Written evidence submitted by the Association of National Specialist Colleges (ATW0239)

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<th>Information about Natspec: The Association of National Specialist Colleges</th>
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<td><strong>Natspec</strong> is the membership association for over 70 specialist colleges in England.</td>
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<td><strong>Natspec colleges</strong> provide high quality, tailored education and skills development courses for up to 3,500 students with complex learning difficulties or disabilities.</td>
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<td>Students follow personalised study programmes that help them to achieve their goals and aspirations, for example to start work or to live more independently</td>
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<td><strong>Natspec colleges</strong> employ skilled staff teams, whose expertise and knowledge enable them to provide individualised learning and support.</td>
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<td><strong>Colleges</strong> use assistive and cutting edge technologies to promote independence and autonomy.</td>
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<td><strong>Natspec colleges</strong> offer a well-rounded education and encourage students to become involved in additional activities like sport, drama, arts and crafts and volunteering opportunities.</td>
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<td><strong>Natspec supports</strong> the range of initiatives that are intended to improve employment opportunities for young people with learning difficulties or disabilities</td>
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Our response is solely in respect of the extension of Access to Work to Supported Internships

**Supported internships**

1. Natspec welcomes the extension of Access to Work support to Supported Internships (SIs), which are available as part of a Study programme for young people with a Learning Difficulty Assessment (LDA), or in the future an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP). Supported internships are college managed programmes based primarily at an employer and are intended to enable young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to achieve sustainable, paid employment. Internships normally last for a year and include unpaid work placements of at least six months. Natspec hopes that they will significantly increase the chances of young people securing and retaining employment

2. One member college participated in the national pilot of Supported Internships and continues to offer them, while another college has since established a number of internships. Other colleges are exploring the options, to find a model that works best for them and their students. Colleges already offer a
wide range of work experience placements and have good relationships with many employers. Supported Internships can be an extension of these relationships

3. It is likely that many young people pursuing SIs in specialist colleges will have support needs that can be funded through Access to Work. These would include travel, on the job support through job coaching and assistive technology to support them in the workplace. Job coaches are trained staff responsible for supporting disabled young people and their employers to create successful paid jobs and careers. They can support in a number of ways, including through induction, teaching specific tasks, and ensuring understanding of the workplace.

Access to Work Funding

4. We have some concerns about the potential bureaucracy involved in securing AtW funding for Supported Internships and other provider managed programmes such as traineeships. Providers will have a number of interns and trainees whose support requirements they need to meet. They will also want to employ their own job coaches so that they can plan staffing, oversee their training and activity, and ensure the overall quality of the provision, as these programmes will be subject to Ofsted inspection and audit.

5. We appreciate that AtW is currently used predominantly by adults in work. Their needs are not the same as those of interns and trainees on provider managed programmes, so it would seem necessary for AtW to change aspects of its service to meet a new and different set of needs.

6. To address this, Natspec is working closely with the DfE and the Preparing for Adulthood team to ensure that the Supported Internship guidance and AtW forms are fit for purpose to make the process as smooth as possible. In particular, it is important to ensure that funding can go direct to the provider to offset the costs of the job coach they have employed and to ensure there is no double funding of the support. This needs to be made clear from the outset, so that interns/trainees and providers are clear from the start about the application to AtW. They also need certainty of funding in good time, so that the funding secured via LAs for high needs students is used to cover college based elements of the programme and the AtW is used for on-the-job elements of support.

7. In particular, it would be useful for providers to have a named link with AtW so that they can discuss likely eligible interns in good time, bearing in mind that planning for those with LDAs/EHCPs takes place months in advance of the programme start date. Equally, interns need to see this work-place support as an integral part of their programme, and understand that the job coach is a member of the college staff team.
8. Young people who are eligible for supported internships must have a LDA or EHCP. This means that they have undergone comprehensive assessment of their learning and support needs, and that the decision to undertake a SI will be part of this assessment. It would therefore make sense, and be in keeping with the expectation of reduced numbers of repeat assessments for individuals, if this assessment information was taken into account by AtW assessors.

9. We would hope that the take up of AtW support for those on SIs will be monitored against overall numbers, and that steps will be taken to improve promotion of the scheme if the data suggests it is underused. At present figures for supported internships are not collected separately from those for traineeships, which do not enable us to understand the level of take up. They include the number of applications, how many were successful, plus an overall spend, but do not include any information about the type of support that is being funded.

10. The figures we have been given (SIs and traineeships) indicate an average spend per applicant of £1579.00. Based on AtW costings of c. £18 an hour for job coaches, this work out at no more than 3 hours a week for the minimum six month on the job period. This seems very little for those who are already identified as having high needs.

11. It has been encouraging to see collaboration between the DfE and the DWP on this issue, and a quick response to queries. We hope that this will enable good promotion of the scheme and the opportunities it offers. However, there is still some way to go in ensuring that providers are aware of it and feel it is worthwhile using.

**Conclusion**

12. The extension of AtW funding to Supported Internships is a welcome move. However, the nature of the college managed programme is significantly different from an adult in employment, and the system needs to reflect that. This could include:

   a) Assessment undertaken as part of LDAs or EHCPs should be taken into account by AtW assessors to avoid duplication

   b) Providers should have named AtW contacts so that they can plan well in advance for new interns

   c) Information about AtW in this context should make it clear that funding can go directly to providers, so that providers can maintain responsibility for the total management and quality assurance of the programme
d) Data should be collected separately for Supported Internship and traineeships, and the type of support that is funded should be logged

20 June 2014