A warm welcome from my point of view to everyone coming to the conference today.

I'm really excited to be presenting and

like Ben and James already pointed out,

we're doing it right now for the third time in a row,

and it feels like ages ago that we organized

the first Digital Accessibility Conference in

a very small environment with only a couple of hundred people coming along,

and now we're having this massive virtual event,

which just also shows that introduced in

digital accessibility is really becoming a thing,

more and more people are becoming interested in it.

In the end, we're all here to help people

and to create an environment that is welcoming and inclusive to everyone.

As a little introduction to myself,

my name is Paul-Georg and my pronouns are he/him and I'm blind.

Also as I'm blind,

I'm very much reliant on things like image descriptions and audio descriptions,

which basically is describing images using my screen reader,

and also with a sense of making it more accessible,

I'm quickly going to audio describe myself.

I am a man, I'm white,

I have a light brown beard, light brown hair,

gray eyes, I'm wearing a blue shirt,

and I'm in front of a office background.

As Ben has already pointed out,

I am a postgraduate,

Masters by Research student at the University of Kent.

I mainly focus on the Digital Accessibility Regulations 2018,

which I'm sure you're going to be hearing a lot

about over the course of this conference today.

I always believe that the best way forward is really when

considering digital accessibility is to consider the end user and how to best [inaudible].

Which is why, in my little presentation today,

I'm going to mainly share my own personal experiences as

a disabled student from an educational standpoint,

as well as pointing out some interesting aspects of my current research,

which I think can be of help to everyone here today.

In terms of just my own experience as a disabled student,

I grew up in Germany,

I went to a school there.

In the first couple of years at school,

I was mainly using a magnifying glass and

a camera with a computer that was fixed on a desktop,

which basically both enabled me to zoom into

different texts and read different documents.

Which on the one hand side was really practical, but on the other hand,

it was quite difficult to read at the same speed as my other coursemates.

So I mainly took 2-3 times as long as any other student to read a text,

and I wasn't really able to really get into the flow of reading or read out loud.

I had all of these disadvantages,

which made me feel like I couldn't really participate on

an equal level in the class as other students, for example.

Later in the following years,

I then started to use a laptop with mainly screen reader software

and first, SuperNova from Dolphin Computer Access and later, JAWS,

which I'm also using currently.

Using a screen reader really changed a lot of things for me because for the first time,

I was really able to keep up with the reading speed,

because you can vary the speed of which the screen reader reads it to you,

so I felt quite liberated to an extent.

But then the other half was that

this whole screen reader only solved one part of my problem,

because the other part then that I didn't really have

was having the same amount of accessible resources made available to me.

What this mean for me was basically at the time I

needed to have all the time that I save through using a screen reader,

I invested then into my afternoon trying to scan different documents,

different worksheets we were given,

trying to convert them into PDF or HTML or Microsoft Word.

Which in the end really didn't feel like I was saving a lot of time.

I again felt like there was some form of inequality

or inequitable experience as a student growing up.

Bearing all of this in mind,

I then decided to go to university in Germany to a city that was

very known to be very accessible and disability friendly.

This changed a lot of things for me because then I also was registered blind.

I started using a long cane,

I started using JAWS and Microsoft Eyes, for example.

I realized that people there were more aware when it

comes to disability or people with visual impairment in particular.

But the downside was, again,

that despite people being more aware and I had a library support,

who basically helped me finding

some books in the library and scanning in different documents.

But the amount of time I had with the library support was still quite limited,

and I still only had a few of the materials that are

needed for my studies actually made accessible to me.

As I was studying at the law school,

which is known to be a quite reading intense subject,

I, again, felt like I was falling

short of the information that was made available to everyone else.

In the end, I just wanted to have

an equal experience, gaining access to the same amount of resources at the same time.

I, again, only had probably two

out of the 10 materials on my reading list made available to me.

This also made me quite worried for the future to come and

how things are going to be if I wanted to qualify, becoming a lawyer,

all these different aspects.

My concern was also one of the reasons why I then wanted

to go abroad and see how things are handled in different countries.

Which is why I decided to do an exchange here at the University of Kent.

There, for the first time, arriving there through people such

as Ben Watson and Nik Duncan from the Opera Project,

I realized the potential of having

digitally accessible resources at the time that you need them,

and to the same extent that others can access to non-digital resources.

I felt like at this time,

everything was made accessible to me.

Again, I got all my library books at the same time,

I got all the papers that I needed,

which really felt fantastic.

Even if something wasn't really available at the time,

it only took like 1-2 days for them to scan it in and

transform it into a tagged PDF, etc.

At this time, I really felt like I had a proper student experience,

I could prepare all my seminars,

all my exams, just also enjoy studying at the university.

All these help, all this assistance that I got

through the people here at Kent then also encouraged

my own passion for accessibility and for improving the standard as it is right now.

For example, we worked on things like a 3D tactile map.

We started to work on an accessible,

self student journey. We got moving through all the different aspects

that a disabled student has to go through when applying to university.

As well as I'm currently the Chair

of their Disabled Student Network here at the University of Kent,

campaigning for more disability awareness.

This was one part of me becoming more passionate about

this whole digital accessibility dichotomy.

On the other hand, I also wanted to do more,

I applied for a masters by research,

all around digital accessibility regulations,

which I'm conducting right now.

Primarily, it is all about the new public sector bodies'

accessibility regulations 2018,

and how they approach disability.

I'm sure you all heard of the medical and social model of disability and how it is

related to what we call an equal access.

What equal access actually means in the digital sphere,

and personally what I always like to point out also in regards to my research,

what I think is very important when it comes to digital accessibility is not

only to view it as a one-dimensional subject matter,

but actually that there are more parts to it that need to be paid attention to.

Like I pointed out, it is not only about having a screen reader,

it is not only about having accessible resources available to you at the time,

it is not only about having people there that are

actually aware of disabilities and accessibility,

and trying to make things that are understandable.

It's all of these different things flowing together

into this whole dichotomy of digital accessibility.

I know that I'm already almost done with my presentation and with the time.

But just to leave,

I always like to refer to my project

as the difference between the magnifying glass and an iPhone.

Because the magnifying glass, you basically have

to carry it around with you at all times.

It feels really burdening and still doesn't really

enable you to equally participate in class.

Whereas the iPhone already provides a lot of inbuilt accessibility features,

you don't really have to worry about it.

It enables you to participate in any spheres or in any digital spheres if you like,

which is the core message for today.

It's really about changing the system without putting the burden on disabled people.

In the end, you're going to see a lot about

digital accessibility and how to make things more accessible today.

I think the most important message from my behalf is

always to really just include disabled people within the process,

pay great attention to them,

actively listening to what they have to say because we know best what is best for us.

In the end, we're all here to create a more equal online experience for everyone.

That is from my part and I'm also

really excited for the speakers that are lined up today.

All hope and wish you a wonderful conference.