



Modern-Eyes

Working together
WITH visually impaired people
FOR visually impaired people

THE MAGAZINE

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Sharing news, views, comments, information
and technology

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Modern-Eyes: **THE MAGAZINE**

is available in large print or Braille, on tape or as a DAISY CD, on a data CD, by email and on the website as a Word file, zipped Word file, webpage or pdf file.

FROM YOUR EDITOR

Hello everyone! Happy New Year to you all! I hope you managed to survive Christmas and the new year without falling victim to some of the nasty bugs which were around.

This month there is news about the accessibility options in Microsoft's new operating system, Vista, news about making dealing with your rubbish easier, new audio described DVDs and much more.

And why not start the New Year by letting other readers know what you like to do – do you have a favourite computer game that is accessible, a good book you have read or an audio described DVD you particularly enjoyed? So let us know what you would like to see in the magazine too. Remember, it's YOUR magazine too!

So, if the mince pies are all gone, sit down with a cuppa and anything left over from Christmas, put your feet up and read on ...!

MEDIA NEWS

DR WHO WITH TALKING MENUS - DVD

At last - a DVD that everyone can use! The latest Dr Who box set of Series Two, starring David Tennant and Billie Piper, will not only have audio description on all thirteen episodes but also talking menus enabling blind and partially sighted fans to find their way around the disks without sighted help.

RNIB has been working with the DVD distributor, 2 Entertain Ltd, to ensure that the disks are as accessible as possible and the hope is that future releases from the BBC will include this new talking menu feature – audio navigation. Immediately you put the first disk in your DVD player the disk will speak and say “Dr Who, Series 2, Disk One” so at least you know what you are watching! It then offers you the option of audio menus and tells you how to select them. From then on, all the menus will talk. They are also on the screen in large print and easy to read – useful if you have some sight.

The box set of six disks, released on 20 November, costs £69.99.

VIDEO NEWS

Audio Described Videos

The RNIB Home Video Service continues to offer a wide range of audio described videos. These are available for sale and rental.

Audio described titles range from children’s classics Beauty and the Beast and the Harry Potter series through to recent Oscar award winning blockbusters; Lord of the Rings Trilogy, The Aviator and Chicago.

We also have a collection of old favourites for you to choose from including Some Like it Hot, The 39 Steps and the spaghetti western trilogy.

Due to the demise of VHS video as a format we will not be adding any more video titles to our collection. However the titles we have are still available for purchase or rental from RNIB Customer Services

Telephone: 08457 023 153

(They will also send you a catalogue containing all the videos we offer in your preferred reading format)

**(RNIB Audio Description Update
Winter 2006)**

DIGITAL SWITCH OVER

Over the past year RNIB has been advising government departments about the effects of switchover on blind and partially sighted people and how they can best be helped through the switchover process. As a result of our involvement the government has confirmed that the following households will be eligible for the help scheme:

Households where:

- One person is registered blind**
- One person is registered partially sighted**
- One person is 75 or over**
- One person with a significant disability on attendance allowance or disability living allowance**

The scheme is not aimed at giving financial assistance and will not work with vouchers. There will be a limited choice of equipment but the receivers will all be very accessible, having at the very least AD capability with some talking features.

The scheme will be free if the eligible person is in receipt of pension credit, income support or jobseekers allowance; others will pay a small fee.

The scheme will give people:

- **An accessible digital TV receiver to convert one television set in their house to digital before switchover**
- **Help with installation of the equipment**
- **Practical advice on how to use the receiver**

Details about when precisely the assistance will be available, who from and how people will be contacted or can apply for the help are not known yet. The assistance will probably not be available more than a year before switchover happens in the region the person lives in, so if you live in the London region and want audio description now, don't wait because this assistance is unlikely to reach you before 2012.

The process of digital switchover will take place between 2008 and 2013, TV region by TV region. The best way to find out which TV region you are in is by checking which ITV news service you receive.

Region Switchover start dates

- **Whitehaven project: Autumn 2007**
- **Border: 2008**
- **West Country, Wales, Granada: 2009**
- **West, Grampian, Scottish: 2010**
- **Central, Yorkshire, Anglia: 2011**
- **Meridian, London, Tyne Tees, Ulster: 2012**
- **Channel Islands: 2013.**

(RNIB Audio Description Update Winter 2006)

NEW SKY REMOTE NOW AVAILABLE

Sky has launched a remote control specifically designed to assist older customers, people with visual impairments and those with limited dexterity: the Sky+ Remote Control - Easy Grip.

It offers all of the familiar features of the iconic Sky+ remote in two variants – it has either a textured easy grip or a hand strap to assist customers with dexterity impediments. Both versions have the additional benefits of:

- **Larger and bolder graphics for easier button identification**
- **Raised contoured buttons with more reference points for easier button identification for visually impaired customers**
- **Increased colour contrast between buttons and remote body**
- **Compatible with all Sky+ and Sky boxes**

Sky+ Remote Control - Easy Grip costs £19.99 (+ £3.50 P&P) for both battery door options. Existing customers can call Sky on 08705 66 33 33. Batteries and instructions are included.

Note:

I've just ordered one and I received my new remote in just over a week, and that was over the New Year! The grip is very good and could really help if you have dexterity problems.

The buttons are slightly different and a little more defined and raised up a bit more than on the standard remote but not a really noticeable difference. The text on the buttons is slightly larger and a better contrast. If you are struggling with your current remote it might be worth giving it a go! However, it still doesn't solve the problem of reading the on screen programme guide!!

DIGITAL ADVISOR SCHEME

Digital UK has announced a new training scheme for retailers so that eventually there should be at least one person in every electrical retail outlet who is an expert on digital television and switchover. As RNIB has been involved in an advisory capacity, these people should also know about audio description. So, next time you're in a TV shop, and there's a member of staff walking around wearing a badge with the "digital tick" symbol on it, why not ask them about how to get audio description on TV – we'd be very interested in your feedback, so let us know how you get on.

*(RNIB Audio Description Update
Winter 2006)*

RNIB BUYING GUIDES

The website now has two additional fact-sheets about equipment that the media and culture department gets queries about, i.e. how to choose a digital radio and how to choose a DVD player. The fact-sheets give advice to blind and partially sighted users who want some help making a choice and can be found on the following websites:

Website:

http://www.rnib.org.uk/xpedio/groups/public/documents/publicwebsite/public_buyingadigitalradio.doc

Website:

http://www.rnib.org.uk/xpedio/groups/public/documents/publicwebsite/public_choosingadvdplayer.doc

If you do not have web access, we can send these fact-sheets to you.

*(RNIB Audio Description Update
Winter 2006)*

FAREWELL TO THE NETGEM I-PLAYER

The only Freeview set-top box capable of delivering audio description has been discontinued. Netgem, the manufacturer, is moving into different technology and so has now stopped making the I-player. This means that there are now no Freeview set-top boxes currently on the market that deliver AD, nor are there any integrated digital TV's that deliver AD.

As this Update goes to press, the position regarding accessing AD on TV is as follows:

Freeview: There are two options. The Nebula DigiTV PC Card, which is very accessible for anyone using screenreading software such as JAWS, but does mean you have to watch TV on a computer. This costs around £120 and is available from Nebula Electronics

Telephone: 01689 897 090

The other option is the Portset Digital Media Centre which costs around £1000 and delivers Freeview channels with AD and includes a Daisy talking book player

Telephone: 01489 893 919

Sky: You can either subscribe monthly, or pay a one-off fee. Any Sky customer can get description by switching it on via the Services\System Set-up\Languages and Subtitles menu. Contact Sky's Accessibility Helpline

Telephone: 08705 66 33 33

If you live outside the London TV region you will need to watch BBC1 on channel 974, ITV1 on channel 993 and channel 4 on channel 994 to get description; if you live outside England you will also need to watch BBC2 on channel 989. Channel 744, one of the Sky Box Office channels, shows nothing but audio described movies.

Cable: NTL and Telewest now offer audio description on a limited basis. These cable TV providers are gradually introducing the service channel-by-channel.

Telewest

Telephone: 08451 420 220

NTL

Telephone: 0800 052 2000

RNIB (Audio Description Update Winter 2006)

READING AND WRITING

BOOST FOR FANS OF BEST SELLING FICTION

The best-selling writer and Children's Laureate Jacqueline Wilson has become the first UK author to release accessible versions of a new book at the same time as its standard print version.

Large print, audio, Braille and DAISY digital talking book editions of 'Starring Tracy Beaker' appeared last month alongside the mainstream version. Earlier this year, Wilson became the first author to ask her publisher to add accessibility as a clause to her publishing contract, and has committed to ensuring all her future books are accessible to her vision impaired fans.

Meanwhile the National Library for the Blind (NLB) has announced it has received a donation of 10,290 pounds from the organisers of the Man Booker Prize to create Braille, large print and DAISY formats of the novel that won this year's prize and the five other shortlisted books.

This is the third year that Man Booker Prize short listed novels have been produced in Braille and large print but the first time they have been produced in DAISY format.

This year, publishers were required to supply text files of the shortlisted books and all of them have done so. This speeds up the production process.

Currently only 4.4 per cent of books are translated into formats that visually impaired people can use, and conversion often takes months or even years, according to the NLB.

The RNIB and NLB are among 20 organisations which in 2002 formed a 'Right to Read Alliance', calling for people with sight impairment to be able to access the same books at the same time and the same price as everyone else.

OUT AND ABOUT

ACCESSIBLE ACCESS GUIDE LAUNCHED

November saw the launch of a new Access Guide for Stroud.

The guide has been put together by members of the Stroud and District Access Group. They spent several months visiting every business in Stroud, as well as churches, out of town stores and more.

The guide names each premises and gives a short description of how accessible it is. For example, it will say if there are steps into the shop, whether the staff are helpful or if there is a level entry.

The guide is available in print – larger than standard and on yellow paper – audio CD, DAISY/MP3 CD and audio tape. It can also be provided in Braille if required.

You can also find the guide on the Stroud District Council website

Website: www.stroud.gov.uk

The guide is also available in Stroud Town Council office, Rodborough Parish Council office, Cainscross Parish Council office and Ebley Mill as well as the Tourist Information Centre in Stroud.

NEW WALKING WEBSITE GOES LIVE!

A new website providing information on walking in the Stroud District has just gone live. The site's main role is to provide people with information on the benefits of walking, but most importantly enables people to find out what walks take place in their area.

"The website is a great opportunity for members of the public to find out all the information they need about walking," said Matt Pearce, Healthy Lifestyle Development Officer for Stroud District Council. "Walking is one of the best forms of exercise to improve people's health and due to the low cost everybody can take part."

The site also offers advice on how people can become volunteers and lead walks within their own community. Additionally, the site enables people to apply for a pack of 44 circular walks across the Stroud District.

Website: www.strollinginstrouddistrict.org

Matt Pearce

Stroud District Councils Health Development Officer

Telephone: 01453 754 501

LEISURE TIME

AUDIO DESCRIBED SPORT

The Soccer Sight project, a scheme to improve access to football facilities, has had a successful year with new commentary services being launched at 6 of our 7 clubs. We have been working with Brighton and Hove Albion, Bristol City, Cardiff City, Swansea City, Halifax Town and Huddersfield Town and each of these clubs has benefited from access appraisals, staff training and development of their football in the community schemes. Doncaster Rovers is now the only club left where work is still to be completed.

The main concerns at each club were centred on the commentary, fans were either unable to have any commentary at all, only receive it at home games or in specific areas or were given faulty equipment. Soccer sight has been working with football organisations and clubs to rectify these problems. This culminated in the RNIB Soccer Sight project working in partnership with BBC sport to launch a national competition on BBC Match of the Day to find new commentators for the seven clubs and to generally raise standards amongst existing commentators. Each club now has state of the art commentary equipment and an RNIB/BBC trained commentator in situ delivering quality descriptive training. If you could benefit from this service and would like to know more please contact

Eleanor Ellison

Telephone: 01273 262221

Email: eleanor.ellison@rnib.org.uk

(RNIB Audio Description Update
Winter 2006)

SUPERNOVA IN LIBRARIES - UPDATE

SUPERNOVA DATA PENS

Gloucestershire Libraries and Information have now launched the Supernova data pens for loan to library customers.

Enquire at your local library.

Supernova software is magnification and speech software enabling visually impaired customers to access email, Internet and Word etc. The data pens mean that the Supernova software can be used on computers which do not themselves contain the software. The other major advantage for visually impaired users is that they can store and retain their own visual preferences, such as colours and font, on the pen from one session to another.

It is important that potential users know that to use the data pen their home computers will need to have:

- **Windows 2000 or Windows XP Home or Windows XP Professional**
- **Microsoft Internet Explorer v5 or later**
- **Intel P2 400 MHz equivalent or higher, 125 MB free hard disk space, 128 MB Memory or higher**
- **PCI or AGP graphics card (not "on-board" – Windows Hardware Compatibility List approved)**
- **Sound Blaster compatible sound card (not "on-board")**
- **USB port (USB 2.0 recommended)**

Please note that you will probably need someone with sight to assist you in loading the data pen's interceptor onto your computer the first time you use it. Straightforward instructions are given with the pen.

If you need someone to assist you in loading the pen, you can contact David Bennoson of the RNIB

Telephone: 01242 224 121

Email: david@bennoson.me.uk

FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE**YOUR FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE**

Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service employs around 600 people, the majority of these people work as fire fighters on our 20 community fire stations throughout the County, however there are a number of others who provide vital support roles, including the men and women who handle the emergency 999 calls in our Control Room.

I think it is true that we have not given the issues related to disabilities the high profile attention we should have over the years. Part of this may be related to the fact that in 1995 when the Disability Discrimination Act became part of the legal equality framework in the UK the Fire Service, Police and Armed Forces were exempted from the Employment provisions. The thinking being that to do those jobs in an operational, hazardous environment, applicants needed to be 100% fit and well both physically and mentally.

However in the intervening years a number of fire fighters who were, when they joined, able to meet the standards of fitness and health, had since developed a number of conditions or received injuries which would, in the medical sense, categorise them as being disabled. Medical opinion of Occupational Health professionals would on most of those occasions recommend medical retirement or perhaps a transfer to a non-operational role.

In the majority of cases the individual did not have much of a say in matters, such medical retirements often lead to a loss of experience and abilities, impacted upon the pension scheme and also additional, premature costs in terms of more frequent recruiting being required.

A number of those individuals however started to question the medical opinions and many through studying their particular conditions, made a case to be allowed to continue their fire fighting duties. Many of these cases were tested in the Courts, the majority being successful. As a result of this in October 2004 that previous exemption was removed and now we take a different and more

positive view of fire fighters who have a disability, either as an existing employee or as an applicant to join us.

There are a small number of our Support Staff who live with a disability from our Personnel Manager who has Impaired Hearing, an Administrator with Epilepsy and our Headquarters Receptionist who is totally Visually Impaired. All carry out their duties in such a manner that it is their abilities, which the Service reaps benefit from.

Quite rightly we have provided the necessary reasonable adjustments in order to facilitate their particular areas of work but we have looked at their abilities above all other issues.

But what about people in the communities who live with disabilities yet depend upon us for our services?

Well as a result of meeting people from various disability groups, we have learnt where we need to do more to remove any potential disadvantage for those groups. This ranges from the ability of our fire crews to be able to communicate effectively with people who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing, the design of our websites, our job application procedures together with the physical access provisions of our community fire stations.

It is only by contact with such groups that we can find out what you need from us.

We are placing more emphasis these days on protecting you through fire safety education, therefore a great deal depends on how you are able to access such information. Only you will know what your preferences are for accessing issues such as that, please let us know if that is a problem for you.

This article which Sue has been kind enough to supply to you through Modern Eyes is a further opportunity for you to have your say about what is important to you from your modern fire and rescue service.

If you have any comments about our service and the way it impacts upon you

Email: peter.thorp@glosfire.gov.uk

Telephone: 01452 753 221

Thank you for taking the time to read this and perhaps we will chat soon.

**Peter Thorp
Cultural Change Manager**

REFUSE NEWS

BACK DOOR COLLECTIONS

Are you disabled, infirm, elderly or visually impaired? Then you can request a back door collection for your rubbish and recycling.

Most councils offer this service. Just telephone your local council and ask to be put on the list for a back door collection. They will arrange a place for you to leave your rubbish and recycling which is easy for you to manage.

JANUARY SALE!

RNIB SALE NOW ON!

RNIB has lots of items with discounted prices during January.

**The sale lasts from
8 January 2007 until
9 February 2007.**

To take advantage of the discounted prices, contact

**Customer Services
Telephone: 08457 023 153
Email: cservices@rnib.org.uk**

Some of the categories with discounted prices are:

- **Board games and cards.**
- **Braille products.**
- **Canes and cane tips.**
- **Children's games and toys.**
- **Christmas cards.**
- **Clocks and watches.**
- **Daisy books.**
- **Daisy players.**
- **Diaries, calendars and address books.**
- **Dictionaries.**
- **Eye shields.**
- **Healthcare.**
- **Keeping in touch.**
- **Keyboard stickers.**
- **Kitchen equipment.**
- **Learning products.**
- **Lighting.**
- **Mobility accessories.**
- **Outdoor activities.**
- **Publications.**
- **Software guides.**
- **Telephones.**
-

COMPUTING

REMOTE HELP!

A low cost service to remotely evaluate the computing needs of disabled people has been launched by AbilityNet, the UK computing charity for people with a disability.

Aimed at users in the home, workplace, college, school or rehabilitation unit, the 'Barrier-free assessment service' will enable users to be assessed by a trained consultant wherever they are located to establish which adjustments or assistive technologies are needed.

Once users have completed an online assessment form to gather background information about them, assessors make the necessary changes to the user's computer, using 'GoToAssist' remote desktop support from technology company Citrix. This allows assessors to download screen reader and magnifier demonstration software onto clients' computers.

AbilityNet assessors plan to talk to users over the 'voice over IP' (VoIP) telephony service Skype and a webcam will be loaned to users so assessors can spot any physical access problems in their workstation set-up. AbilityNet has a small stock of equipment to lend to clients so they can "try before they buy" any assistive devices or software.

"It's about what can you do to improve the accessibility of your workstation without spending much money," David Banes, AbilityNet's Director of Operations told E-Access Bulletin. "The biggest barrier we face is cost."

The scheme aims to eliminate the need for users to travel to an AbilityNet centre, saving time and money, although the initiative does not replace AbilityNet's existing in-centre assessments. According to Banes, these can be "expensive to the point of insupportable," particularly where consultants need to visit people in remote areas such as the UK's small islands in Scotland.

The programme, which follows a year-long pilot in Scotland funded initially by the Big Lottery Fund, will be launched at an event at the Houses of Parliament in Westminster on 22 November.

(E-Access Bulletin November 2006)

NEW ACCESSIBILITY FEATURES IN VISTA

The new version of Microsoft's Windows operating system, 'Vista', offers enhanced access features including an improved screen magnifier, a basic screen reader and the capability to allow users to customise settings according to their needs.

The 'Ease of access centre'

Website:

<http://www.microsoft.com/enable/training/windowsvista/ea.aspx>

contains a set of 'recommended settings,' pages whose function it is to assess the level of the user's disability and make appropriate changes

Users are asked to tick boxes next to statements such as:

- I am blind**
- Lighting conditions make it difficult to see a monitor**
- Images and text on a TV are hard to see**

in short questionnaires grouped by impairment.

The 'centre' is available from the desktop, in a move to make access features easier to discover, Director of the Accessible Technology Group, Rob Sinclair told E-Access Bulletin at a Vista accessibility briefing last week. User feedback revealed many users simply did not know access features existed in Windows XP and previous versions of the operating system.

The software giant has also shed the wheelchair logo that was previously used to open accessibility features available in the

'control panel'. According to Sinclair, not everybody identified with the symbol, particularly those with a temporary disability.

Improvements have also been made to the system's screen magnifier which now enlarges on-screen content by up to 16 times; and to Narrator, a basic screen reader with a new natural-sounding speech engine called Anna. The team aims to further improve these features.

The Vista operating system was launched to businesses last week and released for retail at the end of January 2007.

(E-Access Bulletin December 2006)

NICE TYPE

An easy-to-read font aimed at low vision technology users for use by designers and manufacturers of any equipment with keys has been released by Tiresias. The font, Tiresias Keyfont V2, can be freely downloaded from:

Website: <http://www.tiresias.org/fonts/keyfont.htm>



COMPUTER GAMES

BOGGLE!

A free, accessible word game based on the popular game Boggle has been released by Spoonbill Software. Players must make as many words as they can from letters on 16 adjacent "cubes" arranged in a grid:

Website: <http://fastlink.headstar.com/boggle1>

To order the game contact Ian Humphreys, with your full name and country of residence

Email: at: irhumph@omninet.net.au

Note:

I have downloaded the game and it is easy to play! It is self-voicing so you don't need a screen reader and the playing 'board' can be magnified to fit the full screen.

Sue

COMPUTER CLASSES

IT WORKSHOPS

Don't forget, we are now running computer workshops in Stonehouse and Coney Hill and a new group will be starting soon in Podsmead.

Sue

Telephone: 01453 757 047

Rob

Email: rob@modern-eyes.co.uk

THE INTERNET

BBC IPLAYER TEAM TO BEGIN USER TESTING

A prototype of the 'iPlayer', a new online multimedia content player developed by the BBC, is to be tested next month by 100 people with disabilities.

The iPlayer will allow UK viewers and listeners to stream audio and video content over the internet including all TV programmes broadcast on BBC TV - and later BBC radio programmes, for up to

seven days after an initial broadcast. The service will include audio description where it is already included in programmes

The iPlayer project, which began in 2003, includes the 'display settings project' that develops the ability to customise content such as fonts size, adjust on-screen colour contrast, the spacing between letters and words and the ability to make content linear for ease of navigation by screen reader users.

Gareth Ford Williams, Senior Content Producer, Accessibility at BBC New Media said the iPlayer could create a template for a "completely accessible interface" that could be applied to other BBC online features and websites. "The long term plan is to get it site-wide," said Ford Williams. "You could log on from any PC and the settings will migrate with you."

Before the external user group begins testing the service, BBC staff with a vision impairment are also set to test the iPlayer and provide the development team with feedback. In future, Ford Williams said the BBC New Media accessibility team will also weave in feedback from users via the BBC's Web 2.0 blog and through the existing user groups.

"Access is being built in from the bottom up," says Paul Crichton, director of web analytics consultants net-progress (<http://www.net-progress.co.uk/>) and author of the BBC's Web 2.0 blog. "The plan at this stage is to make it completely malleable. The degree of customisation sounds exciting.

So if you missed the audio description version of Torchwood on BBC2 this week, log on to the iPlayer site and eventually you'll be able to watch it, audio description and all," said Crichton. The iPlayer will be released in April 2007, although Ford Williams said, "In the first two years it will go through many releases. What we put out in the first release is not the finished article."

(E-Access Bulletin

December 2006)

HAVE YOUR SAY!

Accessify Forum is a discussion forum devoted to all topics relating to web accessibility. Topics cover everything from 'Beginners' and 'Site building and testing' through to projects such as the new accessibility testing tool WaiZilla and the accessibility of the open source forum software itself.

All you need to register is a working email address, so come along and join in the fun at:

Website: <http://www.accessifyforum.com>

INTERNET SHOPPING

Would you like to have a go at grocery shopping with Tesco? If so, we are hoping to run a workshop day at Coney Hill Neighbourhood College.

We will be using the Tesco Access site as, although not perfect, it is the most accessible grocery site at present.

Sue

Telephone: 01453 757 047

Email: sue@modern-eyes.co.uk

DISCLAIMER

All information in this magazine is provided in good faith and is, to the best of our knowledge, accurate at the time of printing.

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