

CETL-MSOR Conference 2015

Emma Cliffe: Working session: Making mathematical content accessible – collaborative documentation of practice and sharing of expertise

This working session aims to bring together colleagues with expertise and/or interest in making mathematical content, including equations and diagrams, accessible. Participants will be introduced to an Institute of Physics (IoP) initiative that aims to produce a centralised knowledge base for colleagues who need to create mathematical documents for students with a range of disabilities. During the session attendees will be invited to discuss and give input on the coverage of the knowledge base.

Mathematical content poses specific accessibility challenges beyond those considered in generic good practice. For example, PDF is a commonly produced format in which equations are not accessible but staff are often not aware of this. It may also be incorrectly assumed that Braille, alternative print and speech formats of mathematical documents can be produced automatically and with ease using standard document formats, assistive technologies and inclusive practices. Such faulty assumptions can form barriers for students and may mean that difficulties are not anticipated or successfully resolved. Without clear guidance it may be difficult for staff and students to locate, understand and use the specialist technologies and document formats that do exist. However, producing such guidance locally remains time-consuming and costly. Provision of a centralised knowledge base suited to those without such expertise will enable institutions to:

- build on current good practice, rather than re-inventing the wheel;
- enable practitioners to challenge faulty assumptions and
- better enable staff teaching mathematical subjects to work with technical and specialist support staff to enable students in a timely and cost effective manner.

We would like to use the workshop to encourage colleagues to become involved in the IoP project and more generally with the informal network of people with expertise and interest in areas relating to access to mathematical and statistical content for disabled students.