

# Proactive, not reactive: how the University of Manchester shifted their approach to digital accessibility

With Anthology® Ally, Manchester brought accessibility to the heart of their teaching and improved the learning experience for all of their students.

The University of Manchester, formed in 2004 by the merger of the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology and Victoria University of Manchester, is a part of the prestigious Russell Group of universities. It is the largest single-site university in the United Kingdom with more than 40,000 students.

MANCHESTER  
1824

The University of Manchester

**INSTITUTION TYPE:**

FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC

**LOCATION:**

MANCHESTER, UNITED KINGDOM

**ORGANIZATION SIZE:**

40,000+

**ANTHOLOGY PRODUCT:**

 Anthology Ally



## The Challenge



**Inclusive and accessible design concepts were well-rooted at our university. [Anthology] Ally gave us the tool to identify where and how we needed to strengthen our efforts effectively and university-wide.**

**Ian Hutt**

*Head of Digital Learning*

With the future squarely focused on prioritizing inclusivity, colleges and universities globally are reevaluating their digital accessibility strategies to ensure all students have equitable opportunities for success. And, while the necessity and benefits of creating a more inclusive learning environment are evident, identifying an appropriate starting point many times is not. The university had been attempting to reactively address accessibility for years. By 2019, the sheer scale of content which needed to be reviewed for accessibility was overwhelming, so the university's Digital Learning Service and Disability Advisory and Support Service (DASS) team partnered with Anthology to resolve the issue.

Ian Hutt, Head of Digital Learning, and his team leveraged Anthology® Ally to institute a scalable, manageable method through which the university could begin to revise course content for alternative formats.

Hutt recalled, "We had a whole raft of accessibility tools that we offered our students and had a lot of good advice on how to use them, but when it came to tackling the accessibility of learning materials—that was a black hole for us." By partnering with Anthology, the team was able to implement a process by which learning materials could be systematically improved.

For an institution the size of the University of Manchester, manual efforts would never be able to truly turn the tide. While properly updating course content was a massive undertaking with immediate benefits for the learner, Hutt and his team also sought to encourage instructors with new inclusive and accessible designs for new materials.



## The Partnership

The partnership between the University of Manchester and Anthology was solidified by Anthology's ability to:

1. Go beyond mere guidance, offering effective, powerful tools that aided the university's more than 6,000 academics in improving their digital course content accessibility
2. Measure, report, and track the digital course content's accessibility
3. Confirm the institution's compliance with Public Sector Bodies Accessibility Regulations



## The Result

While the university continues to make strides in improving accessibility scores across campus, quantifiable improvements have already appeared. The institution has seen a 4% decrease in missing image descriptions (a rate which is 12% better than the U.K. average) and a 3% decrease in the total number of scanned PDFs. For a campus the size of the University of Manchester, each percentage point represents tens of thousands of documents, a remarkable feat.


Nearly 50% of the university's students chose to download content in an alternative format in the autumn of 2020.



Hutt aptly points out, “People think accessibility and say, ‘It’s only people with disabilities it applies to’, but almost half of our students use alternative formats.” In fact, students utilized alternative formats in over 329,000 cases since January 1, 2019, including tagged PDFs, MP3s, electronic braille, and more. Hutt and the DASS team aim to continue updating their already-generated course content, coaching instructors on inclusive and accessible designs, and raising alternative format awareness for students. By partnering with Anthology, the team has not only found a way forward on what previously felt like an insurmountable task, but they also have the metrics to demonstrate the successes being experienced across campus.

Championing accessible course content doesn't take a vendor — it takes an Ally.

Product highlighted in this success story:

 Anthology Ally



Learn more at [anthology.com](https://anthology.com)

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