**Access to Long-term Unemployment – or Access to Work?**

*A short report on the Government’s Access to Work programme, why it is failing many disabled people, and what can be done so that disabled people can get into work, stay in work and thrive in work*

*March 2015*



**What is Access to Work?**

Access to Work was launched in June 1994 and is a programme run by the Department for Work and Pensions that provides grants that can pay for [practical support](https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work/what-youll-get) for people who have a disability, physical or mental health condition to:

* start working
* stay in work
* move into self-employment or start a business

The programme covers support such as a communicator, support worker, advocate, sign language interpreter; help towards travel costs; specialist equipment, or alterations to the workplace to make it more accessible.

How much people get depends on their circumstances.

**Executive Summary**

As a group of organisations led by disabled people, we have one clear message from disabled people:

**ALL WE ARE SAYING IS GIVE US SUPPORT WE NEED TO WORK. WE WANT TO WORK WHERE WE CAN.**

But problems with Access to Work are actually stopping people working.

We are increasingly frustrated by the gap between rhetoric on the need for more disabled people to work – and lack of effective support to do so. Our concerns are shared by employers in the Business Disability Forum:

‘Access to Work is a labour market intervention – and must be expanded and improved to serve the needs of business and employees’ (Susan Scott Parker, CEO, Business Disability Forum)

Access to Work is a successful government programme that can make the difference between working and not working. It is the only government disability employment programme that is proven to be effective.

But it serves only 35,000 people a year compared to 3.3 million disabled people of working age.

‘…Access to Work currently supports only a minority of disabled people who might benefit from the programme’ (Work and Pensions Select Committee 2014).

Government accepted in full recommendations from Liz Sayce’s review in 2011 and Mike Adams’ expert panel in 2013, designed to double the numbers supported and personalise the service. This has not happened.

‘We are disappointed that some of our specific recommendations that we believe would have helped double the numbers of disabled people helped have not happened, despite being accepted by government; and we are concerned that no political party has yet committed to doubling the numbers in the next parliament’ (Mike Adams and Liz Sayce)

Meanwhile money has gone into ineffective programmes, like the Work Programme. Latest figures show almost 90% of Employment and Support Allowance claimants (mainly disabled people) on the Work programme have not moved into employment.

Problems with Access to Work actually stop people working. The problems include:

* Letting Access to Work remain a ‘best kept secret’, particularly to people working in small businesses, where employers and employees need the support most (large employers can sometimes make adjustments themselves)
* Reductions in people’s packages – saving costs at the expense of people losing jobs, which costs the Treasury far more long-term
* Inadequate support for entrepreneurs and people who are self-employed
* Delays and complex, bureaucratic processes, that impact on productivity.

We welcome the efforts made by Minister Mark Harper to improve processes and reduce delays, as laid out in his statements on Access to Work of 18th December 2014 and 12th March 2015. For instance, introducing personal budgets and putting the service on-line could strip out the awful bureaucracy of the current system and give people far more control to use resources in ways that really work for them.

But without proper resourcing, as recommended by the Sayce review, Government has increased numbers to a modest extent but only by bearing down on costs of individuals’ awards. Mr Harper’s March 2015 statement makes clear this will continue: the plan is to increase numbers only by ‘capping’ the support of those with higher cost needs.

Some people need (for instance) an interpreter or a support worker. It’s far better to invest in them working than pay out-of-work benefits long-term. And overall the programme is cost-effective – it brings £1.48 for every £1 spent – so there is no need to put a cap on costs. Bearing down on the costs of individuals who happen to have higher needs can cost people their job and is – as the Work and Pensions Select Committee stated - unacceptable.

Our demands:

* All political parties to commit to doubling the number of disabled people benefiting from Access to Work support in the next 3 years without clamping down on disabled people who happen to have higher costs
* Government to demonstrate its serious commitment to more disabled people working by increasing expenditure on Access to Work in the 2015 Budget
* A commitment that no disabled person will be forced out of their job as a result of changes to their AtW
* DWP transparency. Publish:
* the guidelines which Access to Work officials use to make their decisions, including any additional internal instructions on how the guidance is to be interpreted
* the Access to Work complaints and appeals procedure
* data on how many Access to Work applications are turned down or only partially awarded and why
* data on whether employers do make ‘adjustments’ when Access to Work is refused on the grounds that they should
* the report and recommendations of the panel of experts that reported to DWP in 2013, with details of which recommendations have been acted upon, which not, and why
* DWP to publish Implement all the Sayce Review recommendations including:
* Raise the profile of Access to Work to SMEs and under-served disabled people
* A pre-assessment for Access to Work support for disabled job seekers to give an indicative budget, to give them and employers more confidence in the support available
* A far less bureaucratic system, with personal budgets that the individual can manage (agreed by Mark Harper on 12 March)
* Improved cost-effectiveness through a portal to share access to adjustments, technology, supports, so people can compare and drive costs down
* More effective support for people with fluctuating conditions, and mental health and learning difficulties
* More effective support for entrepreneurs
* Speed up the process of assessment and decision making to ensure disabled people have the support they need within 2 weeks of accepting an offer of employment

**Access to Work - The Problem**

**Low numbers supported**

Access to Work only serves a tiny minority of disabled people who want to work. During 2013/14 Access to Work supported 35,450 people; less than 1.1% of the approximately 3.3 million working age disabled people in the UK. Disability Rights UK research suggests that 4% would have additional disability related needs in work. This equates to approximately 132,000 disabled individuals who could benefit from Access to Work. In addition, these figures included just 1,760 people (4.96% of total supported) with a learning disability, and 1,410 (3.97%) with a mental health condition.

**Lack of Understanding of AtW Processes**

There is a lack of understanding of how Access to Work decision-making works. Following the threat of legal action by law firm Leigh Day at the end of last year, DWP agreed to publish the guidance and criteria they use to assess Access to Work claims. In a letter to Leigh Day, DWP also advised they would publish new, updated guidance, “hopefully by April 2015”. However, more work needs to be done to ensure employers and prospective and existing employees are fully aware of what is available to them, and how they can get it.

**Cutting Support to Work – and Jeopardising Employment**

The support disabled people get from Access to Work seems in some cases more related to how knowledgeable and articulate you are in answering the questions rather than what your requirements are:

**Personal experience**

*“One of SPECTRUM’s staff members has recently had her AtW support reduced by 60%, and AtW say they will now only cover 20% of her support hours. This is despite her having the same support in place for more than sixteen years. She has a cognitive impairment, which means she has some difficulties processing information, and this is the basis of her AtW support. However, it has not been taken into account in any contact she has had regarding her AtW claim. We feel this is discriminatory on their part. The longer this drags on, the more it costs our organisation, which is a small local charity, and the closer we get to making her, and her support worker, redundant.”*

**Missed Economic Benefits**

By denying Access to Work for disabled people the Government are missing out on the economic benefits of disabled people being in work The most widely accepted figures suggest that for every £1.00 spent on Access to Work, £1.48 is recouped by the treasury. Therefore Access to Work should be seen as an investment, rather than a ‘benefit’ for disabled people. This figure does not include wider benefits such as reduced use of health services including hospital admissions: if these are included the cost/benefit ratio is even lower.

If the recommendation to double the programme size had been implemented, this would already have generated nearly £60m in additional revenue, based on a 2013/14 programme cost of £108m.

**Reviews aimed at cutting costs and therefore support**

Reviews are taking place that end up with disabled people losing Access to Work support on the grounds that the employer should pay, which creates difficulties for employers.

**Personal experience**

*“B is a senior executive and BSL user. Despite having been assessed as needing full time qualified interpreter support, his AtW was earmarked for restriction to £30,000 under the previously proposed rules. However, the new ‘cap’ of 1.5 times national average earnings replacing this rule will still limit B to three days per week of support at the level he needs.”*

Experience from Disabled People’s Organisations (DPOs) around the country suggest that for most disabled people they are in touch with, if they have a review, they end up with a reduction in their Access to Work support. This is a completely false economy.

And all the time a DPO like SPECTRUM (in Southampton) is arguing about AtW support, SPECTRUM are having to pay out. It is very challenging for a Disabled People’s Organisation.

There is a tension between the Government’s wish (which we share) to increase the number of people who benefit from Access to Work – and wanting to keep the expenditure stable. You can’t do both. As the Work and Pensions Select Committee said, there has to be investment in the programme, to increase the numbers without unfairly bearing down on those individuals who happen to have higher cost requirements. It is particularly difficult for smaller employers – including private sector SMEs, and Disabled People’s Organisations. They do not have the resources to fill in the gap. Nor do people who are self-employed: they have nowhere to go.

The Business Disability Forum is deeply concerned about cuts to disabled people’s AtW budgets. George Selvanera, BDF’s Director of Policy, Services and Communications said: “We really need to see a much more personalised approach to all applicants and particularly those who have higher support costs. All this reflects a fundamental problem, which is that AtW is a labour market intervention, it is not a benefit. It is about addressing a failure in the labour market, it is not a benefit for the individual.”

**Wasting Time through Unnecessary Bureaucracy**

Access to Work is bureaucratic and takes time for decisions to be made which results in withdrawn job offers, or if employers help in the short term this is used to deny the employee support.

**Reductions in Support Leading to Loss of Employment**

Reductions in Access to Work have directly led to loss of employment:

**Personal experience**

*“Due to a substantial cut to his AtW funding, J has been forced to step down as managing director of a successful deaf led social business. As his company cannot pay the support costs, J has had no option but to recruit a hearing managing director to move the business forward. This is despite having spent years building a successful career and company, with the support of Access to Work.”*

* As the number of disabled people in work increases, with the Government recently claiming 141,000 more disabled people are in work than this time last year, then Access to Work needs to increase to support them to stay in work. The Access to Work fund has not yet been significantly increased despite promises that it would be. On 7 March 2012, Maria Miller MP, then Minister for Disabled People, announced the Government was accepting all the recommendations of the Sayce Review, including those on Access to Work. These included:
* Raise the profile of Access to Work to SMEs and under-served disabled people
* A pre-assessment for Access to Work support for disabled job seekers to give an indicative budget, to give them and employers more confidence in the support available
* A far less bureaucratic system, with personal budgets that the individual can manage (agreed by Mark Harper on 12 March)
* Improved cost-effectiveness through a portal to share access to adjustments, technology, supports, so people can compare and drive costs down
* More effective support for people with fluctuating conditions, and mental health and learning difficulties
* More effective support for entrepreneurs
* Speed up the process of assessment and decision making to ensure disabled people have the support they need within 2 weeks of accepting an offer of employment

In 2014 British Deaf Association (BDA) published an Access to Work Consultation, looking at the experience of deaf people using Access to Work. As well as some common goals, this report also recommended:

* Communicate better with deaf people
* Provide deaf awareness training for all AtW advisers

They also called for an urgent review of the implementation of the 30 hour rule policy, which capped expenditure at the equivalent of 30 employee hours. This rule was suspended and then stopped; but was replaced by a proposed ‘cap’ on any individual’s support cost at 1.5 times average salary. This could have a similar impact on some Deaf and disabled people: leaving them without the support required, which can jeopardise employment.

The ‘cap’ will operate from 2018 for existing customers: Government has introduced preparation time, and also intends to work to influence the market, to reduce costs where appropriate. This makes a kind of sense. But any ‘cap’ will mean some individuals losing employment. If this cost effective programme was simply operated at the scale needed, there would be no need for a cap. Instead there could be trigger points to review individual costs where they exceed a particular threshold – at which point imaginative solutions could be discussed, to identify more cost effective solutions. But this would take place in the context of a commitment that no one should have to lose their job.

**Personal experience**

*Jane Cordell was a high flying diplomat. A Deaf woman, she is a role model to thousands. After working successfully for the Foreign Office in Poland, with lip speakers to support her, she was tipped to be a future Ambassador. She applied for a more senior job in Kazakhstan. She was the best person for the job and was offered it. But she never took up the job because the ‘adjustments’ were seen as too expensive, so the offer was withdrawn. Whilst this was not an Access to Work ‘cap’ – government department employees are not eligible for Access to Work – it was a cap nonetheless. A cap on ambition that stopped the best person for the role contributing, and blazing a trail for other disabled people*. *A cap on Access to Work costs per person would stop other disabled people reaching their ambitions*

**DWP Expert Panel Report on Access to Work Never Published**

Access to Work has already been dubbed ‘the Government’s best kept secret’ (Sayce Review) but it has become even more secretive. The report and recommendations from the panel of experts set up by DWP to recommend ways of implementing the Sayce review recommendations on Access to Work has never been published.

**Access to Work & Self Employment**

Problems with Access to Work delivery are stopping disabled people from working and running their own businesses:

*“We need a commitment from government through Access to Work to the rights of disabled people to work and that includes entrepreneurship.*

*A key benefit of the AtW award is that it is not a benefit in the traditional sense. It should remain out of the benefit system as this leads to less stigmatisation.*

*Particular attention needs to be paid to raising the profile of disabled entrepreneurs to provide role models and mentors.*

*We need:*

* *Positive action in terms of introducing disabled people to the concept of, and important role they have to play in, entrepreneurship and the services that are able to help them.*
* *AtW to be effective, based on business innovation and skills led by disabled people, and understand the needs of and ways disabled people lead their working lives, upholding the Social Model of Disability.*
* *Eligibility criteria must be formed from the needs of disabled people in this area, not traditional milestones applied to their non-disabled peers.*
* *We can no longer accept situations where disabled entrepreneurs are not supported effectively because of ineffective systems or lack of understanding or an unwillingness to put the simple measures in place that make it possible.*
* *There needs to be an appreciation of entrepreneurship as a real option for disabled people and a recognition of the innovative support that needs to be put into place to achieve this , including access to finance (to remove the current situation which just sets people up to fail or deems them ineligible)*
* *A simple application process available in alternative formats*
* *Flexible, not over onerous mechanisms for identifying support requirements based on the disabled person’s understanding of their own requirements and implemented at the earliest possible point.*
* *Direct Access to a Personal Advisor who has the autonomy to make decisions, particularly when business priorities require additionality at short notice.*
* *Access to ‘Entrepreneurship Incubators’ for Disabled People to provide initial start up and ongoing advice on managing a health condition as an entrepreneur, alongside traditional areas of business support.*
* *Training on how to manage an AtW award including recruitment, selection and management of support workers.*

*Entrepreneurship offers real and sustainable opportunities for our members who are increasingly choosing this option over mainstream employment.*

*It is essential that the Access to Work Award is responsive to the needs and working patterns required for disabled people to become successful entrepreneurs.*

*Key to this is ATW understanding that our condition is ever present and requires a great deal of support to minimise symptoms, and the level of our award needs to allow for this.”* (Jacqueline Winstanley, on behalf of Fluidity and Universal Inclusion)

**Personal experience**

*“J developed fibromyalgia at the height of her career but unfortunately found she had no choice but to leave work and claim benefits. A lack of understanding of her condition led her away from a return to employment and towards self employment and entrepreneurship. Although AtW support was difficult to come by, when she got it, it enabled her to develop a business based on her previous career.*

*However the restructure of AtW had led directly to a 70% reduction in funding, and the eventual closure of her AtW. She has had no AtW support since August 2014, and unless this changes J will have no choice but to shortly close her business.”*

**What Happens when Access to Work does work?**

**Personal experience**

*“K runs her own successful business, and a recent disability related problem has led her to contact Access to Work, more than twenty years after her first involvement with them. Within 48 hours of the recent contact with AtW, they had agreed to provide K with support which will enable K to deliver ‘business as usual’ while she awaits an operation.”*

**Personal experience**

*“Banane Nafeh is a wheelchair user and has been receiving Access to Work support since 2007. During this period AtW have funded an adjustable electric wheelchair and an adjustable desk, as well as assisting with taxi fares to and from work. Banane is very grateful for Access to Work to have given her the confidence and stimulation to remain in employment.”*

**Personal experience**

*“V has a worsening muscle condition which has been affecting her ability to carry out all tasks required to do her job effectively. V’s manager suggested contacting Access to Work, and she now receives data entry support one day per week. This enables V to focus on other tasks and she is much happier and focused at work.”*

**Why Access to Work Should Grow**

* It realises human rights and the rights of disabled people to equality of opportunity in employment. Article 27 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) *“…States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others; this includes the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities.”*

*“…States Parties shall safeguard and promote the realization of the right to work, including for those who acquire a disability during the course of employment, by taking appropriate steps, including through legislation, to, inter alia:*

*(h) Promote the employment of persons with disabilities in the private sector through appropriate policies and measures, which may include affirmative action programmes, incentives and other measures…”*

* It benefits disabled individuals, their families and the tax payer. The most recent research suggests the net return on Access to Work investment is £1.48 for every £1.00 spent. This figure excludes wider benefits such as reduced hospital admissions, and lower use of health services. SPECTRUM have created a ‘cost savings calculator’, and estimate that in the case of their own staff member, within twelve months DWP will have paid £1,600 more in out of work benefits than it will save in the removal of AtW funding.

Taking into account redundancy payments, reduced household expenditure etc, the overall cost to DWP and the organisation rises to more than £13,000. This will be a common story among those leaving employment through loss of AtW support.

* All political parties say they want more disabled people in work yet they do not invest in programmes to enable us to work, like Access to Work, and instead pour millions in to programmes that simply do not work, such as the Work Programme and Work Choice.

Almost 90 per cent of Employment and Support Allowance claimants who are on the Work Programme have not moved into employment.

DR UK (2013) found that since 2011/12 Work Choice had helped only 58 people per year on average with serious mental health problems to get jobs in the whole of Great Britain. This compared to an NHS Trust covering just one area of London, which helped more than three times as many people (201) with serious mental health problems (239 posts in one year) to get jobs. (DR UK: Taking Control of Employment Support Dec 2013)

Over-arching performance for disabled people is still way below expectations. Performance for Employment and Support Allowance claimants who have completed the Work Programme programme (11 per cent) is below expectations (22 per cent) and previous programmes (12 per cent) (NAO Work Programme report 02/07/14).

* Access to Work enables disabled people to stay in work and aids career development

**Personal budgets**

*“AtW is paramount in providing me with access to communication and information in order for me to perform my role to the best of my ability. Without AtW I would not have been able to achieve as much as I have done particularly during my career with line management responsibilities. I have managed a team of eight people providing professional procurement and programme management to various Local Authorities. Without the presence of SLIs I would not have been able to contribute as much, particularly at meetings.” (BDA Access to Work Consultation 2014)*

**Our Demands**

* All political parties to commit to doubling the number of disabled people benefiting from Access to Work support in the next 3 years without clamping down on disabled people who happen to have higher costs
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**Appendix One**

**Personal Experiences - In Full**

**Personal experience**

*“I am an entrepreneur, running a Global business based in the UK. The main focus of my business is reducing global inequalities which involves creating inclusive organisations and environments, in particular inclusive entrepreneurship, childcare and health services. Up until the recent restructure of Access to Work I had an award of 35-40 hrs support to run my business, and because I chose not to apply for disability related benefits my award also included an element of personal care.*

*I have a fluctuating condition called Fibromyalgia, and some quite serious complications following surgery which have a very debilitating impact on my day to day living. That of course includes work.*

*I was in work when I became disabled, at the height of my career as a Diversity and Inclusion Manager in local government (I was a considered expert in my field and contributed to National Guidelines for good practice and developed a number of models in inclusive working practice) and had the unexpected journey from relative financial stability onto incapacity benefit.*

*I tried to get back into mainstream employment, but the lack of understanding within both the recruitment and selection process, and the complications my medical conditions presented, made this impossible.*

*Determined not to spend a life on benefit and contribute to the global reduction of inequalities, I decided the only way forward was to work for myself. AtW supported me to this.*

*It was not an easy task to acquire support, as I probably have the worst case scenario where you cannot actually see my conditions. They fluctuate, and although my support requirements were the same in my employed capacity, self employment seemed to warrant more intrusion and less ‘trust’ from AtW. They required a disproportionate level of medical evidence, assessments and scrutiny than had been applied to my award in mainstream employment.*

*That being said there was always my personal advisor who knew me and my circumstances. Despite many levels of reconsideration (in part because of my determination) and attempts to reduce my award, all attempts were overturned and we had reached a consensus of support going forward, prior to the restructure.*

*All this changed however following the restructure. Despite having provided everything I had been asked for previously in terms of the criteria applied to my award, I suddenly found myself being asked for further information, threatened with sanctions, and having criteria retrospectively applied to my award that I had never been asked meet before.*

*Worse than this, the restructure cut 70% of the support. A big part of that was the role of the personal advisor and a move to a call centre. Suddenly I lost my ‘ally’ so to speak, and as the service floundered under the new way of working. The ‘backroom management’ of my award impacted on my ability to run my business effectively, and I was suddenly dealing with people who did not seem to have an understanding of the issues I was facing, and perhaps more importantly, didn’t seem to care.*

*I don’t need to talk in too much detail about that because it has been covered in the AtW Select Committee Investigation Report in terms of the service failings but for me the biggest and most detrimental change was how I as a service user was treated when I challenged what was happening to me. The mechanism to challenge a decision appeared to have changed and at points attempts were made to deny my right to reply.*

*I endured 8 months of what I can only describe as a ‘hamster wheel’ scenario trying to retain my award. This took valuable time away from running my business, as well as having a detrimental impact on my health.*

*There were no allowances made in terms of the additional support I would need to comply with the various criteria retrospectively applied to my award, or in the challenge process itself; the time I was unable to respond because I was in hospital; or the number of times the department did not reply to me.*

*The result was my award was initially summarily suspended in July 2014 and subsequently removed in August 2014. Despite repeated attempts to make a new application I still to date have no award in place.*

*I am trying to keep my business running and maintain my position as a Global Thought Leader in Diversity and Inclusion. However it is becoming increasingly difficult to do so without the essential support that AtW provided. As each day goes by my symptoms become worse and the presentation of this within my working environment threatens my professional reputation.*

*I have appealed this decision which is currently being investigated by the Parliamentary & Health Service Ombudsman. Should I not be successful and my award not be reinstated, I will have no choice but to close my business and return to what I now believe is termed Employment & Support Allowance.”*

**Personal experience**

*“Following a review by DWP of one of our staff’s Access to Work funding in September 2014, her funded support hours were reduced by 60% even though there has not been any change in her impairment, work role, support needs, or any other circumstances. After several attempts to obtain clarification from DWP on the basis for this decision, she was eventually informed that this is because the assistance received from her support worker has been classified as job replacement activity rather than job aide. This suggests a change in the assessment criteria to that used in the previous 16 years she had been receiving AtW funding. As a result DWP now say they will only pay for 20% of support costs.*

*However, although we have explained her difficulties with dealing with the assessment process and her communication needs to AtW staff on several occasions, no adjustment or accommodation has been forthcoming. The staff member has a cognitive impairment. The failure to take account of her impairment related communication needs means that the way the assessment was carried out is in breach of the disability related ‘reasonable adjustment’ provisions in the Equality Act. This has also contributed directly to her giving contradictory information when it was not clear to her what she was being asked or how the information would be used. The result is that her support arrangements have been misinterpreted or misrepresented. We have tried to explain to DWP staff how her support works to facilitate her to carry out her job.*

*However they are refusing to carry out a further review in which she can participate without being discriminated against.*

*She has had considerable difficultly obtaining information from AtW staff about the complaints process and, while DWP’s own guidance states that customers have access to a five stage complaints process, they have refused to consider a complaint beyond stage 1.*

*We believe that Access to Work have misinterpreted our staff member’s support need in relation to DWP’s own guidance. This has resulted in a failure to take sufficient account of her impairment related communication needs during the assessment process.*

*Without reinstatement of her AtW support, our staff member will not be able to continue to work and both she and her support worker will be made redundant. We have been making up the shortfall in funding from our own reserves but this has already cost several thousand pounds. While they are both valuable members of staff, the financial cost is unsustainable.*

*Far from saving the Government money, this will actually increase welfare costs as two people will be out of work as a result. We have calculated that within 12 months the Government will have paid out over £2000 more in out of work benefits than they will have saved by the reduction in AtW funding. In addition there are further costs to the employer for redundancy payments and the costs of recruiting and retraining replacement staff, as well as indirect costs to the exchequer (e.g. through reduced tax receipts on lower consumer spending once our staff become unemployed).*

*The way review assessments are being carried out demonstrates a significant lack of awareness of the basic requirements to offer reasonable adjustments to enable people to engage with the process in a non-discriminatory way. The refusal to accept any challenge to this only adds to the discrimination.”*

**Personal experience**

*“I am a BSL user and an experienced senior executive having worked for local, national and international organisations for the past 20 years. Due to the DWP decision to allocate me a maximum budget of £30,000 per annum, my interim decision to use that allocation to continue to source known and trusted freelance interpreters, I have in effect lost 2 days a week of interpreting support from the beginning of October. I have still not yet accepted their decision that I should employ an interpreter to a salaried staff position.*

*I have been assessed as needing full time qualified interpreting support but at the rate that has been given by ASLI to AtW £30,000 per annum, to be used for in-house provision, with AtW saying it will protect the rights of the interpreter. Obviously my role is a senior one which is at odds with using in-house providers, but AtW’s argument is that any PA has access to sensitive material and meetings, and they deal with it. The issue of competency was raised but again AtW said say this is an industry issue not theirs. None of my other queries regarding supervision, training, holidays, equipment, sickness, pensions, travel, registrations, employment issues such as redundancies and grievances, etc. have been answered as constructively as I would have expected them to be.*

*It is an inclusive fee that I am being given. So despite having had an adequate budget from AtW for over 20 years, I now feel I am being forced to work with 24 hours per week at £27 per hour all inclusive, with interpreters expected to travel nationally, or to employ 1 interpreter in-house and still cover travel, training etc.”*

**NB this case study pre dates the removal of the 30 hour / £30,000 limits, and the introduction of the 1.5 x average national wage (£40,800) cap in their place. However we decided to leave this example in as for all new cases, this cap will still limit this level of interpreter support to three days per week, based on current pay rates. Existing cases will have this cap applied in 2018.**

**Personal experience**

*I am self employed, running my own successful business. I have chronic rheumatoid arthritis and had all joints replaced 24 years ago. At Christmas one of my hips once again gave out.*

*I am now awaiting a hip ‘revision’ operation in mid March. I was extremely concerned about the impact this might have on my business, as this led to me being unable to drive, or travel using public transport. Even in the short term covering the period up to the operation and recovery, my inability to meet existing and potential clients could have a lasting impact on the business.*

*With trepidation I contacted Access to Work. However, I was quickly impressed. Once we had established that I fulfilled the criteria, they understood my need and agreed in principle to put the support in place. This all happened within 48hrs.*

*I now have two round trips per week into central London paid for by AtW. This will help me over this period waiting for surgery. It means that with a bit more planning on my part, it is business as usual for my clients, and it is generous enough that I do not have to panic about the longer term impact.*

*Ironically I first encountered Access to Work when I was embarking on my career many years ago, in a junior post at a national organisation. AtW covered my travel then, and I recall thinking that if I could just get over this early period, and keep my job, I would make a success of this and future roles. AtW helped me to do this, and I am extremely pleased they were able to step in when I needed their support again.*

**Personal experience**

*“I am a wheelchair user and have had progressive muscular dystrophy since birth. I am a recipient of Access to Work funding as well as a direct payments holder.*

*I have been working on a part time basis since September 2007 and I am currently working as an Information Adviser.*

*In view of my disability and needs at work, I have been receiving relevant support from the Access to Work scheme since 2007. Access to Work have indeed supported me in every positive way to overcome work-related barriers and obstacles. Thanks to the ongoing practical support that I have been getting from Access to Work, I have been able to remain in my post all these years.*

*Due to my disability needs and in the light of my particular requirements, Access to Work paid the full cost towards the purchase of a special adjustable electric wheelchair and an adjustable electric desk. Access to Work have also been assisting me every month with the additional costs of taxi fares to get to my workplace, and then back home from the office. Access to work also pay the wages of my support worker whenever I require her assistance at work or if I have to attend any work related event.*

*The kind of assistance Access to Work delivers to me is very crucial in enabling me to engage in mainstream society and enjoy the same rights and opportunities as non-disabled people. It is through my work at DRUK that I have succeeded to advice other disabled people on independent living and empower them to self-direct their care and support.*

*I am very grateful for Access to Work to have given me the confidence and stimulation to remain in employment.”*

**Personal experience**

*“I work for a national charity, helping people with health conditions and disabilities into employment. I have a muscle condition which affects my movement and dexterity in one arm. This condition has worsened over the last few years. There is a lot of record keeping and therefore typing required in my job, and this was becoming more and more of a problem, as data entry took more and more of my time as I got slower, effectively typing one handed. I began working extra, unpaid hours to stay on top of it, but this began to impact upon my overall performance at work. Following a discussion about removing the need to work the extra hours, my manager suggested we contact Access to Work to explore if they would provide some part time data entry support.*

*To cut a long story short, I am very pleased to advise that I was granted Access to Work support through a data entry assistant. She comes to my office every Friday and enters all the data from the previous week’s work – I write it down using my ‘good’ arm!*

*I am now much happier and focused at work, and enjoy it a lot more. This has enabled me to concentrate on the most important elements of my job; working to get my service users to job readiness and into and staying in employment.”*

**Appendix two**

**‘Cost/Savings Calculator’ Explained**

The calculator, created by SPECTRUM, splits costs/savings into two areas – ‘direct’ and ‘opportunity’.

Direct costs/savings taken into account:

* Loss of tax and NI revenue for both the staff member and the support worker; and
* Replacement out of work and sickness benefit costs

Opportunity costs/savings taken into account:

* Redundancy payments borne by employer;
* VAT on household spending
* Replacement recruitment costs, including advertising, training etc

*Note*

*The organisations that have contributed to the report represent and champion the rights of disabled people in the UK*