

## Manda

Welcome to Completely Shelfless, a podcast by the OU library. My name is Manda and this episode is called "Everyone gets a library".

I'm joined today by my colleagues Hossam and Geri and we're going to talk about accessibility and making resources and services in the library more accessible to disabled users. Do you want to introduce yourselves?

## Geri

Hi, Geri and I'm a learning and teaching librarian and I work on the Help Desk. So you may have web chatted with me or spoken to me on the phone. And the reason I'm on this episode is that I also have the role of Accessibility lead in the library. So, as well as developing services for the library in supporting students, it also involves working with other departments and I really enjoy meeting staff outside the library. I also liaise with the OUSA Disabled Students' group about new services publicizing them and I find it really interesting talking to them. So that's me!

## Hossam

I'm Hossam Kassem, like Geri I'm one of the Enquiry team librarians, so it probably would have seen me as well on the chat or in the emails.

I also work within the Live Engagement team in the library and we deliver online training sessions to our students and our staff at the Open University. Again, one of the reasons I'm in this episode here is because I'm one member of the Accessibility team. I've started this role about nine months ago and it was an eye opener for me. I've known that such services do exist but never been part of it myself.

So what I do now is testing databases with Geri, in order to see how accessible they are and it's just amazing what the students have to go through to make sure that they can access these databases using softwares and or changing layouts. It's very, very interesting.

## Manda

Wow. So you're quite busy. So you touched on it a little bit there talking about databases, so some of the library resources that a student might look at. You're checking them to see how accessible, they are but in general what sort of services do you offer or what services are there for disabled students?

## Geri

So we have a number of different services and I'll start off by talking about Sensus Access.

## Manda

Okay. So what's that then?

## Geri

Well, we've had this for about three years. It was a pilot first of all, and we had good feedback. So, it's part of our standard provision now. It's an online automated conversion service. You can go to web page on the library website and there's an online form. You upload the file you want to convert.

So, for example, if you're searching and you come across a PDF that's an image and you can't read it with a screen reader. You can use Sensus Access to convert it to a different format. So, you upload the

file, Sensus Access detects what sort of file it is and then gives you the option of different formats to convert to. For example, you can convert from a PDF to mp3 so you can listen to it

Manda

Oh so if I had, if I wanted to listen to it or it was easier for me to listen to it. I could just take a PDF from say a journal article or something, put it through Sensus Access and it would turn into an mp3.

Geri

Yes.

Manda

Oh, that's really helpful.

Geri

Yes, it can't convert to different languages, but you can choose somebody to read that has a French accent, Finnish accent. And so, if you chose you could have an article and have it read back to you with a French accent.

Manda

I'm wondering whether I'd like that. I think I might like quite like that. Maybe it was an Irish accent. I've got a bit of a soft spot for those.

So that's Sensus Access. Who's that available to?

Geri

Yes, that's an important point actually. For copyright reasons it's available for students whose disability means it's difficult for them to access texts online or in print and there is more copyright information on the page.

Manda

Okay, so that's really useful for students with that particular disability or range of disabilities.

Sorry, Hossam – did you want to jump in there?

Hossam

Yeah, it's actually also available to any OU members. So, it could be staff and students if they have print disability.

Manda

Okay, that's really helpful to know isn't it?

Geri

It is and also, for other students - if you are liaising with a student who needs material converted, you can convert it for them. So, tutors as Hossam said.

Manda

So, if you're using Sensus Access and you come up against a problem or you're not sure what you're doing, where should you go for help?

Geri

So the first thing to do is phone the Library Help Desk. There is a certain amount of help available on the Sensus Access page but you're very welcome to contact the Library Help Desk and we've already mentioned that myself and Hossam work on the help desk.

Manda

and I'm aware that it's not just you guys to support these kinds of requests at all is that there's a small team of you in the library. So, and all of us, I think, who work on the Help Desk are aware that of the service and you know, that people might need help with it and who to go and talk to if we're not sure what to do. So, you're saying, contact the Library Help Desk and we can give you some help with Sensus Access.

Geri

And if the item you're wanting to convert doesn't come out correctly - because the quality of the file you get back very much depends on the quality the file that goes in. Sensus access can't cope with everything. You can just contact us, and we'll see about converting it for you

Manda

So if Sensus Access doesn't work and you need access to this particular resource, we can do it anyway in the library. Again, come to the help desk. If you need some support with this kind of thing. But that's fantastic really isn't it?

Hossam

It is, and we have lots of students who contact us with a disabled or not. And we can have them when they can't find what they want, themselves, they can always come to us and we will try to help them as much as possible.

Manda

So that's Sensus Access and you said about how that works and where they should go for help,

Geri

Actually, it's worth knowing that many OU enquiry staff have experience of using assistive software. For example, screen readers like JAWS. I've provided support for screen reader with finding links, searching for library resources for example, and many other staff have experience.

Manda

I have certainly supported a student or over the phone, who was using a screen reader and I could hear it reading out different things about the page and that was quite an interesting experience. I'm amazed at how quickly the screen reader can read and they can understand what's being said - that's quite a skill. I'm not an expert in this, but I know Geri that you're giving a couple of training sessions where we get to play with and try out different assistive technology. I know that comes around every now and then and you do quite a lot of work getting staff at least aware of it, but it's quite interesting to hear JAWS over the phone. I can tell you that.

Hossam

And also, you can control the speed. So you heard it speaking at certain speed - most of the screen reader software's would allow you to slow down or increase the speed to suit your own needs, so it's an amazing piece of software.

Geri

I think it's important as Manda said, for all staff to have experience of using a screen reader. So, we're going to have a look at NVDA, which is a free screen reader and just show staff some of the issues, students can come across when they're using this software.

Manda

It also really helps me in another area of my work, which is working on creating activities for students, to teach them how to use the library. Or even when I'm editing pages on the library website to be aware that it's really important to use headings, because the piece of assistive software talks about... recognizes what headings and things are. So, these little bits of, this bit of information is feeding into all sorts of things that we do in the library.

Hossam

And that's why what Geri said it's the outcome of Sensus Access would depend on the document you feed it so if the document you put in is structured correctly, it has headings and done properly, then the result of the conversion will be better for the students as well. So it's something for the publishers or whoever is writing a piece of information to the to the web to take these in mind when they creating these blogs or activities as you said.

Manda

One thing I know that some students struggle ways and not just disabled students is literature searching and I'm aware that we offer some help with that as well Do you wanna tell us a bit more?

Geri

Yes course. We always want to support students to be as independent as possible when searching library resources but there will be times when a disability means that really just isn't possible.

And in those cases, we do offer something called a supported literature searching service. You need to supply keywords what databases, you want to search for example, and then we provide a list of references for students go through and select. We always do have a conversation with a module team about this because they need to know, and they have to agree that they're happy for us to go ahead with us.

We don't do it for that many students, but for the students we've done it for we've had really good feedback about how it helped them otherwise they probably wouldn't be able to continue with their studies without

Manda

And presumably once you found a list of references based on what they've asked for. If they need those in a particular format. Either they can use Sensus Access or they can request them from the library?

Geri

Yes, we'll have a conversation with them about what formats they would prefer to have the references in.

Manda

Funnily enough, we've been talking about accessibility in the context of this podcast, because we're very well aware that this is only you know sound, and that we don't currently have a transcript available for the podcast and that's something I'd quite like to change.

I don't know how many people would like to read what we're doing here, but it feels a bit exclusive if we don't, at least try. I've been messing around with an app which will record the sound and try and transcribe it for me.

I'm aware of lots of different programs that allow you to caption video and sound and what have you. So, there might be something we could use there. So far, the app that I've been trying is done quite a good job but does need some editing. So, I'm hoping that we might be able to produce a transcript of this episode at least, was we're piloting this podcast.

Hossam

It's funny you mentioned that, it's something actually we thought about already for our what we call live engagement sessions. Basically, online training session where we help students to for example to access the library resources or to search online or even help to use ebooks.

And what we do in these sessions. First of all, there is different stages where we think about accessibility in the sessions. In the design of the session itself we make sure that the colours we use, the background we use, are all accessible, because we put the presentations online so for students to download them. So that's the creation stage. And then we also record the sessions to make them available for students to always visit them.

What we also did, is we made the transcript of the sessions. We use this service where we send the videos recordings to a company and they transcribe them. We edit them to make sure that everything's correct and then we uploaded them into the library website, so students can see the transcript if they have issues watching the video. They can read the transcript and also the sessions are subtitled - and we always aim to do that.

Again something about accessibility, we thought about, Geri myself and a colleague Katherine who actually appeared here several times on these episodes. Also, what we've worked in the accessibility team we designed a session, myself Geri and Katherine, we worked on a session called "Improving your experience accessing online resources"

Manda

When you say a session, what do you mean? Do you mean a training session?

Hossam

Yes, we it's a live engagement training session. And basically, it doesn't teach you how to use the library, but it gives you some hints and tips on how to improve your experience accessing the resources. So, we talked there about Sensus access. We talked about how to change the screen colour or how to change the contrast to make it easier to for the eye to read. Err, how to use a feature in Adobe Connect where you can make the documents read to you.

Manda

That sounds really helpful. So you could get when you're in your online training room using Adobe Connect, you can actually get it to read out things?

Hossam

Yes, you can make it read out to you documents once it's converted and I've actually - during the session - I showed students how to convert the document in Sensus Access and then I made it read to them.

I got brilliant feedback from them. If I can read some – one of the feedbacks was - 'I was shocked at the amount of stuff I didn't know that can help me access things easier, especially PDFs' and other one said, 'so much extra information that I do not think I would have gotten otherwise'.

So there is a room to show the students how to make things easier for them. Lots of them already aware of these because they use screen readers like JAWS or NVDA. But there are small things that you can make where you may not need a screen reader, but you may just need these small changes you can make and lots of people aren't aware of it. Myself, I wasn't aware of it until I became part of this team.

Manda

So yeah, one of the things that jumped out to me - I'm guessing if you're dyslexic, and I'm aware that improving contrast and changing colours can sometimes help with that. And that's probably something you might touch on.

Sounds really interesting and quite useful for people. How do they find that? I presume there's a recording and as you say a transcript of this training session, even if there's not one running right now

Hossam

All the recording our sessions are available on the library website. So, if you go to WWW dot open dot AC dot UK forward slash library. ([www.open.ac.uk/library](http://www.open.ac.uk/library))

There is a tab called Events and Training and within that you can see our training sessions, the ones that will be running in the next few days. And also, there's a section where we can see all the sessions and you tap on them and then you can go to the recording and listen to it.

Some of them have the transcript embedded there, but there is other, we think about how to make these transcripts more available to students and it's a process we're always trying to improve.

Manda

Geri, I know one thing that you wanted to talk about was some of the work you do around databases and testing and making library materials available. Can you talk a little bit more about that?

Geri

Yes, I thought it'd be interesting for people to know that we test the accessibility of databases used in modules and those that we get on a trial basis. So, there's a few members of staff that have been trained up and we look at, can you change the colour contrast? Can you change colours? Can you change text size? Can you navigate the database? can you do the search? Find the results? get the full text using a keyboard only? So, for people who can't use a mouse and we also test using JAWS as well.

Manda

I would have no idea about that. I can completely understand why someone might not be able to use a mouse, but it never occurred to me that I could just navigate say, the interface of a database when I'm trying to do my searches just using a keyboard. That must make a real difference for some people.

Geri

Yes. And you should be able to navigate using a keyboard. So, we feed back the results of our testing to publishers, suppliers and we rank the issues as well. So, we say which ones have the highest impact on people trying to use a database so that they can then prioritize making changes to their database.

We have actually had some publishers come to the OU, and we've demonstrated to them the impact of some of the problems with their database. And I think that has a really powerful impact because they're seeing it. I had a couple of publishers come in and you can see the penny dropping actually. And after they had seen a demonstration they said, well, we're going to go and get a screen reader so that we can test our products.

Manda

That's a really useful relationship to have, you're testing the databases for the students to make sure that you know, lots of different people can use them, but that feedback is going back to publishers and suppliers and then they're listening. That's, that's really quite powerful. I'm impressed!

Hossam

Another thing we we do with the testing is once we've done the testing, if there's any hints and tips we can give to the students we put that under the database name. Where they can click and see what things they can do to easily navigate the database and it does seem to be working with students and users.

Manda

Yeah, I've seen that in the list. Actually, I've not ever really clicked on them - perhaps I should go and have a look. But I've seen it in the list of databases that there are accessibility tips. So that's what that's about. Tthat kind of thing where you can improve student use or anyone's use of the database

Geri

And actually, I just like to say, because we have that relationship with publishers, it's really useful if anyone has problems with a database. If they can't navigate to it using screen reader, please do let us know because we can then feed that back and the publishers are always interested to know.

Manda

Oh, that's really handy so if anyone listening, you know, has a particular bugbear with a database that they come across again and again - if they come back to us we can feed that back to the publishers and maybe improve the situation.

I'm quite amazed at how many different things, the accessibility team does actually in the library and I don't think I would have known the extensive that if we hadn't had this conversation today I am aware of it of some accessibility things feeding into some of the things that I do. I think we think

about it a lot in the library, but I'm quite curious Geri. Do you get many questions about this because I think you've got a question of the episode or question of the week for us?

### Geri

Actually, we do get a few queries from students and one particular example, I've got is to do with a request for a supported literature search. So, it was interesting because a student really thought that that's what would help them. And so, I phoned, and we had a conversation about that. But actually, as part of the conversation, in this particular case, we found that the reason she was having problems finding information was actually a lot of it has to do with lack of confidence and actually experience with searching. And so, I said, well, I'm actually happy to phone you up and we can go through a couple of searches and that's what we did. We spend about an hour or so each time, and after we've gone through the couple of searches, she tweeted to say she didn't realize that the library provided such a service and how useful. She had found it because she was then able to search independently.

### Manda

Well, that's quite fantastic. I mean, we get a lot of people who struggle with searching and you know just disabled students are no different. And sometimes it is about confidence and they've tried something and they're not sure that it's working, and they want to check in with a librarian. And in this case, it sounds like that's no different for this person, but it's really nice that there's the support if someone needs it.

### Hossam

There is that, and it doesn't only apply only to disabled students. Lots of students just need that first help just to guide them through the first tip and then they can do it themselves over and over again. We are there to help and probably, our students, most of them would know now that we have 24/7 service. So, someone will be there to help them whenever they have a question. We have people in the US, librarians, qualified librarians in the US who would help our students when we are not available during our closure hours and we always respond.

### Manda

Yeah, and I think we talked about the web chat service, which is what Hossam is referring to being available 24 seven in our pilot episode and we went into quite a lot of detail, but if you want to get in contact with us, you know overnight, the weekends or you're in another time zone that doesn't quite match with the UK working hours the web chat service is a really great way to do that,

We've come to the end of this episode about accessibility and making library resources available to everybody. Thanks very much to both Hossam and Geri for coming in and speaking to us today.

If you want to get in touch with us at the library, you can go to the library website, which is [www.open.ac.uk/library](http://www.open.ac.uk/library) or you can contact us on Facebook. We have a page there which is OULibrary and on Twitter, which is @OU\_Library.

Thanks for listening!