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Supporting Students
with Disabilities series

AccessMSOR: report on inaugural meeting

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The inaugural meeting was organised by Peter and Emma Rowlett. We acknowledge the kind support of the MSOR Network who funded lunch and travel expenses and Nottingham Trent University who provided the venue and facilities. **The MSOR Network maintains a webpage of accessibility resources at <http://mathstore.ac.uk/index.php?pid=26>.**



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The Accessing Maths, Stats and OR (AccessMSOR) Working Group was established to investigate the support needs of HE students with disabilities studying MSOR subjects. Membership of the working group is diverse, including disability support staff, lecturers, disability consultants, postgraduate students and a representative from the MSOR Network. The group communicates primarily via an email list and will meet face-to-face periodically. The inaugural meeting was held at Nottingham Trent University in May. What follows is a summary of the key points that were discussed at that meeting, which will form areas of further work for the group. The working group actively seeks those with common interest in these areas; please contact the Chair, Peter Rowlett on peter.rowlett@ntu.ac.uk.

Inputting maths: Options include: OCR (InftyReader [1] is getting good reports for maths); typing plain text (e.g. as LaTeX code); programs with Graphical User Interface (GUI) (e.g. MathType, Scientific Notebook).

LaTeX: Support and materials are needed to avoid bad habits, which can cause conversion problems. LaTeX may not be sufficient to support all students; MathML may help.

Putting maths on VLES: Use of Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) can cause access problems.

Wikis and blogs: Issues relating to inputting and displaying maths; GIF images, commonly used to display, are inaccessible.

Maths in audio books: Currently, maths cannot be used in DAISY books.

Review of software accessibility: Much MSOR software has potential accessibility issues.

School-University transition: Differing experiences of students with disabilities making this transition.

Recognising dyslexia: Identifying the symptoms of dyslexia is often down to academics who may not have training in this area.

Swell paper: Tactile diagrams can be produced using swell paper and a machine to heat it, though there is a lack of awareness about this.

The working group also reports the following:

PDF files: PDF files are not necessarily accessible although some users prefer PDF; it is best practice to also provide an editable version such as Word or LaTeX.

Prominence of accessibility issues: Accessibility is often treated as something to “tack on at the end” of a research project. Projects should consider accessibility issues throughout.

Reference

InftyReader: <http://www.sciaccess.net/en/InftyReader/index.html>
[Accessed 19 August 2008].