

Dragon - helping students with **disabilities**

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The Disabled Students Allowance

There are 14.1¹ million disabled people in the UK. In 2019 38% of non-disabled people in the UK had a degree-level qualification compared with 21.8% of disabled people.²

Disabled students in the UK can benefit from a Disabled Students Allowance (DSA). This is a grant which can help a student get the most out of their learning experience. It can provide help with the cost of specialist equipment for example a computer, non-medical helpers, and travel. It is available to those with various disabilities, including mental health conditions, or learning difference.

Dragon speech recognition can play a major part in helping students with disabilities reach their full potential.

The role of the assessor

Students who qualify for the DSA scheme are assessed by a professional assessor who will evaluate their needs and identify the equipment that can help them.

1.<https://www.scope.org.uk/media/disability-facts-figures/#:-:text=Number%20of%20disabled%20people,disabled%20people%20in%20the%20UK>.

2.<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/disability/bulletins/disabilityandeducationuk/2019>

Who can speech recognition software help?

Speech recognition software can be extremely helpful to students with a range of different disabilities. It might seem that it can only benefit those with physical disabilities, but in fact it is helpful for people with a much broader range of disabilities. Some of the key groups that can benefit from speech recognition software are people with physical disabilities, cognitive conditions such as dyslexia or dyspraxia, mental health problems and a wide range of other conditions that can have anxiety associations.

How Dragon supports students with disabilities

We spoke to Jodie Parkes, a DSA needs assessor. He told us about his 20 years' experience of recommending Dragon to students.

Jodie said his job is extremely satisfying. He said that pretty much everyone goes out of an assessment feeling better than they went in, thanks to the range of support and aids he can recommend to them. He says many students he speaks to had not heard of Dragon beforehand, but that the majority of them would not be able to get through their course without access to assistive technology, and Dragon has always been a major part of their success where it has been recommended.

When a student sees a demonstration of Dragon for the first time, Jodie says that their reaction is quite often amazement because they've never seen anything like it. He says they quickly appreciate how it can make things easier for them.

Simplicity and power

A key advantage of Dragon is that it marries being easy to learn to use with great power. Jodie said that because it is highly accurate for most people and it's relatively easy for them to learn how to use it, Dragon provides students with a quick and accurate way to get stuff done regardless of their disability level. "For most students it is essentially popping on a headset, start talking and things happen. And that's pretty much all there is to it." Jodie says he can demonstrate this to students really quickly, "In five minutes I can prove the point to most students that this is something that's going to make a difference to them."

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Every student is different

Jodie assesses students with a wide range of different needs, and he evaluates each person on a case by case basis. There are many different scenarios in which he will recommend Dragon, including:

- People with physical disabilities, where using a mouse or keyboard can be difficult.

- People with specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia, or difficulties where a student can't translate their ideas into writing easily but can verbalise words and thoughts. "That kind of learning disability is nothing to do with intelligence, so students can quite often talk perfectly clearly about their ideas, but when they try and put them into writing, then they can't do it. Dragon gives them that ability."
- People with mental health difficulties and a wide range of other conditions which can create anxiety, who can often have to put in a lot of extra effort to get things done. This extra effort can generate fatigue and feelings of depression, low mood or anxiety because things are so difficult. A student might wake up in the morning full of ideas and feeling great about wanting to get on with things, but just physically not be able to do what they need to do. "Dragon gives them motivation to get stuff done, because they can have the recovery time when they need it and still chat away, get stuff done, and actually end the day thinking 'yeah, I got something done today'."

Levelling the playing field

Dragon brings students a wide range of benefits. Its ability to convert the spoken word to editable text is a central feature. This speeds up the whole process of document creation, so that, said Jodie, "the disability effects essentially disappear for most people."

“ Dragon has been the only thing that has ever served my students well enough. It is the only thing that has ever done the job properly and accurately, and done what was needed.

Dragon – strength in depth

Dragon provides students with a wide range of disabilities a fast, accurate way to produce documents, helping them to achieve their full potential as they learn.

Dragon can also help students with more than document creation. For example it can be used to navigate the screen, to create text in any application from sending emails to tweeting, and for interacting within applications such as selecting links in a web browser. When Dragon has been used for dictation it can read back what has been spoken.

To learn more about how Dragon can help all people with disabilities, visit <https://www.nuance.com/en-gb/dragon/industry/education-solutions.html>

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