



National Star

Realising the aspirations
of people with disabilities

EdTech Demonstrator: National Star case studies

Alexa for independence

By Kayleigh Hunt, July 2021

“The ability for students to use mainstream technology to control their environment (e.g. smart speakers to turn the TV on or off, turn lights on and off) is huge. It allows them independence, a sense of control over their world and the impact to use the same technology as their peers to increase their quality of life.” Emily Harris, Highly Specialist Speech and Language Therapist, 2021.

Alexas are commonly known and used for simple domestic use, such as playing music or adding items to shopping lists. Our students find alternative uses for Alexas in their National Star residences, all of which enable greater independence.



For example, students may use an Alexa to narrate a recipe while they are cooking or preparing food, ranging from making a drink to making a pizza. The beauty of Alexa’s recipe narration is being able to pause instructions or ask Alexa to repeat them. This functionality ensures that the recipes or instructions are relayed at the desired speed, paused when needed and reiterated as required by the student.

This is just one example of how using an Alexa provides students with greater independence and confidence. Encouraging the use of off-the-shelf domestic technologies to assist students in day-to-day activities ensures this technology is transferable with little configuration once they leave college.

“The use of Smart speakers allows our learners greater autonomy within the classroom. They use them for a wide range of reasons to support their learning and their environment. Be it simply setting a reminder for the end of the session to turning on the Christmas tree lights for everyone to enjoy. As a research assistant, a smart speaker allows the learner to explore and develop their knowledge and interest in their own learning.” Simon Barnett, 2021

As part of continuing to develop the use of this technology for residential students, we are exploring using Alexas in students’ bedrooms for environmental controls. Currently we have configured Alexa to turn on televisions, fans, lighting and more. Future tasks include controlling mechanical devices such as curtains, windows and doors.

Technical considerations

- Alexa devices
- WiFi network