Written evidence submitted by Claro Support (ATW0192)

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1.0 Claro Support

Claro Learning Ltd under the trading name of Claro Support has been supporting individuals with disabilities and learning difficulties in education and workplace since 2005. We are committed to providing tailored one-to-one quality support to the clients who access funding through both Disabled Students’ Allowance (DSAs) and Access to Work (AtW).

2.0 Positive Impacts of Access to Work Funding

Although Claro Support is not a primary AtW contractor we have supported a number of clients via this funding through referrals and direct contact from clients, thus enabling us to gain valuable feedback from both employers and employees on relevant matters. Feedback received both from employees and their employers has been extremely positive and the AtW grant has been a key enabling factor. The impact of support is often felt not only by the individual but also by the rest of their team in the workplace. AtW funding has many recognisable benefits and individuals and employers see value in the support it enables.

3.0 Awareness and Access to Support

3.1 Outside of the immediate workplace very few individuals appear to be aware of the support available to them or of how to go about accessing it. In supporting students in Higher Education we feel an obligation to aid their transition into employment on completion of studies. We advise them to contact AtW at the number provided on the gov.uk website. Other than this our ability to provide further information is limited, especially with regards to what applicants may expect and the processes involved. Advice via the AtW Advice Line and Job Centre Plus (JCP) can be contradictory and guidance on how to choose a support provider seems to be unavailable. Some clarity for all parties on the process of gaining AtW funding would perhaps make the transition from job seeker to employee easier especially in the context of implementing workplace support.

3.2 Claro Support actively works with educational institutions and training providers, including Further Education Colleges and Universities. Neither teaching staff nor careers guidance professionals appear to have an awareness of the availability of support in the workplace. Therefore advice and guidance to individuals making vital career decisions is somewhat lacking, especially for those with disabilities. This is particularly important in relation to the government extending the AtW funding to cover a broader range of work experience, traineeships and apprenticeship placements. If staff in educational organisations are not aware then how is this message reaching
those who need it? We suggest that consideration be given to marketing the scheme to this particular audience. Over the last couple of years there has been a significant push to increase the awareness of Apprenticeships. This is being achieved by incentivising relevant organisations, who are experts in the field, to attend schools and business networking events to promote Apprenticeships. A similar campaign could be beneficial for the AtW grant opportunities.

3.3 In Devon and Cornwall the business environment consists mainly of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) with very few large organisations. Large organisations tend to opt into private health care and support packages (e.g. AXA Assistance) for their employees and therefore not require the support of AtW funding. Owing to their limited human resources, however, SMEs are often poorly informed on key initiatives that may aid their business and employees. This may inhibit them from investing in specially-challenged individuals’ future for fear of being unable to support them.

4.0 Availability of Information

With regards to availability of information for employers, there has been recent and considerable improvement of the gov.uk website which now has much of the information that prior to June this year was not easily accessible. However, an area that is still not clear is how the payments are processed once an employee is approved for AtW funding. Again the employer is also likely to want to understand the processes that an individual has to go though in order to access a grant. This is particularly true for an employee who has been working with an organisation for a period longer than six weeks as there is a lack of clear information on assessments, processes and costs to the employer.

5.0 Transparency of Information

To date there appears to be no readily accessible information on how AtW funding is being spent, the types of services that are being delivered, support methods being used and which kinds of support work well. Some individuals receive telephone support on a bi-weekly basis, and others will receive one-to-one support directly in the workplace. It is understood that individuals receive support tailored to their needs. However the lack of comparative data does not allow for employers and their employees to make an informed decision on who provides the support and at what level.

6.0 Conclusion

We consider AtW funding as vital provision for people with disabilities in enabling them to secure and maintain employment opportunities. However, in order to promote the availability of support and access to it, there are some key areas we feel need to be addressed:

- **Raising awareness of support to all relevant parties.** This includes schools, colleges, universities, their staff, students and parents, and employers, particularly SMEs and their employees. In addition, it is essential that all organisations contracted to the Work Programme are fully aware of AtW and how to access grant funding.

- **Increased availability and clarity of information on how to access support.** This should be available to schools, colleges, universities, their staff, students and parents; employers, employees and also to organisations that work to support individuals with disabilities.
• **Availability of information with reference to cost of support.** This is vitally important for employers and those organisations guiding employers on support options.

• **Support-provider choice.** There should be better access to information to enable individuals to select who delivers their support.

20 June 2014