**The PIP Files: DWP documents show ‘absolutely shocking’ failure on further evidence**

Outsourcing companies have been failing to request vital evidence from GPs and social workers that would help disabled people secure the benefits they are entitled to, confidential Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) documents have revealed.

The “absolutely shocking” reports, released under the Freedom of Information Act, show that Atos and Capita contacted health and social care professionals to ask for information far less often than the government estimated would be needed.

DWP documents drawn up in May 2012, before the award of the contracts to deliver personal independence payment (PIP) assessments, show the department expected its contractors would need to request further evidence (also known as further medical evidence) in about half of all cases (50 per cent).

But at one stage, in June and July 2016, Capita was seeking further information from GPs, consultants or social workers in fewer than one in every 50 PIP claims (less than two per cent of cases).

During June 2016, Capita sought further evidence for just 380 of the 21,554 PIP assessments it dealt with.

Information released to SNP’s Drew Hendry last week has highlighted further concerns that suggest the problem may even have worsened last year.

Sarah Newton, the minister for disabled people, [admitted in a written parliamentary response](http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-01-29/125263/) to Hendry that the total number of separate requests for further evidence by Capita had plunged from more than 94,000 in 2015, to about 48,000 in 2016, and then to less than 21,000 in the whole of 2017.

The revelations in the new DWP documents provide fresh evidence of failings by the two private sector outsourcing giants in delivering assessments across England, Wales and Scotland.

Disability News Service (DNS) has been investigating [claims of widespread dishonesty by PIP assessors](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/my-picture-is-proof-that-healthcare-professionals-lie-in-benefit-assessments/) for more than a year, and has now heard from about 300 claimants who say their assessment reports contained clear lies.

The newly-released reports include details of the “management information” (MI) the two companies were contractually obliged to provide every month to DWP, so it could check on their performance and take action when they needed to improve.

They show how they performed during 2016 in certain areas, such as how long face-to-face assessments were taking on average; how many face-to-face assessments were carried out; and how many assessments reports were graded as unacceptably poor.

They were released to campaigner John Slater, as part of his efforts to secure confidential DWP information that he believes will expose widespread failings by Capita and Atos, as well as DWP’s failure to manage the contracts properly.

He has been working with [Disabled People Against Cuts](https://dpac.uk.net/) researcher Anita Bellows, and DNS, to analyse the data since its release last month.

The figures also show a dramatic, unexplained slump in the proportion of cases in which Capita sought further information on PIP claims, from as high as 69 per cent of cases in January 2016, to just 1.8 per cent five months later.

The other contractor, Atos, also has key questions to answer over its performance.

For the first seven months of the year, Atos was seeking further evidence in just five or six per cent of PIP cases, although that rose to 13 per cent in one of its two contract areas and 11 per cent in the other in December 2016, still far below the 50 per cent figure suggested by DWP in 2012.

Bellows said the figures were “absolutely shocking”.

She said: “Let’s not forget about DWP’s explanation about why so many decisions are being overturned at the tribunal stage.”

DWP [has said repeatedly](https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/appeals-against-cruel-disability-assessments-9998087) that “in the vast majority of successful appeals, decisions are overturned because the claimant provides new evidence to support their case”, Bellows said.

She said this new evidence should instead have been requested by disability assessment providers, “which are being paid, and handsomely paid, to do so as part of their contract with DWP”.

In [DWP’s own PIP handbook](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/662190/personal-independence-payment-handbook.pdf), it says: “The face-to-face consultation will be conducted by a health professional who considers the evidence provided by the claimant, along with any further evidence they think is needed.”

And in DWP’s [PIP Assessment Guide](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/655613/pip-assessment-guide-part-3-health-professional-performance.pdf), it makes clear that, in order for a report to be graded as “acceptable”, the assessor must ensure that “sufficient further evidence” has been “appropriately sought and referenced”.

DWP’s own independent reviewer of PIP, Paul Gray, said in [his second review of the PIP assessment system](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/604097/pip-assessment-second-independent-review.pdf) last March that “a key part of the policy intent for PIP was to deliver a greater degree of objectivity and fairness by ensuring evidence-based decisions”.

Although Gray said that the “primary onus of responsibility for providing functional evidence should lie with the claimant”, he said DWP and its providers “should also be proactive in gathering Further Evidence where they identify sources that are relevant and reliable”.

[And in a letter to Frank Field](https://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-committees/work-and-pensions/Correspondence/Letter-from-Chief-Executive-of-Independent-Assessment-Services-to-the-Chair-relating-to-PIP-and-ESA-assessments-18-December-2017.pdf), the chair of the Commons work and pensions select committee, in December 2017, Atos boss David Haley said: “All information whether from a medical or non-medical professional is very useful to our teams, giving them first-hand accounts which they use to build a picture, [and] applying their clinical expertise to the oral evidence received to be able to write a fair, accurate and objective report.”

Slater said the information released by DWP showed there had been “serious failings in key areas”, including the number of cases where Atos and Capita asked for further medical information, the quality of assessment reports, and complaints against assessors (*see separate stories*).

He said: “It is important to remember that these failings are not simply about producing documents or following processes.

“These three areas directly impact the outcome of people’s PIP claims.

“It is almost certain that people will have been denied PIP or given a reduced award due to an assessment report that wasn’t good enough, because further medical evidence (FME) wasn’t obtained or because of assessors who shouldn’t be doing the job.”

He said DWP had now been managing the contracts for almost five years.

He said: “Problems of the magnitude uncovered by the disclosure of the MI shouldn’t exist after nearly five years if the DWP was doing its job properly.”

He said DWP should have learned the lessons from the “debacle” of the contract with Atos to deliver the work capability assessment, which saw DWP and Atos repeatedly criticised and Atos eventually having to pull out of the contract.

Slater added: “When I asked for this information to be disclosed I suspected it would confirm the problems regularly reported by people claiming PIP and that the DWP was managing the three contracts poorly.

“The data did indeed confirm this, but I was shocked by what else we uncovered.

“In addition to the deplorable data on FME and the scale of the problem with unsatisfactory assessment reports, I was shocked by the fact that so much of the management information specified in the contract either wasn’t disclosed by the DWP or simply doesn’t exist\*.

“I hope that both the work and pensions committee and the public accounts committee will put the DWP under considerable scrutiny as a result of what has been uncovered.”

Capita has refused to answer a series of questions about the data released to Slater, including why the rates of further evidence collection were allowed to fall so low, why those rates fluctuated so sharply in 2016 and whether this showed that Capita was cutting corners in the provision of these contracts.

But a Capita spokeswoman said in a statement: “Individuals are encouraged to provide further evidence to the Department for Work and Pensions when starting their PIP claim and this, along with our assessment report, is taken into consideration alongside all other evidence when the DWP, not Capita, makes the decision about the level and length of award.

“We are committed to delivering an excellent service and continue [to] improve this by heavily investing in our training, support, and audit processes to ensure accurate and quality reports.”

Atos also refused to answer the questions but said in a statement: “We are absolutely committed to providing every claimant at each stage with a professional and compassionate service.

“A significant proportion of referrals received already have further evidence provided by the claimant themselves, and where beneficial considerable effort is made to obtain further evidence.

“This includes liaising with GPs, hospital consultants, specialist nurses, as well as social workers, appointees and family members by the telephone and post.”

Asked why the proportion of cases in which Capita and Atos requested further evidence had fallen so low, and fluctuated so violently, and whether this showed how poorly DWP had managed the contracts, a DWP spokeswoman said: “It is not always necessary to seek further medical evidence to assess an individual’s eligibility for PIP.

“In the vast majority of cases, the evidence provided by the claimant on their PIP application form, the evidence claimants send in to support their claim and the evidence provided during their assessment is sufficient for DWP to make a decision.

“Responsibility for gathering further evidence, other than that already held by the department, sits with the claimant as they are in the best position to supply what evidence is available.”

She refused to comment on the references in the PIP assessment guide, the PIP handbook, and the 50 per cent target in DWP’s own 2012 document.

*\*DWP finally released this information to Slater last month, more than a year after he asked for it, following a ruling by the information commissioner.*

*But he has now been forced to complain again to the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO) and DWP because DWP appears to have failed to provide key sections of the reports.*

**8 February 2018**

**The PIP Files: Data shows multiple complaints made against scores of Atos assessors**

Scores of healthcare professionals may have been able to continue carrying out disability benefit assessments despite being the subject of multiple complaints about their behaviour, competence and honesty, confidential new documents have revealed.

The official reports, prepared by outsourcing giants Capita and Atos for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), show that up to 180 personal independence payment (PIP) assessors were the subject of at least four complaints each in three-month periods in 2016.

The documents, released under the Freedom of Information Act, show that 161 assessors working for Atos had more than three complaints made against them in a three-month period.

And 19 Capita assessors were also subjected to at least four complaints in a three-month period in 2016.

Neither Atos nor Capita, nor DWP, will say what action was taken against these assessors and whether they are still carrying out face-to-face assessments of disabled PIP claimants.

The revelations provide fresh evidence of failings by the two private sector outsourcing giants in delivering PIP assessments across England, Wales and Scotland.

Disability News Service (DNS) has been investigating [claims of widespread dishonesty by PIP assessors](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/my-picture-is-proof-that-healthcare-professionals-lie-in-benefit-assessments/) for more than a year, and has now heard from about 300 claimants who say their assessment reports contained clear lies.

The new reports include details of the “management information” (MI) the two companies were contractually obliged to provide every month to DWP, so it could check their performance and take action when they needed to improve.

They show how they performed during 2016 in certain areas, such as how long face-to-face assessments took on average; how many face-to-face assessments were carried out; and how many assessments reports were graded as unacceptably poor.

They were released to campaigner John Slater, as part of his efforts to secure confidential DWP information that he believes will expose widespread failings by Capita and Atos, as well as DWP’s failure to manage the contracts properly.

He has been working with [Disabled People Against Cuts](https://dpac.uk.net/) researcher Anita Bellows, and DNS, to analyse the data since its release last month.

[in a letter to Frank Field](https://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-committees/work-and-pensions/Correspondence/Letter-from-Chief-Executive-of-Independent-Assessment-Services-to-the-Chair-relating-to-PIP-and-ESA-assessments-18-December-2017.pdf), the chair of the Commons work and pensions select committee, in December 2017, Atos boss David Haley said his company had received more than 5,800 complaints connected with the PIP contract in 2016.

Atos is likely to have completed about 800,000 assessments that year.

According to the MI reports, Capita completed about 240,000 assessment reports in 2016 and received more than 3,000 complaints in just the 11 months from February to December (there are no figures for January).

Slater said the information released by DWP showed there had been “serious failings in key areas”, such as complaints against the assessors, the quality of assessment reports, and the number of cases where Atos and Capita asked for further medical information (*see separate stories*).

He said: “It is important to remember that these failings are not simply about producing documents or following processes.

“These three areas directly impact the outcome of people’s PIP claims.

“It is almost certain that people will have been denied PIP or given a reduced award due to an assessment report that wasn’t good enough, because further medical evidence (FME) wasn’t obtained or because of assessors who shouldn’t be doing the job.”

He said DWP had now been managing the contracts for almost five years.

He said: “Problems of the magnitude uncovered by the disclosure of the MI shouldn’t exist after nearly five years if the DWP was doing its job properly.”

He said DWP should have learned the lessons from the “debacle” of the contract with Atos to deliver the work capability assessment, which saw DWP and Atos repeatedly criticised and Atos forced to pull out of the contract.

Bellows said the figures revealed by the reports obtained by Slater were “absolutely shocking”, and she pointed to the number of complaints filed against disability assessors, “and astonishingly against the same assessors”.

Other figures revealed the failure of Atos and Capita to request vital “further evidence” from GPs and social workers, and the number of Capita assessment reports that were found to be flawed.

Bellows said: “This is failure at every stage of the assessment process, and gross incompetence from DWP in overseeing and managing its contracts.”

Slater added: “When I asked for this information to be disclosed I suspected it would confirm the problems regularly reported by people claiming PIP and that the DWP was managing the three contracts poorly.

“The data did indeed confirm this, but I was shocked by what else we uncovered.

“In addition to the deplorable data on FME and the scale of the problem with unsatisfactory assessment reports, I was shocked by the fact that so much of the management information specified in the contract either wasn’t disclosed by the DWP or simply doesn’t exist\*.

“I hope that the both the work and pensions committee and the public accounts committee will put the DWP under considerable scrutiny as a result of what has been uncovered.”

Atos has refused to answer a series of questions about the data released to Slater, including what action it took with the assessors who received at least four complaints in a three-month period, and how many of them were still working as assessors for Atos.

But an Atos spokesman said: “Throughout our relationship with the DWP around the delivery of the PIP contract, we have listened carefully to feedback provided by those being assessed and continually adjust our service to help deliver an enhanced experience for all involved.

“Less than one percent of the 844,000 cases we cleared and returned to DWP in 2016 resulted in a complaint.”

Capita also refused to answer the questions, but a spokeswoman said in a statement: “Our assessors are healthcare professionals who are equipped with the required skills and knowledge to carry out PIP functional-based assessments in a professional and empathetic manner.

“We are committed to delivering an excellent service and continue [to] improve this by heavily investing in our training, support, and audit processes to ensure accurate and quality reports.”

A DWP spokeswoman said: “We expect the highest standards from assessment providers, and we work closely with them to ensure PIP is working in the best way possible.

“We always aim to provide the very best service, and this is why assessments are carried out by qualified healthcare professionals who need to have at least two years of practical experience and must be registered with a medical body.

“Anyone falling below the required standards faces having their contract terminated.

“During the period you’ve outlined above, [Atos] and Capita completed a combined total of 945,000 PIP assessments.

“The total number of complaints that assessment providers received was less than one per cent of the total number of completed assessments.

“The PIP assessment providers thoroughly investigate all complaints and take appropriate actions.

“In addition, the PIP assessment providers have a target for customer satisfaction of 90 per cent, which they have consistently met since it was introduced in 2016.”

*\*DWP finally released this information to Slater last month, more than a year after he asked for it, following a ruling by the information commissioner.*

*But he has now been forced to complain again to the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO) and DWP because DWP appears to have failed to provide key sections of the reports.*

**8 February 2018**

**The PIP Files: Nearly one in three Capita assessments were flawed, reports reveal**

Nearly one in three of the disability benefit assessment reports completed by a private sector contractor were significantly flawed, confidential Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) documents suggest.

The figures were revealed through a government audit of personal independence payment (PIP) assessment reports that had been written by staff working for under-fire outsourcing giant Capita in 2016.

The audit, which examined more than 4,000 of the 190,000 assessment reports completed by Capita from April to December 2016, found that about 7.5 per cent of them were so poor as to be deemed “unacceptable”.

But with another 14 per cent of assessments, DWP concluded that the report was so flawed that there was “learning required” by the healthcare professional who wrote it, although the report was of an “acceptable” standard.

And in a further 12 per cent of cases, the report needed to be amended because of even more serious flaws in the assessor’s report, although again the report was still said to be of an “acceptable” standard.

In all, nearly 33 per cent of the Capita reports audited during 2016 were found to be of an unacceptable standard, to need changes, or demonstrated that the assessor had failed to carry out their role properly.

If the findings of the audit – which examined just over two per cent of all reports – were applied to all 190,000 of the assessments completed by Capita in that eight-month period, more than 14,000\* PIP claimants could have had their claim decided on the basis of a report that was of an unacceptable standard.

And more than 62,000\* could have been based on a report that was of an unacceptable standard or at least significantly flawed.

This and other data was sent to DWP by Capita and Atos, the two private sector outsourcing giants being paid hundreds of millions of pounds to deliver PIP assessments across England, Wales and Scotland.

Data on how many Atos reports were deemed to be unacceptable has not yet been released, although the Commons work and pensions committee [heard in December](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/pip-assessment-companies-admit-unacceptable-failings-on-quality-of-reports/) that at one point since PIP was launched in 2013, about 30 per cent of Atos assessment reports completed in Scotland and the north of England were being judged “unacceptable”, with Capita even reaching 60 per cent at one stage in the contract.

This week’s revelations provide fresh evidence of failings by the two companies.

Disability News Service (DNS) has been investigating [claims of widespread dishonesty by PIP assessors](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/my-picture-is-proof-that-healthcare-professionals-lie-in-benefit-assessments/) for more than a year, and has now heard from about 300 claimants who say their assessment reports contained clear lies.

The new reports include details of the “management information” (MI) the two companies were contractually obliged to provide every month to DWP, so it could check their performance and take action when they needed to improve.

They show how they performed during 2016 in certain areas, such as how long face-to-face assessments took on average; how many face-to-face assessments were carried out; and how many assessments reports were graded as unacceptably poor.

The reports were released to campaigner John Slater, as part of his efforts to secure confidential DWP information that he believes will expose widespread failings by Capita and Atos, as well as DWP’s failure to manage the contracts properly.

He has been working with [Disabled People Against Cuts](https://dpac.uk.net/) researcher Anita Bellows, and DNS, to analyse the data since its release last month.

Slater said the information released by DWP showed there had been “serious failings in key areas”, such as the quality of assessment reports, complaints against the assessors, and the number of cases where Atos and Capita asked for further information (*see separate stories*).

He said: “It is important to remember that these failings are not simply about producing documents or following processes.

“These three areas directly impact the outcome of people’s PIP claims.

“It is almost certain that people will have been denied PIP or given a reduced award due to an assessment report that wasn’t good enough, because further medical evidence (FME) wasn’t obtained or because of assessors who shouldn’t be doing the job.”

Bellows said the figures revealed by the reports obtained by Slater were “absolutely shocking”.

Other figures revealed the failure of Atos and Capita to request vital “further evidence” from GPs and social workers, and the number of complaints filed against disability assessors.

Bellows said: “This is failure at every stage of the assessment process, and gross incompetence from DWP in overseeing and managing its contracts.”

Slater said DWP had now been managing the contracts for almost five years.

He said: “Problems of the magnitude uncovered by the disclosure of the MI shouldn’t exist after nearly five years if the DWP was doing its job properly.”

He said DWP should have learned the lessons from the “debacle” of the contract with Atos to deliver the work capability assessment, which saw DWP and Atos repeatedly criticised, and Atos eventually forced to pull out of the contract.

Slater added: “When I asked for this information to be disclosed I suspected it would confirm the problems regularly reported by people claiming PIP and that the DWP was managing the three contracts poorly.

“The data did indeed confirm this, but I was shocked by what else we uncovered.

“In addition to the deplorable data on FME and the scale of the problem with unsatisfactory assessment reports, I was shocked by the fact that so much of the management information specified in the contract either wasn’t disclosed by the DWP or simply doesn’t exist\*\*.

“I hope that the both the work and pensions committee and the public accounts committee will put the DWP under considerable scrutiny as a result of what has been uncovered.”

A Capita spokeswoman said in a statement: “Our assessors are healthcare professionals who are equipped with the required skills and knowledge to carry out PIP functional-based assessments in a professional and empathetic manner.

“We are committed to delivering an excellent service and continue [to] improve this by heavily investing in our training, support, and audit processes to ensure accurate and quality reports.”

A DWP spokeswoman said: “The department holds our assessment providers to a very high standard to ensure that claimants receive a high-quality assessment.

“There is a ‘No Pay’ policy in place for when our assessment providers do not meet the target of no more than three per cent of audited reports being unacceptable, with providers not paid for the proportion of reports graded ‘unacceptable’ over the three per cent target.

“In addition to identifying if the report is of an acceptable standard or not, DWP provides feedback to assessment providers when an assessment report is acceptable with feedback or with amendment.

“This feedback supports the assessment providers’ continuous improvement activity to improve the quality of their assessment reports.

“Both PIP assessment providers are committed to delivering high quality assessment reports and have increased their activity to improve the quality of their assessment reports.”

*\*The reports that were subject to the audit – about two per cent of them – and found to be flawed are likely to have been amended and improved as a result of the complaints highlighted in the audit*

*\*\*DWP finally released this information to Slater last month, more than a year after he asked for it, following a ruling by the information commissioner.*

*But he has now been forced to complain again to DWP and the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO) because DWP appears to have failed to provide key sections of the reports.*

**8 February 2018**

**Government’s suicide prevention boss refuses to call for action on ESA risk stats**

The head of the government’s national suicide prevention strategy has refused to call on the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) to highlight the high risk of suicide faced by people who receive out-of-work disability benefits.

Louis Appleby, a professor of psychiatry at the University of Manchester and chair of the National Suicide Prevention Strategy advisory group, has declined to act, even though he admits that employment and support allowance (ESA) claimants “are a high risk group”.

Disability News Service (DNS) has now asked him twice, via email, if he will use his influential position to ensure that ESA claimants are highlighted in the national strategy as a high-risk group, and to ask local authorities to include the information in their own suicide prevention plans.

Figures [published in September 2016 by NHS Digital](https://digital.nhs.uk/catalogue/PUB21748) – from a report written by NatCen and the University of Leicester – showed that 43 per cent of ESA claimants had said they had attempted suicide at some point in their lives.

This compared with 27 per cent of those on out-of-work benefits, including ESA, and 20 per cent of those receiving housing benefit.

But DHSC  [has refused to explain](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/department-of-health-silence-over-failure-to-highlight-esa-suicide-risk/) why it fails to mention these figures or to highlight ESA claimants as a high-risk group in the latest version of its [suicide prevention strategy for England](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/582117/Suicide_report_2016_A.pdf), published in January 2017, for which Appleby wrote a foreword.

[DNS reported last month](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/councils-refuse-to-use-suicide-prevention-plans-to-highlight-shocking-esa-figures/) that local authorities in England were – like DHSC – refusing to use their own suicide prevention plans to highlight the “shocking” figures.

Appleby has now told DNS that although suicide “is rarely caused by one thing”, he did accept that a “protracted stressful benefit claim, feelings of being treated unfairly and of course financial problems themselves can all contribute”.

Despite including a section on “people in receipt of employment benefits”, which mentions ESA and describes how the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) supports staff to deal with “vulnerable people”, there is no attempt in the national strategy to highlight the particularly high suicide risk faced by ESA claimants.

Appleby said in an email to DNS: “I appreciate [the updated strategy] may not have been as forthright about the risk as some people would like but it was important that a Govt department was acknowledging suicide risk in claimants and setting out what it would do about it.

“Inevitably DWP has been sensitive about the issue but my impression is that there is greater willingness now to address it.”

He said the NHS Digital/NatCen report does show “that ESA claimants are a high risk group, probably… because of a combination of factors, though I’ve no doubt that for some people the experience of claiming is damaging and a causal factor”.

But he said he believed “the need [is to] make people aware of the vulnerability rather than the specific statistic”.

His words, and the failure of DHSC, appear to contrast sharply with a statement by health secretary Jeremy Hunt.

In his foreword to the updated national strategy, Hunt said he wanted to strengthen the strategy through “better targeting of suicide prevention and help seeking in high risk groups” and by “improving data at national and local level and how this data is used to help take action and target efforts more accurately”.

But when DNS asked, in response to Appleby’s email, whether he would call on DHSC, DWP and local agencies to highlight the high risk faced by ESA claimants, and ensure this message was passed to frontline officers and included in the next refreshed versions of the national and local suicide prevention plans, he declined to do so.

He said he was “disappointed” that DNS had “made the same points as before” and had ignored his “slightly different perspective”, but added: “I genuinely wish you well, it’s an important topic, but I can’t help any more.”

**8 February 2018**

**Disabled peer raises ‘deep concerns’ over impact of Brexit bill on rights**

Disabled people should be concerned that the process of leaving the European Union (EU) could see their rights “lost or watered down”, according to a disabled peer.

Baroness [Jane] Campbell [told fellow peers last week](https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2018-01-31/debates/1E0DE5FF-2281-4ED2-8D68-168B86721E0E/EuropeanUnion%28Withdrawal%29Bill) that she had “deep concerns” at the “sweeping powers” that the government’s European Union (withdrawal) bill would give to ministers to weaken equality and human rights laws.

The crossbench peer said that she and other disabled people were still seeking an “explicit” commitment in the bill that Brexit would not lead to any weakening of laws that protect disabled people’s rights.

Although the government has insisted that all the measures in the Equality Acts of 2006 and 2010 will continue to apply post-Brexit, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) [has warned](http://data.parliament.uk/WrittenEvidence/CommitteeEvidence.svc/EvidenceDocument/Human%20Rights%20Joint%20Committee/Legislative%20Scrutiny%20EU%20Withdrawal%20Bill/written/73898.html) that there is currently nothing in the bill to guarantee that.

Baroness Campbell said she was concerned that the bill gives considerable “delegated” powers to ministers, which would allow them to make “significant” changes to equality and human rights laws post-Brexit without having to introduce new acts of parliament.

She said: “Having been personally involved in developing advice, information and detail on disability equality laws in this country for decades, I would be extremely alarmed if they could be changed other than by primary legislation.”

Baroness Campbell also raised concerns that, although the bill will transfer most existing EU laws into UK law when Britain leaves the EU, this currently excludes the European Charter of Fundamental Rights.

[Legal advice obtained](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/what-are-human-rights/how-are-your-rights-protected/what-charter-fundamental-rights-european-union-0) by EHRC has raised key concerns about the impact of losing the charter.

Without the charter, EHRC says, there will be: less power to protect rights; less flexibility to create new rights and reflect social change; gaps in basic human rights; and a lower level of protection for fundamental rights.

Baroness Campbell said that one charter right which would be lost [was article 26](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text_en.pdf), which recognises the right of disabled people “to benefit from measures designed to ensure their independence, social and occupational integration and participation in the life of the community**”.**

She told fellow peers that the charter “provides a really important framework for protecting equality, fairness and human dignity, which I believe will be weakened if it is excluded.

“Given that the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) is still not incorporated into UK law, this is no time to risk erosion of our rights.”

She said that she would seek amendments to the bill at a later stage that would ensure that “essential rights” are not lost under the bill.

She told Disability News Service after the debate that disabled people should “think about the consequences” of the bill if it passes without significant amendment.

She said: “We have a lot to lose from exiting the EU, not least a significant degree of our recent equality and human rights protection.”

She said that EU directives that could be vulnerable to being reduced or scrapped by ministers using delegated powers include the legislation that guarantees assistance to disabled passengers on ships and planes, and a directive which requires the packaging of medicinal products to include Braille labelling.

Another piece of EU law that could be vulnerable to delegated powers – if it is passed by the EU in time – is the proposed European Accessibility Act, which is still subject to negotiations between the European Parliament, the European Commission and the European Council, but is likely to impose accessibility standards in areas such as computers, transport, websites and online ticketing.

Baroness Campbell said she would fight in the Lords to ensure that “all the EU protections and promotions of disabled people’s human and equality rights are transferred across intact”.

Otherwise, she said, it would give ministers power to “start eroding them by stealth”.

She also said that she was concerned that the bill was not currently clear on whether CRPD’s existing EU law status will be transferred into UK law.

She said this “should worry disabled people, especially those who are involved in the campaign to get government to abide by the CRPD, which we have ratified.

“Without clarity, there is a risk that progressive influence of the CRPD in elaborating the rights and protections for disabled persons may be lost following the UK’s withdrawal from the EU.”

Rebecca Hilsenrath, EHRC’s chief executive, said: “CRPD is part of EU law and a part that we are pressing the government to confirm it will keep after Brexit.”

Because of the status of international treaties like CRPD, EU law has to be interpreted consistently with the convention, where possible.

This contrasts with the situation in the UK, where CRPD is not directly binding in domestic law, and its use to interpret other legislation is more limited.

**8 February 2018**

**‘Muddle’ and ‘confusion’ over DWP’s 1.6 million PIP reviews**

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is causing “muddle” and “confusion” by refusing to clarify which disabled people will have their claims re-examined through its mammoth programme of disability benefit reviews.

Sarah Newton, the minister for disabled people, [announced last week](https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2018-01-30/debates/F35E85CB-FF67-467E-AD63-1C13EB1EC32B/PIPBackPayments) that DWP would review 1.6 million personal independence payment (PIP) claims to see which claimants might be entitled to backdated, increased payments.

The review [follows last month’s decision](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/dwp-u-turns-on-pip-mobility-rules-that-were-based-on-unsupported-opinions/) by the new work and pensions secretary, Esther McVey, that she would not appeal a court ruling that found new rules introduced last year by DWP were unlawful, “blatantly discriminatory” and breached the UN disability convention.

The rules, [rushed into law by the government last March](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/disabled-peer-says-mordaunt-was-spinning-like-crazy-over-pip-cuts/), had meant that people who were unable to plan or undertake a journey due to overwhelming psychological distress would receive fewer qualifying points when assessed for PIP, with many receiving a lower level of financial support as a result, or even no PIP at all.

Those new rules were only introduced because [an upper tribunal ruling in November 2016](https://www.gov.uk/administrative-appeals-tribunal-decisions/mh-v-secretary-of-state-for-work-and-pensions-pip-2016-ukut-0531-aac) had found that DWP was wrong to say that such PIP claimants should not be entitled to those points.

Newton told MPs last week that the DWP review would “include screening the existing PIP caseload of some 1.6 million people to identify the group who may benefit”, but she also told Labour MP Stephen Timms that the department would look at those “who had zero points in their original claim” and therefore had had their claims rejected.

And McVey said last month that DWP would “undertake an exercise to go through all affected cases”.

But there is so far no clarity from DWP, or either minister, on how far back the department will go to review claims, including failed claims.

Welfare rights advisers warned this week that there was confusion around exactly which PIP claimants would now have their cases reviewed.

Andrew Clark, chair of trustees of [Buckinghamshire Disability Service (BuDS)](https://buds.org.uk/), said it was “an area that we are urgently trying to investigate” but that “facts are hard to find”, while he said “the review promised by DWP seems to have rather more presentational substance than reality”.

Clark said DWP appeared to have “arbitrarily” taken November 2016 as the start date for the new interpretation of the overwhelming psychological distress mobility rules, which “suggests they will not be reviewing historic claims much before that date”.

This would mean that DWP would only be reviewing claims from the last 15 or 16 months.

And he said: “Given that DWP have processed 3.2 million claims for PIP but only 1.6 million are currently in payment [[according to the December 2017 PIP official statistics](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/666525/pip-statistics-to-october-2017.pdf)], it’s pretty clear that they had in mind reviewing current claims, not previously failed ones.”

Clark also said he believed that the “review” would simply form part of DWP’s usual process of reviewing all time-limited PIP awards, “rather than being done as part of any separate exercise”.

Graeme Ellis, who founded the Lancaster-based social enterprise [Here2Support](http://here2support.org/), said he also believed the review was “a muddled situation”.

Like Clark, Ken Butler, [Disability Rights UK’s](https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/) welfare rights adviser, said: “Although the DWP says it will review 1.6 million PIP claimants, it has not said from what date any extra PIP would be payable from.

“This means that there is confusion among both PIP claimants and advisers as to who will be included in the review and why.

“There is no excuse for the department not to urgently confirm this information.”

He said he believes that DWP will use the date of the upper tribunal decision in November 2016 to decide which claims to review, rather than reviewing all claims made since PIP was introduced in 2013.

He said: “It’s likely that the DWP instead will hold that the… judgement is a ‘test case’ meaning that it can legally pay arrears only from the date of the decision of November 2016.

“It would then only consider for review… PIP claims in payment at that time and since then and PIP claims made from then and refused.”

He added: “While the DWP has said it will consult with ‘stakeholders’ about the PIP review, this isn’t very reassuring.

“The whole history of PIP has shown that DWP listens to what disabled people say and then disregards it.”

Despite repeated attempts by Disability News Service to secure clarification, DWP’s press office has refused to provide any further information about which claims will be reviewed.

A DWP spokeswoman would only say: “As the secretary of state has previously [confirmed](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2018-01-23/debates/3BEE8BA3-B281-4853-A2F7-6F787417B61D/PersonalIndependencePayment?highlight=Department%20Work%20Pensions%20will%20undertake%20exercise%20go%20through%20affected%20cases%20receipt%20PIP%20decisions%20made%20following%20judgment%20MH%20case%20identify%20anyone%20might%20entitled%20more%20result%20judgment#contribution-BC418EA8-88A9-4AD9-B8A9-F65252B26CC1), DWP will undertake an exercise to go through all affected cases in receipt of PIP and all decisions made following the [appeal court ruling] to identify anyone who might be entitled to more as a result of the judgment.”

Although this suggests that DWP will only look at claims made from November 2016 onwards, when she was asked to clarify whether this was correct, she said the department had “nothing to add”.

**8 February 2018**

**Renovations to Houses of Parliament ‘must provide step change in access’**

A disabled peer has told the House of Lords that plans for a major “restoration and renewal” of the Houses of Parliament must ensure a “step change” in the provision of disability access in a building that can be “extremely unwelcoming” to disabled people.

Baroness [Sal] Brinton, president of the Liberal Democrats and a wheelchair-user herself, said the newly-restored palace “will have failed” if it was not “truly accessible” to all disabled people.

She said that the building itself – and a “wider, unconscious cultural attitude” – can make the Houses of Parliament “extremely unwelcoming to disabled parliamentarians, staff and visitors”.

Members of the House of Lords [were discussing long-delayed plans](https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2018-02-06/debates/4240EA39-17CC-40F5-83F2-F3A5BB9CB724/PalaceOfWestminsterRestorationAndRenewal) to renovate the Palace of Westminster, which will eventually see MPs and peers move out and work in separate buildings nearby in Westminster – probably soon after 2025 – while a major programme of repairs takes place over a number of years.

Last week, MPs voted to approve the plan, and this week peers agreed to this “full and timely decant” to nearby buildings while the work takes place, and that the renovation should ensure “full access for people with disabilities”.

Problems include major fire risks, pipes and cables “decades past their lifespan”, and a “huge amount of asbestos” in the building – which is a royal palace and a UNESCO World Heritage Site – according to the Tory leader of the House of Lords, Baroness Evans of Bowes Park.

Baroness Brinton said that MPs and peers who use wheelchairs do not have the same “rights and experience” as their non-disabled colleagues.

She said: “A parliamentarian in a wheelchair cannot sit with their party or group in either the Commons or the Lords.

“Our Lords’ mobility bench behind the clerks in front of the cross benches, has three spaces, so when five or six of us want to speak we cannot stay in our place for the rest of the debate.

“Worse, if the chamber is full, we cannot even manoeuvre around after speaking to let another colleague move in.

“Even worse, the Commons does not even have a mobility bench.”

She also pointed out that there was just one space for wheelchair-users in the Commons public gallery, and no wheelchair spaces for peers who want to observe proceedings in the Commons.

She said that wheelchair-users often have to travel double the distance around the building, because most routes include steps, which means wheelchair-users often miss votes because there are so few lifts large enough for them to use.

Baroness Brinton also revealed that wheelchair-users are not able to access parts of the corridors used by ministers in the House of Commons.

She pointed out that there are no self-opening doors in the building, and that some of the accessible toilets are “too small, cluttered with bins, and the red alarm cords are often in the wrong place and tied up, which makes their use impossible”.

She also said that many of the ramps in the building have “no wheelchair” signs placed on them because they are too steep for wheelchair-users to use.

Another disabled peer, the former Conservative minister Lord Blencathra, said: “I could add a whole chapter of horrors and, indeed, humiliations about the difficulties of getting around this place in a wheelchair.”

The Liberal Democrat disabled peer Lord Addington said: “We have to get on and do this because we have a duty of care to everybody who works here and to the building.”

He said he believed that moving peers and MPs out of the building should take place sooner than 2025.

The disabled Labour peer, Lord [David] Blunkett, said he was pleased that the motion they were debating “recognises the importance of accessibility for visitors with disabilities and special needs, although that is also true of those working in the Palace of Westminster and will be in the future”.

Another Labour peer, Lord Carter of Coles, said access to the building for disabled people was “a disgrace and we should correct it”.

He added: “We should create a building that represents our values and, more importantly, our aspirations.”

Baroness Doocey, a Liberal Democrat, said the renovations should “go much further than the minimum standards” on access.

She said: “We should make it as easy as possible for every member of the public, regardless of their disability, to come to parliament and, crucially, to feel happy and comfortable when they come here.”

Labour’s Baroness Smith of Basildon, shadow leader of the Lords, added: “We have an opportunity to ensure that parliament abides by the laws that we pass but do not follow regarding disability.”

A Conservative peer, Baroness Bloomfield, told the debate that, after touring the basement of the building last week, she was “amazed that health and safety regulations allow any of us to occupy any part of this estate at any time.

“The threat of a catastrophic failure in this parliament reflects the hideous possibility that a fire within this building, which has the same ventilation construction [as the Mackintosh building in Glasgow](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-glasgow-west-27556659) and the same risks that attach to that system, could indeed cause major damage, potential death and the destruction of historic art and documents on a quite grotesque scale.”

Baroness Evans assured Baroness Brinton and other peers who had raised the need to address access issues that “a major element of the proposed works will include significantly improving disabled access in the palace, which does not currently meet modern standards”.

And she said that Baroness Brinton had “rightly raised some important issues which need to be looked at”.

**8 February 2018**

**Disabled people need ‘equal and fair’ hate crime laws, MPs are told**

Disabled people will only be protected from online abuse when they have “equal and fair” hate crime laws, a leading disabled campaigner has told MPs.

Anne Novis, chair of [Inclusion London](https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/), [told the Commons petitions committee](http://www.parliamentlive.tv/Event/Index/e2cf146d-4840-4558-aca3-bed718478182) that the abuse targeted at disabled people online was “just an echo” of what they experienced on the streets.

And she said that the law fails to protect them in both cases.

She was speaking to the committee as part of its investigation into online abuse of disabled people, which was launched following [a petition set up by former model Katie Price](https://petition.parliament.uk/archived/petitions/190627) which was signed by more than 220,000 people.

Price’s petition called on the government to create a new criminal offence covering online abuse, and to set up a register of offenders.

She set up the petition following years of disablist and racist abuse targeted at her teenage son, Harvey, who met members of the committee before the evidence session.

But Novis, who is an adviser on hate crime to the Metropolitan police, the Crown Prosecution Service and British Transport Police, said she did not want to see a separate offence for online abuse or the creation of a register of online offenders.

Instead, she said, disabled people just needed “an equal and fair hate crime law”.

There is currently no stand-alone offence of disability hate crime, as there is with race hate crime, she said, and disabled people are excluded from offences that protect other groups from the incitement of hatred against them.

This means disabled people are not protected from posts on social media that would be breaking the law if they targeted people on the basis of their ethnicity.

Novis told the committee: “We desperately need government to take on board that we need an equal and fair hate crime law.”

She added: “We know that none of these people will get prosecuted unless they lay hands on us, then they can be arrested for violence and get an aggravated sentence because it’s hate crime.

“But apart from that they can be as rude and vitriolic [as they like] and spit in my face, they can target me [for having a] blue badge, they can target me online as much as they like, and they will not get charged with a crime. That is our reality.”

She warned that online stalking of disabled people can, and has, led to crimes of serious violence, including torture and even murder.

Novis told the committee: “We need that justice and we need you to take it very seriously and understand that people feel they have permission to be horrible to disabled people.”

She said many people had “jumped on the bandwagon of welfare reform and the rhetoric around scroungers”.

She said: “It’s normal for me to be called a scrounger and assume that I don’t work.

“I have an MBE for my efforts but it’s assumed I don’t do anything, that I’m a waste of space, and a burden on society, and the man and the woman on the street, and online, picks up those messages and distorts them.”

Novis said she had never had a successful response to reporting online abuse to social media providers.

And she said that other countries, such as Germany, were much “firmer” with the owners of social media services like Facebook and Twitter.

Price, whose mother also gave evidence about the abuse, had told the committee that the problems faced by her son had grown “worse and worse” over the last few years, with online abuse targeting his skin colour, his size and his impairments.

Although two of those responsible were eventually arrested and questioned by police, they never faced court proceedings because there were no appropriate offences to charge them with.

She said her son was seen as “an easy target” and she added: “At least I have a voice to speak. People who mock Harvey, they know he hasn’t got a voice back.”

Among those who have targeted her son are the comedian Frankie Boyle, who once joked on Channel Four that Harvey was going to rape her.

She said: “Frankie Boyle, the disgusting things he said, he said that Harvey was going to rape me.

“I complained to Channel Four because they were advertising for the Paralympics and then after the ad break they would have Frankie Boyle on talking about Harvey raping me.”

She said that neither Boyle nor Channel Four had apologised.

She added: “There’s so many people that have got love for Harvey but then there’s so many people that just find him a good excuse to pick on.”

Amy Clarke, a digital assistant for the charity Mencap, also gave evidence to the committee.

She said that online abuse “affects people a lot” and she called for stronger laws.

She described how she had joined an online Dr Who forum but had to leave it because someone called her “nasty names, such as retard”.

She said: “It was aggressive, and I felt very shocked. It made me leave the forum and I reported the person.”

She said that police need “to take it seriously. Believing people is really important and not seeing the disability, see the person.”

Clarke said there should be “a big button to report abuse online”, which should be “accessible and easy to use”.

She said it would also be useful to be able to have a live online chat with a member of staff from the social media provider to make it easier to report abuse.

Helen Jones, chair of the committee, said after the evidence session: “What Katie and her family have experienced is extreme and shocking, and other families of people with disabilities can tell similar stories.

“Many people suffer online abuse, but the evidence today shows the government must not ignore the particular needs of disabled people in drawing up plans to tackle it.

“We will be hearing from more disabled people, their families and other experts as the inquiry continues.”

The committee is likely to produce a report on its investigation, and demand a government response, before holding a Commons debate on the issue.

**8 February 2018**

**Disabled women celebrate vote centenary but warn of slow progress on rights**

Disabled activists have celebrated this week’s 100-year anniversary of women gaining the right to vote but have warned that disabled women are still facing breaches of their rights in all areas of life.

On Tuesday (6 February), there were public celebrations to mark 100 years since parliament passed the Representation of the People Act in 1918, which gave some women the right to vote for the first time.

But many disabled women, while welcoming the achievements of the suffragettes whose fight helped bring about that change, believe progress in achieving their rights has been “achingly slow”.

Michelle Daley, co-founder and director of the disabled women’s collective [Sisters of Frida](http://www.sisofrida.org/) (SoF), said: “The suffragettes remain one of the most successful women’s movements in history, bringing the right for women to vote.

“While we celebrate their achievements, we must not forget that there continue to be far too many disabled women who are still not able to exercise their right to vote (just as with other disabled people), and they are far more likely to be sexually abused and much more discriminated against.”

Daley said that disabled women experience “intersectionality” – facing discrimination caused by more than one characteristic – which “increases the experience of inequality”.

She told Disability News Service (DNS): “We continue to be disappointed that disabled women are being failed in all areas of life.

“We know this through attending different UN conventions such as CEDAW (the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women) and CRPD (the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) and it’s clear the UK government is not delivering on its obligations to bring about real equality.”

SoF is currently [asking for help from disabled women](http://www.sisofrida.org/cedaw-asking-for-help-from-disabled-women/) to gather evidence to present to CEDAW, which will then be used to question the UK government.

Daley said: “It is obvious that there is still a lot more work to be done before the true vision of the suffragettes can be achieved.”

Pam Thomas, a disabled Labour city councillor in Liverpool, highlighted the double discrimination experienced by disabled women in politics.

She told DNS: “It is still very hard. Firstly, women are under-represented in elected positions.

“There are some disabled women but very often we have to fit into a disabling world and not raise issues about disabling barriers or cause any discomfort for those non-disabled people who do not see the problem.

“Generally disabled men do experience disabling barriers, but still benefit from male privilege.”

She said that Liverpool Labour party had decided several years ago to introduce all-women shortlists, which have increased the representation of women on the council’s Labour group to 40 of 81 councillors, and four of nine cabinet members.

Thomas said: “Mayor Joe Anderson has understood what I have been saying and has put me on the cabinet to lead on removing disabling barriers in the city.

“All of that is helpful for disabled women. I continually push for the removal of disabling barriers in policy and practice.”

But she added: “I still have to deal with disabling barriers which hinder my activities every day, mostly in the built environment.”

She said the actions of non-disabled allies such as the mayor, the deputy mayor Ann O’Byrne and cabinet member Cllr Steve Munby “make a real contribution to the removal of disabling barriers”.

She said: “Whilst not everything is perfect, Liverpool is setting a very good example that others could follow.”

Deborah King, co-founder of [Disability Politics UK](http://www.disabilitypolitics.org.uk/), which campaigns for MPs to be allowed to job share, and who herself was prevented from standing for parliament on a job share basis in 2010, told DNS: “Progress on disabled women’s rights over the past 100 years has been achingly slow.

“When good proposals are put forward, which would help disabled women get into politics, like job sharing for MPs and local government councillors, they are not taken up by government.

“I would urge readers to email their MPs to ask for a law change to allow job sharing in elected political office.

“Political parties do not even publish adequate data about the numbers of disabled people in their parties and whether there is fair representation of disabled people in the political recruitment process.”

King said she was disappointed by Theresa May’s failure to help more disabled women into politics.

She said: “She could do this by getting the law changed to enable job sharing for MPs and councillors in local government.”

She also pointed out that May’s government had closed the Access to Elected Office Fund in 2015 [and has yet to reopen it](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/new-disabled-mps-back-fresh-call-to-reopen-access-fund/), and she highlighted [the prime minister’s speech](https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pms-vote-100-speech-6-february-2018) in Westminster Hall on the day of the centenary celebrations, in which she said she wanted to see more disabled people in politics and government.

King said that “deeds not words” would mean May would reinstate the fund, which previously provided grants of up to £40,000 for disability-related costs for disabled people standing for the UK parliament and in other English elections, and has been closed since the 2015 general election, supposedly while the government evaluates its success.

King also said that [Rosa May Billinghurst](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosa_May_Billinghurst), the disabled suffragette, “deserves to be included in exam syllabuses across the country”.

Much of this week’s media coverage of the anniversary [mentioned Billinghurst](https://broadly.vice.com/en_us/article/9kz54p/uk-suffrage-centenary-anniversary-women-color-queer-disabled-activists), who used a self-propelled tricycle and was a prominent activist in the years leading up to the First World War, and was repeatedly jailed for taking part in suffragette protests, as well as being force-fed while on hunger strike in prison.

One historian described how there were “loads of reports of her using her tricycle chair to basically ram the police at protests”.

[In a blog to mark the centenary](http://www.disabilitywales.org/blog/deeds-not-words/), Rhian Davies, chief executive of Disability Wales, pointed to parallels between the history of the campaign for women’s suffrage and the disabled people’s movement.

She pointed to how the suffragists had focused on “parliamentary lobbying and constitutional reform” while the suffragettes, who were “frustrated with the lack of progress”, carried out acts of civil disobedience, which saw many imprisoned and taking part in hunger strikes.

Davies said there was a similar split among disabled people in the 1980s and 1990s, with many taking part in lobbies of parliament and mass rallies, while the Disabled People’s Direct Action Network (DAN) “highlighted the inaccessibility of public transport by undertaking suffragette style shock tactics with disabled protestors handcuffing themselves to double-decker buses, gridlocking city centres across the land”.

She said the introduction of the Disability Discrimination Act in 1995 did not “instantly remove barriers”, and she highlighted how although disabled people have the vote “many are prevented from exercising it due to lack of access to information or indeed to the polling booth itself”.

Davies said that mass civil rights movements can often overlook the experiences of individuals who face multiple forms of discrimination, and she added: “The specific barriers faced by disabled women have not necessarily enjoyed prominence either within the women’s or the disabled people’s movements.”

As part of the centenary celebrations, Disability Wales is highlighting the achievements of D/deaf and disabled women through its Embolden project, which is funded by the charity [Spirit of 2012](http://www.spiritof2012trust.org.uk/) – set up by the Big Lottery Fund – and the women’s rights charity [the Fawcett Society](http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/), itself named after the suffragist Millicent Fawcett.

An event at the Welsh National Assembly next month will celebrate eight disabled role models who have been shortlisted from 43 nominations, showing the contributions of D/deaf and disabled women to communities, workplaces, arts, sport and education across Wales.

Meanwhile, the magazine Time Out London has included several disabled women in an article [featuring 64 “inspiring” women](https://www.timeout.com/london/things-to-do/64-inspiring-women-pay-tribute-to-the-heroines-who-blazed-a-trail-before-them) who have chosen “the heroines who blazed a trail before them”.

They include disabled activist Eleanor Lisney, another co-founder of Sisters of Frida, who chose [Nasa Begum](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2011/jun/22/nasa-begum-obituary), who was a rights campaigner and senior policy adviser to the Department of Health, and Ruth Bashall, a disabled campaigner who leads the user-led organisation [Stay Safe East](http://staysafe-east.org.uk/), which supports disabled survivors of abuse in east London.

The disabled Guardian journalist Dr Frances Ryan chose as one of her two picks Linda Burnip, co-founder of [Disabled People Against Cuts](https://dpac.uk.net/), who she said was “one of many unsung heroes at the forefront of the fight for disabled people’s equality”.

Another disabled woman who contributed to the Time Out London feature was performer and comedian Jess Thom, who chose Ono Dafedjaiye, the disabled co-founder of the arts organisation [Perky](https://www.perkyhq.com/), which helps girls and women with learning difficulties “to have conversations about womanhood, the body and sexuality”, and Perky’s co-founder Holly Stratton.

**8 February 2018**

**News provided by John Pring at** [www.disabilitynewsservice.com](http://www.disabilitynewsservice.com)