**Freedom of Information requests about AtW**

**Introduction:**

These are taken from four Freedom of Information (FoI) requests that were sent and are publically available on whatdotheyknow.com (wdtk.com), and from two FoI requests made by individuals directly to DWP.

The date given in (brackets) by the question is the date the request was made, as things may have been different before then, or have changed after that date.

I’ve split up the questions that were asked and grouped them according to what they asked about, as that makes it easier to see what’s been said about a topic.

The way that FoI requests are asked, and the way they are answered, is very important. So I’ve mainly used the original wording, and sometimes used underlining to pick out particular phrases etc. I’ve also summarised in *italics* where the answer is lengthy or complex.

**General / broad questions about AtW:**

**Q.** Please could you supply me with detailed guidance, criteria, eligibility and thresholds which cover how staff follow guidelines in deciding on Access to Work applications from disabled people seeking support in the workplace.

Specifically, I would be looking for any staff guidelines which cover how decisions are made and communicated to applicants; any management guidance on eligibility and thresholds on levels of support; and any other criteria which are used when making decisions. (27/5/14 wdtk.com)

**Ans.** Please find attached a copy of the latest Access to Work guidance provided to advisers. The guidance covers eligibility and the criteria used when considering applications from people for support in the workplace because of disability or long term health problems.

**Q.** What is the current policy relating to provision of British Sign Language interpreters for BSL users through Access to Work? (17/4/14 wdtk.com)

**Ans.** The Access to Work programme is a pan disability programme. There is no separate Access to Work policy relating to the provision of British Sign Language interpreters. Eligible applicants are offered funding for support from one or more of the full range of Access to Work elements:

* Communicator Support at Interview, which meets the full cost of hiring an advocate or interpreter to remove any communication barriers faced at an interview;
* Support Worker Types of support include British Sign Language interpreters and Job Coaches;
* Travel to Work grants, which are available to meet the additional costs of travel to work for people who are unable to use public transport;
* Special Aids and Equipment where types of support include Communications Technology; and
* Adaptations to Equipment, which helps to pay for the cost of making equipment accessible.

**Q.** Details of changes to this policy since January 2012. (17/4/14 wdtk.com)

The Access to Work policy on the funding of support workers applies to the funding of British Sign Language and other types of interpreter support.

Since January 2012 there have been no changes to the Access to Work policy on the funding of support workers.

**Information about my own case:**

**Q.** Anything about your own case.

**Ans.** Information related to your own case is excluded from the FoI Act. (28/5/14 wdtk.com)

**Latest Access to Work guidance provided to advisers:**

**Q.** What is the current DWP guidance for decision makers responsible for administering Access to Work. (17/4/14 wdtk.com)

**Ans.** Please see a copy of the current Access to Work guidance, version 24 and a copy of version 14, the guidance that was in place in January 2012. *(Both attached in the original answer).*

**Q.** Please can you send me the up to date AtW guidance for advisers. (Various)

**Ans.** We are happy to provide a copy of the latest guidance when requested, you do not need to make a formal FOI request.

**AtW / DWP staffing & managerial structure, and contact details:**

**Q.** What is the current structure diagram for AtW managers, with their contact details. (28/5/14 wdtk.com)

**Ans.** Details relating to non-senior service members of staff count as their personal data, and so are exempt from the FoI Act.

We can provide you with the external contact details of Colin Stewart, who is the Work Services Director with responsibility for the Access to Work Programme:

Mr Colin Stewart, North West Work Services Director, Jobcentre Plus
Othen House, 7, Oldham Road, Middleton, Manchester, M24 1BE. Tel: 0161 6542000

**AtW Rates for booking interpreters:**

**Q.** Please provide copies of all policies and other relevant documentation that are used by Access to Work (ATW) staff in relation to rates for the booking of BSL/English Interpreters (broken down by region as appropriate). (27/5/14 wdtk.com)

**Ans.** Access to Work teams decide upon appropriate grant levels, according to customer need and the precise nature of the support required, in individual cases and as such there are no defined or prescriptive rates, in guidance documents.

Our delivery team does work to expectations of reasonable rates, as explained below. For fully qualified interpreters, we would currently expect maximum hourly rates of £45 in London, and £35 elsewhere.

**Q.** What is the rationale behind all rates imposed? (27/5/14 wdtk.com)

**Ans.** Awards in each case are awarded upon consideration of customer need and reasonable benchmark amounts, based upon the qualification level of interpreters. Our hearing impaired delivery team gathers information and discusses such levels, on a regular basis, with a range of appropriate organisations, ensuring our knowledge remains current.

**Communication Support at Interviews (in AtW’s guidance called CSI)**

**Q.** Please provide copies of all policies and other relevant documentation that are used by Access to Work (ATW) staff in relation to rules in relation to the funding of BSL/English Interpreters for job interviews. (27/5/14 wdtk.com)

**Ans.** *(The reply gives the full text from their guidance, I’ve given just the headings)* Communication Support at Interview;Type of support.

**The 30-hour guidance:**

**Q.** Please provide copies of all policies and other relevant documentation that are used by Access to Work (ATW) staff in relation to the 30-hour rule (i.e. therequirement to employ communication support if the support required is 30 hours per week or more). (27/5/14 wdtk.com)

**Ans.** There is no 30 hour rule in Access to Work policy.

The figure of 30 hours per week was added to the guidance for Access to Work advisers in June 2011, as an example of the level of support an individual might require, where it would be more cost effective to agree funding for a full time support worker, than for a support worker, charging by the hour.

**Q.** What is the rationale behind the 30-hour rule? (27/5/14 wdtk.com)

**Ans**. The example of 30 hours of support a week was added to Access to Work guidance to simplify the job of advisers in identifying the most cost effective way of funding the support, an individual needs.

**Q.** What should happen if the 30-hour rule is deemed unsuitable for a Deaf BSL users' role/place of work? (27/5/14 wdtk.com)

Access to Work is a flexible programme and will work with employers to identify reasonable adjustments, voluntary contributions, or changes to job design that will enable them to put the required support in place.

**Q.** What is the impact of potential employers having a recruitment policy? (27/5/14 wdtk.com)

**Ans.** If an employer restricts a vacancy to applicants with a specific disability, it is reasonable to expect the employer to provide any support relevant to that disability. Access to Work funding is only be available to fund support, beyond what it is reasonable, for the employer to provide.

Also see question and answer below about 30 hour rules and people who are self-employed or directors.

**Self employed / directors in own company:**

**Q.** Please provide copies of all policies and other relevant documentation that are used by Access to Work (ATW) staff in relation to eligibility rules in relation to Deaf customers who are self-employed or directors in a limited company. (27/5/14 wdtk.com)

**Ans.** There are no specific eligibility rules for deaf people. Access to Work Advisers use the following guidance. *(The reply gives the full text from their guidance, I’ve summarised just the headings)*: Eligibility conditions for Access to Work; What is employment; What is self–employment?

**Q.** Please provide copies of all policies and other relevant documentation that are used by Access to Work (ATW) staff in relation to eligibility rules in relation to how the 30-hour rule would be imposed in relation to Deaf customers who are self- employed or directors in a limited company. (27/5/14 wdtk.com)

Disabled people who are eligible to apply for AtW funds to support their self employment, or employment as the director of a company and require human support for 30 hours per week, or more, may be offered funding for a full time support worker.

**Questions on statistics / data / return on investment / the Sayce figures, etc:**

**Q.** What are the figures showing successful requests for BSL interpreters over the period from January 2012 to present. (17/4/14 wdtk.com)

**Ans.** There were 6,000 Access to Work awards for BSL interpreter support which started between 1st January 2012 and 31st March 2014.

**Q.** Can you clarify the number of people currently using AtW that receive 30 hours plus and from which category of disability. (Not publically available – 2/5/14)

Ans. *In summary DWP say they have this information, but it would take over 3.5 days for someone to collect it, and as that would cost over £600, they don’t have to do it, and won’t.*

I can confirm that we hold information falling within the description specified in your request. However, we estimate that the cost of complying with your request would exceed the appropriate limit of £600. The appropriate limit has been specified in regulations and for central Government it is set at £600. This represents the estimated cost of one person spending 3½ working days in determining whether the Department holds the information, and locating, retrieving and extracting the information. Under section 12 of the Freedom of Information Act the Department is not obliged to comply with your request and we will not be processing your request further.

**Q**. Extra money was put into the AtW programme. Please clarify the amounts and when this happened. (Not publically available – 2/5/14)

**Ans.** The Department is now spending £15m more per year on AtW than it was at the time of the Sayce Review: £108m spent in the year ended 31 March 2014 compared to £93m in 2011/12. This is within an overall reducing budget for the Department.

**Q.** Is the calculation of £1.18 the amount reaped by the treasury for every £1 spent on AtW, being used internally. I would like to see the workings for this calculation. (Not publically available – 2/5/14)

**Ans.** *In summary the answer below says that DWP have this information, but that Ministers need to be able to think about things and develop policies (etc.) in private, and that in this case the DWP thinks that’s more important than telling the public about this information.*

I confirm that the information you seek is held by the Department. However it engages an exemption from disclosure because it relates to the formulation or development of government policy – section 35(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act. This exemption protects the private space within which Ministers and their policy advisers can develop policies without the risk of premature disclosure.

As required by the Act, I have also assessed the public interest for against disclosure. There is a public interest in greater transparency which makes government more accountable to the electorate and increases trust. There is also a public interest in being able to assess the quality of advice being given to ministers and subsequent decision making.

However, good government depends on good decision-making and this needs to be based on the best advice available and a full consideration of all the options without fear of premature disclosure. If this public interest cannot be protected there is a risk that decision-making will become poorer and will be recorded inadequately

On balance, DWP is satisfied that in this instance the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosure. Therefore, the information you seek will not be released.

**Q.** Please supply a copy of the Department for Work and Pensions' social return on investment analysis cited on page 70 of the report published by the DWP: "Getting in, staying in and getting on: Disability Employment Support fit for the future" dated 6/11. (Not publically available – 12/6/14)

**Ans.** Following a search of our paper and electronic records, I have established that the information you requested is no longer held by this department”

**DWP staff on targets to reduce support packages?**

**Q.** Information on whether any staff employed by the DWP are working to targets and/or incentives to reduce support packages received through Access to Work. (Not publically available – 12/6/14)

**Ans.** I can advise you that no DWP staff are working to targets or incentives to reduce Access to Work support packages.