Equity Response – Timms Review of Personal Independence Payment

About

1. Equity is the largest UK creative industries trade union with 50,000 members united in the fight for fair terms and conditions across the performing arts and entertainment. Our members are actors, singers, dancers, designers, directors, models, stage managers, stunt performers, circus performers, puppeteers, comedians, voice artists, supporting artists and variety performers. They work on stage, on TV and film sets, on the catwalk, in film studios, in recording studios, in night clubs and in circus tents.

2. Most Equity members work on short-term contracts and generally work on the basis that they are self-employed, with limb (b) worker status in some roles. They are treated as self-employed for taxation purposes and, therefore, by the social security system.

3. Equity is the only UK trade union to offer an in-house advice service specialising in tax, national insurance and social security. This response includes evidence from casework with Equity members.

Summary

4. Equity welcomes the opportunity to provide evidence to the Timms review of Personal Independence Payment (PIP). PIP provides critical financial support to Equity members who are Disabled or have long-term health conditions and Equity will not support any recommendations from this review that result in a cut to this support in quantum or in eligibility.

5. The PIP assessment needs reforming to be more Disabled-person centred and away from focusing solely on a one-size-fits-all tick-box assessment. Reforms to PIP must take place from a fundamental position of trusting the claimant, with a duty to safeguard vulnerable claimants as a foundational principle.

6. Assessment for work capability must remain separate from assessment for eligibility for PIP support, there is no justification in the purpose of PIP as a benefit to link it to a claimant's capacity to work. All decision-making frameworks must be on a statutory footing with clear rights for claimants to appeal.

Principles for reform

7. Equity proposes that any reform of the social security system must be based in an underlying four principles. These principles inform our response to the Timms review of PIP:
    i. Claimants are trusted as the authority on their own experience
    ii. Safeguarding vulnerable claimants is a foundational priority of all elements of the system
    iii. Decision-making is robust, reliable and accountable – decision makers are specialists in the area in which they are making decisions, frameworks for

decision-making must be transparent and placed on a statutory footing, with clear rights to appeal for claimants.

iv. Support is adequate to ensure a decent standard of living for claimants.

Pathways to Work proposals

8. Before addressing the main call for evidence, we want to re-address the proposals that DWP made in the Pathways to Work Green Paper, should these be being considered by the independent review. Specifically, proposals to focus PIP eligibility criteria on those with higher needs. We will address proposals to scrap the Work Capability Assessment (WCA) in favour of a single assessment (via the PIP assessment) in our answers below.

9. Equity strongly opposes any reform that would see the enactment of previous proposals for assessment criteria to require claimants to score at least 4 points in a single daily living activity to qualify for the daily living component, as well as the usual 8-point total for standard rate or 12 for enhanced rate. We agree with the position that Citizens Advice took at the time, in that we do not see any rationale for providing support to those with higher needs in one area at the expense of those with lower but cumulative needs across several areas and have serious concerns that this would push thousands of people into poverty.[1]

10. When the government proposed these reforms, Equity commissioned a legal opinion from Jamie Burton KC of Doughty St Chambers which was clear that these reforms were 'plainly "regressive measures" and … the Government cannot show on the current evidence that the reforms comply with the limited conditions in which regressive measures are permitted under international law.'[2] This was consistent with interventions from the UN at the time.[3]

1.	**Role and purpose of PIP** **Q: How effectively is PIP delivering on its intended role and purpose?**

11. The role of PIP as stated in the review terms of reference is in 'enabling disabled people and those with long-term conditions to live independently and fully participate in society' and as the call for evidence states, to 'provide a contribution to the extra costs faced by disabled people and people with long-term health conditions.'

[1] A freedom of information request to DWP in March 2025 found that 1.1m in receipt of standard rate daily living component and 209,000 in receipt of enhanced rate daily living component did not meet the new proposed thresholds, therefore standing to lose their support if the reforms were enacted. FOI2025/24990 <https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/personal_independence_payment_pi_7/response/2989270/attach/html/3/Response%20FOI2025%2024990.pdf.html>

[2] J. Burton KC, 'Opinion on the compatibility of the Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payment Bill with International Human Rights Law', 2025

[3] https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2FCRPD%2FFUL%2FGBR%2F63716&Lang=en

12. The financial support provided by PIP, whilst crucial for many Disabled people and those with health conditions, meets less than half of the average additional cost that Disabled households experience. Analysis by Scope shows that in order to have the same quality of life as non-Disabled households, Disabled households need an extra £1,095 each month. The average PIP payment is £465 a month across households, leaving a £630 shortfall.[4] As inflation is expected to continue to rise, Scope predict that this shortfall will continue to grow.

13. In spite of this, the support that PIP offers is crucial to enabling Disabled people and those with health conditions to meet the additional costs of living independently, including in being able to work. PIP is a benefit without which many people who are currently working would not be able to work. The latest data from the Office for Budget Responsibility shows that 1 in 6 PIP recipients are in work.[5]

14. For Equity's members, working often on fixed-term and sporadic contracts, PIP is particularly important in providing a stable source of financial support that can smooth income volatility. Freelance workers can use PIP to plan for work-related additional costs such as travel, enabling these workers to accept future gigs knowing that they can get to them. This is an important part of PIP's role in contributing to extra costs as it ensures an element of stability so that workers know that their additional costs can still be met as their income fluctuates.

    "PIP helps to cushion the simple fact that many work opportunities are just not open to performers with disabilities due to the cost of insurance on productions and when performers miss out on these opportunities they need the help and support that this benefit provides."

    Equity Member

2.	**Eligibility, fairness and equity in the award of PIP** **Q: Does the PIP assessment, including the assessment criteria, effectively capture the impact of long-term health conditions and disability in the modern world, and provide fair access to the right support at the right level across the benefits system?**

15. Equity agrees with recommendations from organisations across the sector that the government must seek to restore trust in the social security system. We also note the recommendations made by the Independent Review of Adult Disability Payment in

[4] Scope, Disability Price Tag 2025, 2025
[5] Trends in working-age disability benefit onflows - Office for Budget Responsibility

Scotland and recommend that the Timms Review panel considers how these recommendations can inform their work.[6]

16. As laid out in the principles at the beginning of this submission, DWP needs to instil a principle of trust in the claimant as the authority on their own experience throughout all elements of the social security system. There is precedent for this in Social Security Scotland, which bases decision making in core principles of dignity, fairness and respect, and decision-makers in the system are required to treat people as the authority on their own lived experiences and start from a position of trust in what an individual tells them. Equity supports this model of decision making, and encourages the government to seek to instil it throughout DWP.

17. The PIP assessment is not adequately designed to take into account the individual circumstances of a Disabled person or someone living with a long-term health condition. PIP's predecessor, Disability Living Allowance, used a more Disabled person-led form of assessment grounded in the social model of Disability, by reviewing a claimant's description of their issues and making an award accordingly without a points system.

18. There are several specific areas that are not adequately reflected in the PIP assessment, including managing menstruation and incontinence. For example, incontinence has an enormous impact on a person's ability to engage in society yet it is very hard to secure a PIP award on this basis. To illustrate, a person who is doubly incontinent but can manage without another person does not score any points under PIP activity 5. This leads to a situation in which a person can be housebound because of incontinence, but they would not be entitled to PIP unless they also qualified for another descriptor such as engaging socially or planning and following journeys. As these descriptors require the diagnosis of a mental health condition, those without would not be entitled to PIP.

19. Similarly, current descriptors do not adequately recognise the issue of reaching the toilet in time. For example, a person may be able to manage toilet needs once they are there, but they may need to remain within a metre of a toilet. In this scenario, they do not score points under current criteria, despite having to live in a very restricted manner.

20. Equity members experience an issue in PIP assessment in which their ability to work is incorrectly used as a reason not to award PIP. PIP eligibility is not contingent on a claimant's ability to work, given its intended role and purpose is to contribute to the additional costs of disability or long-term health conditions, however, in Equity members' experiences, their ability to hold a job and perform tasks associated with

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[6] *Independent Review of Adult Disability Payment: Final Report,* 2025

this are regularly used as reasons to refuse PIP support. In many cases, a claimant's ability to work and cope with their disability are ultimately used to undermine them, in spite of providing statements to healthcare professionals which demonstrate how they manage this. This is a sufficiently serious problem among members that our advice team has written a tailored advice briefing for members on how to talk about their work without it undermining PIP entitlement.

21. The new 'right to try' regulations do not go far enough in removing perceived barriers to work. The regulations have been rendered worthless by the explanatory memorandum and guidance to the regulations which say that the nature of work activities during the right to try period can still be a prompt for re-assessment even though the fact of starting work cannot.[7]

    "I thought the new 'right to try' guarantee would give people like me the confidence to test going back into work but it doesn't. I have a fluctuating health condition, and I've recently been offered a part-time job that I'd really like to try. But I'm worried that even attempting to work could trigger a reassessment and put my support at risk. The reality is you can't know if a job is sustainable in a few weeks or months, it can take a year to understand how your condition interacts with work, especially if you experience flare-ups. Without that safety net, this isn't a real 'right to try' it's a risk."

    Natalie Amber
    Actor/Dancer/Access Consultant
    Chair of Equity's Deaf and Disabled Members Committee

22. Our members' experience aligns with the concerns raised by the Social Security Advisory Committee report on the regulations that the policy intent is not achieved.[8] We welcome the recent acknowledgement of this by the Secretary of State and the steps proposed in response to the SSAC report.[9] However, this still does not go far enough. Not only should functional capacity demonstrated in a work setting not be treated as evidence of sustained reliability capability *during the first six months of employment* but also there should be recognition that for some people a 12-month work trial is appropriate.

23. Further, capacity should be properly assessed beyond that period. Under the current process, decision-makers frequently extrapolate worker's capacity based on

[7] Explanatory Memorandum to the right to try regulations, paras 5.3 & 6.6; ADM memo 06-26, paragraph 16
[8] Report on the regulations by SSAC dated 19 March 2026, published 13 April 2026 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-universal-credit-personal-independence-payment-and-employment-and-support-allowance-amendment-regulations-2026-unnumbered-act-paper/the-universal-credit-personal-independence-payment-and-employment-and-support-allowance-amendment-regulations-2026-unnumbered-act-paper#reportby-the-social-security-advisorycommittee-the-universal-credit-personal-independence-payment-and-employment-and-support-allowance-amendment-regulations-2026>
[9] ibid, Secretary of State's Statement in response to the SSAC report, dated 1 April 2026

assumptions rather than evidence and ignore variability of fluctuating conditions both within a day and across multiple days, contrary to legislation and caselaw.[10]

"My PIP decision letter said – 'She completes dance performances and teaches on a Saturday … therefore it is reasonable to discount concentration, cognition and memory and she is not at risk of vulnerability.' I had extensively explained how my complex physical disabilities, dyslexia and dyspraxia disable my every day life, providing a wealth of evidence from medical professionals. They did not consider the evidence provided, and only seemed to take into account physical guesses from the assessors audio-only phone call about my ability to mobilise, and did not recognise that I had a carer to support me throughout the assessment. I later went to Tribunal and won my case."

Equity member

24. The inadequacies and inconsistencies baked into the system contribute to a reality where claimants are in constant fear of losing their vital support. Turn2Us recently released research highlighting that 80% of PIP claimants regularly fear that their support will be taken away, and evidence heard by the WPC gave account of how some people who may be eligible for support through PIP are choosing not to apply for what could be vitally helpful support because they have seen how difficult the experience of application and assessment is for other claimants.[11]

25. As well as beginning from a position of trust, decision-makers in DWP must have specialist training to adequately understand the disabilities and health conditions that they are advising on as well as the sectors in which claimants are working. This call comes out of significant evidence from Equity members that throughout their interactions with DWP at all stages of the social security system, the decision-makers and advisers they encounter have a poor understanding of what it is like to be a worker in the creative industries.[12]

26. Equity stands in solidarity with PCS members at DWP who have consistently argued for a more caring social security system and for adequate time, support and training for staff to be able to undertake high-quality, reliable decision-making.

Interactions between PIP and other elements of the social security system

27. Equity would strongly welcome improvements in PIP support through improvements in the application and assessment process and in an uplift to the amount of support

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[10] Regulations 4(2A) and 7 of The Social Security (Personal Independence Payments) Regulations 2013; TR v SSWP 2015 UKUT 626 AAC

[11] Turn2Us, 'From stigma to support: rebuilding trust in our social security system', February 2026; Work and Pensions Committee, *Safeguarding Vulnerable Claimants, First Report of Session 2024-25*, May 2025

[12] *Ashton, H. 'Not here to help' – Equity members' experiences of UC and the Minimum Income Floor, 2024*

received by recipients. We are clear, however, that any improvements to PIP must not come at the cost of cuts elsewhere in the system.

28. We acknowledge that in the current system, characterised by inadequacy, delays and a misunderstanding of the circumstances of claimants PIP does provide a level of stability for recipients where they may have issues accessing broader support. Disabled people and those with long-term health conditions can find themselves reliant on PIP to meet costs associated with accessing work. This is not the role or purpose of PIP and recipients should not be forced to make the choice to prioritise certain areas of their basic needs over others.

29. PIP as a benefit is not and should never be linked to work. Access to Work support should be available to claimants to support with costs needed to access work.

30. The department should bear in mind that changes to PIP may have impacts on passported benefits. Equity members have raised concerns that any reforms which would result in people losing access to PIP might have a knock-on effect with concerns that recipients might lose access to housing support, carers' allowance and face council tax increases.

31. As well as this, PIP eligibility is the easiest form of proof that enables access to other support that Disabled people and those with long-term health conditions rely on such as Access to Work, the Disabled Persons Railcard and a Blue Badge, and enables fuller participation in society via improved access to some sports and arts venues.

3.	**Experience of claiming PIP** **Q: What is the experience of people claiming PIP and does this vary for different groups of people?**

32. As explained, the experience of claiming PIP is distressing, frustrating and inaccessible for many claimants. The burden of this process, influenced and compounded by the stigma that has been long encouraged by successive governments means that there is an inherent safeguarding risk just in the processes that claimants have to go through to get support that they need to live.

33. The WPC have reported extensive evidence on this subject from a range of organisations, including specific evidence relating to the PIP assessment. They highlight evidence from the British Psychological Society and Citizens Advice which notes that the length and complexity of the application meant that some vulnerable

people struggled to complete their claim. In addition, evidence from a survey conducted by the MS society found that 40% of participants considered dropping out.[13]

34. Equity has repeatedly heard from members that dealing with the DWP presents a significant safeguarding risk. The multiple and compound pressures that often vulnerable claimants are under simply to receive the support that they need can be overwhelming. The disability burden is often overlooked, with individual interactions between DWP staff and claimants not being considered in the context of the many other interactions between a Disabled claimant and the state. A Disabled Equity member who taught circus skills, and received PIP and UC, recently took his own life. His support worker told us, *"Bureaucracy got him in the end, as he always knew it would."*

35. We strongly support the WPC's recommendation for the department to legislate for a statutory duty to safeguard vulnerable claimants that applies to the whole DWP, and for which the Secretary of State is ultimately accountable. We also support the recommendation that DWP reviews all aspects of the social security system from a safeguarding perspective and urge the Timms Review to take this approach.

4.	**Changing context and the impact on PIP** **Q: What has changed in wider society and the workplace since 2013 (and might be expected to change in the future), how has this impacted PIP and does PIP need to change accordingly?**

36. It is undeniable that the societal context in which the social security system operates has changed significantly since 2013. Over a decade of austerity has decimated the support that ordinary people once relied on from public services. The social security system, including PIP, needs fundamental reform and significant investment to ensure that it provides adequate support for people when they need it.

37. The ongoing cost of living crisis continues to squeeze low-income households, making it increasingly harder to get by. As highlighted in the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's work on Minimum Income Standard (MIS), many households in the UK, whether they are in work or not, do not have the income they need to reach a minimum socially acceptable standard of living. Moreover, the analysis finds that for many households, paid employment is not enough on its own to provide a minimum living standard.[14]

38. Consequently, the support provided by PIP is now likely to be more crucial than ever to those who receive it. The social security system is not sufficiently equipped to provide this support to an adequate standard.

[13] WPC, *Safeguarding Vulnerable Claimants*, 2025
[14] Joseph Rowntree Foundation, *A Minimum Income Standard for the United Kingdom in 2025*, 2025

39. Equity is unequivocally clear that receipt of PIP must not be linked to work in any capacity. As noted above, the role and purpose of PIP detailed in the review is to provide a contribution to the extra costs faced by disabled people and those with long-term health conditions. A claimant's ability to work has absolutely no bearing on the additional costs that they may incur due to their disability or health-condition.

Motability changes

40. Recent changes to Motability have prioritised reducing costs for Motability at increased cost and burden for Disabled people who use the scheme. The reduction in mileage allowance for those without substantially adapted vehicles and corresponding increase in excess mileage charge will restrict many Disabled people who, for example, may use their vehicles for work such as Equity's members. One Equity member who has a Motability car that is not wheelchair adapted told us that the new mileage restrictions will make it unaffordable for them to continue to use their vehicle. This will make them less mobile for work as a result.

41. In addition, the introduction of Drive Smart has been criticised by Disabled People's Organisations for introducing unnecessary restrictions on the way in which people can drive their Motability vehicles. For Equity's members, being penalised for driving after 10pm would be incredibly disruptive to their work given that a large portion of work in the performing arts and entertainment industry requires late night travel. Equity's members have raised with us the persistent issue of inconsistency and a lack of clarity in Motability rules, and Drive Safe appears to be adding to this lack of clarity for many.

WCA removal / conditionality

42. The department has been clear that the Work Capability Assessment (WCA) will not be scrapped until the recommendations of the PIP review have been received. As such, we are submitting evidence WCA removal in case this falls into the remit of consideration for the panel. We have significant concerns about the government's apparent intention to scrap the Work Capability Assessment and use the PIP assessment as the one gateway for access to health and disability benefits.

43. Under no circumstances should PIP eligibility be linked to work. Assessment for work capability must remain on a statutory footing and remain separate from the PIP assessment. There is a concern that, given the current quality of assessment and the involvement of poorly trained, outsourced assessors, assessing eligibility for all support whether work-related or not would lead to a conflation of work and PIP.

44. Equity provides advice to members on the interaction between the WCA, work search, gainful self-employment and the minimum income floor (MIF). Our work shows that the impact of MIF pushes the self-employed away from seeking work in the industry due to its impact on those with fluctuating incomes, and pushes those that are both

gainfully self-employed and have limited capability for work towards the WCA. Many in this group may have previously received in-work support through Working Tax Credit and were classified as disabled workers. It is not their work capability that has changed, but the system classification. Once they have passed the WCA, with no conditionality or the financial hardship created by the MIF, they are then able to seek work in the industry again.

45. The suggestion that the WCA divides people into 'can work' and 'cannot work' groups is incorrect. As a result of the WCA, a claimant can be found 'capable of work', to have a 'limited capability for work' or to have a 'limited capability for work and work-related activity'. Rules within UC and ESA allow for work to be undertaken despite these determinations, without conditionality. Passing the WCA provides space for Equity's Disabled members to continue work, which is important given the absence of an additional financial element for Disabled workers following the abolition of Working Tax Credit.

46. Equity has written to the Secretary of State to clarify whether the Department's intention is for the PIP assessment to also be used to determine conditionality and we await clarification on this point.

47. Equity fundamentally disagrees with the premise that the social security system must remain within such limiting fixed financial limits. We understand that the government is operating in a challenging context and within strict fiscal rules, however strongly oppose the idea that the burden for this challenge must rest on the backs of those in need of support from the social security system.

48. Despite this, throughout this submission we have highlighted several actions that the department could take to improve the service as it currently stands. As noted above, OBR analysis has shown that PIP has ended up costing more than DLA.[15]

49. It is worth highlighting that, while the narrative of the department points to increased spending and an increase in claims for health and disability support, spending on these benefits was 2.4% GDP in the latest figures, predicted to rise to 2.8% by 2030.[16] Even with this predicted rise, this brings the UK's spending on these benefits to a lower level than several OECD countries were spending as a percentage of GDP in 2019.[17]

Contact

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15 *WPC, Oral evidence, HC 837 Q1-42, Q.30*
16 *DWP, Benefit expenditure and caseload tables 2026, 2026*
17 *TUC, submission to Work and Pensions Committee inquiry – Getting Britain Working, 2025*