Written evidence submitted by Carolyn Hunt (ATW006)

1. Context
I am the Disability & Wellbeing Adviser at the Institute of Education, University of London. I work with disabled students and a number of these students are on work-based programmes which mean that they claim Access to Work funding for disability support rather than Disabled Students’ Allowance. The two programmes which qualify for this funding are Teach First and School Direct (salaried route). These are intense courses where trainee teachers are working and studying at the same time.

2. AtW Application
As a university we have found that employers (schools) are not aware of AtW and do not know of their role in supporting staff to apply for AtW. We have also experienced difficulties in persuading students to apply for AtW and they report that their reasons are connected with their concerns about discrimination in the workplace. I attended three presentations about AtW in 2013 and been definitively informed of two separate positions: one AtW presenter informed the audience that people applying for funding always have to disclose to their employer; another informed the audience that people only have to disclose if the employer is required to fund any services or confirm taxi journeys have taken place. Having clarified the position with John Beasley, I have informed students that they do not need to disclose to their employer for certain forms of assistance; only to have the students return to me stating that they have decided not to apply as the person on the telephone told them that it is compulsory to inform their employer.

3. Assessment process
For the 2012-13 academic year I supported three students applying for AtW funding. Although all had a diagnosis of dyslexia and were based in London, they were assigned to three different AtW assessors: one in the Highlands of Scotland, one in Cardiff and one in Havant. All three assessors contacted me for advice and I ended up writing a recommendation for support needs for all three students. This was time consuming and not part of my role as the school should be supporting their employee but they have limited disability experience. The assessors had no idea of local equipment companies or support services. One was happy to recommend specialist tuition the other two said that AtW did not fund this support.

Assessment for trainee teachers is a difficult process. The teaching role changes throughout the year of the course. It starts with
observation and gradually builds up to a full teaching role. This makes it difficult to assess the needs of the employee. The Teach First course starts in June but they do not start at school until September; schools are very busy in September and many do not welcome an assessor visiting at this time. The trainee teacher is also concerned about annoying other school staff during their first weeks in employment. This results in delays with assessment, supplying equipment and services and thus trainees struggle with the first weeks of their course which increases risk of failure.

AtW assessors can now base their report on the Study Needs Assessment written for Disabled Students’ Allowance. This has been a good step forward but the document will generally be at least three years old. It considers the needs of a student studying at a university; not a trainee teacher trying to study and work at the same time. The employee often has little idea of what support they need in the new role and the employers (the school) tend to have little experience with disabilities so they cannot offer advice. Many employers also do not understand the extra difficulties raised by working full time and studying an intense course as a disabled student.

4. Adequacy of Ongoing Support
A high percentage of students discussing support requirements with us, have specific learning differences such as dyslexia. At this point in their studies, they have learnt many strategies which are transferable to their role in employment. Their main concern is that they will need specialist tuition in order to learn new strategies to cope with the school procedures and paperwork required; and also to cope with the high demands of studying and working full time. As one trainee teacher described: ‘at university I just used to work harder and longer than anyone else and there are not enough hours in the day to do that anymore’. Supplying this support during the first year of employment would appear to be a short term but cost-effective way of supporting a teacher but, in my experience, assessors have not wanted to recommend this support.

5. Marketing of AtW
At the start of every new intake of trainee teachers I present information about AtW as part of our commitment to supporting the diversity of our students. The only students who knew about the scheme before my presentation were those with severe hearing impairments and those who were blind.

I would recommend that AtW made contact with the Disabled Students’ Allowance team so that information about AtW could be
disseminated to all DSA claimants when they complete their courses.

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