

Access to Politics Toolkit

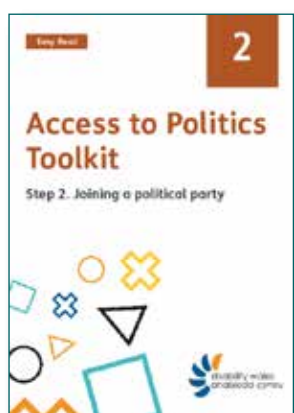
Step 2. Joining a political party



About this booklet



This is an Easy Read version of: **Access to Politics Toolkit – Stage 2. Joining a Political Party.**



This part of the toolkit is about:

- Choosing a political party to join.
- Explaining your support needs.
- Joining a party.
- Your rights.



You might need help to read it. You can ask someone you know to help you.

Contents

How to choose a political party	4
Joining a party – what usually happens.....	10
What to expect as a new member	15
Understanding unwritten rules	18
Overcoming barriers when you join	21
Your rights when you a join a party	27
First steps you can do right now.....	30
More information.....	32

How to choose a political party



Political parties can be very different. This step can help you choose the party that is right for you.



You do not need to know everything about politics.



It is more important to find a party that values you. You should feel safe and able to take part.



Think about:

- Does the party share the beliefs and plans that matter to you.
- Does the party understand your life and the issues you care about.
- Does the party welcome different people.
- Do you have any worries about the party.
- Does the party have a plan for fairness and including people.



No party is perfect. You do not need to choose one straight away. You can change your mind over time.

Local party groups



Most political parties have local groups. This is where local party members meet and work together.



Local party groups can be very different. Check your if your local group:



- Has someone in charge of disability and fairness.



- Has disabled members.



- Has accessible meetings – meetings where people with different needs can take part.



- Is willing to listen and improve.

You can do this by finding out:



- If meetings are in person, online or both.



- If the office or building is easy to get into and get around in. For example, are there steps, accessible toilets.



- If you can travel there easily.



- If they have people who oversee equality, safety, and disability issues.



If your local group does not feel right for you yet, you can still join the national party.



You can learn more about the party and your local group in private. And take part at your own pace.

Joining a party – what usually happens

To join a political party, you usually have to:



- Fill out an application form.

- Pay a membership fee.



- Wait for a reply from the party.



- You will be given details of your local group.



- You will get information about the party and being a member.

This can be hard because:



- The forms can be hard to read and fill out.



- It is not clear what is done with your information.



- You are not given the chance to share your support needs.



- You are not told what happens next.



- You are not given a contact person.

Sharing your support needs



Most parties do not ask about your support needs.



This makes it hard for disabled people to fully take part.



It is important to share your support needs.



You are not asking for special treatment. It is your right to be included.



Sharing your needs helps you get the right support.
And it helps the party include more people.

You can share:



- The best way to communicate with you.



- What you need to take part in meetings.



- That you need breaks.



- That you need information in different formats – like easy read, or large print.



- That you do not like taking phone calls.



- That you need quiet spaces to work in, or certain lighting.



- That you need help with forms or certain processes.



You can use the **Personal Development Form** in this toolkit to help you talk about your needs.



Ask the party who you should send your support needs to. They should give you the name of a person in the party.

What to expect as a new member



After joining many people feel unsure of what to do next.

You should get:



- A welcome email – you can reply and ask for a contact person.



- Invites to meetings – go when you feel ready.

Feeling out of place



Lots of people feel out of place at first.



Meetings can be hard to take part in. This is not your fault.



It is usually because the party has not thought about different needs. You can help them make changes.

To help with this, you can:



- Go to a meeting just to watch how it goes.



- Ask to see meeting papers before the meeting date.



- Ask for a link to join online.

- Connect with someone who stands up for disabled people's rights.



- Join online groups, on things like Facebook and WhatsApp.



- Email people in the party explaining you are new. Ask them how you can get involved.

Understanding unwritten rules



Unwritten rules are rules people think everyone knows. But they are not written down or talked about.

This can be confusing. It can be things like:



- When you should speak at meetings.



- How decisions are made.



- Who everyone looks to and listens to when making decisions.



- How people get chosen for roles.



- Which meetings matter and which do not.



It can be harder for disabled people to get used to unwritten rules.



A **mentor** or **peer network** can help with this.



A **mentor** is someone who supports you to get better at something.



A **peer network** is a group of people, in similar situations as you, supporting each other.

Overcoming barriers when you join



Barriers are things that stop you or make it harder for you to fully take part.



Here are some examples of barriers and how you can overcome them.

Barrier: Inaccessible meetings

Overcoming this:



- Ask if you can join an in person meeting online.



- Ask for captions or transcripts – this is when spoken words are written on your screen.



- Suggest they include accessibility on every agenda. This means they are always thinking about changes they can make to include everyone.

Barrier: No local disability officer

Overcoming this barrier:



- Ask who manages including people.



- Ask for a disability officer to be appointed.



- Offer to work with the party to create a disability officer.



- Use the national parties plans and policies.

Barrier: officers do not reply to you

Overcoming this barrier:



- Ask for someone else you can contact.



- Copy other officers into your emails.



- Go to a meeting and introduce yourself to the officer.



- Ask someone to support.

Barrier: Low energy or mental health limits

Overcoming this barrier:



- Go to meetings once every few months at first.



- Start with online events.



- Use emails instead of going to meetings.



- Take your own time. You do not have to go to every meeting and event.

Barrier: Worrying about not fitting in

Overcoming this barrier:



- Remember most members feel this way.



- Focus on what matters to you.



- Connect with other disabled members.

Your rights when you join a party

The law says political parties must:



- Provide **reasonable adjustments** – changes to make it easier for you to take part.



- Offer equal chances for different people to take part.



- Make meetings and ways of working **accessible**.



- Communicate in different ways – like Plain English, Easy Read, and video.



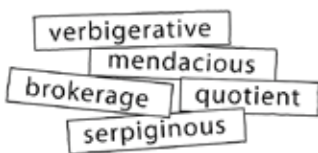
Taking part should **never** depend on your:



- Ability to travel at night.



- Ability to stand for long periods.



- Ability to understand jargon.



- Ability to use phones.



- Ability to attend every meeting.



Accessibility is a right, not a favour.

First steps you can do right now

If you think you want to join a party, you can do small things, like:



- Look through their websites.



- Ask friends, family and other people for their views and advice.



- Go to an open or public meeting.



- Email an equality officer and ask them about accessibility and how they support people with different needs.



- Talk to someone who is already a member.



- Write a list of what you need to take part.



You can join when you are ready. Or not at all. It is your choice.



When you feel comfortable to join, step 3 will help you get involved with your chosen party.

More information



To find out more contact **Kat Watkins**, the Access to Politics Project Officer:



Website:

disabilitywales.org/projects/access-to-politics



Email:

kat.watkins@disabilitywales.org



Hawdd ei Ddeall Cymru
Easy Read Wales

[Easy Read Wales](#) made this Easy Read document.
[Click here to tell us what you think.](#)

Photosymbols®
Publisher Licence 403527247