



BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY

*JON HAINING
DISABILITY ADVISOR*

Birmingham University is the original 'redbrick' university and part of the prestigious Russell Group. Students can enjoy a wide range of undergraduate, postgraduate and research courses in a huge variety of topics and specialisms across five colleges.

The 11 Nobel Laureates they count among their staff and alumni have contributed to some of science's greatest discoveries, including in recent times the Higgs Boson and Gravitational Waves.

The terptree team spoke to Jon Haining, a Disability Advisor whose work involves advising the university on inclusive practice and individual reasonable adjustments focusing on the needs of students with sensory/physical impairments and long-term health conditions.

How did you discover terptree?

As a university, we use various suppliers, and as they weren't on our procurement list, I wasn't specifically aware of terptree originally. But I remember they were on a student's Disabled Students Allowance 2 (DSA2) letter as a special request. To explain, when a student applies for DSA, either the independent Needs Assessor will find an appropriate provider for that student's requirements, or the student can recommend one themselves. So in this particular case, they were recommended by the student, and it was my first encounter with terptree.

What were your initial requirements from terptree?

It was in relation to a deaf BSL user who needed support accessing a course. It wasn't a taught course; it was a research course which is a bit unusual, so the student needed help to attend meetings with their supervisor and also support interpreting their written work.



What function has terptree performed for your organisation?

After a dialogue with the student about the type of role terptree were required to fulfil, it became clear this was a slightly unusual scenario. The student needed one-to-one support, not just interpreting: and they needed to attend face to face meetings and access support when translating written materials into BSL, which would help them with comprehension.

This is something we hadn't seen or been required to facilitate before. In previous situations, it's been a BSL interpreter interpreting verbally. However, in this case, written transcription was involved.

What benefits has this brought?

Aside from the obvious support with face to face and one to one meetings: because of our student's difficulty understanding written English, having the interpreter on hand to sign benefited him hugely.

So in terms of how they've benefitted the university, they provided a level of access for this student and made it very straightforward in terms of management. They dealt directly with the student, and it's an approach we prefer as it empowers the student to be independent and prepares them for future employment situations.

What would your advice be to others?

Our role within the university is to make things as streamlined and uncomplicated as possible for our students. However, DSA will often, understandably, make decisions based on budget. And in my experience, there are good and bad interpreting companies – as a student, you don't really know what you will get. Our procurement system is quite rigid, and the system dictates that we work through a list of suppliers in the order they're presented. So we recommend students make a specific request for their preferred interpreting company as the DSA assessor will take the student's views into strong consideration.

Why would you recommend terptree?

Based on our experiences so far, I would be happy to recommend terptree personally.

As an interpreting company, terptree has now been added to our procurement list. But as I mentioned previously, our default process is always to ask the student if they have a preferred provider - someone they've worked with before and are happy with. If they don't, and they ask us for a recommendation, we would happily suggest terptree.

Jon finished by saying,

"We've never received any bad feedback from our student's experiences with terptree, and as we all know, problems are generally shared straight away. If I see terptree has been requested by a student on their DSA2 letter, I always feel confident and relieved because they are a legitimate, experienced provider and have never let our students or us down. When I see their name, I know we're unlikely to have any issues. As a busy team, that's a good situation for us!"



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