Written evidence submitted by Dyslexia Adult Network (ATW0115)

1. This feedback is provided on behalf of the Dyslexia Adult Network (DAN), a collaboration of the national charities engaged with adults with dyslexia/SpLD and six experts in the field.

2. In summary, AtW is a excellent concept, it is very helpful in enabling disabled people to work, there are some issues over the current scheme in terms of elements of its marketing, design and operation. The contract has some elements which impact negatively on the employer and employee experience in relation to clients with dyslexia/SpLD. DAN has had a meeting with JCP and AtW staff to request a quality audit of the current scheme but this has not occurred thus far.

3. The application process is very simple and well advertised through the website. Recently, there have been delays in its operation, so the provision of support to some dyslexic people, has been delayed.

4. There could be improvements to the marketing of the scheme so that employers hear about it more widely. Working with charities is a way to do this that does not increase the costs of such marketing. DAN wrote to the Sec of State for Employment and the Minister last year and in December had a meeting with their representatives. As a consequence of that, AtW staff provided a summary description of the scheme and contact details for all our charities to display on our websites.

5. Employees must disclose their application to their employer. This represents a barrier for many dyslexic individuals as rates of disclosure are very low in the workplace and the academic research shows that employees are better off not disclosing dyslexia to their employer, ref: McLoughlin and Leather research on disclosure to employers, http://eu.wiley.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-1119973937.html). A recommendation on this would be to have a nominated person in the workplace, such as someone within HR who could be the employer representative. This is done by universities in relation to DSA and does protect confidentiality.

6. The choice to either request adjustments directly or to have a workplace needs assessment which will make recommendations for reasonable adjustments, is good for some people but not all. This depends on whether the disabled individual knows what is available for them. Most dyslexic individuals are not fully aware of the resources available, they are better served by having a workplace needs assessment from an expert in this area.
7. In the current contract, there has been an over emphasis on time frames for delivery rather than the quality of what is being provided. This has placed considerable strain on the providers who want to offer a high quality experience. Additionally, the requirement for assessors to have 2 years existing experience has meant that recruitment is from a very small pool for dyslexia experts and that has led to supply difficulties. There is no acknowledgement within this contract that some conditions are more complex and require more time to do the assessment. All assessments are paid at the same rate. In the case of dyslexia, individuals are all different and so it takes time to identify their specific challenges. In order for costs to be covered, most contractors need to do more than one assessment per day, in some cases up to four assessments are organized. This is simply not possible when dealing with assessments for dyslexia/SpLD. Generally, the client has not had anyone to talk to about their challenges at work previously and so there is a lot of first line help given at the assessment. Additionally, just having someone listen to the problems you are facing as a dyslexic in an environment where managers generally do not understand the condition, is a significant stress reliever and thus keeps people at work. Finally, as the number of assessments requested for dyslexic people is relatively low, it is not feasible to arrange two assessments in a day as they do not occur at this rate. The impact on the employee on this is that their expectation of the assessment is greater than that covered by the contract or the fee received for the work.

8. The assessments have to be delivered holistically, that is all aspects of a person’s disabilities have to be dealt with in a single assessment by a single assessor. Despite considerable cross training (provided by the charities for free), it has not been possible to train all assessors to the same level across all disability areas. Where the individual has dyslexia as their primary disability but also, for example, a bad back and therefore requires an ergonomic assessment as well as a dyslexia needs assessment, then the dyslexia specialist is able to provide an excellent set of recommendations. However, this is not the case where the issues are reversed, ie the person has a bad back and also happens to be dyslexic. It takes 2 years to train as a dyslexia specialist so the ergonomic assessor has only a light touch awareness of dyslexia. At Dan, we have been presented with reports from individuals from Wales, the Midlands and the North of England where there has clearly not been a good knowledge of dyslexia or other SpLD and the reports are extremely generic in their recommendations. As an example, we saw three reports within the same fortnight, one where the person was dyslexic, another from someone with dyscalculia and another where the individual was ADHD/Dyslexic. All the reports had the same conclusions and recommendations. This is not right and those individuals would have less opportunity to perform their jobs with the appropriate reasonable adjustments.

9. Many employers are still unaware of the scheme. In 2013, 3200 dyslexic individuals were supported but as 10% of the working population are dyslexic and another 5% have co occurring conditions, the number supported is very low

10. We, at DAN, have experience of seeing employees in receipt of the scheme and some of our members have themselves benefitted from AtW support. They have found it very helpful. In general though, these are individuals that have been fully aware of what to ask for and have received support from specialists within our field to encourage them to seek support and the range of support. One aspect that sometimes gets overlooked is the role of supporting managers, especially senior managers. When these individuals are supported through reasonable adjustments to perform their jobs well, they are able to ensure that other subordinate staff retain their jobs, and they assist their organizations to thrive, all of which is good for the country’s economy.

11. There is a bit of an issue with the repayment timeframes for employers. This has put off some employers we work with from going down the AtW route again.

12. We have routinely come across a perception amongst AtW and JCP staff that the purpose of the workplace needs assessment is clouded by the suggestion that all the recommendations are the same whatever the job. We have checked a number of the reports done by BDA staff and whilst there are similarities, they are not the same recommendations. I think the reason they appear very similar is because we have only a limited range of assistive technology solutions to offer. Where things would look very personalized to the person’s challenges and role, is in the 1:1 coping strategy training. One way forward (which was trialed successfully in Norwich) is to provide 1:1 coping strategy sessions for dyslexic individuals (always necessary) and do the recommendations for assistive technology during these sessions. This would save some costs and mean that those making the recommendations had time to address the needs with much more evidence.

11. A small number of AtW and JCP staff are well aware of the issues for dyslexic individuals. However, it is a very complex neurological condition and so in general most staff have low levels of awareness and are not equipped to provide support or suggestions to individuals with these conditions.

12. Quite frequently, AtW is only recommended when the individual is in the penultimate stage to losing their job. This is very sad because at this stage often the relationship with the line manager is beyond repair and the individual has lost their self esteem. In these circumstances, individuals rarely keep that specific job long term. However, we have also seen many instances where whilst that job is lost, the individual realizes that there is support for them to take on the next post successfully. Therefore this can also be a positive outcome in employability.
13. We have only experienced one person being passed on for mental health support as a consequence of their workplace needs assessment. We are aware of the scheme and what it offers and it sounds excellent. Many people with dyslexia suffer from stress and depression and it occurs to us that offering both services to them would be a good idea.

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