



The university is located in south west of Ireland with about 15,000 students, approximately 1,000 of which are registered with disabilities.

Before the first week of a term we hold an orientation with student & parent sessions where the students are informed about all the support & technologies that we have here for reading and exams. Many students haven't come across technology like this before; a lot are unfamiliar with writing up projects or assignments with referencing.

UL's outreach plays an important part in how students learn about available assistive technologies before they reach university. Our outreach coordinator ran a funded project called NEAT (National Exchange of Assistive Technology) project where we identified and trained a lot of students with high needs disabilities in post primary schools in our region. This meant that these students required little or no training in assistive technology and could engage with the curriculum without any accommodations being put in place. This outreach work has included primary schools too; addressing the use of assistive technology early means it becomes part of the everyday environment and reduces the stigma around using these technologies. In fact, a lot of the technologies we use today—though specialised in theory—work well for the majority of the students, not just those students registered with a disability or a specific learning difficulty.

Our service can get a lot of student walk ins—a lot of people who have had dyslexia & a lot of students with dyslexia who I know, personally, never come near our service. They have just gone through the system, but they could have done so much better. A lot of them struggle even though they say do fine; some feel they don't need the support.

Often the first thing I do is send them Grammarly & ClaroRead and instantly you see an improvement in their writing. Then, as you see them reading back, you see them thinking about spotting their spelling mistakes which is made easier with text-to-speech devices like ClaroRead, Reading Pens and mobile apps like Office Lens. There have been times where students have read the same mistake over and over without noticing an error, but then they spot it when they hear the text-to-speech read it back. Students just want reassurance with words.

When it came to exams, students would require a human reader. So, that is what we had set up originally, but it wasn't working for lots of reasons. We had a massive issue with students going out on placements in the workplace where they weren't

able to read text that was put in front of them, so we had to come up with a more practical solution, and that's when we came across Scanning Pens' ExamReaders at ATIA.

We brought them on to try them and see how we got on. We picked 5 students and it worked really well. After that, we went from 5 to 40 to 120 students to I think over 200 today. While our driving force was increasing student independence, there have been other tangible benefits too. Logistically speaking, organising exams has become much easier as fewer rooms are required. We no longer need to train staff as readers and when we introduced it for all first years it saved us approx. 7000 EUR for one semester for one year. This year we will be using ReaderPens with first years through to postgraduate students and are hoping to save up to 30,000 EUR a semester.

The training is good too because it only takes around 20 minutes. If somehow a student is unsure after the training, they are allowed to take the pen away with them and practice and use it on one of their sample papers that they've already had from their course. Since the ReaderPen is now available for official exams students seem happy to adopt them, in fact, we see more and more students coming in having used the ExamReader in school.

For us, the improvements in the pens have made is a big difference and it just keeps improving every update. The users specifically love that the pen can be changed for left or right-handed people.

Overall, we've got about over 200 students using the pens, maybe 50 (25 per room) at any one time. And instead of having one invigilator/assistant for each student, we now save time and money by having ExamReaders that perform that same role.

- **Thomas OShaughnessy, Assistive Technology Officer - University of Limerick**