

Co-Chairs' Foreword

In an age when digital is 'no longer optional' for finding work, it is crucial that disabled people have full digital access, including access to assistive technologies (AT). The last 18 months have thrown into sharp relief that equality of opportunity depends on the extent to which we harness talent and technology. Both are essential, as never before, to building bridges to employment for disabled people.

The increasing use of digital tools in education, training, recruitment, and job roles, accelerated by Covid-19, is a mixed blessing for disabled people. These technologies represent unprecedented opportunities to remove barriers to employment, such as remote working for those who need to shield or who experience travel difficulties. However, inaccessible technologies and poor digital practices are actually preventing disabled people from finding and thriving in work.

As Co-Chairs of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Assistive Technology, we have seen the powerful benefits of AT and how innovative technologies can remove obstacles for disabled people entering employment. Examples include a visually-impaired person using a screen reader to access a recruiting site, or a person with Muscular Dystrophy using a mouth stick to navigate an application form, or an autistic person using a specialised app to help them travel to an interview.

Unfortunately, we have also seen disabled people struggle to get a job as a result of not having access – at the right points in their lives - to assistive technologies and the opportunities to learn to use them. Often these difficulties arise at key transition moments, resulting in 'cliff-edges' of support and 'battles' for provision.

Ultimately, inclusive digital practice benefits us all, whether we are classed as disabled or not. This was also a clear finding from Policy Connect's *Arriving at Thriving* inquiry into the experiences of disabled people at university – that learning from the experience of disabled students benefits all students.

The UK, already a world-leader in the development of assistive technologies, should harness the power of these tools and inclusive practices to make the world of work accessible to all.

We would like to thank all of the disabled people, employers, education providers, and technology and disability professionals who provided evidence to the commission. We would also like to thank the Ian Karten Charitable Trust and City Bridge Trust for their sponsorship of the inquiry, without which this work would not have been possible.



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