



Public Appointments for Disabled People



This guide is for use by disabled people interested in taking-up a public appointment.

Introduction

Being disabled should not be a barrier to taking up a public appointment. In fact, organisations can benefit from the skills and life experiences disabled people bring.

This information pack provides answers to some of the questions that disabled people might have when considering whether or not to apply or accept a public appointment. It also provides a personal account of being in a public appointment from Asif Iqbal MBE, who is deaf.

The pack is made up of two sections:

Section 1: Questions and Answers

Section 2: Taking on a Public Appointment – a personal account

Section 1 - The Question and Answer section helps to answer questions you may have about the recruitment process, reasonable adjustments, expenses and benefits.

Section 2 - Asif Iqbal MBE writes about his experiences of a public appointment role and how he was able to influence public policy.

We hope you find this pack useful.

Section 1: Questions and Answers

The following Question and Answer section was developed in collaboration with a range of Disability Action Alliance members, including government partners and disabled people with experience of public appointments.

The section is made up of the following sections:

1. Department for Work and Pensions, application and recruitment process
2. Public Appointments, additional expenses and time off work
3. Public Appointments and my benefits
 - a. Unpaid appointments
 - b. Paid appointments

1. Department for work and pensions, application and recruitment process:

Q: Are the application packs provided in different formats?

A: Application packs are usually in word format, however you can request alternative formats.

Q: What guidance and support is available for people completing your application forms?

A: A point of contact is always provided to answer questions about each application process.

Q: Do you offer guaranteed interviews to disabled people who meet the minimum/essential person specification criteria?

A: yes, interviews will be offered under the Guaranteed Interview Scheme.

Q: Do I have to reveal my disability if I don't want the opportunity of a guaranteed interview?

A: No. We ask applicants to complete a personal information form to help us record and analyse diversity data. Once an appointment is offered, we do suggest that it is in the best interest of all parties that a disability is declared. All information is kept securely and in confidence.

Q: If I disclose that I am a disabled person on an application monitoring form, will this information be kept separately from my application? Will it be used at any stage of the recruitment process?

A: Information will not be disclosed, unless you have applied under the Guaranteed Interview Scheme.

Q: Is there a tribunal process available to me if I have concerns following a recruitment process?

A: Yes.

Q: Will I be able to claim travel expenses to attend interviews?

A: Yes.

Q: Will you provide reasonable adjustments at interviews?

A: Yes, we always invite people to request reasonable adjustments ahead of an interview using the point of contact provided.

2. Public Appointments, additional expenses and time off work

Q: If the expenses are based on a standard expenses policy, but my expenses are higher than the policy because of my disability, can I claim the extra?

A: This will be considered on a case by case basis as part of a reasonable adjustment.

Q: If I am employed, will my employer give me extra time off, paid or otherwise, to undertake a role?

A: This will be for you and your employer to discuss.

3. Public Appointments and my benefits

a. Unpaid appointments, (so I would be a volunteer)

Q: Would I be able to receive Access to Work support for my role and, if not, will the host organisation provide the equivalent of that support as reasonable adjustments?

A: You will not be eligible for Access to Work in a volunteer role however public bodies are required to make reasonable adjustments under the Equalities Act 2010.

Volunteers who have Access to Work equipment supplied for use in other jobs may use this equipment in their voluntary duties, as long as the owner of the equipment (their employer) agrees.

Q: Will it impact on my JSA / IS benefits?

A: For IS and JSA purposes, a volunteer is someone who performs a service for a non-profit-making or charitable organisation or works for someone other than a family member and does not expect or receive payment, other than reimbursement of the actual expenses incurred during their participation.

Generally, volunteering does not affect entitlement to IS or JSA. Any money paid to refund expenses incurred, or to be incurred during voluntary activity, will be disregarded when assessing benefit.

Volunteers must continue to meet all the entitlement conditions relating to the benefit they are claiming. For example, for JSA they will need to continue to be available for employment and continue to take steps to actively seek employment.

As with any other change of circumstances, it is important that you inform staff at your Jobcentre Plus office if you or a partner decides to volunteer, as cases are decided on an individual basis according to the individual circumstances.

If a decision is made to disallow benefit as a result of volunteering, the person claiming has the right to ask for the decision to be reconsidered and also has the right of appeal.

Q: Will I be able to retain my ESA benefits?

A: Taking a public appointment will not affect your ESA as long as you are not being paid for your work, other than reasonable expenses in connection with that work.

Reasonable expenses could include travel, meals, child-minding, the costs of caring for a dependant, equipment needed for work and use of a telephone. There is no limit on the number of hours you can volunteer.

However, it is important to inform the office which pays your benefit before you start a paid or unpaid role, so they can advise you how your benefit might be affected.

Q: Will this impact on my PIP / DLA benefits?

A: No.

b. Paid appointments

Q: Will I be able to gain Access to Work support to undertake the appointment?

A: In the first instance the recruiting board will make reasonable adjustments but you can contact an Access To Work advisor to discuss any remaining support needs.

Further information in relation to Access to Work can be found online:

www.gov.uk/access-to-work

Q: Will it impact on my Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) / Income Support (IS) benefits?

A: If you are paid anything other than reimbursement of expenses, then you are no longer considered to be a volunteer and this may impact on your benefit.

It is important to obtain information from the office which pays your benefit before you accept a paid or unpaid role, so they can advise you how your benefit might be affected.

Q: Will I be able to retain my current Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) benefits and undertake the appointment under "permitted work"?

A: Taking a public appointment that is paid might affect your ESA, depending on the number of hours worked and how much is earned in any given week.

If you are getting ESA you are allowed to do some 'permitted work', the higher limit of which is currently £107.50 a week (after tax and national insurance deductions). This will increase to £115.50 in April 2016. This work must be for less than 16 hours a week. This means that you can earn up to £107.50 a week, for work totalling less than 16 hours a week, without it affecting your benefit. If you work for 16 hours or more, or earn £107.50 or more in a week, your ESA will stop.

If you are in the Work-Related Activity Group you can normally only do permitted work at the higher limit for up to 52 weeks. However, you may do so without time limit if you are in the Support Group.

If you receive a councillor's allowance that pays more than £107.50 a week (excluding expenses), the excess will be deducted from your contributory ESA, Incapacity Benefit or Severe Disablement Allowance.

Duties undertaken as an appeal tribunal disability member – one day a week are allowed (or two half days).

It is important to inform the office which pays your benefit before you start a paid or unpaid role, so they can advise you how your benefit might be affected.

Q: Will this impact on my PIP / DLA benefits.

A: No.

Please contact your local benefits office for advice on if or how your benefits may be affected if you accept a public appointment.

Section 2: Taking on a Public Appointment – a personal account

Asif Iqbal MBE, an inspirational Deaf role model, shares his experience of his Public Appointment Role.

Asif was one of the first deaf people to be appointed by Government Ministers, as a former Board member for the following:

- Disability Employment Advisory Committee, Department for Work and Pensions
- Disabled Person Transport Advisory Committee for Department for Transport
- Public Appointment Ambassador for Government Equalities Office and Cabinet Office.



Asif was able to offer his wealth of experience to his public appointment roles within Government which he enjoyed very much. He explained how vital it is to be involved in Public Appointment roles as it offers a fantastic opportunity to influence and represent the public voice on decision making.

In Asif's role as Public Appointment Ambassador; he gave presentations to the public and went on a tour across the UK, encouraging the public to apply for public appointment roles including those hard to reach groups, maximising opportunities for people from all walks of life to apply.

Asif explained that there is vast opportunity to apply for public appointment roles to represent Government departments and public bodies. There are over 1,200 public bodies across the UK delivering important and essential public services. This includes large public bodies managed by boards of directors and small, advisory committees made up of lay members, experts and specialists. Examples of public bodies include:

- health authorities, NHS trusts and primary care trusts
- national museums and galleries, including the British Museum, the Natural History Museum, the Tate and the National Gallery
- key regulatory bodies such as the Competition Commission, the Environment

Agency, the Equalities and Human Rights Commission and the Health and Safety Executive expert, advisory bodies such as the Low Pay Commission, the Committee on Standards in Public Life.

- a number of specialist scientific and technical committees
- a list of public bodies is published annually by the Cabinet Office

So, how did I get to where I am, you may wonder. My journey to a Public Appointment role started when I saw an advert for a public appointment information day. I went along and was introduced to a mentoring scheme at the Cabinet Office. It was my mentor who encouraged me to observe his public appointment role, which was an eye-opening experience for me. From there, I realised that it was what I always wanted to do. The role and responsibilities for the appointment included:

- to provide direction and leadership - this includes setting the organisation's strategy, agreeing business plans to deliver the strategy and recruiting key staff
- to hold senior staff to account - this includes holding managers to account on how the body is managed, how business plans are delivered and how the budget is spent
- to represent the work and views of the body - this might be to ministers, Parliament, key stakeholders and the wider public
- Those appointed to government committees or advisory bodies provide independent, expert advice to government departments and ministers on specific issues.

One of the biggest challenges I have had to face doing my public appointment role was the fact I was the only Deaf Asian person on the board. The board were not deaf aware and not familiar with deaf issues. For the first meeting in my new Role, I had two British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters. This was a new experience for the board and the supporting officials.

The board meetings were often long and heavy so two BSL interpreters were essential to ensure continuity with minimal disruption to the proceeding (by co-working, taking turns to translate the dialogue of the meeting from English into BSL at 20 minute intervals). The board members realised the value of having two BSL interpreters and their role to facilitate communication. This enabled me to have access to all of the proceedings.

In addition I suggested to the Chair that at meetings people should raise their hand before speaking in order to avoid people talking over each other. This helped to make the meetings run much more smoothly and benefitted all of the participants. So if you have any support needs, please ensure you inform the Board of your requirement in advance.

It is important to remember that public appointment roles represent - the talent and expertise that diverse groups bring to our public boards, the importance of diversity at board level and how a diverse mix brings about the best decisions. People who hold public appointments come from all backgrounds, every walk of life and every part of the UK.

I believe in giving something back and making a useful contribution by using my expertise to help the community and influencing decision making on issues that affect everyone's lives. I made useful contributions on deaf/ disability and Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic issues that the board would have otherwise not thought of. I also enjoy meeting Board members and the public, from all walks of life who want to make a difference.

So my key message is - If I can achieve my dream, then you can achieve your dream to. If you want to represent people's views and influence public policy then consider a public appointment.

If you are interested in applying for a public appointment you need to show that you have the right skills to match a particular role. The types of skills needed, will vary from post to post but, in general, I believe that you will need to show:

- commitment to devote the time to prepare and take part in the work of the body,
- courage to ask questions that no one else has asked or ask why things are being done a certain way,
- confidence to speak up and express your point of view,
- common sense to be able to assess the impact of decisions on all sections of the community and bring an independent view to the debate,
- skills to take part and influence the actions and decision-making of a formal board or committee,
- clear thinking to assess a situation quickly, accurately and even-handedly,
- You will also need to understand and accept the Seven Principles of Public Life.

Asif Iqbal MBE

This pack has been developed by the [Disability Action Alliance 'Public Appointments'](#) project group, in conjunction with the [Office for Disabilities](#). Published in December 2015, this project was led by Stephen Brookes of the [Disability Hate Crime Network](#).

A special thanks to Asif Iqbal MBE for sharing his experiences with us for the purposes of this pack.

The Disability Action Alliance is an alliance of organisations with an interest or specialist knowledge in disability.