

# DispATches - April 2018

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April 2018: Parliamentarians and industry experts explore links between assistive technology and Industrial Strategy, the government invests £300 million in technologies for healthy ageing, smartphone app for blind and visually impaired people adds specialised help.

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## Public policy, legislation and campaigns

### Parliamentarians and industry experts explore links between assistive technology and Industrial Strategy

The All Party Parliamentary Group for Assistive Technology has held [a symposium on the government's Industrial Strategy](#). A panel of industry experts and parliamentarians discussed how the government might support the sector in emerging fields such as robotics and artificial intelligence, help new entrants establish themselves and improve public sector provision.

### The government invests £300 million in technologies for healthy ageing

The government has pledged [an investment of £300 million in new technologies](#) designed to promote healthy ageing as part of the government's industrial strategy. The new funding will support a range of projects such as the development of artificial intelligence and other technologies to support better diagnosis, innovative therapies based on genome sequencing, a dementia research hub and products and services to help older people live independently.

### Report assesses speech and language services a decade on from the Bercow Review

The tenth anniversary of the landmark review chaired by John Bercow MP which recommended changes to services for children and young people with speech, language and communication needs has been marked with [a new report exploring its impact](#). The study concludes that a lack of awareness and focus at national and local levels continue to undermine the planning, commissioning and funding of services required to address children and young people's communication needs.

### Government commissions review of the Disabled Facilities Grant

The University of West of England has been commissioned to [carry out a review of the Disabled Facilities Grant](#), which funds adaptations in the homes of older and disabled people. The purpose of the review will be to explore whether the grant is effective in meeting the demands of an ageing population and how it might be used to deliver a more person-centred service.

## Technological developments and innovations

### Smart thermostats and light switch enhanced with Amazon Alexa

A home automation company has incorporated Amazon Alexa into its new product range. The US-based Ecobee's [Ecobee4 and Switch+](#) are smart thermostat and smart light switch devices that use Amazon's voice-activated assistant to combine control over heating systems and lighting with the capabilities of Echo products such as the ability to music and access online services.

### Hands-free music software provides physically disabled people with creative outlet

Microsoft has built a suite of hands-free music making technologies that allow disabled people with profound physical impairments to express themselves creatively. [The Red-Eye Sound Studio](#) consists of three complimentary software applications for music performance and composition that use eye-tracking technology.

### Robotic feeding device promotes independence

A technology company based in Michigan and Ohio has created a robotic device that assists people with physical disabilities to feed themselves. [Obi](#) is a robotic arm fitted with a purpose-built spoon which works by allowing diners to choose what to eat next by selecting one of four bowls containing portions of food.

### Smartphone app for blind and visually impaired people adds specialised help

[Be My Eyes](#) is a smartphone app for iOS and Android devices connects people who are blind or visually impaired with a band of almost one million volunteers from around the world who offer assistance with everyday tasks. The app has recently introduced a specialised help option that allows users to receive advice on specific products or services when a randomly-selected volunteer is unlikely to fulfil their needs.

## Funding news

### The Princes Trust Youth Can Do IT development awards

The Princes Trust [Youth Can Do IT](#) provides development awards to help young people achieve their plans for education, training or employment. Applicants must be aged 16 to 30 years old and must not be in compulsory education or full-time employment. The programme covers the costs up to £500 for course fees, equipment, transport and other items.



## Training & events

[The Assistive Technology Conference: Empowering Independence](#)



Wednesday 18th April

Adelphi House, University of Salford

A conference dedicated to showcasing how assistive technology can help people live, work and learn more independently

[Naidex 2018](#)



Wednesday 25th - Thursday 26th April

Birmingham NEC

One of the UK's largest independent living disability event bringing together disabled people, professionals and suppliers

[The Assistive Technology Exhibition and Conference 2018](#)



Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> May

ILEC Conference Centre, London

A conference aimed at disability professionals and technologists involved in post-16 education and the workplace.

