TRANSCRIPT: Switch access to computers

Switches provide opportunities for pupils to understand the relationship between cause and effect and, thus, to control their environment and enhance their ability to communicate.

Switches can utilise the smallest of movements and the right choice of switch will enable most pupils to achieve success and confidence.

An understanding of cause and effect is the first step to using switches successfully. Pupils need to learn that when they press a switch, something will happen. There are a number of simple computer programmes that enable pupils to gain an increasing understanding of cause and effect.

For pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties, the learning process will be slow and require constant repetition to build up awareness, attention, anticipation and memory.

A more advanced skill is scanning. Scanning allows pupils to make choices or to express preferences from a selection shown on a computer screen. Pupils scan the options presented, wait until the choice is highlighted by the scanning box and then activate a switch to make a choice. Proficiency in scanning is a pre-requisite for using many voice-output communication aids.

The correct positioning of switches is important to ensure that pupils can develop a controlled movement which is reliable and which they can use consistently and in comfort.

Seating positions should allow pupils to maintain the correct posture, which allows them both to interact with the switch and to observe its effects on the screen. It is essential that the physiotherapist and occupational therapist are consulted to minimise problems and maintain consistency.