



Future of Assistive Technology Workshop Summary

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Assistive technology (AT) refers to devices and tools which allow people to perform many of the tasks of daily living and to participate in social activities, employment and education, increasing independence and wellbeing and improving quality of life. It has been said that *“for people without disabilities, technology makes things easier, for people with a disabilities, technology makes things possible”*.

Assistive Technology (AT) has been identified by the European Commission as a key enabling tool to help to overcome the barriers faced by people with disabilities in everyday life and allow them to participate in society as equal citizens. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Person with Disabilities requires member states to ‘undertake or promote research and development of, and to promote the availability and use of assistive technologies, suitable for persons with disabilities’

AT can be either high tech or low tech. High tech devices are using electronics or computers as solutions, such as speech recognition software, digital hearing aids, talking calculators, iPhone, and iPad; in contrast, low tech devices are less costly, do not require computer or electronics to operate and easy to obtain, examples are highlighting pens, grab rails, adapted eating utensils, pencil grips, splints and picture sequence board.

- The use of both low and high-tech should be considered and compared
- We should have a common language within the field of AT to allow the different disciplines and stakeholders to understand aims, objectives and outputs.
- It is vital that we do not just develop new technology, but that it is appropriate to the needs and ability of the person, user friendly and affordable. Multi-disciplinary research will inform decision making and research design to ensure that any AT is fit for purpose.
- Bridging the gap between the developers and users; being more inclusive and involving all stakeholders in the design process, e.g. end users, parents, carers
- Building teams to deliver the needs of service users; how to identify the key personnel to help achieve successful projects? Involving service users in research projects from the beginning is key.
- It is vital to train the trainers/carers to use the technology and ensure that they are comfortable using and teaching AT solutions to/with their clients or family members.
- Funding for ongoing training and support of AT use is equally as important, monies should not all be directed towards the design and implementation of new devices or systems.
- It is important to have a clear sense of the end goal of AT devices, so that their impact can be maximised and assessed. What exactly do we want or expect the AT to achieve?
- AT devices need evaluation and assessment (especially when they are used in specific contexts; home, centres, etc) their effect on Quality of Life and value for money.
- The role of adaptive systems should be addressed. How can AT be designed to overcome issues of scalability?
- Cognitive reinforcement systems to help with independent living, using psychologists to help understand services users reaction to adopting technology, identify barriers, develop educational and training strategies to promote positive behavioural change.
- More technology is required within the services (specifically iPads) with user friendly apps

- Use of AT could cause embarrassment, stigmatization, particularly with young people. It is important to think about unobtrusive AT. How do we make AT 'cool'?
- Exploring the role of virtual reality as AT
- Using /designing technology for a range of disabilities (including lower-functioning)

Future research collaborations and grant opportunities

Research direction: consider parents voice and also ethical concerns / safety; dealing with danger

Identify potential policy updates which could reduce barriers to service delivery and provision of AT.

Virtual environment for empathy, training in life and social skills

FET (H2020) & blue sky funding opportunities

Use pre-commercial devices and focus on big-data

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SME – academic