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EduApps – AccessApps, LearnApps and TeachApps Three portable USB solutions for anytime, anywhere learning!



The freely downloadable copy of *AccessApps* that I reviewed last year in November 2008 was an initiative developed by the Scottish JISC Regional Support Centres in 2008. *AccessApps* has received numerous accolades!

It now is part of an upgraded solution called *EduApps*. This suite of portable applications now consists of over 90 (ninety) open source and freeware assistive technology applications. The three application suites are now known as *AccessApps*, *LearnApps* and *TeachApps*. All three can be used *entirely* from a 4GB or larger capacity USB stick on an MS Windows computer.

Students and users can also store their documents, assignments; music, video and graphics file on the USB thumb drive. A ready-made portable solution, for anywhere, anytime access to learning. At no cost – except for the thumb drive!

When I first discovered this wonderful innovation, it was truly a 'Eureka' moment! At last - affordable, amendable and appropriate Inclusive Technologies that can be acquired by nearly everyone in society!

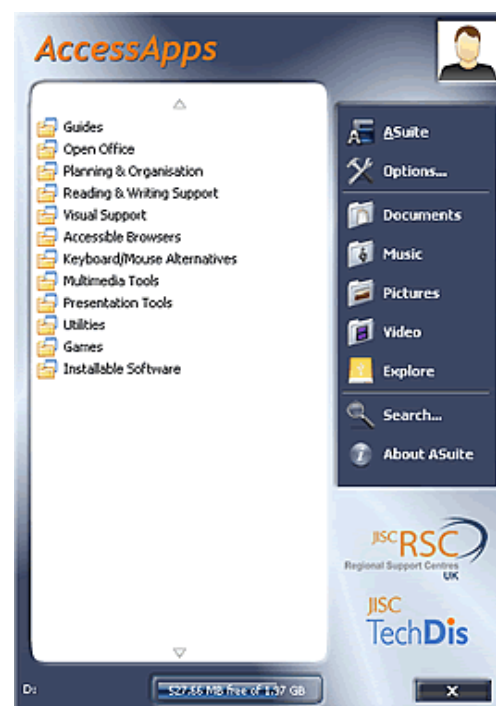
AccessApps, *LearnApps* and *TeachApps* run from the USB external drive - *without needing to install any software or utility application* on a host computer. These fast growing and expanding e-learning solutions support writing, reading, planning, organisation, music editing art and graphic design, desktop publishing as well as visual and text-to-speech and text-to-audio tasks. Additional portable applications can be installed to any of the three suites as well.

The download files are very large though. The respective suites (in their full versions) are currently 817Mb, 567Mb and 794Mb in size (see <http://www.rsc-ne-scotland.ac.uk/eduapps/download.php>). There are core versions of each solution as well (61Mb 80Mb and 59Mb). Once they are unzipped, extracted or decompressed onto a computer or USB drive, they increase to 40-60% in size.

Over the past four months I have been demonstrating the various portable applications that are so cleverly and elegantly packaged within *AccessApps*. People rave about the power, functionality and practical application of these various technologies. There are so many different tools that perform so many different tasks. Basically, there is something for everyone!

1. EduApps – What Do I Need?

LearnApps is targeted primarily to students. *LearnApps* includes many free software tools and a few games that cater to student learning, access and study needs. For teachers, lecturers, or instructors, trainers, school support



staff and others in educational settings, there is *TeachApps*. A few things that were carefully considered for teachers such as portable versions of *Virtual Learning Environments* were included. It predominantly caters to people involved in accommodating students, not to say that some parents may enjoy this suite as well.

AccessApps is the original and now acclaimed and award-winning collection of portable open source and free software. There is some duplication between the three but it includes specialised applications that are required for equitable access to computers. It includes a range of necessary functions and feature sets in free tools that are more specifically required for learners with different learning needs, learning styles, disabilities and impairments. Students engage almost immediately – it's the older generations who take time to accept it!



It certainly caters to disadvantaged groups. The little or no cost approach assists schools and students. It caters to

- Users on limited budgets,
- Parents who cannot afford commercial software
- Users who want to delve into Inclusive Technologies but do not want to necessarily commit
- Users who wish to experiment with a genre or type of software (e.g. text-to-audio)
- Schools who need 'convincing' that these technologies have merit
- Schools who do not have the necessary tech support
- Remote schools and disadvantaged communities
- Schools who are just starting to recognise the need for assistive technology tools
- Students and schools who just need solutions – *now!*

As with all software, the original intention and purpose may morph into other quite unrelated solutions for other users. It is in the innovative use and deployment of software that makes its use expansive and open to interpretive applications. Each person brings their own abilities, needs and skills and applies them as they deem fit. Some of my sessions have witnessed laughter, exclamations of joy, some bewilderment and proclamations that "this is what I needed two months ago!" or "I want everything"! Mostly, participants are delighted and can identify with the program features, its functions and especially see the potential outcomes for themselves and for their students.

2. Free Solutions On The Go

The Magnifying Glass provides access to small items on the screen (e.g. menu items program icons etc) or could be used to scan across text so as to more easily read it. The *VU Bar* assists dyslexic users as it acts as a "ruler" to target and isolate text. The Sunbird Calendar assists in planning, organisation, remembering times, classes and appointments helping with timetabling and scheduling. Hottnotes 4 is a handy 'sticky note' app that can be used in a variety of ways.

The popular Open Office Org applications (Ms Word, Excel, Access and PowerPoint) equivalents are met with surprise and acclamations of "this can't be free – it's too good?" Desktop Publishing with Scribus, music and MP3 editing with Audacity ... the list goes on! Even brainstorming and mind mapping with Xmind and Freemind can be performed.

All of these programs, and more are stored, carried and extracted from portable applications on a USB drive that is carried on your person, around your neck on a lanyard, in your bag or on your key ring! Or in your pocket!

Students, teachers and support staff can use these portable applications on any computing resource at school, TAFE, University workplace or at home. I now fully recommend a 4GB or higher capacity USB drive though, as users can add more portable apps as well as their documents, videos and photos. Ensuring that naïve users and younger students backup their files is mandatory and must be encouraged if not made very clear. USB drives, as with all technologies, can be easily compromised by being lost, stolen, and misplaced, broken, misused, incorrectly mounted or dismounted from a USB port on the computer, stood on or damaged.

Folders are provided for files and documents in handy, easy to find and access folders. The advantages of having AccessApps and now TeachApps and LearnApps still remain as they did last year:

- ❖ No need for technical support or installation of assistive software at a school or workplace
- ❖ No permissions required for installing assistive technologies onto a local computer or server
- ❖ No time lag for the permission or installation or technical 'glitches'
- ❖ No confusion as to what is available on computers about a campus (or even in one room!)
- ❖ Independent use, independent tools - anywhere, anytime
- ❖ The applications are portable and will prompt the user with alarms and data (e.g. *Sunbird* calendar)
- ❖ Independent set up, configuration and preferences in each App for each user
- ❖ Ability to add more portable apps to cater to individual interests or needs
- ❖ Low cost solution (approximately \$20-\$25 for a 4GB USB2 memory thumb drive)
- ❖ Provides increased independence, and ability to be in control of technology
- ❖ Provides educators with ready made solutions for instruction (particularly the very powerful and cool *Virtual Learning Environments*)
- ❖ USB drive technology is accepted and used universally by students
- ❖ Most users now are very familiar with USB based drives and technologies
- ❖ Practically all computers since about 2005 have at least two USB ports (or you can use 4 or 8 port hubs)
- ❖ The ability to add and save MP3 files, Podcasts, graphics, photos and other documents on the drive
- ❖ Ideal for older PCs and Eee PC style and ultra portable computers that have minimal or restricted hard disk space
- ❖ It is mainstream technology and not 'made for the disabled'
- ❖ It is so portable, discreet and readily accessible!

As mentioned in my previous article, the only real downside is the issue of integrity. Schools, colleges, training institutes and workplaces must have up-to-date virus protection and software protection and protocols in place. These standard best-practise mechanisms must be in place so as to avoid malicious files from entering their intranets, servers and IT systems.

If these are present and securely applied to IT networks and systems, then AccessApps should be allowed. The portable applications run *completely* from the external thumb drive and will not compromise the integrity of the system(s) used. Added viruses can attach themselves to a USB memory drive. The virus protection software at home or at school or University will alert the user and thus it can be captured and controlled.

3. Acquiring and Downloading EduApps

The download section allows you to choose the portable applications which best suit your individual needs and download them in a single application suite. There are a few versions – the full AccessApps, LearnApps and TeachApps and core versions are available or a "pick and mix" option where you choose the apps that you need.

[Click here to download EduApps](#)

4. Customise - Mix and Match

If users can't find a package to suit their needs, then they can create their own "*MyApps*" bundle by selecting from the range of available applications before downloading them in a single installation file. Users can link to *Create MyApps* here: <http://www.rsc-ne-scotland.ac.uk/eduapps/register.php?suite=EduApps&clientID=1>.

Further information about using AccessApps can be found on the Help Page - <http://www.rsc-ne-scotland.ac.uk/eduapps/help.php> Students, parents and educators can access *Help* files and directions about all of this material as well. There are video guides and tutorials to help from selection of the suites, download, through to installation and later to the use of the applications. It is extremely comprehensive and a great way to invite students to learn how to install the three EduApps themselves.

Videos include:

- ❖ Watch - Downloading a pre-packaged version of AccessApps
- ❖ Watch - Downloading a 'Pick n Mix' version of AccessApps
- ❖ Watch - Extracting installation files for AccessApps
- ❖ Watch - Starting AccessApps for the first time

A new FAQ page lists (<http://www.rsc-ne-scotland.ac.uk/eduapps/helpfaq.php>) includes such questions as:

1. Is it possible to install other applications to AccessApps?
2. Does AccessApps work with JAWS?
3. When I extract AccessApps my anti-virus software detects a virus. Is AccessApps infected?
4. Does the AccessApps work on a Mac computer?
5. I get an error message when trying to use BBC Radio and BBC Listen Again. Is there a way of fixing it?
6. I get the error message 'Cannot find specified application'.

There are Step-by-step introductory guides (in alternative formats) that you can download. These include: MS Word format, Open Writer (i.e. *Open Office Org* word processor), Adobe PDF format, in large print, in MP3 format and in DTB format.

A handy "wall of description for 90 software packages" - www.rsc-ne-scotland.ac.uk/eduapps/compare.php.

5. Is it possible to Install Other Applications to EduApps Suites?

As long as the application has a *portable* MS Windows version and it performs the task(s) a user requires, then the answer is a definite "Yes". Users can usually find these portable apps using a preferred search engine using the keyword 'portable' followed by the application the users would like to add (e.g. "*portable Irfanview*").

These are the instructions for adding a student's own applications to the AccessApps menu:

1. Download a portable version of the application you would like to add.
2. Install/extract the downloaded file to the 'Applications' folder of your USB stick.
3. Open the *AccessApps* menu by clicking the *AccessApps* icon in the systems tray.
4. Click on a button labeled '*ASuite*' (right hand side towards the top).
 - a. Note: You should see the menu structure of all the installed applications
5. Right click on the folder you would like to add your application to and select '*Add software*'
6. In the '*Properties*' dialog window which opens click on '*Browse*'.
7. Navigate to the folder of the application you are adding and double click on the file used to launch that application, usually *.exe.
8. This should take you back to the *Properties* dialog.
9. Click on '*Retrieve*', which should populate the fields with the program information (if not fill in the fields as appropriate) then click *KO* to finish.

When users click on the AccessApps/LearnApps or TeachApps icon in the system tray, he or she should now see his or her new application listed in the menu.

Other Web links to applications that have portable versions for free download include:

- ❖ <http://www.portablefreeware.com/>
- ❖ <http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/portable-software-usb/>
- ❖ <http://www.app-stick.com/>
- ❖ <http://www.techsupportalert.com/best-free-portable-programs.htm>
- ❖ <http://www.softpedia.com/get/portable-software>
- ❖ <http://portableapps.com/>
- ❖ <http://www.pendrivesoftware.com/>
- ❖ <http://www.techsupportalert.com/best-free-portable-programs.htm>

Note: All of the above technical information was sourced from the RSC Scotland website: <http://www.rsc-ne-scotland.ac.uk/accessapps/> as at 27th May 2009.