Pluss response

1. Pluss believe that if we are to improve the impact of Access to Work, and maximise the value for money it can offer, we need to think about the programme in the wider context of the sector in which it sits.

2. There is currently limited cohesion amongst the various programmes intended to support people with disabilities and health conditions to follow their chosen career path and to sustain paid employment. There is also no apparent evaluation of the total cost attributed to a single customer if interventions are used from more than one programme.

3. For those reasons, we support the aspiration of the Sayce Report in wanting to see an alignment of disability employment support activities, including A2W, into a single specialist programme.

4. We recognise that Access to Work developed historically around the needs of employers. When a specific job is offered, a customer is permitted to engage with the Access to Work service and initiate the process that will go on to identify their support needs in the workplace of that employer.

5. This is both clumsy and inefficient, and means that many people (those for example with learning disabilities and mental health conditions) are least equipped to make effective use of A2W without intensive support.

Pluss case study

I know a number of the team here have had repeated issues when we need to act as advocates for our customers. A2W will often insist they are only able to deal with the individual and not with the provider supporting them, even if the customer’s disability or condition means they are not able to engage with the A2W official themselves or want to choose to nominate their adviser or consultant to speak over the phone A2W on their behalf.

Alistair Hannah-Briggs
Cluster Manager

6. To be most effective, the deal about in-work support needs to be largely struck up front and be used as part of the bargaining with prospective employers. This is especially important with people with LD and MH as these two groups require very specific pathways into employment which don’t align with the current architecture of A2W.
7. At present, people with learning disabilities and mental health conditions are required to win their jobs first and then negotiate support. This is the wrong way round. The framework of a deal for Access to Work support needs to be in place as part of that employer engagement process – a deal which can subsequently be fine-tuned.

Pluss case study

My team member Sara contacted Access to Work two weeks ago for a customer relating to a new claim. The process has now changed in that Access to Work take the information and say that they will be passing the information to an advisor, who, in turn, will contact the customer within 5 days. They could not be specific regarding the date or time that they would be calling back.

This isn’t ideal as (a) the customer is in work and (b) the customer requires support when the call is received. Previously, the claim was processed during the initial phone call and paperwork sent out to confirm everything that was discussed. This approach was much better as it meant that we could be there to support the customer with making the claim. The new approach is less helpful to both the customer and the employer, and puts employment at risk, and the employer on the defensive, at the very start of the job.

Gillian Ireson
Employment Team Manager

8. Disabled jobseekers should be able to approach an employer with their package of support already largely agreed and in place. We believe this would make a significant contribution in the fight to win over the hearts and minds of employers for many of whom employing someone with a disability remains both a step into the unknown and a risk to their business.

9. As part of this process, providers commissioned to deliver the single specialist programme should have some delegated authority to agree straightforward or minor supports within a clear financial framework to remove some of the current delays which put jobs at risk.

10. The principle advantages of this approach are:
   i. Greater efficiencies and outcomes through alignment of programme infrastructure, the reduction of complexity and the removal of duplication;
   
   ii. Access to appropriate, individual interventions rather than a programme of support of which some aspects may be irrelevant;

   iii. Greater control and checks of eligibility to ensure that the programmes is focused on individuals who need support;
iv. A vehicle to fully engage with employers and ensure that they receive a service that fully meets their needs;

v. Improvements in job entry and sustainability rates that results from the development of highly focused and appropriate in-work support packages;

vi. A programme designed to support people in delivering job attainment and job retention to all people with disabilities;

vii. The development of a programme that is designed to meet the needs of disabled people, rather than a programme which is focussed on those closer to the labour market;

viii. The maintenance of the competencies and professionalism that has been developed by specialist disability providers and JCP over many years.

11. A single disability employment programme with A2W capacity and functions at its heart would offer:
   a. A flexible programme gateway that could take referrals from a number of different sources;
   b. Initial diagnostic assessment to determine entry point.
   c. Test centres that enables the customer to explore and trail the range of adaptive equipment and aids that are available as part of a concerted programme to raise aspiration and scope out the potential people have as employees given the right aids, adaptations and support;
   d. A preferred suppliers catalogue featuring a price list for equipment and services;
   e. A single point of contact/support for employers;
   f. Mechanisms to work with special schools and other educational institutions to ensure that there is a smooth transition from education to work;
   g. A specialist supply chain which includes talking therapies provision and which is subject to rigorous quality control which will feature feedback from customers.

12. The process of review needs to be more hands-on and interactive with employers so the support can be adjusted and, where appropriate, reduced efficiently in a way that maximises job retention and security.

**Pluss case study**

LS had an A2W agreement in place for taxi travel to work. His Asperger’s Syndrome means if he takes public transport into the very busy city centre he uses up so much mental and emotional energy he is severely impacted at work. He was a retention referral to us and as he went off sick from work due to the
depression which is a symptom of his Asperger’s.

We requested an in work assessment, which was agreed and paid for by A2W, completed by NAS on 28th April and received by him on 19th May. In this time, the A2W official who was looking after his agreement has left and we have been chasing A2W to ask what they will agree to pay for in response to the report. This has been escalated 4 times now, twice to team leader (which is meant to produce a response that day) and we still have not got an answer.

Due to the delay, the customer has gone from full pay to half pay, we have an HR/dept manager Skype meeting this Friday which is the final deadline for a decision on whether he will accept their proposal to return to work, but this relies on what A2W will fund. The stress of not sticking to the designated timeframes for each escalation is having such a detrimental effect that I am now extremely concerned that even if the support is provided, it is too late to rescue the situation and our client will be forced to leave.

Lucy Norbury
Cluster Manager

13. This approach would allow the Access to Work brand to be rationalised and reinvigorated around long term in-work support aimed at underpinning sustained employment and combatting the revolving door of jobs started and jobs lost.

14. Finally, A2W must be clearly connected to the new Health and Work Service in a way that minimises lost retention opportunities. We have concerns that, in the current proposed format, the Health and Work Service will not achieve the retention impact it is capable of achieving, and we regard this as a potentially lost opportunity for the sector since better alignment with both Access to Work and the Welfare to Work industry would bring benefits to all sides.

19 June 2014