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Version: Presentation

Conference or Workshop Item:

Hadi, F., Lawson, A. and Pearl, A. L. Tackling Accessibility Barriers in the UK: Partnership Working for Better Law, Practice and Awareness. In: 2026 Disability Studies Conference, 14-16 Apr 2026, Leeds, UK. (Unpublished)

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Tackling Accessibility Barriers in the UK: Partnership Working for Better Law, Practice and Awareness

16th of April 2026,
Disability Studies Conference,
University of Leeds

Fazilet Hadi MBE, Head of Policy at Disability Rights UK,
Professor Anna Lawson, FBA, FAcSS, and
Dr Alex Louise Pearl, Visiting Scholar, School of Law
and Centre for Disability Studies, University of Leeds



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Overview of the Session

45-minute panel presentation followed by 35-minute discussion

Structure of the panel presentation:

1. Contextualising Accessibility Barriers
2. Reflecting on Legal Responses – Present and Future
3. Collaborating and Campaigning for a UK Accessibility Act

Open Discussion

1) Contextualising Accessibility Barriers

Examples of persistent accessibility barriers

Examples of new / recent accessibility barriers

Persistent Accessibility Barriers

History of the struggle for rights

- 30 years on from the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, we are not as far forward as we should be

Current disability climate

Indicators suggest we are going in the wrong direction

Need for stronger equality law

New / Recent Accessibility Barriers in Pedestrian Spaces

Inclusive Public Space Research Project - <https://inclusivepublicspace.leeds.ac.uk/>

Shared space

Cycle tracks and floating bus stops

Removal of kerbs

New / Recent Accessibility Barriers in Financial Spaces

Predominance of remote and digital access

Loss of cash and bank branch access

Inaccessible information and technologies

- Touchscreens / Captcha tests / Biometrics etc

Third sector initiatives including the Project Nemo Collaboration -
<https://projectnemo.co.uk/learning-disabilities-report/>

2) Reflecting on Legal Responses

Present and Future

Limitations of the Equality Act 2010

Nature and limits of the reasonable adjustment duty

Nature and limits of the Public Sector Equality Duty

Nature and limits of other specific accessibility obligations

Enforcement challenges

Individualised rather than systemic approach

International Context

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities - Article 9

European Accessibility Act and Brexit

Developments in other jurisdictions, e.g.

- Canada,
- Norway
- USA

Imagining a UK Accessibility Act

Overarching aim

Flexibility through regulation-making powers

Types of accessibility obligation:

- accessibility standards
- accessibility planning
- accessibility information

Enforcement and monitoring

3) Collaborating and Campaigning for a UK Accessibility Act

Actions to Date

Anna Lawson, 'Accessibility and the Limits of the Equality Act 2010: Time for a UK Accessibility Act?' (2025) 78 *Current Legal Problems* 127, <https://doi.org/10.1093/clp/cuaf006>

Formation of informal Working Group

Learning from elsewhere

Articulating a case for change

Gathering evidence and gauging support – survey

Initial indications of survey findings

About the Sample (initial indications)

As of the 7th of April 2026, we had received:

- 445 responses to the standard survey (from 430 individuals and 15 organisations).
- 30 responses to the Easy Read survey (from 29 individuals and 1 organisation).
- 14 responses to the British Sign Language survey (from 12 individuals and 2 organisations).

Experiences of Accessibility Barriers

87% of individual respondents told us that they regularly encounter accessibility barriers

Key themes in the types of barriers included:

- Communication and information
- Housing and white goods
- Employment
- Public realm
- Public transport
- Healthcare
- Payment terminals, touch screens and other products

Experiences of Using the Equality Act 2010

64% of all respondents had used the Equality Act 2010 or the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 to try to persuade people or organisations to remove accessibility barriers through dialogue

But only 13% had brought a formal case

Enforcement Barriers

87% of respondents told us they had never brought a case under the Equality Act 2010 or the Disability Discrimination Act 1995

Lack of lawyers with relevant expertise

Costs of litigation

Lack of legal aid

Tight time limits

Impact on Disabled People

Negative impacts on health, mental wellbeing, stress and energy levels

Increased financial burdens

Exhausted

Resigned to the status quo

Support for a New UK Accessibility Act

97% of all respondents support the broad idea of a new UK Accessibility Act

61% willing to campaign

A further 33% reported they may be willing to campaign provided things like personal resources and sufficient support was available to enable this.

Your Thoughts on Next Steps, Getting Involved

Possibilities we have mooted:

- Thoughts on an Advisory Board?
- How best we should use the findings?
- Engage wider stakeholders / build alliances / continue to learn from international experiences?
- Lobby Government / Influence MPs?
- Draft a Bill?

Keep in touch via: <https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/accessibility-act>

**Thank you so much for listening.
Now we want to hear your thoughts on next steps?**