



Assistive Technology - An Overview

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Introduction

This section provides an overview of Assistive Technology (AT). While AT refers to any device or system that helps to improve the functional capacity of people with disabilities, this section deals primarily with computer-related applications.

Assistive technology is a very broad field and may range from the very simple to the very complex. It may be divided into high, medium and low-tech categories:

- 'low-tech' refers to unsophisticated and largely non-electronic devices, such as a laptop stand
- 'medium-tech' devices are more complicated but are used by those by pupils with some degree of independent functioning. Adaptive computer peripherals, such as alternative mice or keyboards, will usually come within this category
- 'high-tech' devices include sophisticated communication and computer control systems. At this end of the AT range, considerable specialist training and support will be necessary, and pupils with little independent functioning or communication ability will be the main users.

This section is a starting point and provides indicators on the range of considerations involved in finding an appropriate 'fit' for the technology within the life of a pupil and school. These may include assessment, training, on-going support, the characteristics of the school and, above all, the pupil. Where the full benefits of the technology can be realised it can be enormously advantageous for the pupil by liberating them to achieve their optimum potential. Such a result can also be a most rewarding experience for everybody concerned.

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