**Draft summary of some possible changes DWP and AtW can make to put things right and improve the system (as of 23/11/2014):**

This is a list of some suggested changes that the Minister, DWP and AtW can make. These are taken from recommendations made to the Select Committee by a variety of organisations and people, and those made to the Business Disability Forum (BDF) event. They are a mixture of actions to:

* Address specific problems created by changes to AtW provision – both for individuals and systemic.
* Restore and improve Guidance and processes.
* Restore, clarify and improve the focus of AtW on supporting Deaf and disabled people to get, keep and progress at work.
* Bring Deaf and disabled people, and their experience, into the heart of provision.

The timescales required to make changes are assumed, as it may be that with good will the DWP are able to bring in some of the medium term changes more quickly.

**The top quick (0-4 months) and relatively easy improvements to make:**

Whilst all of these recommendations are important, these are in rough priority order according to the potential impact of the changes.

1. Following changes to processes and structures, and with staff changes, AtW decisions and reviews are not all effective. For an interim period, to address this, introduce an emergency contact for Deaf and disabled people whose support has stopped, and they cannot carry out their job, or where they or their clients are put at potential risk due to AtW changes in support. This should be staffed by people who properly understand the guidance, work access needs, and who are able to either resolve issues directly or provide guidance for AtW advisers to help them resolve the issue.
2. Self-employed / own limited company – review the eligibility criteria for start-up businesses, make them clear in writing, offer all of those people whose AtW support has been stopped due to failing to meet these criteria the opportunity to make the necessary changes and resume support, backdated to when the support stopped.
3. Make the rationale for the award and the reconsideration decisions clear in writing – i.e. showing what support was requested by the Deaf or disabled person, the support actually offered, the rationale for making this offer – including reference to specific guidance if the awards differs from that requested, and next steps (e.g. clear signposting to reconsideration and complaints processes).
4. Set up an ATW website that is accessible and contains information ATW customers need, such as guidance/policies, organisational aims and objectives, organogram, scheme eligibility criteria, how to complain, how to seek a reconsideration, option to call through a BSL live video stream, customer satisfaction survey statistics, proposed changes to the scheme, opportunities for consultation, job opportunities within AtW, separate section for employers and public advisers, and so on. The website should be updated on a regular basis.
5. Review (particularly interpreting) support to ensure that it meets local market rates. Market rates decided on the basis of average freelance rates, rather than cheapest provider, or anonymous market intelligence.
6. Plan and deliver a cultural shift within AtW where staff should have as their primary objective the desire to enable Deaf and disabled people to access, keep and progress at work and in the job market. This message should be made public.
7. AtW staff should assume the Deaf and disabled person is expert in their own needs, and that the scheme should provide an amount of support that is sufficient to enable them to perform in their job roles. It would remain the AtW adviser’s decision to approve the budget and ensure sufficient checks and balances to reduce the risk of fraud, but not to the exclusion of the customer’s stated needs.
8. Provide an accessible service, e.g. in BSL, large print, easy-read, face-to-face contact and specialist needs assessments available where needed. With all written information in plain English.
9. Have named / dedicated advisers for individuals and organisations – with contact details (email / phone / BSL web link access).
10. Work should begin immediately with Graeae, Deafinitely Theatre and Candoco, to ensure changes are made that mean AtW supports Deaf and disabled actors to work in the UK and abroad, as was previously the case.
11. Until work is done with employers and on formulae for employer’s contributions, and unless employers have explicitly agreed to fund the difference, awards should not be for less than the employee needs to access work. (See point 22)
12. Offer immediate and easy to access support to customers at interview and probation stage to avoid the risk of employers perceiving new or potential disabled employees as costly and burdensome. This would be in line with current CSI guidance.
13. Where work access is required through interpreting, provide registered and qualified interpreters, not CSWs. CSWs should only be provided where the Deaf person expresses a preference for using CSWs.

**The top medium term (4 months – 1 year) improvements:**

1. Establish a working group and hold regular meetings with senior staff members.. Also set up and run customer feedback sessions (focus groups) and provide feedback from those meetings to both the working group and leadership/executive team meetings for action. The outcomes of the customer feedback should be clear and made public “*you said: we did*”. As a general point, where possible source direct customer experience should be ascertained, rather than rely solely on reported experiences via organisations.
2. Feedback and complaints should be encouraged as ways of improving understanding of the customer’s experience and securing continuous improvement. Making complaints and providing feedback should be accessible to all customers. Anonymised summaries, complaint statistics and themes published quarterly. Senior management actions after considering complaints and feedback should also be published on the website.
3. Improve the training programme for advisers,. Enhanced on-going Deaf and disability awareness training should be provided by a range of Deaf and disabled trainers, avoiding over-reliance on just one perspective or approach. Training providers and the nature of training packages should be published. Online learning should only be used as a supplement after receiving disability and deaf awareness training for advisors with proper training sessions. ‘Word of mouth’ training in-team should stop (as experiences shows that this is too vulnerable to inaccurate information being passed on). Advisers should be trained to understand not just disability/Deafness, but the impact on different job roles of disabilities and Deafness to move away from the one-size-fits-all approach seen lately.
4. Set up an accessibility user group that is consulted on access to the service. For example, this group should be used to advise on the accessibility of the new website, of the call centre, of the complaints process, and of the scheme administration. The feedback this group provides should be used directly and transparently to improve access and details of this published on the website.
5. Review the administration of the scheme (engaging with customers and employers). Reduce the administrative burden on customers and employers, make an e-portal for online admin, set up electronic accounts where customers and employers can access and view the information ATW hold, clarify what information needs to be gathered for a new and an established claim (e.g. no need for a Deaf person to keep explaining that they are Deaf). Improve the, speed of decision making on claims. Choose a response to correspondence timescale and stick to it (this currently says 48 hours but is not adhered to). Make the application system fully accessible so that customers need only minimal support to use this.
6. Have a full menu of communication support and disability access options, with professional quality support materials (in English, Easy Read and BSL) so that customers understand the options available. Offer trial periods of different kinds of support so that customers and ATW can understand if and how different services meet the customer’s needs.
7. Make awards that are annual or tri-annual, allowing for fluctuating need, with averaged daily / weekly / monthly usage, and no 'penalty' for over / under using within the broad parameters. Or give the disabled person responsibility for a personal budget to be spent as they see fit. Stop setting unreasonable restrictions on use that make the support unusable.
8. Ensure Advisers have access to all relevant historic and current support information on the computer system.
9. Set out clearly how the threshold for a ‘reasonable adjustment’ is measured, and where ATW will step in to assist with the cost of adjustment that is judged not to be ‘reasonable’. Ensure that where employers are expected to contribute towards costs, a clear formula to assess employers’ contributions is used and this formula is published on the website. This piece of work should be based on a programme of engagement with employers and customers, and exclusions are made for SMEs and organisations led by and/or employing a high proportion of Deaf and/or disabled people, who would otherwise be disadvantaged e.g. in competitive tendering.
10. Work with interpreters (and other support services), employers and Deaf and disabled people to ensure that support workers are paid on time. Stop the practice of failing to pay for work done in good faith where the stopping or reduction of an award has been backdated.
11. Begin a programme of capturing broad and detailed data on the scheme, including the profile of customers, volume and costs of awards made, volume of contacts and complaints made by various customer groups, costs claimed vs. costs paid, etc.
12. For higher value awards, provide customer-centered workplace based assessments that involve the customer and employer, and refer these cases to an expert panel made up of customers and highly experienced ATW staff to quality assure the decision and consider whether other potentially suitable options have been overlooked.
13. Deaf ATW applicants need to be able to apply in BSL and receive letters in BSL and respond in BSL, or AtW provides support for them to do so even before they are a customer (e.g. through BSL live video stream on the website).

**Long-term improvements (1 year +):**

1. Make the case for an increased budget allocation from the Treasury both to invest in improving the administration of the scheme, and to enable the scheme to support more people.
2. Establish a Deaf/disabled-led Policy Unit and a Deaf/disabled-led Assessment Unit within DWP and ATW. Not subcontracted to Deaf/disabled organisations and charities, but staffed by independent individuals with lived experience and no vested interest.
3. Provide AtW support to volunteers, where part of a pathway to work. (This recommendation assumes the money for this will not be found by reducing access support available for people in work).
4. Contract to provide accessible Advocacy support for Deaf and disabled people who find the AtW assessment process inaccessible and who currently don’t have any relevant support (e.g. people with learning disabilities, mental health issues, Deaf people with limited English, etc.).
5. Consider procuring an improved IT system so that the recording of customer contacts, decisions, reasons for decisions, reconsiderations, feedback, complaints, support paid for, budget remaining, etc., is comprehensive and easy to interrogate when a customer makes contact so that advisers can refer to those records instead of asking the customer to repeat their information. The system should also be able to produce management data on the performance of advisers.