

How do disabled people take part in politics?



University of
Strathclyde
Glasgow

UNIVERSITY OF
Southampton



This is an Easy Read guide to the book
Disability and Political Representation.

Contents

What is in this guide

- Chapter 1 About this book, page 3.
- Chapter 2 How we can change the way we think about politics, page 10.
- Chapter 3 Things that make it hard for disabled people to vote, page 12.
- Chapter 4 Things that make taking part in politics harder for disabled people, page 14.
- Chapter 5 Things that make politics harder for disabled candidates and MPs, page 16.
- Chapter 6 What people think of disabled candidates, page 19.
- Chapter 7 Disability rights in Government, page 20.
- Chapter 8 Disabled MPs do important work for disabled people, page 22.
- Chapter 9 How we can change politics to include more disabled people, page 24.

Chapter 1

About this book



We are **researchers** at the University of Southampton and the University of Strathclyde.

Our job as **researchers** is to find things out so we can all understand things better.



We want to understand how disabled people's voices can be a part of **politics**.

Politics is the way people decide how to run the country and their local area.



Politics means talking about

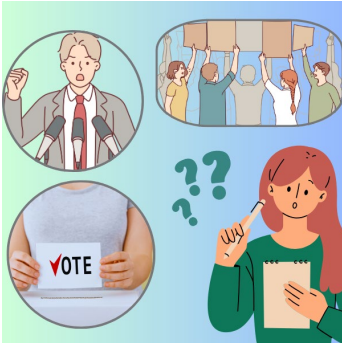
- ideas and how to make things better
- changing laws and rules
- and choosing our leaders.



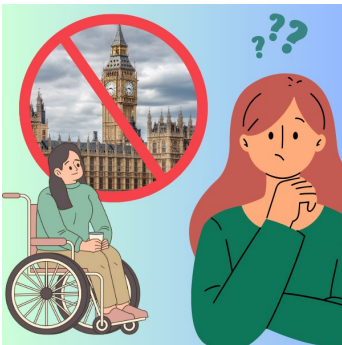
We think it is important that the views and experiences of disabled people are included.

But disabled people are left out of politics in lots of different ways. They are **excluded**.

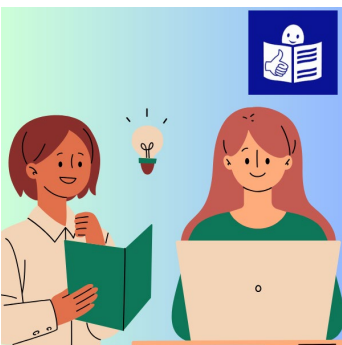
What we wanted to find out



We started a research project to find out the answers to these 2 questions.



- How do disabled people take part in politics in the UK?
- What stops disabled people from taking part in politics?



We wanted to tell people what we found out in our research.

So we wrote a book called

Disability and Political Representation.



This is an Easy Read guide to our book.

We start by explaining some important things about how politics works in the UK.

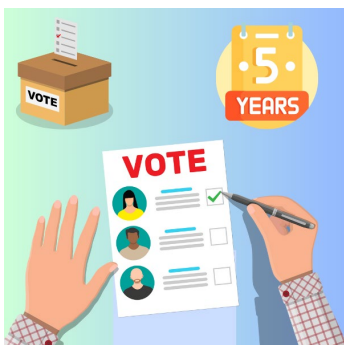
The UK is a democracy



The UK is a **democracy**.

This means every adult can have a say about who they want to run the country.

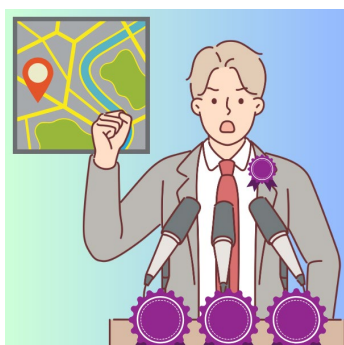
If we do not agree with how the country is run we have the power to change this.



We decide who we want to run the country by voting in elections.

In elections we can vote for a **candidate**.

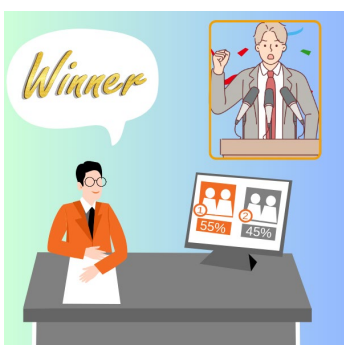
A **candidate** is someone who wants to represent us and other voters in our area.



It is important who we choose.

In local elections we can vote for candidates to represent us in the local council.

For example as a councillor or mayor.

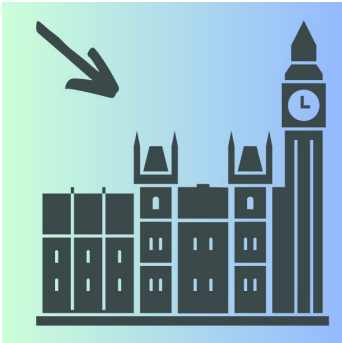


In the general election we vote for a candidate to be our **MP** in the **Houses of Parliament**.

MP stands for Member of Parliament.

The candidate with the most votes wins and gets to represent us as our MP.

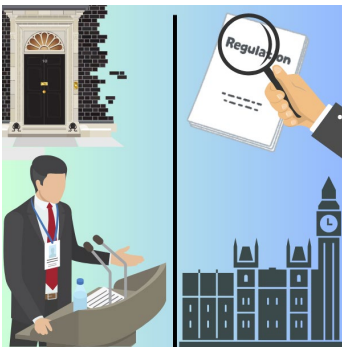
Government and the Houses of Parliament



This building is the **Houses of Parliament**.

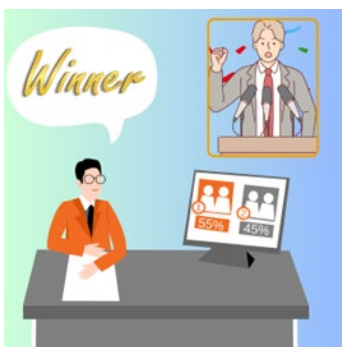
We call it **Parliament**. It is in London.

Parliament is where MPs make sure the Government thinks about what is important to us and our local communities.



The job of Parliament is to check what the Government is doing.

Parliament is separate to the **Government**.



The Government decides how the UK should be run.

The party with the most MPs after a general election gets to make the Government.



The Government runs things like

- the NHS
- the police
- schools
- disability benefits.

Political representation



Your MP and councillors represent you.

They should listen to you and stand up for you and your community.

This is called **political representation**.



MPs and local councillors are **politicians**.

Politicians help decide rules and laws that can make big changes in all our lives.

A politician is an important job.



We think there should be more disabled politicians.

Then politicians will talk more about things that matter to disabled people.

And disabled people can get what they need.



It is **not** always easy to tell if somebody is disabled. We only know when they tell us.

We think some disabled politicians do not say they are disabled.

Because disabled people often get treated badly.

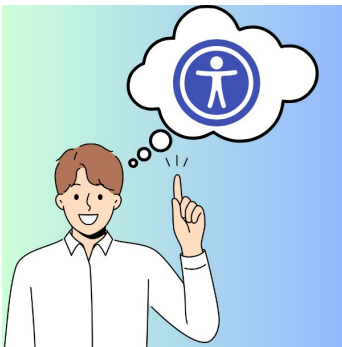
Thinking about disability



Disabled people have differences or illnesses to do with their body or mind.

Like having a learning disability.
Or using a wheelchair.

This can make doing everyday things harder.

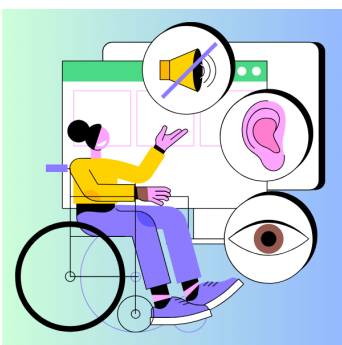


The **Social Model of Disability** is a different way of thinking about disability.



It says that disabled people are not the problem.

It says people are not disabled because they are ill or their body is different.



It says the problem is that the things around disabled people are not made for them.

Like buildings, services and information.

It shows us this is not fair.

To answer our questions about disability and politics, we did 4 kinds of research



1. We read the laws on **voting** in the UK.

Voting is when we choose a politician to represent us.

For example as an MP in Parliament.



2. We spoke to 82 disabled politicians and **political activists** to hear their experiences.

A **political activist** is someone who tries to change things in politics and law.



3. We looked at what people said in surveys.

We wanted to know if disabled people felt their needs and ideas were represented in politics.



4. We also did an **experiment**.

An **experiment** is when someone does a test to learn something new.

We wanted to find out how voters treat disabled politicians.

Chapter 2

How we can change the way we think about politics



In the past, political representation did not always mean everyone was represented.

Most MPs were rich white men.

They did not always listen to what other people needed or wanted.



In the past, other groups of people were left out of politics.

Like women.

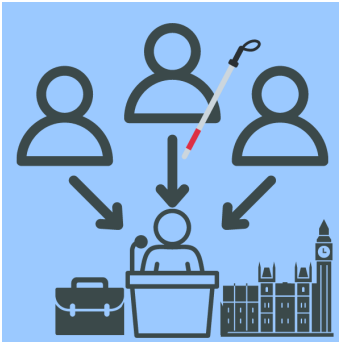
Women only got the right to vote in 1928.



Disabled people were also left out of politics.



In the past, some people thought disabled people should not take part in politics.

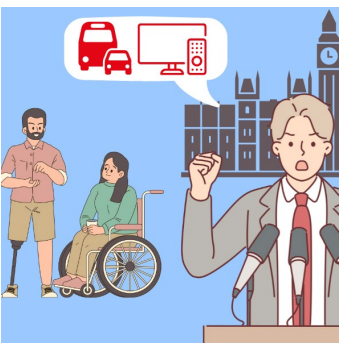


We think that when we say political representation it should mean that everyone is represented.

This means disabled people too.

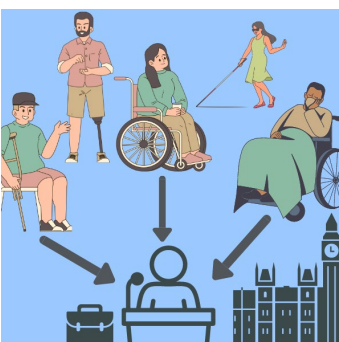


We think the experiences of disabled people are important in political representation.



We think good political representation of disabled people is when politicians understand more about disabled people's lives.

And their Lived Experiences.

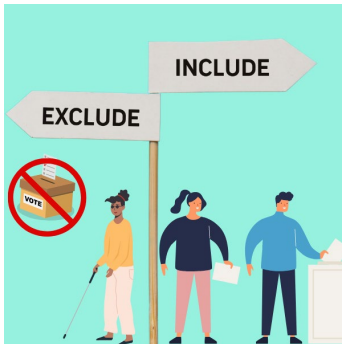


In our book we call this idea **Experiential Representation.**

Another way to say it is Lived Experience Representation.

Chapter 3

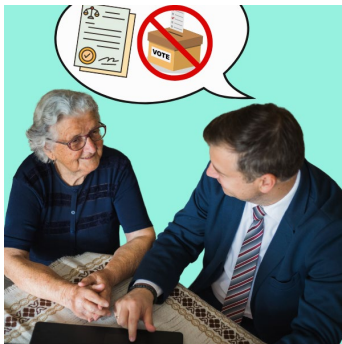
Things that make it hard for disabled people to vote



Even today, not all disabled people have the right to vote.

Some disabled people are **excluded**.

This means they are left out of politics.



Some disabled people in Europe cannot vote because they are under **legal guardianship**.

This means doctors say they are not able to make important decisions.

So someone else makes decisions for them.



Other disabled people do not vote because some polling stations are not accessible for them.

Like people who are visually impaired.

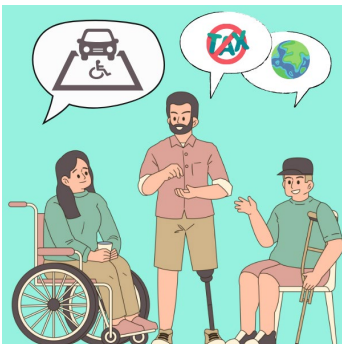


This is against the law.

But it still happens.



So disabled people vote less than non-disabled people.



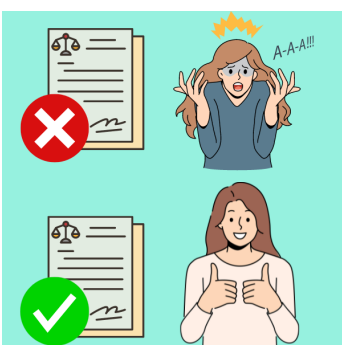
But research shows that many disabled people are interested in politics.

And that some disabled people take part in politics in other ways.



Like being **political activists**.

Political activists try to change things in politics and law.



Political activists do this by telling the public what the problems are and why.

Then telling the Government what they think needs to change.

Chapter 4

Things that make taking part in politics harder for disabled people



A **political party** is a group of people who share the same ideas about the best way to run the Government.

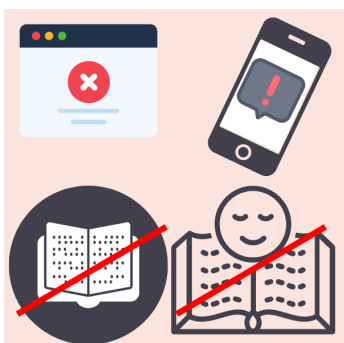


Some big political parties in the UK are

- Conservatives
- Labour
- Liberal Democrats
- Scottish National Party.



But lots of things make it hard for disabled people to be part of these political parties.

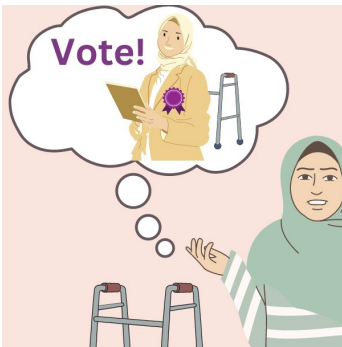


For example,

- Websites are not always accessible.
- Leaflets are not always in accessible formats like Easy Read or Braille.



- Meetings are sometimes in buildings that disabled people cannot use.



- Disabled people are sometimes stopped from talking to the public about politics.

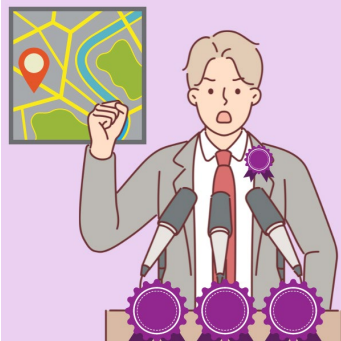


For example, a political activist told us

“...disabled people were told that disability doesn’t look good on the doorstep...”

Chapter 5

Things that make politics harder for disabled candidates and politicians



A candidate is normally part of a political party.



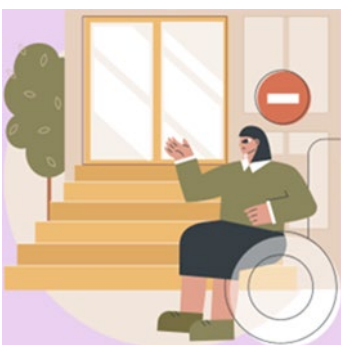
Like the Conservative or Labour Party.



But lots of things make it hard for disabled people to become a candidate.

Or to work in politics.

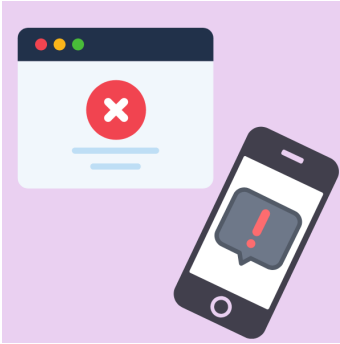
For example,



Buildings

Some buildings are not accessible. They might need ramps or better signs.

Then more disabled candidates and politicians can use the buildings.

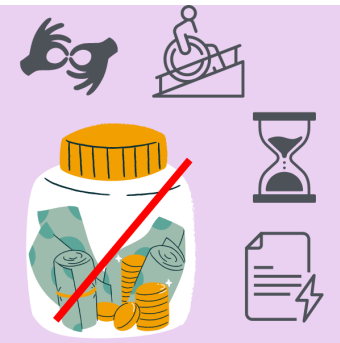


Information

Some disabled politicians do not get information in the right way.



Like blind politicians who need information in Braille.



Money

There is not enough money to make things accessible.

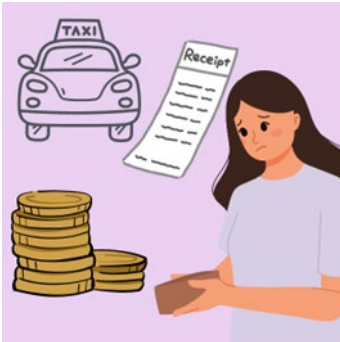


Wrong ideas

Lots of people still have wrong ideas about disabled people.

They think that disabled people cannot do things. Like being a councillor or an MP.

Stories from Lived Experiences

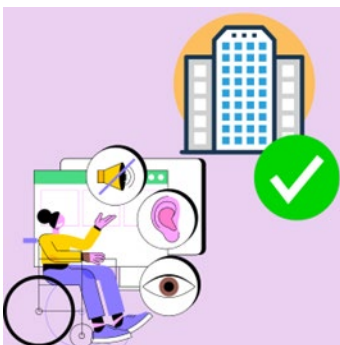


A local politician told us she did not have enough money to do her job.

She had to use a taxi for her work because of her disability.



But the council would not pay for the taxi. So she had to pay with her own money.



An MP told us the Government should use a new building that is easier for disabled MPs to use.

It should be accessible for everyone.



He said the Government should stop spending lots of money fixing old buildings.

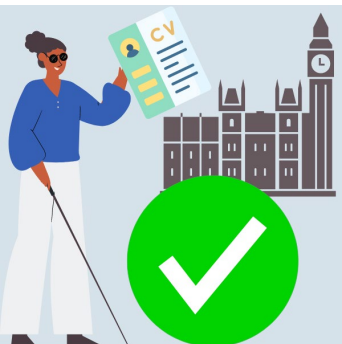
Chapter 6

What people think of disabled candidates

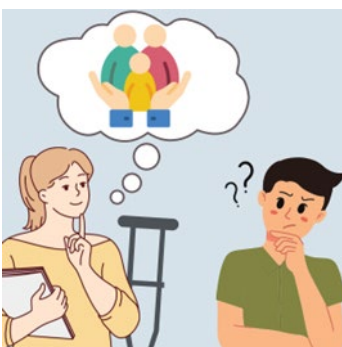


We asked **voters** in the UK and the USA what they think about disabled candidates.

Voters are people who vote in elections.



Most voters said disabled candidates have the same skills and experience as non-disabled candidates.



But that they are more honest, understanding and hard-working than non-disabled people.

And know more about things like healthcare than non-disabled people.



Voters think disabled people are not as strong as non-disabled people.

But people are just as likely to vote for disabled people as non-disabled candidates.

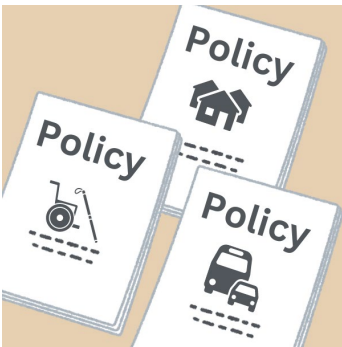
Chapter 7

Disability rights are not well represented



We know from surveys what **policies** are important to disabled people.

A **policy** is an idea or plan that a political party has about how to do something.



Political parties have lots of different policies. For example on

- housing
- disability
- transport.



We found out that the Government did not use policies that were important to disabled people.



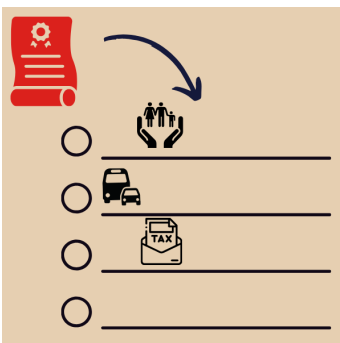
This is the same for disabled people in countries all over Europe.



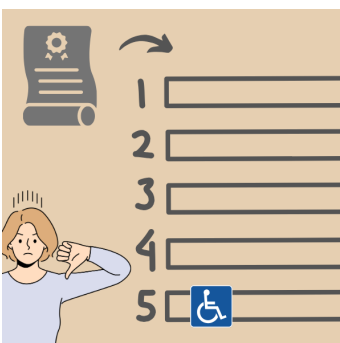
We also looked at the **manifesto** of each political party.



A **manifesto** is a list of big ideas and plans.
A manifesto tells voters how the political party would like to run the country.



And the changes the party would like to make when they are in Government.
For example, a manifesto might say that a party will make all buses accessible.



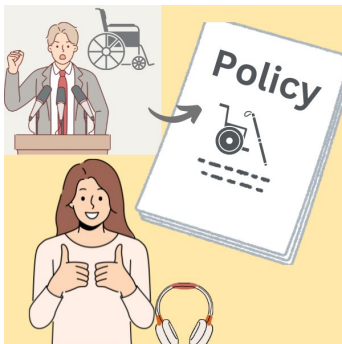
We found out that political parties do not see disability as important when they write their manifestos.

Chapter 8

Disabled MPs do important work for disabled people

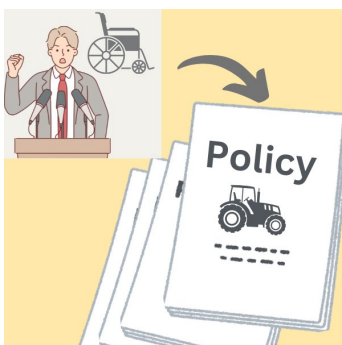


We looked at what kind of things 31 disabled MPs did in their work.



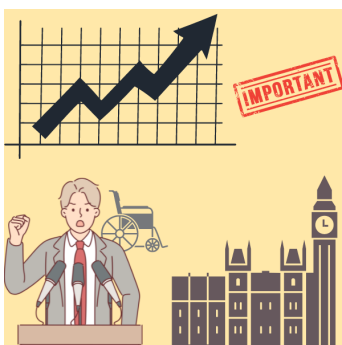
Most of these disabled MPs did important work on disability policy.

Their work made disabled people's lives better.

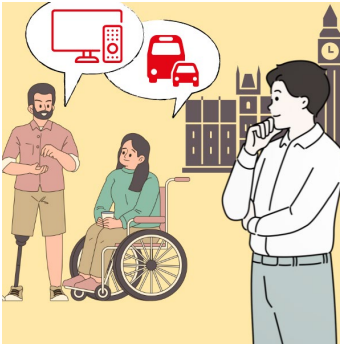


But some disabled MPs did not do work on disability at all.

They worked on other areas of politics.



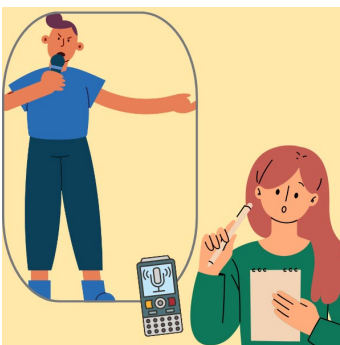
Everyone told us it was important to have more disabled politicians.



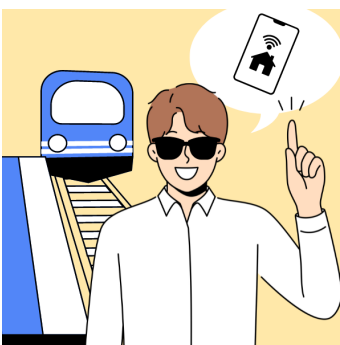
This is because we can learn from people's experiences of being disabled.



And we can make sure the things that are important to disabled people are included in policies and Government.



Someone we interviewed told us that disabled people have an understanding...



“...into what makes the world more accessible for us that non-disabled people often forget about.”

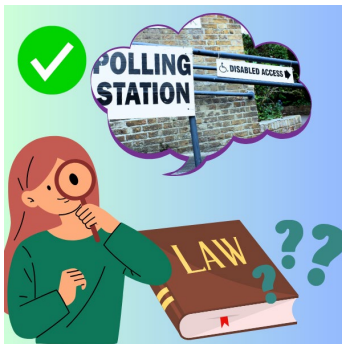
Chapter 9

How we can change politics to include more disabled people



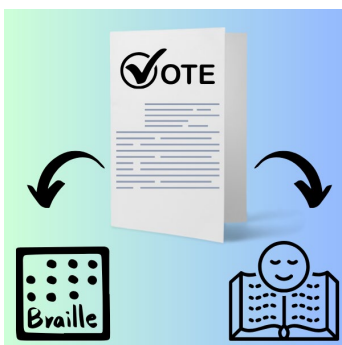
This is the last chapter.

It tells you how we can change things so disabled people are better represented in politics.



Voting

- We need to make sure the laws and rules on voting do not stop people from voting because of their disability.



- We need to make sure it is easy for disabled people to register to vote.
For example, by making sure people can get information in Easy Read.



- We need to make sure disabled people can vote in different ways.
For example, by post, in person and online.



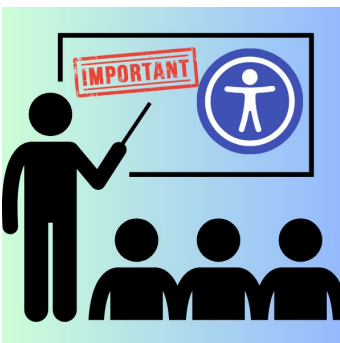
- We need to make sure all **polling stations** are accessible for people with any kind of disability or difference.

A **polling station** is where people go to vote.

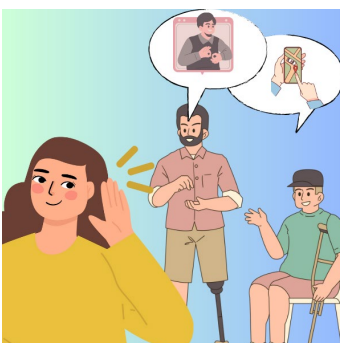


Political parties

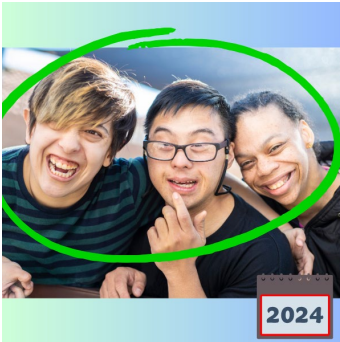
- We need to make sure all the political party websites are accessible.



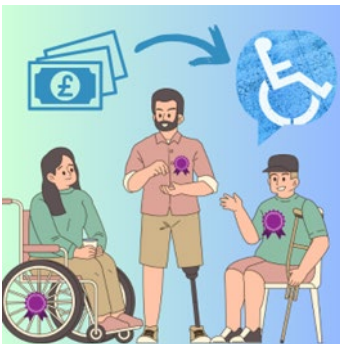
- We need to make sure members of political parties know about disability and accessibility.



- We need to work with disabled party members to hear their experiences.



- We need to check that political parties work in a way that includes everyone.



- Every political party should have a disability group.
And make sure there is money to run it.



- The disability group should make sure disabled members can give their views and experiences of the party.
And give their views about disability policies.

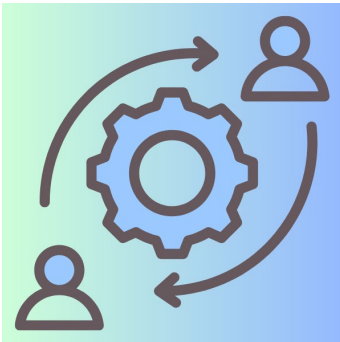


- We need to find out how many members of each political party are disabled.
And then share this with the public.



Disabled politicians

- We need to make sure that disabled candidates have enough money to pay for the extra costs of having a disability.

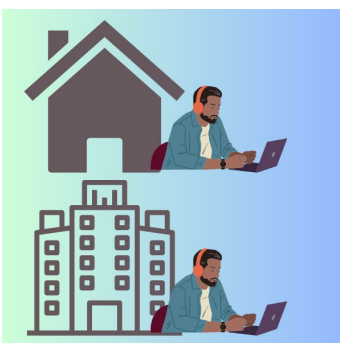


- We should check if politicians could do a **job share**.

A **job share** means 2 people would do the job. Each person would work part-time.



- We need to make sure politicians can choose **hybrid-working**.

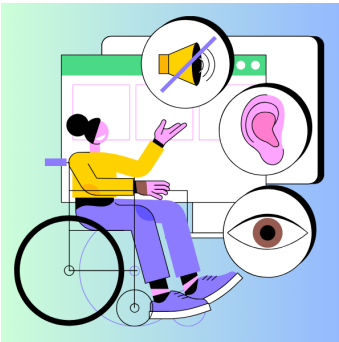


Hybrid-working means working sometimes in the office and sometimes at home.



- MPs should be able to vote in Parliament by phone or computer.

This can make it easier for some disabled MPs to take part.



- All buildings should be easier for disabled people to use.



For example, they should have

- lifts
- accessible toilets
- ramps.



- We should find out how many politicians are disabled.
And share this information with the public.



Thank you for reading this guide to our book about disability and politics.

We hope you have enjoyed it.



If you have any questions or want to tell us what you thought, please email us.



Elizabeth Evans
E.J.Evans@soton.ac.uk



Stefanie Reher
stefanie.reher@strath.ac.uk



Copyright European Easy-to-Read Logo:
Inclusion Europe. More information at
www.inclusion europe.eu/easy-to-read/



Thank you to spokespeople Shalim Ali and
Shui-Ming Man at [My Vote My Voice](#) for the
use of their photos.



This Easy Read booklet was made
by [Go Easy Read](#) and lived experts.