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for Work &
Pensions

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Rt Hon Frank Field MP
Work and Pensions Select Committee Chair

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20 February 2018

Dear Frank,

Response to Work and Pensions Select Committee (WPSC) assistive technology inquiry letter

Thank you for your recent enquiry in relation to the Work and Pensions Select Committee Assistive Technology Inquiry.

Please find attached the following information in relation to your questions as requested:

Annex A: Response to WPSC assistive technology Inquiry letter from Frank Field

Annex B: Prescribed supply chain list used by Access to Work assessors.

*Yours sincerely,
Sarah Newton*

Sarah Newton MP
Minister for Disabled People, Health & Work

Annex A

Response to WPSC assistive technology Inquiry letter from Frank Field

1. How much has been spent on assistive technology via Access to Work since 2015
 - a) Please provide, if possible, a breakdown of spending by type of technology that Access to Work has funded.

Access to work grant expenditure is not broken down into spend that could be considered “technology” for example to distinguish between an iPad and an ergonomic chair. Both would be categorised as “Special Aides and Equipment” (SAE).

Similarly Video Relay Service (VRS) support (remote British Sign Language interpreting) which could be considered a technological solution is categorised under the “Support Worker” (SW) element of provision that will also include traditional face to face interpreting.

The level of expenditure on both SAE & SW categories is listed in the table below.

AtW DEL (Programme) spend			
Element	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
SAE	£5.6m	£5.2m	£5.2m
Support Workers	£55.7m	£56.9m	£62.3m
Total AtW DEL P	£97m	£96.5m	£103.9m

The advent of a new internal computer system from April 2018 – AtWIS (Access to Work Integrated System) which is replacing the current DiSC (Disability Service Client) database which is over a decade old, may offer opportunities to better dis-aggregate support and provide greater granularity of reporting in future.

2. An outline of the training process for Access to Work assessors
 - a) How often is this training updated and who is it provided by – the Department or contractors?
 - b) If contractors, what input does the Department have on the content of training?

Outline of the Training Process for AtW Assessors

Contracted AtW providers are responsible for the training and on-going professional development of their AtW Assessors. The training and on-going development is delivered via the following methods.

Induction/Initial Training

All new employees undertake a full induction. Inductions address all aspects of the role, including the knowledge required to become an effective Access to Work Assessor. A blended learning approach is adopted, including specific training courses, shadowing and on the job-coaching, e.g., with lead Assessors (who have extensive AtW assessment experience).

Training includes (please note list is not exhaustive):

- Provider Guidance training
- Systems and processes training
- KPI training and performance management processes
- On-the-job observation and feedback
- Probationary/other reviews
- Buddy system/mentoring in addition to line manager support

Continued Professional Development

To ensure continued professional development, as well as to update knowledge of new products, internal training will include explanations of changes to practices and requirements of the contract, and changes to prices or product availability.

This is delivered via a number of steps, including:

- Team Meetings - includes best practice sharing, peer-led training (refresher sessions/updates).
- Internal training may be identified through appraisal process and/or on-going monitoring – tailored to individual assessors in order to up-skill and or develop knowledge. For example, RBLI provide access to Momentum, their online learning platform
- External Training – delivered to a group of assessors to broaden technical knowledge and awareness or indeed increase product knowledge

How often is training updated?

- Team meetings – approximately every 8 weeks
- CPD Sessions – approximately every 8 weeks
- RBLI offer internal training – delivered in blocks of 4 x 1.5hr seminars/webinars over a four week period. The recurrence may be applied every 3-6 months depending on identified needs
- External Training – as required, when a clear need is identified

DWP Support and Training for AtW Providers

DWP also provides ad-hoc support, including:

- AtW Provider Forums
- AtW Provider Workshops, e.g., PRaP input processes, guidance overviews, etc.

3. A copy of the prescribed supply chain list used by Access to Work assessors.
 - a) Are assessors allowed to recommend technologies that are not supplied by these providers?

The supplier lists for PPG and RBLI are both non-exhaustive and holistic assessors are free to make recommendations beyond the lists of prescribed suppliers provided by their respective organisations below in **Annex B**.

4. Are Access to Work assessors actively encouraged to recommend pre-existing built-in technologies (for example a built in screen reader or an app)?
 - a) Will Access to Work fund mainstream technologies (for example an iPad)

- b) Can assessors recommend training for users to use built-in assistive technologies. If so, who provides this?

Assessors should raise awareness of built in functionality in mainstream products. Lists of Assistive technology trainers are provided for both contracted assessment providers in Annex A.

AtW will fund items such a tablets provided the need is related to disability rather than a normal business need. Such expenditure is not recorded separately but will come under “Special Aides and Equipment (SAE). “Mandatory Cost-share” may be required as a contribution from medium and large employers towards any SAE, however from April 2018, the “Tech Fund” rule will apply where should the purchase of a technological item lead to a longer term reduction in costs to AtW by reducing support worker expenditure (where no such mandatory cost share exists) the mandatory cost share requirements will be waived to avoid dis-incentivising an SAE technology solution for employers.

Jobcentre Plus

5. A list of assistive technology services Work Coaches can refer claimants to through the Flexible Support Fund/Dynamic Purchasing System.
- a) Do the services on offer differ from JCP to JCP?
 - b) Data on the number of referrals to those services since 2015

Flexible Support Fund is delegated to Jobcentre Plus (JCP) District Managers. Each District Manager is allocated their proportion of the national budget and, other than a few national guidelines; they have the freedom to decide how they deploy this locally. FSF will support a wide range of people who engage with DWP programmes and services providing they meet the eligibility criteria.

A key element of Flexible Support Fund is giving JCP Advisory Teams a means by which they can remove barriers that are:

- preventing claimants from moving closer to the job market;
- hindering a claimant’s search for work; and
- preventing a claimant from accepting a firm job offer or moving into self-employment.

Barrier awards are made for a variety of reasons. The more common awards are for clothing, tools and travel costs but Work Coaches generally have flexibility and discretion to make awards that will enhance the employment prospects of claimants. This could include awards for the purchase of specialist equipment, such as assistive digital packages where appropriate. Each award must be considered on its individual merits and in exercising their discretion, Work Coaches must take into account national and local guidelines and ensure all awards are reasonable and represent good value for money in terms of enhancing employment prospects.

National barrier award spend is known. Details of individual awards and the description of items purchased is not tracked.

The Dynamic Purchasing System is used to purchase FSF provision to help claimants move into or closer to work. It is not used to buy equipment.

Work coaches are supported by specialist Disability Employment Advisors (DEAs). We have recruited up to 300 more Disability Employment Advisors, taking the total to over 500, to work alongside the work coaches to provide additional professional expertise and local knowledge on health and disability issues. The role now has a much stronger focus on coaching to build the confidence and expertise of work coaches to support claimants with complex employment needs resulting from health conditions or disability to prepare for or move into work.

The new Community Partner role provides insight into the issues disabled people face, bringing in external people who have a lived experience or expert knowledge of disability provides a new perspective on disability. The Community Partners bring a network of local support that is helping to shape the services we provide and meet the needs and aspirations of disabled people and those with health conditions.

Jobcentre Plus has a critical role in supporting people with a disability or health condition on their journey into employment. The Community Partner role builds on expertise within jobcentre plus and strengthens disability understanding within the Jobcentre to ensure support is tailored to meet the needs to disabled people customer.

6. Does disability employment support training in Jobcentre Plus contain any specific training on assistive technology?

The Department's established learning offering for work coaches includes a range of learning about how to identify and support customers with a disability. Staff in Jobcentres also have access to the services of Disability Employment Advisors (DEAs). DEAs are given the relevant learning to be able to assess the needs and identify equipment and other possible adjustments that can assist in the employment or retention of disabled people. They can also offer advice on Access to Work issues.

Prescribed supply chain list used by Access to Work assessors

RBLI Suppliers Used – Not Exhaustive

Ergonomics

Back Care Solutions
Healthy Workstations
Shape Posture Seating
Posturite
Posture People
Ergo Monkey
Sit Ability
Back2
Barry Bennett

Assistive Technology & Training

E-Voice
Hands Free Computing
Iansyst
Enabling Technology
Freedom of Speech
Genius Within
Voice Active
Speak It/The Speech Centre
Blazie
AME Teamworks
Keytools
Wyvern

Disability Awareness Training

YMS Training
Right 2 Write
ASC Cymru (Autism only)

Visual

Sight & Sound
Enhanced Vision
Professional Vision Services

Hearing

Connevans
Gordon Morris
FM Hearing Systems
iHear
Action on Hearing Loss

It should be noted that RBLI does not maintain a 'prescribed' supplier list. This is so that RBLI can provide customisation, objectivity and impartiality in their

recommendations. As such RBLI has listed some of the organisations that recur frequently but this list is not exhaustive. RBLI has stated that the organisation continues to load these suppliers into their new on-line assessor portal to aid productivity.

PPG Supply Chain Options v6 Feb 18

Staff are to be aware that there is no set advisement on which company you make use of, instead you are advised to recommend the product based on the clients' needs. Options are not limited to, but can include:

Ergonomic Chairs

Online Ergonomics
Shape Seating
Posturite
Osmund Ergonomics
Back Care Solutions
Barry Bennett
OrangeBox
ErgoChair
office furniture online
Viking Direct
Furniture work
Ergocube
Ergo Expert
Back App UK Ltd

Ergonomic Equipment

Online Ergonomics
Shape Seating
Posturite
Osmund Ergonomics
Back Care Solutions
Barry Bennett
VariDesk
YoYo
StandingDesks4u
Ikea
Height Adjustable Desks
Desk Centre
Lumie
Viking Direct

Hearing Equipment

FM Hearing
Connevans
iHear
Gordon Morris
Hearing Direct

Digital Hearing Care
Action on Hearing Loss
Roger System (HI)
FM Hearing
Connevans
iHear
Gordon Morris

Vision Equipment

RNIB
Vision Aid
Sight and Sound
Opletec
Freedom Scientific
Humanware
Enhanced Vision
Vision Engineering
Optima
Professional Vision Services

Vision Software

RNIB
Vision Aid
Sight and Sound
Opletec
Freedom Scientific
Dolphin
Magic
Inclusive
Humanware

Technical Training

Right2Write
Ability Smart
Iansyst
Barry Bennett
Online Ergonomics
Concept Northern
E-Voice
Enabling Technology
Hands Free Computing
Freedom of Speech
dyslexic.com
Posturite
Wyvern Business Systems
MicroLink
RNIB
Sight and Sound
Connevans
FM Hearing

Specialist Learning Disability Software

Right2Write
Ability Smart
Iansyst
Barry Bennett
Online Ergonomics
Concept Northern
E-Voice
Enabling Technology
Hands Free Computing
Freedom of Speech
dyslexic.com
Posturite
Genius Within
MicroLink
Nuance
TextHelp
Matchware
Inspiration
IRIS
The Dyslexia Shop
Assistive IT
The Speech Centre

Mental Health Coping Strategies

Right2Write
Ability Smart
Iansyst
Barry Bennett
Online Ergonomics
Concept Northern
E-Voice
Enabling Technology
Hands Free Computing
Freedom of Speech
Mind
Genius Within
MicroLink

Specialist Learning Disability Coping Strategies

Right2Write
Ability Smart
Iansyst
Barry Bennett
Online Ergonomics
Concept Northern
E-Voice
Enabling Technology
Hands Free Computing
Freedom of Speech

Wyvern Business Systems
British Dyslexia Association
Genius Within
MicroLink
National Autistic Society

Equipment ie. Tablets/laptops

Viking Direct
eBuyer
Argos
John Lewis
PC World
Currys
Dictaphones: IT Solutions
Apple
Dell
HP
Microsoft
Crossbow Education
Remtek
scanning pens
Printerland
One Direct
Hands Free Computing
Online Ergonomics
Bose
Plantronics
The Dyslexia Shop
Keytools - Hypertec Ltd

Disability Awareness Training

Right 2 Write
Ability Smart
RNIB
MIND
Genius Within
Hands Free Computing
CB Consultancy
Colourfield training