

Access to Politics Toolkit

Step 3. Getting involved in party work



About this booklet



This is an Easy Read version of: **Access to Politics Toolkit – Stage 3. Getting involved in your political party.**



This part of the toolkit is about:

- Meeting people and joining support networks.
- Understanding how the party works.
- Going to meetings.
- Taking part in your way



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

Contents

Getting support and joining networks.....	4
Going to meetings	8
Understanding how the party works and unwritten rules	16
How to take part at your own pace.....	21
Making yourself known	26
More information.....	29

Getting support and joining networks



This part of the toolkit will help you get support within your party. You do not have to do everything alone.

Mentors



Mentors can be:

- A disabled member.
- An equality or disability officer.
- Someone who has stood for election.
- Any trusted member willing to help you.

A good mentor should:



- Explain words and terms used.



- Introduce you to important people.



- Help you understand unwritten rules – rules everyone seems to know but do not explain.



- Give you honest advice.



- Support you to overcome barriers.

Other Disabled Members



Within the party, you can get to know and work with other disabled members.



They will understand what things are like for you. And be able to support you and encourage you.



Your party may have a disabled people's members group.



You can get support from Disabled People's Organisations.

Going at your own pace



You do not need to:

- Go to every meeting.
- Be online all the time.
- Volunteer straight away.
- Prove yourself.



Start slowly, even 1 meeting every few months counts.

Going to meetings



Meetings can feel scary, hard, or confusing.



This section helps you feel confident about joining meetings.

What usually happens in meetings



All meetings will have an agenda. This is a list of things to talk about at the meeting.

Most agendas include:



- Apologies – People who could not go to the meeting.



- Minutes of last meeting – a check to see if the minutes, or notes, from the last meeting are right.



- Reports from officers – an update of their work.



- Actions or policy – talking about what needs to be done and when.



- Campaign updates.



- Sometimes officers are chosen or elected.



- Any other business – anything else people want to talk about that is not on the agenda.

It's normal to:



- Not understand a lot of the agenda and the words used.



- Need help keeping up.



- Feel unsure of when to speak.



You are not the only one who feels like this. Many non-disabled people feel the same.

Asking for changes



You can ask for **reasonable adjustments** – changes to help you fully take part in meetings.

You can ask for things like:



- Joining in person meetings online.



- Captions or transcripts – spoken words written out on your screen.



- Agenda and papers before the meeting - so you can read them and have time to understand them.



- Clear language, no jargon – words used as a short way of saying something.



- Support to take notes.



- Comfort breaks.



- Quiet spaces.



- Changes to things like sound and lighting.

You can also ask:



- To speak first or last.



- To share your views by email instead of having to speak them.



- To talk about things affecting you earlier in the meeting.

What if they say no?



This does happen but you can still:

- Explain why the change is needed.
- Tell them they have a duty by law to make reasonable adjustments.
- Suggest easier changes.
- Ask for the decision in writing.
- Tell the equality officer about the issue.



Asking for changes is your right. Accessibility is not optional.

Understanding how the party works and unwritten rules



Unwritten rules are rules everyone knows about, but no one explains.



Every party works in different ways, but there are some things most parties have:

Regulars



“Regulars” are members who have been part of the party for a long time.



They have held their roles for a long time and know each other well.



They are given time and space to talk about issues.



Taking part is easy for them. They may have forgotten what it is like to be a new member.



This can make new members feel like outsiders.



This is a problem with how parties work. It does not mean you are any less important.

Informal power structures

This is when decisions are made outside of meetings. For example:



- Small groups of people chatting outside of meetings.



- Connecting with people at social events.



- Important conversations happening in the pub or late at night.



You do not have to take part in anything you would struggle to be part of.

Being left out



You may be left out because of attitudes. For example, people saying things like 'but we have always done it this way'.



People may not listen to your ideas or support needs.



People may try to control who knows what, and keep certain information from different people.



People may not understand you or your needs.



You may not be able to get in and around some spaces.

Remember:



- You are not being difficult. You are asking for your rights.



- Change is slow but possible.



- You can choose how and when to challenge things.

How to take part at your own pace



Disabled members often feel pressure to prove themselves.



They can feel they must go to everything. Even if it is inaccessible – difficult to take part in.



You do not need to do this. Your wellbeing matters.

Choose what you do carefully



Choose work that matches your strengths and skills, for example:



- Go to important meetings only.

- Help with online campaigns.

- Write policy ideas at home.



- Be a spokesperson for disability issues.

- Support your party's Disabled People's officer.



- Join working groups that interest you.

Look after yourself



Disabled members often feel pressure to do too much.



It's okay to set rules for how you take part.

Examples:

- “I can meet online, but not in person.”
- “I can work on 1 task at a time.”
- “I need agendas early otherwise I cannot take part.”
- “I won't do evening events.”



This helps you stay involved, without being overworked.

You can also:



- Plan time to rest before and after meetings.



- Take breaks from meetings when needed.



- Do not feel guilty about saying no.

- Work online whenever you can.



- Share duties with others.



Take care of your mental health too.

Politics can be hard for disabled people:



- You may worry about being too much trouble.



- You may feel you do not belong.



- People may not understand your needs.



You are not alone in these feelings.

Making yourself known



If you want to be selected for a role in the future, make sure people know who you are.

Ways to be known without overworking yourself:



- Share your views in 1 meeting.



- Share your experience when it is important to what you are talking about.



- Introduce yourself to the main officers.



- Volunteer for 1 small task when you can.



- Use social media. Remember to be professional.



- Go to social events that are easy for you to take part in.



- Share ideas by email if public speaking is hard.



If things are not going well, get help.



When you feel ready, Stage 4 will guide you through the next step - Becoming a candidate for your 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