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## Access to Work Scheme Faces Criticism for Failing Disabled Workers

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The Access to Work scheme, designed to support disabled people in securing and maintaining employment, is under fire for proposed changes that campaigners warn could force many out of work and into poverty. The initiative, which provides grants for workplace adjustments, travel assistance, support workers, or specialist equipment, is at a crossroads

as the Labour Government pushes for reforms while facing accusations of neglecting those it serves.

Critics argue that the current Labour administration's approach to Access to Work, coupled with broader plans to overhaul disability benefits, risks undermining its rhetoric on economic growth by sidelining disabled workers. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) insists reforms are necessary to address a backlog of 62,000 applications (reported in February 2025) and to ensure the scheme's financial sustainability. Yet, disability advocates, including Dr Shani Dhanda, have slammed the Government for rushing changes without meaningful consultation.

In a recent interview with The i Paper, Dr Dhanda, a prominent disability advocate, stated, "I welcome reform of the scheme because that is what's needed, but not what the DWP is proposing. They want to reduce eligibility conditions and the type of support provided." She warned that such measures would prevent capable disabled individuals from working, directly contradicting the Government's stated aim of boosting employment among disabled people. Dr Dhanda's Access to Work Collective, representing over 3,000 people, reports that many have already seen their grants slashed since 2024, raising fears the scheme's core purpose is at risk.

Dr Amy Kavanagh, a 35-year-old blind disability activist and accessibility professional, echoed these concerns. She relies on Access to Work to fund support workers who assist her in travelling across the country to advise businesses on accessibility. Dr Kavanagh told The i Paper, "I'm very, very concerned about the proposed cuts and changes, but also the system is not currently fit for purpose. There are significant delays for people who are applying for the first time, renewing any piece of paperwork can take months, and something that is supposed to empower disabled people to work is becoming an obstacle." She highlighted a six-month delay in securing additional funding to cover the increased minimum wage for her support worker, a change introduced by the Government itself.

Dr Kavanagh also expressed alarm at proposals to limit support worker roles and cap hourly rates, as suggested in leaked DWP documents reported by Disability News Service. "One of the proposed cuts is to take away support workers," she said. "This would massively reduce my capacity to work. I would be stuck working at home, and it would also mean that my support worker would lose a job." She argued that such cuts would not only diminish her earning potential but also remove jobs from the economy, questioning how this aligns with Labour's pledge to invest in Britain's future.

The Government's broader disability benefit reforms, including changes to Personal Independence Payments (PIP) and the universal credit health element, add further complexity. Dr Kavanagh noted the interconnected nature of these schemes: "Something PIP allows is to purchase or have a lease of an accessible car. So if they lose their PIP and they lose their accessible car, they then need more Access to Work funding to cover the cost of the travel." She urged ministers to pause reforms and engage directly with disabled people to ensure changes meet their needs.

A DWP spokesperson defended the Government's position, stating, "Despite deploying additional staff and streamlining our procedures, the number of Access to Work applications waiting to be processed is continuing to grow. We will be reviewing all aspects of the scheme now that the consultation has closed and will be developing future policy in collaboration with disabled people." However, the brevity of the consultation process has drawn criticism, with Dr Kavanagh describing it as insufficient and lacking genuine co-design with those affected.

The Access to Work scheme currently supports only about one per cent of working disabled people, and campaigners argue that scaling back its scope will exacerbate existing inequalities. With the Government's "Pathways to Work" Green Paper already hinting at funding reductions, there is growing concern that the scheme's ability to deliver meaningful support is being eroded. As disabled workers face mounting barriers, the Government's commitment to economic growth and fairness will be judged by its actions, not its words.