AsIAm: Invitation to Tender - AAC Support Programme (https://www.activelink.ie/node/115649)

Invitation to Tender
AsIAm AAC Support Programme

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Issued by: AsIAm Ireland's Autism Charity

Closing date/time: Monday the 2nd of June 2025 at Midday

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Background

Since 2014, AsIAm has been a powerful movement for change for the Autism community in Ireland. What started as an online platform designed to share information and experiences, has evolved into Ireland's Autism Charity.

AsIAm is Autistic-led, and we are dedicated to transforming society, working for Autistic people and their families. Our work focuses on representing, connecting, coordinating, and unifying the Autism community in Ireland. We empower and support Autistic people to reach their full potential, while simultaneously challenging society to be fully accepting and accessible to every Autistic person.
Our vision is an Ireland in which every Autistic person is accepted as they are - equal, valued, and respected. Our purpose is to advocate for an inclusive society for Autistic people that is accessible, accepting and affirming. We work to support the Autistic community and their families to fully engage in Irish life and build the capacity of society to facilitate true inclusion.

We are guided by and grounded in our living values. We commit to perseverance, same chance, and service.

About the Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Support Programme

AsIAm is committed to helping reduce the barriers experienced by Autistic people and their families. Communication is a fundamental human right, yet many autistic children in Ireland face significant barriers to accessing appropriate communication systems. Speech is often overvalued as the "typical" mode of communication, while other forms, such as augmentative and alternative communication (AAC), are undervalued or misunderstood. This lack of understanding, coupled with inadequate funding, training, and support, has left many children without the tools they need to express themselves and participate fully in their communities.

The AAC Support Programme was established to provide access to high-tech communication devices for autistic children under 18 years old who are non-speaking or minimally verbal. It offers three pathways of support: Device funding and Trial and Keep Programmes for families *working with speech and language therapists* (SLTs) and the AAC Support Programme to provide direct support for families *not yet linked to a SLT.* The programme also highlights the importance of a Total Communication approach and supporting and acknowledging all communication method as equal and valid.

The aim of the AAC Support Programme is to make communication systems more accessible and provide an alternative pathway for Autistic people who may benefit from AAC. The Programme aims to provide high tech communication devices as well as supports, information, and guidance on AAC devices to the Autism community and their families.

The AAC support programme has three separate referral processes:

- **AsIAm's AAC Support Programme** is for families who are not currently working with a Speech and Language Therapist (SLT). Here families attend a series of live webinars and 1:1 session with our AAC Team to better understand their child's communication preferences, and to receive support in setting up their chosen AAC device. Families are provided with a managed Communication device and are supported to choose and trial a communication app.
- **AsIAm's Device Funded Scheme** is for families already engaged with a Speech and Language Therapist (SLT), who has supported the child and their family with AAC assessment and AAC device trial. AAC assessment, feature matching and device trials have been completed and there is clear rationale and evidence for which communication device is the best fit for the child's communication needs.
- **AsIAm's Trial and Keep Scheme** is for families who ARE engaged with a Speech and Language Therapist (SLT) and do not know what communication device or app would suit their child's communication needs. The child can trial AsIAm's managed communication device with the communication app of the families/SLT's choice. If the trial goes well, the child can keep the device.

Objectives

The key objectives of this programme are:

- Increased access to high tech AAC devices
- Empower families to understand their child's communication preferences and to start their AAC journey.
- Create a supportive space and community for families who are using AAC devices

Scope of Tender

1. Overview

AsIAm is seeking to engage a qualified and experienced researcher or research team to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of two distinct AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication) access pathways:

1. **The AAC Support Programme**, funded by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, which provides families with direct access to AAC devices, training, and community-based support.
2. **Device Funded/Trial and Keep Programmes**, which operate under a different access model where devices are assessed through professional recommendation and funded or trialled with the option to retain.

Each programme will be evaluated independently, with a comparative analysis to identify differences in outcomes, impact, and scalability. The evaluation will highlight what is working effectively, identify areas for improvement, and explore opportunities for contributing to the academic literature through co-authored research outputs.

2. Objectives of Tender

The key objectives of this evaluation are to:

The evaluation seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- **Assess programme impact**: Measure how the programme has increased access to AAC devices and how it has influenced communication outcomes for children and families.
- **Identify strengths and areas for improvement**: Provide a balanced analysis of programme components that are effective, as well as those requiring refinement or development.
- **Empower families**: Evaluate how well the programme enables families to understand and support their child's AAC needs.
- **Support community development**: Examine how a sense of connection, shared learning, and community has developed among families using AAC.
- **Contribute to the field**: Offer findings with the potential to inform policy, service delivery, and academic understanding, including exploring co-authorship of a peer-reviewed research article.

3. Key Deliverables

The successful tenderer will be responsible for delivering:

- **Evaluation Framework and Ethics Approval**
  - Design a detailed mixed-methods evaluation framework.
  - Address data protection and ethical standards, especially where vulnerable participants are involved.
- **Literature Review**
  - Conduct a comprehensive review of national and international research on AAC access and family supports.
  - Identify best practices and benchmarks relevant to the Irish and global context.
- **Data Collection**
  - Implement tools including:
    - Pre- and post-programme questionnaires for families
    - Semi-structured interviews with families, professionals, and programme staff
    - Focus groups with key stakeholders
  - Ensure inclusive practices and accessibility.
- **Analysis and Reporting**
  - Thematic and statistical analysis of qualitative and quantitative data
  - Draft an interim report and final comprehensive evaluation report
  - Include case studies, success stories, and visuals (e.g., graphs/charts)
- **Research Collaboration**
  - Work with the AsIAm to explore the potential for co-authoring a peer-reviewed journal article based on findings
  - Identify suitable journals and develop a publication plan
- **Presentation of Findings**
  - Deliver an accessible presentation of evaluation results to programme stakeholders

4. Timeframe

The expected duration of the contract is **4-6 months**. Key milestones and deadlines will be agreed upon at the project initiation stage.

Suggested :

Milestone - Deadline

- Tender Issued - 14/5/25
- Questions submission deadline - 31/5/2025
- Submission of Tenders deadline - 2/6/2025
- Evaluation of Tenders - 9/6/2025
- Notification of award - 19/6/2025
- Contract start date - 22/7/2025

5. Submission Requirements

Interested researchers should submit a proposal that includes:

- A brief overview of relevant experience and qualifications.
- Proposed methodology for the evaluation.
- Timeline for completion.
- Budgetary considerations including Personnel costs, Travel and logistics, data process and analysis and report production

6. Evaluation Criteria

Tenders will be evaluated using the following criteria:

- Price
- Ultimate Cost (includes all foreseeable associated costs)
- Quality and level of professionalism
- Lead time/availability
- Experience in Speech and Language Therapy or comparative field.
- Familiarity with charity sector
- Technical ability
- Demonstrate understanding of the requirements
- Terms of payment

7. Deadline for Submission

All proposals should be submitted by **Monday the 2nd of June of 2025**

This is a **paid** research evaluation. Total budget for evaluation of all AAC access pathways is 16,000 euros maximum.

For further information on this tender please contact fionaom@asiam.ie (mailto:fionaom@asiam.ie)

We look forward to receiving your proposal and working together to enhance communication access for the Autism community in Ireland. Thank you for your interest in supporting this vital initiative.

Region
Nationwide

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14th May, 2025

Expiry Date
2nd Jun, 2025

Attachment	Size
Tender for AAC Support Programme Evaluation.pdf	262.75 KB

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