Royal British Legion Industries (RBLI) has been delivering specialist employment related support to individuals with disabilities and health conditions for almost a hundred years. It currently operates as one of five prime providers of Access to Work contracts. RBLI believes that Access to Work is a key contributor to reducing inequalities in the workplace and undoubtedly has a greater part to play in improving employment opportunities and choices for disabled people. It has the capacity to remove barriers to work through the provision of personalised and practical interventions which should not only enable more disabled people to take up employment but also to progress in the workplace based on their skills and abilities. In compiling its response to the Select Committee Inquiry, RBLI has involved Access to Work Assessors, sub-contractors, customers and employers in consultations.

As a result of our consultations, we believe that a number of the recommendations made by Liz Sayce in her review of specialist employment services, have been positively considered and, to some extent, adopted to improve the effectiveness of Access to Work in supporting individuals to find and sustain work. Of particular note were initiatives to support young people and ease the transition from education to employment. However, the focus on retention of employment rather than moving into work or progressing through a career remains and a number of key recommendations from earlier studies have not been translated into significant improvements of the provision, the ultimate success of which is still impacted by:

- Speed at which support is approved and/or implemented;
- Consistency of decision making across the country;
- Skills and abilities of decision makers in making appropriate judgements;
- Accessibility for customers with mental health conditions and learning disabilities;
- Effective and appropriate use of internet based technology;
- Lack of integration with other support programmes.

Furthermore, the real impact of any initiatives to improve provision continues to be limited by the lack of awareness amongst employers regarding the availability of Access to Work support and the application process. Indeed, on one occasion an RBLI Assessor was refused access to premises because the employer was not aware of Access to Work or that their employee had made an application. Despite this, there appears to have been limited resources from DWP to either market the programme more widely or support provider initiatives to do so (for example Access Ability, a provider initiative to fund the set up of a web based directory for employers).

From its research, RBLI has also identified that customer outcomes and experience would be improved if the assessing organisation were able to undertake post assessment follow up in order to obtain feedback to inform continuous improvement and link customers to further support if required. Current contracts do not allow for this; data must be destroyed once the Access to Work report has been produced and approved. As such providers are not able to have further contact either with the employee or the employer. This inability for follow up is

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1 Getting in, staying in and getting on, published on 9 June 2011
not only counter to the *modus operandi* of many providers but can impact on the achievement of a sustainable outcome for the customer. Further there is limited evidence of appropriate levels of ongoing support being provided by any organisation engaged in supporting beneficiaries of Access to Work provision.

20 June 2014