

Integrating universal design transferable skills in student presentations

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ABSTRACT

Students were trained to deliver Power Point presentations using universal design practices which are inclusive of visually impaired people. This resulted in a high-level of engagement from students, with positive feedback on the value of this training.

INTRODUCTION

Digital accessibility is the inclusive practice of ensuring that all people can equally access and navigate digital information and platforms.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Students with disabilities in the HE sector (16.6%) are underrepresented compared to disabled people in society (22%) and adults of working age (18%). They are also significantly less likely to be employed. Approximately 1.1% of all undergraduate students, who declare a disability have a serious visual impairment. This represents 0.1% of all students compared to 0.5% of the population and 0.2% of young people. However one in five people will live with sight loss in their lifetime.

STRATEGY

One aspect of changing the culture to be more inclusive involves training the next generation.

STUDENT FEEDBACK

It is so important; It makes it clearer and easier to follow, why would anybody not do this?... Feedback from a graduate: I am grateful and happy that I am using it [at work] and I only learnt about it through your project. It really does help.



METHODOLOGY

Seventy-two students from three separate cohorts of finalists students at Kent enrolled on Chemistry or Forensic Science degree programmes were given bespoke training in universal design practices relating to PowerPoint (see Table 1) and asked to incorporate these in their presentations. The training was given in person. The requirement to include these good practices was not mandatory and no marks were associated.

ASSESSMENT

The presentations were inspected using Microsoft checker, Blackboard Ally (an accessibility checker) and manually for the criteria listed in the table below.

TABLE 1

Criteria for digital accessibility compared to additional time required as a percentage of slide preparation time; and student engagement as a percentage of the overall student numbers.

Universal design criteria	Additional time required	Engagement as a percentage
Navigational usability	Low <5%	99%
Large font	Low <5%	90%
Colour contrast	Low <5%	83%
Alternative text	High (20-80%)	13%

CONCLUSIONS

From a total number of seventy two students all but one engaged with at least one aspect of good practice. Most students however avoided producing alternative text which is time consuming. Three students engaged with all aspects of universal design producing presentations, which were assessed as perfect by the accessibility checkers.

As a comparison without bespoke training less than 5% of finalist students had used universal design principles in the previous two academic years.