**Charities fail to tell MPs about clauses that ‘prevent them attacking McVey and DWP’**

Representatives of disability charities have given evidence to MPs about the impact of government social security reforms on disabled people, without disclosing that they signed contracts preventing them from attacking work and pensions secretary Esther McVey.

Senior figures from Shaw Trust and the Disability Benefits Consortium (DBC) both answered questions from members of the Commons work and pensions select committee yesterday (Thursday) about universal credit and the government’s new Work and Health Programme.

But neither of them made any attempt to place on the public record that the contracts could be seen as preventing them criticising McVey or her Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in the evidence session.

And the committee’s chair, Frank Field, failed to ask the two witnesses to place on the record the existence of the contractual agreements, even though Disability News Service alerted the committee to the concerns two days before the evidence session.

Charities including Shaw Trust, Leonard Cheshire and RNIB have confirmed that they have signed contracts – either with DWP or with one of the five main Work and Health Programme contractors – that include clauses that prevent them attracting adverse publicity to DWP or McVey.

Other charities linked to the Work and Health Programme, such as Action on Hearing Loss, have refused to answer questions about the clauses.

Leonard Cheshire, RNIB and Action on Hearing Loss [are all DBC members](https://disabilitybenefitsconsortium.wordpress.com/dbc-members/).

The clause in the DWP contract signed by Shaw Trust says the charity must “pay the utmost regard to the standing and reputation” of McVey and must promise not to do anything that harms the public’s confidence in her or DWP.

And the clause warns that these promises apply whether or not the damaging actions relate to the Work and Health Programme.

Other charities, including RNIB, have signed agreements with the main contractors that say they must have “regard to the standing and reputation” of DWP, must do nothing to bring McVey and her department into disrepute in delivering those contracts, and must not “attract adverse publicity” to them.

A spokeswoman for the committee confirmed that the two witnesses had not been asked about the clauses or to place the existence of the contracts on the record.

She declined to comment further.

A Shaw Trust spokeswoman said the clause “does not and has not impinged on our independence as a charity”.

She said: “Shaw Trust’s spokesperson [its director of policy, marketing and communications, Gemma Hope] gave evidence informed by the direct frontline experiences of our staff.”

But she declined to say why Hope had failed to draw the committee’s attention to the clause, and if she agreed that it could be seen as preventing Hope giving the fullest possible evidence to the committee and from criticising DWP and McVey.

Rob Holland, DBC’s co-chair and public affairs manager for Mencap, declined to say why he did not draw the committee’s attention to the clauses, and whether he agreed that the clauses could be seen as preventing DBC giving the fullest possible evidence to the committee and criticising DWP and McVey.

He referred instead to [a previous statement given by DBC in April](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/dwps-disrepute-contract-clause-is-proof-charities-cannot-be-trusted/).

But Geoff Fimister, policy co-chair of DBC and a consultant to the Thomas Pocklington Trust, said later in a statement: “I don’t see why the contracts in question should have any effect on the DBC’s capacity to comment.

“There’s nothing in our terms of reference to require us to have regard to such things and I doubt any DBC spokesperson has any inclination to do so.

“It isn’t for the DBC to comment on member organisations’ contractual affairs, but if you want my strictly personal opinion, as a commentator on welfare rights issues, I would say that it’s highly inappropriate of the DWP to impose such conditions – which look suspiciously like an attempt to nobble legitimate criticism.

“I also think that the charities concerned run the risk of creating a conflict of interest.

“Having said that, whether this will have any practical effect is another matter and may vary between organisations.

“Certainly, I have done a lot of work with RNIB, some of it recent, and have experienced no pressure to hold back.

“I think they would say that well-evidenced criticism is unaffected. But not every organisation may take that view.”

**5 July 2018**

**Rival international summit aims to highlight government’s ‘global hypocrisy’**

Disabled activists and their organisations are to host their own international “solidarity summit” in a bid to highlight the hypocrisy of the government’s decision to co-host a major “global disability summit” in east London later this month.

The solidarity summit will also be held in east London, on Sunday 22 July, two days before the government’s Global Disability Summit takes place less than a mile away on the Olympic Park in Stratford.

The government has invited disabled people’s organisations (DPOs) from across the global south to its event and says it wants to “galvanise the global effort to address disability inclusion in the poorest countries in the world”.

But [Disabled People Against Cuts (DPAC)](https://dpac.uk.net), which is organising the solidarity summit with the support of the [Reclaiming Our Futures Alliance (ROFA)](http://www.rofa.org.uk/), says there has been anger among disabled activists at the decision of the UK government to co-host the event when its own record on disability rights is so poor.

Although DPAC and ROFA are not calling for a boycott of the government’s event, DPAC’s Ellen Clifford said: “We want to draw attention to the hypocrisy of the government in hosting the global summit.

“People in the UK are rightly very angry about it, but we think it is important that that anger is not channelled at the summit itself because of the chance that it is going to benefit disabled people in other countries.”

Some DPOs in the global south are believed to feel that the summit will give them leverage to push their own governments to act on disability rights.

Clifford said DPAC and ROFA “support initiatives that genuinely benefit disabled people and DPOs” but do not yet have enough information to say whether the government’s summit “is going to achieve the aim of benefitting Deaf and disabled people and their organisations”.

[In a statement](https://dpac.uk.net/2018/06/statement-on-uk-government-hosting-global-disability-summit/), ROFA said the UK government had been found [guilty in November 2016 of “grave and systematic violations”](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/un-confirms-that-uk-governments-treaty-violations-were-both-grave-and-systematic/) of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in connection with its policies on independent living, social security and employment.

And it said the UK government continued to “dismiss the findings and expertise” of the UN’s committee on the rights of persons with disabilities.

Last October, Penny Mordaunt, then the minister for disabled people, [dismissed the committee’s report](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/uk-wants-to-promote-its-disability-policies-to-rest-of-the-world-says-mordaunt/) on the UK government’s implementation of the convention.

The committee had [called for more than 80 improvements](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/uk-is-going-backwards-on-independent-living-says-un-committee/) to the ways in which the UK’s laws and policies affect disabled people’s human rights, the highest number of recommendations it had ever produced for a country undergoing the review process.

But Mordaunt still insisted that she wanted to “promote” the UK government’s disability policies so they could be a “catalyst for change elsewhere in the world”.

ROFA said the UK government’s involvement in this month’s summit – which will be headed by Mordaunt, who is now the international development secretary – undermined any attempts to strengthen disabled people’s rights under the UN convention.

Instead, ROFA said, it “provides a platform for them to showcase to other states how it is possible to get away with ignoring those rights when it comes to your own citizens”.

And it said the government had frequently used the poorer conditions faced by disabled people in other countries to deflect criticism of its own policies, which it said was “a misunderstanding of the UNCRPD, which is about the progressive realisation of rights”.

ROFA was also critical of the decision of Mordaunt’s department to exclude UK DPOs from the design and delivery of its[Disability Inclusive Development Programme](https://supplierportal.dfid.gov.uk/selfservice/pages/public/supplier/publicbulletin/viewPublicNotice.cmd?bm90aWNlSWQ9NzE0NTA%3D), believed to be worth more than £25 million.

Disabled activists from Bolivia, Uganda and Greece are set to attend [the DPAC and ROFA summit](https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/international-deaf-and-disabled-peoples-solidarity-summit-tickets-47524826034), which will explore issues around the international fight against the oppression of disabled people.

Other leading disabled activists, including Anita Cameron, director of minority outreach for [Not Dead Yet](http://www.notdeadyet.org/) in the US and a leading figure in the national grassroots organisation ADAPT, and Naziaty Jaacob from Malaysia, who is among disabled people [campaigning for a disability discrimination act in her country](https://www.thestartv.com/v/harapan-oku-do-away-with-the-lame-disabilities-act-2008#8hSWCK3uIA3PHDCI.01), are planning to speak to the International Deaf and Disabled People’s Solidarity Summit via Skype.

The government’s “global disability summit” is being co-hosted with the International Disability Alliance (IDA) and the government of Kenya.

Among those speaking at the government’s event will be the disabled president of Ecuador, Lenin Moreno.

More than 60 representatives of DPOs from the global south have been invited to the event.

The themes are: tackling stigma and discrimination; inclusion in education; routes to economic empowerment; and harnessing technology and innovation.

As well as showcasing best practice, the summit aims to generate sustainable commitments from the governments of developing countries, donors, voluntary organisations and the private sector.

The previous day, 23 July, IDA will host a Civil Society Forum, which aims to amplify the voices of disabled people and DPOs and highlight current issues relevant to the global disability movement and the realisation of UNCRPD.

Among the forum’s tasks will be to agree a statement on behalf of disabled people and DPOs that will be read during the opening of the summit.

It will also discuss what is needed to achieve full implementation of the UN convention, and the need for capacity building of DPOs at local and national level.

**5 July 2018**

**Minister calls on her own government to act on ‘shared space’ street designs**

The minister for disabled people is calling on her own government to take “urgent action” to address concerns about the dangers of “shared space” street developments.

Sarah Newton called for action in letters she wrote to both the minister for transport accessibility, Nusrat Ghani, and the housing, communities and local government secretary, James Brokenshire.

Since she wrote the letters, the government’s accessible transport advisory body, the [Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC)](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disabled-persons-transport-advisory-committee), has also spoken out on shared space.

DPTAC has issued a position paper in which it is heavily critical of the government’s current position and calls for an immediate halt to all further shared space developments.

Newton met in parliament with disabled campaigners on 24 April, the same day that nine separate petitions about the dangers of shared space street designs were handed in to Number 10.

In Newton’s letter to Ghani, she calls for urgent action by the Department for Transport (DfT) to produce new guidance for local authorities that would warn them they risk breaching the Equality Act if they “deliberately install an area that prejudices disability inclusion”.

DPTAC says [in its position paper](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dptacs-position-on-shared-space/dptac-position-on-shared-space) that DfT’s current guidance is “widely argued to be inadequate and in need of fundamental revision” and calls on the government to “take a lead role in the shared space agenda”.

And it calls for “detailed independent evaluation” of all existing shared space developments, with the involvement of disabled people.

It adds: “The implementation of shared space schemes should be paused, until the independent evaluation referred to above has taken place.”

DPTAC also calls on the government to ensure advice is “readily available” so campaigners can challenge local authorities on “existing or new shared space schemes which exclude or have the potential to exclude disabled people”.

Shared space schemes often remove kerbs and controlled crossings from a street, encouraging vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists to share the same space, posing greater risks for partially-sighted and blind people, as well as other disabled people, including many of those who are neuro-diverse, or have mobility impairments, learning difficulties or are deaf.

[Last September](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/protesters-demand-end-to-shared-space-no-go-zones/), campaigners from across the country gathered outside parliament to call for an end to unsafe shared space street designs, which they said risked turning public spaces into “no go zones” for many disabled and older people.

[National Federation of the Blind of the UK (NFB UK)](https://www.nfbuk.org/) has taken a lead role in the campaign against shared space street designs.

David Bates, NFB UK’s street access executive, said: “The evidence is overwhelming that urgent action is required to bring an end to shared space roads and to halt the misery and devastating impact this road design has had on the lives of blind, partially sighted and deaf-blind people across the UK.

“Blind people with no sight can independently navigate the urban environment through the use of kerbs and controlled crossings.

“Taking away these features takes away this ability and leaves blind people avoiding the areas or relying on sighted assistance, which is totally against the principles of the public sector equality duty placed [on] local authorities under the Equality Act 2010.”

He said that “urgent action” was now required to ensure that all such schemes were now “revised and modified to ensure access for all”.

He added: “It is critical that we leave no one behind, and we design our urban environments and public realm based on inclusive design principles and guidance developed with disabled people.”

Andrew Hodgson, NFBUK’s president, welcomed Newton’s “positive support”, but said the government needed to “take ownership [of] the problems that have resulted from local authorities who followed government guidance on shared space”.

When contacted by Disability News Service, Newton refused to say if she believed there should be an immediate pause in further shared space developments.

Ghani also refused to say if she would call an immediate halt to shared space developments, whether she welcomed Newton’s letters and the DPAC position paper, or if she would produce new guidance.

The Department for Work and Pensions and DfT instead produced the following joint statement: “We take the issue of accessibility very seriously.

“We understand the concerns that have been raised around ‘shared space’ schemes and are considering what action may be appropriate.

“Disabled people must have the same opportunities to travel as other members of society, and it is essential that streets are accessible and safe.”

The two ministers will be meeting to discuss the concerns, while DfT will publish its response to a consultation on its Accessibility Action Plan, and its Inclusive Transport Strategy, later this year.

NFBUK’s campaign has been backed by many other disabled people’s organisations, including [Inclusion London](https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/), [Transport for All](http://www.transportforall.org.uk/), [Disability Rights UK](https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org), [Inclusion Scotland](http://inclusionscotland.org/), [Merton Centre for Independent Living](https://www.mertoncil.org.uk/), and many organisations representing blind and partially-sighted people.

The disabled Tory peer Lord [Chris] Holmes, who has campaigned against shared space street designs, [including publishing a report in 2015](http://chrisholmes.co.uk/news/accidents-by-design-the-holmes-report-into-shared-space/), said: “Three years on from my report, and with an increasing chorus of voices joining the tireless work of campaigners such as NFBUK, the government must take action to halt this dangerous and discriminatory urban design that excludes disabled people, and ensure Britain will finally be built with the Golden Thread of inclusivity, leaving nobody behind.”

**5 July 2018**

**Kamil Ahmad: Anger over review’s failure to expose systemic flaws that led to murder**

The brother of a disabled asylum-seeker who was brutally murdered by a racist neighbour has joined disabled activists in criticising a “safeguarding review” for failing to expose the “catalogue of injustice” he faced in the years leading to his death.

They spoke out during a series of events in Bristol that were held to honour the memory of Kamil Ahmad, and another disabled refugee, Bijan Ebrahimi, who were both murdered by racist neighbours in the city.

The memorial included the unveiling at Bristol’s City Hall of a copy of a mural that Ahmad helped create, which will be hung in the building’s foyer, followed by a march through the streets of the city to a nearby venue where campaigners discussed the barriers faced by disabled asylum-seekers and how to fight for change to the systems and agencies blamed for the two murders.

Days before the memorial events, [the safeguarding review, commissioned by Bristol Safeguarding Adults Board, had concluded](https://bristolsafeguarding.org/adults/safeguarding-adult-reviews/bristol-sars/kamil-ahmad-and-mr-x-june-2018/) that the murder of Kamil Ahmad in July 2016 by Jeffrey Barry “could have been avoided”.

The two men had been living in separate flats in the same supported accommodation, but Ahmad had repeatedly told staff and police in the months and years leading to his death that Barry had been threatening and assaulting him and that he did not feel safe.

Barry was finally sectioned following growing concerns about his behaviour, which included writing notes threatening to kill a number of people, including Ahmad.

But he was released from hospital the following month on the orders of a mental health tribunal. Neither Ahmad nor the police were told of his release.

Hours later, Barry attacked Ahmad and stabbed him to death in his own room.

Bristol social services – which Ahmad had also told about his fears for his safety – had been about to evict him and leave him destitute on the streets, and only announced that this decision had been reversed the day after he was murdered.

Barry was convicted of murder last year and will serve at least 23 years of a life sentence.

Kamil Ahmad’s brother, Kamaran Ahmad Ali, who attended the memorial events, told Disability News Service that he was “not happy” with the review, and that both the police and health services had failed to admit their mistakes.

He said he wanted what had “happened to me not to happen to anyone else. I can’t get my brother’s life, but we can get that”.

But he said he welcomed the memorial events and believed that bringing disabled activists and disabled asylum-seekers together was “a very good thing”.

He had earlier said at the unveiling of the picture that his brother’s murder by a “brutal and racist person” was “inhuman” and that “the silence and negligence of the organisations that were responsible for protecting him makes this suffering even harder to bear”.

He said: “None of those organisations and institutions managed to protect Kamil’s life from this racist person, otherwise Kamil would have been with us now.

“Our request is that those who were in charge of Kamil and people like him should reassess their practice and try to improve their services in order to prevent more lives to be lost.”

Three of the main organisers of the memorial events – Rebecca Yeo, a disabled academic and friend of Kamil’s; Ellen Clifford, from [Disabled People Against Cuts (DPAC)](https://dpac.uk.net) and the [Reclaiming Our Futures Alliance](http://www.rofa.org.uk/); and Mike Steel From Bristol DPAC – said the review had failed to expose repeated injustices.

[In a joint statement](https://dpac.uk.net/2018/06/response-to-bristol-safeguarding-review-into-the-murder-of-kamil-ahmad/), they said they were pleased the review had recognised that Kamil had been subjected to “systemic racism” and had been failed by many agencies in the city.

But they added: “There could have been deeper investigation into potentially racist attitudes towards Kamil as an asylum-seeker by services that should have been providing support”.

And they pointed out that decisions by Bristol City Council that led to a disabled man with high support needs being assessed as ineligible for support were “barely referred to, let alone questioned” in the review.

They also said the review had failed to expose the police’s failure to protect Kamil, who had repeatedly asked for action to be taken in response to Barry’s violence and racist threats.

And they were highly critical of the review’s repeated references to Kamil and other disabled people as “vulnerable”.

They said: “All humans are vulnerable. People become more vulnerable if barriers are faced getting their rights met.

“Kamil was failed by multiple agencies. He died because insufficient action was taken to prevent someone intent on killing him.

“That is not a sign of Kamil’s ‘vulnerability’ but of agency failure.”

They also said the review appeared to show that “as a service-user and as a refused asylum-seeker, Kamil’s rights to live free from abuse, harassment and fear were denied”.

They added: “The repeated communication failures between the NHS, voluntary and private sector services which also contributed to Kamil’s murder are simply not a matter of ‘learning lessons’ or ‘designing new pathways’.

“We believe these are a direct consequence of drastic funding cuts, unaccountable commissioning and the impact of service fragmentation on front-line staff.”

Bijan Ebrahimi, a disabled refugee who was also brutally murdered by a racist neighbour in Bristol, had also made repeated pleas for the police and other agencies to protect him before his death in 2013.

As a tribute to Ebrahimi at the unveiling at City Hall, the city’s first poet laureate, [Miles Chambers](http://www.mileshiltonchambers.com/), read the poem he wrote about the murder.

The poem included the lines: “Faith in the police respected British rules and authority/Bijan thought they’d take care of me.”

And: “Wake me up, shake me, give my cheek a pinch/Was I dreaming? Was this 1950s Mississippi/Did we just witness a lynch?”

Ebrahimi’s two sisters had attended the unveiling and had asked Chambers to read his poem at the event.

Alex Raikes, strategic director for the Bristol charity Stand Against Racism and Inequality (SARI), told the unveiling event that both Kamil Ahmad and Bijan Ebrahimi were supposed to be in housing “where they could be safe”.

She said that both men had been disabled, and much of their impairments were “hidden, much exacerbated and made worse by the systems they were fighting here in the UK”.

She said they had both “believed in authorities and systems and both thought authorities and systems were there for them”, but both had lost their lives to racist murders.

Raikes said both Kamil and Bijan had used the system but “were failed because they were not listened to.

“The system didn’t listen to them, and worse still it didn’t take them seriously and didn’t really believe in the racism they were suffering.”

[Marvin Rees](https://www.bristol.gov.uk/mayor/biography-of-the-mayor), the mayor of Bristol – who was elected just two months before Kamil Ahmad’s murder – apologised to the relatives of both men “on behalf of Bristol”.

He told them: “I do hope you take from today… that both Kamil and Bijan’s lives matter.”

He said the city was committed to ensuring that there were people working in its institutions “who are committed to make sure that safety is the norm and is something we can guarantee and it is not an exception” and that “the support around individuals and communities, the response to people raising concerns, is as good as it should be”.

Following the memorial events, organisers and representatives of groups that had taken part – including Yeo, DPAC, Bristol DPAC, TUC, Bristol Disability Equality Forum and Bristol Refugee Rights – wrote to Rees and the city’s MPs, calling for urgent action and a meeting with them and Bristol social services.

They warned that the failings by agencies that had affected Kamil were “neither unusual nor the result of oversights”.

And they said they knew of at least three disabled asylum-seekers with mental health conditions who had been evicted by the city council from social services supported accommodation and left homeless with no support.

They said: “It is only a matter of time before we have the next tragedy and then the next apology.

“We need urgent action to find a solution to this inhumanity and to turn Bristol’s apology into practical change.

“We are fully aware that local authority budgets are in crisis and that social services have to make huge cuts.

“The impact of this needs to be highlighted at a national level but we also need to find solutions at local level.

“This is an urgent issue of saving lives, right now in Bristol.”

**5 July 2018**

**Kamil Ahmad: Campaigners demand ‘fundamental change’ to systems that led to murders**

Disabled asylum-seekers and activists have come together to seek fundamental changes to the systems and agencies that have been blamed for the brutal murders of two disabled refugees in the same city.

Disabled people’s organisations (DPOs) and groups working with asylum-seekers in Bristol organised a series of events on 29 June to mark the murders of Kamil Ahmad, in July 2016, and Bijan Ebrahimi, in July 2013.

[Both men were failed by official agencies in the city](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/police-and-council-face-questions-over-second-murder-of-disabled-refugee/), and both were murdered by racist neighbours, despite repeatedly raising concerns about their own safety with the authorities.

Friday’s memorial events were organised in a bid to build “positive change” in the city and across the country and to honour the two men and other disabled refugees who have been failed by a system that is supposed to support and protect them.

The events began with the unveiling at City Hall of a copy of a mural that Kamil Ahmad had helped design – [a project that was led by the UK Disabled People’s Council](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/murals-paint-colourful-pictures-of-hopes-and-barriers/) – and which illustrated the experiences of disabled people trapped in the UK asylum system.

Disabled asylum-seekers, representatives of DPOs and allies then marched through the streets of Bristol to a nearby venue – with protesters chanting slogans such as “they came here for safety, they were murdered in Bristol” and “never again” – where they discussed how they could fight for change by working together.

Rebecca Yeo, a disabled academic, and herself the daughter of a refugee, who became a friend of Kamil’s after working with him on the mural project, told the meeting: “If we can bring together disabled asylum-seekers and refugees into a movement of real solidarity then we can fundamentally change the system.”

The idea for a memorial event came originally from Yeo and Ellen Clifford, from [Disabled People Against Cuts](https://dpac.uk.net) and the [Reclaiming Our Futures Alliance](http://www.rofa.org.uk/), with support from local DPOs and groups from the asylum sector, universities and trade union branches.

Clifford said: “Since 2010, while the poorest members of society have been made to pay for a financial crisis we didn’t cause, there has been a deliberate attempt to try to divide us and make us blame and hate each other to prevent us from uniting and fighting our shared oppression.

“And that’s what today’s event is all about: strength in unity.

“Today is about honouring the memories of Kamil and Bijan and it is right that we should be angry about what happened in their lives – not just that they were repeatedly let down and taken from us in such brutal ways, but everything that happened in their lives that forced them to have to seek sanctuary in Britain.”

She said the day was “just one very small step in bringing together people who might not otherwise have met” in an effort to end oppression and build a society “founded on principles of fairness and social justice”.

Yeo said: “The harsh reality is that the conditions in which Kamil and Bijan were failed were neither unusual nor the result of oversights. The hostile environment is designed to be hostile.”

She said that Kamil Ahmad’s experience of mental distress was not unusual among asylum-seekers.

She said: “When I listen to disabled asylum-seekers and refugees, I wonder how we have come to a point where people can be treated so badly.

“The denial of rights to asylum-seekers, including disabled asylum-seekers, is not new.”

She added: “If our commitment to universal human rights is removed it is an easy step to remove rights from ever more people.”

She said the government had removed the rights of disabled asylum-seekers to mainstream benefits in 1999, but there had been no organised resistance from the disabled people’s movement.

Yeo said the drastic reduction of support to disabled citizens through the 2012 Welfare Reform Act, 13 years later, was “the price we are paying for the lack of resistance to the removal of rights from disabled asylum-seekers”.

She said the destitution faced now by many disabled asylum-seekers was “not an oversight” but “a deliberate policy” by the government, and she added: “We don’t want ramps in detention centres, we want rid of detention centres.”

She pointed out that Kamil Ahmad had been told by social services that he was about to be evicted and made destitute and street homeless, a decision that was only reversed the day after he was murdered.

She said: “The Home Office labels people in Kamil’s position as failed asylum-seekers. Kamil didn’t fail. He was failed in the country he had hoped to find peace and safety.”

There was a message of support to the event from Labour’s shadow chancellor, John McDonnell, who said that the “institutional racism and systemic failures” of the immigration system, and the failure to provide services and support for disabled citizens, were “costing lives”.

He said: “It is a disgrace that these two disabled men who sought sanctuary in Britain were so tragically failed and as a result died.

“It is vitally important that we honour their memories by building something positive out of what has happened.

“The number of campaigns, trade union branches and organisations supporting this event shows the desire for peace and unity and that our Great Britain can be a place that welcomes and includes asylum-seekers, refugees and disabled citizens.”

The event included [video footage of Kamil](https://dpac.uk.net/2018/06/bristol-dpac-honouring-kamil-exploring-disability-and-migration-fri-29-june/) speaking about his treatment in the UK, and describing how the way he was being treated by the police, where he had to keep reporting to police stations, was “like playing with my mind”.

Through an interpreter, he said: “In this country, which is a developed country, they are unable to provide me with the basic needs that I was provided with in an underdeveloped country [Iraq].

“I am so tormented by the system here that sometimes I feel like killing myself because I don’t know where I can get some support.

“I didn’t come here for money, I came because I had problems.”

He compared the way he was treated in England with the way prisoners were treated in Baghdad’s notorious Abu Ghraib prison, and added: “I feel like I am in a prison in a country where I am supposed to be free.”

The event also featured another short film, by Frank Spencer, of interviews by Yeo with disabled asylum-seekers.

One wheelchair-user described in the film how on one occasion she had been left for a week with no food but a single potato and some milk, and how she could not leave her home because she had no support.

Another said he was only surviving because of his partner, while a third disabled asylum-seeker described how he and others feared to campaign for their rights because “the Home Office are opening their big eyes” and “we know all people are not on our side”.

Another described how his life had become so miserable that he harmed himself.

Manjeet Kaur, of Manchester-based RAPAR (Refugee and Asylum Seeker Participatory Action Research), [a disabled asylum-seeker](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/disabled-asylum-seeker-fends-off-government-bid-to-make-her-homeless/) who had been involved in creating the mural, told the event that it was important “not to lose hope” and to be “persistent” and ensure there was no distance between disabled asylum-seekers and other disabled people.

She said: “I had to fight for one year to get a care package for my needs. You feel you are fighting for something you don’t deserve.

“You have to feel it should not be like that. Then you can make a difference.”

Mark Williams, co-vice-chair of [Bristol Disability Equality Forum](http://bristoldef.org.uk/) (BDEF), told Disability News Service (DNS) that bringing disabled asylum-seekers together with DPOs was “very important”.

He said the murders had been “terrible” and added: “We are supposed to be a city of sanctuary, a multi-cultural city.”

Laura Welti, BDEF’s manager, said the forum was “determined to do what we can to make sure Bristol does move on and learns about how to work together more effectively”.

BDEF has previously worked with the charity Bristol Refugee Rights (BRR) and Welti said that more of BRR’s members were now willing to self-identify as disabled people.

The forum, which lost its city council funding this year, is now seeking financial support that will allow it to bring the two communities together.

She called on disabled asylum-seekers in Bristol to contact BDEF for support with campaigning or securing the social care they need to counter social isolation.

Rob Punton, a member of DPAC and Stand up to Racism, said: “Until we unite together and fight together we will not be able to change society, because all we want is a better life for everybody.

“There are no such things as vulnerable people, there are only vulnerable situations. People are put in vulnerable situations by the actions and inactions of everybody else.”

Mohammed Elsharif, a local activist, said that institutions must be held accountable for their failings.

He said: “The problem is systematic failure. Housing, police.

“There is very good citizen support, but institutions in Bristol have a lot to do. As citizens we need to follow this through.

“It is not good enough to have an inquiry. What next? We need to ensure there is a very clear process to stop this happening to asylum-seekers and refugees.”

Rick Burgess was one of several disabled activists who came to Bristol from Manchester for the event.

He told DNS that the agencies that were supposed to help Kamil Ahmad had “not only failed but helped the terrible outcome”.

Burgess said that disabled asylum-seekers found themselves “at the sharp end of two hostile environments”, which he said could be fatal.

He added: “We have a common enemy in the government [because] a lot of the same instruments of bureaucracy are used against us both.”

Among the suggestions for change from those attending the event were the need for the voices of disabled asylum-seekers and refugees to be heard; for improved information sharing; and for the social perception of asylum-seekers to change.

One attendee suggested there was a need for activism and direct action to draw attention to how people are being treated and to challenge the “hostile environment”; another called for outreach work by DPOs to find disabled asylum-seekers in their communities.

There were also calls for best practice to be shared, and for closer links between disabled asylum-seekers, the organisations working with them, and disabled people and DPOs.

There were also many tributes to Kamil Ahmad from people who knew him.

He had come to Britain seeking sanctuary, after having been imprisoned and tortured in Iraq.

Esam Amin, who spoke at the unveiling and co-chaired the discussions, said his friend – they were both Kurdish asylum-seekers – was “generous and smiley and friendly and helpful”.

He had said at City Hall: “He’s still in my heart, he’s still in our heart.

“I hope after today we understand more of those disabled people, why the community should look after them a lot more.

“We are asylum seeker community, we are nothing different from you.”

He described later how Kamil Ahmad had found a bag of jewellery in a city lake but was determined that he would not keep it because it was not his, and handed it in to the police.

Welti, who got to know Ahmad after BDEF hosted an exhibition of the mural, said he had “avoided conflict wherever possible”.

She said: “He was a very quiet man and really gentle in his communication and had such an eloquent way of talking about his experiences of fleeing enormous oppression and physical threat to somewhere that he thought was going to be safe, only to get here and realise that he was no better off.”

Manjeet Kaur, from RAPAR, said she believed Ahmad “would be very pleased to see he is not forgotten, as he thought he would be, and that he didn’t die in vain”.

**5 July 2018**

**Project offers new bridge between chronic illness community and disability movement**

A disabled researcher has suggested a way to bring the hundreds of thousands of people with chronic illness under the umbrella of the disabled people’s movement.

Catherine Hale, who has lived with a diagnosis of ME for nearly 30 years, hopes that her new discussion paper will build bridges between the disabled people’s movement and the chronic illness community.

She is keen for her paper to “stimulate reaction and debate” from members of the movement, disability studies academics and policy-makers.

Hale suggests in the paper that people with chronic illness can be viewed as having a “stamina impairment” which restricts their activities – despite any treatment regimes they undergo – and that such people could make up the second-largest impairment group of disabled people in the UK.

She says that people with such impairments can and do experience socially-constructed disabling barriers, such as their marginalisation by society, the lack of medical understanding of their conditions, and the discrimination they face from those who doubt their ill-health.

She hopes that this will provide a way to explain their oppression through [the social model of disability](http://www.disabilitywales.org/rights/social-model/) and bring them under the umbrella of the disabled people’s movement.

[The publication of the discussion paper](http://inclusionproject.org.uk/publications/) by [The Centre for Welfare Reform](http://www.centreforwelfarereform.org/) is the latest stage of the three-year Chronic Illness Inclusion Project, which is receiving £40,000 lottery funding through the pioneering user-led DRILL ([Disability Research into Independent Living and Learning](http://www.drilluk.org.uk/)) programme.

The project’s aim is to explore the experience of chronic illness within the social model of disability, co-produce an agenda for social, political and cultural change, and “forge a collective voice” for the online chronic illness community under the umbrella of the wider disability movement.

Hale says she believes that the only way that people with chronic illness can have their voices heard is for them to adopt a social model approach, which she believes will “strengthen and enrich” the disabled people’s movement.

She argues in the discussion paper that “there are restrictions to our lives, activities and wellbeing that are entirely created by social and political responses to chronic illness”, an approach that would allow a social model explanation for the barriers faced by people with conditions such as ME, fibromyalgia, Crohn’s disease and Ehlers-Danlos syndrome (EDS).

But she says these are forms of oppression that have “rarely been articulated or addressed” by the disabled people’s movement or academics working in the field of disability studies.

Hale is part of a “new generation of disability activists” who live with chronic illness – many of whom were involved in the [Spartacus Network](http://www.centreforwelfarereform.org/our-work/spartacus-network.html) – and who “emerged in response to attacks on social security for those too ill to work”.

Their focus on impairment and their need for social security prompted some criticism from parts of the disabled people’s movement, she says, because this was seen as a return to the medical model of disability.

But Hale says in her discussion paper that the aim of the project is to overcome any divisions, “without threatening the integrity” of the disabled people’s movement.

She told Disability News Service that since writing the paper there had been extensive focus group discussions with people with a range of energy-limiting chronic illnesses, including lung disease, fibromyalgia, ME, EDS, multiple sclerosis and liver disease.

Although all of them met the Equality Act definition of disability, nearly all said a key reason they did not identify as “disabled” was that they “didn’t feel entitled to and they feared negative and hostile responses” if they did.

Nearly all said that fatigue was “the most debilitating and restricting aspect of their health condition, yet the one that was not understood, believed or accounted for, by society in general, by government agencies, and sometimes by their nearest and dearest.”

Hale said: “‘Fatigue is not a real disability’ seems to be the most common negative attitude they encountered that had the most restricting consequences for them.

“It was psychologically restricting because they internalised judgements that they were just lazy, attention-seeking, exaggerating or faking, sometimes to the point of doubting themselves profoundly.

“It was also restricting because it meant they didn’t claim or couldn’t access support to live more fully, either from fear of a hostile response or because they weren’t considered to have a proper disability.

“People in the focus group wanted to get together and challenge these attitudes, educate people about the lived experience of energy-limiting chronic illness and how it can restrict the most basic [aspects] of daily living, as well as exclude from society.”

The focus group members said that certain adjustments can help them participate in society, but nearly all stressed that “adaptations and adjustments only enabled participation to a limited extent” and that it was their illnesses that had a bigger impact on their lives than society.

Hales said she hoped that broadening the conversation “to include different experiences of impairment, ones that aren’t obvious or even medically legitimated”, and different experiences of disability and disablism, would allow people with chronic illness to be included in the disabled people’s movement and “embrace the social model and its empowering philosophy more fully than they currently do”.

*To comment on Catherine Hale’s discussion paper, use the comments box* [*on this page of the project’s website*](http://inclusionproject.org.uk/publications/)

**5 July 2018**

**Call for media action after news agency’s shorthand ‘discrimination’**

A disabled journalist is calling for action to address widespread discrimination in the media industry after a news agency told him he had not been interviewed for a job because he did not have a qualification in shorthand.

Declan McSweeney has tried several times to apply for posts with Mercury Press in Liverpool – and with other news organisations – and has been told on each occasion that he was not suitable for the role.

But on the last occasion the agency admitted that the experienced journalist would not be considered because he did not have a recognised shorthand qualification.

McSweeney, who has cerebral palsy, has previously worked as a journalist in Ireland and London for more than 20 years, and has his own system of shorthand that he has used successfully throughout his career.

But he was told that this would not be acceptable for the Mercury position.

A senior executive for the agency, which is owned by Birmingham-based Caters News Agency, told him in an email: “To follow up your comment about it not being mandatory to be qualified in shorthand.

“We have never once stated that you could not get a job with another company without this qualification, rather it is our own company policy to require any applicant to have this.

“Again, I would like to point out that this is not discriminatory in any way, shape or form.”

He also threatened to call the police if McSweeney persisted in complaining about the way he had been treated.

After Disability News Service approached Caters for a comment and asked why it had apparently refused to make a reasonable adjustment for McSweeney under the Equality Act, it claimed its comment about shorthand was “a human error mix-up our end”.

Chris Dyche, co-owner of Caters, said: “I have written to Declan explaining everything and setting the record straight, as he had been given incorrect information, unfortunately.

“We don’t discriminate against anybody. We haven’t on this occasion or any other occasion.

“We are a mature and responsible company. There had simply been a human error mix-up our end, resulting in a miscommunication to Declan, which I’m now happy to correct.”

Caters had not confirmed by noon today (Thursday) what reasonable adjustments it would make to another disabled journalist in McSweeney’s position.

Dyche also apologised to McSweeney and told him in an email that he should not have been told that his “lack of a formal shorthand qualification is the reason why you have not been selected for interview” because the company had “quite a number of people who work for us who don’t have a formal shorthand qualification”.

He said the reason he was not given an interview was that his past experience had been in the wrong areas of journalism.

McSweeney previously worked as a journalist for more than 18 years with the Offaly Express in Ireland, which has now closed, and in London for the Romford Recorder and as a sub-editor with Associated Press.

After he was made redundant by an Irish company in the wake of the global financial crisis of 2008, he returned to the UK and attempted to re-enter the industry but has been unable to secure any employment as a journalist.

He believes this is partly due to age discrimination – he is 58 – but also because his impairment means he cannot achieve a recognised shorthand qualification.

He said: “The issue of shorthand continues to present impossible barriers to my returning to journalism.”

He believes this discrimination is widespread and points to the case of Kyle Gunn, a journalism student with cerebral palsy, who was originally told that he would fail his course because he would not be able to pass a shorthand exam.

Following outrage over the case, [the Scottish Qualifications Authority agreed to start offering a separate journalism qualification](https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/80837.html) that did not require shorthand.

McSweeney said: “I feel that Mercury/Caters need to ensure that their advertising in future contains no reference to 100 words per minute shorthand, because even if they do have journalists who don’t have a shorthand qualification, their advertisements have been specifying it, and staff there told me it was a requirement.

“However, this is a much wider issue than one company.

“The Kyle Gunn case underlines how endemic discrimination on grounds of disability is, and the failure of editors generally to grasp that insisting on shorthand is discriminatory because there are many of us who could not get a shorthand qualification if we studied for it for one million years, due to a condition we were born with.

“I am aware, for example, of a deaf woman who was unable to pursue a journalism career because of the shorthand requirement.

“I have been told by other media outlets that they could not hire me for this reason, that a judge would have to be able to read my notes if there was a dispute, but I have been advised by legal sources that there is no foundation to this idea.”

He said a further problem he faced was the failure of the regional media in Britain to recognise the validity of experience in Irish journalism, when British journalists are frequently and successfully employed by Irish media.

The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) declined to comment on the shorthand issue.

But an NUJ spokeswoman said: “News organisations must make the necessary adjustments for disabled media workers so they can play their full part as journalists.

“The NUJ campaigns for equality and improved diversity across all sectors of the industry.

“It is absolutely crucial that disabled journalists are given access to the profession on an equal footing and can also bring their perspective to bear on stories.”

**5 July 2018**

**Autistic teen’s legal fight over ‘physical abuse’ school exclusion**

A legal case being heard this week highlights how disabled children who can be physically aggressive because of their impairment are currently being failed by equality laws, say inclusive education campaigners.

The upper tribunal this week heard the appeal brought by the parents of a 13-year-old disabled boy, known as L, who was excluded from school because of behaviour linked to his autism.

The way that [Equality Act regulations](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2010/2128/regulation/4/made) are currently interpreted means children like L who are defined as having “a tendency to physical abuse” are often not treated as “disabled” and are therefore not protected by the Equality Act.

The lack of protection under the Equality Act means schools do not have to justify how a decision to exclude a disabled child in these circumstances is proportionate or explain how they have made reasonable adjustments to support the pupil so the behaviour can be prevented or reduced.

Statistics show that almost half of all school exclusions involve a child with special educational needs.

Two years ago, [a report by a House of Lords committee](https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201516/ldselect/ldeqact/117/11714.htm#_idTextAnchor202) on the impact of the Equality Act on disabled people said the regulations had “unintentionally, discouraged schools from paying sufficient attention to their duties” under the act.

It called for the regulations to be amended “so that a tendency to physical abuse of other persons ceases to be treated as not amounting to an impairment for the purposes of the definition of ‘disability’”.

Simone Aspis, campaigns and policy coordinator for [The Alliance for Inclusive Education (ALLFIE)](https://www.allfie.org.uk/), pointed to the committee’s recommendation, and said: “If the law was amended to remove this regulation then we will find that education providers will be required to follow the law and make reasonable adjustments for disabled pupils and students.

“Too often schools hide behind this regulation so that they can exclude disabled pupils without good reason, which is totally unacceptable.”

Navin Kikabhai, ALLFIE’s chair,said the case demonstrated that the law was “fundamentally flawed” and “highlights the increasing erosion of disabled children’s rights, and an increasing indifference to children who require multi-disciplinary support”.

He said this support was “disappearing in increasing numbers from local schooling due to the depletion of local authority support and engagement”.

Polly Sweeney, a human rights partner at solicitors Irwin Mitchell, who is representing the family in its appeal against a ruling that found in favour of L’s school, said: “This appeal is about the fundamental right of access to education for disabled children whose conditions, like autism, result in behaviours which can be physically aggressive.

“The legal definition of ‘physically abusive’ has been stretched to the point that it means disabled children even as young as six or seven who may have only displayed low level physical aggression on a handful of occasions, or even just once if the physical aggression was significant, are denied protection from discrimination under the law.”

Barrister Steve Broach was set to ask the tribunal to find that the way the rule has been interpreted so far breaches L’s human rights.

The appeal has received funding from the Equality and Human Rights Commission, and is supported by the National Autistic Society, but is being opposed by the education secretary, Damian Hinds.

L’s parents said: “We believe passionately that our son and other children in his position should have equal rights to be able to go to school and receive the support they need to achieve the best possible outcomes.

“L’s autism means that he will grow up in a world where he will face challenges and adversity throughout his life.

“School should be somewhere he can go without fear of discrimination or exclusion for actions which he has no control over.

“These rules currently prevent that and we hope the tribunal will do what is needed to correct this inequality.”

The Department for Education (DfE) has said it will examine whether a change in the law is needed.

A DfE spokeswoman said: “All schools have a legal duty not to discriminate against disabled pupils, which includes not excluding them from school because of their disability.

“While this case continues, it would be inappropriate to comment on the details.”

**5 July 2018**

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