

## TRY BEFORE YOU BUY – SUMMARY



## INTRODUCTION

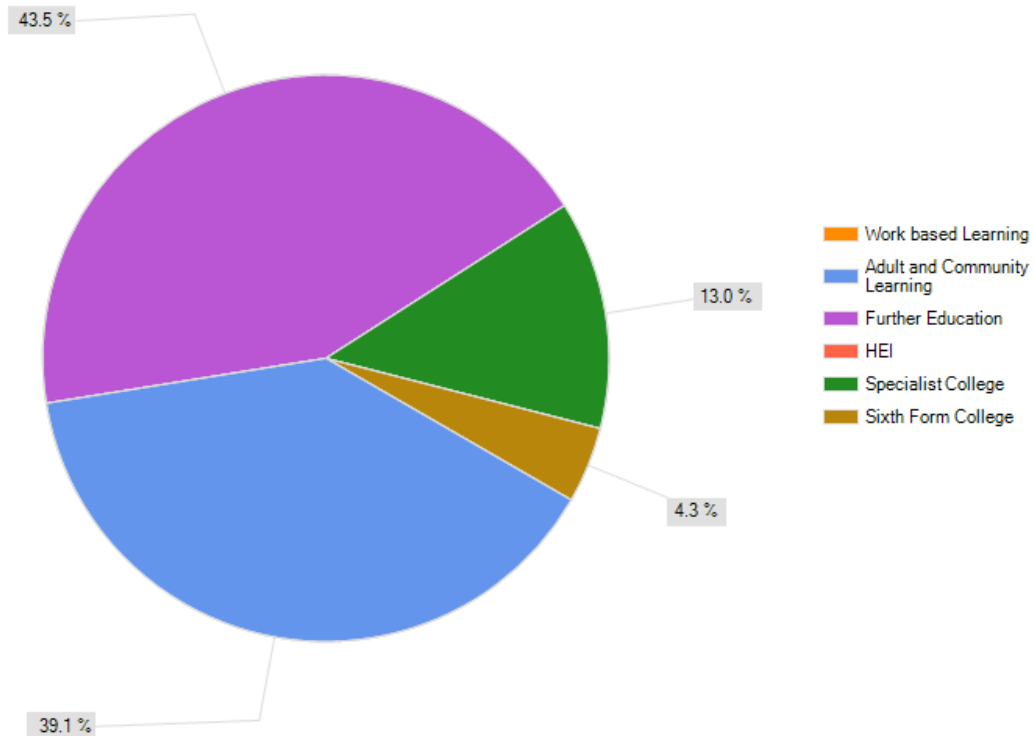
The JISC Regional Support Centre West Midlands offers a service for regional Learning Providers to trial a variety of assistive technologies. The 'Try before You Buy' service, allows learning providers to borrow accessibility and mobile learning equipment for a six-week period, to raise awareness of accessibility equipment and to help them make an informed decision on purchasing such equipment. In return, each learning provider completes a survey highlighting the benefits of the pieces of equipment which will be published on the RSC West Midlands Wiki for other learning providers to read.

## LEARNING PROVIDERS

The scheme commenced in 2009 with the purchase of four kit bags intended for Work-based Learning, Adult and Community Learning, Further Education and HEi's. The kit has been loaned out to 23 Learning Providers.

The results below are based on the number of respondents to the survey of learning providers who have taken part in the loan service.

What type of Learning Provider are you?



## PARTICIPANTS

<b>FE/HEi</b>	<b>ACL</b>	<b>Specialist Colleges</b>	<b>WBL</b>	<b>Learning Resources</b>
Birmingham Metropolitan College	Coventry AES	Strathmore College	NCT	Burton College
City of Wolverhampton College	Coventry AES	Glasshouse College		Ludlow College
Dudley College	Hereford Community Learning	Derwen College		Solihull College
North Warwickshire and Hinckley College	Hereford Academy Community Learning	Hereward College		Hereford College of Technology
South Staffordshire College		Regent College		Shrewsbury College of Technology
Stafford College				Bournville College
Worcester College of Technology				

There is an opportunity to target Sixth Form Colleges and Work-based Learning Providers highlighting the benefits for learners with dyslexia, reading difficulties and memory or organisational issues. The kit bag will be available to these groups as a priority for 2012.

## TECHNOLOGY INCLUDED

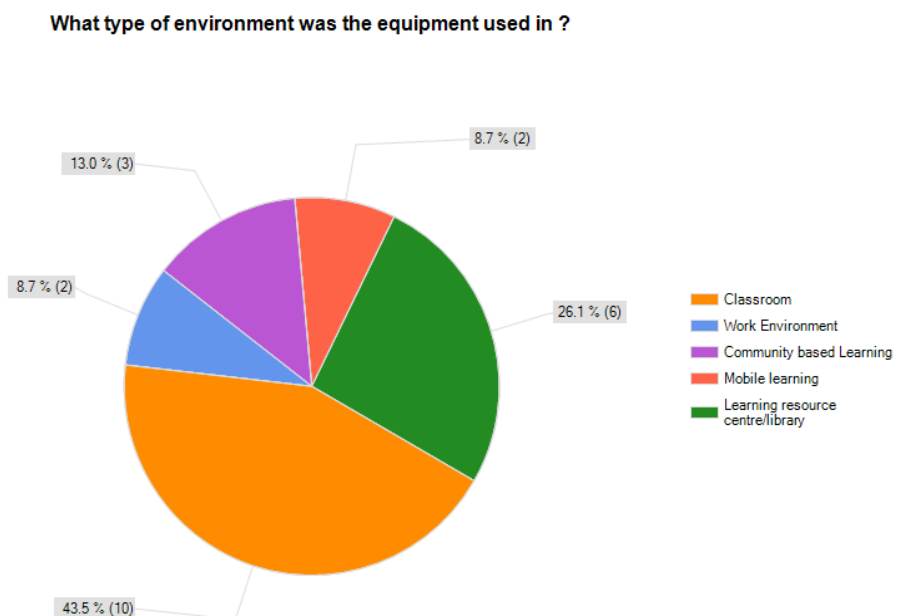
The Kit bags contain the following equipment:

Wireless Key Board & Mouse	Flip Video Camera	Panasonic Lumix Camera
Big Keys Key Board	Oxford Reading Pen	Sony eBook Reader
ZPen	Mp3 Player	Sony Voice Recorder
Asus EeePC	Gryo Mouse	

The JISC RSC also provides a short demonstration of the equipment highlighting possible uses and teaching and learning approaches.

## WHAT TYPE OF ENVIRONMENT WAS THE EQUIPMENT USED IN

This answer suggests that Further Education Colleges tend to run their courses within the college using the traditional classroom environment. However, the Learning Resource Centre showed that even though the traditional method of classroom teaching is still popular with the tutors, the learner would still require the technology to be available within a private study area. This suggests that learners may prefer the smaller learner centred environment with a more inclusive and holistic approach to learning.



## TELL US ABOUT THE LEARNERS WHO MAY USE THE EQUIPMENT

Even though the kit bags contain equipment which could be used in many different situations, such as mobile learning and assessment, the majority of the responses identify that the equipment has been used with learners with learning difficulties. These range from Dyslexia to more severe learning difficulties. The equipment has also been useful to support literacy related difficulties. Learners include:

16-21 years of age male and female with Downs Syndrome,

16 - 50, LDD, Dyslexia, mobility

Any age over 16 range of learning difficulties

17 + young adults with learning and physical disabilities

## IN WHAT CONTEXT WOULD YOU USE THE EQUIPMENT WITH A LEARNER?

Learning providers have identified pedagogical reasons. The list below summaries some of the ways the equipment may be used with learners.

1. Use of the camera for evidence for e-portfolios
2. Using the wireless keyboard and mouse with a group of learners to interact with a Smartboard
3. The Oxford Reading Pen on a one-to-one basis for reading unknown words.
4. Recording learner feedback with the Sony Voice Recorder.
5. Capturing detailed drawings with the ZPen and inserting a PowerPoint presentation.

## PRIOR TO USING THE EQUIPMENT WHAT TYPE OF CHALLENGES DID YOUR LEARNER FACE?

Numerous barriers have been identified such as motivation and concentration. Subjects like functional skills benefit from using the equipment such as the EeePC to watch videos, the Sony Voice recorder for role play and the MP3 player to record travel information.

Several comments have suggested that the challenge is getting tutors to engage with the technology as many see this as being time consuming.

## HOW ACCESSIBLE DID THE EQUIPMENT MAKE THE LEARNING?

This question has given me some interesting and surprising answers, firstly the use of MP3 players and Digital Voice recorders. The survey shows that over 60% of the participants felt that the MP3 player was very accessible to use. Both of these pieces of equipment help the learner to overcome some of their dyslexic traits such as memory recall, organisation and reducing the amount of hand written notes.

How accessible did the equipment make the learning?					
	Accessible	Very Accessible	Presented some barriers	Not Accessible	Response Count
Asus EeePC	62.5% (5)	12.5% (1)	25.0% (2)	0.0% (0)	8
Digital Voice Recorder	42.9% (3)	28.6% (2)	14.3% (1)	14.3% (1)	7
Reading Pen	11.1% (1)	22.2% (2)	33.3% (3)	33.3% (3)	9
Mp3 Player	20.0% (1)	60.0% (3)	20.0% (1)	0.0% (0)	5
Sony E-Book Reader	66.7% (4)	16.7% (1)	16.7% (1)	0.0% (0)	6
Z Pen	42.9% (3)	28.6% (2)	14.3% (1)	14.3% (1)	7
Digital Camera	42.9% (3)	14.3% (1)	42.9% (3)	0.0% (0)	7
Flip Video Recorder	40.0% (4)	50.0% (5)	10.0% (1)	0.0% (0)	10
Wireless Keyboard and Mouse	50.0% (3)	33.3% (2)	0.0% (0)	16.7% (1)	6
Big Keys keyboard	0.0% (0)	100.0% (2)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	2
Finger mouse	50.0% (3)	50.0% (3)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	6

However it can be seen from the survey that only one tutor felt that the Asus EeePc (a small portable PC) was very accessible which was surprising. This suggests that a lot of learners are still handwriting notes and course materials. However there are opportunities to have information made available electronically reducing the number of hours writing and allowing them access to material prior to the lesson.

Secondly and possibly the most interesting point on the chart is that 100 % of the participations agreed that the Big Keys Keyboard was accessible. However reading through the comments about this piece of equipment, many of the institutions who took part in the survey say that they are being utilised in some form. This suggests that not all learners want discreet and unobtrusive technology.

## DO YOU HAVE A PARTICULAR PREFERENCE FOR ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY THAT YOU WOULD RECOMMEND TO OTHER PRACTITIONERS?

From the responses it can be seen that equipment like the EeePC, ZPen and the Sony Voice recorder are popular with both the learner and the tutor. Many tutors have stated that the technology is easy to use. However comments suggest that training is required for uploading and manipulation of files and videos. Comments from the respondents include:

Flip video for assessment.  
Digital voice recorder for those not wishing to be filmed.

Equipment like the ZPen and the Flip video have the necessary degree of coolness!

I have a particular non-preference: Not too many fiddly batteries or equipment which needs constant charging after each use.

## WHAT ACTIONS WILL YOU TAKE, FOLLOWING TRIALLING THE HARDWARE?

Many learning providers have indicated that they have already purchased some of the equipment from the kit bag. However, 'budget constraints' and 'lack of technical knowledge of staff' have been suggested as reasons for not purchasing the equipment. Out of the 22 replies, 18 have stated positive feedback and will be purchasing selected items of equipment.

Have already purchased some of the kit after using the kit bag

Have already spoken to other tutors and my manager about the positive benefits of using the flip video recorder in relation to evidencing learning for our students

## SUMMARY

On reflection the Try before You Buy Scheme has had a positive response from the Learning providers. 23 of the JISC RSC West Midlands learning providers have trailed the equipment. Further Education has had the biggest portion of the loan time and classroom environment has been the most popular place of use. Tutors have identified how the equipment could be used for evidence collection, capturing drawings and reading digital manipulation. The majority of the feedback suggests that the technology will help to support learners with literacy-related difficulties such as Dyslexia.

Evidence from the survey suggests the easier the technology is to use, the more favorable the response from the tutor. Many have identified that there is a training issue with some staff reluctant to use the equipment due to poor technical skills.

Some learning providers have identified that they have purchased equipment since the loan of the kit bag.

## NEW PURCHASES

The Try Before You Buy kit bags have been updated in 2011. New equipment includes an Apple iPad, Live Scribe as an alternative to the ZPen and a Sony dual video camera (this is to replace the Flip Video cameras which are no longer manufactured). There are many uses for the new purchases however the equipment will help with learners with memory recall with the Sony dual video and camera, processing of information and play back through the Live Scribe, and multimedia learning with the iPad.

## THE WAY FORWARD

The scheme is already proving popular for the September 2011 term with a waiting list building. There will be a push to loan the bags to ACL and WBL and to target Sixth Form Colleges who at present haven't borrowed the equipment.

## CONTACTS

If you would like to take part in the trial please contact Alison Wootton by e-mail at [a.wootton@rsc-wm.ac.uk](mailto:a.wootton@rsc-wm.ac.uk)