



Government  
Equalities Office

# **Barriers to Political Representation**

Disability and the EnAble Fund

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# Glossary of Terms

## **BSL**

British Sign Language

## **Cllr**

Councillor

## **D/deaf**

D/deaf refers to those who are Deaf (sign language users) and those who are deaf (hard of hearing people with English as their first language who may lip-read and/or use hearing aids).

## **Disability**

According to the 2010 Equality Act, you are disabled if you have a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities.

## **DRUK**

Disability Rights UK

## **Impairment**

The functional limitations of an individual's body and/or mind. For example, an injury, illness, or congenital condition that causes, or is likely to cause, a loss or difference of physiological or psychological function.

## **LGA**

### Local Government Association

#### **Reasonable adjustments**

Where someone meets the definition of a disabled person under the Equality Act 2010, associations (including political parties and local councils) are required to make reasonable adjustments to policies and practices, premises and venues as well as additional aids and services. Associations are required to anticipate the needs of disabled people and to make reasonable adjustments without disabled people having to request those changes be made

# Executive Summary

The Government Equalities Office launched the interim EnAble Fund for Elected Office on 3rd December 2018, in time for the May 2019 local elections in England, and closed on 31st March 2020. The Fund was intended to cover the financial costs of any necessary reasonable adjustments which would enable a disabled person to seek elected office. The Fund was launched in order to help increase access to elected office for disabled people, and in recognition of the fact that disabled people face greater costs when seeking elected office *because* they are disabled. This report provides an evaluation of the EnAble Fund.

The Fund was administered by Disability Rights UK. Applications to the Fund went through a two-stage approval process involving an independent panel of experts on disability as well as the Political Groups of the Local Government Association.

In total, 41 candidates were awarded funding. These candidates had a range of different impairments and came from across England. The largest number of applicants came from the Labour Party. The majority of funding awarded was for £700 or less. The most frequent types of support applied for included distribution of campaign material and personal assistants. Of those who received funding, 45% were elected.

The report draws upon a survey of applicants to the Fund, as well as interviews undertaken with the Administrators of the Fund. Applicants were very satisfied with the administration of the Fund, similarly, the Administrators of the Fund were also largely satisfied with the processes and procedures. The report concludes that an earlier launch, as well as a national advertising campaign might have increased the number of applications made to the Fund. The data does not allow a direct causal line to be drawn between the funding and the number of disabled people elected, although the applicants believed the additional funding helped reduce the barriers to elected office.

This research provides government and political parties with an understanding of how effective the EnAble Fund was in addressing the barriers to elected office for disabled people. This will be used by the Disability Unit as they consider the future of support for disabled candidates and how to ultimately increase participation in public life, as part of the National Strategy for Disabled People.



# Introduction

Around 20% of the UK population is disabled,<sup>1</sup> but disabled people remain under-represented in our Parliaments, Assemblies and councils.<sup>2</sup> In recognition of the additional costs that disabled people may face when seeking to stand for elected office, the interim EnAble Fund of £250,000 was introduced in 2018. The fund was initially intended to provide financial support for disabled candidates in order to meet additional disability-related expenses. The fund was open to candidates representing political parties as well as to Independent candidates standing in the 2019 English local elections and the 2020 Police and Crime Commissioner elections; it was retrospectively expanded to support candidates who stood in the 2019 European Parliamentary elections. The interim fund closed on 31st March 2020.<sup>3</sup>

The fund was jointly administered by Disability Rights UK (DRUK) and the Local Government Association (LGA). The application process was demand-led, including a number of steps which required checks and authorisations from both an independent committee convened by DRUK and the political groups at the LGA. This report summarises the background to the fund,

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1 Department for Work and Pensions (2019) *Family Resource Survey 2017/18* [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/790000/family-resources-survey-2017-18.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/790000/family-resources-survey-2017-18.pdf)

2 Evans and Reher. 2019. Disability and Political Representation. Working paper.

3 The fund was originally intended to cover the 2020 PCC elections and had subsequently been expanded to cover the 2020 English local elections, but due to Covid-19 the elections were postponed and so the fund closed.

details the processes and procedures used to administer the fund, reports on the outcomes, and concludes by setting out the lessons learnt from the EnAble Fund. Whilst the available data does not reveal whether the fund had an impact on the number of candidates who stood for election and were elected, the overall conclusion is that the fund was effectively administered and seen as helpful by its users.

This evaluation is published alongside a research report on the barriers to elected office for disabled people. This report provides a comprehensive insight into the barriers experienced by current and former candidates, elected representatives, and those who were not selected. It also summarises the measures that have been taken in the UK and abroad to reduce the barriers.

# Background and Scope of the Fund

In 2010, the Speaker’s Conference Report on improving diversity in politics noted the additional disability-related costs which disabled people face when seeking selection and election. In 2012, the Government launched a two-year pilot fund, the Access to Elected Office Fund (AEOF), to provide grants for disabled candidates who wanted to seek elected office. The AEOF was intended to ‘level the playing field’ for disabled candidates and to increase the number of disabled people in local and national politics. In 2016, the Access to Elected Office Fund Scotland (AEOFS) launched a pilot project, supporting disabled people standing for selection and as nominated candidates in the 2017 local government elections. The AEOFS, which shared its aims with the Access Fund launched in England and Wales, was administered by Inclusion Scotland. The Scottish Government have extended the AEOFS until after the Scottish Parliamentary elections in 2021.

In December 2018, the Government Equalities Office launched the interim EnAble Fund of £250,000 to support disabled candidates, as a successor to the AEOF, principally for the English local elections in 2019.<sup>4</sup> As the Government cannot directly give financial support to

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4 See <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/fund-launched-to-support-disabled-candidates-stand-for-office>

candidates, an external contractor was appointed to administer the Fund.<sup>5</sup> Disability Rights UK (DRUK) were appointed in November 2018 following an open and competitive process. DRUK were responsible for administering the applications and for making recommendations to the four Political Groups (Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat, and Independent<sup>6</sup>) in the Local Government Association (LGA). The Political Groups decided whether or not the funding should be awarded. The administrative process brought together DRUK's specialist knowledge of disability and reasonable adjustment guidelines with the political insight into elections and campaigning provided by the LGA. The application and decision process is outlined in detail in Section 3. The administration of the fund cost £83,000, with £75,000 paid to DRUK and £8,000 to the LGA.

The grants were available for disabled people to meet additional costs in seeking selection and election as a candidate for a registered political party or as an Independent. The fund was designed to cover the cost of any reasonable adjustments necessary to enable someone to stand for elected office, e.g. BSL interpreters, Assistive Technology, a Personal Assistant to assist with specific tasks, or taxi fares where other modes of

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5 The external contractor had to meet the definition of a 'permissible donor' under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000.

6 The Independent group in the LGA represents Independent as well as smaller party councillors <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/our-meetings-and-leadership/political-composition/political-groups>

transport were not appropriate. The fund was not designed to cover the day-to-day costs of campaigning, but rather the reasonable adjustments associated with campaigning.<sup>7</sup> Deposits for Parliamentary elections were not covered by the fund.

Applicants were informed that, wherever possible, they should use existing funds/resources to reduce barriers to elected office (e.g. free bus pass, or software provided by Access to Work (with permission)). Applicants were notified that any equipment purchased should be returned to DRUK following the election and within a pre-agreed time frame.

The fund was originally intended to cover applicants standing in the 2019 English local elections (248 councils in England held elections for 8,425 council seats) and was later extended to cover the May 2020 Local and Police and Crime Commissioner elections, but due to Covid-19, the latter set of elections were postponed until May 2021. The scope of the fund was amended to provide retrospective funding for applications who stood in the 2019 EU Elections.<sup>8</sup>

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7 The Electoral Commission were consulted about the scope of the fund to ensure that any funding awarded was not in breach of electoral regulation.

8 The decision to extend the funding to the EP elections was made after the elections, meaning that applications had to be made retrospectively. No retrospective applications were received for the EP elections.

# Process and Procedures

The administration of the fund followed a four-stage process: submission of Initial Enquiry Form to DRUK; interview with DRUK; assessment of application by an independent panel appointed by DRUK; and verification and sign-off by the relevant political group at the LGA.



The process for the administration was agreed between DRUK, the LGA, and the Government Equalities Office. DRUK's role was to make a recommendation to the LGA as to whether or not an application should be granted. The decision to award funding was made by the LGA. An applicant's prospects of being elected was not a criterion for being awarded funding.

The first stage of the process involved applicants submitting an Initial Enquiry Form, which asked them to detail: which election they were planning to stand for; which political party (if any) they were standing on behalf of; and whether they had an initial idea about the kinds of reasonable adjustments for which they would require funding. In addition, applicants were asked to provide details of a referee and submit equality monitoring data. Applicants were not asked to detail their disability but



were informed that DRUK reserved the right to request evidence. Following submission of the form, the EnAble project manager at DRUK contacted them within 3 working days.

The second stage of the process was an interview with the applicant, conducted via telephone, Skype or in person, during which they were asked a series of questions regarding their impairment(s) and campaigning. The questions were designed to establish the day-to-day impact of the individual's impairment and how that would affect their ability to campaign for elected office.

Applicants were asked about what specific reasonable adjustments might be necessary in order for them to be able to compete equally with a non-disabled candidate. The interview was an opportunity to explain the process to the applicant and to ensure the additional costs could not be met through other existing sources. Applicants were informed that they would be responsible for securing two quotes for the service/equipment required, and that this would be a necessary step in order to proceed.

A fully anonymised report of the interview, including the amount requested, was then submitted to an independent committee, appointed and trained by DRUK, to assess the application.<sup>9</sup> The panel comprised three disabled people appointed on the basis of their expertise in disability rights. The panel reviewed the applications as

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<sup>9</sup> Any details relating to the applicant's party identity or where they were standing for election were removed.

and when they were submitted and decided (by majority vote) whether or not to recommend the applicant be awarded funding. DRUK asked the panel to communicate their recommendation within a week. The panel were guided by the following assessment criteria: the nature and impact of the person's impairment; the barriers to the activities necessary for their campaign; and, whether the adjustments that required funding were reasonable. In addition to reviewing and making recommendations, the panel were also able to indicate suggested additional reasonable adjustments.

Once the panel recommended that the award be granted, the application was sent to the Political Group at the LGA associated with the party of the candidate or with independent candidates. The representative of the relevant group would then verify that the applicant was a legitimate candidate standing on behalf of their group and that the award met the criteria for reasonable adjustments. This involved evaluating whether the campaign activities for which the candidate requested adjustments were adequate and proportional to the activities expected of candidates. Once this verification process had been completed, the representative of the LGA group would give the final sign off.



# Funding Awarded

A total of 46 individuals applied to the fund and were interviewed by DRUK (for demographic details, see Appendix A). Of those, one subsequently withdrew their application following LGA approval, whilst a further four did not submit the required quotes in order to proceed with their application. In total, 41 applicants completed the process, meaning they were approved by the LGA for financial support.

**Table 1: Total applications, by party**

Party	Applications started (applications approved)	Percentage of total started (approved)
Conservative	10 (10)	22% (24%)
Labour	22 (19) <sup>1</sup>	48% (46%)
Liberal Democrats	8 (8)	17% (20%)
Green Party	1 (1)	2% (2%)
Independent and other parties	5 (3) <sup>2</sup>	11% (7%)
Total	46 (41)	100% (100%)

1 application actively withdrawn, 2 not completed

2 applications not completed

The largest number of applications came from the Labour Party, followed by the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats (Table 1). All of the 41 applicants who completed the process were awarded funding. Of these,

33 have claimed their full award or parts of it.<sup>10</sup> In total, £35,809.01 was awarded in funds and £20,393.75 was claimed, with invoices provided, and paid out.<sup>11</sup>

**Table 2: Amount of funds awarded and claimed**

Amount	Funds awarded		Funds claimed	
	Number	Percentage	Amount	Number
<i>Unclaimed</i>	–	–	<i>Unclaimed</i>	–
up to £299	8	20%	up to £299	8
£300-499	7	17%	£300-499	7
£500-699	11	27%	£500-699	11
£700-999	3	7%	£700-999	3
£1,000-1,499	4	10%	£1,000-1,499	4
£1,500-1,999	6	15%	£1,500-1,999	6
£2,000+	2	5%	£2,000+	2
Total	41	100%	Total	41

Table 2 shows the distribution of the size of awards and claimed funds. Just over a third of awards were for less than £500, while slightly more applicants ended up claiming less than £500. About a third of applicants were awarded more than £1,000, but only about half of them

10 Of the remaining 8 who have not claimed their funding, some have confirmed that they did not eventually need the funding, whilst others said they were still planning to submit their invoice; at the time of writing they had not yet done so. There was no cut-off date given for reimbursement.

11 The mean average award was £873.39 and the median average award was £600.00. The mean average amount of the claimed funds was £617.99 and the median average was £450, excluding those applicants who have not claimed any part of their award. The highest fund awarded was £4,500.00, the lowest was £54.00. The highest amount claimed was £2,610, the lowest was £110.

claimed more than £1,000. 14 out of the 41 applicants claimed the full amount they were awarded.

Of the 41 applicants who were awarded funding, 19 (46%) were elected. Of the 33 applicants who have to date claimed their full award, or parts of it, 15 (45%) were elected.

# Applicant Evaluation of the Fund

This evaluation draws upon survey data gathered from those who applied to the fund as well as interviews undertaken with the fund administrators. The analysis focuses on how the EnAble fund has been used, the outcomes that have been achieved by recipients of the fund, and the effectiveness of the process.

In September 2019, the 46 applicants to the fund received an email from DRUK asking them to participate in an online survey, hosted on the platform Qualtrics. To ensure that the survey was accessible to all applicants, they were also given the option of answering the questionnaire via the phone or in person.<sup>12</sup> One applicant chose to answer via the phone. Applicants contacted by email received three survey invitation reminder emails from DRUK. They were informed before starting the survey that the results of the survey would be fully anonymised and would be used to evaluate the administration and impact of the fund.

The response rate to the survey was 50% (24). Appendix A contains details on the survey respondents, including demographic data and party affiliation, along with statistics from all applicants as well as 35 applicants who provided demographic data to the fund administrator.

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<sup>12</sup> One applicant received the questionnaire by mail as no email address was provided.

These comparisons suggest that the sample of applicants who responded to the evaluation survey is representative of the total pool of applicants along most key demographic dimensions and in terms of party affiliation.<sup>13</sup> Appendix A also contains information about respondents' impairments and disabilities.

Table 3 lists the adjustments and support for which the applicants who responded to the survey reported to have sought funding through the EnAble Fund. 40% of respondents indicated that they applied to cover multiple types of adjustments or support. Almost 80% of respondents applied for funds to cover postage and assistance to deliver leaflets and other campaign material because they had difficulties doing it themselves, usually due to mobility problems or a visual impairment. Around a third of respondents reported that they applied for money to pay for a personal assistant, for instance to help visually impaired candidates with canvassing. Other adjustments applied for include coverage of transport costs, assistive technology, and material to set up canvassing stalls for candidates who have difficulties with door-to-door canvassing. All respondents except one said that they were awarded the amount of funding they applied for.

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13 The sample of survey respondents reflects the distribution of applicants across political parties well, with a slight under-representation of Labour candidates and a slight over-representation of candidates standing as Independents or for other parties. The sample is representative of the pool of applicants who provided monitoring data with respect to gender and ethnic background. Applicants in the 55+ group, as well as those from the North East and South East were less likely to respond to the survey.

**Table 3: Types of adjustments and support applied for**

Adjustment/support	Number of respondents	Percentage <sup>1</sup>
Support/postage for distribution of campaign material	17	77%
Personal assistant	8	36%
Transport (taxi, mileage)	2	9%
Assistive technology (text-to-speech software, recording device)	2	9%
Material for static canvassing (banner, stall)	2	9%

1 Percentage out of total number of respondents with valid responses (N=22)

## Overall Satisfaction

Applicants were very satisfied with the EnAble Fund: 88% (21) of respondents indicated that they had a “very positive” experience and 4% (1) that they had a “fairly positive” experience. Only 8% (2) of respondents found the experience “somewhat negative” or “very negative”; according to the Administrator, these negative experiences may well be feedback from people who applied during the first few weeks of the Fund when processes were still being established. The survey sought feedback from the applicants on a number of other specific areas related to the administration and impact of the fund: advertising; process; role of the political parties; and impact.

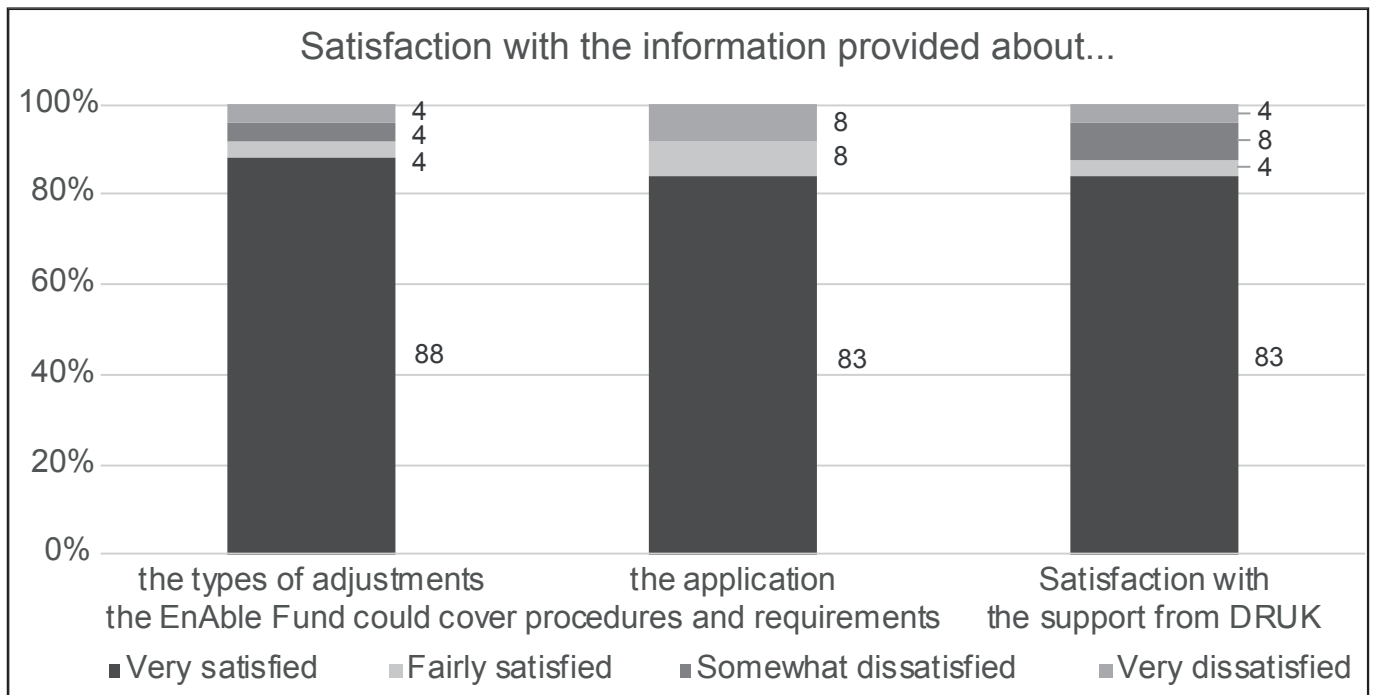
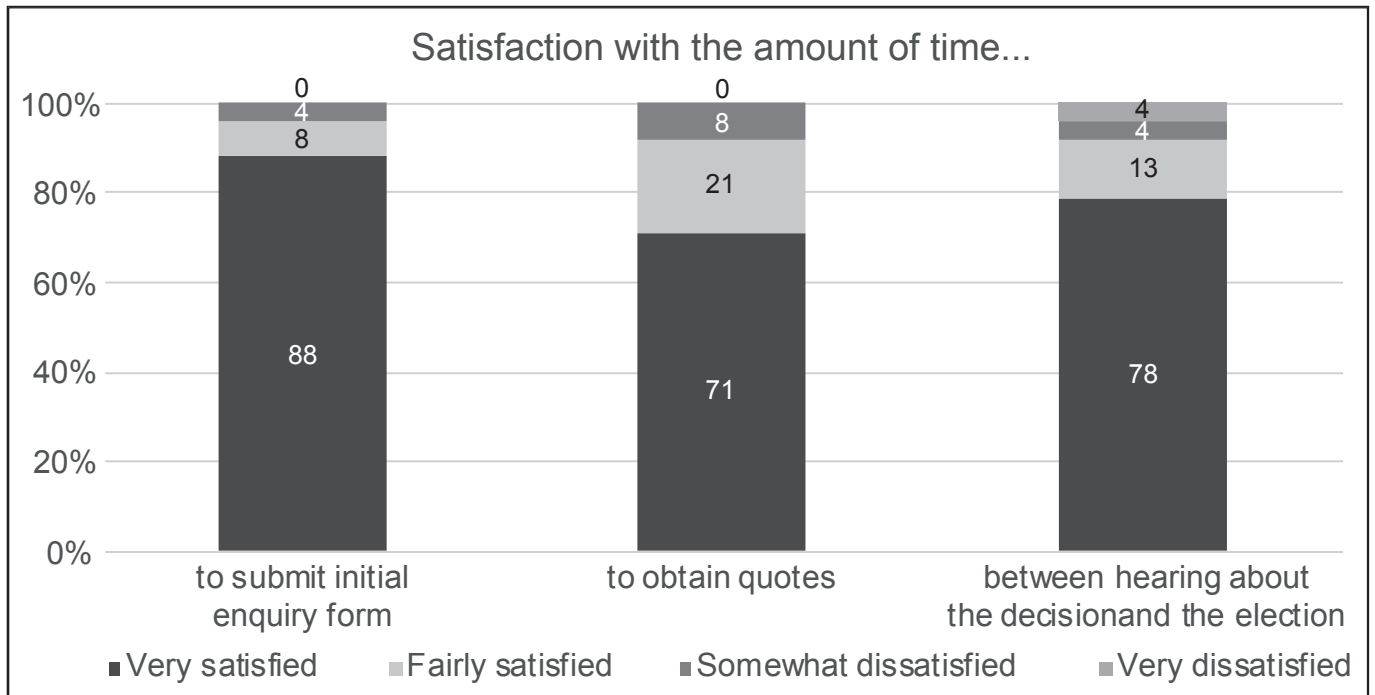
## Advertising the Fund

The fund was launched by the Minister for Women and Equalities and was promoted by DRUK and the LGA via their websites, email lists, social media, and publications. Survey respondents learned about the EnAble Fund in a variety of ways, including: word of mouth (33%); news and social media (29%); via their political party (25%); directly from DRUK (13%); or from active searching online (8%).

## Completing the stages of the process

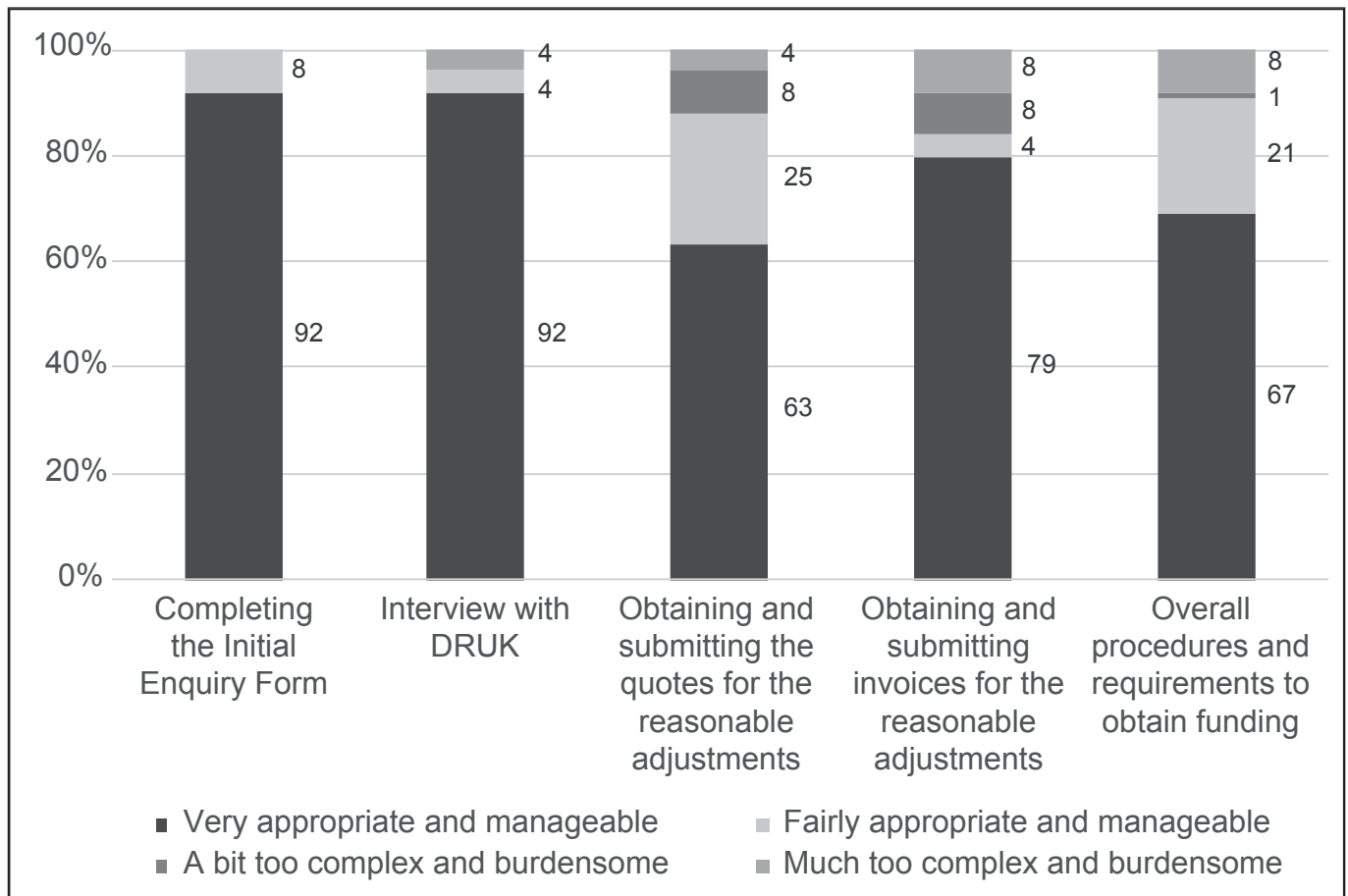
The vast majority of applicants who participated in the survey were “very satisfied” with the application process, including: the amount of time they had to complete the different stages; the information with which they were provided; and the manageability of the procedures and requirements. Figure 1 shows that almost all applicants who participated in the survey were satisfied with the amount of time they had to go through the application process. Equally, they praised the quality of the information that was provided by DRUK regarding both the types of adjustments the fund could cover and the application procedures and requirements.

# Figure 1: Applicant satisfaction with the application process





## Figure 2: Applicant perceptions of manageability of the application process



As Figure 2 shows, all applicants found completing and submitting the Initial Enquiry Form very or fairly manageable. Similarly, the interview with DRUK was seen as very or fairly manageable by all respondents except one. This respondent reported that the adjustments they asked for were challenged. While a very small percentage of respondents reported that the decision or an appeal that they made took too long, the majority of respondents praised the efficiency and speed of the process, including some who applied late in the campaign. Several respondents noted that the support they received from the DRUK administrator enabled them

to complete the application in a timely manner. This resonates with the overall high satisfaction with the support that DRUK provided to applicants: 83% were very satisfied while 12%, meaning three respondents, were fairly or very dissatisfied.

The large majority of applicants found the procedures and requirements to be appropriate and manageable. Overall, 67% of respondents found the process very, and 21% fairly, appropriate and manageable, with 12% considering it too complex and burdensome. This slightly lower overall evaluation is likely due to the requirement that applicants organise and submit two quotes for the reasonable adjustments, which 63% found very and 25% found fairly appropriate, while 12% found it a bit, or much, too burdensome. One respondent noted that obtaining quotes from unknown suppliers within a short period of time was difficult, while another explained that some small businesses do not issue invoices for payment before delivering the service, which meant that the applicant had to pay for the service and later claim the costs. Overall, however, the large majority of applicants found the process of submitting invoices after the services had been delivered appropriate and manageable (83%).

# Role of political parties in applying for the EnAble Fund

Of the 22 respondents to the survey who stood as candidates on behalf of a political party, 26% indicated that they received support from their local party organisation with the application process (Conservatives: 20%; Labour: 30%; Liberal Democrats: 25%; Others: 33%). One respondent received support from other candidates and Cllrs. The remaining respondents reported that they did not receive support from their party, including the party's (affiliated) disability group and disability representative.

Survey respondents were also asked about whether or not their political party provided any additional funding for disabled candidates: 3 candidates reported that their party spent money on reasonable adjustments, while 19 respondents said their party provided no funding.

## Significance of the EnAble Fund

The survey results clearly illustrate the significance of the EnAble Fund for those who used it.

- 92% felt that the EnAble Fund helped decrease the barriers they faced in the election process.

For those respondents who felt that the fund had helped decrease the barriers, 50% reported that it had “completely” removed the barriers, whilst a further 42% reported that it had helped “a little bit”. Only 2

respondents (8%) said that it did not help them very much or at all.<sup>14</sup>

The fund was judged to be important in facilitating disabled people to stand as candidates in the local council elections.

- 42% of the respondents thought that they could “probably not” have stood for election without the funding from the EnAble Fund.

Although no respondent answered that they would “definitely not” have stood for election without the fund, only 21% of respondents said that they could have “definitely” stood for election without the funding, and 33% answered that they “probably” could have, with one respondent saying they did not know.

- 92% of respondents thought that the provision of funding for disabled candidates was “extremely important” for increasing the numbers of disabled people in politics.

One respondent thought the funding was “somewhat important” and one indicated they did not know, whilst no applicant said that they did not find it important.

The survey data reveals a number of key findings:

- applicants were very satisfied with the administration of the fund;

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<sup>14</sup> These two respondents accounted for the majority of negative evaluations reported here.

- applicants were very satisfied with the various stages of the application process;
- political parties play a critical role in advertising the fund;
- applicants felt that funding helped reduce the barriers to elected office for disabled people; and
- applicants believed that the provision of funding was critical for increasing the number of disabled politicians.

# DRUK and LGA

The LGA worked with the GEO to establish the process for administering the fund and were involved in the awarding of the contract. DRUK was appointed in November 2018, and the fund was launched on 3rd December 2018, the International Day of Disabled Persons; as such, there was a relatively short preparation period. Although there was some initial ‘trial and error’, which perhaps could have been avoided had there been a longer period between the appointment of the Administrator and the launch of the fund, both DRUK and the LGA reported that the process eventually became efficient and well-functioning. The relationship between the LGA and DRUK worked well and all those involved with the scheme highlighted that communication between the various stakeholders was clear. The involvement of both DRUK and the LGA political groups was considered important in order to ensure that the awards were evaluated by disability experts, as well as by political parties.

Central to the administration was a desire to ensure that the process was not too lengthy, complicated or burdensome for potential applicants. Particular care was taken to ensure that not too many personal or intrusive questions were asked of applicants and that the focus remained on what reasonable adjustments could be funded in order to remove barriers to elected office. There was a concern that the process placed too much

of a burden on the applicants, particularly relating to which specific reasonable adjustments they should request funding for. This perhaps is a particular issue for Independent candidates, or those without previous experience of standing for elected office. However, as the results of the survey above indicated, applicants were very satisfied with the information, advice, and support provided by DRUK relating to the scope of the fund.

## **Advertising the fund**

In terms of publicising the fund, DRUK advertised it to their members and in their newsletters. Some of the LGA groups were only able to advertise it to Cllrs via their existing networks and lists, thereby potentially limiting the reach of the fund to those already elected. Advertising was a challenge for the Independent group, given the lack of a centralised network. Indeed, there was a perception on the part of some of the political groups that the fund was only effective insofar as it helped existing Cllrs, rather than encouraging more disabled people to stand for office. On the other hand, some other party groups were able to use additional party networks to help promote the fund to a wider audience.

## **Decision-making process**

The use of an independent panel made up of non-partisan disabled people with a range of expertise about different impairments to evaluate fully anonymised applications, was seen by DRUK as critical to the



success and legitimacy of the fund. This stage in the process ensured that those with expertise in disability and reasonable adjustment guidance were making recommendations in an informed and objective manner. Having an independent panel make the recommendations was judged to be preferable to them being made by either the LGA (who lacked knowledge of disability) or the Administrator from DRUK (who had too much knowledge of the individuals and their applications).

The independent panel had neither political expertise nor particular knowledge of the specific requirements and expectations under which election candidates operate. Accordingly, involving political parties via the LGA was seen as important. In particular, it was felt that the political parties were best placed to ensure that the funds were being used to create a 'level playing field' without potentially giving applicants an advantage over other non-disabled candidates or be perceived as giving such an advantage. Having the LGA provide the final sign off was deemed by DRUK to be an important safety net because of the complex laws and regulations regarding campaign finance and election regulations.

Although there was no existing expertise in disability amongst the key stakeholders at the LGA, several training sessions around disability and political representation were organised, which helped those involved in the scheme feel more prepared. The applicants had little to no contact with the LGA as they dealt directly with DRUK, although the political groups at



the LGA played a critical role in verifying and signing off the awards.

In order for the funds to be awarded to an applicant, the political group had to verify that they were a legitimate candidate. For those political groups with access to a centralised list of candidates, this was a relatively simple and quick process, whereas, for others without access to such a list, it was a time-consuming and difficult task. The verification process was particularly challenging for the Independent group. Furthermore, in addition to having no centralised or regional list of candidates, the Independent group did not follow a typical political party timetable for candidate selection, whereby candidates are usually in place months ahead of an election. This meant that some candidates submitted their nomination papers up to the day before the official deadline. Such a tight turnaround time consequently put pressure on the Independent political group to act quickly in order to ensure that the funds were awarded in enough time to be of use.

There were mixed views on whether or not the political groups at the LGA should be the point of final sign-off for this fund. Some felt that it was not appropriate to have political parties involved in this as they might be more likely to approve any application for funding that would benefit their own group. Meanwhile, others were anxious about the extent to which they felt out of their depth on decisions concerning the specifics of reasonable adjustments. However, there were those who thought that

the process and the role of the LGA political groups in the decision-making process were both important and necessary in order to ensure that the reasonable adjustments were in line with normal campaigning procedures.

Since the funding decisions were made on a case-by-case basis, rather than being based on pre-determined rules and guidelines, there were occasions where it proved difficult to decide on the appropriateness of an adjustment. However, in these cases solutions were found through consultation between the LGA, DRUK, and the GEO.

There was a suggestion that the entire process could be made simpler in terms of granting a pot of money rather than requiring set quotations for specific reasonable adjustments. This reflects a feeling on the part of some survey respondents that this stage in the process was somewhat burdensome for applicants. Moreover, it is difficult to anticipate all the barriers which may emerge during a campaign and the associated costs. However, there was also a fear that if greater flexibility was introduced into the system, this might lead to a lack of transparency about exactly what the funds were used for. Despite initial concerns that election agents or political parties would push to request more funding than was either fair or reasonable in order to distribute to other non-disabled candidates, there was no evidence that this occurred.

# Funding and reimbursement model

In general, the decision-making process and reimbursement model were viewed as somewhat complex and time-consuming by the administrators. Whilst the process of developing, evaluating, and approving ‘tailored packages’ of adjustments for candidates based on their needs meant that applicants were given extensive advice, it was also a very time-intensive process. There were concerns that the requirement that the applicant provide quotes and invoices represented an additional burden for the applicant, not least because they had to try to anticipate potential barriers, adjustment needs, and associated costs. Indeed, on a few occasions, applicants submitted invoices which differed from the approved quotes; in these cases there were no clear guidelines on how to proceed, which led to ad hoc decision-making.

At the same time, the ‘tailored package’ approach minimised the risk that the funding would be used for purposes other than the reasonable adjustment for which it had been granted. However, a slightly adjusted model with pre-determined guidelines and restrictions on spending purposes and amounts could potentially grant more flexibility to candidates, while ensuring that the funds are not used to create what might be seen as unfair advantages.

# Conclusions

This evaluation has revealed that the fund was important for applicants. Survey respondents agreed that the fund helped them to reduce the barriers they faced in seeking elected office, thereby meeting one of the stated aims of the fund. Analysis of the process and administration of the fund revealed that applicants were generally very satisfied with the process and the support they received. However, the available data does not allow for a direct causal line to be drawn from the allocation of funding to the number of disabled candidates, or to an individual's electoral success. Therefore, it would be useful to encourage political parties to collect and publish selection data regarding the number of candidates with a declared disability in order to better identify the effects of measures, such as the EnAble Fund, on the numbers of disabled people in elected office.

The fund's administrator and the LGA representatives were also largely satisfied with the procedures and the sharing of responsibilities, although this varied somewhat with the resources and structures that each Political Group representative had available. In particular, the involvement of several parties in the approval process who are experts on disability and the electoral process, respectively, was perceived as helpful. Furthermore, separating the administration of the fund from the approval process allowed the administrator to provide

personalised support to the applicants, which was praised by both applicants and the administrator.

The evaluation also raised a couple of issues with the processes and procedures. The process could have been made easier for applicants; in particular, the requirement that applicants must source two separate quotes for the services/equipment was, for some, too burdensome.

A predefined list of cost estimates for different adjustments and services, or even providing block grants, could have potentially facilitated the process.

Launching the Fund earlier in the election cycle would, potentially, have attracted a larger number of applicants. Moreover, an earlier launch would have allowed applicants to receive notification of their funding in sufficient time for it to, potentially, have played a stronger role and had a more meaningful impact on the planning and execution of their election campaigns. It could have also prevented some applicants from feeling rushed and overwhelmed by having to complete the different stages of the process. The administrator and those involved in approving the applications, who, at times, had a high work-load, would have also likely benefited from this.

A national advertising campaign could have helped raise awareness of the Fund and increased the number of applications. This could have encouraged more Independent candidates to apply, as well as those candidates representing political parties with fewer resources and structures in place to distribute

information. Candidates who were not already elected councillors in some cases also seem to have been disadvantaged by the reliance on informal and intra-party networks for spreading information. This necessarily limits the number of people who are aware of the fund and might introduce inequalities in information and access.

# Appendix A – Characteristics of survey respondents and applicants

**Table A.1 Characteristics of survey respondents, applicants who provided monitoring data, and all applicants**

Characteristics	Survey respondents (N=24)		Applicants who provided monitoring data (N=35)		All applicants (N=46)	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Gender						
Female	14	58	20	57		
Male	10	42	15	43		
Age						
18-34	3	13	5	14		
35-54	10	42	13	37		
55+	9	38	17	49		
Unknown	2	8				
Ethnicity						
White	23	96	33	94		
Mixed white/ black Caribbean	1	4	1	3		
British Pakistani			1	3		



	Survey respondents (N=24)		Applicants who provided monitoring data (N=35)		All applicants (N=46)	
Political party						
Conservatives	5	21			10	22
Labour	10	42			22	48
Liberal Democrats	4	17			8	17
Green Party	1	4			1	2
Independent	2	8			5 <sup>1</sup>	11
Other Party	2	8				
Region					2	
East Midlands	2	8			3	7
East of England	4	17			6	13
North East	0	0			3	7
North West	5	21			9	20
South East	1	4			6	13
South West	6	25			8	18
West Midlands	3	13			6	13
Yorkshire and Humber	3	13			4	9



	Survey respondents (N=24)		Applicants who provided monitoring data (N=35)		All applicants (N=46)	
Amount awarded						
Up to £299	4	17			8	20
£300-499	3	13			7	17
£500-699	7	29			11	27
£700-999	2	8			3	7
£1,000-1,499	1	4			4	10
£1,500-1,999	1	4			6	15
£2,000+	2	8			2	5
Unknown	4	17				

- 1 Includes Independent and other party candidates
- 2 Data on region is not available for the applicant who withdrew their application.

## Table A.2 Impairments of survey respondents

Impairment	Number
Mobility problems	15
Organ function	4
Visual	5
Chronic pain	3
Chronic fatigue	2
Autism	1
Cerebral Palsy	1
Dyslexia	1
Hearing	1
Mental health	1
Multiple Sclerosis	1

Notes: Several respondents reported multiple impairments

## Table A.3 Political experience of survey respondents

- Years of political activity: Mean: 10; shortest: >1 year; longest: 40 years
- Member of party disability group (if applicable): 58%
- Hold party office related to disability, e.g. Disability Officer: 48%
- Previously participated in selection process: 58%
- Previously held elected office: 50%



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