



The University of Kent's Opera (Opportunity, Productivity, Engagement, Reducing barriers, Achievement) scheme took a novel approach and rethought how best to help students with a disability. Instead of the traditional method of asking students to declare a disability and then providing bespoke assistance, Kent adopted a proactive approach that anticipated student requirements.

"The Opera project has achieved one of the most difficult things of all – making the support we have invisible, which means that students do not have to ask for help because we have anticipated the most common requirements and put them in place for everyone," explained one staff member.

In association with Jisc, Kent's student services team launched the project in 2016. It identified 2,600 different adjustments and made them to benefit all students – not just those with a disability. The changes included reviewing the accessibility of all campus entrance areas, assessing how technology and digital resources are provided to students and updating the library's accessibility service catalogue.

"I've spent years dealing with dull, badly contrasted photocopies which I cannot remedy in any way to read them effectively," explained one visually impaired politics student. The Opera project, however, resulted in "huge improvement in the delivery of accessible resources". "It is simply a lifesaver," they added.

Our judges described Kent's initiative as an "exemplary project that demonstrated a student-focused approach to opening up the university to all students". The Opera scheme showed a "strong focus on creating an accessible environment for all students based on understanding the needs of those declaring a disability", they added.