

Upgrade of Assistive Technology Resources for Visually Impaired Students in the Hallward Library

Rebecca Robinson, Disability Support Coordinator for Information Services, looks at the use of the new assistive technology facilities in the Hallward Library

What was the learning and teaching issue that this technology sought to address?

An assistive technology room (ATR) had previously existed in Hallward Library, but had become out-of-date and was not especially well used. During the development of the Learning Hub, an opportunity arose to allocate a new area as an assistive technology room (ATR) on Level 1.

The Visual Learning Lab (VLL) provided funding to allow the development of accessible, assistive technology for use by any student with a visual impairment.

Although this initiative concentrated on the purchase of equipment and furniture, it was also important to support the development of the ATR with in-house training for Information Services (IS) staff on general disability awareness and use of the assistive technology. The equipment was purchased early in 2008, and installed in the room over the summer in readiness for the start of the academic year. Further installations and/or changes have been made throughout the academic year as the room has evolved.

Have students enjoyed using the new facilities?

Usage has been monitored through the manual booking system and statistics show that there was an increasing number of 'new' students using the room throughout October and early November 2008. Later in the term, users started to make return visits. This indicates that users have found the room/equipment useful. Users tend to use the room for 2-3 hours each visit, although this increased to 4-5 hours towards the end of term.

This work has been a catalyst enabling IS to continue to improve the provision of assistive technology. Although the ATR is only in use by a relatively small number of students it appears to be a valuable resource for them, as repeat usage shows. Since the initiation of this project, further funding has been secured (from the Development Office and IS) to widen the provision. There is now an ATR in Djanogly Learning Resource Centre on the Jubilee Campus,

along with a pilot provision at Sutton Bonington in the James Cameron Gifford Library. All of this has been based upon the innovative template in Hallward Library.

Beyond equipping the ATR, the funding has also enabled IS to be reactive to student requests, an example being a request for coloured overlays. These were purchased and made available for loan through the Lending Desk at Hallward Library. If successful, this provision may be rolled out to other libraries. Based on evaluation and feedback to date, the ATR in Hallward Library has been successful so far and is providing a good foundation on which to build future provision across the University.

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