

We are currently looking for peer researchers to join our new participatory action research project. Peer researchers are key for our work – they design our research, carry out data collection, analyse our findings, and share them with key stakeholders.

Below is a collection of frequently asked questions to help you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. If you would like more information you can contact our research team at research@toynbeehall.org.uk

What is the project about?

Disabled people struggle with disproportionate costs and increased barriers to education and employment. Recent research commissioned by the DWP in response to the cost of living crisis showed 52% of respondents said they could no longer afford to buy everything that they needed for their impairment, condition, or access needs. With the changes to Universal Credit made by the Universal Credit bill, and the government aiming to abolish the Work Capability Assessment and make PIP daily living the sole gateway to this support, many Disabled risk losing even more vital income.

Using participatory action research (PAR) we will be working in conjunction with Disabled people and DPOs to research and respond to proposed changes to disability benefits over the course of 15 months. Together, we will look at how these changes could affect people who currently get the health element of Universal Credit because they have 'Limited Capability for Work and Work-Related Activity' (LCWRA), as well as Disabled people in the future. Peer researchers with lived experience will co-design the study, interview and run workshops with Disabled participants across England and Wales, analyse the findings, and develop practical recommendations. The results will be used to influence legislation, policy guidance, and public debate to ensure reforms protect Disabled people's living standards.

Who is conducting the research?

This research project is conducted by a team coordinated by Toynbee Hall led by Rushaa Hamid, Research Manager.

Who are we looking for?

We are currently looking for Disabled people to be paid peer researchers for a year long project on the changes to Universal Credit. Peer researchers are key for our

work – they design our research, carry out data collection, analyse our findings, and share them with key stakeholders. If you are interested you can [apply now](#).

We are recruiting peer researchers 18+ who live in England and Wales and:

- have a disability or health condition that limits or prevents work,
- receive Universal Credit,
- OR would be eligible to receive Universal Credit should you apply or once you have finished education if you are a student

You don't need previous research experience to apply.

What do we mean by Disabled?

We use the term Disabled in line with the social model of disability. The Social Model of Disability was developed by Disabled people and describes people as being disabled by barriers in society, not by our impairment or difference. If modern life was set up in a way that was accessible for Disabled people, then we would not be excluded or restricted.

By 'Disabled people', we mean those of us whose bodies and/or minds work differently to how 'normative' society assumes they should, and who face disabling barriers as a result. These impairments/conditions/differences include physical, mental, neurodivergence, and chronic illnesses.

What is Participatory Action Research (PAR)?

Our approach to peer research is called Participatory Action Research. Essentially that means that we will work with people who have lived experience of the issue we are researching to design the project, carry out the data collection, analyse the results, and advocate for findings. PAR is composed of three parts:

- Participatory - We involve the community in our research from the very beginning and value everyone's knowledge.
- Action - We work to make meaningful changes with the research we do.
- Research - We produce high-quality research to give us and others a deep insight into the topic at hand.

What will happen to the findings of the research?

We don't want to do research for research's sake – we want to push for change. To do this we will produce:

- A report (with an executive summary) drawing together the research findings and recommendations for key stakeholders. This will be made publicly available.
- An alternative creative way of sharing this information, such as videos, zines, or art productions as a way of capturing attention.

- Public talks and media opportunities for peer researchers to share the key findings and recommendations.

What can I expect as a peer researcher?

Peer researchers shape our research and are an essential part of PAR. You can expect:

- £17 per hour for your time
- Training in research ethics, methodology, interviewing and facilitation, public speaking, policymaking and influencing.
- Online workshops where you will be supported with your fellow peer researchers to develop and carry out the research, and - later on - share our findings.
- A chance to share your views to those in power about what would make life better for Disabled people on Universal Credit.

If you apply and aren't selected (as we are recruiting 10 peer researchers), there are also other ways to get involved in the project.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

While being involved in participatory research can be rewarding, there are some risks to consider. Talking about personal experiences, especially difficult ones, can sometimes be upsetting or emotionally tiring. If you are paid for your involvement, it could affect your benefits, so it's important to get advice. We have written more about this [below](#).

We will do our best to create a supportive and safe experience for you. Should reflecting on your experiences bring up distressing memories or feelings during the interview, you can take breaks, or end the interview if you would like. We can also give you information about services that are available to you if you would like to access support.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Being involved in participatory research can have several benefits. If you take part, you will be helping us to make changes to systems that haven't been working properly. You will be participating in innovative and exciting research where you will gain new skills and meet new people. Your involvement can help make our research more relevant and meaningful, and you will have a chance to meet decision makers to push for positive change. You will also receive a thank you for your time at a rate of £17/hour.

What will happen to my personal information?

Unless we have your explicit, written consent, we will not talk to anyone else about you or the information you have given us, it is confidential.

Under the Data Protection Act 2018, you have rights over how your personal data is collected, used, and stored. This means you have the right to know what data is being collected about you, why it is being used, and who it will be shared with. You also have the right to see your data, correct it if it's wrong, and ask for it to be deleted in some cases. Any personal information you share will be kept secure, used only for agreed purposes, and handled in line with the law to protect your privacy.

For this project any personal information that can identify you will not be included in any reports or other public materials we produce, unless we have your explicit written consent. In accordance with data protection legislation, your personal details will never be given out to anyone not involved in this research, and any recordings we may take will be safely stored and permanently deleted at the end of the project.

How and when will I be paid?

We arrange payment by bank transfer, normally around 3-4 weeks after each session. There are unfortunately sometimes delays in this payment system depending on when our sessions are held as our finance team has a strict deadline for each of their payment cycles. In situations where a casual worker contract is agreed payment is on the same monthly cycle as staff.

I receive state benefits, how does this impact them?

We know that some people may be concerned that their benefits will be affected by joining this project. Payment can affect means-tested benefits like Universal Credit and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA).

If you are categorised in limited capability for work and/or work-related activity you are allowed some earnings before your benefit payments are reduced – this is called a work allowance and is normally at least a few hundred pounds. In ESA you can continue to receive payments so long as you work less than 16 hours a week and your earnings are below a certain amount (currently £195.50). This information is not formal advice as we are not experts or a regulated advice service. You should make sure to speak to an advice organisation such as Citizens Advice to understand how payments from this project might affect your benefits.

When you work on this project you should inform your work coach, who will decide if this work counts as income. We can provide a letter that explains what we are doing, and how it is similar to service user involvement and how it should not be mistaken as capacity for work.

What do I have to know about tax and self-employment?

Generally when you are paid over £1000 in a tax year for participation you will need to inform HMRC and register for self-employment ([see HMRC 'Who must send a tax return'](#)). While it is unlikely that you will be paid this amount by Toynbee Hall, any participation in other research projects may impact this. You have a personal responsibility to handle the financial and tax implications of being involved in peer

research. Whether you have to pay tax will depend on how much other income you have and where it comes from. This information is not formal advice as we are not experts or a regulated advice service. You should make sure to speak to an advice organisation such as Citizens Advice to understand how payments from this project might affect your tax liability or whether you need to register as self-employed.

Who should I contact for further information?

Please contact research@toynbeehall.org.uk for further information and to ask any questions you might have.