1. We consider that the contract awarded to Remploy in respect to support for people with mental health problems is discriminatory because people with other disabilities are encouraged to choose the supplier of their support.
2. Support provided by Remploy is not sufficient when working with people with severe enduring mental health conditions.
3. Telephone assessments are not suitable for some people with mental health conditions.
4. Delays in processing claims for support have caused distress to people with mental health conditions.
5. We consider it an extremely important principle that people with disabilities be encouraged to remain in work and supported to work in a healthy way. The Access to Work scheme is a vital tool which has helped and supported many people but in order to succeed it must learn from the needs and experiences of the people it exists to support.

6. **Background.**
   I am writing as the General Manager/CEO of Moodswings, a registered charity based in Manchester. Moodswings has successfully supported a significant number of people in the Manchester area with severe mental health conditions and this support was funded by the Access to Work scheme. Access to Work have stated that Moodswings support was successful and that they received excellent feedback. However, our support has now ceased due to the enforcement of a contract with Remploy.

7. **Mental Health support via Access to Work**
   As a specialist mental health organisation we have provided support to staff and employers in the Manchester area to enable them to keep staff in work and healthy despite their mental health difficulties. This ensures that the cost of training these highly skilled individuals is not wasted and they are able to contribute fully to society. Much of our work is done with individuals working at Manchester University in vital roles. Until recently, individuals working and suffering from mental ill health were able to request our support if and when it was appropriate. This arrangement has now ceased and as a result, people with mental health problems no longer have the same rights as those struggling with other disabilities. We are concerned that across the country people with mental health problems do not have the same rights under the Access to Work scheme as those with physical health problems. This situation is unacceptable given that people with severe mental health problems are more likely to feel isolated and find it hard to gain employment than other sections of society.

8. We have the support of the Manchester Disabled Staff Network and Occupational Health at Manchester University. ‘I have always found the support from Mood Swings very valuable in helping university employees
remain in, or return to the workplace. I have received many positive comments about Mood Swings from my patients. I have also been in touch with Dr Robson and she concurs with this. We would both be very sorry, if the facility to have University staff supported by Mood Swings was no longer available in future and doubt if Remploy could provide the same level of expertise.’ – Dr Oliver Occupational Health.

9. People with physical disabilities, visual impairments etc. are able to choose the supplier of their support or even source their own support. To deny this opportunity to people with mental health problems is discriminatory.

10. We are not disputing that valuable support is provided by Remploy to people with mental health conditions, however, we believe that more intense support is required by people with severe enduring mental health conditions and we believe that since Moodswings has an excellent track record of providing this support it would be well placed to continue to provide it. This would be a good business decision and also a fair and compassionate decision based on the needs of the employer and those who need support.

11. Our organisation and our mentors have a close relationship with occupational health at the organisations with whom we work and have had involvement with HR since some of our work is with very complex cases involving complaints, tribunals or bullying. Our intention is to keep people in work and keep them well long term. This helps the individuals but also helps the employer since it is very cost effective in terms of retaining people in their roles, some of whom have huge experience which should not be wasted. Moodswings has a strong track record of understanding the systems of the organisations we work with, particularly Manchester University where we have a full understanding of the academic pressures on staff. We can keep people in work who are of great value to their employer in terms of productivity. This system of working has taken time and effort to develop. It relies on one to one support provision and face to face contact with the employer and involved agencies. It cannot be provided successfully by remote contact.

12. All our work is carried out by specialist mentors, with counselling and psychotherapy training. The mentors do not offer formal counselling, however, they use their counselling skills and coaching skills, along with specialist employment training to support people in making goals and solving the issues facing them so that they can continue to work successfully. We then provide advice on management of symptoms and difficulties to enable people to maintain their wellbeing.

13. The vast majority of people with severe mental health problems are unemployed. It is to the employer’s huge credit that they do employ people with a diagnosis of psychotic illness, however, for this to work well; these people do need intense face to face support.

14. As useful as the support provided by Remploy is, it is time limited and restricted in its scope. Much of the support appears to be at a distance rather
than face to face. While we are certain that this support is successful for some people, it would not be a suitable alternative for the people with severe or complex difficulties who we support.

15. Because the service is overseen by the award winning charity Moodswings, we are able to use the contacts built up by the charity over 15 years in the voluntary and statutory sectors. We have excellent links with the local mental health teams, drug and alcohol services and the Specialist Service for Affective Disorders. Staff, once engaged with a mentor, also have fast track access to the Moodswings self-help workshops on subjects such as sleeping better, anxiety management, anger management, psychosis management, self-esteem and assertiveness. There is a waiting list for these workshops which were developed by leading mental health trainer Tom McAlpine OBE and they have been replicated in other organisations across the country. We also provide support for friends and family of the staff member and we are happy to engage with HR, Occupational health, and line managers where appropriate. We have provided training to managers and staff working alongside people with mental health problems. Beneficiaries are also welcome to call our helpline during office hours and in crisis times have access to an out of hours number. We can provide telephone and Skype support outside of the arranged appointments. Once a member of staff engages with Moodswings all the additional support is provided at no extra cost and will be provided for such time as it is beneficial.

We are aware that the current system of applications has some limitations since the time spent waiting for approval can be extensive. During this period it is possible that people will find their condition worsening to the point at which they need to take time off work. There have been a significant number of changes in personnel working for Access to Work and new staff members are not always aware of the process for making assessments, neither do they have a full understanding of mental health conditions and how they can affect working life. People we work with often report difficulty in being understood by the assessors and a lack of response from Access to Work.

17. The current application system for Access to Work is based on an initial telephone call and a further assessment telephone call. The people we work with have not been made aware of an alternative application option. For some people with mental health problems, the idea of making a telephone call to explain their difficulties is too overwhelming. This means that people with mental health issues are less likely to apply or benefit from Access to Work support which could be vital for their recovery and vital for their employer in terms of maintaining them successfully in their role.
18. We ask the committee to consider the following suggestion.

19. That people with mental health conditions be allowed to choose the supplier of their support in the way that people with other disabilities can. By doing this, the Committee will acknowledge the wealth of experience and knowledge held by individuals with severe mental health conditions and the importance to society of maintaining them in work rather than losing their expertise and wasting the costs of their training. People with severe enduring mental health problems are extremely unlikely to be in paid employment and much more likely to claim long term, expensive benefits. To keep them in work and healthy is useful for society and cost effective but they will inevitably need specialist support.

20. That people are made aware of an option to apply for support online or in writing rather than on the telephone.

21. That Access to Work assessors are given access to full training on the impact of disability, including awareness of mental health conditions, and how they can impact on working life.

22. The following quotes are taken from recommendations of Moodswings support received within the month of June 2014.

23. I was diagnosed with bi-polar disorder in January 2004 when I had my first major episode. In October 2004 I took up a statistics position at the ARC Epidemiology Unit, Manchester University. Unfortunately, I had to retire from my post in October 2005 on health grounds as I had another severe episode and a continuation episode.

24. After periods of unemployment and two 6 month admin contracts I started work as a statistician in the Biostatistics department in December 2010. In February 2011 I started seeing Tom McAlpine from Moodswings. I went through a very difficult period as my supervisor was off on sick leave for an extended period. I benefitted from Tom’s input and guidance on how to cope during this period.

25. At our meetings I value discussing my workload and priorities etc. so as to try and reduce my stress, anxiety and negative thoughts which can be high given I have 5 clinical trials to report.

26. Clearly Moodswings are in a very good position to monitor my mood and make suggestions about my coping strategies. Although my family live close by I don’t want to over burden them with my issues so I do benefit from our face to face contact. As my job is demanding and needs focus, and I have tendencies towards anxiety I would strongly value the opportunity to keep you as my coach and have the opportunity in the future to choose who supplies my support, preferably continuing with you as I am very satisfied with our 1*1 meetings and the opportunity to contact you at other times if needed. Anon
27. As a person who suffered from a mental breakdown over 2 years ago and ended up in hospital, I more than most can say that the works at Moodswings in helping me get back to enjoying life and looking forward cannot be measured. I was passed from pillar to post on the NHS and just given more and more drugs. Since coming in to contact with Tom & his superb support staff I have managed to reduce my tablets to 1 anti-depressant a day. This has been achieved through support and advice given to me by the charity because they had the time to spend one-to-one with me face to face and have kept me seeing the same person. I open up and speak more freely, which I never found under the NHS at hospital or when I had to call over the phone.

28. As this was funded through the government and not my employer I had the right to choose and this was a big factor. I am know back in full time employment and still need help from Moodswings which I still receive. I feel this would be another shame to make such a clinical choice. I know most things sound on paper but don’t work out in practice I can’t stress enough how having the choice when I was as low as I was gave me a glimmer of hope to see that there was help out there which I could choose.

29. I hope this letter helps the powers that be see that not everything is about money and that Human health needs to be considered from all aspects not just financial. When making your decision about this please think that the people running this charity care more about the help they provide than the money. They are not asking just for the money they are asking that they are supported financially so they can offer the likes of me the great support. I will always be indebted to them as the help save my life & I would hate to see such a charity not be able to give the support to more unfortunate people like myself who suffer from mental health issues.

30. I would be more than happy to answer any questions you would like to ask myself. So I will give my email address as a point of contact. Christopher Lyons Email: 75cl@gmx.com

31. I am currently receiving support from Moodswings under the Access to Work scheme. It was very important to me to have the choice to be able to access a provider of such support who have knowledge of my job role. It means I can arrange face to face meetings at a time and place that is most suitable to me and the least intrusive to my day to day work. Face to face support is I believe very important and much more useful and successful than distant support which I do not believe I would find helpful.

32. An additional benefit of Moodswings support, as opposed to receiving distance support from another provider, is their detailed knowledge of my job role and work environment. This makes the understanding of any work related issues much easier and facilitates their provision of specific work related support as required. This in my mind is critical to helping me to gain the most benefit from the support I receive. In short, I value highly the support I receive through Access to Work and strongly believe that the specialist support
Moodswings provides me is much more appropriate than any support I could receive from a distance provider with less specific knowledge of my particular job role and challenges. **Anon 2**

33. I can't recommend Moodswings highly enough! Having the opportunity to access the personalised expert therapy offered by Moodswings has been transforming and has resulted in my being to perform far more effectively at work. The particular "solutions oriented approach" was well suited to my personality and needs.

34. The highly skilled support that I have been receiving is based on trust and shared understanding of an academic context. Having this insight into the context and ways of academia has been crucial and is strength of the fantastic service that Moodswings provides.

35. For me the support has not only allowed me to continue in my job (which given the resources that go into the making of an academic is a worthwhile and cost effective service) but has helped me to develop my professional capabilities, but has opened up new territory to me by equipping me to use my skills better so to be able to work at a whole School level and with success. My career is not only back on track I am now on an upward trajectory as witnessed in my recent annual review.

36. I am convinced I would not be at this place had I not been able to access Moodswings. Indeed I would likely have been lost to academia entirely, as would have been my skills and potential. When I started therapy with Moodswings I was in the aftermath of burnout and I felt violated by an overwhelming sense of loss of my professional identity. I could not imagine how I would ever recover from this very horrible situation, which has started to impact on every aspect of my life and being. This is now behind me and Moodswings have helped me to not only recover but to go forward all the stronger.

37. It is not just a case of being able to access any therapy, but of being able to access the particular expertise and approach that Moodswings provides. This service is exceptional. What is more, it has also been important that my support has been on-going, is personalised and responsive to my changing situation. **Pauline.**

38. The ability to choose appropriate mental health support is vital in ensuring that it is effective- like physical disabilities, mental health problems are wide-ranging and the support given must be relevant and tailored to suit the individual in order for it to be worthwhile. Being able to access regular, relevant, high quality support has allowed me to remain in work and prevented me from needing further support, either for my health or financially. For me, getting support remotely or less frequently would not have been so effective and I don't believe I would be able to contribute to my work or home life so
positively without the service I am currently receiving. Moodswings offers an outstanding service and I will continue to thoroughly recommend its benefits to others. **Naomi.**

39. I have been receiving support from Moodswings via Access to Work for depression and anxiety. I have a severe and enduring condition and have found the specialist intensive sessions extremely helpful. Having suffered this condition for many years, I have experienced different methods of support and have found the help from the highly experienced mental health specialists invaluable. The Moodswings team have accompanied me to see my psychiatrist and provided excellent care, support and advice whenever I have needed it, supporting my attendance at work. This level of support is extremely rare in my experience and I feel it is vital for my continued wellbeing. Distance support would, in no way, be a substitute and I feel the support from Moodswings to be vital in my continued improvement. **Rose S.**

19 June 2014