

Campaign for Disability Justice (2025)

Version as at 27 November 2025

We all want a decent quality of life for ourselves and those we care about.

But over five million Disabled people are trapped in poverty because they're unable to work or to find an accessible job. And because social security doesn't even cover the basics.

That's nearly five times the population of Birmingham struggling to afford enough to eat or to heat their homes adequately.

The Campaign for Disability Justice is changing this.

We all want dignity, respect and a decent quality of life for ourselves and those we care about. And the opportunity to use our talents.

But over five million Disabled people in the UK are trapped in poverty. And Disabled people are 50% more likely to be in poverty than non-Disabled people.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation's **Poverty 2025** report found that the poverty rate for Disabled people was 30%, 10 percentage points higher than the rate for people who were not Disabled – and nearly three million people living in a family with a Disabled person were living in very deep poverty in 2023.

Not all Disabled people can work. But for those who can, too many employers are unwilling to employ Disabled people or to make jobs accessible.

And social security doesn't even cover the basics, let alone the hidden or additional costs of disability – things like electricity for extra heating, laundry or to run vital equipment; extra shopping or cleaning costs; or transport to get out of your home.

We can change this.

It's other people's negative ideas about what Disabled people can and can't do, and how things are designed and run, that hold us back. But

we know change is possible because we've made changes before. For example, more accessible buses and trains, and the right to request flexible working from day one in a job.

We're calling on the Government to promote opportunity, security and respect for Disabled people so that everyone can live a decent life, whether they're in work or not.

Opportunity

We want the Government to make sure Disabled people have access to meaningful and accessible work, free from discrimination and prejudice.

Security

We want the Government to guarantee a decent standard of living for Disabled people, whether they're in work or not, that reflects the real costs of disability.

Respect

We want the Government to lead the way in building a society that values all Disabled people and invests in strong Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs).

1. Opportunity

The benefit system puts working-age people in three "boxes":

- work-ready
- not able to work at present, but able to do some "work-related activity" – such as training or work preparation
- or not able to work at all.

In reality, people don't live in boxes: there is a range of circumstances between not being Disabled at all and being so unwell or Disabled as to have no realistic employment prospects.

Yet, which box you are put in is very important. Those considered by benefit officials to be capable of work or work-related activity get much lower benefits than those thought to be unable to do either – a difference of up to nearly £100 per week (and sometimes more) in the case of Universal Credit.

This is why some Disabled people don't want to risk work-related activity such as a training course.

People who have no realistic prospect of employment need to be assured of a reasonable standard of living.

People who do have a realistic chance of getting paid work likewise need an adequate income, but also to be able to move quickly into a decent job – not be parked for months or even years doing “work preparation” on the lowest rates of benefit.

Existing employment support is often not good enough and to make matters worse is mostly compulsory for those benefit claimants who are thought by benefit officials to be capable of work or work-related activity. So it can look more like a trap or a punishment than a help.

We think that employment support must not only be high-quality – and not compulsory – but should be provided as far as possible locally and with the involvement of DPOs. We welcome the Government's intention to pursue a local approach but would emphasise the need for DPOs' involvement in design and delivery.

Like its predecessor, the Government proposes to abolish the “Work Capability Assessment” (WCA) (fit-for-work test). But you would then usually have to qualify for Personal Independence Payment (PIP) to get the higher rate of Universal Credit. Some people would gain and others would lose from this.

The Government, in its March 2025 Green Paper, also proposed to restrict access to PIP and to almost halve the higher rate of Universal Credit for new claimants. It has had to drop the proposed PIP restriction following a backbench revolt, but the Universal Credit cut is going ahead, from April 2026.

Meanwhile, a review of PIP has been set up, chaired by the Disability Minister, Sir Stephen Timms. It is due to report in Autumn 2026. The

Government says it will be co-produced with Disabled people and is not a cuts exercise.

We think that:

The WCA should not be abolished unless and until something better has been proposed to put in its place.

If the WCA is, in the event, retained:

- It should be thoroughly reviewed, with the full involvement of Disabled people and DPOs.
- High-quality employment support should be offered to Disabled people on an opt-in basis.

If the WCA is abolished:

- The PIP assessment will be more important than ever – assuming, as proposed, it becomes the main gateway to the higher rate of Universal Credit. The “Timms review” (see above) will have been completed by then. We hope that it will have meaningfully and transparently engaged with Disabled people and that its outcome will have been positive, making PIP work better for Disabled people.
- High-quality employment support should be offered to Disabled people on an opt-in basis.

Either way, **engagement with employment support must be on an opt-in basis for Disabled people** – taken up on its merits and not forced on people through the threat of benefit reductions.

As noted above, it should also be **provided as far as possible locally and with the involvement of DPOs.**

Turning to the **role of employers:**

However good employment services may become, this won't matter if employers don't step up and employ Disabled people.

Large employers should be **required to publish their disability employment rates and relative pay rates.** We welcome the

Government's commitment to introduce disability "pay gap reporting" for large employers.

Disability Confident is a scheme that is supposed to promote disability employment by getting employers on board. It hasn't been a noticeable success and **should be replaced by a new initiative**, co-produced with Disabled people and DPOs, with a pan-disability focus, to ensure that good practice is effectively encouraged and embedded in workplaces.

The **Access to Work scheme could be important if done better**, with more publicity and enough resources – a strategy needs to be developed to get more employers to recognise the possibilities.

Such improvements should be planned and implemented with the full involvement of Disabled people and DPOs.

The Government proposes to review Access to Work, but there are concerns that this will aim at cost-cutting rather than improvement. Indeed, there is evidence that this is already happening, in advance of any formal review.

Our proposals

- Large employers to have to publish their disability employment rates and relative pay rates. We welcome the Government's commitment to introduce disability "pay gap reporting" for large employers.
- High-quality employment support to be universally available, to help Disabled people get decent jobs.
- Employment support to be provided as far as possible locally and with the involvement of DPOs. We welcome the Government's intention to pursue a local approach but would emphasise the need for DPOs' involvement in design and delivery.
- Employment support to be provided on an opt-in basis for Disabled people – taken up because it has a good reputation, not because of threats and sanctions.
- The WCA should not be abolished unless and until something better has been proposed to put in its place

- If the WCA is retained, it should be thoroughly reviewed, with the full involvement of Disabled people and DPOs.
- The current “Timms review” of PIP should meaningfully and transparently engage with Disabled people and its outcome must be positive, making PIP work better for Disabled people.
- A strategy to be developed to raise employers’ awareness, to ensure they have the knowledge, skills and confidence to employ more Disabled people.
- The Disability Confident scheme to be replaced by a co-produced initiative, with a pan-disability focus, to ensure that good practice is effectively encouraged and embedded in workplaces.
- The Access to Work scheme to be properly resourced and available in a timely fashion at point of need, with a full review to ensure that the current challenges with provision are well understood and firmly addressed.
- Such improvements to be planned and implemented with the full involvement of Disabled people and DPOs.

2. Security

Disabled people in work are more likely than other workers to have low earnings, topped up by in-work benefits. Disabled people out of work are likely to depend wholly or mostly on out-of-work benefits.

Politicians tend not to ask whether benefits are enough to live on.

Although benefits are usually (although not always) increased every April to reflect inflation, there is no attempt to show that they are adequate in the first place.

Benefit rates should be considered in the light of **independent research on the minimum income standards needed** not only to afford essentials – although that is important – but to ensure that Disabled people are able to afford to take part in the social and cultural activities that most of society takes for granted, including addressing the extra costs of disability.

We recognise that large immediate increases in benefit rates would be unlikely to happen, even with political support. **Phasing in via above-**

inflation increases would be more realistic. But minimum income standards as a target to aim for could point clearly in the right direction.

Our proposals

- Annual Government-sponsored research on minimum income standards, to act as a target for adequate benefit rates, in and out of work.
- Above-inflation annual benefit upratings, to move towards adequate benefit rates, in and out of work.
- The WCA (if retained) and PIP assessment to be thoroughly reviewed, with the full involvement of Disabled people and DPOs, as described above.

3. Respect

The 2024 General Election and consequent change of Government has opened up new possibilities for policy discussion and changed directions.

We shall carry on talking to Ministers, officials and parliamentarians regarding measures to promote disability justice, while strengthening alliances with other organisations and building support among DPOs and Disabled people.

A key task is to **shift the climate of public opinion – tackling negative attitudes** that hold Disabled people and benefit claimants back and prevent positive change.

A strong network of DPOs to progress this agenda is in society's interests. The Government should **support the development of local Disabled people's organisations**.

Our proposals

- Respect for the dignity and rights of Disabled people, in or out of work. The Government – and politicians across the political spectrum – must commit to talking respectfully and responsibly about Disabled people, avoiding inflammatory language and negative stereotyping.

- Respect for the dignity and rights of people claiming benefits, in or out of work. Again, the Government – and politicians across the political spectrum – must commit to talking respectfully and responsibly about benefit claimants, avoiding inflammatory language and negative stereotyping.
- Disabled people always actively to be involved in developing policies that affect them.
- Support for the development of local Disabled people's organisations.