Centre for Technology Enhanced Learning

Blackboard Ally: Awareness Raising

A part of Kings commitment to inclusive education, Blackboard Ally, an accessibility tool available via KEATS, is being implemented in Summer 2020 and available for staff and students prior to the start of the 20/21 Academic Year. This document provides an introductory overview of Blackboard Ally to raise awareness for colleagues and provide context as to how it will be embedded within training and support when it's launched.

Blackboard Ally will add value to KEATS once enabled and assist staff with understanding accessibility considerations and facilitate the creation of more accessible content available from KEATS. Blackboard Ally does not fix content, but highlights issues and provides support as to how to improve accessibility. This will allow for greater awareness of accessibility considerations and will allow colleagues to implement the practice they learn on documentation/content which resides outside of KEATS.

WHY BLACKBOARD ALLY?

EU Web Accessibility Directive

The Cabinet Office brought the EU Web Accessibility Directive into law on 23 September 2018. This law removes any ambiguity about universities being public sector bodies and includes VLEs, online course documents and video recordings as web content. The Directive states that universities must:
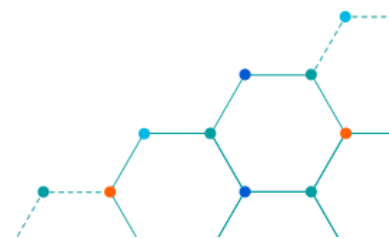
- Meet the **Accessibility Requirement** by ensuring websites & apps (including VLEs) are perceivable, operable, understandable and robust.

- Publish an **Accessibility Statement** which lists inaccessible content, provides alternatives / ways users can request alternatives and procedures for feedback on dissatisfaction with approach. A model for Accessibility Statements has been published by the Government Digital Service.

Blackboard Ally provides an opportunity for us to improve the accessibility of KEATS and facilitates us meeting the Accessibility Requirements of the EU Directive.

King's Context

As part of the response to COVID-19 King's has released two key documents focussed on teaching and learning. Both of these reaffirm the commitment to an accessible and inclusive education for all.

- **The Academic Strategy 20/21** "Our commitment to inclusive education and well-being in the Education Strategy remains at the centre of our approach".

- **Teaching and Learning plan:** There is significant focus on ensuring staff produce accessible and inclusive materials in the King's Teaching and Learning Plan: "PowerPoint Templates with inbuilt accessibility/inclusivity guidance will be available for use in the delivery of lecture/learning content."
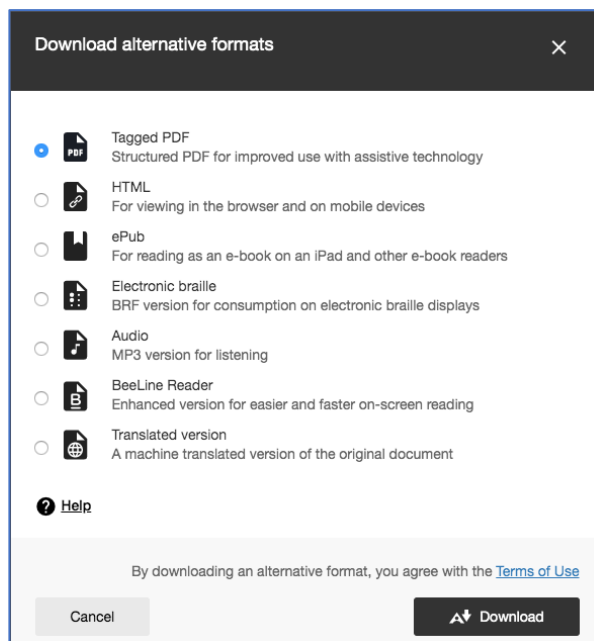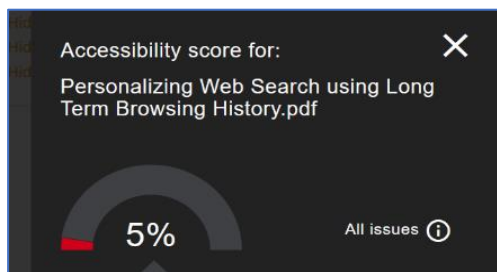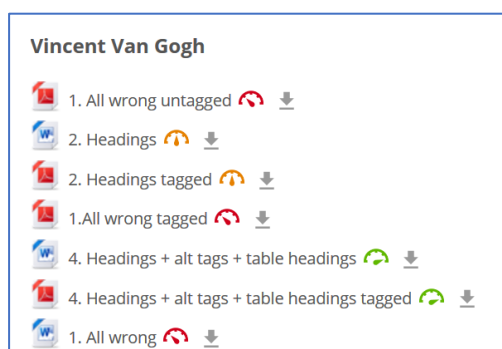
WHAT IS BLACKBOARD ALLY?

- For **Students**, Blackboard Ally provides end users with the ability to download alternative formats to those uploaded into KEATS e.g. an uploaded PDF can be downloaded as an MP3, ePub or eBraille file.

- For **Academic & Professional Services Staff**, Blackboard Ally provides individuals with a RAG (Red, Amber, Green) rating for the accessibility of content they upload and accompanying guidance to assist with improving accessibility.

- For **Institutional Administrators**, Blackboard Ally provides an overall/institutional view of KEATS content displaying statistics which details the total number of documents, the levels of accessibility achieved and the most common issues identified.

Further information can be found in the video demonstration (3.06).

HOW DOES IT WORK?

The screen shots below show Blackboard Ally working in a KEATS (Moodle) environment. Blackboard Ally can simply and easily be used by academics and students and provides the below features:

1. Accessibility Dial ( ): Next to each compatible item is an accessibility dial that indicates how accessible the document is against set criteria. This dial is only visible via the 'Tutor View'.

2. Alternative Formats Download ( ): Each compatible item also has a download arrow which gives access to alterantive formats. Students see the downlaod options, not the accessibility dial.

3. Opening a document gives more details about the accessibility rating with information on how to fix the problems. It also provides an option to upload a more accessible version.

It is important to note that Blackboard Ally is a tool to help staff identifying accessibility issues. It **will not** make any changes to improve the accessibility of any content uploaded to KEATS directly, but will highlight issues/considerations which should review and fix. Staff who have issues identified with uploaded content will need to improve the accessibility of their content using tools such as the Microsoft Accessibility Checker alongside the advice given by Blackboard Ally, then re-upload to KEATS.

As Blackboard Ally gets embedded staff will see visual representations of accessibility issues (via the Accessibility Dial), be guided through improvements which can then be built into standard practice and as such reduce the overall accessibility issues when resources are created, not just when they're uploaded onto KEATS.

WHERE CAN STAFF FIND SUPPORT?

Going forward, support for Blackboard Ally will be provided via relevant how-to guidance and targeted content. This guidance will be available for use by faculties and embedded within the Flexible Learning Resources focussed on supporting teaching and learning for 20/21.

To enable Blackboard Ally to be effectively used to support inclusive education, guidance will be fed into the flexible delivery plans each faculty is producing and highlighted to the relevant staff development and CPD committees. TEL Leads and inclusive education allies will be provided with resources and support to support further dissemination and all relevant central CPD workshops will have content embedded directly within them.
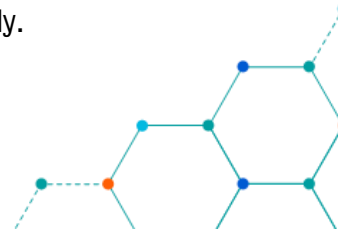
WHAT CAN STAFF DO NOW?

Blackboard Ally will be available on live KEATS from early September 2020. As colleagues are likely preparing teaching and learning content for the academic year 2020/21 to be uploaded to KEATS, there are accessibility considerations and improvements which if implemented now will reduce the need for review/reupload of content when Blackboard Ally becomes available. Below are several suggestions for colleagues to understand and improve accessibility now.

General Accessibility Tips

- Ensure there is sufficient colour contrast between any text and the background colour.

- Colour should not be used as the only way of conveying information (e.g. 'The green box is right, the red box is wrong').

- The use of images should be accompanied by alternative text which provides information for those who cannot access the image.

- Tables should only be used for tabular data (not for layout) and all tables should have column headings.

- Any video and audio content should include subtitles and transcripts and be clearly signposted. Kaltura (King's video hosting software) can automatically generate subtitles that can be edited manually and is available to all staff at King's.
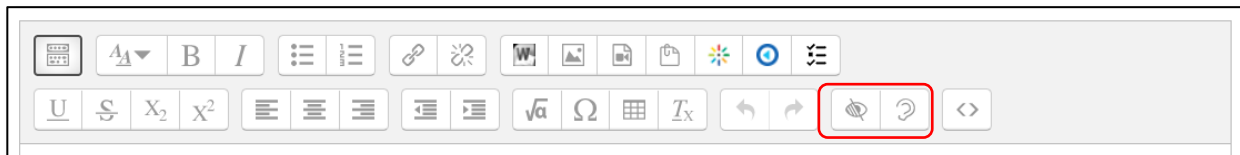
Microsoft Accessibility

- Both Microsoft Word and PowerPoint have accessibility checkers built into them. These checkers will highlight relevant accessibility issues and provide guidance on fixing them. The Accessibility Checker should be run before any document/slides are completed.

- Linkedin Learning (freely available to all staff and students via a King's Login) provides a course on Creating Accessible Documents in Microsoft Office containing guidance on Office, Word, Excel and PowerPoint.

- A PowerPoint template for teaching and learning has been developed as part of templates activities. This template has accessibility guidance built in and will be available shortly.

KEATS Accessibility

- Use the headings and styles built into the KEATS Text Editor and ensure that a logical heading structure is used.

- Ensure all images added have alternative text provided or are marked as decorative.

- Ensure that any links provided are descriptive. Avoid 'Click here' links or pasted URLs as screen readers will not be clear on what the link is provided.

- KEATS contains an accessibility checker and a screen reader helper in the standard Atto Editor. This will be displayed whenever text can be added.

Additional Resources

- A KEATS Course on Accessible and Inclusive Practices is available for colleagues. This will be reviewed in light of the COVID-19 situation.

- Colleagues interested in learning more about accessibility can view the UX Foundations of Accessibility Linkedin Learning Course.