Moving forward with digital accessibility in Higher Education

David Sloan, The Paciello Group
@sloandr
February 22nd, 2019
Introduction: Accessibility as a career?
Objectives for this talk

• Defining accessibility, and why we’re here talking about it
• Organizational accessibility maturity
• A strategy for a shared responsibility for accessibility
• What are the things I can do now?
  • Practical advice for different stakeholders
Equivalent access. But sub-optimal user experience.
Equal access.
A better user experience for all.
Defining digital accessibility
Digital accessibility — a definition

• Relating to the degree to which a digital resource can be used for its intended purpose by people with disabilities
What? Digital resources

- Web sites and applications
- Mobile apps
- Digital documents: Word, PowerPoint, PDF, Excel, etc.
- Digital publications
- Tools for creating and hosting digital content (LMS, repositories, catalogues...)
- Desktop software
- Digital signage, kiosk interfaces
- Video, audio, animation
- Classroom technology
Why? The risks

• Inaccessibility means some people can’t do their job, study, access information...
• Inaccessibility creates vulnerability to legal action
• Inaccessibility can lead to negative publicity
• Inaccessibility puts Sussex at a disadvantage compared to peer institutions
• Inaccessibility creates a financial burden for evaluation and remediation
Why? The regulatory framework

• Equality Act 2010
  • Sets out general rights for people with disabilities
  • Obligations for employers
  • Obligations for organisations providing employment and services (including education)
Why? The regulatory framework

• The Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018
  • UK implementation of an EU directive on public sector web accessibility
  • Builds on Equality Act to provides more specific requirements for digital accessibility—**WCAG 2.1 AA**
  • Higher Ed institutions considered to full under definition of public sector bodies
  • Sets targets for new (Sep 2019) and existing (Sep 2020) web sites and apps (June 2021) to comply with the regulations
  • Defines exemptions (some multimedia, “heritage collection” content, some PDFs, maps)
  • Defines an obligation to provide an accessibility statement
Why? Opportunities

• Accessibility enables a greater audience to successfully use a digital resource
• Accessibility supports flexibility of interaction, accommodating different individual needs, devices, situations
  • Including those not yet envisaged
• Accessibility connects excellence in digital resource provision with inclusion and diversity goals
I mean, big picture, I think we could mitigate blindness as a disability in twenty years vis-a-vis technology. I really believe that.

— Jessie, TPG usability study participant and screen reader user
Who benefits from accessibility?

- People
- People with disabilities: visual, hearing, cognitive, motor, speech
- Older adults
- People with English as a second language
- People with technological or environmental constraints
Organisational accessibility maturity
Identify and repair accessibility issues based on standards compliance
Prioritize evaluation and repair activities based on real-world impact
Inject accessibility best practices into the design and development process
Integrate accessibility best practices into culture and practice
Where are you on the accessibility maturity continuum?
Where do you want to be on the accessibility maturity continuum?
What challenges do you foresee in getting to that point?
A shared responsibility for accessibility
People responsible for digital resources

• Communications
• Developers
• Procurement
• Project managers
• Service managers
• Leadership
• Media producers
• Teachers
• Instructional designers
• Researchers
• Librarians
• Human Resources
• Students
• And more...
Responsibility for accessibility

• Responsible for ensuring that resources are optimally accessible, whether created in-house or procured
• Responsible for having and applying knowledge and skills appropriate to roles — writing, multimedia, visual design, development, procurement
• Responsible for defining, knowing and following policies and processes
  • including exception processes when accessibility can’t be fully met
Responsibility needs knowledge and skills

• To apply best practice in accessibility when creating digital content
• To articulate accessibility needs when procuring digital resources, and assess candidate solutions
• To know when to ask for specialist help
Responsibility needs governance

• Standards for baseline levels of accessibility
• Processes for applying best practices
• Procurement processes for including accessibility in requirements, in evaluation and selection
• Processes for identifying and dealing with instances of inaccessibility
• Processes for giving staff the skills and knowledge they need to meet their accessibility responsibilities
• Processes for involving disabled people in accessibility decision-making
Responsibility needs leadership and commitment

• A public commitment to accessibility across the institution
• To define and implement an institutional accessibility strategy that supports all those with responsibility for accessibility
• Taking advantage of strategic partnerships with other organisations to influence accessibility in the marketplace
Organisational accessibility strategy supports collective and individual responsibility
Supporting creators of digital content

• Internal standards for accessibility
• Training and supporting resources—general, and tailored to specific roles and activities
• Tools that facilitate accessible content creation
Supporting procurers of digital content

• Define and publicise internal standards for accessibility
• Incorporate accessibility requirements in contract language
• Define and implement an exception process
  • What happens when you don’t get what you ask for
• Work with other institutions to share expectations and experiences
Supporting people who use digital resources

• For many people, there should be no need to disclose accessibility needs when digital resources are designed with accessibility in mind

• For others:
  • Provide assistive technology and advice on using it
  • Provide guidance on diagnosing accessibility needs

• For all—open communication channels on accessibility
  • Include a way to report accessibility issues, and a system for handling them
  • Communicate current state and progress towards addressing known issues
What you can do next
If you produce Office-type documents
Making more accessible Office documents

• Use headings and lists to convey content structure
  • In Office, use the Styles menu
Making more accessible Office documents

• Provide images with suitable text alternatives
  • In Office applications, look in *Format Picture*
Making more accessible Office documents

• Use colour carefully
  • Ensure sufficient contrast between foreground and background colours
  • Use a contrast checking tool to check contrast

• Write accessibly
  • Use abbreviations and acronyms with care
  • Check for missing punctuation
  • Don’t rely on visual appearance when describing other content
If you use a content publishing tool
Using content publishing tools accessibly

• Familiarise yourself with and make use of features that support accessibility
  • Ways to add alternative text
  • Ways to add structure to your content
• Provide documents and links to documents with meaningful titles
• Use automated accessibility solutions with care
• Check content before publishing
If you develop web sites or applications
Key web accessibility checks for developers

• Interactivity:
  • Does every input element have an accessible name, role and value?
  • Are these updated when the application’s state changes?

• Keyboard:
  • Can every active element be reached and operated by the keyboard?
  • Is keyboard focus logical and clearly visible?

• Forms and error handling:
  • Do form fields have visible labels?
  • Are error messages provided that clearly describe the error?
  • Are they programmatically associated with the source of the error?
If you find you are responsible for a resource with accessibility issues
Dealing with the current situation

Based on the results of your evaluation, identify:

• What is the greatest accessibility risk?

• What’s the best way to manage that risk?
  • Remediation now
  • Remediation/replacement later and provide temporary alternative now
  • Provide equivalent alternative access

• Document and be prepared to communicate your decisions
If you have authority to establish or support campus services
Campus-wide services that support accessibility

• Accessibility centre of excellence
  • Digital accessibility best practice repository
  • Tools to support accessible development and checking
  • Quick tips
  • Patterns for accessible documents and content

• Assistive technology and user research lab

• Services:
  • Captioning service
  • Alt formats service
  • Enterprise-level evaluation and monitoring service

• Training on accessibility—general, role based, injected into existing training modules
If you have an opportunity to influence campus culture and attitude
Support excellence in accessibility

• Reward excellence in accessibility and inclusive technology use
• Include accessibility expertise in job descriptions
• Demonstrate and promote inclusive digital communication across campus
Raising the profile of disability on campus

• Look at ways to increase representation of disability across campus, including in diversity and equality initiatives
• Make sure disability is represented positively in publicity materials
• Support recruitment of staff with disabilities
The road to accessibility maturity may be not always be quick, but the journey is worth it!
More on the Public Sector Bodies
Accessibility Regulations

• Policyconnect.org.uk (2018)
  • Accessible VLEs – making the most of the new regulations
    https://www.policyconnect.org.uk/appgat/research/accessible-vles-making-most-new-regulations

• Gov.uk (2018)
  • How we’re helping public sector websites meet accessibility requirements
    https://gds.blog.gov.uk/2018/09/24/how-were-helping-public-sector-websites-meet-accessibility-requirements/
  • Public sector website accessibility statements - what you need to know

• Webdevlaw.uk (2016)
  • A plain English guide to the EU public sector accessibility directive:
    https://webdevlaw.uk/2016/12/05/plain-english-guide-eu-accessibility-directive/