ANNIE: Hello, everyone, welcome to

today's webinar.

It has just gone 1:00, so I'm just going to give everyone a chance to

join.

It might be a good opportunity to take a moment to check the technology, so

if you joined online feel free to drop into the Q&A and say hi to the

panellists and attendees.

We've disabled the chat reader as we've discovered it can cause some

problems for people using screen readers.

I can see the numbers shooting up, so we'll just give it a few more minutes.

OK, so I can see lots of you have joined now.

So we're going to officially start the webinar.

So hello and wok to the webinar this afternoon on the HE and public sector

update, excelling in digital accessibility at Open University.

My name is Annie Mannion and I will be running through what you can expect

from the session.

Just going through some housekeeping for the content today.

Live captions are on the webinar provided by Catherine at MyClearText,

so thank you, Catherine!

You can turn them on using the CC option on the control panel and there

are additional captions via Streamtest.

net, and slides from today are available on our website.

If you have any technical issues and you need to leave early, don't worry,

you will receive an email at the end with the recording, a transcript and

slides, and that will be a couple of days after the end of the webinar.

Depending on how you joined the webinar, you will find a Q&A window,

so please use this for any queries or comments or if you want to ask the

presenters any questions, drop them in the Q&A for us to address later on.

Finally, we have a feedback page that you will be directed to at the end

which tells you about any future topics you would like us to cover, so please

do let us know.

Today I'm joined by Kate Lister who is accessibility inclusion and wellbeing

EdTech lead at Open University and also Amy Low, the service delivery director

at AbilityNet.

For those of you who aren't familiar with AbilityNet swee support people of

any age living with any disability or impairment to use technology to

achieve their goals at home, at work and in education, and we do this by

providing specialist advice services, free information resources and I'll

share a little more about our services at the end of the webinar.

So just a summary of today's session.

With just one day to go until the Public Sector Bodies Accessibility

Regulations and the 23 September deadline, Amy Low will provide an

update on how the Government Digital Service will be monitoring compliance

and Kate Lister is going to be explaining how they embed and evaluate

accessibility throughout learning and teaching at her institution, and then

Amy and Kate will discuss the AbilityNet and McNaught Consultings

new accessibility badging service pilot and finally we will have an

opportunity for questions at the end.

So I'm just going to start today with a poll.

So, how much do you understand about how the Government Digital Service

will be monitoring compliance?

Do you understand it fully?

Do you know a little?

I'm not clear, please enlighten me, or nothing at all.

So depending how you joined the webinar you may find you can't see the

poll, but you can respond in the Q&A panel.

So I will leave it a few more moments for people to vote.

I can see 75% of you have voted so just a few more seconds.

OK I will end the poll now and share the results.

So you can see that we've got 5% understand it fully.

48% of you know a little - that's the majority of you.

And then, "I'm not clear, please enlighten me,," 34% and then 14% of

you know nothing about it at all, so hopefully Amy can give you some useful

pointers and tips on the GDS monitoring plans now.

AMY: Great, thanks, Annie.

ANNIE: Yes, so over to you, Amy.

AMY: Thank you, so hi, everyone, happy

deadline eve, I think!

We know what a huge amount of effort you've all been putting into preparing

for this deadline in and around everything else that has been going on

this year, so a massive well done on getting as far as you have with the

requirements so far.

Can we go on to the next slide?

Thank you.

So I will cover off some information that was published by GDS on 20

August, and based on the poll, it seems like some of you have seen it, and

maybe others haven't, so hopefully there will be some useful stuff in

here.

I will be covering how GDS are going to be selecting samples to monitor,

what it will be testing and reviewing, how the feedback and reporting will be

undertaken, and I've added the link to the Gov.

uk page on to the slides and I will also stick it in the chat at the end,

too, so that people can access that easily.

So going on to the next slide, just to start off with, the first monitoring

period is already under way and covers between January 2020 and December '21.

So the aim is to monitor a sample of all organisation and website types and

sizes to whom the regs are applicable, and that includes those with

exemptions, to learn about any differences needed in the monitoring

process.

So in terms of choosing the sample that's going to be taken from two

lists - public sector organisations list, and also from the the domain

names that are registered on public sector top-level domains, so things

like gov.

uk, NHS.

uk and that kind of thing.

So parts of the requirements of the sample is that it needs to be diverse,

representative, geographically balanced and to be inclusive of a broad range

of public services.

Sampling within each organisation type or domain list is going to be random,

but if a certain organisation type, size, location or purpose turns out to

be dominating the sample, then GDS will review and rebalance that to make sure

the coverage is more representative.

There may be some sectors who update their websites less often, so they

might not be in scope of the regulations until after September

2020, and GDS will be rebalancing the sample in '21 to make sure those

sectors have representative coverage.

So next slide please, Annie. So testing.

So the testing will cover accessibility of a site against web --

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines and GDS will also be reviewing the

website accessibility status for compliance.

The test in this is divided into simplified and in-depth testing.

So the simplified testing will relate to the home page and a sample of other

pages across the site - the number of additional pages will depend on the

size of the site - and the team will be testing using AXE which is an open

source automated tool and they have said the testing methodologies will

remain under review as technologies advance and they will also be

undertaking manual testing in the simplified testing such as keyboard

accessibility and Zoom functionality.

So if simplified testing finds major issues, the site is likely to be

referred on to a detailed audit and that will be tested against the full

range of success criteria up to level AA, using assistive technologies,

automated and manual methods.

The prioritisation of the sites selected for detailed testing will be

based on social impact, so the size of the population that are using that

site, but also will consider a level of complaints received about a site or an

organisation.

So those will be some of those considerations.

So moving on to the next slide, please.

So feedback and reporting.

What happens after a test?

Well, GDS will send a report to the public sector body that runs the

website and they will be providing them with a reasonable deadline to fix any

issues that have been encountered.

So following that deadline, if issues are still remaining, then that will be

referred to the Equality and Human Rights Commission who are tasked with

enforcement of the regulations and, again, I will pop a link into the chat

from their website around how they'll be managing that.

But if anyone on the webinar needs to make a complaint about a public sector

website, basically, the guidance is to contact the Equality Advisory Support

Service, so they've got a helpline, and I'll pop that in the chat in a minute

so you've all got that to refer to.

So GDS will also be periodically publishing findings from their

monitoring, so that will be sort of public information, and also on behalf

of the Cabinet Office they will be publishing a list of sites with

non-compliant accessibility statements.

So that is pretty much my update on the GDS monitoring.

Obviously if anyone has any questions, pop them in the chat and we can pick

those up at the end.

ANNIE: OK, great, thank you, Amy.

We will have an opportunity to take your questions for Amy later on in the

Q&A, but for now I will hand over to our next presenter, Kate Lister, to

share her experiences of digital accessibility at Open University .

KATE: Thanks, for that useful update.

I wanted to say thank you first for inviting me here today and thank you

also for the amazing vote of confidence in the title that you've selected

about excelling in digital accessibility.

It's just a lovely thing to be told that we're excelling.

I suppose for myself I tend to be rather critical about what we're doing

and say I think we're doing a fairly good job in the OU but there's always

room for improvement!

Nice to meet you all, my name is Kate Lister.

I manage accessibility and also inclusion and wellbeing in learning

and teaching, so the title given here isn't quite right, I'm not the lead on

those things, but I work in a team called CIGA, which I will be talking

to you about today, which is a case study for how we can be embedding

accessibility across our universities and settings.

I'll give you some background on the OU first of all, I'm sure everybody

here as heard of the OU in some way and knows people who have done courses and

things like that in the OU but there are some things that people don't

know, for example, we are a four-nation university, which is a wonderful,

wonderful thing, but it does put us in a rather - what's the word?

It creates challenges sometimes because we have four different

governments so we need to be responsible and as possible to four

different kinds of policies and things like this around accessibility and

inclusion and all of those kinds of things.

We have a very high number of students disclosing a disability.

As of March 2020 we had 27,979 disclosing a disability to us and we

know that we have an awful lot more disabled students who don't disclose a

disability for their own reasons.

Just to give you a bit of an idea of how that sits in our wider cohort,

it's normally around about 20% of our total cohort - the percentage is

always increasing, which is a really nice situation to be in.

Another thing about the OU is we have an open admissions policy, so all of

our students come to us at undergraduate level with any level of

qualifications or experience, so it doesn't matter if they don't have

GCSEs or A-levels, they are welcome to come and study at an undergraduate

level for us but that creates an interesting situation for our early

level modules.

We do have access courses that people can choose if they want to but a lot

of people choose to start on the level one courses which means we have very

different levels of experience and ability coming in there.

Another thing about the OU context that many people don't know is that we

have an open programme at both undergraduate and postgraduate level

which is where students can study an open degree, either a Bachelors or

Masters and choose their modules from any discipline and from any other

programme.

This runs alongside our named programmes, so students can choose to

study a named programme but they have the option of studying whatever they

want, which means that they can effectively study at the first level

and second level they can study something completely different to the

third level, which also creates interesting challenges for inclusion

and for accessibility.

It is worth mentioning that the open programme is our most popular course

by far as well with an awful lot of students on it.

Can I have the next slide, please, Annie?

Thank you.

So in terms of how we deliver our OU courses the vast majority of them have

some kind of online presence, in fact all of them have a module on the

website and a vast majority of them deliver at least some of their content

online, there are few these days which are entirely by book.

A lot of them are blended learning, some of them do still have some books

and other bits and pieces like that, but the majority of it is online, so

we have module websites, we have digital activities, we have

community-based activities, we have forums, collaboration, we have books,

we have all sorts of different ways to deliver the material - all of which

present their own accessibility challenges, particularly at a

distance, which is something I imagine many of the participants can identify

with this year!

In terms of our tuition model, we support all of our students with

tutors and they are placed in a tutor group where they can interact with

their peers and they have regular tutorials.

These also present accessibility challenges as you can imagine.

We also try very hard to create online communities and our Students'

Association does a fantastic job of running and moderating a lot of

student-led communities via social media and via mediums as well so there

is a very strong distance learning community that students can be part of

or be separate from if they prefer.

So as you can imagine all of those things create their own accessibility

challenges and taking it back in time a little bit, back in 2010, a gap was

identified between student support and between the faculties in that our

students were phoning student support, speaking to student support,

communicating the challenges that they were experiencing, the problems with

accessibility that they were experiencing, and our student support

teams were then working very hard to support them in those areas and mop-up

the accessibility bits and pieces for them but there was no mechanism for it

to be systematically fed back to the faculties so that it could be

meaningfully embedded in practice and anticipated for future cohorts of

students.

So my team, which stands for Securing Greater Accessibility was created to

bridge that void, which is where we are now.

I said SeGA, my team, but I wasn't leading on it back in the days when it

was created and I'm sure people will have heard of lots of people who have

been involved with SeGA and led on it at different points.

But SeGA was created to operationalise accessibility but it was recognised at

a very early stage by Mary Taylor, one of the people who founded it, that in

an ideal world we would have people in fak -- faculties, and working in them

in a context to embed accessibility.

innovation. So now, SeGA's framework covers three core areas - community, quality and

areas. I'll talk you through each of those in turn and what we do in each of those

So in terms of community, we now, as of last week, when I made these

slides, had 17 faculty accessibility coordinators situated in the different

faculties and different schools.

Many of those have been in post since 2010 since this started and are

incredibly knowledgeable.

What the coordinators do is work to support module teams who are creating

new modules and make sure that accessibility considerations are taken

into account right at the design stage, because we know how absolutely

critical it is that that happens, and how very hard it can be to retrofit

accessibility, as I'm sure all of you have experienced at different times.

They also work to support modules in presentation when they are actually

out and being delivered to students, with student-requested reasonable

adjustments as and when they occur.

So our model is to almost anticipate things, so we anticipate for things

like collaborative activities, if we have a collaborative activity we

always create an alternative, reflective activities, we'll create an

alternative for people who can't take part in reflection.

Digital accessibility, so all of our videos have captions and transcripts

and things like this, and any other things where students are required to

engage with an image or an audio clip or something like that, we'll have an

alternative, an accessible version, in place.

The reasonable adjustments then tend to be the more complex side of things

where students need something that is a bit more personal or a bit more

nuanced.

Worth mentioning as well that all of the coordinators might have a

substantive role, they might be curriculum managers or things like

this, but they have a dedicated amount of time set aside specifically for

accessibility.

We also have 36 accessibility champions in other areas who work to

promote and support accessibility within their areas and that includes

areas like marketing, finance, IT, our editors, the digital development

editors, the interactive media designers, the graphic media designers

and all the different areas across the OU.

The other side of the communities that we work very closely with are the

disabled students' groups, and we have disabled students represented across

all of the meetings and everything that we have there, so we have them as core

members, but we also work very closely with them to try to make sure that

we're getting their input on everything as we're doing things and we run

regular events so that we're seeking their voice and so that we are up to

date with the issues that disabled students are experiencing at any one

time.

The other side of things is we run training, we have a working group that

works on different projects every year, we have community spaces and events,

so we have forums and social media and things like this and also I run the

comms for accessibility across the OU as well, to make sure that everybody

is up to date with everything and try and break down some of the silos that

you often find in HE.

The other area we work in is quality, or the second area of the three.

Here we do an awful lot of training and guidance of procedures and things.

We manage a referrals panel for complex cases, so when we have

particular accessibility cases or requests that have been discuss at

various different levels by student supports and faculties and can't be

agreed, we operate a referrals panel for a panel of people who will look at

the case anonymously and make a recommendation for how it should be

managed, and these are the really sticky, complex cases.

We also own the accessibility policy, the accessibility learning and

teaching, I should say, and we basically represent accessibility

across the OU and input to strategies and things like this.

Next slide, please.

The third area in which we work is innovation and we've become a lot more

focused on this in the last few years.

The main way we do this is through research and scholarship and here are

three of the projects we're currently working on.

We are two years into the mental wellbeing in the curriculum project

which I run, which is a participatory research project to identify the most

effective ways to embed wellbeing, student mental wellbeing, throughout

learning and teaching and it's called curriculum but also includes tuition

and various other elements as well.

We are working on another project funded by Microsoft which is around

disability disclosure and using AI and here we are really pushing chatbots to

their limits to create a virtual assistant that will very gently and

sense actively talk students through the disability disclosure process and

it means they don't have to use the static HTML form that we are currently

asking them to use because that's something that students have fed back

to us many times over the years that it can be very hard to disclose a

disability and it's also not very social model to have to fill in a form

saying all of the things that you can't do, it is something that has annoyed

us for years, so this is something that we're working on to try and change

this and if anyone wants more information on any of these, do get in

touch.

The third project we've been running for a while now is called Our Journey

and it is an accessible digital tool for students to map and represent

their study journeys and experiences and the challenges that they

experience, and basically their experiences.

We do this for two areas.

We are promoting this for two areas.

Partly for students to reflect and think about how they've managed those

challenges and how they've overcome them and moved on, but also so that

they can represent them to the university, either for a particular

individual person like a mentor, or more broadly for the university to

learn from their experiences and to identify ways in which the university

can be better.

Then we channel the research findings from these projects and all the other

projects we've done back into practice via the community.

That completes the wheel in a way of the community innovation and quality

side of things.

So effectively, this is our framework, our operational framework, for

accessibility is these three areas, but it gives rise to a sub-framework with

a lot of different areas and so I wanted to kind of share it with you

today as a framework that might well be useful for other universities in

operationalising accessibility, and I think for the rest of the webinar

today we're going to be talking about different frameworks and the different

ways that different frameworks that are involved in accessibility.

There was one other question I wanted to put before you today as well and it

was a question - it's not mine, it has come from my wonderful colleague, Pete

Mitten, who may be known to some of you, and I thought it was extremely

interesting and I wanted to put it out there.

Recently in education there has been a lot of emphasis on efficiency and

streamlining processes and making them as efficient as possible and when it

comes to efficiency in operations what you are effectively doing is stripping

away all of the buffering, all of the padding and all of the extras, and

that is fine as long as things stay the same, but obviously this year things

haven't stayed the same, to put it lightly!

Even in the OU, we've all found ourselves working in extremely

difficult circumstances, so should we be thinking about a framework for

resilience, instead of a framework for efficiency?

Should we be thinking about a framework that enables us to respond

to the change as things are changing and continue our core practices

without stripping out all of the side things that can affect us?

So I will leave that with you as something that we can consider or

discuss, thank you very much.

AMY: Brilliant, thank you for that,

Kate, excellent examples of best practice there and we will have a

chance for you to pose your questions to Kate in the Q&A later, and I can

see lots of questions coming in.

Now we have another poll before I hand back over to Kate aAmy to discussing

the badging service pilot.

So how confident are you that you have a good framework in place to ensure

that digital accessibility improvements are sustained?

Are you really confident, we're smashing it - quite confident - a

little kernt - or really not confident at all?

Depending on how you joined the webinar you might not be able to see

the webinar but you can respond in the Q&A panel.

So just over half of you have voted so the last few seconds to answer.

OK, I'm going to end the poll now and share the results.

So you can see that there are - unfortunately, nobody is really

confident and smashing it.

But a fair few of you, 31%, are quite confident.

48% are a little concerned.

And then 21% of you are not that confident at all.

So hopefully there will be some guidance in this area coming up.

I will hand back over to Amy and Kate for the next part of today's webinar.

AMY: Yes, so I'm going to be talking

really now about planning for ongoing momentum and continuous improvement

and just giving you a bit of a sneak preview around the badging pilot that

AbilityNet and McNaught Consulting are going to be running.

So if we go to the first slide.

So the question on my first slide is, how can you keep momentum, celebrate

success and also measure progress beyond the deadline tomorrow?

Because reflecting on the deadline, you know, it has been really, really

useful in driving stift -- activity and focusing people around a goal, but I

think potentially it's been less helpful in terms of creating a sense

of slight panic and, in some cases, focusing people more around short-term

damage limitation and frenetic activity and a bit less around longer term

strategy and continuous improvement.

We've been talking to some staff that we're working with that have put in an

enormous amount of effort in recent months, but there are concerns amongst

them that after the 23rd, there will be this sense that the project is

finished, and that progress could then start to unravel before the culture of

designing accessibly has been properly bedded in.

Sometimes we've talked about accessibility being a journey in this

series, but it can really also sometimes feel a bit like

mountaineering, I think.

So just going on to the next slide, please, Annie.

So we're hoping to be able to provide some sort of ski lift to those trusty

mountaineers and what we really wanted to come up with was a way to make the

whole strategic and long-term piece feel a bit more achievable.

Some of the thinking came about after a Twitter exchange with the lovely

Kate here, so I don't know how many of you have seen the AbilityNet and

McNaught Consulting HE and FE maturity model, you can download that on our

website, and I'll make sure - I haven't put my other links in the chat, have I?

I will put a link in the chat for that as well.

But Kate had been using that to evaluate the OU.

The model includes elements such as culture, focus, student engagement,

structure around skills and so on, and as you might imagine from Kate's

presentation just now, the OU measured up pretty well, didn't you, Kate?!

And Kate asked Alastair, you know, do they get a badge for demonstrating the

level of maturity un.

This was something that we'd definitely already been thinking about

developing, going back to that knowing how far you've come, being able to

celebrate success and also set new stretching goals for yourself.

So we invited Kate to join us in a bit of a chat about it, because we were

really keen to get her thoughts on what that might look like.

During our chat, we agreed that, whilst having a scorable system at the

sort of institutional level is really useful from a collective goal and

strategy planning perspective, Kate brought this up and we thought this

was really, really insightful, is that you really do need to focus at the

module level, where the student is experiencing the learning as well, so

you've got that kind of overarching, but then the frontline granular

approach to accessibility.

Some of the reasons this would be really powerful would be to make sure

that you're disseminating responsibility to where the impact can

be made in the learning experience, but also to make it really straightforward

for people to be able to achieve a standard, you know?

You don't have to rely on the whole institution to be doing it - you can

affect that piece of the action that you're putting together - and that

could create that sense of motivation and achievement at a faculty, school

and course level.

In time, you know, one of the things - AbilityNet talked to lots of students

as well, you know, disabled students, about the choices that they want to

make and where they should study and what advice can they draw on about

whether their needs are going to be catered to or not, so we hope in time

that sort of a badging system would be able to provide greater visibility for

students of what they can expect in terms of accessibility standards when

they're choosing options for study.

We definitely want this to be something that the university owns, so

it's a kind of model where champions within the institution would be

trained up to do the internal monitoring and QA and any change

management that's required to implement the frameworks, and then there would

be an annual external review and validation from AbilityNet and

McNaught.

So moving on to the next slide.

So as Annie mentioned, we're looking to pilot this now, and the process

that we've outlined would be that we will be circulating to the pilot

participants a self-assessment framework and they will be invited to

join a training session for both the institution-level side of things and

the module level, and people can choose whether they want to participate in

institution level, module level or both, that's absolutely fine to opt

for one or the other, or both, at once.

So following that training, people can either go away and use that framework

under their own steam, and use that for roadmapping, to plan improvements

within the institution and take that forward, or there is the option to

invite AbilityNet and McNaught in to conduct some baseline mapping and

prioritisation with them and then after a set period of time, depending on

readiness, we can return to review progress and do some sample moderation

for the badging.

So as I mentioned earlier, we're at a point where we're ready to pilot the

programme, so if anybody would be interested in being in that initial

group, that would be fantastic.

Obviously we know now is a very busy time of the year for everybody in HE,

so we're planning to run those pilot training sessions probably in late

October/early November, when things have hopefully calmed down a little

bit for you folk working in the sector.

Kate, I haven't drawn you in here, but I don't know if you wanted to

potentially say anything about (a) what you - how you found the maturity model

and then some of the discussions that we've had since, where you have been

helping us to think about what might go into the frameworks?

KATE: Yes, absolutely.

I found the maturity model really, really helpful, I thought it was a

brilliant model for laying out the different elements and I really liked

the way that student voice was embedded throughout it, throughout the higher

levels of it.

I think for me, the focus on modules was really important from an OU

perspective, because there is such different practice in different areas

and I imagine it's the same elsewhere in HE, although it might not be at a

module level, it might be at a school level or an individual level, but

there are discipline-specific differences.

We know that a lot of the STEM disciplines may present more

accessibility challenges than some of the other disciplines so I think it's

hard to draw that general, "This is how good my institution is" sort of

picture, so I found the granular approach very helpful and I thought it

was a good model for laying out the different areas and a nice holistic

map of accessibility, if you like.

AMY: Excellent, well we look forward

to you joining us in the pilot sharing your pearls of wisdom and how it fits

in around your current frameworks.

So that's pretty much all from me on the sneak preview of the badging pilot.

ANNIE: Well, thank you very much to

Kate and to Amy.

I'm sure you all have a lot of questions you would like to ask so

please fire away in the Q&A window.

We will provide the links that Amy referenced on our website after today

at abilitynet.org.

uk/ou-access, and if we don't manage to cover all of your questions today,

we'll try to capture them in a follow-up blog with the answers soon.

So I'm just going to look through the questions now, there's tons that have

come in.

Just a quick question for Amy - is there a cost for the badging pilot,

asks Jonathan?

AMY: So the first part of the pilot is

free, the signing up and the initial part, and the second part there is a

cost, so to cover the initial benchmarking, if you were doing both

parts of the badging, so the module level and the institutional level and

then for when we return to do the evaluation after the agreed timeframe,

it would be £5,000 for the two together.

ANNIE: Then a question for Kate.

There is a question from Sam who says, you said only around 20% of students

normally disclose - how do they disclose and how do you know there are

others who aren't disclosing, and do you have ways to support those people?

KATE: Yes, absolutely.

Disclosure is a big thing for us, as you can imagine and it has been an

area I've done a fair amount of research in as well.

So at the OU we have multiple means for students so disclose.

They're invited to disclose upon registration and we've done a lot of

work around the framing of the disclosure question which we know is

so important when it comes to this.

So now we have it framed as the case that students have to say they don't

have a disability.

We've got processs in place to channel it through if they speak to a tutor

about it or a support person.

How we know students don't disclose, we see it in social media and

community groups, it comes up again and again and again around, I haven't

disclosed a disability, should I, is it worth it, or I don't want to disclose

a disability, I want to do my degree on my own and there is this sense that

disclosing can be asking for help to complete your disability and people

want to do it without help, that's something that exists out there.

But we don't know how many people don't disclose, it's hard to quantify.

In terms of how we support them we do as much as we can for anticipatory

adjustments, so we try to make most of our module content available in

alternative formats, so there are tensions here, because when it's our

content, when we own it, we can make it available in whatever formats we want,

and we do, so you can have it online through structured content or you can

have it through a Word document or a PDF and various other different things

as well and we also have access for people to convert things themselves.

However, when it is third party content like a book or something, we

are restricted in terms of rights, that we can only - the only alternative

formats of that kind of content for students disclosing a disability, so

that is one of the reasons that we would ask people to disclose.

Does that answer your question?

ANNIE: Hopefully, yes, I should think

so!

Another question for you, Kate, from Richard.

He says, are you able to say a little about the training provision and staff

development that have been introduced at OU, and how have you moved

professional services forward in terms of their accessibility practice?

KATE: That is a really interesting

questions actually.

The kind of the academic and professional services side of things

is slightly different at the OU, I imagine, compared to a lot of

different universities, and we - they've moved on in terms of their

training equally, they go through the same training and everything like

this, because we have a lot of academic-related staff or professional

services staff involved in module development and module production and

module presentation as well.

At the moment, a lot of the training we have is opt-in.

We have been working for the last year on a spec for mandatory training for

everybody when they come into the OU, around accessibility, but that has

taken a long time to come up with what that might look like because as you

can imagine the different roles in the OU and the different requirements for

training mean it's quite a big task.

So we have a lot of guidance and training that is available

asynchronisely on our website, so all staff can access those and that

includes specific things like how to write figure descriptions, how to

create alternative activities and things, through to very specialised

things like how to support students with autism spectrum conditions, for

example, and other sides of things as well.

We also run regular training sessions.

At the moment it's every two months and hopefully there will be more

coming up soon.

So we try to provide a really wide range of training.

Also we try to focus on - although we focus on training for module

development and teaching, effectively, we do also do quite a lot around

inclusive scholarship, inclusive research and other things like that as

well.

ANNIE: Nicola asks, do you have an

example of a feedback questionnaire to gather information from students about

their digital accessibility experience?

And if so, could we add it to the web page afterwards.

KATE: That is a good question.

We don't actually.

We have surveys that go out to students about their satisfaction, and

there is a question in there about their experience, but it is only one

question and a tick box to add more.

But we do have a survey that goes out to staff every two years about their

perceptions of accessibility and their practices around accessibility in

terms of knowledge, skills, attitudes and the support context in which they

are in and I would be very happy to share that if that would be of use.

ANNIE: Great, we will add that to the

follow-up questions we don't get to answer today.

A question from Neil for both of you, he says with the accessibility

checking of the public sector websites, how will internal sites like BLE's be

checked?

If this is only if there are significant issues with the

public-facing website or if there is a complaint?

I'm not sure if you are able to answer that, if not we can follow-up

afterwards.

AMY: I can take that one if you like.

As far as I'm aware the simplified testing will be on public-facing sites

only.

I think someone asked earlier as well how many sites are going to be in the

sample, and I think the initial monitoring sample, they plan to do

just under 1,400 simplified tests across public sector bodies and 80

detailed audits.

Now, if you had a simplified test on your main site and there were

significant problems, then it is likely that you would then be referred on for

the detailed audit, which could take in non-public-facing sites.

And you are absolutely right, Neil, if there were student complaints,

particularly relating to content within the VLE, that would be a point at

which you would probably be contacted to provide access for more detailed

checking.

That's how I understand it, but we can double check all these things and

we'll summarise answers to all the questions in the blog.

ANNIE: Great, a question that came

through early on in the webinar, will the Government Digital Service notify

organisations that they are being or due to be audited?

AMY: You will certainly be notified

post because I think everyone who has been in the sample will receive a

report, whether there are issues or not.

I'm not sure whether you are advised prior, but I think it literally will

be a matter of, yep, scan, do some checks and send the report.

So you should find out about it shortly after.

ANNIE: I'm just looking through the

questions to see which ones haven't been answered.

A question for Kate - did you find that SeGA was seen to be the lead

across the institution for digital accessibility with senior-level

support?

For example, when there are several departments involved can it be

difficult to have a lead on the topic to avoid siloing?

KATE: Yes, that is a good question.

The situation has changed recently in the OU and we've now got different

departments in different aspects of accessibility so we've had to switch a

lot of our focus and focus more on the teaching and learning side of things

and there is a different team that focuses more on the accessibility

legislation and the digital accessibility across the whole range

of the OU's online estate.

So I'm a little bit hesitant to use the word 'lead'.

I would say 'coordinator' would probably be the best word to describe

us now because there are lots of different people involved and lots of

different teams.

But for a long time we were the only team operating in this area and we

probably are still very much the central point where people would go

to, I would say.

ANNIE: And just jumping back to Amy's

description of the badging pilot, a question from Sam is, how does it

differ from the Microsoft accessibility badge?

AMY: So I'm assuming I think it's the

accessibility fundamentals badging that Microsoft provides?

So that is more, as far as I'm aware, a training course that individuals

will go through and then you get your badge as being at a certain level of

knowledge.

This badging would apply to a module within the VLE, or at the institution

level would be relating to a calculation around different sort of

evidence that you would present around having accessible practice baked into

how you operate as an institution.

I hope I've understood the Microsoft badge appropriately, that's the one

that I was aware of.

ANNIE: OK, and there was a question

that we had through at the beginning which was about accessibility in

assessments.

Kate, I don't know if you are able to provide any examples of best practices

or any problems that you've encountered with students ?

KATE: Yes, assessment is a big area

for us, as you would imagine and generally in a lot of the work I do

you tend to find that people will put a lot of effort and attention into

making sure that the courses, the modules themselves, are accessible,

but then they'll draw back and be a bit more hesitant about doing that in

assessments, often because of external body regulations and things like this,

accrediting bodies and sector bodies and things like this.

However, as you can imagine, it doesn't matter how accessible the

learning and teaching is if the assessment isn't accessible, because

the students can't achieve their objectives.

So it is a really core fundamental area for us, and a lot of the case

that is we get coming through to the accessibility referrals do relate to

assessment in some way.

Exams are a big issue.

It's very hard to make an exam inclusive and accessible.

We do a lot in terms of we support home exams, we can spread exams out

over several days, we can in some cases we allow students to have redacted

notes or memory joggers in the exam.

We can also have the exams taking place not only over set different days

but the student can choose on the morning whether they feel well enough

to be able to take the exam on that day.

We can have them not timed.

We do a lot of different things to adapt reasonable adjustments to the

exam, but there haven't been many cases in which we've actually agreed to do

an alternative to an exam, and I think that is a really tension for higher

education, and I think it's something that we're going to be moving on an

although the in the future is recognising that exams are not

inclusive, they don't give people equal opportunities to succeed and to

demonstrate their learning, and that far more inclusive assessments and

strategies are appropriate moving forward.

I think that is going to be a really challenge for the sector about what

that looks like because as soon as we're not doing exams, people will

tend to move into, right, we will do an essay instead or a presentation, and

those aren't terribly inclusive either, so until you are actually coming up

with a situation where students have a certain amount of autonomy in their

assessment, it's going to be very hard to make it inclusive.

AMY: I think that's really, really

topical, Kate, because, you know, when we look at the feedback - we had a

lady who did a bit of research for us during the summer, talking to students

about their experience of the rapid move to online learning and how their

assessments were managed through the summer, and you know, having the

ability to sit exams untimed, at home, take a break, you know, just - people

said it actually transformed their opinion of themselves.

There was one young lady who said she genuinely thought she just wasn't up

to the job of doing her course, because she'd been so sort of knocked about by

traditional exam approaches and having that breathing space, she had the best

results she had ever had and it's completely transformed her opinion of

herself and I think going back to what you said just now, it's about choice -

don't say we're not doing those anymore, we're doing these.

It's about, like you say, autonomy, and laying out options that won't also

#NAME?

place to say they never need to do presentations, but that's a bit sort

of - well, it is a bit of a nail in a coffin, isn't it, you know?

Whereas if you say choose, and the time when that feels like the most

appropriate, or people want to test their comfort zones, then they can,

and I think that's what's really key in assessments, is choice, and

recognising the level of stress attached to them.

KATE: Yes, absolutely, and I think

choice is really pivotal and links in to learning but it's really important

to make sure that choice is well scaffolded and it is not suddenly

thrust upon students.

I will give a shoutout to my friends in the University of Warwick doing

amazing work on student-devised assessments where students have the

autonomy to choose - they still have the learning objectives they need to

demonstrate, they have those given to them, but they are supported

throughout the entire module to choose how they demonstrate their learning at

the end of it.

AMY: I think that's really good in

terms of understanding yourself and your strengths and ways of operating,

as well, isn't it?

KATE: Yes, totally agree.

ANNIE: I think we have time for one

quick question from Susie and she asks how is the OU supporting students to

create accessible content?

She mentions that more and more student-led learning involves students

as creators, for example, during group work, and when they submit

assignments, so she suggests, surely we need to develop their digital

practices, too, but no-one really talks about this in the same way as the

staff skills.

KATE: That is funny that you mention

that actually - that has long been a topic of discussion and debate, well

the entire time I have been at the OU.

So we are actually going to be doing a project on that this year, usefully

enough, it has just literally been decided in the last cross-faculty

working group I chair, one of our areas of focus for this year is working on -

we are not quite sure what it is going to look like yet, there will probably

be template guidance for students on how to make their contents accessible

and also guidance for module teams in how they can structure the activities

requiring - bleurgh!

Requiring students to make content in a way that they are supported to embed

that accessibility throughout, but it is early days with that yet, we

haven't yet planned what we are going to do and I will be happy to feed back

on it at the end of the year to let you know how we got on.

ANNIE: Great!

Thank you, looking at the time I think we are going to wrap up the webinar

now.

Just a bit more information that might be useful to you.

AbilityNet also runs online training sessions on accessibility, so you can

find out about that at abilitynet.org.

uk/training and there's a special 10% off discount code for registerants for

this particular webinar, which is OUAccess10, and then we also have a

suite of accessibility services aimed at the public and further and higher

education sectors, and you can see more information about that on our website.

Then you can also sign up to our newsletter for the latest

announcements about digital accessibility and then finally, don't

forget about our next webinars.

The next one is on Tuesday, 29 September about how technology can

help with dyslexia.

Then on 6 October we are joined by Brynne Anderson from Sainsbury's.

And thank you so much to Kate and Amy and everybody for joining us today and

we will be in touch very soon.

KATE: Thank you, everyone, have a

great afternoon.

AMY: Bye.