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**Monograph:**

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three quotations can be difficult and contribute towards delays. People with sensory impairments in particular call for alternative media, such as Braille and e-mail, to make information accessible and form filling easier.

### **Variations in opinions of Access to Work**

Travel to Work users are most likely to report that the support they receive 'completely' meets their needs, to rate the usefulness of Access to Work in enabling them to work most highly, and to have the highest overall opinion of Access to Work.

Only one in three users of human support, compared with half of users of environmental adaptations, say that Access to Work meets their needs 'completely'. Users of human support rate Access to Work overall less highly than users of environmental adaptations. One in five users of Communicator Support at Interview feel that Access to Work meets their needs only 'a little' or 'not at all', and one in four feel the support helped 'not much' or 'not at all' in enabling them to work. Over half of those who have ever received Communicator Support at Interview consider it 'very good' or 'excellent', while one in six find it no better than 'fair'. While three out of four Support Worker users say their support worker hours are about right, those with a communicator or sign language interpreter at work are least satisfied with the amount of time allocated.

Employees in the private and independent sectors are more likely than those in the public sector to say that Access to Work 'completely' meets their needs and that they cannot work without it. They are more likely than those in the public sector to rate their experience of Access to Work as better than 'fair'.

Opinions also vary according to disabling complaint reported. Users with a hearing impairment are most likely to say that Access to Work meets their needs 'a little' or 'not at all' and most likely to question the usefulness of Access to Work; and one in three rate Access to Work overall as no better than 'fair'.

Half of the users reporting musculo-skeletal complaints say that their needs are met 'completely' while most users reporting visual impairments and mental health problems say that Access to Work meets their needs 'mostly'. Users with mental health problems and visually impaired users are more likely to say that they 'could not work without it' while those with musculo-skeletal complaints are more likely to say that Access to Work helps 'a great deal'.

Respondents with musculo-skeletal complaints and mental health problems rate Access to Work overall most highly, while almost one in four visually impaired users rate it as no better than 'fair'.

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Summary

Report Ref: ESR72, March 2001

Patricia Thornton, Michael Hirst and Hilary Arksey of the Social Policy Research Unit, University of York. Heslington and Nigel Tremlett of Ipsos-RSL

Access to Work is a programme for people with long-term health conditions or impairments who need extra practical support to do their job or to take up work. Disability Service Team (DST) staff assess what is required to meet applicants' needs, sometimes drawing on specialist advice. Employers, or users in some cases, obtain and pay for provision approved by the DST, and most costs are reimbursed in full or in part.

There are three broad types of provision:

- 1 environmental aids and adaptations - such as ergonomic furniture, accessible computer equipment and software, and alterations to the workplace
- 1 human support - for assistance on the job or in getting to work, and for communication at a job interview
- 1 fares for travel to work

A national survey comprised face-to-face interviews with 628 Access to Work users, 20 of whom took part in follow-up qualitative interviews. The main aim was to learn from users what works well and what might be improved.

The key findings are that:

- 1 Users rate the appropriateness of Access to Work very highly: more than nine out of ten say that Access to Work support meets their needs 'completely' or 'mostly'.
- 1 Its usefulness in enabling them to work is also highly rated: almost half say they 'could not work without it' and a further one in three feel that the support helps 'a great deal'.
- 1 Over half of users rate Access to Work overall as 'very good' or 'excellent' and a further one in four describe their experience as good.
- 1 Over half describe the ways DST staff handled their last application as 'excellent' or 'very good' overall, while 12 per cent thought them 'poor' or 'very poor' overall. Users are least satisfied with their adviser's readiness to keep them informed of

decisions and what happens next. Only one in three recalled being told how long it would take for support to be in place.

- 1 Almost one in three respondents described the time taken for support to be provided as 'poor' or 'very poor', Users attribute delay primarily to red-tape and poor liaison between employers, users, specialist advisors, suppliers and Access to Work staff in what they perceive as an overly complex administrative process. Many users see delay as cumulative, rather than attributable to a single factor.
- 1 There were striking differences in opinions of public and private/independent sector users, with the former more likely to rate Access to Work less highly on most dimensions, and twice as likely to rate their employer's involvement as no better than 'fair'.
- 1 Use of the different Access to Work support elements varies markedly according to sector, occupational status and reported impairment; for example, of support worker users one third are in professional jobs, half have a visual impairment and a further quarter a hearing impairment.
- 1 On many dimensions users of human support tend to be less satisfied than users of environmental adaptations.

- 1 Better publicity for the programme was a top suggestion for improvement. Users are mostly unaware of the range of support available through Access to Work, and are least satisfied with DST advisers' explanations of options to meet their needs. Access to full information is important for choice and self-determination, as well as to ensure the most appropriate package of solutions.

As part of a review of Access to Work, the ES commissioned the Disability Services Research Partnership to carry out a study of users' views and experiences of Access to Work. A national survey was carried out in summer 2000 with a representative sample of new users and people already using the service. Follow-up qualitative interviews with 20 survey respondents explored their opinions in depth, and assisted with the development of nationally consistent approaches to routine monitoring of user satisfaction with Access to Work.



# Executive Summary

## Users of Access to Work

Over nine out of ten users were in paid work when they last applied to Access to Work. At interview, nine out of ten users were working as employees with one in eight of those in supported employment. More employees work in the public sector than in the private and independent sectors combined.

Users work predominantly in non-manual, white collar and professional jobs: four in ten in professional jobs and a further one in three in administrative, secretarial and related occupations.

Over four in ten users had a musculo-skeletal impairment when they last applied for Access to Work support, three in ten had a visual impairment and 15 per cent a hearing impairment. Few users reported mental health problems, severe learning difficulties, dyslexia or specific learning difficulties.

## Access to Work support

The most common forms of support are:

- 1 new furniture or equipment (in two thirds of Access to Work supported jobs)
- 1 help with fares for travel to work (in over four out of ten such jobs)
- 1 human support on the job (in one in four jobs), comprising support workers (16%), personal readers for visually impaired people (11%) and communicators at work (7%).

The ES classifies support into five elements. Of those, Special Aids and Equipment, Adaptations to Premises and Equipment and Support Workers are more likely to support public sector users, while Travel to Work and Communicator Support at Interview are more likely to support users in the private sector.

Over half of users receive more than one element of support; and 17 per cent three or more. Private and independent sector employees are somewhat more likely than those in the public sector to receive several elements. Users with sensory impairments are more likely than those with other conditions or impairments to receive more than one support element.

There are striking differences in support according to

occupational status. One third of users of human support (Support Workers and Communicator Support at Interview) work in professional jobs compared with one fifth of users of environmental adaptations (Adaptations to Premises and Equipment and Special Aids and Equipment). One third of users of the latter work in administrative or secretarial occupations compared with one in seven of those receiving human support. Travel to Work users are least likely to work in professional and senior managerial jobs.

Types of support differ according to impairment. Half of Support Worker users have a visual impairment and a further quarter have a hearing impairment. Around one half of users of environmental adaptations and around four in ten users of Travel to Work have a musculo-skeletal impairment. Over one third of Travel to Work users have a visual impairment.

## Awareness of Access to Work

The great majority of users first heard about Access to Work through employers and people at work or through the ES and other public agencies. Promotional material was mentioned by only three per cent, and disabled people's organisations by six per cent. One in three feel they missed out by not using Access to Work earlier. Users called for the existence of the programme to be more widely known among the general public and not just among those who advise potential users.

Users are mostly unaware of what else Access to Work can offer. They advocate fuller information about the range of options being made available to potential users and employers before an application is made and support agreed.

## Service provided by DST staff

Users value advisers who listen to users, understand their needs, explain options available, put effort into getting what is needed and keep them informed of progress. Nine out of ten users are satisfied with the privacy of their discussions with their adviser, and users praise advisers who are discreet about their impairment and its effects. Some feel DST staff could be more sensitive to, and understanding of, the needs of disabled people. Users are least satisfied with advisers' explanation of options to meet users' needs and their readiness to keep users informed of decisions and what happens next. Opinions of DST staff vary according to element of support, with users of human support rating their adviser's handling of their application less highly.

Only one in four survey respondents were followed up within one month of getting their support. Over half of those not contacted would have liked someone to get in touch. Follow-up is seen as important to ensure that the support agreed is in place. Recipients of Adaptations to Premises and Equipment and Support Worker support are more likely to want follow-up contact, and Special Aids and Equipment recipients also report high levels of unmet need for follow-up. Users want contact to check that they are using equipment to best advantage or to find new solutions.

For a minority of users for whom adaptations had been made to premises or equipment, Access to Work provision had not kept step with changing needs and circumstances. Follow-up also might help clarify responsibility for repairs, servicing or replacement of Special Aids or Equipment; one in three such users do not know who is responsible. When such a need had occurred, reported by one in four of these users, three quarters reported adverse effects.

There are no significant differences in users' views of dedicated DST advisers and Disability Employment Advisers who handled their application.

### Specialist advice

Four out of ten users of environmental support had specialist advice arranged through their DST adviser. Those who required alterations to premises are least likely to have seen a specialist. Ratings of advice on technological or computer-based equipment are consistently lower than advice on furniture or equipment. Users in the qualitative study valued visits by specialists to the workplace, especially when privacy was protected. There is some criticism of misleading or over-prescriptive advice. Specialist advice at assessment centres receives mixed reports.

### Employers' involvement

Three out of four employees reported that their employer was actively involved in facilitating their last Access to Work application; over half rate their involvement as 'very good' or 'excellent' and a further one in five describe it as 'good'. Over half of users of Travel to Work, Special Aids and Equipment and Support Worker provision rate their employer's involvement as 'very good' or 'excellent'. However, one in eight users of Adaptations to Premises and Equipment or Support Worker provision rate their employers' involvement as 'very poor' (compared with one in twenty overall).

Users in the public sector are twice as likely as those in the private/independent sector to rate their employer's involvement as no better than 'fair'. One in seven employees say that their employers' involvement (or non-involvement) caused them problems, mainly delay in getting the support required. Users recommend better communication between the employer, Access to Work and users themselves.

### Administration of Access to Work

Opinions of the speed of provision range widely. Overall, almost half indicate that the time taken to provide what was requested was better than 'fair' but almost one in three as 'poor' or 'very poor'. Four in ten applicants for alterations to buildings, training to use new equipment, special equipment or furniture, and alterations to existing equipment feel that the time taken was 'poor' or 'very poor'.

Only one in three respondents recalled being told how long to expect support to be in place, and a further one in five could not remember if they had been told. One in three respondents said they felt 'completely' informed about progress but one in five said they felt 'not at all' informed. Being told how long it might take for support to be provided and being informed about progress help to shape users' appreciation of the time taken for that support to be provided. Users' opinions of the speed of provision reflect their views about DST staff. Being informed about progress also has a positive influence on views of DST staff.

Three months waiting for support to be provided seems to be a critical threshold for users. Within this timescale most users are satisfied with the time taken; beyond it users become increasingly dissatisfied. More than four out of five of respondents who rate as no better than 'fair' the time taken to provide fares to work, a support worker, reader or communicator/sign language interpreter at work reported delay having an adverse effect on their work.

Users offered many explanations for delays but attribute them primarily to 'red-tape' and poor liaison between employers, users, specialist advisors, suppliers and Access to Work staff in an overly complex administrative process. Many users see delay as cumulative, not attributable to a single factor.

Users comment on overly bureaucratic procedures and unnecessary paperwork and form filling. Regular, repetitive form completion to claim reimbursement of Travel to Work fares is a particular concern. Obtaining