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1. I am providing this feedback in the context of being an employer, being dyscalculic myself and working with many colleagues with dyslexia and other specific learning difficulties. I am Joint Chair of the British Dyslexia Association and also Chair of the Dyslexia Adult Network (a collaboration of all the charities involved with dyslexia in adults and 6 coopted specialists in that area). I also wrote the accredited training programme for workplace needs assessors for the British Dyslexia Association and am active in advising employees, employers and institutions, such as the CIPD. Incidentally, I would be more than happy to attend a meeting of the Commons Select Committee to provide any further information or clarity on the employer and employee experience of AtW.

2. In summary, AtW is a brilliant concept, it is very helpful to enabling disabled people to work, there are some issues over the current scheme in terms of elements of its marketing, design and operation.

3. The application process is very simple and well advertised through the website. Recently, there have been delays in its operation, so the provision of support to some dyslexic people I have been in contact with, has been delayed. I have worked with the external liaison team in London to visit employers and encourage them to use the scheme. This experience has been excellent, the staff were really knowledgeable about dyslexia and AtW processes. As an example, I was working, with my BDA hat on, with Guys and St Thomas' Hospital Trust to encourage them to support their dyslexic staff. The Trust employs over 13,000 staff but revealed that in the last 3 years the numbers accessing AtW ran into single figures. We have had a number of events to create awareness and now the Trust has changed its policies and some of its processes to make it easier for staff to know about and use AtW.

4. Employees must disclose their application to their employer. This represents a barrier for many dyslexic individuals as rates of disclosure are very low in the workplace and the academic research shows that employees are better off not disclosing dyslexia to their employer (ref McLoughlin and Leather research on disclosure to employers, http://eu.wiley.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-1119973937.html). This could be improved by having a nominated person in the workplace such as an HR manager who the employee could disclose to and that would assist with confidentiality and rates of disclosure (a similar practice is used in universities for DSA support.)

5. The choice to either request adjustments directly or to have a workplace needs assessment which will make recommendations for reasonable adjustments, is good for some people but not all. This depends on whether the disabled individual knows what is available for them. Most dyslexic individuals
are not fully aware of the resources available, they are better served by having a workplace needs assessment from an expert in this area.

6. In the current contract, there has been an over emphasis on time frames for delivery rather than the quality of what is being provided. This has placed considerable strain on the providers who want to offer a high quality experience. Additionally, the requirement for assessors to have 2 years existing experience has meant that recruitment is from a very small pool for dyslexia experts and that has led to supply difficulties. There is no acknowledgement within this contract that some conditions are more complex and require more time to do the assessment. All assessments are paid at the same rate. In the case of dyslexia, individuals are all different and so it takes time to identify their specific challenges. As a Charity, the BDA which supplies assessments in the South of England, has routinely been supporting these assessments at a cost to the Charity in order to provide a good experience to the individuals.

7. Many employers are still unaware of the scheme. In 2013, 3200 dyslexic individuals were supported but as 10% of the working population are dyslexic and another 5% have co occurring conditions, the number supported is very low indeed. Ref: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/303353/access-to-work-statistics-april-2014.pdf

8. Employees in receipt of the scheme, that I have worked with closely, have found it very helpful. In general though, these are individuals that have been fully aware of what to ask for and have received support from elsewhere to encourage them to seek support and the range of support. There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that without this support, several of them would not have been able to do their jobs. In addition, some of the senior staff supported have done an outstanding job which means that not only has their employment been secured but so have a lot of other subordinates jobs and new posts have been created.

9. There is a bit of an issue with the repayment timeframes for employers. This has put off some employers I work with from going down the AtW route again.

10. I have routinely come across a perception amongst AtW and JCP staff that the purpose of the workplace needs assessment is clouded by the suggestion that all the recommendations are the same whatever the job. I have checked a number of the reports done by BDA staff and whilst there are similarities, they are not the same recommendations. I think the reason they appear very similar is because we have only a limited range of assistive technology solutions to offer. Where things would look very personalized to the person’s challenges and role, is in the 1:1 coping strategy training. One way forward (which was trialed successfully in Norwich) is to provide 1:1 coping strategy sessions for dyslexic individuals (always necessary) and do the recommendations for assistive technology during these sessions. This would save some costs and mean that
those making the recommendations had time to address the needs with much more evidence.

11. A small number of AtW and JCP staff are well aware of the issues for dyslexic individuals. However, it is a very complex neurological condition and so in general most staff have low levels of awareness and are not equipped to provide support or suggestions to individuals with these conditions.

12. Quite frequently, AtW is only recommended when the individual is in the penultimate stage to losing their job. This is very sad because at this stage often the relationship with the line manager is beyond repair and the individual has lost their self esteem. In these circumstances, individuals rarely keep that specific job long term. However, I have also seen many instances where whilst that job is lost, the individual realizes that there is support for them to take on the next post successfully. Therefore this can also be a positive outcome in employability.

13. I have only experienced one person being passed on for mental health support as a consequence of their workplace needs assessment. I am aware of the scheme and what it offers and it sounds excellent. Many people with dyslexia suffer from stress and depression and it occurs to me that offering both services to them would be a good idea.

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