A Digital Champion's guide to helping a person with a learning disability choose the right technology

If you are helping someone to think about starting to use technology, they may need some support to choose the right technology for them. There are five key areas to consider:

1. Affordability
2. Availability
3. Accessibility
4. Usability
5. Compatibility

We will consider each of these in turn in this guide.

1. Affordability

"I got my iPad from John Lewis. I had to get permission from supported living though to get it through. Because supported living looks after my money, I had to fill out a form to get the money out." Chris

Does your learner have access to their own funds that they can use to purchase technology?

☒ If **No**, then:
explore with them if they have access to technology where they live, work, or socialize.

☑ If **Yes**, then:
find out if your learner has sole control over their finances or if a 'guardian' has to give permission for money to be spent on purchases such as new devices.
→→ find out what they can afford to spend on a new device.

Useful resources:

- **AbilityNet's Webinar: How to get online for free or low-cost:**
  https://abilitynet.org.uk/webinars/how-get-online-free-or-low-cost

- **Digital Unite's guide: Getting online more cheaply:**
  https://www.digitalunite.com/technology-guides/easy-read-technology-guides/getting-online-more-cheaply

2. Availability

"Every supported living team has a netbook or a laptop and a team phone that residents can use. Most people would prefer to have their own if they can afford it, but if they can't, then it is there to use." Janet

Does your learner have access to technology where they live, work, or socialize?
- In supported living or residential care homes there may be a 'house' or staff device that residents are permitted to use with communal access to the Internet.
- If your learner attends college, a day centre or a work placement there may be internet-enabled devices that they can use.
- If your learner belongs to a self-advocacy group or activity group run by a charity or a local community, the group may have internet-enabled devices that they allow access to

☑ **Yes**. If your learner feels comfortable using and sharing these communal devices, it may be appropriate to arrange a visit, so you can see what it available and make sure your learner knows how to use them.

☒ **No**. If your learner does not feel comfortable using and sharing these communal devices. then you may need to discuss with them the possibility of buying or loaning their own personal devices.

3. Accessibility

"My sister did have a Google system, but she can't say Google. She has speech difficulties, so she was calling it 'Doogle' and it wouldn't answer to Doogle. She had real trouble. She wanted to play ABBA and she wanted to play her music, but the thing wouldn't listen to her commands."

Does the physical, sensory or cognitive abilities of your learner mean that they may not be able to access a particular device or app?
For example:
- Too much text they find difficult to read.
- Small screen size they find difficult to see.
- Lack of fine motor control, making the pressing of buttons and keys difficult.
- Too many steps or information to remember in order to do something.

☑ If **Yes**, then:
You may need to recommend an alternative device or app, or check what inbuilt accessibility features their device or app has.

Useful resources

- **AbilityNet's guide to learning disabilities and computing**: https://abilitynet.org.uk/factsheets/learning-disabilities-and-computing#simple-table-of-contents-3
- **Microsoft's guide to accessibility:** https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/windows/guide-for-people-who-have-learning-disabilities-b422a139-fab0-8047-826a-8879c23a9cb2

4. Compatibility

"My brother was given a basic tablet by his supported living provider. But they did not understand that he would have been better supported with an iPad, because all of his family use an iPad and so they know how to use an iPad and can help him use it. With the basic tablet he is struggling with things." Creating Connection Project

Are the devices or apps your learner wants to use compatible with the devices and apps used by their family, friends, support workers or employers?

☒ If **No**, then:
- You may need to discuss with your learner whether compatibility is important to them.
- You may need to find out which device or app is most commonly used by family, friends, support workers or employers?
- You may need to recommend an alternative device or app.

Compatibility is often an issue that arises when a person with a learning disability decides they want to be able to use technology to video call or message the people they know.

- It is possible that the people they know use different communications apps. Their friends may use Zoom or WhatsApp, their support worker may use Teams and their family members may use Facebook Messenger.
- It is possible that your learner is capable of learning how to use all of the different apps. But it is more likely that you will have to help your learner choose one app and understand who they will or won't be able to talk to using that app.

Further Resources

- **A framework for thinking about the practice of supporting people with learning disabilities to use technology** (Case study page 24 describes how staff in a supported living organization recommended technology) https://tinyurl.com/mmm98txe