

Funding for running for an elected office

United Kingdom (Government Equalities Office, administered by Convey) - ACCESS TO ELECTED OFFICE FOR DISABLED PEOPLE FUND

In most countries people with disabilities are underrepresented in public life because they face substantial barriers to putting themselves forward for election. In the United Kingdom grants are available to help meet the additional costs associated with running for election that candidates with disabilities can face.

IN BRIEF

The Access to Elected Office for Disabled People Fund, established in 2012, offers individual grants of between £250 and (only in exceptional circumstances) £40,000 (about €320 to €49,700) to persons with disabilities who wish to put themselves forward as a candidate or for running their election campaign, but who incur additional costs associated with their disability. While the Fund was initially set to run until March 2014, the government decided to extend it until March 2015 and to fully evaluate it by summer 2015.

FACTS & FIGURES

- Initial Year: 2012
- The Fund's website is fully accessible and contains guidance for applicants and others.
- A publication of case stories of disabled people who are active in politics has been produced.
- As of 2014 the Fund had supported 50 persons with disabilities to put themselves forward as a candidate.
- The average value of claims has been £4,289 (€5,390).

INNOVATION

Towards a level playing field

By funding the disability-related costs associated with standing for selection and election, the Fund enables candidates with disabilities to better compete with other candidates.

Cooperation with civil society

The fund is an excellent example of a government working with civil society to develop an evidence-informed approach to removing barriers to the political participation of persons with disabilities.

Testing cost-effectiveness

Launched as a three-year pilot project, the Fund is the first of its kind, and its effectiveness will be evaluated in June 2015.

CONTEXT

In 2010 a House of Commons Conference on parliamentary representation stated that there is considerable evidence that the financial barriers facing candidates with disabilities were particularly high; that the necessary extra spending has to be borne by candidates who are often poorer than other candidates; and that social care funding packages limit the area in which persons with disabilities can be candidates. While assistance to Members of Parliament can be provided through the Access to Work programme (**Innovative Policy 2013**) it is not available to candidates. In response, the disability charity Scope recommended establishing a fund to meet the cost of reasonable adjustments during campaigns. As a result, a Stakeholder Group, chaired by the Government Equalities Office and including the main political parties as well as a variety of disability organizations, developed the Access to Elected Office for Disabled People Fund, launched in 2012.

“The Access to Elected Office Fund was a lifeline to me as it enabled me to fund a support worker to accompany me when I went out canvassing and met residents and community groups.”

—Alison HANSFORD, former Local Council candidate

KEY FEATURES

The Fund offers individual grants of between £250 and, only in exceptional circumstances, £40,000 to candidates with disabilities. Grants can cover, for example, the cost of using private taxis if public transport is not accessible, the cost of accessible meeting rooms, or the cost of a sign language interpreter. In order to be eligible, the person with a disability needs to demonstrate that the nature of their condition creates a barrier to standing for election and to provide evidence of their involvement in community activities. The Fund is administered by Convey, which is independent of the government and assesses all applications and pays grants. Convey is advised by an advisory panel, which consists of members – including four with a disability – who have expertise in a range of disability and electoral issues. The monitoring and evaluation is carried out by the Government Equalities Office.

OUTCOME, IMPACT AND EFFECTIVENESS

- The Fund was initially set to run until March 2014, but the government decided to extend it until March 2015 and to evaluate it by summer 2015.
- 35 applicants have stood for election to date, mainly in Local Authority elections.
- The Fund has received considerable media coverage, and has been promoted through political networks and disability charities to raise awareness of the support it can provide.

TRANSFERABILITY, SCALABILITY AND COST-EFFICIENCY

Depending on the outcome of the pilot period of the Fund, it could, in principle, be replicated in other countries, depending on their laws regarding limits on electoral expenses for candidates. Start-up costs were approximately £30,000 (€38,000).

CONTACT

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SOURCES

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