Microsoft

# Could accessibility be the secret to business growth?

**Unlock opportunities, enhance experiences, and drive sales with a more inclusive, equitable workplace.**

**There are approximately 9.5 million people of working age (16 to 64) in the UK who are disabled — approximately 23% of the working-age population.[1]**

Yet sadly, people with a disability often don't get equal experiences at work, and many struggle to find a job that fits their needs. Microsoft is on a mission to change this—highlighting the very practical and measurable benefits of creating more accessible and inclusive workplaces.

In this eBook we will discuss some of the current challenges for people with disability in the workplace; highlight the significant benefits of taking a more inclusive and accessible approach; and explain how Microsoft's new Horizon methodology—a framework for helping organisations optimise accessibility and inclusivity—can help drive success.

# In this eBook

Disability in the workplace: the challenges

Focusing on accessibility and inclusion: the benefits

Microsoft's commitment to accessibility: a blueprint for change

The Horizon Methodology
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- Build
- Innovate

Microsoft accessibility features and tools

Next steps/recommendations

# Disability in the workplace: the challenges

## Securing employment

A recent UK survey found 20% of employers consider the costs of modifying the workplace too expensive to employ disabled people.[4] Many organisations are also not as open to employing people with a disability as they intend to be. Before being offered a job, a person with a disability typically applies to around 50% more jobs than a non-disabled person.[5]

## Growing Awareness into Adoption

While organisations may have good intentions regarding accessibility, they often fail to maintain communication regarding their objectives across the organisation. As such, there's a risk that any gains in awareness made during an induction or training period will be forgotten. Many organisations also miss opportunities to increase the awareness that can come through aligning with important initiatives and events such as Deaf Awareness Week, Dyslexia Awareness Week and so on.



**While 90% of organisations say they are inclusive, only 30% of employees say their leaders are committed to creating an inclusive and diverse workforce.[2]**
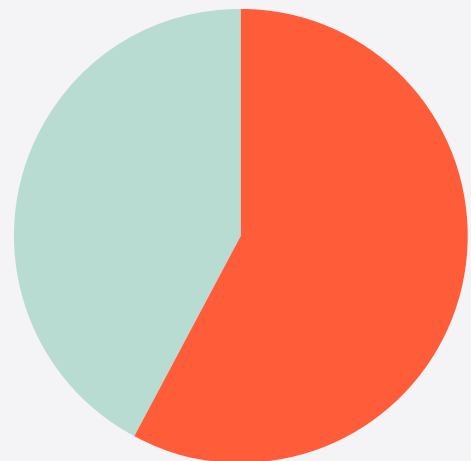


**58% of employees said getting the adjustments they needed in the workplace was due to how assertive and confident they were in asking for support.[9]**

## Seeking adjustments

Employees with a disability typically need to wait a long time for any adjustments they need to reduce or remove the barriers they experience in their jobs. They also need to be proactive in pushing for adjustments, like flexibility over hours, time off for medical appointments, or more ergonomic equipment or assistive technology.[6]

## Discrimination

It's not uncommon for employees with a disability to be underestimated in their role, overlooked for opportunities, and generally discriminated against. 72% of disabled people in the UK have experienced negative attitudes or behaviour.[7] This can have significant flow-on effects in terms of overall workplace culture, as well as the employee's own career prospects and tenure.

## Slow progress

While some progress is being made in terms of accessibility, 62% of UK organisations still have no specific budget for inclusion and diversity activities.[8] This is largely due to a lack of understanding of the many potential benefits—including significant financial gains—that can come through being more inclusive and accessible.

"The importance of inclusion and diversity in the workforce can be underestimated, but research into the field continually reveals that a high level of adoption is associated not only with greater productivity and performance, but innovation, talent attraction, employee retention and overall workforce wellbeing."

**Ian Nicholas**
Global Managing Director, Reed[3]
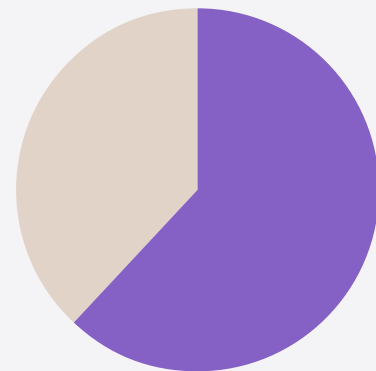


**62% of UK organisations have no specific budget** for inclusion and diversity activities.[10]
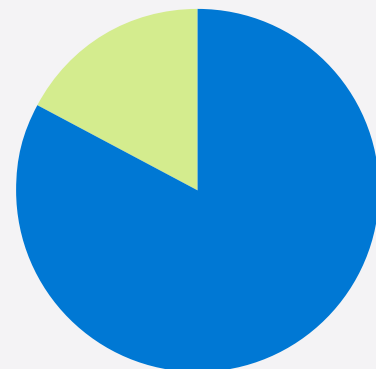


**A disability can be experienced by anyone at any time: around 83% of disabled people acquire their impairment during their working lives.[11]**

# Focusing on accessibility and inclusion: the benefits

The good news is that the tide is beginning to turn. Organisations across the UK are starting to realise the significant and measurable benefits that can come from making workplaces more accessible and inclusive.

## Financial performance

According to an Accenture report on the Disability Inclusion Advantage, organisations focused on disability are **four times more likely to have total shareholder returns that outperform their peer groups.**[12] In this study, organisations that championed disability inclusion achieved—on average—**28% higher revenue, double the net income, and 30% higher economic profit margins over a four-year period.**[13]

## Innovation

People with disabilities often take a creative approach to the world around them, leading to the development of sophisticated problem-solving skills, agility, persistence, forethought, and a willingness to experiment—all of which are essential for innovation.[14]

Research indicates that having employees with disabilities across departments helps ensure the products and services that go to market are truly inclusive, with features such as voice recognition, which can enhance revenue.

## Whole-of-workforce benefits

Using assistive technology to make workplace more accessible and inclusive doesn't just benefit those with disabilities—it has the potential to benefit all employees. For example, the 'dictate' feature in Microsoft Word can be beneficial for transcribing content from a video, or writing documents and emails on the go.

## Staff recruitment and retention

By creating a more inclusive and accessible workplace, organisations can be more likely to recruit and attract workers, leading to long-term loyalty.

## Improved productivity and company culture

More inclusive practices enhance company culture and therefore productivity and longevity of tenure. 72% of employers also saw an increase in productivity after adjustments were offered.[15]

## Enhanced reputation

Showcasing accessibility and inclusivity is also positive for an organisation's brand and reputation, which has the potential to greater sales and an improved customer experience.

"Teams that value diverse perspectives and inclusive design principles will have the deepest impact in designing products for everyone."
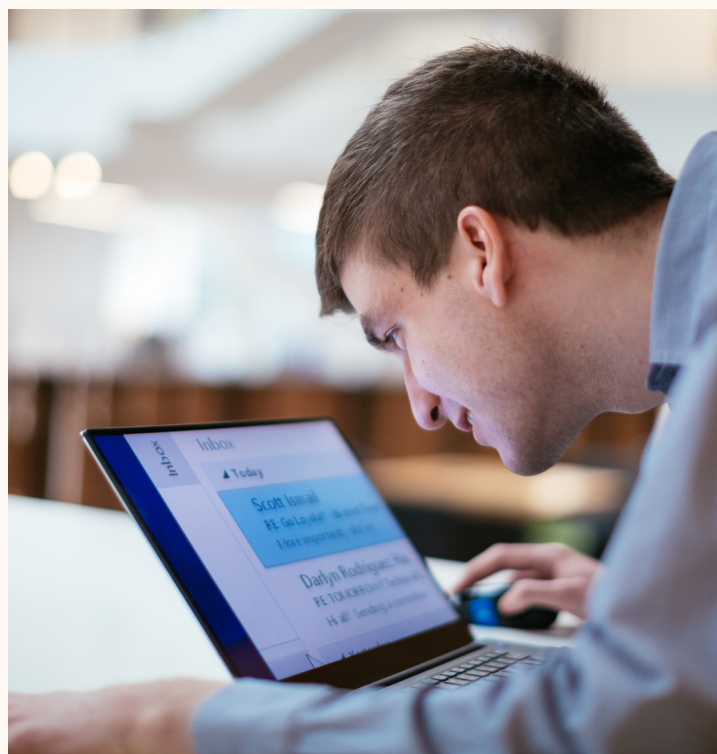
**Satya Nadella**
CEO, Microsoft

# Microsoft's own accessibility journey:
## a blueprint for change

At Microsoft, we've been on an accessibility journey since the 1990s, when we introduced Sticky Keys for Windows—a feature to help Windows users with physical disabilities reduce the sort of movement associated with repetitive strain injury.

Under our current CEO Satya Nadella, accessibility has become core to Microsoft's mission to empower individuals and organisations on the planet to achieve more. By embracing accessibility, we are building a culture of inclusion that extends across all teams and defines our approach to 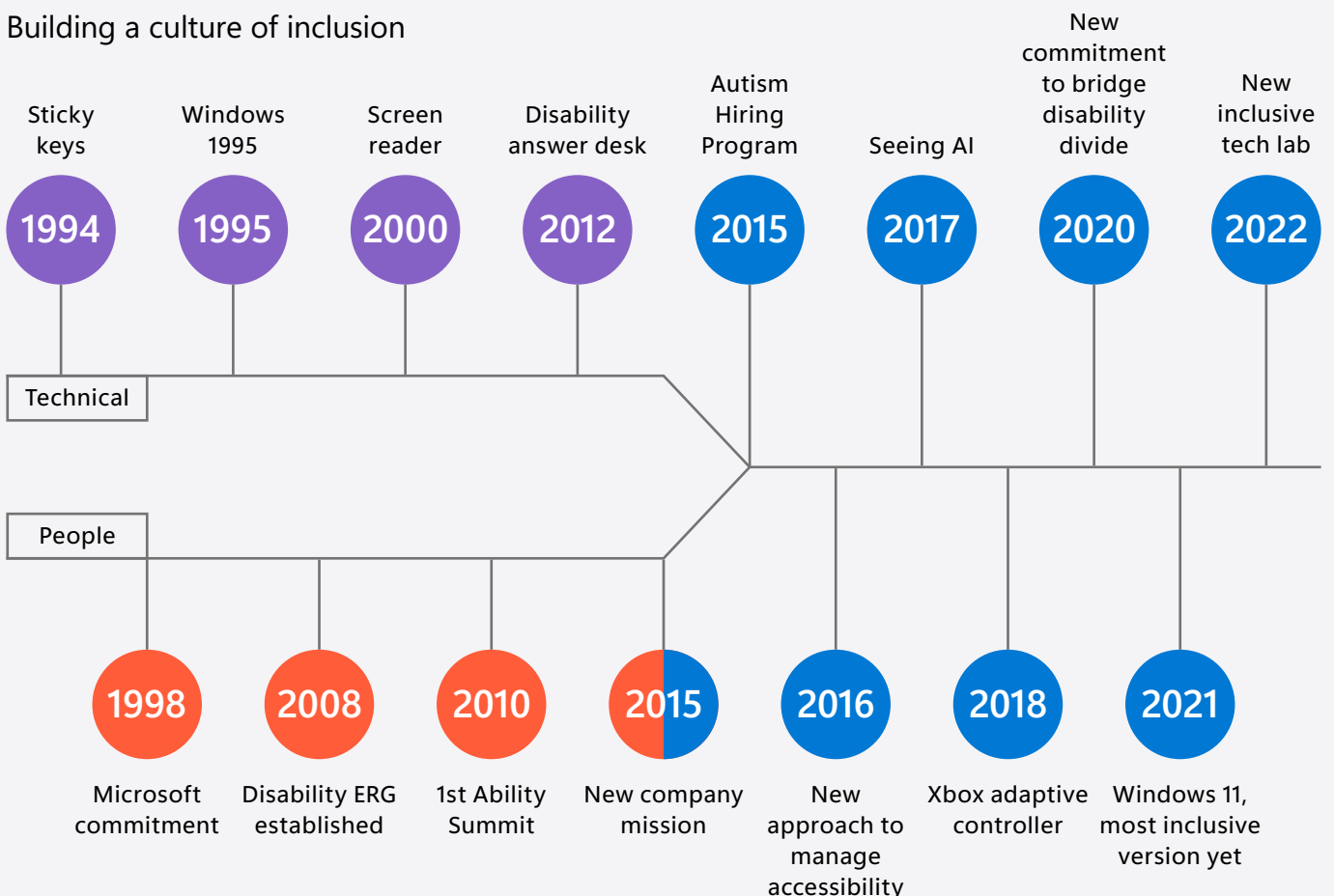recruitment. Employing people with disabilities enables us to create more innovative products that help meet the needs of everyone— ensuring accessibility is 'built-in', not just added as an afterthought.

In 2016 we rebuilt our company-wide accessibility program with a more systematic way to measure progress and set targets with our Accessibility Evolution Model. We began to measure and manage accessibility like a business, which helped accelerate some great innovations:

Most recently, we have put all our learnings into developing our new **Horizons Methodology**.

## Our accessibility journey

Building a culture of inclusion

| Sticky keys | Windows 1995 | Screen reader | Disability answer desk | Autism Hiring Program | Seeing AI | New commitment to bridge disability divide | New inclusive tech lab |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1994 | 1995 | 2000 | 2012 | 2015 | 2017 | 2020 | 2022 |

Technical

People

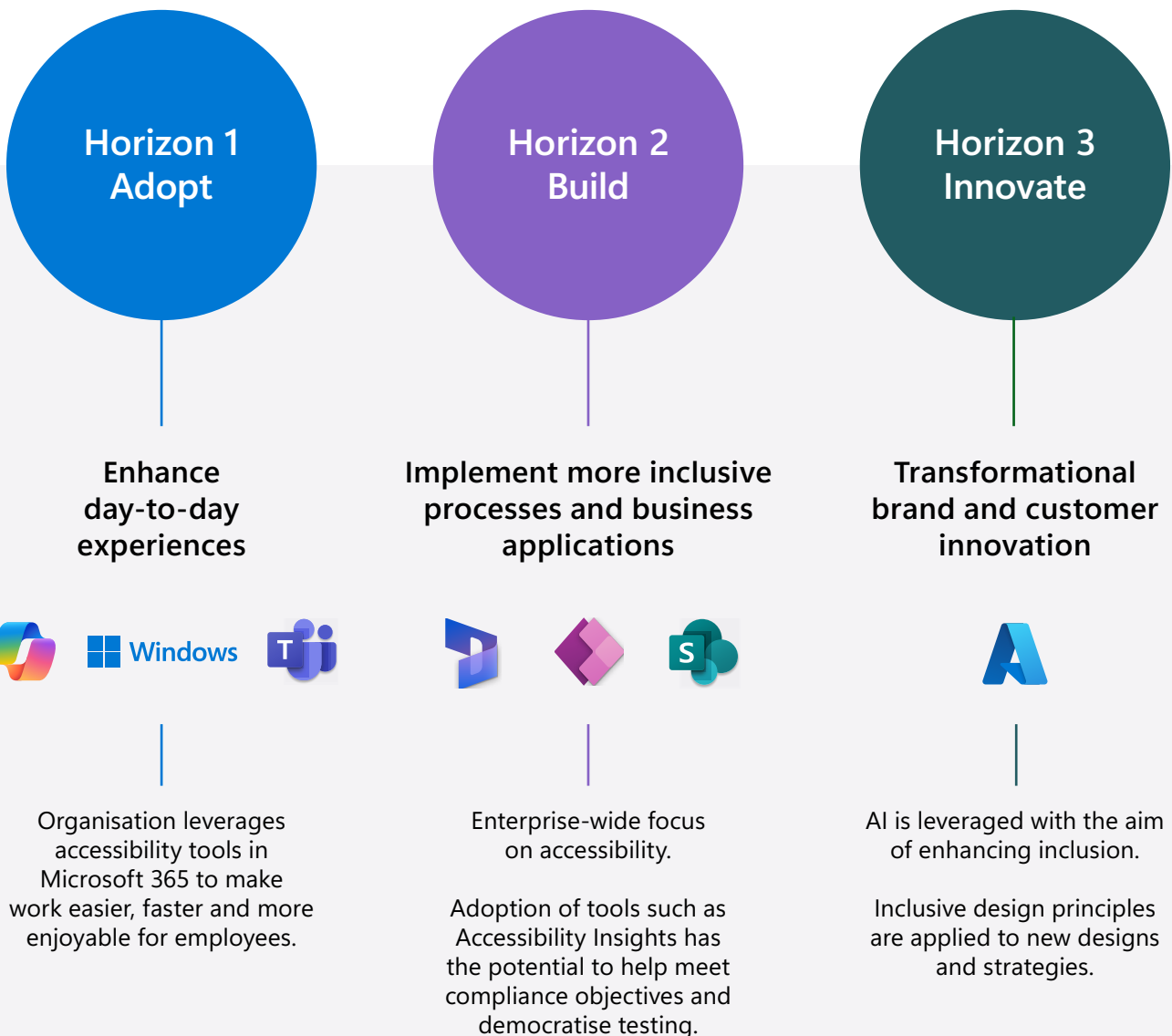| 1998 | 2008 | 2010 | 2015 | 2016 | 2018 | 2021 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Microsoft commitment | Disability ERG established | 1st Ability Summit | New company mission | New approach to manage accessibility | Xbox adaptive controller | Windows 11, most inclusive version yet |

# Microsoft's Horizons Methodology

The research is clear: most UK organisations lack a deep understanding of their level of workplace accessibility and inclusiveness (or lack thereof).

Microsoft is aiming to change this with our **Horizons Methodology**: a framework that helps organisations determine their current level of accessibility, with clear steps for adopting technology to enhance outcomes.

**Horizon 1
Adopt**

**Horizon 2
Build**

**Horizon 3
Innovate**

**Enhance
day-to-day
experiences**

**Implement more inclusive
processes and business
applications**

**Transformational
brand and customer
innovation**

Organisation leverages accessibility tools in Microsoft 365 to make work easier, faster and more enjoyable for employees.

Enterprise-wide focus on accessibility.

Adoption of tools such as Accessibility Insights has the potential to help meet compliance objectives and democratise testing.

AI is leveraged with the aim of enhancing inclusion.

Inclusive design principles are applied to new designs and strategies.

# Horizon 1
# Adopt

This foundational level is a starting point for organisations wanting to become more accessible. Organisations can work towards their accessibility goals by leveraging the wide range of accessibility tools in Microsoft 365—such as voice-to-text.

**Ideal for**
Organisations at the start of their accessibility journey.

**Aim**
Make day-to-day work more accessible and enjoyable for all, enhancing productivity and uncovering opportunities for innovation.

**Technology**
Microsoft 365, including Office and Teams.

**Tips for success**
- Ensure accessibility is prioritised by the leadership team

- Celebrate and showcase any improvements to build momentum.

- Provide your people with accessibility fundamentals training.

- Contact the Enterprise Disability Answer Desk to consult with experts and receive feedback on accessibility within the organisation.

## Grant Thornton UK creates a more accessible workplace with Microsoft 365

Grant Thornton is a large professional services firm, employing 62,000 people in over 140 countries. By educating all staff members about the accessibility features within the Microsoft 365 suite of products, Grant Thornton has made its communication and collaboration far more accessible and inclusive. Accessibility training is now provided to all staff, showcasing specific tools within Microsoft Teams and SharePoint. This has led to heightened productivity for the team and more fruitful customer engagements.

**"There are no limits to what people can achieve when technology reflects the diversity of everyone."**

**Ruth Topham**
Finance Partner & Disability Convenor,
Grant Thornton UK LLP

**Read the full story »**

## SeeAbility closes the digital divide for people with disabilities

SeeAbility is a charity that provides ambitious support for people with sight loss, learning disabilities and autism. They recently built a Creating Connections Programme, in partnership with Learning Disability England, with funding from the National Lottery Coronavirus Support Fund and support from Microsoft. This programme helps people with disabilities use Microsoft accessibility tools to create digital connections.

**"We continue to make sure that everything that we do is accessible for the people we support so that they can really thrive. It's about giving them the time to and support them to learn to connect to things like Microsoft Teams and Microsoft products."**

**Scott Watkin**
Head of Engagement, SeeAbility

**Read the full story »**

# Horizon 2
# **Build**

**This level is for organisations that are starting to build accessibility into their customer platforms and business application experiences.**

**Ideal for**
Organisations looking to drive enterprise-wide accessibility and inclusion.

**Aim**
Embed a broader suite of accessibility tools and capabilities across the organisation.

**Technology**
Microsoft SharePoint, Power Platform, Dynamics 365

**Tips for success**

- Microsoft Accessibility Insights software can be used to support compliance objectives, in collaboration with Chief Technology Officers and Chief Legal Officers.

- The Microsoft Power Platform has accessibility features built-in. Using this smart software as a 'front end' for various data sources across your business can be a quick and easy way to improve overall accessibilty, as well as ensure everyone has access to valuable insights.

## Unilever empowers employees to balance their productivity and wellbeing with Microsoft Viva

Unilever is a multinational corporation with a long history of taking its employees' wellbeing very seriously. The company adopts Microsoft Viva to provide individuals, managers, and leaders with data-driven, privacy-protected visibility into how work patterns affect their wellbeing and productivity, empowers them to achieve balance, and improves their employee experience.

**Read the full story »**

## Samhall starts a digital awakening with the Microsoft Power Platform

Samhall positively impacts Swedish society by helping people with disabilities find gainful employment, transforming nearly 250,000 lives in the process. Recently, the company underwent a transformation of its own.

Using Microsoft Power Platform, Samhall automated its manual credit check process, saving employees time and effort, and setting an example that has sent ripples across the company. It has created a culture of innovation, boosting Samhall's pursuit to help the most disadvantaged in society to improve their lives.

**Read the full story »**

# Horizon 3
# Innovate

**Organisations at this advanced level are co-creating with customers and partners to develop accessibility innovations which harness AI in ground-breaking ways—with the aim of promoting profound inclusion.**

**Ideal for**

Organisations looking to completely transform their approach to inclusion and diversity, as well as potentially deliver (and monetise) inclusive solutions or those which cater specifically for the disability community.

**Aim**

- Transformational brand and organisational innovation

- Revenue generation or enhanced delivery of services through solutions focused on accessibility.

**Technology**

Leverage opportunities within the Microsoft Power Platform and Azure to empower your organisation to create applications that suit all needs.

**Tips for success**

- Employ inclusive design content and strategic thinking to deliver rigorously accessible customer experiences.

- Pioneer technologies that capture larger audience shares and promote greater inclusion.

- Use the existing accessibility features within Microsoft 365 and Teams (such as computer vision, or the readaloud tool) in your own services to enhance accessibility for employees and customers.

## Reddit improves accessibility and SEO through Azure Cognitive Services

Reddit is an online community where people can find and share images and other content around their interests, hobbies, and passions. To broaden accessibility, particularly for users who are blind or have low vision, the company decided to find an AI tool to generate alt text for images on the platform.

With the help of the Microsoft Azure Cognitive Services product team, Reddit moved forward with Azure Cognitive Service for Vision to support the automatic generation of captions for millions of images.

**"With Microsoft's Vision technology, we are making it easier for users to discover and understand our content."**

**Tiffany Ong**
Product Manager of Guest Experience & SEO, Reddit

**Read the full story »**



## WPP embraces accessible technology to bring employees together

WPP—one of the world's largest advertising and communications companies—has worked closely with Microsoft to ensure that its 100,000 employees around the world have access to technology that encourages collaboration and empowers everyone to thrive at work.

Microsoft also worked with WPP to train 85 accessible tech champions—people who have an in-depth knowledge of all the accessibility tools available across Microsoft's products and services so that they could, in turn, help their colleagues.

**"Working with Microsoft has enabled us to really speed up our inclusion work."**

**Nancy Lengthorn**
Managing Partner and Head of Inclusion & Belonging, WPP UK

**Read the full story »**

# Microsoft accessibility features and tools

## Vision

Need a larger screen? A brighter screen? A narrator to read text? Find out about accessibility tools and features for people who are blind or have low vision.

Learn about vision-related tools >

## Hearing

For those who are hard of hearing, have hearing loss, or have deafness, our specialised features can provide solutions including closed captioning, mono sound and live call transcription.

Explore hearing-assistive tools >

## Neurodiversity

Innovative tools such as dictation and Windows Hello sign-in can help the digital world more accessible for those with dyslexia or other neurological or cognitive differences.

Discover tools for neurodiversity >

## Learning

Our applications for people living with learning differences can help increase focus, concentration and understanding—and include tools to improve reading and writing skills.

Uncover tools for learning >

## Mobility

Our suite of tools helps people living with arthritis, quadriplegia, spinal cord injuries and other mobility disabilities to navigate the digital world in new ways.

Find mobility-assistive tools >

## Mental Health

Learn more about assistive technologies for people facing barriers when living with, for example, bipolar disorder, anxiety, PTSD, depression or ADHD. Our products can help reduce distraction and improve concentration and reading.

Try mental health assistive tools >

# Microsoft accessibility features and tools

Microsoft offers a very broad and comprehensive range of accessibility tools which can be leveraged across the enterprise, in multiple functions.

| **Windows OS and Software** | **Learning solutions** | **Hardware and accessories** |
| --- | --- | --- |

### Windows OS and Software



**Windows**

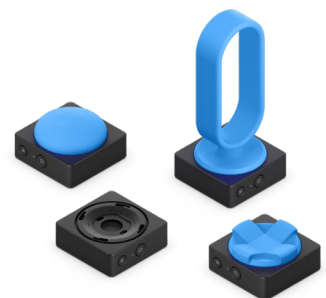| | |
| --- | --- |
|  Word |  Microsoft Teams |
|  PowerPoint |  Excel |
|  Power BI |  Power Apps |
|  Copilot |  Visual Studio |

### Learning solutions

Viva Insights          Viva Learning

### Hardware and accessories

# Microsoft accessibility features and tools

## Breaking down accessibility barriers with Microsoft Copilot

Microsoft Copilot is a smart, AI tool that's built into Windows, delivering significant benefits in terms of accessibility.

Users can control their operating system via Microsoft Copilot using the input method that is best for them, whether voice or text.

The tool can also utilise a wide range of accessibility features which a user might not know exist—such as Magnifier, Colour Filters, Narrator, Live Captions, Translation, or even Sticky Keys.

Microsoft Copilot can also bridge gaps in both the production and representation of content. This allows users to do their best work based on their strengths, and Copilot will do the rest.
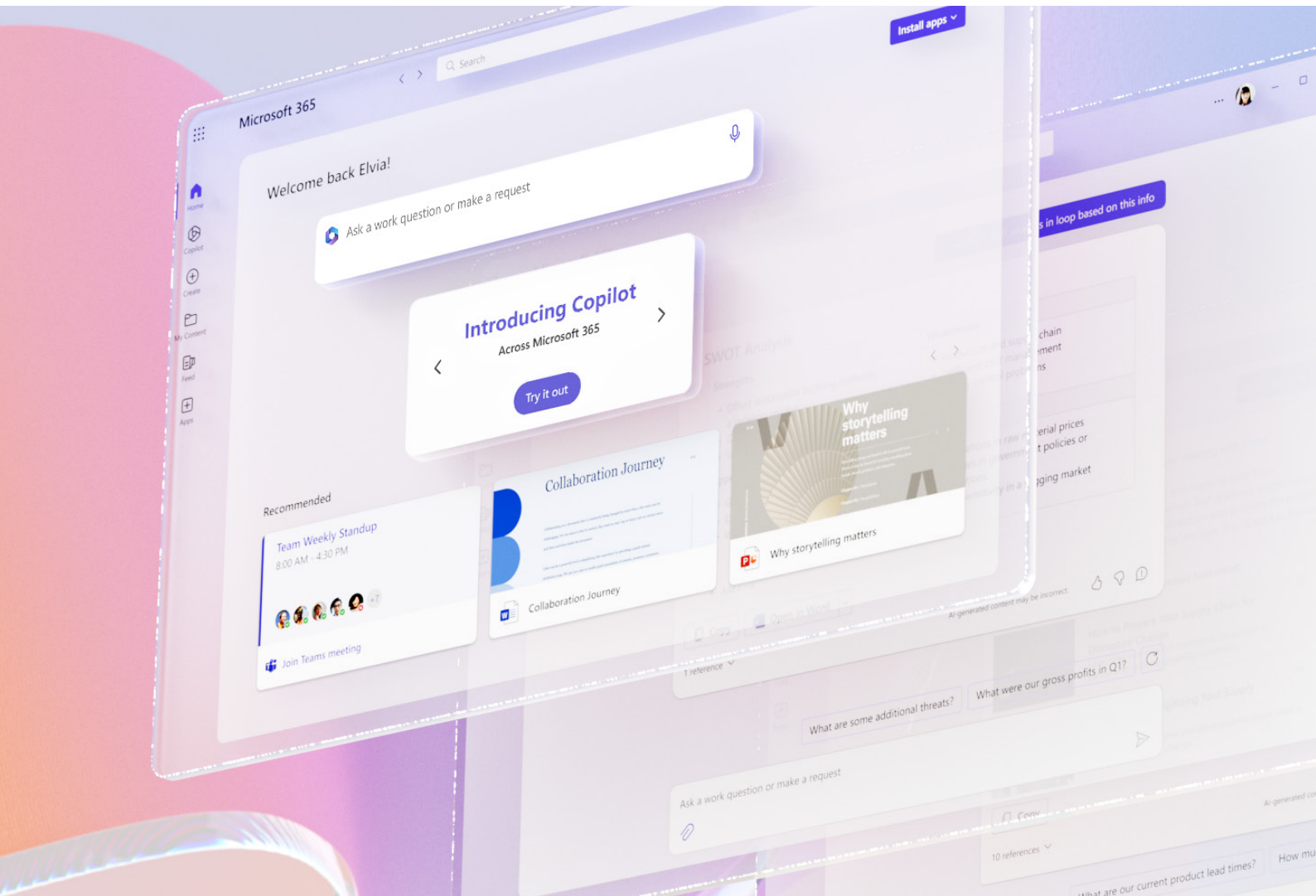
# Next steps/ recommendations

Explore each level of the Microsoft Horizon Methodology in more detail:

- [Horizon 1 - Adopt](#)
- [Horizon 2 - Build](#)
- [Horizon 3 - Innovate](#)

Email the Microsoft Accessibility Team to further the conversation on [accevent@microsoft.com](mailto:accevent@microsoft.com)

1. House of Commons, Research briefings: Disabled People in Employment, 2023  2, 3, 8, 10. CIPD, Inclusion at work report 2022, 2022  4. LSE, Disability inclusion at work: the many not the few, 2022  5. Valuable 500, Valueable Truth Report, 2022  6, 9. Business Disability Forum, The Great Big Workplace Adjustments Survey, 2023  7. Scope, Disability facts and figures, 2022  11. UK government, Level 2: Disability Confident Employer, 2019  12, 13. Accenture, The Disability Inclusion Advantage, 2018  14. LinkedIn, What do companies gain hiring people with disabilities?, 2023  15. Business Disability Forum, The Accessibility Business Case, 2021

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