

In 2011-2014, Deletrea collaborated in an EC-funded project called FIRST which aimed to develop software that would help people to convert documents into a more accessible form for people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

<INLINE VIDEO: [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QGrjio1epAo>]>

This international project was carried out by 9 organisations from 4 different countries including charities, non-governmental organisations, healthcare service providers, software companies, and universities. We are proud to have been a part of this international consortium of experts.

At Deletrea, we did research to improve understanding of the difficulties that people on the spectrum have with reading and the steps that can be taken to overcome these barriers. We learned a lot from our work in the FIRST project and from the research that was done by other partners in the consortium. Under our guidance, the project team developed a set of guidelines to show people how best to adapt texts to make them more comprehensible for people with ASD. Through our work, we discovered effective ways to adapt texts to make the information that they contain more accessible for users. We interviewed people with ASD and their carers about their experiences reading texts that had been adapted using our approach and they were very positive.

Our participation in the project helped us, too. We learned more about ongoing international research related to the reading comprehension difficulties of people on the spectrum and the ways in which these difficulties manifest themselves in the international context.

On a weekly basis, the knowledge we gained in our work on FIRST allows us to rapidly develop easy-to-read documents (e.g. school worksheets, excerpts of school books, kitchen recipes) for people with autism spectrum disorder, significantly improving the quality of care that we offer. Deletrea now provides more reading support for people with ASD than we did before the start of the FIRST project and the support that we offer is now of better quality. This includes informal training for parents and other carers to adapt reading material for children.

In addition to this, we began to see the potential benefits that other assistive technologies (e.g. *MyStudyBar* and *Detach that book*) might offer people with ASD when reading and studying. Deletrea now actively promotes the use of such technologies.

Over the course of the project, we were able to establish direct links between the world of academic research and improvement of the quality of life of people with ASD. We have since embarked on further collaboration with the *University of Jaen* in a spin-off company called *Yotta* (<https://bit.ly/3iUDhTq>) that is working to develop software that will improve the communication skills of people with autism. As a result of the expertise we acquired in FIRST, staff from Deletrea were first authors of a research paper about the project which was published in the prestigious Spanish journal *Revista de Neurología* (<https://bit.ly/3mL7UNu>). Production of this article was part of the role we played in disseminating research findings from the FIRST project and which also enabled us to extend our track record in the scientific community.

The story doesn't end there. We plan further collaborations with our partners from the FIRST project, including the University of Wolverhampton, on new projects aimed at improving the quality of life of people with ASD.