our content management and production teams are actively looking into this issue. One way to do this is to summarise the information within the body of the page. Another way is to represent the same data that is graphically displayed in a chart, within an accessible table, with headers and a summary. A large part of this is a communication issue with our authors to ensure they understand the need for providing a summary or long description for complex data.

“Q: Khadija - you've hit on a common challenge for us (and I imagine other libraries too) - we use an omni channel approach to promoting library services and support and still face challenges with students not knowing about us. Based on yours and your peer's experiences, what do you think works particularly well as a way of engaging students with services?”

- **Khadija:** I think it is important to advertise your services both online and in person. It would be great to have a webpage that focuses on the services dedicated to supporting users with accessibility needs. This could take the form of Frequently Asked Questions or Useful Information and Services. Even signposting the dedicated webpage on other parts of the university/organisation websites could be effective. I also think that it does not hurt to remind users through emails about your services as well.

In person events such as welcome talks are perfect opportunities to tell library users what specific support you can provide. Also, having well informed help desk staff is an excellent start. In addition, providing tours of the library and its resources can be really helpful. Being a blind student, I also had physical accessibility needs, so it was essential to be able to navigate the library safely. I wish that this would have been used as an opportunity to tell me about the other services that could be useful for me too.

I hope that this is helpful. If you need more clarification, then you can contact me at: khadija-raza@hotmail.co.uk

“Q: Bev - Do you refuse to purchase resources which do not meet accessibility standards?”

- **Bev:** At present, we don't refuse to purchase resources that do not meet accessibility standards. This can be a tricky area as some visual resources can be really help for dyslexic students but can be very difficult if using a screen reader. The good relationships we build with the publishers and suppliers allow us to work with together with them and explain needs. We do raise the issue accessibility within procurement and renewal. This has proved to be successful with publishers we have worked with such as CUP, OUP and Jove.

“Q: Khadija - I have been noticing recently that websites are increasingly visual, which as you say is very difficult for people using a screen reader. What things can more visual websites use to make your user experience better?”

- **Khadija:** This is a very interesting question, as I do not have any vision in which to see visual content. Therefore, as long as the visual content does not negatively impact my screen reader, I am fine. The key thing for all web content is to make sure that all links, images and buttons are properly labelled, otherwise a screen reader will not know what it is hovering over. However, for people with enough vision to see their screens, too much visual content can be overwhelming. As a rule, I would suggest to always keeping your text in a simple and clear font. You should always have a high contrast between your text and the background. Block coloured backgrounds are far better than image backgrounds with text on top. Make sure that your images are always captioned. I would like to make sure that you do not have any moving graphics or carousels as these do not work well with screen readers. They are also very fast moving for people with limited vision to keep up with. Also, things like embedded advertisements and popups really slow down the functionality of a screen reader, so I would avoid using these too.

It also depends on the purpose of the visual content. For example, is an image there for an aesthetic purpose? Then a short image description label will be fine. If the visual content is supposed to be portray information, then a text description is essential. This can be done as a label or a separate description, depending on how long the description needs to be. In addition, a lot of video content is now being made without any audio, rather captions are used. Most captioning is not accessible through a screen reader. So, an audio version or a transcript is necessary. I hope this helps.

“Q: Bev - A link please to open uni page for info for students/staff about accessibility? (even if need to login, that is fine, please do share)”

- **Bev:** <https://www.open.ac.uk/library/help-and-support/disabled-user-support>

“Q: Khadija - what is 'readable font'?”

- **Khadija:** I would say that readable fonts are simple and clear and of a reasonable text size. For example, Calibri, Helvetica or Ariel. Fonts, rather than Cursive or Victorian Script. Fonts that are in bold are easier to read than plain text. I would recommend size 12 as a minimum font, but larger sizes like 14 are preferable. Also, to make sure that they have a high contrast between the text and the background. Block coloured or plain backgrounds are far better than images used as backgrounds, as these create mixed contrast.

“Q: The screen reader reads fast...can you follow so fast?”

- **Khadija:** This is a very funny question, as the screen reader on my phone is even faster. Screen readers have settings where you can change how fast they speak. I started off at a far slower speed and built it up, the more confident I became. I can understand everything the screen reader says, but it took practice. The benefit of a fast screen reader speed is that you can read through digital books and journals a lot quicker :)

“Q: For students who do not have the digital skills to use all of the electronic resources now available, what do you offer to support this and what more can we do?”

- **Bev:** As a distance learning university with an Online library, we gradually built digital skills throughout the qualifications and modules as part of normal study using our DIL framework https://www.open.ac.uk/libraryservices/subsites/dilframework/view_all. In addition, we have developed resources such as Being Digital <https://www.open.ac.uk/library/services/being-digital>

“Q: Are accessible PDFs acceptable, or do you prefer EPUBs?”

- **Khadija:** As a screen reader user, I have not really noticed a huge amount of difference between the effectiveness of an accessible PDF and EPUB. However, I believe an EPUB is able to be more customisable in regards to font size. Therefore, I would say that the latter is better for those who have limited vision who can still see their screens.

“Q: How can I find out more information about the digital accessibility champions? I am the only front-end developer at my institution and have become passionate about developing with accessibility in mind. I would love to be able to reach out to fellow developers from other institutions to share and discuss ideas!”

- **Julie/James:** Please feel free to reach out to us (jelseden@cambridge.org and jcarr@cambridge.org) and we would be more than happy to discuss our Digital Accessibility Champions network with you in more detail. There is also a [great workshop available on YouTube](#) from last year’s Tech Share Pro conference all about creating an accessibility champions network that we highly recommend for inspiration and advice.
- **Khadija:** I can say that the CUP Digital Accessibility Champions are a fantastic group. I have learnt a lot through the range of speakers that they have had. As a member of the Champions, I would be very happy to lend my support if useful. My email address is: khadija-raza@hotmail.co.uk

“Q: For the descriptive alternative text, do you have any best practices or parameters that you use for length or other parameters? On Twitter, I tend to write long descriptions mentioning colour and descriptions of the images and I am never sure if they are too long or specific. I would love to know what is most helpful for the user and works best with screen readers. Can you recommend anything please?”

- **Julie/James:** This is a great question. Having overly long alt text will result in poor user experience for those using screen readers. If an image requires a lengthy description, it is better to describe the image in the content and provide a short alt text. However, describing alt-text accurately and succinctly can sometimes be tricky so we often use third party specialists to consult with. There is a great two part [webinar on the Art and Science of describing images](#) that we would highly recommend for further advice on this. You can also use the [longdesc](#) attribute which allows you to provide a detailed description for more complex images in a separate file.