

Written evidence submitted by the Department for Work and Pensions (ATW0235)

Introduction

1. The Government is committed to ensuring that disabled people have the opportunities, chances and support that they need to get a job and remain in employment. For those with more complex needs we offer a range of specialist disability employment provision including Work Choice, Residential Training Colleges and Access to Work.
2. Access to Work provides support to help with the additional costs that may arise as a result of an individual's needs. The types of support it can provide include travel to work, support workers and specialist aids and equipment. It does not replace the duty an employer has under the Equality Act to make reasonable adjustments. Instead it aims to provide support that is over and above that which is a reasonable adjustment.
3. Access to Work awards are usually made for a period of three years but are reviewed annually.

Operational delivery

4. Access to Work is delivered by Jobcentre Plus. The National Access to Work Team aims to provide a prompt, efficient service for its customers by assessing needs and agreeing support packages that meet those needs in a timely fashion. The tables below show expenditure and complaints over the past three years (previously shared data).

Access to Work take up and expenditure			
Year	Customers helped	Programme spend	Admin spend
2011/12	30,780	£93m	£8m
2012/13	31,500	£96m	£7m
2013/14	31,230*	£108m	£7m

* Part Year: only includes customers helped between April 2013 and December 2013

5. Over the last two years Access to Work has succeeded in supporting more customers for lower administrative costs, whilst broadly maintaining service delivery standards. Average cost per Access to Work award is £3,000.
6. Analyst research report (Dewson S, Hill D, Meager N, and Wilson R, 2009, Evaluation of Access to Work: Core evaluation. Department for Work and Pensions Research Report 619 <http://www.employment-studies.co.uk/pdflibrary/rr619.pdf>) show that Access to Work customers rate the programme affective in delivering;
 - positive impacts related to the support received;
 - reducing sickness levels and absenteeism;

- helping secure work, and;
 - retain employment.
7. Further analysis (Thornton P & Corden A (2002). Evaluating the impact of Access to Work: A case study approach. DWP Working Age Research Report 238. <http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/spru/pubs/pdf/wae138rep.pdf>) shows that:
- 23% of Access to Work users said they would “absolutely not” be in their job without Access to Work, and;
 - 46% said it was more than “halfway likely” they would not be in their job without Access to Work.

A summary of complaints received is given below:

Customer complaints received			
Year	2011/12 (Q4 only)	2012/13	2013/14
Number of complaints	121	75	157

Application and assessment process

8. Access to Work aims to meet the needs of both the disabled individual and their employer. From December 2013, following engagement with employers and service users, we introduced a new delivery model which changed the application process, which begins with a telephone conversation with an Access to Work adviser to establish eligibility, evaluate the customer’s support need and offer a decision on the support offer. This simpler process has reduced the need for significant amounts of paperwork and reduced the customer journey by an average of 10 working days. See **annex 2** for an overview of the application process.
9. Suitable and tailored solutions are agreed by undertaking assessments of needs, undertaken either by an Access to Work adviser or, in more complex cases, by an externally contracted expert assessor, who will arrange to meet the disabled person, often at their workplace. The purpose of the assessment is to identify the effects of the customer’s disability on the way they do their job. It does not identify or diagnose the disability or its causes.
10. Contracted assessors are required to make contact with the individual within 24 hours of the referral and provide the adviser with an assessment report within 10 working days of the referral.
11. If a customer has had a previous assessment, either from a previous job or resulting from a Disabled Students Allowance Assessment, it will be taken into account as evidence in support of the application and may be sufficient to make the award decision. This helps to avoid duplication and delay in processing support.

Operational guidance

12. Access to Work advisers are supported by operational guidance that sets out how support should be administered and when discretion can be used. The three core principles that underpin Access to Work guidance are:

- Additional costs: anything over and above what a non-disabled person would require to do their job and beyond what is reasonable for the employer to provide;
 - Minimum needs: meeting the needs of an individual in-so-far as the support provided allows them to overcome workplace barriers that arise from their disability; and,
 - Value for money: providing support that meets an individual's needs in the most cost effective way.
13. Access to Work shares cost with employers for specialist aids and equipment only in recognition of the fact that employers have a legal duty to provide support that is reasonable. The current cost-share arrangements are:
- Small employers (49 employees or less) pay no cost-share;
 - Medium-sized employers (50-249 employees) pay the first £500 plus 20% of remaining costs up to £10,000; and
 - Large employers (250+ employees) pay the first £1,000 plus 20% of remaining costs up to £10,000.

Access to Work awards

14. Awards are made for a three year period but subject to annual reviews, at which support packages can be corrected or adjusted as required. Reviews can also take place when a change of circumstances is reported. Since December 2013 we have been following up on initial awards with a review after 13 and 26 weeks. This has contributed to a substantial increase of referrals (in 2011/12 just under 50 cases were referred rising to just over 200 during 2013/14) to the Departments Fraud & Error service.

Mental Health Support Service

15. Since December 2011 Access to Work has offered a Mental Health Support Service (MHSS), currently delivered by Remploy Employment Services. The purpose of the MHSS is to help and assist individuals who have a mental health condition and are absent from work or finding work difficult. This has been a major boost to the help on offer for those with mental health conditions and referrals to this provision have continually increased over time. To date over 2, 500 customers have been referred to the MHSS of whom over 90% have been retained in sustainable employment for 26 weeks.

Strategic progress

16. The Department has expanded and strengthened Access to Work over recent years. We have increased the budget and have implemented a wide range of improvements. As a result, customer volumes and expenditure on the programme have increased over the last two years (**see Annex 3**) and more disabled people are now being supported.
17. This progress has been shaped by the 2010 Sayce review, which made wide-ranging recommendations about the Government's specialist disability employment provision. It concluded that resources should follow individuals (so that they can work where they choose), rather than on disability-specific workplaces or facilities.

It therefore recommended that Remploy factories were not the model of employment support for the future and should be exited from Government control.

18. The Sayce review found Access to Work to be a popular and effective programme and recommended that funding for Access to Work should be increased to transform it from “the Government’s best kept secret to a recognised passport to successful employment.” The review made a number of recommendations to improve Access to Work, such as extending eligibility to work experience, undertaking a targeted information-sharing campaign about Access to Work and strengthening pre-employment eligibility. The Department subsequently established an Expert Panel during the summer of 2012 to provide advice to the Department on how to take the recommendations forward and come up with its own recommendations for reform.
19. Following these reviews, Access to Work now delivers awards in a more flexible and personalised way, including building tolerances into award packages for customers who need to ‘flex’ their support so they can take on work at short notice. We have also improved the application process (for example, introducing a fast-track assessment process for customers who are familiar with the type of support they need) and extended eligibility by opening the scheme up to cover work experience and a range of other pre-employment activities that help disabled people move closer to the labour market.
20. For a full list of improvements introduced over the past 18 months (March 2012 – September 2013), see **annex 1**. Alongside these changes, we have also undertaken a 12 month marketing and awareness raising campaign (June 2012 onwards), which aimed to:
 - Raise awareness and improve understanding of Access to Work amongst under represented groups and disabled people both in and out of work;
 - Establish key partnerships with third parties to develop strong information delivery networks and build positive voices; and
 - Provide the framework for shaping more detailed communications and stakeholder engagement delivery plans that will evolve and change over time.
21. This campaign involved a wide range of communications activities, including press releases, presentations at disability and employer events, and articles in disability publications and engagement in direct marketing to large employers. It also included use of digital media, paid advertising links in popular search engines, magazine adverts and awareness training for Jobcentre Plus Disability Employment Advisors. A total of £55,000 was spent on marketing activities and no further paid activities are planned. On going marketing activity is being undertaken at no additional cost as a natural consequence of the range of customer and employer contacts occurring through the Jobcentre Plus network and the activities of staff in specialist areas with a signposting role in respect of the programme.
22. This campaign helped to increase awareness of Access to Work. During the course of the campaign we saw a 78% increase in views on the Access to Work gov.uk ‘*how to claim*’ page and the decline in customer volumes that occurred in 2011/12 has been reversed (take up dropped by over 5,000 to 30,780 in 2011/12 but rose to 31,500 in 2012/13). This upward trend has continued throughout 2013/14 and volumes are expected to continue to rise.

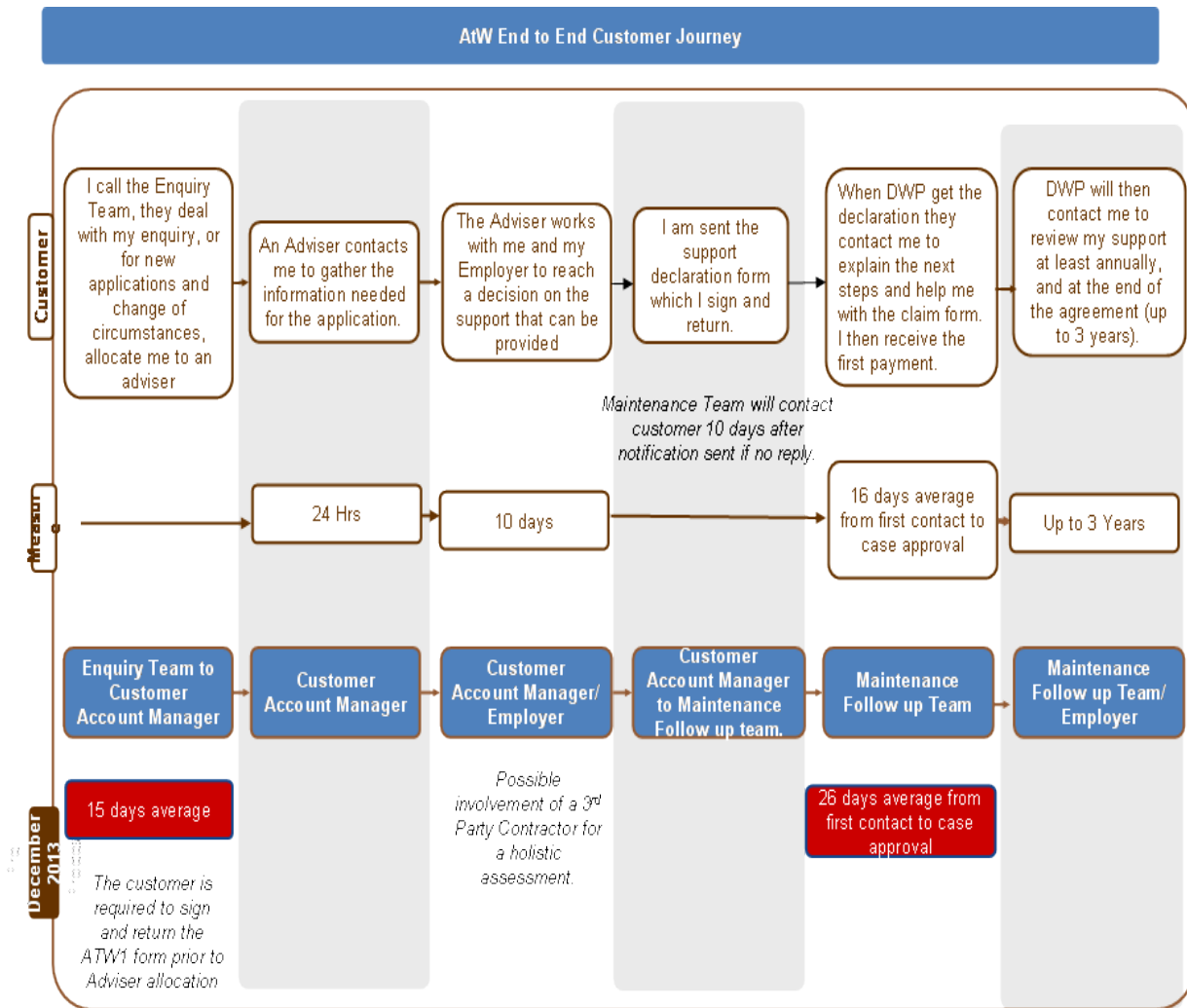
23. Access to Work also supported the Department's Disability Confident campaign in July 2013 and the subsequent regional events. Through this campaign, we are working with employers to remove barriers, increase understanding and ensure that disabled people have the opportunities to fulfil their potential and realise their aspirations. Over 1,100 employers have attended these events and Access to Work has been a key feature in the presentations of a number of disabled people who have spoken at the events.
24. A further review of Access to Work was announced by the Minister for Disabled People (Mike Penning MP) on 10 June to build on the success of this programme. We want to see the available resources support more disabled people in the future, in a sustainable way that offers good value for money for the taxpayer. We will be announcing further details on this review shortly. See attached link for further details of the announcement: <http://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-vote-office/June%202014/10%20June/8-DWP-Access.pdf>

20 June 2014

Annex 1: Changes made to Access to Work since Sayce review

- An extra £15 million for Access to Work during the current Spending Review
- 12 month targeted marketing campaign to raise awareness of Access to Work amongst under-represented groups (June 2012 – May 2013)
- From February 2013 a fast track assessment process has been put in place for individuals who already know their support requirements
- Funding for the physical transfer of equipment so that individuals can move more easily between employers (estimate @300 customers a year impacted with an average cost £500.00).
- Allowing individuals to use their Disabled Students Allowance assessment information as part of the Access to Work assessment process.
- Strengthening of Access to Work's support agreement letter to place more emphasis on individually tailored travel plans
- Greater use of Disabled People's User-Led Organisations to produce innovative employment related peer support proposals to support disabled individuals using Access to Work
- Up-skilling of advisers to work more constructively with employers
- Removal of the standard equipment list so Access to Work advisers can work constructively with employer and employee to identify where Access to Work can assist
- Removal of cost share for small employers employing between 10 and 49 people
- Extending Access to Work to eligible disabled people undertaking business start up activity on the New Enterprise Allowance scheme.
- More flexibility in how awards are delivered, such as upfront payments to customers who need their award in advance
- Extension of Access to Work eligibility to cover a range of activities that help disabled people prepare for work, including work experience, supported internships and traineeships .
- Access to Work awareness training within Jobcentre Plus.

Annex 2: Access to Work end-to-end customer journey



Annex 3: The table below shows the total expenditure on customers by year and the customer volumes.

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Customers who are hearing impaired are a key customer group who account for over a third of the expenditure: around £35m in 2012/13 from only 5,250 customers out of the total 31,500. Awards are individual Access to Work grants. Almost 40% of Access to Work customers received **more than one award** to cover different elements of the support (around 43,500 awards supporting 31,500 customers). There are over **120** award elements costing **over £40,000** of which **60** awards costing **over £50,000** in 2012/13.