The Access to Work (AtW) application and assessment processes, from the perspectives of employees and employers;

Employee:

Although the scheme is extremely valuable in supporting you to work equally alongside colleagues, the application process is extremely difficult to get right because:

a) You’re required to apply for your support before you understand what the scope of your job will be. This means that you can find several months into your job that the support is not quite what you need to do the job effectively day to day.

b) You’re required to predict support needs for travel and personal assistant hours despite not knowing how frequently or how far you may be required to travel. This includes average taxi fares that are impossible to predict.

c) The AtW scheme now does not include basic access technology and although this is considered to be the responsibility of the employer, it may still need to be purchased as new equipment and may be a deterrent to an employer taking you on as a disabled member of staff.

d) The scheme does not automatically offer specialised assessors who understand your disability and your needs.

e) It would be of great help to have the option of peer support in this process.

f) The application process is set for an agreed period of time and is very difficult to change and respond to your changing requirements at work.

Employer:

a) The employer is expected to fund all specialist equipment in advance which could be expensive.

b) It may be more appropriate for an employee to receive their equipment as they develop in the role and are able to adapt to it but all claims have to be made at the same time for reimbursement of equipment.

The adequacy of ongoing support, both in terms of the aids, adaptations and support workers provided through AtW, and the help and advice offered by DWP;

- A major shortfall of the program is that it does not cover the travel cost of your support worker even though it may cover your own travel to work/within work costs.

- Basic access technology is no longer covered under the scheme.

The effectiveness of AtW in supporting people with mental health conditions and learning disabilities;
The key problem is that the scheme lacks flexibility and does not recognise that people with mental health problems and learning disabilities needs will vary from month to month.

**AtW's effectiveness in terms of helping disabled people to:**

**Secure a job; Stay in employment; and develop their careers**

- It is clearly an enormous help in securing a job but there is still a lack of awareness in employers.
- It can be complicated to arrange the employment of your support worker as some employers insist that they are also an employee in order to be covered by company insurance etc.
- AtW is important to support people to stay in employment but needs to be flexible as disabilities and health conditions are rarely static.
- From my own experience as a senior member of staff, it has become more difficult to organise my AtW support as my role has become more senior because there is an expectation for you to be more flexible with working hours, availability, attendance at meetings etc, often at short notice.

**The steps taken so far by DWP to extend AtW, including its marketing and funding of the scheme.**

The evidence suggests that this has not been successful and as an employer and user of AtW, I am not aware of their efforts to extend the scheme.

*19 June 2014*