I have been an ATW client since 2012 and am use the scheme for support in my current and previous roles.

Throughout my time using the scheme I have found it to be confusing and very frustrating to access the service, I believe that ATW is a brilliant scheme and I would not be able to do my current role without the support I receive however I feel that the scheme does need improvements.

After university my first job role was with RNIB. Before taking on the role I was not aware of the ATW scheme and was only informed once I was offered the position by my employer. I was lucky enough to be advised on the support I was eligible for by my new manager. In my current role with a social landlord, my employers were not aware of the scheme and I later found out that they were worried about employing me due to the extra cost I would have as a disabled employee. I have heard many times that ATW is the government’s best kept secret and I have to agree that the awareness of the service is very limited. This impacts on individuals not applying for positions as they are not aware of the support they are entitled to and employers not hiring disabled people as they feel they would cost more than hiring a non-disabled applicant. The ATW scheme needs to be better advertised with employers, employees, educational establishments, employment advisors and other relevant professionals.

My application to the scheme was delayed as I was initially told by ATW that I could not apply for an assessment until at least 6 weeks before I was due to start work, When I rang back closer to my start date I was informed that I was able to apply as soon as I received a job offer, this lead to me experiencing delays in receiving my equipment and being able to conduct my role fully. This could have detrimental effects to an employee starting a new role and not being able to complete all tasks on their job description and could impact on them passing probation and securing their role.

Last year I went through an application review and was extremely frustrated by the questions being asked by the advisor. As I was continuing in the same role, I felt frustrated that I had to reapply for support became anxious and worried that I would not continue to receive the same report, which would have resulted in me losing my employment. When dealing with ATW advisors I feel that they neither do nor understand the various disabilities people face. I have previously been asked why considering that I have some sight I am unable to complete certain tasks. The advisors do not seem to understand the complexities of visual impairments and the effects on the individual.

1. I do not receive any on-going support from my ATW advisor and feel that once support has been agreed the relationship with the advisor ceases. The communication I receive from ATW is very limited; I was not recently informed of a change of address for invoices and was only made aware of this change from a colleague who received a letter from ATW.

I employ a support worker through ATW and was told by ATW that they do not offer support or advice regarding hiring and employment of a support worker. Fortunately I had friends to offer advice regarding employing a support worker and the difficulties
it can bring, however I was not differed this support from ATW, if I had not received support from my peers I would have found managing a support worker very difficult and would not have understood the enormity of becoming an employer myself.

2. I have found that there is very little literature available regarding ATW. I have continuously asked advisors for guidelines on the service and have never been given any information,

3. In my experience and in talking to my peers it seems that the support you are offered by ATW depends on the advisor that you are given, which is not efficient or fair on ATW clients. I have had friends tell me that ATW does not agree to a support worker fee of £15 an hour, which is what I have been receiving for nearly 2 years, there seems to be a lot of conflicting information surrounding the service and support available.

4. The scheme needs to be made more transparent. I understand the support is decided on an individual basis however It would be great if the service users had access to guidelines of the support available to them and information surrounding the scheme was more widely available. In addition the schemes expansion to support young people on work placements, general awareness of this expansion is poor and the DWP needs to allocate more resources into the advertisement of the ATW scheme as a while.

5. When interacting with the advisors I feel that they are not empathetic or understanding of the various disabilities that they may come across. I am registered blind and I have minimal functional vision. In the past I have been asked questions starting with the phrase ‘As you do have some sight,’ I find this phrase extremely insulting and to me it assumes that all people with some sight should be able to complete the same tasks, not taking into consideration the complexities and variations within sight loss.

6. I have been extremely disappointed by the attitude of ATW advisors when dealing with them over the phone, As previously mentioned the lack of empathy and understanding needs to be improved and I would recommend that advisors attend regular specific disability awareness training.

7. In conclusion I think that ATW is a brilliant scheme however it does need to be made more transparent, better communication to; employees, employers and current service users, In addition advisors should receive more frequent disability and customer service training and work from guidelines to ensure all applicants are treated fairly and appropriately.

18 June 2014