

Accessibility

Accessibility is not an issue I have given much thought to before this week. When I reflect on why this has been the case I have come to the conclusion that in my professional role we are dealing with a known set of students who access e-learning from dedicated e-learning PCs. The only time the issue of accessibility arose was during the Moodle implementation when it was not possible for our offices around the country to access Moodle through the Citrix network. At that time our IT department solved it by installing dedicated e-learning PCs into all our offices country wide with a modem that linked them to the web allowing access to Moodle. So whilst it was an issue it was solved quickly and easily. From a personal perspective I live in an area that has full broadband access and have had no issues with accessibility.

*This week my awareness of accessibility issues began with reading *Designing Digital resources for Learning*. In this essay the authors look at design from the perspective of the designer, the learner and the resource itself. When it comes to the learner the focus is the ability of the learner to have full accessibility to the resource and the underpinning principle is that designing for learners with disabilities will result in a better resource being created for all learners. As my experience has been involved with designing resources for learners with no disabilities this is not a challenge that I have thought about. Then in class the issue of accessibility was discussed and we experienced assistive technology in the form of a screen reader. We also discussed browser issues and how different it is to access a site from a PC or a mobile device. Since we are about to embark on creating a resource where the abilities of our audience are unknown to us nor do we know how they will choose to access the resource accessibility becomes an issue that we must address. In the time available for us we have agreed that it is not possible to develop content that will be fully accessible from mobile devices but we acknowledge that it is an aspect that would be worthy of full consideration if we were to develop the resource further. Instead to improve accessibility we have researched the most appropriate fonts and colours that should be used for learners with dyslexia. We have agreed that we will use these as much as possible throughout the resource and include alt text on graphics.*

Back at work this week saw the launch of a new course. We had taken a different approach with the course allowing the learner full freedom to navigate the course as they wished. The course had only been issued a short while when we started to receive feedback from learners. The feedback didn't concern their ability to navigate the course but rather their inability to read the content. Once again accessibility was the issue. The fonts and colours used made it difficult for learners to read the content. Whilst the fonts and colours were easy to read on our monitors they were not easy to read on the smaller monitors used by learners. It was necessary to re publish the course. We now realise that it is necessary to test the resource using different monitors to ensure that content can be easily read.

The feeling today with the developments that have occurred in technology is that everything is at your fingertips you just have to go online and find it and yet when I look back at this week I realise that this is certainly not the case. The device, the browser or indeed where you are located in the country will determine whether or not you can access the information you require. No doubt as technology advances accessibility issues will reduce but in the meantime it is an aspect that must be addressed regardless of whether the audience of learners is known or not.