Accessibility in Austerity: Formulating Strategies for Accessibility Research in Constrained Times

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Accessibility research, and the experience of disabled people are increasingly threatened by economic cuts and fluctuating political landscapes. Austerity sees a shift towards frugality with public money, with disabled people most at risk. Accessibility research, similarly, faces challenges as governments wish to reduce research funding, and large technology companies shift their focus to the global AI race. This workshop will bring together accessibility researchers, students, and practitioners to explore what we can do with these increasing constraints in the UK and its broader context. We will create a strategy for both managing current challenges and resisting future constraints, with a view to shaping a community of resilient and impact-led accessibility researchers in the UK.

Accessibility, Austerity, Inclusion, Assistive Technologies

1. WORKSHOP CONTEXT

The wider context for this workshop is one of decreasing resources for accessibility research, yet a growing need for access to technology for all. The 2024 autumn budget, calculated in austere financial conditions Lawford (2025), will see benefit cuts totalling £3.9 billion McRae (2025); impacting everyday life for many disabled people. Further, increases in the threshold for Personal Independence Payments McRae (2025) have been highlighted by the disability charity Sense as *"devastating"*, meaning that disabled people are increasingly unable to get support for vital services, provision of assistive technologies, as well as challenges with basic living costs.

Against this context, we also see a real-terms cut in research funding from UKRI – a drop of £63M (£8,874M (24/25) to £8,811M (25/26)) UKRI (2025), exacerbated by increasingly inflation and living costs. Further, we see scarce research funding allocated specifically for accessibility research. Many accessibility-focused schemes, which have primarily been led by large technology companies have been sidelined – for instance the Google Air scheme has been seemingly halted; now framed in the past tense on their website and described as from '2020 – 2023', with no indication of future rounds.

Consequently, UK researchers must compete in the broader research panels for funding from UKRI, especially the EPSRC, and must therefore align their research appropriately – perhaps to its detriment.

Challenges in the funding landscape aside, there does appear to be some remaining appetite to support accessibility in the UK and amongst international near neighbours (e.g., EU) at a governmental level. EU policy, such as the European Accessibility Act (EAA), mandates that many commonplace products and services comply with accessibility requirements for users with disabilities European Accessibility Act (EAA) (2025); Official Journal of the European Union (2025). Similarly, the UK Government highlight users with disabilities as one of the priority groups in their Digital Inclusion Action Plan' Department for Science, Industry and Technology (2025). This sits, however, in a broader landscape of current US Government policy, where the Trump Administration has made swingeing cuts to research relating to EDI, disability, health and wider social studies.

2. WORKSHOP CHALLENGES AND AIMS

Our workshop will address the following three, inter-related challenges:

- How can accessibility research support disabled people in increasingly austere political environments?

- How can impactful accessibility research be achieved with less resource?

- How can we build and maintain a vibrant, enthusiastic accessibility research community in the UK within these constraints?

The aim of this workshop is to bring together accessibility researchers, students, and practitioners to explore how we might do accessibility research with increasing constraints. The key aims of the workshop are to:

- Form a community of researchers, combining our skillsets and experiences across UK accessibility research

- Map the challenges facing accessibility research, disabled people and their intersection

- Create a strategy and vision for addressing the challenges identified

- Identify the key stakeholders we need to engage to realise accessibility impact.

3. SCHEDULE AND DESCRIPTION OF PLANNED ACTIVITIES

The workshop will be one day in length with a one-hour break for lunch. Below, we detail our schedule for both the morning and afternoon sessions.

09:30-10:15 - Arrival and Welcome: Informal welcome, tea/coffee, housekeeping (i.e., establishing collaboratively values of the day for respectful and safe participation, ensuring that all participants have ownership of the workshop space), aims for the workshop.

10:15-10:45 - Opening Provocation/Keynote: A short interactive provocation reflecting on the intersections of austerity and access (e.g., workshop participant or invited external who could be an activist, academic, policy expert, or practitioner).

10:45-11:00 - Break

11:00-12:30 - Participant Introductions: Who We Are, What We Face: 1–2 minute pitches from each participant: who they are, what challenges they face in their research work related to accessibility, inclusion, one question or frustration they bring to the table/whiteboard.

12:30-13:30 - Lunch Break

13:30-14:30 - Mapping Problems and Possibilities around Accessibility and Austerity: Small group activity to brainstorm and cluster the most pressing problems and potential initiatives. Prompts to guide this discussion could be *"What and who gets cut in accessibility research? What persists?"*, *"Who are the stakeholders involved?" "What problems and opportunities do we foresee in the context of accessibility under constrained time?"*.

14:30-16:00 - Creating a strategy for accessibility in austere environments: Co-create a shared roadmap outlining short-, mid-, and long-term priorities, values, and actions for doing access work in austerity. Organisers will help identify themes, tensions, and collective priorities to document a shared an accessibility roadmap. Prompts: *"What values should guide access work during austerity?"*, *"What do we refuse to compromise on?"*, *"How does a successful 2030 publication in accessible design under austerity would look like?"*, *"What happened to get there?"*.

16:00-16:15 - Break

16:15-17:00 - Closing Reflections and Next Steps: Identifying opportunities for further engagement and collaboration.

4. INTENDED AUDIENCE AND PROMOTIONAL STRATEGY

This workshop is intended for HCI researchers, students, designers, and practitioners who are interested in accessibility, inclusion and assistive technologies, and have faced challenges in accessing research funding especially in early career stage. We welcome both disabled and non-disabled participants engaging with participatory and community-based design, and exploring alternative perspectives on access and assistive technology design.

We aim to recruit up to 25 participants to foster rich, collaborative discussion. Promotion will take place via the BCS CHI 2025 website, our own website for the Workshop, social media, mailing lists, and personal networks. As organisers from multiple institutions, we are part of diverse HCI and accessibility communities and expect strong interest from those working at the intersection of access, design, and austerity.

5. REQUIRED EQUIPMENT AND INCLUSION AND ACCESSIBILITY CONSIDERATIONS

The workshop will require a room that can accommodate up to 25 people. A projector and a whiteboard are preferable to run the planned activities. Organisers will bring sketching materials such as markers, paper, and sticky notes. We are committed to making the workshop an accessible environment, so will be sure to enquire and support any special accommodations which may make the workshop more accessible for participants.

6. PLAN TO DISSEMINATE RESULTS

We will document the workshop outcomes and write up the discussions and roadmap/strategy as an ACM Interactions article. We will also write up the findings, share on our website and distribute via the BCS HCI mailing list. This will inform future investigations and interventions to global accessibility research.

7. BIOGRAPHIES OF THE ORGANISERS

- **Timothy Neate** (he/him) is a senior lecturer in the Human-Centred Computing Group, Department of Informatics, King's College London. He conducts research with and for populations with communication disabilities, mostly in the areas of assistive technology, accessible digital content and healthcare.

- **Beatrice Vincenzi** (she/her) is a lecturer in the HCI Research Centre at Birmingham City University. She is interested in inclusivity and designing technology with disabled people. I draw from critical disability and feminist theories to re-think the role of technology in shaping social relationships, interactions, access and inclusion.

- **Belén Barros Pena** (she/her) is a lecturer in HCI at City St. George's, University of London. She is interested in enabling inclusive design through participatory methods, particularly in the context of financial technologies.

- **Alexandre Nevsky** (he/him) is a PhD student at the Human Centred Computing group, King's College London. His research focuses on personalisable audiovisual media, applying it to accessibility for people living with communication impairments.

- **Sarah Lewthwaite** (she/her) is a Senior Research Fellow at Southampton Education School, University of Southampton, where she leads research on the teaching and learning of digital accessibility in computer science and the workplace.

- **Shital Desai** (she/her) is an Associate Professor and Research Chair in Accessible Interaction Design at York University, Canada, where she leads research on codesign and participatory design of technologies to support marginalised groups, including older adults, people with dementia and children.

- **Fernando Loizides** (he/him) is an a Reader in Computer Science and Informatics at Cardiff University. His main area of research and development lies in Information Interaction and user experience (UX) with a large focus on Decision Making and Accessibility.

- **Humphrey Curtis** (he/him) is a PhD student at the Human Centred Computing group, King's College London. His research focuses on wearable and discreet augmentative and alternative communication devices – specifically for communities living with aphasia.

- **Filip Bircanin** (he/him) is a postdoctoral researcher in the Human-Centred Computing Group at King's College London, focusing on accessible and assistive technologies for people with communication difficulties.

8. CALL TO PARTICIPATION

Accessibility research and the digital inclusion of disabled people are increasingly threatened by economic cuts and fluctuating political landscapes. Austerity sees a shift towards frugality with

public money, with disabled people most at risk. Accessibility research, similarly, faces challenges as governments seek to reduce research funding and large technology companies shift their focus to the global AI race. This in-person 1-day workshop will bring together accessibility researchers, students, and practitioners to explore what we can do with these increasing constraints in the UK and its broader context.

For participation, we have a lightweight submission process consisting of three questions, administered through and online form [URL TBC]:

1. Background to your research or practice in accessibility

2. Challenges that you face during their work

3. What you hope to contribute to the workshop

We will not request position papers, but will however disseminate the results of the workshop via our website [URL TBC] and, if possible, through an ACM Interactions magazine article. All invited participants will be required to register for the Workshop.

9. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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