



5TH FLOOR
HOLBORN TOWER
137-145 HIGH HOLBORN
WC1V 6PL

E: INFO@SPORTANDRECREATION.ORG.UK
W: WWW.SPORTANDRECREATION.ORG.UK

25 March 2025

Rt Hon Liz Kendall MP, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions
Caxton House,
Tothill St,
London,
SW1H 9NA

Dear Secretary of State,

Open-Letter from the Sport, Recreation and Physical Activity sector on the costs to disabled people of 'Pathways to Work' and the adverse impacts on activity levels across the UK

The way we talk and think about, and seek to support, disabled people in the UK needs to change.

The proposed changes to health and disability benefits and employment support – set out in [Pathways to Work: Reforming Benefits and Support Green Paper](#) – and the discourse surrounding them imposes significant adverse impacts on disabled people, creates even greater barriers for disabled people to access the physical and mental health benefits of an active lifestyle, and continues to propagate harmful perceptions across society.

We understand the financial challenges facing the Government and recognise that difficult decisions must be made. However, we urge the Government not to rebalance public finances at the expense of disabled people.

Impact on activity levels and Uniting the Movement

Further, as organisations representing the sport, recreation, and physical activity sector, we implore the Government to consider the additional negative effects these reforms will have on the ability of disabled people to get and remain active. The tightening of the Personal Independence Payment criteria will make disabled people more fearful of being active. The changes will not only impact

individual wellbeing but will also reverse progress made by Sport England's Uniting the Movement strategy in tackling inactivity and social isolation among disabled people.

We know that disabled people already need an additional £1,010 a month (or 62% more) to have the same standard of living as non-disabled households. There are nearly 17 million disabled people in the UK, and they remain the least active group in society. Increasing financial pressures – through proposed changes to Personal Independence Payments (PIP) and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) - will make participation in physical activity even harder than it already is, exacerbating health inequalities and social isolation.

Activity Trap and its Consequences

Research on the [Activity Trap](#) by the Activity Alliance, commissioned by the Dwarf Sports Association UK, shows that 65% of disabled people rely on benefits or financial assistance to stay active. The loss or reduction of these essential funds will limit access to sport and physical activity, reducing opportunities for disabled people to lead independent, healthy lives.

Additionally, the harmful narrative surrounding these reforms - particularly the increased scrutiny and cynicism around benefit claimants - creates a significant barrier to participation. The fear that being seen as active might result in the withdrawal of financial support is well-documented in the [Activity Trap](#), highlighting how 47% of disabled people worry about losing their benefits if they participate in physical activity, while 34% have already had or know someone who has had their benefits declined or removed due to being active. This fear discourages engagement in sport and physical activity, despite the significant health and wellbeing benefits it provides.

Cost to Public Health, the NHS and the Economy and Society writ large

From an economic perspective alone, these proposals are counterproductive. Research from the [Sport and Recreation Alliance](#) demonstrated that the sport, recreation and physical activity sector contributes an estimated £9.5 billion in healthcare savings annually and almost £100 billion in direct economic output. And the [Activity Alliance](#) showed there is £6,200 social value per disabled person per year when supported to meet the Chief Medical Officer's guidelines of at least 150 minutes moderate intensity activity per week.

Language and public perception also matter. The rhetoric surrounding welfare reform must not stigmatise disabled people or suggest that those who engage in physical activity are less deserving of support. Terms like "consigned to a life on health and disability benefits" are damaging and contribute to the discrimination and exclusion that disabled people already face.

Change is Possible

The good news is that change is eminently realisable. The undersigned organisations are committed to working with the Government to help deliver that positive change, and in doing so both supporting the Government's overarching missions as well as ensuring that policy and public discourse empower disabled people rather than hold them back.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet and discuss how we can make this happen.

Copies of this letter are being sent to Rt Hon Lisa Nandy MP, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport; Rt Hon Rachel Reeves MP, Chancellor of the Exchequer; and Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP, Secretary of State for Education and Minister for Women and Equalities.

Yours sincerely,

Lisa Wainwright MBE, CEO, Sport and Recreation Alliance

Adam Blaze, CEO, Activity Alliance

David Clarke OBE, CEO, ParalympicsGB

Justine Baynes, CEO, British Wheelchair Basketball

Chris Jones, CEO England Athletics

Kiera Roche, CEO, Limbpower

Jon Dutton OBE, CEO, British Cycling

Ali Oliver, CEO, Youth Sports Trust

Sarah Powell, CEO British Gymnastics

Ashley Metcalfe, CEO, Paddle UK

Martin McElhatton OBE, CEO, WheelPower-British Wheelchair Sport

Georgina Usher, CEO, British Fencing

Nick Pink, CEO, England Hockey

Chris Ratcliffe, CEO, UK Deaf Sport

Andy Salmon, CEO, Swim England

Will Evans, CEO Boccia England

Vicky Gosling, CEO, GB Snowsport

Hamish McInnes, CEO, British Shooting

Stewart Kellett, CEO, Basketball England

Charlie Ford, CEO, Volleyball England

Alastair Marks, CEO, British Rowing

Alaina MacGregor, CEO, British Blind Sport

Gill Cummings-Bell, CEO, EMD UK

James Hope-Gill, CEO, Skateboard GB

Brendan Tonks, CEO, Cerebral Palsy Sport

Elizabeth Winfield, CEO, British Biathlon

Jason Brisbane, CEO, Great Britain Wheelchair Rugby

Mark Winder, CEO, Goalball UK

John Boyd, CEO, BaseballSoftball UK

Helen Rowbotham, CEO, Access Sport

Matthew Curtain, CEO, British Weightlifting

Ian Leafe, CEO, British Taekwondo

Sara Sutcliffe MBE, CEO, Royal Yachting Association

Paul Ratcliffe, CEO, British Mountaineering Council

Hitesh Patel, Executive Director, Sport for Development Coalition

Peter Thompson, CEO, English Indoor Bowling Association

Richard Shaw, CEO, SAPCA

Rob Drinkwater, Head of Volunteers and Community, England Golf

Jim Eyre, CEO, British Equestrian

Chad Ehlerksen, CEO, British American Football

Ben Powis, CEO, Surfing England

Tim Shephard, CEO DSAuk

Drew Barrand, CEO, Aquatics GB

Polly Martin, CEO, National Trails UK

Richard Bevan OBE, CEO, League Managers Association

Kath Hipwell, CEO, ABC Walls

Catherine Hughes, CEO, British Nordic Walking CIC

Mike Spinks, CEO, Schools Association Football International Board

Guy Jarvis, Executive Officer, Mountain Training England

Burk Gravis BEM, CEO Haringey Sports Development Trust

Margarita Sweeney-Baird, BEM, Founder and Chair Inclusive Skating

Richard Norman, CEO, Leadership Skills Foundation

Kathy Morris, BIPHA National Officer & BRSF Company Director, British Inline Puck Hockey Association and British Roller Sports Federation

Ian Ireland, Chair, National Council for School Sport

Abbi Blakey, Projects Manager, NICAS

Barry Jones MBE, CEO, Police Community Clubs of Great Britain

Tracey McCillen, CEO, Sport Excel UK

Gemma Lumsdaine, Disability Lead, Sported

