

# Access to Politics: Charter for Political Parties





**Mynediad at Wleidyddiaeth**  
**Access to Politics**

Rhwydwaith Llawr Gwlad  
Grassroots Network

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Disability Wales receives funding  
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# Introduction

This Charter was co-produced with members of the Access to Politics Grassroots Network, informed by the Access to Politics Charter created by Inclusion Scotland<sup>1</sup> and a broad range of stakeholders. Disability Wales is grateful to Inclusion Scotland for granting permission to draw upon this pioneering work. Additional key resources that shaped the Charter include the Diverse 5050<sup>2</sup> Toolkit and the Welsh Government's Diversity and Inclusion Guidance for Registered Political Parties<sup>3</sup>, documents that will serve as valuable complements to the Charter. This work was made possible thanks to funding from the Welsh Government.

The Access to Politics Grassroots project aims to promote greater political participation amongst disabled people, raising awareness about opportunities for political involvement. As well as championing disability equality and inclusion in political representation at all levels of government.

The project has formed a grassroots network for disabled people interested and/or involved in politics; and with members, co-produced the Access to Politics Charter. It sets out practical steps for political parties to follow, ensuring greater inclusion of disabled people within party structures.

Disabled people represent one fifth of the Welsh population, however this is not reflected among elected members across Wales. The absence of disabled people in decision making roles, means that policies and services are not informed by lived experience.

Disability Wales is calling on all political parties to adopt and begin implementing the Access to Politics Charter as part of their commitment towards making Wales more equitable, inclusive and representative of the population.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://inclusionscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Access-to-Politics-Charter-with-Guidance-Notes-Final-1.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://wenwales.org.uk/en/campaign/diverse5050/diverseandequalrepresentationtoolkit/>

# Access to Politics Charter

1. We will write and publish an Accessibility and Inclusion statement.
2. We will support and resource a Disabled Members' Group in our party.
3. We will undertake and provide mandatory Disability Equality training to all elected officers, party members and staff.
4. We will commit to using language and terminology in line with the Social Model of Disability.
5. We will use a range of methods and approaches to ensure all can fully participate in the Party.
6. We will voluntarily publish Candidate Diversity Data in line with Welsh Government's Diversity and Inclusion Guidance, particularly part 2<sup>4</sup> and the Local Government candidate survey.
7. We will actively support and encourage Job-Sharing for both internal staff and elected members.
8. We will actively support and encourage the increased representation of disabled people in politics including as elected representatives, candidates, office holders and party members.
9. We will adopt the Social Model of Disability in policy and practice.

**By signing up to this Charter**, we affirm our commitment to creating an equitable political environment in Wales where Deaf / disabled / neurodivergent people are respected, supported, and fully included.



<sup>3</sup> [Diversity and inclusion guidance for registered political parties | GOV.WALES](https://gov.wales/standards-and-guidance/guidance-for-registered-political-parties)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.wales/diversity-and-inclusion-guidance-registered-political-parties-html#168278>

# Accessibility and Inclusion Statement

## Our Commitment

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We commit to supporting Deaf / disabled / neurodivergent people's full, equal and equitable participation in every aspect of our political activities. We will work proactively to identify and remove barriers, meet access and support requirements, and ensure that Deaf / disabled / neurodivergent people's political engagement is embedded in our party's culture.

We will produce and regularly update this statement to reflect ongoing progress and reaffirm our commitment to accessibility and inclusion.



## Accessibility and Inclusion Policies

We will establish and implement clear accessibility and inclusion policies, including:

- **Meetings and Events:** All venues will be accessible, also by public transport, with appropriate seating, signage, and accessible toilets.
- **Digital Accessibility:** Our websites, social media, and digital communications will meet recognised accessibility standards.
- **Communication Materials:** All party materials will be produced with inclusive design principles, and available in accessible formats.
- **Training:** Staff, members, and elected officials will receive disability equality training, BSL awareness, social model, and anything appropriate.

We acknowledge that accessibility goes beyond physical access and must also encompass cultural, communication, and procedural inclusivity.

## Specific Actions and Timelines

We will take the following specific actions to remove barriers:

- **Nominate Disability Equality Champions** in every regional and national body.
- **Audit party procedures** to identify barriers to participation for Deaf / disabled / neurodivergent people and publish findings.
- **Develop and implement an action plan** to remove identified barriers, with annual progress reviews.
- **Establish annual party conferences** for disabled political groups, to share best practice and shape policy.
- **Regularly review and update** accessible documents and videos to ensure they are accurate, clear, and meet readers' needs.
- **Publish this statement** in accessible formats and ensure all updates follow the same inclusive approach.

## Requesting Access and Support

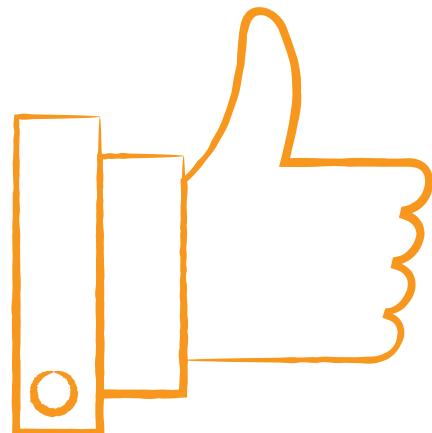
We will ensure a clear and supportive process for requesting access:

- Deaf / disabled / neurodivergent members and participants can make access requests by contacting our Accessibility Officer.
- A dedicated team will oversee implementation of access requests and ensure accountability.
- The names and contact details of designated accessibility contacts will be published and regularly updated.

## Accessible Formats

This statement and all future updates will be published in:

- **Large Print**
- **Low Contrast**
- **British Sign Language (BSL) video with captions**
- **Braille**
- **Online pictures will contain alt text**
- **Audio**
- **Easy Read**
- **Bilingual versions** in English and Welsh and other languages needed



Accessible formats will be available upon request and promoted via our website and communications channels.

## Additional Commitments

- **Disabled People's Champions** will advocate for inclusive practices and monitor progress within the party.
- **Co-production:** Deaf / disabled / neurodivergent members will be invited to policy meetings and working groups to co-produce decisions.
- **Cultural Change:** We will publish a roadmap outlining how we will challenge discrimination, adopt fairness, equity and equality, and build a more inclusive party environment.

## Accountability and Review

- This statement will be reviewed annually in consultation with Deaf / disabled / neurodivergent members.
- Progress will be reported publicly to ensure transparency.
- Feedback mechanisms will be established to allow Deaf / disabled / neurodivergent people to report challenges and suggest improvements.

# Supporting and Resourcing a **Disabled Members' Group** in Political Parties

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## Purpose and Vision

- Empower Deaf / disabled / neurodivergent members by supporting the creation of a dedicated group within the party.
- Ensure Deaf / disabled / neurodivergent members co-produce decision-making.
- Embed lived experience and expertise into political structures to build a more inclusive society.

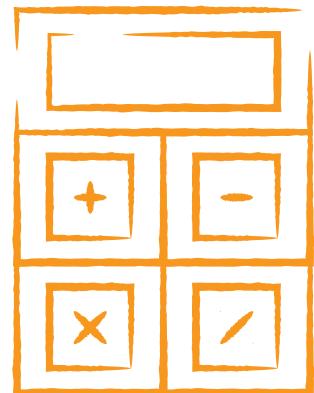


## Establishment and Support

- Support the formation of a disabled members' group and peer support network.
- Facilitate meetups at party conferences or standalone events.

## Funding and Resources

- Provide financial assistance for:
  - Reasonable adjustments
  - Creation of group resources
  - Communication support
- Ensure fair distribution of party donations and funding.



## Visibility and Promotion

- Advertise the group internally and externally to:
  - Raise awareness among Deaf / disabled / neurodivergent party members
  - Showcase good practice to other groups.
- Promote the merits of standing as a Deaf / disabled / neurodivergent candidate.
- Provide visibility and platforms for Deaf / disabled / neurodivergent candidates.

## Insight and Co-production

- Involve the group from the beginning to co-produce party policies and practices.
- Ensure inclusion is a priority from the start, not an afterthought.
- Ask the group to inform solutions to barriers Deaf / disabled / neurodivergent people face.

## Collaboration and Unity

- Encourage cross-party cooperation and shared learning.
- Host events or initiatives that bring people together to drive change.
- Work towards a more unified, inclusive political landscape.



# Disability Equality Training: Key Commitments & Approach

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## Core Principles

- **Mandatory Training:** Disability Equality Training (DET) will be required for all party members, staff, and elected officials.
- **BSL Awareness:** Becoming familiar with basic BSL signs, communication barriers are as exclusionary as physical barriers.
- **Lived Experience:** Training must be co-designed and delivered by Deaf / disabled / neurodivergent people.
- **Social Model of Disability**<sup>5</sup>: The training will focus on how societal, organisational, and environmental barriers disable individuals rather than emphasising impairments.
- **Best Practices:** Participants will learn to identify and challenge discrimination, use inclusive language, and implement reasonable adjustments.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.disabilitywales.org/social-model/>

## Distinguishing Disability Equality Training from Disability Awareness Training

- **Disability Awareness Training** often lacks input from Deaf / disabled / neurodivergent people and focuses on impairments rather than societal barriers.
- **Disability Equality Training (DET):** Recognises the distinction between impairment and disability. Must be delivered by Deaf / disabled / neurodivergent individuals to share lived experience. Empowers participants to challenge discrimination and promote inclusion. A positive experience that engages.

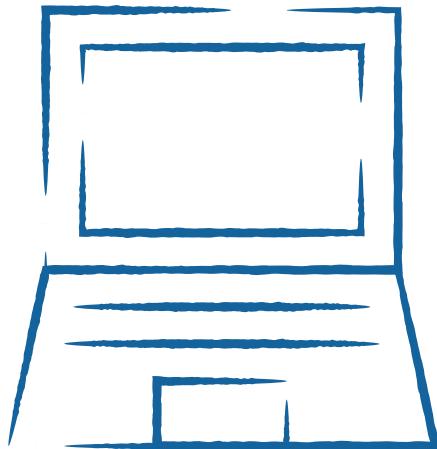
## Enhancing Training and Implementation

### Targeted Training for Key Roles:

- **Campaign Managers:** Training on reasonable adjustments, accessible venues, and scheduling considerations.
- **Social Secretaries:** Awareness of event timing ensuring inclusivity.
- **Political Candidates:** Confidence training to equip candidates to represent their communities.
- **Party Leaders and Officials:** Benchmark training, using Disability Wales' Cabinet training as an example.

### Greater Representation and Engagement:

- Promoting Deaf / disabled / neurodivergent people in political spaces.
- Encouraging younger Deaf / disabled / neurodivergent people to engage in politics.



### **Technology and Accessibility:**

- Develop training on digital inclusion and using technology to connect Deaf / disabled / neurodivergent members.

### **Training Delivery Format:**

- A mix of trainers with diverse impairments to cover different perspectives.
- Supplementary film content can support training and provide ongoing education but must not replace in-person delivery by a Deaf / disabled / neurodivergent person.

## **Broader Party Commitments**

- The party commits to an equality policy that supports disability inclusion.

# Language & Accessibility Commitment

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## Social Model of Disability

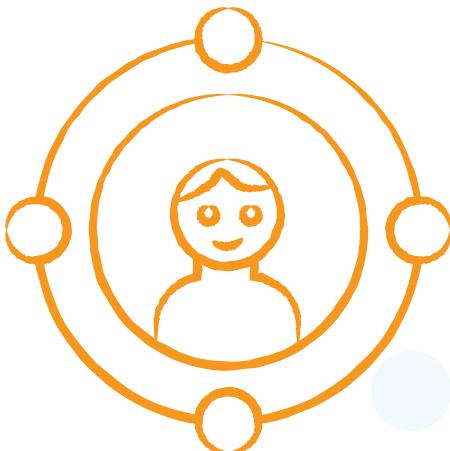
- Disability should be framed as a societal issue, not a medical condition.
- Barriers faced by disabled people are societal, attitudinal and environmental and must be addressed through societal, environmental and attitudinal change.
- Use the term “disabled people” rather than “people with disabilities” emphasising that adjustments must be made by society.

## Accessible Communication and Materials

- All political materials (leaflets, manifestos, briefings) must be available in all accessible formats.
- QR codes should be included in all materials linking to videos with lived experience examples of accessibility in action.

## Training Development

- Develop an online training module on inclusive language and terminology.
- Make this training mandatory for all.
- Use resources such as – Disability Wales’ Social Model toolkit<sup>6</sup> to support learning.
- Party is educated on the importance of reasonable adjustments.



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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.disabilitywales.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/SMD-Toolkit.pdf>

## Inclusive Events and Political Engagement

- Ensure hustings and political meetings are accessible with BSL interpretation, palantypists, and communication support.
- Briefings and debates must be fully accessible to all participants.

## Respect for Identity and Language Preferences

- People have the right to be addressed as they prefer, including those who do not identify as disabled, for example a person who is Neurodivergent.
- Engage with representative groups to ensure correct and respectful language is used.

## Leadership and Implementation

- The presiding officer must promote appropriate language use and inclusivity initiatives.

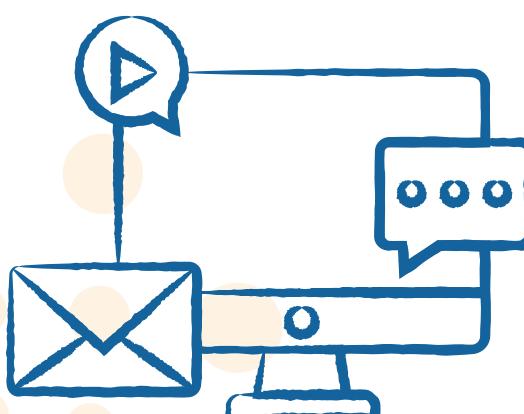


# Alternative Means of Participation

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## Core Principles

- Explore hybrid and internal digital voting options to increase inclusivity.
- Understanding that attendance in person can be difficult for Deaf / disabled / neurodivergent people, carers, parents, and those in remote areas.
- Knowing that full participation should not require physical presence will avoid exclusion, discrimination or disenfranchisement.



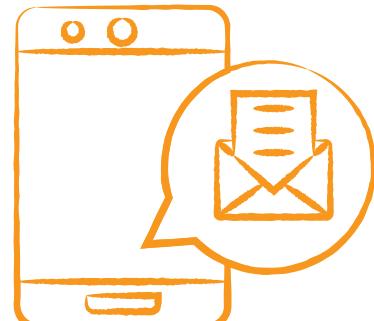
## Technology Requirements for Hybrid Participation

- Use technology (internet, audio equipment) effectively with an accessible platform to allow hybrid attendance and voting.
- Changes may be needed in meeting rules to allow hybrid attendees to participate and vote.
- Best practices should be modelled on the Senedd's hybrid voting system.

## Financial and Logistical Considerations

### Targeted Training for Key Roles:

- Identify funding for reasonable adjustments and equipment.
- Explore the possibility of centrally funded reasonable adjustments for smaller meetings.
- Address the issue of some parties prohibiting hybrid community meetings.



## Expanding Inclusivity

- Hybrid meetings can increase participation for Deaf / disabled / neurodivergent people and others who face barriers to attending in person.
- Push for all regional and community meetings to be hybrid.

## Accessibility and Equipment

- Ensure accessible venues and provide technology for participation.
- Ensure accessible voting mechanisms for internal elections and decision-making.

# Voluntary Publication of Candidate Diversity Data

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## Candidate Diversity Monitoring

- Make a commitment to voluntarily publish data on the protected characteristics of political candidates in line with Welsh Government's Diversity and Inclusion Guidance and the Local Government Candidate Survey<sup>7</sup>.
- Section 106 of the Equality Act has not yet been enacted by the UK Government, implementing it voluntarily along with the above guidance, enhances transparency, improves representation, and supports diversity in political participation, particularly for Deaf / disabled / neurodivergent candidates.
- Disability is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010<sup>8</sup>, which safeguards individuals from discrimination in various settings, including political parties.
- The Act also allows for positive action to improve representation and remove barriers for Deaf / disabled / neurodivergent individuals.
- Collect and publish anonymised data on the protected characteristics of all party candidates.

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2023-03/local-government-candidates-survey-2022\\_0.pdf](https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2023-03/local-government-candidates-survey-2022_0.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/106>

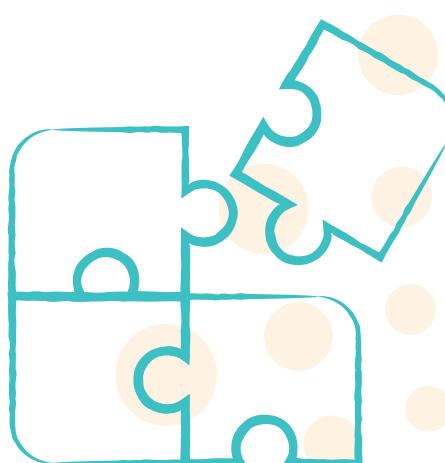
## By voluntarily publishing candidate diversity data, we will:

- Promote transparency about representation gaps.
- Strengthen our commitment to inclusivity.
- Encourage a culture where candidates feel comfortable disclosing their disability status.
- Improve opportunities for Deaf / disabled / neurodivergent candidates to be selected and supported.



## Enhanced Transparency

- Provide clear, accessible reports on party diversity and areas where improvement is needed.
- Demonstrate accountability in adopting an inclusive political landscape.
- Independent candidates will also need to be included in the collection of diversity data particularly at Local Government where numbers may be higher.



## Privacy and Ethical Considerations

- Ensure that all disclosures remain voluntary and anonymous.
- Respect candidates' right to privacy while encouraging participation.

## Culture Shift for Greater Inclusivity

- Reduce bureaucratic barriers to disclosure.
- Adopt an environment where Deaf / disabled / neurodivergent candidates feel supported in running for political office.
- Increase visibility of Deaf / disabled / neurodivergent individuals in leadership roles to inspire and encourage future candidates.

## Data Collection and Reporting

- We will invite candidates to disclose their protected characteristics voluntarily.
- Data will be anonymised and collected to ensure privacy is maintained.
- Reports will be published after elections, detailing representation trends and diversity gaps.



## Legislative and Institutional Support

- Collaborate with electoral commissions and presiding officers to explore mandatory disclosure through an independent body.
- Advocate for the full enactment of Section 106 to make reporting a legal requirement.
- Utilise Welsh Government's Diversity and Inclusion Guidance for Registered Political Parties as a tool to support increasing diversity among people who are currently underrepresented<sup>9</sup>.

## Positive Action Measures

- Utilise provisions within the Equality Act to introduce policies that support Deaf / disabled / neurodivergent candidates.

## Public Engagement and Awareness

- Launch campaigns to raise awareness about the importance of diverse political representation.
- Engage with Deaf / disabled / neurodivergent communities addressing barriers to participation and encouraging candidacy.
- Highlight role models and success stories to encourage confidence in prospective Deaf / disabled / neurodivergent candidates.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.gov.wales/diversity-and-inclusion-guidance-registered-political-parties>

# Job-Sharing for Elected Roles

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## Enhancing Accessibility and Representation

- Presents an opportunity to make public office more accessible to individuals who face barriers to full-time political engagement.
- Including Deaf / disabled / neurodivergent people, those with long-term health conditions and carers, who may struggle with the demands of traditional political roles due to fatigue, unpredictability, or other constraints.
- Adopting greater inclusion and ensuring a broader range of voices are represented in decision-making spaces.

## Existing Precedents

- For example: Senedd staff and trade unions have already implemented job-sharing arrangements successfully.
- Demonstrates that shared leadership roles can be effective in practice, provided there is clarity around responsibility and decision-making processes.
- Existing equality laws support the requirement for reasonable adjustments in public office to provide greater accessibility.
- Without explicit legislative provisions, uncertainty remains around the legality and practical implementation of job-sharing for elected positions.

## Challenges and Considerations

- **Practical Concerns:** Sharing responsibilities, maintaining consistency in policy decisions, and ensuring coordinated engagement with constituents could present operational hurdles.
- **Implementation Timeline:** The process of introducing job-sharing would require phased implementation, consultations, and legal amendments.
- **Legal Adjustments:** Legislative frameworks need to be adapted to explicitly allow and regulate job-sharing for elected positions, ensuring clarity on accountability, voting rights, and governance structures.



# Increasing Representation of **Disabled Candidates**

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## **Safe Spaces to Share**

- Establish safe, confidential spaces where Deaf / disabled / neurodivergent candidates can choose to share information about their impairment or health condition without fear of prejudice.
- Respect candidates' right to privacy while acknowledging that greater visibility can encourage and empower others.
- Promote open conversations about the advantages of sharing their experiences publicly, showcasing diverse lived experiences.

## **Increasing representation across the board**

- While candidates aren't required to share their impairment or health condition publicly, parties should track representation to ensure diversity and lived experience of disabling barriers.

## Breaking Down Barriers

- Challenge outdated perceptions that Deaf / disabled / neurodivergent people “can’t do that” by promoting stories of successful Deaf / disabled / neurodivergent politicians.
- Provide training and awareness to party members to combat unconscious bias.
- Create policies that promote flexible, accessible campaigning methods, including digital canvassing.

## Mentoring and Team support

- Implement mentoring programs, where mentors and Deaf / disabled / neurodivergent candidates can learn from one another. Ideally the mentor will have their own lived experience.
- Offering “on-the-job” learning opportunities through mentoring helps candidates build skills and confidence.
- Provide party-backed support to navigate the complexities of work-life balance, factoring in the candidate’s health condition, neurodivergence and/or impairment.
- Ensure practical adjustments are in place including fast-tracked Access to Work support removing logistical barriers.
- Build support teams around Deaf / disabled / neurodivergent candidates with lived experience expertise.
- Create ambition and show that Deaf / disabled / neurodivergent people can thrive in public office.

## Visibility and Long-Term Impact

- Promote intersectionality of Deaf / disabled / neurodivergent candidates with visible and non-visible impairments to encourage future generations.
- Encourage young Deaf / disabled / neurodivergent people to engage with politics by showcasing relatable role models.
- Build a network of candidates through ongoing mentorship, creating a cycle where today's leaders support tomorrow's candidates.



# Adopt the **Social Model** **of Disability**

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- The Social Model of Disability is foundational, it reframes disability as the result of societal barriers, not individual impairments.
- Everything hinges on embedding this model in policy and practice.
- Parties can recognise that the problem lies in inaccessible environments, discriminatory attitudes, and systemic exclusion, not in Deaf / disabled / neurodivergent people themselves.

## Key principles

- **Using appropriate language and terminology:** respecting the identity and individuality of Deaf / disabled / neurodivergent people. Self-definition must always be honoured.
- **Implementing Reasonable Adjustments:** ensuring adjustments can be made proactively, without the need for someone to disclose a disability.
- **Recognising disability through the lens of the Social Model:** not solely as defined under the Equality Act. The Social Model of disability must not be diminished or overridden by legal definitions that fail to capture the lived experience.
- **Applying Universal Design principles:** creating environments and systems that work for everyone designing with inclusive accessibility in mind.
- **Mandatory training for all political parties:** on the Social Model of Disability to ensure genuine understanding and consistent application.
- **Promoting and learning from success stories and best practice:** including Disability Wales' Social Model Toolkit<sup>10</sup>.
- **Investing in initiatives such as apprenticeships** to provide real-world experience and support mutual learning, thereby strengthening the practical implementation of the Social Model.

Adopting the Social Model is not only about policy alignment it's about creating an inclusive, respectful, society where everyone can thrive not just survive.



<sup>10</sup> <https://www.disabilitywales.org/social-model/>



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