

**Remarks by Ambassador Ismara Vargas Walter at the
Cuba-UK Disability Network launch
University of De Montfort, Leicester 1 October 2024**

Professor Katie Normington, Vice Chancellor of the De Montfort University:

Dear Dr Rosi Smith:

At the outset, I would like to thank the organisers for the invitation. It is a real pleasure to be here for this event on the Cuba-UK collaboration network.

With a focus on accessibility and inclusiveness, this project is very instrumental in promoting a collaboration that effectively helps to bridge gaps and divides that we see in society. Equitable development is certainly an area that the Cuban revolution has always paid a lot of attention to; however, there is always room to do more, improve what has been done and build on past achievements and successes to take it to the next level.

I am also very pleased in that this collaboration has sought to go far and beyond the Cuban capital—as it often happens that Havana tends to concentrate much of the cooperation action. It is commendable that the project decided to go farther out of the capital city and venture into the eastern part of the country. And this cooperation with the University of Granma, and the Bayamo, Manzanillo Bartolomé Masó municipalities also shows the great potential for mutually beneficial cooperation and collaboration arrangements with various academic—and cultural—institutions throughout our entire country.

On Sunday, we had the great news that the Cuban team won the 2024 Blind Baseball International Cup that was held here in England. This summer, Cuba put on a very solid performance at the Paris 2024 Paralympic games, winning a total of 10 medals, including 6 golds. These two examples, are testament to how much can be achieved when we support and help people overcome disabilities to be able to be their best self and reach their full potential.

Furthermore, this project of building links and active participation, that is a network, for the development of academic and cultural exchanges

between Cuba and the UK not only further contributes to improve their quality of life and sensitize the communities where they live and belong but also it gives them visibility, an opportunity to be appreciated in front of society and to devise local initiatives and more participatory practices.

In addition to the practical benefits and outcomes of the project, the fact that it seeks to involve the university for an academic approach on the situation of people with disabilities, hopefully leading to a new academic look from other areas of knowledge to seek sensitisation and alternatives in favour of people with disabilities, is particularly relevant. This is especially fitting in the context of our Government pursuing a policy of governance on the basis of science and innovation in order to dictate policy and take measures to address specific issues.

International cooperation is particularly important at this juncture when the Cuban community of disabled people is suffering the demolishing effects of the most wide-ranging and longest-lasting ever set of unilateral coercive measure: the US blockade, which is applied by the mightiest superpower in history against a small island just 90 miles off its shores.

As a matter of illustration, let me mention two examples

The cost of 15 minutes of blockade is equivalent to the funding necessary to cover the demand of hearing aids for disabled children studying in Cuba's Special Education system (around USD 144 000).

The cost of 30 minutes of blockade is equivalent to the funding required to cover electric and conventional wheelchairs for the Special Education system (around USD 256 000).

In this connection, I also want to express my thanks for the work done with the associations of people with disabilities in Cuba in connection with the inclusive parks, the equipment to support the repairs of mobility devices, exchange of artists, etc.

It is my understanding that the project is now completing a phase and needs to move on to further stages. I would like to wish you every success going forward and, with the support of the University and other partners, hope that you continue to forge partnerships and links between the UK and Cuba.

Thank you very much.