

Key Findings & Recommendations

Finding 1:

Current systems of AT provision leave disabled people in digital ‘black holes’ at key transition points that affect their ability to find and secure employment. The government is not ambitious enough about ensuring equitable access to digital for disabled people in their efforts to close the Disability Employment Gap.

RECOMMENDATION 1:

The Government should appoint and empower a National Assistive Technology Champion. The Champion will lead on developing and delivering, in collaboration with disabled people, a framework on disabled peoples’ life transitions that guarantees access to digital which meets the needs of the individual at all stages of life. This would remove the transition ‘black holes’ we have identified and create good bridges across the different phases from classroom to employment. The framework should ensure that new assessments build on previous ones and that data is shared safely and efficiently between stakeholders to create a feeling of seamless transition for the disabled person. In order to achieve this, the Government should begin by undertaking a comprehensive assessment of users’ access to digital assistive technology across the UK.

Finding 2:

Disabled students are leaving education without knowledge of work-based AT provision, without the skills to use AT in the workplace, and without the confidence to navigate these issues when starting a new job.

RECOMMENDATION 2A:

Education providers should ensure careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) and disability support and guidance is joined-up so that education leavers know how to access AT and support to enable their transition into employment. This should include providing on-going training to both disability support teams and careers guidance teams on AT.

RECOMMENDATION 2B:

The DfE should produce and promote guidance and resources for education providers on assistive technology and workplaces and preparing for employment. This should include information about Access to Work and other routes to securing access to AT.

Finding 3:

In its current form, Access to Work does not put AT in place fast enough for disabled students on short-term work placements, and education professionals can be unaware of this DWP-sponsored support.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

The DfE and DWP should collaborate to ensure that disabled people on work placements/traineeships/apprenticeships are able to use assistive technology from Day One of their placements. This support could be developed as an enhanced Access to Work offer jointly sponsored by both departments, or as a fund available to education providers, or a combination of both elements. It may also be appropriate to pilot a number of different approaches.

Finding 4:

The government is not systematically and strategically identifying and removing digital barriers to employment for unemployed disabled people.

RECOMMENDATION 4A:

The government should take advantage of existing JobCentre Plus (JCP) structures to identify and remove digital barriers to employment for JCP customers. To achieve this, the DWP should commission a review of current JCP AT procurement practice, with a focus on the use of the Flexible Support Fund. This review should inform the training and guidance that Work Coaches and Disability Employment Advisors receive on AT. The DWP should stop relying on customers disclosing their digital barriers by adopting inclusive practices such as investing in equality adjustment screening tools and informing all job seekers about AT and Access to Work, regardless of disability status.

RECOMMENDATION 4B:

The DWP should recognise digital access as a key enabler of employment for all customers, including those who are disabled. As such all DWP contracts related to job support (including the Work & Health Programme) should include consideration of how clients will be supported to use technology as an enabler, including assistive technology.

Finding 5:

Employees and employers (particularly SMEs and self-employed people) do not have sufficient understanding of the importance of digital accessibility and how AT can remove barriers, nor of routes to provision of AT in the workplace.

RECOMMENDATION 5A:

The government should improve targeting of disability support schemes to employers and employees who need them most (e.g. boosting the number of SMEs in the Disability Confident scheme; increasing the proportion of self-employed people using Access to Work). In order to do this, the government should collect data on who is participating in these schemes, with consideration for:

- Employer size, industry, and region
- Employee age, ethnicity, educational background, and type of disability

Based on this data, the government should launch a targeted campaign to recruit currently underrepresented participants. The success of the campaign should be measured by how well Disability Confident and Access to Work participants represent the UK as a whole. To improve awareness raising, the government should take lessons from similar programmes, like Disabled Students' Allowances, where the disability support sector itself has played an important role alongside government communications.

RECOMMENDATION 5B:

The government should take advantage of existing networks, such as Disability Confident, to skill up employers on digital accessibility and inclusive recruitment practices. The government should commission Disability Confident Leaders (Level 3) with AT expertise to produce resources for their fellow employers on technology, disability, and best practice.

RECOMMENDATION 5C:

Employers should ensure their recruitment and on-boarding practices are digitally accessible and inclusive by following guidance produced by Disability Confident Leaders (see recommendation 5B). Staff, in particular managers and HR teams, should be provided with CPD on accessibility and assistive technology. Employers should consider investing in equality adjustment screening tools and training and consultancy that is led by disabled people.

Finding 6:

Access to Work customers and their employers often have poor experiences with the provision of AT, even when official success measures are met. This suggests that current success measures (e.g. Needs Assessment reports to be sent to advisers within 8 working days) do not reflect customers' own experience of the impact of the programme.

RECOMMENDATION 6:

The government should measure the success of Access to Work's grants according to the impact on customers. To enable this, government should collect data on:

- The length of time from when an Access to Work application is triggered to when all support is in place. It is key that this includes the time it takes for an employee to complete their training in any new AT;
- Whether the employee uses the AT that was recommended to them six months after support is in place;
- The percentage of AT recommendations that are found to be inappropriate and require amending;
- The satisfaction of employee and employer with the process.

