

Open letter: Global Disability Innovation Hub, UCL London

30th June 2025

Dear colleagues, decision makers, and members of the public,

Open letter response *Pathways to Work* Green Paper

We at the [Global Disability Innovation Hub \(GDI Hub\)](#) are a research and practice center based at University College London. We grew out of the 2012 Paralympic Games in London, a time when the UK made great strides in the fight for disability justice. We write this open letter in response to the government's [Pathways to Work Green Paper](#). While we have submitted a detailed consultation response, we believe it is equally important to share publicly our position and the evidence that underpins it.

As researchers, scientists, and innovators working in the disability space, we strongly oppose the [Green Paper proposals](#). We believe they are unlikely to achieve their stated policy objectives, namely, reducing the benefits bill and increasing employment among disabled people. On both counts, we find that the underlying policy assumptions are deeply flawed, and evidence points to the contrary. These points are explored in more detail in our consultation response.

We agree with Prime Minister Rt Hon Sir Keir Starmer that the UK benefits system is "unsustainable, indefensible, and unfair." Indeed, disabled people have long pointed out that the disability system is bureaucratically inefficient and personally burdensome, and the path to fulfilling and accessible work is rife with barriers. However, the government's current proposals risk deepening these problems, rather than resolving them.

A Stigmatising Narrative

First, we think it important to challenge the flawed narrative that the green paper presents as a given: that disabled people are “work-shy” and burdensome to the welfare system. Harmful narratives such as this make it extremely difficult to foster inclusive employment and easier to justify regressive reforms.

The true systemic barriers disabled people face to accessing fulfilling work include inaccessible hiring practices, inadequate reasonable adjustments, underfunded accessible transport and education systems, and a crisis in accessible housing. Many disabled people work, including those receiving PIP. The issue is not motivation, but a lack of equitable access to opportunity in an ableist system.

A Flawed Economic Argument

The economic proposals in the Green Paper fall short on two key fronts. First, they are unlikely to help disabled people access meaningful employment or create more inclusive economic opportunities. The assumption that cutting support will incentivise employment misrepresents the true obstacles disabled people face. Labour market discrimination remains widespread: [A third of Disability Confident employers](#) employ no disabled people at all. Among disabled adults who had left work for disability-related reasons, [90% said that discrimination led to or contributed to their departure](#).

Moreover, removing vital benefits such as PIP risks stripping away the very tools, like assistive technology, accessible transport, or personal assistance, that [enable disabled people to prepare for, find, and sustain employment](#). Finally, at its core, PIP exists to offset the [extra costs of living with a disability](#) — not as a work incentive, but as a matter of justice and rights.

Second, the proposed reforms are unlikely to reduce overall government spending. [The Disability Policy Centre](#) projects that the proposed PIP cuts would save only £100M by 2030, just 2% of the £5bn claimed. At the same time, they are likely to result in £1.2bn in additional costs for the NHS, social care services, and local authorities. Rather than creating savings, these changes are poised to force [hundreds of thousands of disabled households](#) into poverty while pushing existing costs on other struggling public services.

Trust Must be Earned

This government urges the public to trust the benefits system. However, as [philosopher Baroness Onora O'Neill notes](#), trust is not given lightly; it must be earned. We must shift the focus from whether people “trust” the system, to whether the system is worthy of trust — that is, demonstrably honest, competent, and reliable. Right now, disabled people’s fear of losing vital support is rational. Rebuilding trust requires rigorous research, transparent assessments, and communicating results in accessible formats.

We are also concerned about the rushed process: publishing a bill before the consultation closes undermines confidence in the legitimacy of reform.

A Better Way Forward

Inclusive, evidence-based innovation in the welfare system is possible, and essential. From GDI Hub's beginnings in London 2012, we know that when disabled people are placed at the centre of design, new solutions are born. Thus, we propose an alternative path: innovation led by lived experience.

We draw from models like the [Built Environment Access Panel \(BEAP\)](#), a standing committee of disabled people who held a planning veto with respect to the construction of Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. The veto power signalled true co-design and power-sharing, cultivating creative solutions. Likewise, [in our work supporting over 100 start-ups in the Assistive Technology space in the UK and Africa](#), as well as in our [teaching at UCL](#), we emphasise that leadership and co-design by the most affected people, those at the sharp end of the problem, isn't just a nice to have — it's a prerequisite for good outcomes and innovation. This type of model could work well in re-designing some of the policy solutions proposed, including PIP redesign. Other alternative approaches include:

- Tackling employer discrimination and inflexible work directly with the private sector,
- Reducing bureaucratic inefficiencies and duplication across fragmented disability services, [as we recommended in the England Country Capacity Assessment for the UK Disability Cabinet Office in 2023](#),
- Learning from Scandinavian models of non-binary benefits, and
- Investing in assistive technology systems, workforce, and infrastructure.

Call to Action

Significant reforms are due to be voted on by 30 June, before the consultation process has even concluded. This raises serious concerns around transparency and evidence use. The DWP's decision not to commission research on the impact of the proposals, despite [Commons Committee recommendations](#), only deepens these concerns.

Furthermore, the proposed 'concessions' suggested by the government do not address the points we raise and create a two-tier system which is contrary to the principles we have set out above. This has been noted by many MP's, including the few who are disabled people themselves. We strongly urge the UK government to pause, reflect, and re-centre this reform process around rights, evidence, and inclusive innovation—by working in partnership with disabled people and their organizations to co-create bold, practical solutions that work. Our consultation response provides further detail on these critiques and recommendations. We would love to help you think this through further.

Sincerely,

Vicki Austin PhD, Dr Catherine Holloway PhD, and Iain McKinnon,

Co-founders and Directors on behalf of the Global Disability Innovation Hub team.

Notes to Editors

For further information or comment do contact us: gdihub.comm@ucl.ac.uk

The Global Disability Innovation Hub is a research and practice centre driving disability innovation for a fairer world. Based at UCL and born out of the London 2012 Paralympic Games, GDI Hub delivers research, teaching, innovation, and global programming focused on disability and social justice. Since 2018, GDI Hub has raised £120 million, supported 100+ businesses in 40 countries, and reached over 40 million people. We are the WHO Global Collaborating Centre on Assistive Technology and base all our work on robust evidence. This response was developed collaboratively across disciplines and lived experience in solidarity with disabled communities.