

High-tech products to level the playing field for disabled pupils

Trials of pioneering technology to help disabled pupils in the classroom will take place across the country in the first programme of its kind in the world.

Speaking at the largest education technology show in the world today (22 January), Universities, Science, Research and Innovation Minister Chris Skidmore will announce plans to fund trials of ground-breaking assistive technology for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities in up to 100 schools and colleges.

Innovations are expected to include 'text-to-speech' and 'speech recognition' software, which can help pupils with dyslexia improve their reading and proof-reading. Other trials include the use of eye-gaze technology, which can help pupils with severe motor impairments to communicate, helping to level the playing field for children with additional needs.

Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation Chris Skidmore is expected to say:

Harnessing the power of modern technology can help us change lives and unlock the potential of every child.

With technological advances happening at increasingly breakneck speed, it is only right that we ride the wave so pupils in our classrooms with special educational needs are given all the support they need.

The trials of cutting-edge technology will be funded by an initial investment of £300,000, as part of a wider investment of £10 million through the Department's EdTech Strategy, which aims to transform the use of technology in education to support innovation and raise the bar in schools, colleges and universities across England.

The pilots will run from April 2020 until the end of the 2020-21 academic year and will assess the impact of different types of assistive technology for pupils with special educational needs, informing best practice on the tools which most help pupils in the classroom.

EdTech exports are worth an estimated £170 million to the UK economy, and the strategy will deliver on the Government's ambition for tech firms to work with the education sector and create innovative solutions to 10 key education challenges, including:

- Promote the use of innovative tech to level the playing field for people with special educational needs and disabilities – identifying the

- technology that best suits individual needs;
- Reduce teachers' marking workload – using technology to cut the time teachers spend preparing and marking homework;
 - Demonstrate how artificial intelligence can support the effective delivery of online learning and training for adults; and
 - Prove that the use of apps contributes to improved literacy and communications skills for disadvantaged children

Chief Executive of Nasen Professor Adam Boddison said:

Assistive technology is increasingly being used by schools to ensure that pupils with SEND have full access to the curriculum offer.

This programme will play an important role in providing a reliable evidence base for schools so they can be as effective as possible in their use of assistive technology.

This programme sits alongside the development of a network of Demonstrator schools and colleges to support peer-to-peer learning in the use of technology, which will launch in Spring 2020. These will be supported by a consortium consisting of the London Grid for Learning, The Education Foundation and the Sheffield Institute of Education.