Assistive Technology (Beyond Screen Readers)

What is it for?

Assistive Technology (AT) is any tool that helps people with disabilities use a computer. It's not just screen readers! Many users rely on other tools to navigate the web. Examples include:

- Screen Magnifiers, for users with low vision to zoom in on parts of the screen
- Switch Devices, for users with motor impairments to navigate using a single button or puff of air, which acts like hitting 'Tab' and 'Enter'
- Voice Control, for users to speak commands like 'Click Submit' or 'Scroll down'

Bad design (like tiny text, layouts that break when zoomed, or buttons that only work with a mouse) can block these users completely.

How to support it

Make your designs compatible. It's simpler than you think and mostly means following the basics:

- Prioritise keyboard navigation. This is the #1 rule. If you can use your site with only the keyboard (Tab, Shift + Tab, Enter, Space, the arrow keys and Escape), you're supporting switch devices, voice control, and more
- Make sure your layout doesn't break or hide text when a user zooms in
- Use clear, simple labels. 'Submit Form' is much better than just a > icon for voice control users
- If you show info on hover, make sure keyboard users can get that same info (e.g. by tabbing to it)

Useful links

- WebAIM - Introduction to Assistive Technology