It's actually quite lucky that I'm following on.

This is completely unplanned.

I hadn't heard what Amy was going to speak about

storytelling and that George was going to talk about bad accessibility statements.

Basically, today, I'm going to be talking about creating

good accessibility statements and,

initially, I'm going to tell a story.

There is continuity going on with the conference.

The title of the talk here is The Hitchhiker's Guide to Accessibility Statements.

You'll probably guess where this is going.

Once upon a time in a land far,

far away, well, not so far.

It's actually in Austria, which is 770 miles away, based on Google Maps.

It recommends that you take the A4 and no other kind of ferries or anything like that.

But in a little place called Innsbruck,

there was a man and he was lying in a field looking up at the sky,

at the night sky, at the moon hanging low in the sky.

He was lying in the field because he had had many beers and he was very drunk.

With him, he had a copy of The Hitchhiker's Guide to Europe.

This is 1971, and he thought to himself,

"Someone should really write The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy,"

and nobody did. So he thought, "I'll write it."

That man was Douglas Adams and he brought us dolphins, stories about Marvin,

the depressed robot, he brought us tales of Vogon, bad poetry,

and he taught us that 42 is the meaning of life.

He also taught us about the humble towel.

A towel, according to The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy,

is about the most massively useful thing an Interstellar Hitchhiker can have.

Now, in my spare time, I like to think about

comparisons between the university and the universe,

mainly because they almost got the same letters.

But the university is a very complex place and especially the website real estate.

It's very complex with different sites and VLEs.

It's a complex environment.

For a universe, it's really useful to have a towel, but for

a university website or a college website or a public sector body website,

it's really useful to have an accessibility statement.

We've been talking about the Public Sector Bodies Accessibility

Regulations already this morning.

A lot of people think, "We've done that, tick.

That was last year.

We can all sit back and relax."

Well, I'm here to say,

"You can't. Sorry about that."

An accessibility statement is an evolving document.

It changes over time.

Your website will change over time and your accessibility statement

should change and complement that website.

I'm here to talk about thinking differently about accessibility statements.

I'd like you to think about them as a user guide.

You can talk about the intuitive design of your website,

the features of your website,

the tools and services available on your website,

the issues and the fixes you'd put in place because no website's perfect.

We all know that. But there could be a workaround.

Having that information in your statement really helps users.

You can talk about partnerships you have.

If you work with certain companies that make

improvements to the accessibility of your website, talk about them.

Accessibility statement, if I can even say it,

is also an inclusive marketing tool.

It's a place where you can tell your story.

You can talk about the investment and time that you've put into your website.

You can talk about the resources that you've used to make improvements,

the innovations you've made.

You can talk about the vision and identity of the actual university.

You can talk about student recruitment as well, in terms of

thinking about a student looking at your website.

Is it enticing?

Are you putting across your point of view about accessibility?

Are you making it an inclusive environment for everyone?

Hopefully, it will result in more students choosing your university or college.

Basically, an accessibility statement is a window on the soul of your institution.

Your statement is also an ongoing conversation.

It's a dialogue between you and your users and that should

be really included in the roadmap that is included on your statement.

It's about you listening to your users.

It's about engaging with the community.

It's about encouraging feedback within your statement.

It's also a way of measuring your progress and the achievements you've made.

You can tick off, "Yes, we're going to do this in Q2,"

and when you've done it in Q2,

you can tick it off and use it as a measurement of your progress.

I just wanted to talk briefly about ASPIREeducation and ASPIRE public sector.

Now, ASPIRE came about when we were reviewing

publisher statements and publish an e-book platform statements.

We've branched out to do education statements,

basically, for the university and college sector,

higher education and FE,

and for public sector organizations as well in

conjunction with All Able and McNaught Consultants.

It's a way of measuring compliance at a basic level.

We will review your statement and provide

you comprehensive feedback on every element of it.

Make sure it's compliant with the regulations.

It's also about risk management.

We can point out all the issues that you might face and

you can be prepared if you have a review by the government.

Essentially though, we are trying to make it into a statement plus,

not just about compliance but also mainly focused on

the user, so it's actually useful for your students.

The ASPIREeducation model is based on FACTS, which are: formative,

actionable, compliant, transparent, and supportive.

We measure your statement against all of these elements.

This is probably quite small.

So small on my screen,

but the FACTS criteria cover a lot of different aspects.

It's about 30 different aspects that we're looking at in a statement.

In the first two charges,

which is communication, compliance and content compliance,

that's basically looking to see if it's compliant with the regulations.

We've added the user experience layer so that we can actually

make it user-focused and helpful to students.

Things like do you talk about colors and contrast?

Does your website support magnification?

How about the page navigation and screen reader navigation?

Really getting into the details

of the accessibility statement and we're making it much more user-focused.

Now, there's a download link there from the

textBOX website which provides ASPIREeducation guidelines.

These are free guidelines that you can just look at and use to build your statement.

Now, the University of Kent have already gone through this process and they received

100 percent compliant score and a 98 percent ASPIRE FACTS score.

They're completely compliant with

the government regulations and they got a 98 percent score,

both gold scores, for their FACTS review,

which is fantastic start.

We then put this onto an ASPIRElist,

which is the ASPIREeducation List.

We've got one for publishers and one for e-book platforms.

We can see which universities are performing well.

Basically, I just want you to think about accessibility statements in terms

of being a user guide, a marketing tool,

and also an engagement forum.

It's a place where you can really talk

to your users and understand their requirements, whoever they may be.

Make a statement based on FACTS.

Make sure that you have all the information available, that it's actionable.

If there's any issues,

you're talking about providing workarounds,

things like that, identify.

It's basically about being transparent and honest about your statement.

Everyone knows that a website is not going to be perfect.

If you have issues,

it's fantastic to highlight them and offer alternatives and really engage.

It's saddening to see these stats

from George earlier that the people weren't even responding

to inquiries because it's a real opportunity

to grow as a community and engage with the users.

An accessibility statement isn't just a tick boxing exercise.

It's all about engagement and improving the quality of the website.

Hopefully, you'll be able to tick off that compliance and relax in the future.

Maybe, when we can, we can all go away and actually go somewhere sunny.

But remember to bring a towel because towels are always useful.

Almost as useful as an accessibility statement.

That's me.