Paper: ATech (Assistive and Accessible Technology) in UK Government Policy 2024-25

ATech Policy Lab, Policy Connect

# Department for Science, Innovation and Technology

## Digital government

* + Policy paper: [A blueprint for modern digital government](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/678f6665f4ff8740d978864c/a-blueprint-for-modern-digital-government-web-optimised.pdf) (21 January 2025)
    - The first element of the paper’s six point-plan is to “Join up public sector services”, to meet the needs of those who “have to interact with more than 40 different services across nine organisations when managing a long-term condition or disability.”
  + Blog: [Government Digital Service:](https://gds.blog.gov.uk/2025/06/04/making-services-work-together-starting-with-health-disability-and-work/) [Making services work together — starting with health, disability and work](https://gds.blog.gov.uk/2025/06/04/making-services-work-together-starting-with-health-disability-and-work/) (4 June 2025)

## Digital inclusion

* + Policy paper: [Digital Inclusion Action Plan: First Steps](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/digital-inclusion-action-plan-first-steps/digital-inclusion-action-plan-first-steps) (26 February 2025)
    - Disabled people listed as one of the five priority groups for digital inclusion.
    - Notes that ‘Breaking down barriers to digital services’ requires making public digital services “inclusive of users who use assistive technologies.”
    - Amy Low, the CEO of ATech charity AbilityNet has been appointed to the Inclusive Digital Services Sub-committee of the [Digital Inclusion Action Committee](https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/digital-inclusion-action-committee).

# Department for Work and Pensions

## Employment support services

* + Policy paper: [Get Britain Working White Paper](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/get-britain-working-white-paper/get-britain-working-white-paper) (26 November 2024)
    - [Chapter 3: Tackling economic inactivity caused by ill health](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/get-britain-working-white-paper/get-britain-working-white-paper#chapter-3-tackling-economic-inactivity-caused-by-ill-health) sets out plans to create “a new jobs and careers service” that will be “digital, universal and fully inclusive”.
  + Research: [The experience of Additional Work Coach Support: Findings from qualitative interviews with customers](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-experience-of-additional-work-coach-support-findings-from-qualitative-interviews-with-customers/the-experience-of-additional-work-coach-support-findings-from-qualitative-interviews-with-customers#:~:text=Customers%20who%20lacked,their%20health%20condition.) (2 May 2025)
    - Finds that coaches supported clients with “basic digital skills or access to technology”, e.g. “customers reported that their work coach had organised a new laptop for them” and “Others were referred to digital skills courses.”
  + Research and analysis: [Evaluation of Access to Work Plus – Qualitative research with employees, employers and DWP staff involved in the Access to Work Plus Proof of Concept](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/evaluation-of-access-to-work-plus-qualitative-research-with-employees-employers-and-dwp-staff-involved-in-the-access-to-work-plus-proof-of-concept/evaluation-of-access-to-work-plus-qualitative-research-with-employees-employers-and-dwp-staff-involved-in-the-access-to-work-plus-proof-of-concept) (17 July 2025)
    - Found that ATech and equipment was “highly valued by interviewed employers”, and “Some employers believed the equipment funding was the most successful element of AtW+ support”
  + Research and analysis: [Disabled people’s employment in the UK: A thematic review of the literature](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/disabled-peoples-employment-in-the-uk-a-thematic-review-of-the-literature/disabled-peoples-employment-in-the-uk-a-thematic-review-of-the-literature) (17 July 2025)
    - Found that “inflexible company policies” can hamper the implementation of ATech.

## Access to Work

* + Official Statistics: [Access to Work statistics: April 2007 to March 2024](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/access-to-work-statistics-april-2007-to-march-2024/access-to-work-statistics-april-2007-to-march-2024) (31 October 2024)
    - Shows that 41% of people who received an Access to Work grant in 2023 to 2024 received some form of ‘Special Aids and Equipment’ (a category that includes ATech).
  + Research and analysis: [Access to Work grant expenditure forecasts](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/access-to-work-grant-expenditure-forecasts/access-to-work-grant-expenditure-forecasts) (18 March 2025)
    - Estimates that, over the next 5 years, spending on ‘Special Aids and Equipment’ (ATech) will increase in absolute terms (due to higher numbers of people being awarded an Access to Work grant), but will decrease significantly as a proportion of Access to Work spending (as spending on Support Workers will rise more quickly).

## Cross-cutting initiatives

* + Green Paper: [Pathways to Work: Reforming Benefits and Support to Get Britain Working](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/pathways-to-work-reforming-benefits-and-support-to-get-britain-working-green-paper) (Published 18 March 2025, closed 18 June 2025)
    - Notes that, in addressing the long-term unemployment of disabled people, “the potential for work to be accessible and inclusive has improved considerably with advances in assistive technology."
    - Expresses that government "are keen to consider the potential for greater support for assistive technology (‘Atech’) to help people access employment and wider society.”
    - Consults on potential changes to Access to Work, including “shaping the market for aids, appliances and assistive technology, to reduce their cost and spread their adoption.
    - Announces that “government is going to develop and deliver a digital resource that will help raise awareness of existing Atech and provide guidance on how it can be used to support disabled people. The first stage of the digital resource will be developed and launched in 2025.”
    - Announces plans to set-up an “Atech expert working group in 2025, made up of specialists from the Atech industry, disabled people’s organisations, researchers, and relevant public and third sector organisations, to identify and, where possible, develop solutions to the barriers disabled people face when trying to use and access Atech.”
    - States that the Cabinet Office Disability Unit are “considering ...the establishment of a Centre for Assistive and Accessible Technology.”

# Cabinet Office

* Research and analysis: [Accessibility of private sector products and services for disabled people in the UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/accessibility-of-private-sector-products-and-services-for-disabled-people-in-the-uk/accessibility-of-private-sector-products-and-services-for-disabled-people-in-the-uk) (17 July 2025)
  + Survey of disabled people includes data on those who experience barriers to using technology
* Press release: [Government unveils new era for British Sign Language (BSL) by championing accessible communications](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-unveils-new-era-for-british-sign-language-bsl-by-championing-accessible-communications) (21 July 2025)
  + Includes the announcement of intention to develop a new ‘Plan for Disability’. This Plan is likely to include consideration of technology.

# Department for Education

## Higher Education

* + News story: [SLC continue to deliver DSA service reforms](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/slc-continue-to-deliver-dsa-service-reforms) (20 November 2024)
    - Update on the new way in which Disabled Students’ Allowances (DSAs) provide access to ATech and related training.
  + Call for evidence outcome:[Non-medical help for disabled students in higher education](https://www.gov.uk/government/calls-for-evidence/non-medical-support-for-disabled-students-in-higher-education#full-publication-update-history) (30 January 2025)
    - Seeks evidence on how support for disabled HE students that is provided via DSAs may be “adapted to take into account [of], for example, ... new technologies.”

## Further Education

* + Guidance: [Supported internships](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supported-internships-for-young-people-with-learning-difficulties/supported-internships#introduction) (6 January 2025)
    - States that “The support a job coach provides for a supported intern in the workplace includes”… “producing visual or written aids (for example, a step-by-step task list) and ensuring any assistive technology is provided.”

## Schools: awareness and training

* + Research and analysis: [Assistive technology (AT) training for schools: evaluation report](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/assistive-technology-at-training-for-schools-evaluation-report) (27 September 2024)
    - Evaluation of pilot where staff mainstream secondary schools received training on ATech.
  + Speech: [Education Secretary gives Bett Show 2025 keynote address](https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/education-secretary-gives-bett-show-2025-keynote-address) (22 January 2025)
    - Announced that DfE “has designed and delivered training sessions on assistive technology, in schools, and it’s why it’ll become part of national training for all new teachers in 2025.”
    - Also announced that DfE is “commissioning brand new research to see how different agencies can best come together to encourage schools to use assistive technology as effectively as possible.”
  + Research and analysis: ‘[Developing a competency framework for effective assistive technology training](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/developing-a-competency-framework-for-effective-assistive-technology-training)’ (8 May 2025)
    - Report considers the provision of ATech in special schools and specialist colleges.
    - Aims to facilitate the development of new AT training pathways for learner-facing staff by “proposing a competency framework of knowledge and skills required by different job roles across the AT implementation pathway: assessment, provisioning, ongoing support and review.”

## Schools: other

* + Press release: [£740 million allocated for 10,000 new places for pupils with SEND](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/740-million-allocated-for-10000-new-places-for-pupils-with-send) (27 Match 2025)
    - Notes that “funding can be used to ensure an inclusive environment in which all pupils can be supported, for example by creating breakout spaces where children can go to self-regulate or investing in assistive technology.”
  + Press release: [Thousands of children with SEND to benefit from assistive tech](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/thousands-of-children-with-send-to-benefit-from-assistive-tech) (27 June 2025)
    - Government launches “lending libraries” assistive technology pilot with up to £1.7m available to help children with SEND in mainstream schools Pilot launched in up to 4,000 schools, with “lending libraries” stocked with “a range of tools, including reading pens to scan text and read it aloud, dictation tools which convert spoken word into text, and tablets which leverage images to help non-verbal pupils communicate.”
  + Corporate report: [Ofqual strategy 2025 to 2028](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofquals-corporate-plan/ofqual-strategy-2025-to-2028) (1 May 2025)
    - [Equality objectives 2025 to 2028](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofquals-corporate-plan/equality-objectives-2025-to-2028) includes plans to “publish research on the potential impact of on-screen assessment on students, considering a range of different demographics, including those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)”

# Department for Health and Social Care

## Social Care: awareness and training

* + Guidance: [Adult Social Care Learning and Development Support Scheme](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/adult-social-care-learning-and-development-support-scheme) (6 September 2024)
    - The Scheme includes a [level 5 qualification](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/adult-social-care-learning-and-development-support-scheme/eligible-training-courses-and-qualifications#:~:text=New%3A%20supporting%20care%20leaders%20to%20embed%20digital%20technologies) on digital technology aimed at care leaders. A [press release](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/cutting-edge-tech-introduced-in-social-care) in April 2025 states that “Care leaders will be trained to use the latest technology to improve patient care, free up staff time and help people live independently in their own homes for longer.”
  + Guidance: [Care workforce pathway for adult social care](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/care-workforce-pathway-for-adult-social-care) (23 May 2025)
    - The pathway sets out a range of social care role categories and, in each of these, specifies required digital skills (referring to the Adult Social Care Digital Skills Framework). In addition, it is possible that the new ‘[Practice leader'](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/care-workforce-pathway-for-adult-social-care/practice-leader-role-category) role category, could include the role of [Care Technologist](https://www.nationalcareforum.org.uk/care-technologist-training-project/).

## Social Care: digital switchover

* + Policy paper: [Telecare National Action Plan: protecting telecare users throughout the digital phone switchover](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/telecare-national-action-plan-protecting-telecare-users-throughout-the-digital-phone-switchover) (11 February 2025)
    - Highlights that several local authorities are “trailblazing the trial and use of new care technologies” beyond telecare, including smart home ATech in the context of digital phone switchover.

## Digital health: accessibility

* + Policy paper: [Fit for the future: 10 Year Health Plan for England](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/10-year-health-plan-for-england-fit-for-the-future/fit-for-the-future-10-year-health-plan-for-england-executive-summary) (3 July 2025)
    - States ambition “to create the most digitally accessible health system in the world...patients will have a ‘doctor in their pocket’ in the form of the NHS App, while staff will be liberated from a burden of bureaucracy and administration.” (‘accessible’ here is likely being used in a broad sense, of easy to access – but this should also cover digital accessibility).

## Research and development

* + Corporate report: [Assistive technology research and development work: 2023 to 2024](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/assistive-technology-research-and-development-work-2023-to-2024) (25 February 2025)
    - Latest in a [collection of annual reports](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/assistive-technology-research-and-development-reports#full-publication-update-history) that detail developments in priority setting and funding for ATech research and innovation.
  + Research and analysis: [Disability, loneliness and relationships: a thematic report](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/disability-loneliness-and-relationships-a-thematic-report/disability-loneliness-and-relationships-a-thematic-report) (17 July 2025)
    - Qualitative literature review on the lived experiences of disabled people regarding relationships, loneliness, and connectedness.
    - Notes that “Disabled people who use alternative forms of communication, such as sign language, Makaton, or other assistive technology, were routinely excluded from participation” in research on this topic.