There is a paucity of outcome research that considers the impact of interventions for adults, especially those who are working rather than studying. The comments outlined below are, therefore, based on our impressions of the experience of individuals with whom we have worked and who have been supported by the Access to Work programme. They should be interpreted in the context of our professional writing, which brings together more than twenty years of experience in assisting individuals who have specific learning difficulties and is published as: McLoughlin & Leather, 2013. The Dyslexic Adult: interventions and outcomes—evidence based practice (Wiley Blackwell).

We would like to make the following observations:

1. Access to work is potentially an excellent scheme, both in terms of its aims and the outcomes for individuals who have specific learning difficulties. We have worked with people for whom it has made a considerable difference in the workplace.

2. In contrast, we have a number of concerns regarding the administration and implementation of the scheme. These include:

   i. Insufficient information for individuals and employers about the scheme and the way it operates.

   ii. Some workplace assessors have insufficient training with regard to understanding individuals who have specific learning difficulties and their needs.

   iii. Possibly as a result of the above too much of the support provided is generic rather than individualised. Insufficient consideration is given to specific needs and a one size fits all approach is adopted, an example being the provision of software and hardware. Often this does not fit with an individual's skills and work setting. In fact, the provision of technology is often seen as a panacea and its availability leaves employers to conclude that an individual's needs are being provided for. It is coaching in the development of skills and strategies, including the ability to self-advocate which is more important.

   iv. Selection of contractors is an issue as some do not seem to engage coaches who have the training and skills required to support people who have specific learning difficulties. Individuals receiving support should have more choice with regard to who provides it and know that they are able to change. The relationship between coach/trainer is fundamental to effectiveness.
v. There needs to be flexibility in the frequency and duration of sessions, as well as the length of the programme. Half day sessions, for example, are onerous for people who have learning difficulties.

vi. There should be more accountability, including evaluation of outcomes. The experience of individuals who have received support must be part of this.

vii. Employers need to be informed that making the resources of Access to Work available is not a complete solution. They will still need to make other adjustments.

19 June 2014