

Information

Specialist equipment: sources of help and information

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1 Introduction

Specialist equipment may help you with your studies or at work. It is useful to find out what equipment is available and what is right for you. You may already have equipment. However, technology changes very quickly so it is worthwhile finding out if there is something that will better suit your needs. This information booklet tells you about specialist centres and organisations that can help you get the right equipment. It gives details about how you can get help paying for equipment and about how you can borrow equipment if you do not want to buy your own. There is also information for professionals and researchers who want up-to-date advice about technology.

2 How technology can help

Technology helps you to access education more easily by:

- providing access to the input and output of a computer. For example, by using alternative keyboards or enlarged text.

- aiding communication. For example, computers can convert text to Braille or speech.
- easing the pressure. Easy access to a computer and software may help where access to libraries is difficult.
- providing access to electronic learning resources. For example, using Email, CD ROMs and the internet for research.

With the appropriate technological support, specialist equipment can help you to make the most of your learning opportunities. However, technology does not provide solutions to every problem.

It is also important to consider other means of support such as specialist tuition and assistance from support workers.

3 A to Z of equipment that is currently available and guideline prices

This section provides a list of the specialist equipment that is commonly used. It briefly says what the equipment is used for and who may benefit from it. Everyone has their own needs so there are no hard and fast rules about what equipment is the best. New equipment comes on the market all the time and technologies change quickly. This is not a full list of all available technology.

The prices listed are only guideline prices. They can change and may vary according to where you live and how far the equipment has to be delivered. Do not take these prices as fixed. If you have any questions regarding equipment prices, Skill advises you to contact individual suppliers who can give you the most up-to-date price at the time.

Abbreviation expansion is a program, or feature of a word processor, which allows a person to input abbreviations which the

software then turns into standard text. It is available from nothing to £200.

For: anyone taking notes.

Access utilities software can alter the responsiveness of the keyboard. It will slow down the rate at which a character will repeat when a key is pressed, reducing the key sensitivity so that only definite depressions are recognised. Alternatively, keys like <shift>, <alt> and <ctrl> can be latched to allow single-finger access for those only able to press one button at a time. It is worth noting that some of these facilities are available as standard features on today's computers (eg Windows).

For: people with dexterity difficulties.

Braille displays replace the computer monitor and they are often augmented with synthetic speech. A line of Braille cells gives a tactile representation of the computer's textual output. Braille displays cost between £3995 and £10,000+.

For: blind or partially sighted people.

Braille embossers are the Braille equivalent of printers. They cost between £1300 and £2250.

For: blind or partially sighted people.

Braille note taking devices are part of a software system and have one key for each of the six dots in Braille along with some additional keys to allow a person to type in Braille. The systems include Braille keyboard input and speech or soft braille output for taking notes. They cost between £795 and £2500 and are about the size of a video cassette.

For: blind or partially sighted people.

Braille translation software converts text to Braille, ready to be printed on a Braille printer/embosser. They cost between £95 and £495.

For: blind or partially sighted people.

CCTVs are magnification systems based on closed circuit cameras. They are used to produce an enlarged image of the text on a monitor or your own TV etc. The camera can enlarge books, journals, handouts, diagrams or any other written material. Some CCTVs can be linked to a person's own computer screen. The background colour of the screen can be changed. A CCTV costs between £250 and £2700.

For: blind or partially sighted people, or people with dyslexia.

CD-ROMs (compact disks) store information in an electronically accessible form. The main difference between CD-ROMs and floppy disks is that CD-ROMs have a much greater capacity and the information cannot be altered. The extent to which any given CD-ROM will be suitable will depend on the given person's subject interests. A person can access information in the format they require in his or her own time. They are available between £20 and £200. Information is increasingly becoming available only in **DVD (Digital Versatile Disc)** format which allows greater storage capacity and enhanced picture and sound quality. DVD-ROMS for educational purposes are around the same price as their equivalent CD-ROM.

For: people who may find it difficult to access printed material in a library, eg partially sighted, people with dyslexia, mobility difficulties, or deaf people.

Communication aid systems including augmentative and alternative communication devices (AAC), employ text or pictorial symbols to create communication that will be turned into speech. Output can be from the screen, in print or in speech. These systems are intended to make interactive communication possible, so they frequently include features which can enhance the rate of communication. On text-based systems, accelerated writing techniques such as word prediction, word banks and abbreviation expansion will be used. They are available from

between £40 and £6000.

For: people with speech and language difficulties.

Electronic notetaking devices such as Braille 'n' Speak can be used to take notes. The notes are typed into the machine and can be read back to the user or transferred to another computer for further editing or storage. Prices range from £795 to £1200.

For: blind or partially sighted people.

Email (Electronic mail) is a method of communicating by computer to send messages and files. Most higher education students and workers are expected to use email and other online resources. Users with disabilities can prepare messages at their own pace, using a PC that has been configured to suit individual needs. For example the information can be read in large print on the computer screen, printed in Braille or read out by the computer. A person can carry out tutorials, obtain lecture notes, send reports, or communicate with people via email. One benefit for disabled users is that email enables a user to connect to a standard system, but on his or her own terms. Remember that to be funded through DSAs, email needs to be a disability related study cost.

For: people with any disabilities who may find it difficult to access teaching and learning sessions orally or physically.

Ergonomic keyboards are keyboards which are specially designed and shaped. Ergonomic keyboards have altered layouts. Some features are two-way tilts, wrist rests and split angle key layouts, and in some cases the whole shape and layout of the keyboard has been radically altered. Single handed models are available. The keyboards are designed specifically to reduce strains and movements, and thus reduce the pain and effort of typing. They are available from £60-£450.

For: people with dexterity difficulties.

Font size and type - facilities to change the font size and type

are features on standard computer systems.

For: blind or partially sighted people, or people with dyslexia.

Foreground and background colours - facilities to change the screen colours are features on standard computer systems.

For: blind or partially sighted people, or people with dyslexia.

Furniture - in addition to the technology itself, a person may also need particular computer furniture, eg wrist rests, copy holders, page turners, arm supports, tables and chairs. Depending on how much furniture needs to be specially made and adapted, the price range varies greatly, between £50 and over £500.

For: people with physical disabilities.

Hi-Linc is a system for deaf people or hard of hearing people which allows a trained operator to type a transcript of a lecture or meeting connected to a person's own laptop. A person can then read on his or her own VDU. Hi-Linc requires an experienced typist who is familiar with the topic and its language. Hi-Linc also requires two laptops to be purchased separately. The Hi-Linc systems costs £125 for disk only software or £495 for a more complete system that allows subtitles and changes colours according to speaker.

For: deaf or hard of hearing people.

Hot Spotters use heat sensitive paper to produce raised 'tactile' diagrams. They cost from about £370.

For: blind or partially sighted people.

Infra-red communication aids are similar to radio aids (see below) but provide better quality signals in most situations. They cost about £500 to £1500.

For: deaf or hard of hearing people.

The internet (see also Email) provides access to information available on the World Wide Web via a personal computer and modem. The internet provides many documents, points of contact and information. By using the Internet, people with disabilities can obtain information in exactly the same way as any other user, but in an environment which is suited to their needs, using whatever enabling technology they have. For the purpose of DSAs, it is important that information on the Internet is directly related to the course, and the need to use it is disability-related. Access to the internet is provided through an Internet Service Provider (ISP). Costs vary enormously. Some ISPs do not charge for their service. However, connection requires a telephone line and call time normally has to be paid for.

For: people with any disabilities.

Joystick - please see trackerball, under mouse alternatives.

Keyboard alternatives include ergonomic keyboards, Braille keyboards, overlay and concept keyboards which are all listed individually. Other alternatives include the BAT chording keyboard which uses seven keys. These keys offer the same functions as a standard keyboard through multiple keystrokes. The BAT can be held in one hand with comfortable hand posture. The Twiddler is a small device which is strapped to the hand. It has twelve buttons and a mouse pointer. Cost from £100-£550.

For: people with dexterity difficulties.

Keyboard emulation systems are systems where a keyboard is represented on the screen for the user to select letters by using a cursor controlled by a mouse, pointing device, switch or switches. The keys can also represent whole words, phrases and pictures. Keyboard emulation systems cost from £40 to £1000.

For: people with dexterity difficulties.

Keyguards are rigid overlays of metal or plastic which fit over the keyboard with holes to allow access to individual keys. This

makes it harder to hit the wrong key and therefore enables more accurate typing. They can help in cases where users hit more keys than they want to, and also allows users to rest their hands on the keyboard while they type. Prices range for between £40 and £100.

For: people with dexterity difficulties.

Keytop stickers - can have either Braille or enlarged characters on them. These cost between £7.50 and £30.

For: blind or partially sighted people.

Laptop computers, or **notebook computers** are portable PCs. Before purchasing a laptop or notebook, ensure that the person has an absolute need to use the computer in more than one place. Laptops cost between £1000 and £4000. Insurance may be expensive for a laptop.

For: disabled people who need a computer to take notes.

Larger keyboards can help a person who has difficulties controlling their movements to the degree demanded by the standard keyboard. Larger keyboards are especially useful when a person uses a foot or elbow to press the keys. Larger or expanded keyboards cost between £100 and £1500.

For: people with dexterity difficulties.

Large monitors increase the screen size thus the print size. They cost between £300 and £1500. An upgrade to a larger monitor with a PC system costs around £250.

For: blind or partially sighted people.

Low vision aids including magnifiers, monoculars, and other devices used to maximise any useful sight an individual may have. The particular aids required may be identified during an assessment with Social Services, although further assessment may be required to identify specific aids needed in higher education. Cost free to £2000.

For: blind or partially sighted people.

Mouse alternatives

Pointing devices can be used to provide access to computers for people who cannot use any kind of keyboard. Pointing devices can be used alongside keyboard emulation systems. Priced from £30 to £200, and up to £1600 for a head-mounted solution.

For: people with dexterity difficulties.

Touch screens are fitted to the computer and allow software to be operated by touching the screen. Touch screens cost between £230 and £350. Many systems will need specialist software to allow the user the best access to the computer.

For: people with dexterity difficulties.

Trackerballs or joysticks produce the same results as the mouse. A joystick is a stick which can be moved to control the screen pointer. Trackerballs are balls which are moved to control the screen pointer. They cost between £40 and £300, depending on how complex they are. Most of this technology is for people who need alternatives to not only the mouse, but the keyboard as well. Many systems will need specialist software to allow the user the best access to the computer.

For: people with dexterity difficulties.

Mind Mapping software helps with the organisation and planning of written tasks. It is particularly valuable for those who tend to think in non-linear fashion. Packages cost from £60.

For: people with specific learning difficulties.

Minidisk and other digital recording devices are operated in a similar way to tape recorders (see below). However, they produce a recording which is completely free of machine operated background noise. This is particularly useful when lecture theatre acoustics are poor. They cost between £220 to

£300.

For: hard of hearing and people with some specific learning difficulties.

Overlay and concept keyboards are an alternative to the standard keyboard. The keyboard itself is a touch sensitive membrane divided into a grid of separate user assignable cells. Over this, interchangeable overlays can be fitted which show what function has been assigned to each area of the keyboard. These keyboards are entirely programmable and can therefore be adapted to suit individual needs. Keys can be as large or small as needed, they can be positioned with large gaps between the keys and the number of keys can be reduced. Overlay keyboards vary according to complexity. Prices range from £90 to £400.

For: people with dexterity difficulties, or dyslexia.

Palantype is a system of machine shorthand which can help deaf or hard of hearing people participate in meetings and lectures etc, by providing a simultaneous word-for-word transcript of the spoken word. A Palantype Speech-to-Text reporter listens and types in what is said in a special shorthand code. A computer is used to transcribe these notes back into English and displays the text in a variety of different ways (small screen, TV monitors, or video projector) to suit the user. The transcript is also stored on disc. The Palantype keyboard and software packages costs around £3000. Palantype equipment and services can be hired.

For: deaf or hard of hearing people.

PCs are standard equipment that may be useful to any disabled person, depending on their individual needs. Much of the technology in this section will require a standard PC. PCs are usually compatible to Desktop computers. A PC usually costs between £750 and £1500.

For: people with any disabilities.

Portable communication aid or voice output communication aids (VOCA) generate artificial speech and can be either a dedicated communication aid or computer-based communication system. Users can input whole words chosen from a word bank. This is available between £380 and £3700.

For: people with speech and language difficulties.

Portable keyboards are useful for making notes on the move as they are lightweight and battery operated. They tend to have a liquid crystal display and have the capacity to hold approximately eight files. Typed notes can be transferred directly to a PC. Others have a floppy disk. They are available for around £200.

For: disabled people who use a keyboard to take notes.

Radio aids use radio signals to transmit sounds via a microphone to the user's hearing aid. They cost about £1000.

For: deaf or hard of hearing people.

Scanners with optical character recognition (OCR) scan a document and provide a computer image of the printed material. Character recognition software can convert the image into machine readable print, large print, Braille and synthetic speech. They cost between £50 and £1500 depending on complexity.

For: blind or partially sighted, people with dyslexia or people with manual dexterity difficulties.

Smaller keyboards are alternatives to standard keyboards. The keyboards enable users with limited reach or who need to support their wrists and reach all of the keys to do so. Smaller keyboards cost between £50 and £800.

For: people with dexterity difficulties.

Speech output systems are an alternative to standard computer output. The computer reads to the user. Speech output can range from computers with sound cards that can read text to the use of output speech as a communication aid, to a fully functional

screen reading package. These systems require both software and hardware to run. Prices range from nothing to £800.

For: blind or partially sighted, people with dexterity difficulties, or dyslexia.

Spell checkers are standard features on many word processors. They work with a word list, and offer options to misspelled words alphabetically. Software programs are available which check words phonetically. These are available for between £70 - £100. Other types of software can speak the text that has been written and spell check orally. This is available for around £35. Computer based dictionaries are available for around £20.

For: people with dyslexia, deaf or hard of hearing, blind or partially sighted, or people with dexterity difficulties.

Standard MS Windows and Mac OS features can slow down the responsiveness of the mouse, slow down the speed of the movement required to make a double-click on the mouse and the responsiveness of the keyboard so if a key is pressed for a second or two the character will not be repeated. Other standard features include spell checkers, grammar checkers, features to change the size of fonts and colours of text.

For: people with dexterity difficulties, dyslexia, blind or partially sighted, deaf or hard of hearing.

Switch access is an alternative way to drive a keyboard emulator. A controlled movement from a foot, the head, an eyeblink or a breath can be interpreted by a switch and appropriate software as input to the computer. You can input with a switch through Morse code, but the most common technique in the UK is scanning. A keyboard is represented on the screen for the user to select letters from. Instead of direct selection with the cursor, the software highlights keys or groups of keys in turn until the user operates the switch to select a highlighted key or keys. Switch input through scanning is extremely slow, but it can give severely disabled users access to computers and

communication. Most switch users will need to purchase special software for their computers. Many different switches are available ranging from simple to complex, and this complexity is reflected in the expense. Most of this technology is for people who need alternatives to not only the mouse, but the keyboard as well. Many systems will need specialist software to allow the user the best access to the computer. Prices range from £35 to £350.

For: people with dexterity difficulties.

Tape recorders can be used to record lectures or meetings. The tape can then be played back as and when necessary, or given to someone else to type up. Print impaired people will use four-track, rather than the usual two-track tapes, allowing up to four times the amount of material to be stored. Some specialist tape libraries produce academic materials in this format, for example, The RNIB Student Tape Library, and the US-based Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic. Prices range between £100 and £400.

For: blind or partially sighted, hard of hearing, people with dexterity difficulties, or dyslexia.

Text manipulation facilities (cut and paste) are facilities on a standard word processor that can alleviate the number of keystrokes required.

For: blind / partially sighted, dexterity difficulties, or dyslexia.

Voice recognition systems are an alternative to standard computer input. Consistent speech patterns are required. VR systems need a powerful computer or laptop. Prices range from £50 to £550.

For: blind or partially sighted, people with dexterity difficulties, or dyslexia.

Word banks are lists of words that can be selected and sent to a word processor or other program to reduce the number of keystrokes needed to produce text. Word banks may come free

with a computer or cost up to £200.

For: people with dexterity difficulties, blind or partially sighted, people with speech or language difficulties, or dyslexia.

Word prediction programs will suggest words based on the letter or letters typed in. Some predictors can predict the next word based on context and previous use. These are available from £40 for simple software to £400.

For: people with dexterity difficulties, blind or partially sighted, deaf or hard of hearing, people with speech or language difficulties, or dyslexia.

Word processors are standard software packages that come with a computer and facilitate writing. Word processors allow a measure of control over work (eg essays) that a pen and paper cannot offer. Many disabled people require word processors for different reasons. It may depend on its built in facilities and their usefulness. Prices range between £80 and £600.

For: people with any disabilities.

Word search facilities are features on many standard software packages.

For: blind or partially sighted, people with dexterity difficulties, or dyslexia.

Remember: these are only guideline prices. Do not take these prices as fixed.

4 Organisations that provide assessments, individual advice or information

Assessments help you to find out what equipment is right for you. You may have come up with your own equipment solutions over time. However, your needs change as you begin a new course or

job. Assessors take into account the new learning environment and the equipment that is already available at your college/ university or workplace. Assessors also know about the most recent equipment available on the market so can give you good advice about changing technologies.

You will probably need to have an assessment if you are in higher education and are planning to have your study support needs funded by Disabled Students' Allowances. You will also need an assessment if your college is going to fund your extra support needs (see section 5 below). You will also need to have an assessment if you are applying for funding via Access to Work.

Your college or university may do an assessment for you or someone at college may be able to organise one for you. Most colleges have a member of staff who can advise disabled students. This person is often called the learning support co-ordinator or disability co-ordinator. If you do not have such a person at your college, you may need to get help from an independent organisation. The list below gives some suggestions.

This is an alphabetical list of organisations that give assessments and advice.

Ability Net

PO Box 94, Warwick, Warwickshire CV34 5WS

Freephone advice line: 0800 269 545 Fax: 01926 407 425

Email: enquiries@abilitynet.co.uk Website: www.abilitynet.co.uk

Ability Net is a charity which provides advice on the use of computers and communication technology for people with all types of disabilities. They carry out assessments and can make personal visits to disabled people at home, at college or in the workplace. They supply computer equipment and offer training and support to use it. One day each month, there are open days

where you can try equipment and have a short assessment free of charge. They have separate days for professionals (there is a charge for these). They also produce a range of fact sheets on computer and communications technology.

The ACE Centre Advisory Trust

92 Windmill Road, Oxford OX3 7DR

Tel: 01865 759 800 Fax: 01865 759 810

Email: info@ace-centre.org.uk Website: www.ace-centre.org.uk

The ACE Centre in Oxford offers assessments to physically disabled children and young people in full-time education who have speech or communication difficulties. They also offer training, information and advice to parents and professionals.

Aidis Trust

Assessment Centre: 1 Albany Park, Cabot Lane, Poole, Dorset BH17 7BX

Tel: 01202 695 244 Fax: 01202 695 322

Email: info@aidis.org Website: www.aidis.org

The Aidis Trust provides specialised computer equipment to physically disabled people of all ages, to aid their communication. Equipment is purchased by the charity specifically for the individual and tailored to suit their needs. It is then the person's own property.

British Computer Society Disability Group

EASAMS Ltd, West Hanningfield Road, Great Baddow, Chelmsford CM2 8HN

Tel: 01245 242 950 Fax: 01245 242 924

Email: geoffrey.busby@gecm.com Website: www.bcs.org.uk

Encourages the computer industry to consider the needs of disabled people when new products are being developed. The group also runs a volunteer support scheme called the IT Can Help Network which offers computer advice to disabled people at home. Contact the Society for details of local schemes. Publishes Ability, journal of the British Computer Society Disability Group.

British Dyslexia Association

98 London Road, Reading, Berks RG1 5AU

Tel: 01189 668 271 Fax: 01189 351 927

Email: info@dyslexiahelp-bda.demon.co.uk

Website: www.bda-dyslexia.org.uk

The BDA produce a range of leaflets that may be helpful to people with dyslexia including an adult information pack for further and higher education and a computing information pack. Please send a large stamped addressed envelope.

CALL (Communication Aids for Language and Learning) Centre

University of Edinburgh, Paterson's Land, Holyrood Road, Edinburgh EH8 8AQ

Direct line: 0131 651 6235 Fax: 0131 651 6234

Email: call.centre@ed.ac.uk

Website: callcentre.education.ed.ac.uk

The CALL Centre provides services and carries out research and development projects across Scotland for people with severe communication disabilities, their families and people who work with them in augmentive communication techniques and technology, and specialised computer use. It offers an information service and publications. CALL offers loans of specialist equipment for communication and learning. It has a limited assessment and support service accessed via education authority channels. CALL offers staff training and development.

Centre for Micro-Assisted Communication (CENMAC)

Eltham Green Complex, 1a Middle Park Avenue, Eltham, London SE9 5HL

Tel: 020 8850 9229 Fax: 020 8850 9220

Email: cenmac@cenmac.demon.co.uk

Website: www.cenmac.demon.co.uk

CENMAC offer assessments and support to children and students in post-16 education who have communication

difficulties as a result of a physical disability. They loan equipment to people living within the inner London boroughs, review students' changing needs and update equipment when necessary. They also provide an assessment service to students living outside London boroughs.

Communication Aids Centres (CACs)

Communication Aid Centres can offer assessments, advice and training in the use of communication aids. There are a number of CACs around the country, usually found in hospitals. **You should usually get a referral from your doctor, speech therapist or social worker if you have one. To find out if there is a centre near you contact:**

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, 2 White Hart Yard, London EC2A 3DR

Tel: 020 7378 1200 Fax: 020 7403 7254

Email: postmaster@rcslt.org Website: www.rcslt.org

Dayan, Ginette

15 North Avenue, South Shields, Tyne and Wear NE34 6BB

Tel: 0191 456 0898

Ginette Dayan has produced the publication: Clearing the Way - the dyslexia and technology handbook. Charge.

Disabled Living Foundation

380-384 Harrow Road, London W9 2HU

Tel: 020 7289 6111 Textphone: 020 7432 8009

Fax: 020 7266 2922

Email: advice@dlf.org.uk Website: www.dlf.org.uk

National Disability Helpline: 0870 603 9177

Textphone: 0870 603 9176

Open 10am to 4pm, Monday to Friday.

A major reference source used by those who are involved with choosing, recommending and providing equipment for people with disabilities. They also provide services directly to the public by telephone, letter and through appointments at their equipment

centre. They publish fact sheets and other guides to equipment of various kinds, mostly for daily living needs. Many are free to individual disabled people.

Dyslexia Institute

133 Gresham Road, Staines, Middx TW18 2AJ

Tel: 01784 463 851 Fax: 01784 460 747

Email: info@dyslexia-inst.org.co.uk

Website: www.dyslexia-inst.org.uk

The Dyslexia Institute offers an advice and information service, educational psychological assessment and teaching programmes for all ages. It provides a range of training programmes for teachers and other professionals from one day introductory level courses to a postgraduate diploma in partnership with York University. Training takes place in various locations around the country. The Dyslexia Institute Guild offers support for teachers and other professionals, a termly journal and access to an annual symposium. The Dyslexia Institute produces a wide range of information and practical guides for people with dyslexia, families and professionals. You will need to send a large stamped addressed envelope with your leaflet order.

Local authority services for partially sighted people

Some local education authorities' services for partially sighted people may be able to help and advise people in further and higher education as well as those of school age.

Local authority services for people who are deaf or hard of hearing

Some local authority services have a member of staff who works with people who are in further, higher or adult education.

Medical Engineering Research Unit

8 Damson Way, Orchard Hill, Carshalton, Surrey SM5 4NR

Tel: 020 8770 8286 Fax: 020 8770 8398

Email: info@meru.co.uk Website: www.meru.co.uk

The Medical Engineering Research Unit is run by volunteers who work on a part-time basis with the Unit's technicians. They aim to help design and make equipment for disabled young people whose needs cannot be satisfied by commercially available equipment. Referrals can be made by anyone caring for a disabled child or young person, preferably in liaison with a qualified health professional. There is no charge to the young person.

National Federation of ACCESS Centres (NFAC)

South West Regional ACCESS centre, University of Plymouth,
Drake Circus, Plymouth PL4 8AA

Tel: 01752 232 278 Textphone: 01752 232 278

Fax: 01752 232 279

Email: nfac@nfac.org.uk Website: www.nfac.org.uk

Contact Skill or NFAC for addresses of other ACCESS Centres.

NFAC members are independent access centres offering individual assessments and advice to disabled people in further education and higher education or employment about using enabling technology. They are also able to give training in the use of equipment tailored to the needs of users and trainers. There are a number of ACCESS Centres around the country. Some of them specialise in helping people with certain impairments. NFAC will advise on the centre most appropriate to your needs. In some cases the access centres can loan equipment to students. More information is available from NFAC or individual ACCESS centres.

Open University office for students with disabilities

PO Box 79 Milton Keynes MK7 6AR

Tel: 01908 653 745 Fax: 01908 655 547

Email: OSD-WH@open.ac.uk

Website: www.open.ac.uk/OU/Admin/access.osd.html

The Office for Students with Disabilities can advise on study support and services such as alternative media, communications support and equipment loans. They also produce a newsletter,

Open Links. The Open University's regional centres can give you advice on support.

Papworth Trust

Papworth Everard, Cambridge CB3 8RG

Tel: 01480 830 341 Fax: 01480 830 781

Website: www.papworth.org.uk

The Papworth Trust provides a specialist assessment service to enable individuals to determine suitable careers. This will usually include advice on adaptations and aids, often for computers.

They can also undertake assessments to support applications for the specialist equipment allowance as part of the disabled students' allowances.

Partially Sighted Society

9 Plato Place, 72-74 St Dionis Road, London SW6 4TU

Tel/fax: 020 7371 0289

Can give help, advice and assessments about low vision aids and computers for people who are partially sighted.

Remap

'Hazledene', Ighiam, Sevenoaks, Kent TN15 9AD

Tel: 01732 883 818 Fax: 01732 888 238

Website: www.remap.org.uk

Remap can design and supply, free of charge, equipment for individuals that is not available commercially. They can also help with modifications to computer software and hardware to meet the needs of disabled people.

Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB)

105 Judd Street, London WC1H 9NE

Helpline: 08457 669 999 Textphone: 0800 515 152

Tel: 020 7388 1266 Fax: 020 7388 2034

Email: helpline@rnib.org.uk Website: www.rnib.org.uk

Equipment and book sales: PO Box 173, Peterborough PE2 6WS

Tel: 08457 023 153 Textphone: 08457 585 691

Email: cservices@rnib.org.uk

The RNIB has student advisers based around the country. The head office for their student support service is based at the RNIB Vocational College in Loughborough. They give help and advice about getting the right equipment as well as giving support in other areas. The RNIB Access Technology Unit and the Education Information Service (in London) produce a range of information and fact sheets about specialist equipment for people who are blind or partially sighted. They also publish Access IT which provides information about access technology.

Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID)

19-23 Featherstone Street, London EC1Y 8SL

Helpline: 0808 808 0123 Helpline textphone: 0800 808 9000

Fax: 020 7296 8199

Email: helpline@rnid.org.uk Website: www.rnid.org.uk

The RNID produce a range of leaflets about how specialist equipment can help people who are deaf or hard of hearing at home and in education.

Sequal Trust

3 Plowmans Corner, Wharf Road, Ellesmere, Shropshire SY12 0EJ

Tel/fax: 01691 624 222

Sequal provides a skilled full-time assessor who will visit any disabled person requiring help and information regarding suitable communication equipment. The assessment will cover the range of equipment available and also advice about funding.

TechDis. Technology for disabilities Information Services

Website: www.techdis.ac.uk

TechDis provides an on-line resource of up-to-date information about the technology available to assist people with disabilities. The database allows you to search by keywords, product or company / supplier.

Part of the Techdis organisation is **Web Accessibility Initiatives** which provides guidelines on making websites more accessible. See www.w3.org/WAI

Treloar Disability Assessment Centre

Lord Mayor Treloar National Specialist College, Hollybourne, Alton, Hampshire GU34 4EN

Tel: 01420 547 403 Fax: 01420 547 434

The centre's rehabilitation engineering services can give assessments and apply solutions to a wide range of problem areas. These include: computer and communication equipment; controls and adaptations for powered/manual wheelchairs; equipment for daily living. They offer specialist design and development, advisory and consultancy services. A report of the assessment is given to you, with an estimate of the cost of any recommendations.

5 Getting money to pay for assessments and equipment

Most centres will make a charge for carrying out an assessment of your needs. You will also need to find the funding for your equipment unless it can be loaned to you. The following section looks at sources of official funding, funding from trusts and how you can borrow equipment if you do not want to buy your own.

Official funding

At school

If you are between 16 and 19 and are attending school, your local education authority or social services department should assess what your educational needs are. If the assessment shows that you need specialist equipment to help you with your studies, your school should provide it for you. However, often this equipment is available for use in the school but not for use in the home. The

equipment will probably be loaned to you while you do your course.

At college

If you have support needs on a course because of your disability, the college should do their best to provide what you need. All colleges in England and Wales have **Disability statements** that explain what support the college has for students with disabilities, what policies the college has and how it aims to increase support in the future.

In Scotland and Northern Ireland **development plans** are written by college boards of management. The aim of the plans is to make sure that each college makes a commitment to provide teaching resources for the learning support of all students.

The funding systems for further education in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland allow colleges to get extra funding to pay for the extra support that disabled students need. They are expected to meet most of the equipment needs of all students (including those with disabilities) from their main budget.

Sometimes students do find it difficult to get exactly what they need. The Government has stated that if a college accepts a disabled student on a course, then the student can expect their disability-related needs to be met. However, often equipment is available for use in the school and not for use in the home **See Skill's Information booklet Funding for disabled students in further education**.

Note that from September 2002, education will be covered in the Disability Discrimination Act Part 4. Disabled students will have rights and colleges will be expected for example, to make reasonable adjustments. **See Skill's information booklet Disability Discrimination Act 1995**.

In higher education

If you are studying full or part time for a degree, a higher national diploma or other higher education course you may be eligible for student support from your awarding authority. This includes payment of some or all of your tuition fees and eligibility for a student loan. In England you apply to your Local Education Authority, in Scotland you apply to the Student Awards Agency for Scotland and in Northern Ireland you apply to your local Education and Library Board.

You may also be eligible for the Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs) which are intended to help with the extra costs of studying that disabled people can face. The DSAs are available to full-time, part-time, postgraduate and open/distance learning students. One of these allowances is for specialist equipment.

The specialist equipment allowance can cover your needs up to a maximum amount over the whole course. The awarding authority should buy what you are assessed as needing up to the maximum amounts. If you need to pay for an assessment of what equipment you need, you can normally claim the cost of this assessment from the other expenditure allowance. The other expenditure allowance can also be used to top up the equipment allowance. **See Skill information booklets [Applying for Disabled Students' Allowances, Postgraduate education and Opportunities in open or distance learning.](#)**

Note that from September 2002, education will be covered in the Disability Discrimination Act Part 4. Disabled students will have rights and universities/colleges will be expected for example, to make reasonable adjustments. **See Skill's information booklet [Disability Discrimination Act 1995.](#)**

Training

Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs) fund training courses such as Work Based Training and Modern Apprenticeships. They should also fund the equipment you might need to take part in

these courses. For more guidance contact the Disability Employment Adviser (DEA) at the jobcentre or your local LSC. In Scotland the equivalent company is called the Local Enterprise Company (LEC). On the New Deal for 18-24 year olds education and training option there is a discretionary fund for extra costs including specialist equipment.

In Wales, the National Council for Education and Training will fund training schemes. **See Skill information booklet Careers and work for disabled people**.

Employment

Your Disability Service Team can advise disabled people about getting equipment to use in their job. The **Access to Work** scheme can provide equipment or alter existing equipment at work. This is available to disabled people in, or looking for, any type of work; full-time or part-time (over 8 hours per week), temporary or permanent and employed or self-employed. You do not need to be registered as disabled to get help through Access to Work. Contact the Disability Employment Adviser at your local jobcentre. **See Skill information booklet Help for disabled people from Jobcentre Plus**.

Unofficial funding

If you cannot get any financial help through official sources to pay for equipment, you may be able to get help through trusts and charities, either local or national. There are some trusts in the UK which specifically try to help people with disabilities who are training or studying. The size of the grant varies. Unfortunately, there is no guarantee that you will be able to obtain funding from trusts. **See Skill information booklet Funding from charitable trusts**.

6 Alternatives to buying equipment

You can sometimes borrow specialist equipment while you are studying or working. Your college, university, education authority or education department may lend you equipment. Some of the organisations listed above may be able to loan or donate equipment to you.

The following organisations may assist you to borrow equipment. Contact details can be found in section four.

- **Aidis Trust**
- **CALL Centre**
- **CENMAC**
- **Local authority services**
- **Medical Engineering Research Unit**
- **National Federation of ACCESS Centres**
- **Open University office for students with disabilities**
- **Remap Great Britain**
- **Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB)**
- **Sequal Trust**

7 Information for professionals or people doing research

If you work with students or workers who need specialist equipment or you are researching new technologies, the following organisations and publications can provide you with up-to-date information about what is available.

Disabilities Informer

Healthworks Ltd, Unit 8, Riverside Court, Don Road, Sheffield S9 2TJ

Tel: 0114 261 9011 Fax: 0114 243 1597

Email: info@medecal.com Website: www.healthworks.co.uk
This publication covers news of the latest developments in the field of assistive technology. Healthworks researchers contact assistive technology developers and manufacturers all over the world, and then compile news of their activities into one concise report, which is published every two months.

British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (BECTA)

Milburn Hill Road, Science Park, Coventry CV4 7JJ

Tel: 024 7641 6994 Fax: 024 7641 1418

Email: becta@becta.org.uk Website: www.becta.org.uk

BECTA supports information and communications technology (ICT) in education, including for special educational needs. They have a directory of local ICT support providers. They have publications and free information sheets. Publications include Computers and Inclusion: Factors for Success, Learning on Line, Dyslexia and ICT.

Computer Applications to Special Education (CASE)

Department of Psychology, University of Keele, Keele, Staffs ST5 5BG

Tel: 01782 583 386

Develop software for people with learning difficulties. Provide consultancy and run a distance learning diploma course in special needs IT for professionals such as teachers.

CompareScreenReader List

An email forum which provides information about screen readers and allows people to discuss their experiences of using different readers. To subscribe, send an empty message to comparescreenreaders-subscribe@onelist.com

Dis-Forum

Email forum which is mainly designed for people working with disabled students, such as disability co-ordinators. To join send a

message to jiscmail@jiscmail.ac.uk. Leave the subject field blank and type: join disforum [first name] [last name]. You can also join, view previous messages and send a message from the website: www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/dis-forum/

Dyslexia Unit, University of Wales, Bangor

College Road, Bangor, Gwynedd LL52 2AS

Tel: 01248 382 203 Fax: 01248 383 614

Publish, Dyslexia and higher education. Compiled by Dorothy Gilroy, 1996.

Research Centre for the Education of the Visually Handicapped (RCEVH)

University of Birmingham, School of Education, Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 2TT

Tel: 0121 414 6733 Fax: 0121 414 4865

Scottish Council for Educational Technology (SCET)

74 Victoria Crescent Road, Dowanhill, Glasgow G12 9JN

Tel: 0141 337 5000 Fax: 0141 337 5022

See also the following organisations and their publications (contact details in section 4):

- **Ability Net**
- **ACE Centre**
- **British Computer Society Disability Group**
- **British Dyslexia Association**
- **CALL Centre**
- **Dyslexia Institute**
- **NFAC**
- **RNIB**

8 Checklist

	Any Disability	Assessments	Blind/ partially sighted	Communication difficulties	Deaf / hard of hearing	Dyslexia	Information or advice	Lend / give equipment	Physical disabilities	Publications	Researchers or Professionals
Ability Net, p16	X	X					X			X	X
ACE Centre, p16		X		X			X		X	X	X
Aidis Trust, p17		X						X	X		
BECTA, p28	X						X			X	X
British Dyslexia Assoc. p17						X	X			X	X

CALL Centre, p18		X		X			X	X		X	X
CASE, p29	X										X
CENMAC, p18		X		X				X	X		
CACs, p18		X		X			X				
Disabled Living Foundation, p19	X						X			X	
Dyslexia Institute, p19		X				X	X			X	X
Medical Eng Research Unit, p20		X						X	X		
NFAC, p20	X	X					X	X			X
Open University, p21	X						X	X		X	
Papworth Trust, p21	X	X									
Partially Sighted Society, p22		X	X				X				
REMAP Great Britain, p22	X							X			
RNIB, p22			X				X	X		X	X
RNID, p23					X		X			X	
Sequal Trust, p23		X					X	X	X		
TechDis, p23	X						X				X
Treloar Disability Centre, p23	X	X					X				

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