1. Introduction

1.1. Remploy is the UK’s leading provider of specialist employment support for people with disabilities, health conditions and complex barriers to work. Our mission is to transform lives through providing sustainable employment opportunities. We operate a national network of more than 64 town and city centre recruitment branches and offices across England, Scotland and Wales, providing specialist recruitment and development services to job seekers.

1.2. We deliver a number of major Government welfare to work programmes. We are the largest provider of the Department of Work and Pensions’ Work Choice programme, and operate as a Work Programme subcontractor in a number of CPAs across the UK. We also deliver a range of contracts for local authorities, devolved administrations, Job Centre Plus, housing associations and private sector organisations.

1.3. In the last five years Remploy have found over 80,000 jobs in mainstream employment for people across the UK with a range of physical, sensory and mental disabilities and other disadvantages. More than one in three of all individuals we support has a mental health condition or learning disability. We partner with more than 2,500 employers each year, including Marks & Spencer, BT, ASDA, Royal Mail, Sainsbury’s and Lloyds Banking Group.

1.4. Remploy has been the sole provider of the Access to Work Workplace Mental Health Support Service (WMHSS) since 2011, having successfully bid to deliver the service in all seven contract package areas (CPAs) across England, Scotland and Wales. The service provides personalised, confidential support to individuals with mental health conditions who are at risk of absenteeism or falling out of work because of their condition, and achieves consistently high sustainment rates.

1.5. In addition, thousands of Remploy’s Work Choice and Work Programme customers utilise all aspects of the Access to Work service each year to obtain vital in-work support and workplace modifications.

2. Executive Summary

2.1. Remploy is a strong supporter of the Access to Work programme, which provides vital in-work support and workplace adjustments for thousands of disabled people every year. The programme should be expanded and reformed in line with the proposals outlined in the 2011 Sayce Review and the Disability and Health Employment Strategy.

2.2. The Workplace Mental Health Support Service, delivered by Remploy, provides successful and cost effective support to individuals who are on sick leave, or who are struggling in work, because of their mental health condition. 90% of service users remain in work after 6 months of support.

2.3. We would encourage greater flexibility in Access to Work, both in the referral process to access the programme, which can be far too rigid, and in how
packages of support are tailored to the individual. Many people with mental health conditions will have a secondary disability or health condition that they may require support with.

2.4. Those with mental health conditions and learning disabilities continue to make up a small proportion of overall Access to Work claimants. Linking Access to Work to innovative provision such as supported internships for young people with learning disabilities, and increasing take-up of mental health support through marketing and cross-Government campaigns, could help to address this.

3. Access to Work Workplace Mental Health Support Service

Background and outline of service

3.1. In December 2011 the Government launched the first Access to Work scheme specifically to support people with mental health conditions to remain in work. Remploy was awarded the contract after an open tender and delivers the service across England, Scotland and Wales. To date more than 2,580 people have been supported, and 90% of the individuals utilising the service have sustained in employment following six months of specialist support. It has met its contractual targets, and provides a substantial return to the taxpayer by reducing the likelihood of unemployment and out-of-work benefit payments. Remploy receives around £900 per individual on the service.

3.2. The service is available to individuals who have a mental health condition and are on sick leave from work because of their condition, or are finding it difficult to maintain their wellbeing and performance in the workplace. Individuals must self-refer by contacting a central Access to Work call centre, and if they are eligible, are referred on to Remploy to begin support.

3.3. The service is delivered by a national network of vocational rehabilitation consultants (VRCs) who are all experienced in supporting individuals with mental health conditions to return to, or retain, employment and are members of the Vocational Rehabilitation Association. Support is provided both through face to face meetings and over the phone.

3.4. Interventions suggested by the VRCs as part of the service are fully tailored to the customer’s individual circumstances and based on their mental health condition and job role, which explains the service’s high success rate. While engagement with the individual’s employer is encouraged, no contact is made without the individual’s consent. Common interventions can include:

- Workplace adjustments, including the potential for flexible hours, home working or a workplace mentor or buddy to provide additional support.
- Coping strategies related to working practices such as time management and planning.
- Condition management, with resources and information to support anxiety, stress or fatigue management, relaxation techniques, and many other conditions. This may also involve signposting to provision available through the NHS or leading mental health organisations.
- Support with disclosure in the workplace, and potential mediation between the employer and individual if their relationship has broken down.
• Employer education and advice on mental health in the workplace, increasing understanding of the impact of mental health conditions and how they can be managed.
• If the individual is already on sick leave, suggestions on a return to work strategy, particularly around timing, nature of tasks upon return, and any adjustments required beforehand.

Application and assessment process

3.5. The application process for the Workplace Mental Health Support Service was overhauled in April 2014 with a number of major changes designed to streamline the process, reduce the delay between initial application and referral to support from Remploy’s VRCs, and a central call centre for all applications. Prior to these changes taking place, some candidates were experiencing waits of several weeks for referral to take place.

3.6. While the streamlining of the application process is to be welcomed, a number of other changes were also introduced, which have been more challenging. For example, accessing the service now requires the individual to make the initial application call to Access to Work, and then wait for a call-back. An employment support provider, advocacy group or employer cannot make the call on the individual's behalf, even if the individual requests this, except in exceptional circumstances. If the individual does not respond to 3 attempted call-backs over a short period of time, their case is closed down.

3.7. We believe this could be made more flexible, especially for people with a fluctuating mental health condition or severe anxiety issues. We understand that this is a self-referral service, and decisions should be in the hands of the individual, but these rigid rules can be unsuitable for people with a MH conditions and/or complex needs for obvious reasons, and we’d suggest a more flexible approach that provides greater accommodation for support from advocacy groups, employers or employment organisations.

3.8. One of the most successful changes to Access to Work, announced by the Department of Work and Pensions (the Department) in December 2010, was the introduction of a standardised eligibility letter that individuals with a disability or health condition could present to an employer at interview that guarantees workplace support upon will be available upon job offer. Remploy strongly supported these changes, and hundreds of our candidates have utilised the letter during their successful move into employment.

3.9. This element of Access to Work is not applicable to the Workplace Mental Health Support Service, as the service is only available to individuals who are already in employment or have a firm job offer in place. Remploy believes it may be worth exploring how an individual with a mental health condition could secure the commitment of workplace mental health support while undertaking their jobsearch, giving them the confidence to apply for roles. Given the fluctuating nature of mental health conditions, and that short periods of support may be required over a long period of time, it would also be worth exploring if a flexible ‘passport’ of workplace mental health support could be offered to an individual for a fixed period of time, for example 18 months, with rapid referral available.
Funding of the service

3.10. The current three year WMHSS contract is worth around £1.6m per annum, less than 2% of the total annual Access to Work budget of around £96m1. Remploy believes that current funding for the service is adequate to cover the number of individuals supported each year. However, we appreciate that with 1 in 6 adults experiencing a mental health condition at any one time, and an estimated 70 million working days lost each year to mental ill health, the WMHSS can only reach a tiny proportion of those requiring workplace mental health support. As outlined in Section 4 of our submission, we do support the expansion of specialist services within Access to Work that support typically under-supported disability groups, including mental health and learning disability. We also support the recommendations in the Sayce Review on expanding Access to Work.

3.11. Remploy would also recommend exploring a simplified extension process for individuals requiring more than the standard six months of support on the WMHSS, acknowledging the varied and often complex nature of mental health conditions. Under the current system, an individual who would benefit from an additional few months on the service can only do this by reapplying to the service for a new six month package of support. Allowing the individual to apply for a short extension of their current support, with additional funding contingent on sustainment at the end of this period, could offer greater value for money for the Department.

Marketing of the service

3.12. Liz Sayce’s 2011 review of disability employment support, ‘Getting in, staying in, and getting on’ described the Access to Work programme as “the best kept secret in Government”, and recommended the initiation of a ‘targeted information sharing campaign about Access to Work’, concentrated on individuals with disabilities that were under-supported by the programme, including mental health conditions and learning disabilities.

3.13. Remploy has made the marketing of the WMHSS a priority since the rollout of the contract in 2011/2, carrying out a number of marketing campaigns targeting the NHS, GPs and mental health professionals, trade unions, business associations and employers to highlight the benefits of this free to use service. All of Remploy’s 60 branches and offices across the UK are encouraged to promote the service to local stakeholders and partner organisations, and we have also engaged MPs on the benefit of them signposting constituents to the service. Through our engagement, Remploy has developed effective partnerships with major employers, including the Highways Agency, Aviva and Bradford Council, and continues to develop relationships in new sectors, such as the emergency services.

3.14. Despite the efforts of Remploy and the Department, Awareness of the WMHSS and Access to Work in general remains fairly low, particularly among employers, with many stakeholders and partners in the disability sector still unaware that a

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1 2012/13 figure from House of Commons Library standard note on Access to Work, April 2014.
mental health services exists on Access to Work. We would encourage the Department to continue to work across Government, in particular with the Department of Business Innovation and Skills and the Department of Health, to launch joint awareness campaigns aimed at increasing applications. Access to Work should also be linked to Government campaigns, such as the ‘Disability Confident’ initiative, whenever possible. We would also encourage the Department to highlight the availability of workplace mental health support as part of the Access to Work programme, in particular on the GOV.UK website where we have been told it can be hard to ascertain additional information.

3.15. In addition, looking at ways to allow greater flexibility for employers to track an individual’s progress and sustainment- with their consent- would highlight the success of the service and the tangible benefits it offers to their employees. This would make it easier to approach employers and build strong engagement around the WMHSS across their business.

4. Access to Work for Work Choice users and disabled jobseekers

Effectiveness of Access to Work and compatibility with Remploy’s service delivery

4.1. Access to Work plays a pivotal role in many of Remploy’s service users’ journeys’ into sustained employment, particularly on the Work Choice programme that we deliver nationally. Thousands of individuals we work with rely on Access to Work for a wide variety of workplace adjustments and ongoing transportation and support provision.

4.2. Many of Remploy’s employer partners, particularly small businesses, tell us that the service has been invaluable in allowing them to take on additional disabled employees without the potential barrier of additional costs for workplace adjustments.

4.3. Feedback from Remploy’s branches and offices suggests that regional differences were common on Access to Work prior to its call centre and administration being centralised in April 2014 (see point 3.5). Some Remploy branches reported high levels of satisfaction with the service, with flexible and accommodating customer service and minimal delays with appointments being offered and support being authorised. Others in different parts of the country reported frustration that employment opportunities were being routinely put at risk by long delays and slow response times. In some cases, Remploy advisors reported covering some initial costs to avoid further delays in an individual starting work.

4.4. Therefore, initial feedback suggests that recent changes that have been made to the overall Access to Work service have made it far more consistent, and this is to be welcomed, provided that staff at the central call centre are fully trained to support people with mental health conditions. We also welcome of the other recent changes, such as providing additional eligibility for sole traders and individuals undertaking internships and work experience placements.
4.5. In addition, 50% of users of the Access to Work Workplace Mental Health Support Service tell us that they have an additional disability or health condition alongside their mental health condition. This highlights the importance of ensuring that the programme is flexible and meets the needs of individuals who may require a range of support and adjustments in the workplace.

Online functionality

4.6. Remploy supports allowing online applications for Access to Work, as part of an online ‘One Stop Shop’ of information and support for employers and individuals, as set out in the Disability and Health Employment Strategy. We believe that increased online functionality would be particularly beneficial for employers who have told us that a paper-based system with inflexible reporting requirements can be burdensome, and this is particularly applicable for small businesses. However, it is important that the application process remains accessible for all, and a telephone-based service should not be removed until this can be guaranteed.

Future of specialist Access to Work services

4.7. The WMHSS is the only specialist service for a specific disability type within Access to Work. Remploy strongly encourages the continuation of this highly successful service, but also encourages the exploration of other specialist services that have typically received little support from Access to Work in recent years.

4.8. Remploy welcomes the extension of Access to Work to cover supported internships for young people, which have proven particularly effective at supporting individuals with learning disabilities into employment. By pooling funding from other sources such as colleges, employment support providers and employers, this has the potential to open up the supported internship model to a much wider group of young disabled people who can undertake work experience and continued education in a workplace environment. Access to Work can pay for a job coach for approximately every 10 students as part of an integrated model of provision.

5. Recommendations

- Flexibility in application: accommodation for advocacy groups, employers or employment organisations to support individuals during the application process, with less rigid deadlines and the possibility of online application also available.

- Flexibility in support: investigating the opportunity of a 'passport' of mental health support on Access to Work, recognising the fluctuating nature of many mental health conditions and the reassurance this could provide to an individual.

- Additional specialist services: the high sustainment rate and low cost of the Access to Work Workplace Mental Health Support Service should be used as a basis to explore how other specialist services could support people with other disabilities, including learning disabilities.
• Supported internships: for colleges taking part in supported internships, a single application for Access to Work per cohort of 10 students would be far less of an admin burden that making multiple applications and piecing together funding. As only one job coach is required for each cohort, ten applications for one job coach seems excessive.

• Consistency in delivery: continue to innovate to ensure that the service is consistent nationally, and the user experience, for both the individual and employer, improves over the coming year.

19 June 2014