

Summary of WP3 Retreat, Copenhagen, June 2005

Those attending:

- The four current members of the Board of User Communities (BUC).
- Three representatives of the User Community and Helpers.
- WP3 Partners.

NOTE: Names have been removed from this public summary.

The purpose of the retreat, incorporating a BUC Meeting, was as follows:

- To gain a first-hand insight into the way that the different systems work with different needs and abilities.
- To share our observations
- To help COGAIN partners make better-informed decisions in our future work

Discussion at the end of the day was based around the following open questions:

- What do you feel about what you've seen today – any surprises?
- From what you've seen, have you changed your view about who could benefit from these systems and ideas?
- Why aren't more people benefiting already?
- What can be done to enable more people to use eye control?
eg. What more can COGAIN do to help to establish links with people who might need this technology? (both to provide and gain information).
- Any additional questions/ comments?

Summary of the discussion

The retreat provided a context for the work we are all doing and hopefully, gave the manufacturers an idea of what is needed from their systems. It also gave us all the opportunity to continue building good and informative relationships with each other. The role of the BUC was discussed, and all agreed that is to give us advice and help us to spread information about the project. We want their help to communicate with more people and will benefit from the valuable experience they have in the field.

One of the representatives of the user community, said that the moment eye control had worked for her ‘was so great’. She showed us her own switch software that might be able to have an eye control version.

A mother of another user representative at the camp said that the first calibration was good had been easy but that they’d later struggled with the second. She said it was ironic that the more fun his son had, the more he laughed and the more his eyes closed, making it impossible for the tracker to pick up his eyes. We discussed having the monitor even higher, to make him look up and open his eyes. We were all pleased to have learned how accurately he had been able to focus on small coloured dots placed in different positions the screen.

The strengths and weaknesses of different systems were discussed and it was agreed that each system has merits. Not all systems that the user representatives had tried could handle head movement, for example, and other systems had not been able to work with only one eye.

All user representatives agreed that they wanted to be mobile and not restricted by their computers. We discussed the importance, while mobile systems are not available, of secure mounting and that this was being investigated. A member of BUC said that the ‘missing link’ at the moment is a small eye tracker and that work being done by Cambridge looked very promising.

When asked how they felt about the idea of wearing anything head-mounted, two of the users agreed. One said that she would hate wearing anything on her head and that she even finds it uncomfortable to have to hold her head in a certain position to accommodate an eye tracker. The other said that wearing glasses was bad enough – they were regularly bumped and broken during her spasms and she could imagine anything else being the same. The small boy’s mother felt that even if an eye tracker could only be used indoors it would be very useful at home and at school, and would certainly be better than his current communication method.

All parties agreed that we should communicate the latest possibilities and developments with each other and this led to a discussion about the COGAIN web page, which we believe will be made more exciting and easier to navigate as soon as possible.

The question of how to pass the information we find on to potential users was also raised and one of the BUC members suggested that it should be through their AT service. He also suggested that information should perhaps not only be targeted at those people who had no other choice but eye control, but also people who may simply prefer using it to another method.

Another member of the Board of User Communities said that she felt that price and the available support were a huge factor in how AT services decided on equipment. She also felt that it was important to inform those who might not be able to benefit from eye control, to prevent them from spending money or raising their hopes unnecessarily. It was agreed that it would be useful if AT centres could borrow systems to try with people and that this would increase knowledge and publicity for both users and suppliers. It was felt that COGAIN partners were in a better position than manufacturers to loan out systems and gather information because they would have no financial motives.

People must be realistic about how things are and not hyping things up. Maybe put both good and bad comments from users on web page.... Many thought it was better than expected. Some hard moments and we need things to be plug and play, reliable etc.

All in all, it was felt to be a very worthwhile event with valuable contributions from all involved – suppliers, the user community, COGAIN partners and BUC members. Any further thoughts following the meeting, from user representatives, BUC members and WP3 partners are welcome. Please send them to office@cogain.org (the Office personnel will forward them to appropriate persons).