**NUJ submission to the UK government’s Pathways to Work: Reforming Benefits and Support to Get Britain Working Green Paper.**

June 2025

**About the NUJ**

The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) is the voice for journalism and journalists in the UK and Ireland. It was founded in 1907 and has more than 22,000 members working in broadcasting, newspapers, news agencies, magazines, book publishing, public relations, photography, videography and digital media.

The NUJ represents numerous disabled workers who are contracted, freelances and self-employed as well as some disabled people who are unemployed or on long-term sick leave. The union has a Disabled Members’ Council (DMC) that meets regularly, engaging with issues such as lack of disability representation in the media and discrimination in employment practices.

The NUJ is affiliated to the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and promotes the social model of disability, which recognises that people are disabled by societal barriers – such as inaccessible working practices, environments, and attitudes. The NUJ is not affiliated to any political party.

**Introduction**

Following detailed feedback from numerous disabled members, the NUJ is deeply concerned that proposals in the *‘*Pathways to Work’ green paper will have a devastating impact on disabled journalists’ personal and professional lives. Cuts to disability benefits are counter intuitive. Rather than fulfilling the paper's stated aim of ‘supporting people into work’, members working in various specialisms - from writing to editing to photography – told the NUJ that the proposals would instead force them out of work.

This response collates testimonies from people with various impairments and health conditions, including chronic fatigue syndrome, mobility issues, multiple sclerosis, and visual, hearing or cognitive impairments. The NUJ also received responses from autistic and neurodivergent people as well as workers with other hidden impairments.

**Loss of PIP**

Feedback received by the NUJ consistently highlighted acute concerns over the potential loss of Personal Independence Payments (PIP). NUJ members felt compelled to point out that PIP is not means tested and is unrelated to employment status; the payments instead cover the additional costs disabled and neurodivergent people incur in their daily lives - regardless of whether they are in employment. These include transport costs, osteopathy, prescribed medications, costly supplements, meeting dietary requirements and paying for specialist equipment and communication support. “It is vital for me because it helps with some of the extra costs of being disabled and helps me maintain my independence”, said one NUJ member.

Many disabled people who receive PIP are already in work and rely on PIP to stay in work. For example, a community radio journalist - who uses PIP to cover mobility aids, transport costs, and health and wellbeing support - said that losing the payments would force them to choose between their work and their health. “I would have to sacrifice some of my diet or assistance to stay mobile and continue doing what I love,” said the journalist. Similarly, a senior editor who needs PIP to manage chronic pain said that losing payments could force them to become housebound and leave full-time employment. Without PIP, many disabled journalists and media workers would not be able to afford to live and therefore would not be able to work. The NUJ calls for PIP to remain and be adjusted to account for inflation and cost of living increases.

**Access to Work**

The NUJ is concerned by reports of further cost-cutting that will make it harder to obtain Access to Work grants, which are particularly useful for freelances and self-employed workers. Some disabled journalists work as freelances because managing chronic or progressive illnesses can be time-consuming and fatiguing. This means they often do not enjoy benefits such as holiday pay and sick leave. Meanwhile other disabled journalists are excluded from the labour market due to discrimination and lack of access, often forcing them into self-employment with far fewer rights and protections, or to leave their profession altogether. The potential loss of talented, skilled journalists should be of concern to us all. Journalism is a public good and should reflect the communities served. Disabled journalists with lived experience are a valued part of our media landscape and outcomes resulting in them forced to leave the jobs they love must be a considered risk resulting from proposals.

NUJ members who have tried to secure Access to Work grants reported that they must regularly monitor and chase payments, creating additional stress and diverting time away from work. “Access to Work is a fantastic resource - but it needs to be widely advertised, and it needs to be made easier to access, follow and implement,” said one member. The NUJ echoes a call by its Disabled Members’ Council for greater funding and staffing for the Access to Work scheme. Under the proposals, people who are self-employed would be required to cover the same costs as a large employer, which could easily price those on a low income out of work entirely.

**Reasonable adjustments**

Feedback from NUJ members emphasised the right to reasonable adjustments as a central ‘pathway to work’. There are many non-costly reasonable adjustments that can support disabled journalists to do their job – from screen readers to flexible working and assistive software for reading, writing, and recording. For example, a senior journalist said they would not have been able to enjoy a successful career as a broadcaster without their ear plugs.

Creating a supporting, compassionate environment is essential to dignified work. As the government rightly notes, employers have a legal duty to implement reasonable adjustments. However, without government enforcement, employers will cite lack of resources for reasonable adjustments as a reason not to hire – or even to fire – disabled workers. As a trade union, the NUJ frequently represents disabled members whose employers have refused reasonable adjustments such as flexible working and working from home. The disability pay gap and disability employment gap persist with a lack of suitable roles and supportive employers. Reducing access to PIP and Access to Work will not create accessible employment opportunities, leaving disabled people at risk of losing jobs, not finding new employment, and falling into poverty. The NUJ therefore calls on the government to increase resources for reasonable adjustments and to enforce inclusive, accessible hiring and working practices.

**Harmful rhetoric**

As a union representing thousands of journalists across sectors, the NUJ is particularly attuned to the power of language. Numerous NUJ members noted the use of inaccurate, stigmatising labels, such as ‘economically inactive’, as well as misleading government narratives, for example referring to ‘fraudulent’ benefits claimants.

People are already effectively penalised for being disabled. While most disabled NUJ members reported that government proposals will penalise them further by hindering their ability to work, one worker with a progressive illness worries that they will be forced to keep working despite medical advice because there is not adequate support to allow disabled people to put their health first. “I didn’t choose to become ill and disabled”, said the member. “I actually am worse off physically for working.”

Rhetoric implying that people who can't work are ‘scroungers’ fails to value the contributions many people have already made to the UK economy as well as the inherent value people have to their community and wider society. The NUJ urges the government to stop perpetuating discriminatory and dehumanising narratives about disabled people.

1. **What further steps could the Department for Work and Pensions take to make sure the benefit system supports people to try work without the worry that it may affect their benefit entitlement?**

The opportunity to try work without losing benefit entitlement is important to provide a level of financial security. This system needs to be straightforward to understand and access without creating additional stress and trauma. The overwhelming impression based on feedback from NUJ members is that many disabled workers do not think the Department for Work and Pensions have taken sufficient steps to support people to work. The majority of responses expressed frustration and concern over what seems to be a profound lack of understanding about the benefits system and the people who use it. Rather than allaying fears, the proposals in this Green Paper have only increased anxiety over benefit entitlements.

Disabled people require security and inclusion in their daily lives. There are many practical steps the government can take to remove barriers and stresses that reduce people's capacity to work. These include greater availability of accessible housing, transport, and education as well as more timely access to diagnosis and treatment of health conditions via the NHS. This requires long-term investment and cannot be addressed in the timescale proposed for implementing changes to the welfare system.

1. **What support do you think we could provide for those who will lose their Personal Independence Payment entitlement as a result of a new additional requirement to score at least four points on one daily living activity?**

Many disabled people’s organisations have explained that the additional requirement to score at least four points on one daily living activity is cruel and arbitrary. Disabled people often need to spend extra time on routine tasks such as washing, getting dressed, self-care, and food shopping. As one NUJ member said, “disabled people fight a thousand battles every day just to survive.” The changes proposed in this green paper would only add further stress and upheaval to disabled people’s lives. The NUJ joins disabled organisations and the wider trade union movement in urging the government not to withdraw PIP entitlements in the first place.

1. **How could we improve the experience of the health and care system for people who are claiming Personal Independence Payment who would lose entitlement?**

Multiple NUJ members highlighted that the apparent savings made by the removal of PIP will be passed on to the National Health Service and social services, increasing the burden on carers, social workers, and health workers. Forcing people out of work and thus potentially out of a home will inevitably cause damage to mental and physical health with more people potentially requiring sickness benefits. The NUJ repeats its call not to cut people’s PIP.

1. **How could we introduce a new Unemployment Insurance, how long should it last for and what support should be provided during this time to support people to adjust to changes in their life and get back into work?**

The NUJ requires further detail on time-limited Unemployment Insurance. There will likely be concerns on whether it is an appropriate solution to support people to get back into work.

1. **What practical steps could we take to improve our current approach to safeguarding people who use our services?**

NUJ disabled members frequently highlighted onerous and “soul-destroying” PIP application processes that drain time when they could be working, recuperating or relaxing. Some said that they were initially refused PIP payments only for this decision to be overturned following a lengthy mandatory reconsideration process. It is distressing, demoralising and dehumanising for people to constantly have to prove their disability.

Others said that the application process itself is inaccessible with the Department for Work and Pensions giving unreasonable deadlines to return forms and only allowing hand-written or printed documentation. The welfare system is complex and hard to navigate. Anyone who needs support should be informed of their entitlements and be able to access them without an arduous application process.

NUJ disabled members rejected the framing of the questions in this consultation with many feeling that the government does not want to engage with the real impact these proposals will have on people’s daily lives. Several members stated that the government is creating a hostile environment for disabled people. These cuts come after over a decade of austerity where social services and the welfare system have already been hollowed out. Disabled people have a right to life and to safe, dignified work. The NUJ urges the government to withdraw the proposals in this Green Paper and instead work with disabled people’s organisations and trade unions to design a modern welfare system that supports people to work and to live. We welcome direct engagement with Officials.