

Written evidence submitted by Scope (ATW0247)

1. About Scope

- 1.1. Scope exists to make this country a place where disabled people have the same support as everyone else. Until then, we'll be there. We provide support, information and advice to more than a quarter of a million disabled people and their families every year. We raise awareness of the issues that matter. And with your support, we'll keep driving change across society until this country is great for everyone.

2. Executive Summary- Expanding, Improving and speeding up Access to Work

- 2.1. This submission is based on the experiences of disabled people who have spoken to us about Access to Work, and the day to day stories that have come out through the employment services Scope provides.
- 2.2. We are worried that despite the proven cost-effectiveness of the service, providing a saving of £1.88 to the Treasury for every £1 spent¹, the number of people using Access to Work has fallen over the last three years. Given the long term individual and societal benefits of supporting people to stay in work this should be of concern.
- 2.3. Disabled people Scope works with tell us that Access to Work is an important aspect of supporting them to enter and sustain work, providing the tools, services and expertise they need. However, this vital programme is not being used to its full potential, with delays in the assessment and delivery process, slowness in implementing support, and inflexibilities when circumstances change.
- 2.4. In the long run we believe that only fundamental reform of the way in which employment support for disabled people is provided will enable disabled people to be able to take control of their own careers, and to work in inclusive workplaces. This should be based on the following 'principles of reform' :
 - 2.4.1. Introduce personal budgets for employment support for disabled people, available both before and during employment. We recommend the Government carry out a large scale pilot.
 - 2.4.2. Allow disabled people to access employment support quickly and easily at any point in their careers, helping to prevent people falling out of the labour market unnecessarily.

3. It is of concern that the number of people using the service has decreased

- 3.1. Increasing the number of disabled people in employment is a clear government priority. This is matched by disabled people's own aspirations: 91% of disabled people are in work or have been in work in past and more than one third of disabled

¹ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmworpen/158/15807.htm>

people who are not in work would like to work². Despite this, the gap between disabled people's employment rate and the rest of the population remains relatively static at 30%³. Access to Work is an essential route of support in employment for many disabled people. However, problems and delays within the processing of applications and putting support in place, which we outline below, means that in some cases, navigating Access to Work becomes a barrier to moving into work in itself – the complete opposite of what it is set up to do.

- 3.2. From a peak of 37,280 in 2009-10, the numbers of disabled people supported through Access to Work fell to 31,500 by 2012-13, an overall decrease of 16%. New starts have also fallen. From a peak of 16,230 in 2009-10, new starts fell to 10,470 by 2012-13, an overall decrease of 36%⁴.
- 3.3. Awareness of Access to Work is still low, despite efforts by the Department of Work and Pensions to promote the service. Scope's 2013 Living Standards Survey found that whilst 98 respondents (13%) were using Access to Work, out of a total 738 disabled adults just under half (49%) either had not heard of the scheme or were unsure whether or not they had heard of it⁵.
- 3.4. Lack of awareness of Access to Work is also common amongst employers, placing responsibility to educate and inform the employer with the disabled person. This can be a daunting prospect when you're still at the interview stage.: "Employers possibly don't even know Access to Work exists, so you've got to – in your own job interview, you've almost got to educate them about that. And then you can't approach Access to Work until the job's got." (Gavin, who uses Access to Work)⁶
- 3.5. We are concerned that, despite statements from the Government that they plan to expand the service, the numbers of people using the service has decreased over the last three years and awareness remains low. Given the cost-effectiveness of the service and its importance in create inclusive workplaces, enabling disabled people take control of their careers.

3.5.1. *Recommendation:* The Government should investigate the potential to expand Access to Work and increase awareness amongst employers in its current review of Access to Work led by Mike Penning MP.

4. Delays in implementing Access to Work adaptations are preventing people from moving in to work and discouraging employers from hiring disabled people.

² Office for Disability Issues disability equality indicator B9; Labour Force Survey:

<http://odi.dwp.gov.uk/disability-statistics-and-research/disability-equality-indicators.php>

³ Berthoud, R. (2011), Trends in the employment of disabled people in Britain: Institute of Social and Economic Research

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/access-to-work-official-statistics-april-2014>

⁵ Scope Living Standards Survey of 738 disabled adults, run between 28 August and 16 September 2013

⁶ Scope Living Standards interview, 2013

- 4.1. Delays between applying to Access to Work, receiving an assessment and hearing the outcome, and implementing these recommendations are often too long. In some cases this has led to jobs falling through, as people are unable to start roles due to a lack of support and employers won't or can't wait. It also prevents people from taking on short term or temporary jobs, as Access to Work is unable to respond in time. Even in the best cases applying takes time- responses to phone calls can take 24-28 hours to be processed, and it takes seven days for any paperwork being posted to go into their systems. Our employment services noted a number of examples of this happening, and we have heard the same story repeated in our Living Standards research: "Two months ago, I was out of work about six weeks. I had a company ring me up because of the admin work I did, and they said 'Oh, we've got a job for you. Da da da da. We need you to start on Monday.' And I had said 'Well I'd love to but I probably can't because of this, this and this.' Therefore I lost the opportunity of a job." (Gavin, Living Standards interview)⁷
- 4.2. Not only do these delays and difficulties in implementation affect the person starting their job, but have the potential to discourage employers from hiring disabled people in the future. Anecdotal evidence indicates this has already occurred in several cases. A member of staff who works for our Employment Services told us about one case in which one of their customers had had such difficulty contacting Access to Work regarding IT equipment he needed to do his job (over ten calls and voice mail messages, and no response), his employer has now said that they would not hire a disabled person in the future. This sense of having to fight to be heard and to get the support you need was echoed by a number of disabled people and employment support services we spoke too.
- 4.3. We are also concerned that cases are not being properly managed when case managers are not available. We are aware of instances where cases seem to be put on hold when the assessors are on annual leave, are ill or away from the office, with work only resuming when they return. This potentially adds a number of weeks to a person's claim. Whilst we appreciate the importance of a single point of contact when possible, greater flexibility is needed to ensure timely delivery. Cases need to progress even when their case manager is not available. The onus should be on the case manager to ensure that this happens.
- 4.4. Employees and employers need clear timescales to predict the assessment and implementation process, enabling a swift and smooth transition into a new job. As far as we are aware there are currently no publicly available timescales for the Access to Work process, making it harder for disabled people to predict when they will be able to begin work.
- 4.4.1. *Recommendation:* The Government should put in place clear timescales for assessment and implementation, giving employers and employees clear guidance to plan appropriately for support to be in place.
- 4.5. A further concern is that the Access to Work programme can assume employers have funds readily available to pay for equipment upfront prior to reclaim and this

⁷ Scope Living Standards interview, 2013

can in itself lead to lengthy delays. In one example we are aware of, the cost of a required chair (£6,000) caused a delay of several months.

- 4.6. In other cases people have been expected to fund support, transport or technologies themselves and claim the money back at a later date due to delays. We are aware of a number of examples where people have been forced to turn down a job as they are unable to fund their own transport whilst waiting for Access to Work to cover the cost.
- 4.7. Disabled people already face a financial penalty⁸. Our research has shown that disabled people have on average £108,000 fewer savings and assets than non-disabled people⁹ and are twice as likely to have unsecured debt totalling more than half of their household income¹⁰. Disabled people are already three times more likely to use door step loans than non-disabled people. Excessive upfront costs in Access to Work are not only a potential barrier to work but place an additional financial burden on a group already at a higher risk of being in poverty and/or debt.
- 4.8. As Gavin, who uses Access to Work, puts it: "If you were relying just on Access to Work and you were starting with a company say next Monday, it's highly, highly likely that there wouldn't be any equipment in place for you to start with Access to Work, because they take four to six months to put that claim through and stuff. I'm sure they work hard not to do that but... some companies may not be willing to stump up that money for you to start the job straight away."¹¹
- 4.9. Access to Work, at its best, enable workplaces to be flexible and inclusive. This allows disabled people to take control of their own careers and fulfil their goals. Delays in implementing Access to Work adaptations prevents this, hurting both the individual and the employer, but also hurting wider society as the skills, experience and unique perspectives of disabled people are wasted. Scope urges the government to take a serious look at the administration and structure of Access to Work, focusing on how the service can be sped up and how barriers to implementing adaptations can be removed.
- 4.10. There is a need for a greater focus on linking up and smoothing transitions between out of work support and employment. As described in our recent report 'A million futures: halving the disability employment gap' applying for support at each separate stage of unemployment is burdensome and unhelpful. Support should feel seamless.
- 4.11. Therefore Scope suggests that Access to Work should provide greater flexibility and reassurance to employers by having a single personal budget for employment support. This should be available both before and during employment. This could help disabled people guarantee to employers that the adjustments they require (or be perceived to require) are covered by the financial support that they already have

⁸ Brawn E. (2014) Priced Out: Ending the financial penalty of disability by 2020, Scope, <http://www.scope.org.uk/Scope/media/Documents/Publication%20Directory/Extra-Costs-Report.pdf?ext=.pdf>

⁹ McKnight A. (2014) Disabled people's financial histories: uncovering the disability wealth penalty, CASEpaper 181, <http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/dps/case/cp/casepaper181.pdf>

¹⁰ Scope (2013) Disabled People and financial well-being- credit and debt, <http://scopesblog.files.wordpress.com/2013/07/credit-and-debt1.pdf>

¹¹ Scope Living Standards interview, 2013

in place. Support should feel seamless, enabling effective and sustained support throughout the changes in an individual's life. This would provide disabled people with choice and control to decide what support they need to meet their own career goals.

4.11.1. *Recommendation:* The next Government should introduce large-scale pilots of the use of personal budgets in employment support, ideally applying Randomised Control Trial (RCT) methodologies to the evaluation.

5. Access to Work needs to be better at responding to changes in a person's circumstances, whether this is a change in their condition , or a promotion or a job change

- 5.1. People's lives change. This can be as a result of a change in the impact of their condition, as a fluctuation in their condition, or the development of new condition or co-morbidity. Change that effects work can also come from other areas of a person's life- from having a child to moving house. Change is also an important part of taking control of your career and your future- having more responsibilities in your current role, earning a promotion, or a finding a new job.
- 5.2. However, whilst Access to Work has the potential to help support these changes, too often the system is too inflexible to do so effectively. Issues in contacting Access to Work advisors and the length of time having a reassessment can take are all barriers to managing change in people's lives.
- 5.3. Moreover, fear of inflexibility within Access to Work can also be a barrier- taking on a new job or considering a career change is a much more difficult if you are unsure you will have the tools and support you need to carry out your job in a new environment.
- 5.4. The impact of Access to Work being slow to adapt to changes will not only effect an individual's ability to work, but will impact on the rest of their lives as well. As John, interviewed by Scope as part of our work in to living standards puts it- "I recently needed to move house. Because of a change in my impairment I required a house with a downstairs toilet. I informed Access to Work about my change of address and this led to a complete review of my support. Only when I went through the reconsideration process was my support reinstated after just over a year's time. Through the process again you can imagine my anxiety. It almost destroyed my family and put us under a lot of pressure not long after the death of my eighteen month old daughter who had cerebral palsy."¹²
- 5.5. Disabled people should be able to access employment support at any point in their career. Increasing flexibility within employment support would allow it to effectively respond to changes, and enable disabled people to take control of their careers. Support as and when it is needed enables inclusive and flexible workplaces.

¹² ¹² Scope Living Standards interview, 2013

Importantly, this would help prevent people dropping out of the labour market unnecessarily. 80% of disabled people are in work when they acquire a condition or impairment¹³. Part of this increased flexibility should include linking up support services, such as health, education and social care, with employment service, creating a more person centred system.

5.5.1.*Recommendation:* The next Government should set up a national board to drive forward the personalisation agenda in unemployment and in work support, modelled on the Think Local, Act Personal partnership.

20 June 2014

¹³ DWP In-house report 109