

Outcome Briefing: Roundtable on Technology and the SEND Reforms

A parliamentary discussion on how assistive and accessible technology (ATech) can support SEND reform and how policy, funding and workforce development can deliver more inclusive and equitable education.

Summary

On 8 July 2026, the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Assistive and Accessible Technology (APPGAT) convened a parliamentary roundtable in the House of Commons to consider how ATech should be embedded within proposed reforms to the SEND system. Chaired by Peter Swallow MP, the session brought together educators, researchers, practitioners, technology providers and people with lived experience.

Contributors emphasised that effective reform must place children and young people at the centre of decision-making through genuine co-production. The discussion also made the case for 'inclusion by design', combining universally available accessibility tools with personalised specialist provision for learners with more complex needs.

Participants highlighted persistent barriers to equitable access to ATech in education, including regional variation, fragmented funding, limited specialist expertise, inadequate infrastructure and inconsistent support during implementation. The Assistive Technology Lending Libraries pilot, SEND workforce development and the Experts at Hand Fund were discussed as important opportunities to improve provision, provided they are supported by sustainable funding, training and ongoing technical expertise.

The roundtable also examined the responsible use of AI, recognising its potential to improve accessibility, communication, personalisation and reduce workload while raising concerns about bias, privacy, over-reliance and unequal access. Overall, contributors agreed that ATech must be integrated across wider SEND reforms rather than treated as a standalone intervention.

The Speakers:

- **Peter Swallow MP**, Chair; Member of Parliament for Bracknell and member of the Education Select Committee
- **Khamani Edwards**, Student Voice Lead, CENMAC; Founder, KJ's Craft Time
- **Kathryn Stowell**, Head of CENMAC; Head of Outreach and Augmentative and Alternative Communication, Charlton Park Academy
- **Craig Wilkie**, Technical Director, RIX Inclusive Research, University of East London
- **Julaan Govier**, Class Teacher, Curriculum Leader and Lead Practitioner for Digital, LEO Academy Trust
- **Reeza Awoodun**, Co-founder and CEO, TechEdology
- **Zoe Mather**, Education Officer, nasen
- **Robert McLaren**, Director of Policy, Policy Connect

Summary of Discussion Points

Learner Voice and Co-production

One prominent issue raised in the discussion was that children and young people with lived experience of SEND are too rarely treated as experts in their own needs in conversations about reform.

The voices of children and young people with lived experience of disability provide valuable insight into existing inadequacies in ATech implementation, teacher training and access. Incorporating their knowledge is essential to making informed decisions when reforming the SEND support on which their education relies. Craig Wilkie, Technical Director at RIX Inclusive Research, highlighted that this incorporation needs to be centred on genuine co-production, meaning that these voices play a

leading role in the development and implementation of ATech, rather than simply being included tokenistically afterwards. Rix's inclusive hackathons served as an example of people with lived experience being involved from the outset and throughout the design process, allowing them to help shape and test products and services as they are developed.

Khamani Edwards, Student Voice Lead at CENMAC, reinforced the importance of feeding young people's voices into real decisions and highlighted how the CENMAC Changemakers Collective is designed to do this effectively. The group brings together young people supported by CENMAC who use assistive technology and receive SEND support, enabling them to share their experiences and help shape and influence CENMAC's services as genuine partners. This exemplifies the co-production model for incorporating lived experience.

Khamani Edwards explained that when asked what needed to improve, the young people involved in the CENMAC Changemakers Collective raised concerns about not being listened to, inconsistent support during transitions, unequal access to available technology and decisions being made without their involvement. This demonstrates how, when given the opportunity to be heard, young people with lived experiences provide valuable insight into the barriers within existing SEND provision, and what decisions would bring about real change.

Inclusion by Design

Contributors made the case for inclusion by design, moving away from a reactive or deficit model in which ATech is introduced only once a pupil is struggling, towards an anticipatory approach that embeds accessibility into everyday teaching and learning from the outset.

Universal and specialised provisions were identified as both necessary and mutually reinforcing in moving towards an anticipatory model and delivering the inclusive design needed to support all pupils adequately. Universal provision should be available to all, with its design anticipating a diverse range of needs. Zoe Mather, Education Officer at nasen, explained that one way to achieve this is to integrate commonly used tools into every classroom, including text-to-speech, speech-to-text, captions, reading and translation tools, enlargements and overlays, as well as providing access to lesson materials before and after teaching.

LEO Academy Trust provides a strong example of how universally designed ATech can help preserve dignity and reduce the stigma associated with SEND support. By embedding accessibility tools discreetly within the Chromebooks used by all pupils,

the Trust has reduced reliance on separate resources, withdrawal groups and continuous one-to-one adult support. This helps avoid drawing unnecessary attention to individual pupils while enabling them to access support alongside their peers.

Further discussion demonstrated how, in addition to universal provision, designing and incorporating individualised ATech would also be necessary to ensure all needs are met as specialised technology remains essential for some learners. Zoe Mather noted that inclusive design would need a continuum from universal accessibility tools to specialist technology that is highly personalised for communication, cognition, literacy, sensory needs, physical access and independence. She further detailed that inclusion should also mean support following SEND learners through key transitions, when provision is often fragmented because devices, connectivity and eligibility change.

Kathryn Stowell, Head of CENMAC, highlighted the lack of communication technologies available through lending libraries as a significant barrier to inclusion, noting that only two local authorities had equipped their libraries with such tools. This leaves many learners who do not meet the criteria for specialist augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) hubs without access to the local provision that should support them.

Access, Funding and Regional Consistency

The discussion also made clear that issues surrounding funding and access would need to be addressed to improve regional consistency and ensure equitable access to ATech and SEND support.

Contributors identified significant variation between local authorities in implementation capacity, access to technology, specialist expertise, staff training and suitable infrastructure. These disparities contribute to the 'postcode lottery' experienced by pupils who rely on ATech and specialist support. However, the Department for Education's Assistive Technology Lending Libraries pilot, delivered in partnership with CENMAC, indicates that there is a growing recognition of need to expand provision across localities, while demonstrating how barriers may be addressed by guidance, expertise and learning between participating authorities. Participants also highlighted the potential role of the Experts at Hand Fund in improving access to specialist expertise, particularly in areas where support from specialist teachers and speech and language professionals remains limited.

Kathryn Stowell emphasised that effective lending libraries require more than devices: they depend on trained staff, practical guidance, technical support, clear

standards and sustained collaboration. She argued that the pilot was a strong foundation but must be developed further, with professional bodies helping to maintain standards and support consistent implementation as technology evolves.

However, funding routes must be clearer, more accessible and available earlier in the education system to support consistent ATech provision. Reeza Awoodun, CEO and Founder of TechEdology, explained that companies are more likely to prioritise higher education and workplace markets because these offer clearer funding through the Disabled Students' Allowance and Access to Work. Additionally, supplying UK schools is comparatively difficult because the market is fragmented across thousands of schools and multi-academy trusts, procurement is slow and funding is not ring-fenced. He explained that, as a result, companies more regularly turn to international markets with stronger specialist infrastructure and clearer procurement routes.

To address these effects, Reeza Awoodun recommended learning from earlier initiatives such as e-learning credits and Harnessing Technology funding, and considering whether an equivalent of the Disabled Students' Allowance could begin earlier in a learner's education.

Staff Training and Workforce Development

Across the discussion, there was broad agreement that distributing devices across schools and localities without training, adequate time and follow-up support would not produce meaningful or sustained adoption.

Several contributors noted that, while classroom teacher training is essential, appropriate training must also be available to SENCOs, learning support staff, therapists and those who design ATech. To achieve meaningful change, this training should go beyond how to operate devices and explain how ATech can reduce stigma and discrimination and support inclusive school cultures. Julaan Govier described this as a pedagogical approach that asks not only whether technology could be used, but whether it should be used and why, shifting the focus from EdTech to "PedTech".

The discussion identified further features of effective training: practical guidance, adequate time, clear definitions, agreed standards, strong leadership, and ongoing specialist support. Rowan Slaughter, Senior Lecturer in Assistive Technology and lead of the MSc in Education and Assistive Technology at the University of Dundee, explained that work on a competency framework identified three enabling practices: sustained training at basic, advanced and expert levels; dedicated specialist posts to support practitioners when difficulties arise; and a national support structure to connect and maintain this expertise.

Responsible use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

One prominent concern was how schools should approach the responsible use of AI, recognising its potential to strengthen ATech while mitigating risks to pupils.

Contributors argued that school policies, procurement processes, safeguards and training must keep pace with rapid AI development. As the APPGAT Chair, Peter Swallow MP observed, “AI is a tool” with “no innate morality” and, like any tool, can be designed and used for good or ill. Potential benefits of AI included improving speech-to-text and text-to-speech, supporting personalisation and communication, providing immediate feedback and reducing staff workload. However, contributors also highlighted risks including disability bias, privacy concerns, over-reliance and unequal access.

To preserve these opportunities while reducing risks, schools need greater understanding and clearer AI strategies. Reeza Awoodun argued that policies should distinguish between generative AI and AI used to support accessibility functions, while Zoe Mather emphasised the importance of digital literacy and appropriate safeguards.

Julaan Govier explained that LEO Academy Trust had taken a proactive approach by upskilling teachers, supporting early adopters and creating space for experimentation. The Trust also developed an AI literacy curriculum across Key Stage 2, covering ethics and morality in Years 3 and 4, different forms of AI in Year 5, and sustainability, prompting, bias and hallucinations in Year 6. The aim was to help pupils understand how AI works, why it works and when its use is appropriate.

Next Steps

Policy Connect will share this outcome briefing with policymakers and use the insights to inform future programmes and research of the APPGAT

Robert McLaren, Director of Policy at Policy Connect, noted that the discussion touched on two topics relevant to upcoming research. This includes changes to the Disabled Students Allowance, for which the APPG is looking to hold a session on after parliamentary recess, and the funding system for augmentative and alternative communication (AAC), a topic which will be the focus of a forthcoming research project.

For more information regarding these projects and other accessibility policy work, please contact Robert McLaren (robert.mclaren@policyconnect.org.uk).

About the APPG for Assistive and Accessible Technology

The APPGAT aims to disseminate knowledge, generate debate and facilitate engagement on assistive technology among Members of both Houses of Parliament. The group is chaired by Josh Fenton-Glynn MP (Labour), with parliamentary Officers Lord Shinkwin (Conservative), Sadik Al-Hassan MP (Labour) and Lord Low (Crossbench), and Members including Steve Darling MP (Liberal Democrat), the Rt Hon. Lord Blunkett (Labour) and Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson (Crossbench).

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