Jisc TechDis will be launching two new SBRI Assistive Technology Competitions

Learners with disabilities and/or learning difficulties could enjoy much greater independence and access in the future thanks to two new funding competitions aimed at technology developers and launched by Jisc TechDis.

Both competitions are part of the SBRI (Small Business Research Initiative) programme, which encourages innovative solutions to specific public sector needs by engaging a broad range of companies in competitions that result in technology development contracts. It uses the power of government procurement to accelerate technology development, supporting projects through proof of concept and prototype development which are typically hard to fund.

Following consultation with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and the Technology Strategy Board, joint sponsors of the initiative, Jisc TechDis highlighted two areas where assistive technology can help and which have the potential to be addressed by opening up competition amongst developers.

Ready, steady, STEM

The first competition is 'Ready, steady, STEM'. This competition is about opening up access to science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects. These subjects present a range of accessibility issues for some people with disabilities. This includes those who: are print impaired (dyslexic, blind or partially sighted, colour blind); have learning difficulties (including dyscalculia); and those with manual dexterity difficulties. Challenges include having to work with pen and paper, manipulating formulae and symbols, or interacting with diagrams and graphs.

Sal Cooke, Director of Jisc TechDis explains, "Imagine trying to interpret or position plot points on a graph if you have limited vision or mobility, how challenging that would be?"

This competition is about opening up access to STEM subjects for disabled learners in a variety of contexts and should also help them take advantage of the new routes to apprenticeships via traineeships and internships. The aim is to increase equality of access and instil confidence for those whose disabilities currently present barriers in accessing STEM subjects.

Good to go

The second competition is 'Good to go'. Disabilities can present barriers to independence in accessing work based technologies and equipment in a variety of industries. In many cases it is time consuming or even impossible to create the real time technical instructions and information needed to mitigate the risks disabled learners may face when working, training or learning in challenging or unfamiliar environments.

There are two complementary elements to 'Good to go'. The first is about managing risk and increasing independence in unfamiliar or challenging environments. The second is about enabling people to access the information needed so they can work more independently with less supervision in these challenging environments.

This competition seeks to discover new and innovative solutions. Critical to the success and sustainability of any project solution is the ability for people with minimal or modest technical skills to easily adapt the support given as environments change or the learner needs reduce.

The competitions will launch on **16 September 2013** when there will be a dedicated website available with all the information potential applicants will need.

http://www.jisctechdis.ac.uk/techdis/news/detail/2013/sbri2013

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About Jisc TechDis
Jisc TechDis is a leading UK advisory service on technologies for inclusion. We explore and promote inclusive practices, resources and advice for learning and teaching in UK higher education, further education & skills, and independent and specialist colleges. However, our numerous resources and expertise are equally relevant to the business and community sectors.
www.jisctechdis.ac.uk

About SBRI
The SBRI programme uses the power of government procurement to drive innovation. It provides opportunities for innovative companies to engage with the public sector to solve specific problems. Competitions for new technologies and ideas are run on specific topics and aim to engage a broad range of organisations. SBRI enables the public sector to engage with industry during the early stages of development, supporting projects through the stages of feasibility and prototyping.
www.innovateuk.org/deliveringinnovation/smallbusinessresearchinitiative.ashx

About The Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (BIS)
The Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (BIS) is at the heart of delivering the Government's growth agenda, and works hard to achieve strong, sustainable and balanced growth. The department invests in skills and education to create a more educated and flexible workforce in order to promote trade, boost innovation and help people to start and grow a business.

About the Technology Strategy Board

The Technology Strategy Board is the UK's innovation agency. Its goal is to accelerate economic growth by stimulating and supporting business-led innovation. Sponsored by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), the Technology Strategy Board brings together business, research and the public sector, supporting and accelerating the development of innovative products and services to meet market needs, tackle major societal challenges and help build the future economy. For more information please visit.
www.innovateuk.org