1. I am a Senior Lecturer in the History and Philosophy of Science at Durham University and I currently receive Access to Work (AtW) aid that mitigates my disability. I am making this individual submission because I suspect that much of the written evidence submitted to the Committee will be tabled by employers and not necessarily by disabled employees who receive assistance from AtW. Indeed, my own institution, Durham University, is working with UCL, Oxford and other universities to create a joint submission.

2. While I think that institutional submissions will provide invaluable information to the Committee, I worry that the perspective of individual disabled workers might be lost. In other words, whereas institutional submissions will undoubtedly focus on issues that are currently affecting their ability to manage AtW processes (particularly applications and appeals), I worry that this might draw the Committee’s attention away from the good application and assessment practices that were in place in AtW’s early years.

3. To gain insight into the managerial processes employed today by AtW, I suspect that the Committee will need to speak with longstanding recipients of AtW funding if it is to gain a useful sense of perspective on the effectiveness (or ineffectiveness) of the current forms of assessment and support offered to disabled workers. As a disabled employee of a leading British University who has received AtW aid for a number of years, I would be willing, if the Committee so wished, to act as a witness who could give historical insight into the ways in which AtW currently interacts with disabled employees.

4. My original encounter with the application and assessment process was largely positive and I have received ongoing support. AtW helped me to effectively stay in employment and to significantly develop my career. It provided me with tools that aided in my promotion to the level of Senior Lecturer and allowed me to thrive as an active member of a Russell Group university. Since I have a longstanding relationship with AtW, I have knowledge of a number of good practices that were used in the past (but which are not used now). I feel that a discussion of these practices could yield great insight into how AtW could re-introduce them with a view to improving the application and assessment process and the efficacy of ongoing support.

5. One good practice that originally contributed to my success as an AtW funding recipient was the presence of face-to-face contact with a well-trained, longstanding AtW advisor who met with me when I needed guidance and who acted as a liaison between me and the central administration of my university when paperwork confusions occurred. These kinds of advisors were eliminated a few years ago. If there is one thing that could improve the current application and assessment process, it is the re-introduction of this kind of advisor. Indeed, even though they are not ‘employers’ or ‘employees’ who interact with AtW, I feel that the committee
should seek some of them out with a view to identify evidence of good practice that was in place several years ago.

6. In sum, I would be happy to give oral evidence about my experiences with AtW, or even to provide further written evidence if needed.

20 July 2014