

Department for Work and Pensions

Research Report No 621

Evaluation of Access to Work: Ministerial Government Departments

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A report of research carried out by the Institute for Employment Studies on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions

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First Published 2009.

ISBN 978 1 84712 673 3

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Acknowledgements

The project team would like to thank all the people in Ministerial Government Departments who took part in this research and particularly, past and present employees and their line managers, and staff working in human resources, occupational health and diversity teams. We greatly appreciate your time and all your inputs. Equally, we would like to thank trades union officials and branch representatives for their contributions.

The authors would like to thank Tim Conway, Maria Strudwick and Jo Whateley at the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) for their guidance and support. Our thanks also go to everyone on the steering group who provided invaluable inputs along the way.

At the Institute for Employment Studies (IES), we would like to thank Karen Patient, who provided unfailing support in arranging fieldwork and getting the report ready for publication. We would also like to thank research colleagues Darcy Hill and Matt Williams for their help throughout the project.

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Summary

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) commissioned the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) to undertake a qualitative evaluation of Access to Work (AtW) provision. This report, which is one of three strands of the evaluation, looks at the effects of the decision that Ministerial Government Departments (MGDs) should directly fund workplace support for their own disabled staff, instead of using AtW. When the decision was announced in 2006 to change the funding arrangements, DWP made the commitment that all MGDs would provide the same level of support that was previously available under AtW and that MGDs would still be able to use AtW personnel for advice and assessments.

The research was designed to explore employees' experiences of accessing support through MGDs and to ascertain the level of support provided. The research also aimed to examine how MGDs had chosen to provide support to their employees and identify areas for improvement. The research used a qualitative approach; depth interviews were conducted with four groups of key stakeholders between February and July 2008. These were:

- human resources (HR) managers responsible for the employment of disabled people in 17 MGDs (these individuals, and some associated staff, are referred to throughout the report as 'HR leads');
- 71 disabled employees, most of whom had been in receipt of AtW before the transfer and continued to work in the MGD;
- eight line managers of disabled employees;
- eight trades union representatives.

The research was limited in a number of ways: it was impossible to undertake a full quantitative impact study of the effects of transferring responsibility for funding in-work support from AtW to MGDs, nor to assess the effect the changes had on the recruitment of disabled people into MGDs. The research has, instead, necessarily focused on those people who were involved at the time the funding arrangements changed.

The key findings from this research are:

Most disabled employees, and particularly those who received regular ongoing support, knew that the funding arrangements for in-work support were going to change and reported finding out about the transfer from AtW to MGDs a couple of months before it occurred. Importantly, all disabled staff who were receiving AtW at the time of the transfer continued to receive the same amount of in-work support once their MGD assumed responsibility for funding.

Most MGDs found out about the change in funding arrangements about two months beforehand, although some reported that they had not received any official notification of the changes. Many HR leads in MGDs felt that they had little time to design and implement systems to manage the change in funding arrangements. This was compounded by data protection constraints, which meant that DWP was unable to pass the personal details of AtW recipients directly to MGDs: HR leads did not know who was affected by the funding change and internal information from MGDs about the funding change was slow to reach disabled employees.

The type of in-work support available in MGDs is the same as under AtW:

- **Special Aids and Equipment (SAE);**
- **Adaptations to Premises and Equipment (APE);**
- **Travel-to-Work (TtW) grants;**
- **Support Worker (SW);**
- **Communicator Support at Interview (CSI);**
- **Miscellaneous Expenditure.**

Since the transfer, MGDs had mostly provided one-off support in the first two categories (SAE and APE), for example, ergonomic chairs and desks, and specialist disability software. Ongoing support claims for TtW costs and SWs were also fairly common. All HR leads stated that they aimed to provide whatever was needed to support disabled staff and several gave examples where they had gone beyond the remit of AtW. Many MGDs offered additional support to disabled employees including the Civil Service Disability Network, a forum set up by a group of disabled employees to act as a link between senior managers and disabled people.

Information for employees on how to access support was usually disseminated through internal intranet systems, and disabled employees noted that the information on in-work support had improved within MGDs since the transfer was first introduced. Some disabled employees questioned the accessibility of this information, particularly employees who were visually impaired, and some were worried about using the intranet in open plan offices for such a sensitive and confidential purpose. The research also found that there was a lack of detailed information on the various types of ongoing support that were available.

Workplace support could be accessed via a number of channels within most MGDs including via line managers, the HR department, and occupational health (OH) services. In a few MGDs, employees could only access support via their line manager. HR leads in most MGDs implemented flexible application systems to make it easier for disabled employees to apply for in-work support, although some disabled employees said they preferred AtW's standard application procedures as there was less onus on them to negotiate their own support.

Assessments, triggered by an application for support, were organised in three ways:

- contracts with external OH providers only;
- OH contracts supplemented with specialist disability assessors on an ad hoc basis;
- specialist disability assessors only.

Managers and HR leads were particularly satisfied with the quality of the specialist assessments and, through experience, were starting to develop lists of preferred providers. MGDs that used more general OH assessors were concerned that they were less able than their specialist counterparts to recommend appropriate support for complex disabilities. There was little evidence that MGDs had used AtW to obtain assessments after the funding change, some not being aware that they were still able to do so. Those who had accessed assessments through AtW found that there were long delays and it was often quicker to organise the assessments themselves.

There were no clearly defined processes or guidelines for making decisions on what support to provide for disabled employees and MGDs reported that each decision was made on a case-by-case basis. Some MGDs operated a centralised funding model where in-work support was provided from a central budget held by HR (although other resources were also used for certain types of support, e.g. estates budgets for adaptations to premises or IT budgets for specialist software). In MGDs with centralised funding models, decisions on support were normally made by a key member of HR (or central) staff, which allowed experience and expertise to be acquired. Other MGDs operated a decentralised funding model, whereby equipment and support was mainly procured through the disabled employee's business unit budget. In this model, decisions on support were generally taken by line managers.

Some questions were raised about the consistency of decisions as there was evidence that in-work support provided in one MGD was refused in another despite it being for needs of a similar nature. The problem of inconsistent decision-making was also pertinent to MGDs with a decentralised funding model where decisions on support were made by individual line managers. There was evidence in some MGDs that line managers, who may never have been involved in the provision of in-work support before the transfer, were reluctant to purchase equipment or put support in place for disabled employees: because they were struggling to make

a decision on whether to provide the support or not; and/or because they were concerned about budgets. More generally, staff in MGDs reported that decisions about ongoing support needs were the most difficult to make as they had very little experience of, or involvement in, providing this type of support in the past. As the provision of in-work support in MGDs becomes more commonplace, we might expect confidence and expertise to improve.

There was little evidence that value for money was a specific consideration for MGDs when making support decisions. HR leads in the MGDs stated that they did not have enough expertise or knowledge to challenge recommendations from assessors and identify suitable cost saving alternatives, if appropriate. The approach that most MGDs took was to 'do the right thing' and this often translated to providing the support that was recommended in the assessment without question.

Many MGDs had plans to improve their systems for providing in-work support in the long term, and intended to focus primarily on monitoring the cost of providing equipment and developing comprehensive follow-up and review procedures, particularly for staff with ongoing support needs. There was little evidence that MGDs were tracking their spend on in-work support and most had not introduced any formal review procedures, so far, to reassess disabled employees' support needs. MGDs had focused their early efforts on ensuring that all disabled staff continued to receive support during and after the transfer and almost all MGDs felt the systems they had implemented were 'works in progress'. Many MGDs also planned to improve the flow of information about the Department's provision of support to disabled employees.

Although there is no evidence that budgetary cuts have impacted on in-work support to date, HR leads and line managers responsible for making decisions about support have questioned how sustainable the existing level of expenditure is in the current operating climate. MGDs have made a particular effort to maintain in-work provision following the transfer of funding responsibility, as they were committed to do so, however, budgets continue to be reduced and concerns were voiced about maintaining existing support for disabled employees if these reductions intensified. Some disability awareness training and other types of support had already been curtailed because of budgetary constraints. Whilst this was beyond the scope of this research, HR leads and line managers were also concerned that the future recruitment of disabled people in MGDs might be negatively affected due to the extra support costs associated with employing them.

Disabled employees also raised concerns about the future of their in-work support, and particularly employees who were receiving ongoing support for TtW or SW. Some employees feared that MGDs would start to question the reasonableness of funding these support needs over the long term. Several employees were unsure how long their support would last in the absence of formal review periods. The research also uncovered a handful of examples of disabled employees who had (re)applied for their ongoing support since the changes were made and had been turned down, had their support reduced or were still awaiting decisions although their support needs had not changed.

Many of the concerns raised by interviewees in the research remain just that: concerns, and they have yet to be tested. Generally speaking, most people who have been affected by the changes reported fairly positively on the transfer of responsibilities to date. However, a few disabled employees have also reported quite significant changes in their support in recent times. The research findings point to a number of areas where improvements to in-work support within MGDs are required. The main recommendations arising from this study relate to:

- issuing comprehensive advice and guidance to MGDs on how and when to support disabled employees in the workplace;
- drawing on the expertise of Jobcentre Plus, and AtW Business Centres to inform MGD operating procedures;
- improving the consistency of decision-making within and between Departments;
- giving greater consideration to value for money;
- using specialist assessors where appropriate;
- improving awareness of in-work support for disabled staff;
- improving review procedures for in-work support for disabled staff;
- improving monitoring information.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) commissioned the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) to undertake a qualitative evaluation of Access to Work (AtW) provision, and in particular, to explore the effects of the decision that Ministerial Government Departments (MGDs) should directly fund workplace support for their own disabled staff, instead of using AtW. The decision followed recommendations made in the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit report *Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People*, published in January 2005.

The AtW programme has been operating in Great Britain since 1994, (although some of its elements have existed for much longer) and is designed for disabled people who need extra practical support to take up work or to do their job and overcome barriers to work. It aims to reduce inequalities between disabled people and non-disabled people in the workplace by removing practical barriers to work. To this end, the AtW programme can pay towards the following types of provision:

- **Special Aids and Equipment (SAE)**, which helps pay for equipment to help a disabled person overcome disability-related barriers in the workplace.
- **Adaptations to Premises and Equipment (APE)**, which helps to pay for the cost of making premises and equipment accessible.
- **Travel-to-Work (TtW)** grants, which are available to meet the additional costs of Travel-to-Work or within work for people who are unable to use public transport.
- **Support Worker (SW)**, which allows the applicant to use the services of a helper. Types of support at work might include reading to a visually-impaired person, communicating for a hearing-impaired person via sign language (other than at interview which is covered by Communicator Support at Interview (CSI)), providing specialist coaching for a person with a learning difficulty or helping with personal care needs.

- **CSI**, which meets the full cost of hiring an interpreter to remove barriers to communication at a job interview.
- **Miscellaneous Expenditure**, to remove disability-related barriers not covered elsewhere – e.g. car park charges incurred because disability requires the individual to use a convenient but chargeable car park.

Combinations of support are permitted, and are quite common. AtW is available to people who are disabled as defined by the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995, and also to those not covered by the Act because their disability affects them only at work. They must be in need of support to take up, or remain in, work on an equal basis with non-disabled colleagues. AtW is intended to supplement 'reasonable adjustments' made by employers as they are required to do under the DDA, rather than substitute for them.¹

Since October 2006, MGDs have been required to fund AtW provision in cases where their staff are civil servants and are employed in the 'centre' rather than in agencies. This report examines these changes as they affect the 17 MGDs involved, including the DWP which has been funding its own in-work or workplace support since 2003, and the Department for Constitutional Affairs to which the new arrangements applied from April 2007. The MGDs included in this research are:

- Cabinet Office;
- Department for Communities and Local Government;
- Department for Constitutional Affairs;
- Department for Culture, Media and Sport;
- Department for Education and Skills (now Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills and Department of Children, Schools and Families);
- Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs;
- Department for International Development;
- Department for Transport;
- Department for Work and Pensions;
- Department of Health;

¹ At the time the research was commissioned and undertaken, AtW was delivered by Jobcentre Plus through a network of 11 Business Centres, operating within each region in England, and in Scotland and Wales. Since this time, the delivery model for AtW has changed: Business Centres no longer exist and have been replaced by three Operational Support Units that deliver the AtW administrative function. The vast majority of AtW advisers are now based in Jobcentre Plus offices.

- Department of Trade and Industry;
- Foreign and Commonwealth Office;
- HM Treasury;
- Home Office;
- Ministry of Defence;
- Scottish Government;
- Welsh Assembly.

A number of provisions were made at the time of the funding change including the option of delaying the transfer until April 2007, the exceptional circumstances rule where in certain, exceptional cases, AtW would still be available for funding support although not beyond April 2007 and the arrangement that, after the transfer, MGDs could still access AtW Business Centres for advice, guidance and/or assessments for in-work support.

1.2 Research aims

The main aims of this research have been to:

- examine disabled employees' experience of workplace support funded by MGDs;
- examine the level of service disabled employees are receiving, or have received, including new recipients and those needing ongoing support;
- examine how MGDs are delivering support to their disabled staff since DWP required them to fund such support from their running costs rather than through AtW;
- identify areas where support to disabled people in MGDs could be improved.

1.3 Our approach

The approach for this research has been entirely qualitative, and has not attempted to examine the quantitative impact of the changes in funding². The study consisted of qualitative depth interviews with four groups of stakeholders:

² It was impossible to undertake a full impact study of the effects of transferring responsibility for funding in-work support from AtW to MGDs in any meaningful, quantitative way. In order to do so, a counterfactual would have needed to be established. As funding arrangements changed in all MGDs and all staff within those departments were subject to the changes, there was no control group against which the impact of the changes could be assessed.

- human resources (HR) staff and/or other lead personnel staff;
- disabled employees in MGDs;
- line managers of disabled employees;
- trades union officials and representatives.

Fieldwork for this research was undertaken between February and July 2008.

1.3.1 HR staff

For this research, we interviewed at least one person from each of the 17 MGDs listed above. Interviewees were identified in discussions between DWP and the individual Departments and in most cases, interviews were held with a member of the head office HR or diversity team. In some cases, the lead person identified was from the occupational health team or the health and safety team. Four of the interviews with HR staff also involved other people from the Departments' Disability Networks and additional staff from the HR department or diversity team. Throughout the report, we identify these interviews as having been carried out with 'HR leads'.

1.3.2 Disabled employees

Three groups of disabled employees were targeted for interviews for this research:

- All employees affected by the change in funding, i.e. disabled employees who had received AtW support prior to the change in funding arrangements and who were now being supported by their Department.
- Ex-employees who had received AtW support prior to the change in funding arrangements but who had subsequently left the MGD following the changes in funding, irrespective of whether they had left because of changes in funding.
- New disabled recruits to the MGD and employees who had become disabled since the date of the change and who, at the time of the research, were receiving workplace support from the MGD.

Ideally in a full evaluation, we would have included two further groups of people in the research, namely:

- disabled people who had applied for employment in the MGDs following the change in funding arrangements and who were not recruited (in order to explore whether and in what way the support arrangements might have led to them not being recruited);
- disabled people who might otherwise have applied for employment in the MGDs but who did not (in order to explore whether the lack of availability of AtW acted as a deterrent).

It was not possible to identify either of these groups of people: the first primarily for data protection reasons and the second because it is impossible to know who might have applied for positions within MGDs had AtW still been available. The research has, instead, necessarily focused on those people who were involved at the time the funding arrangements changed.

The study used a mixed method for sampling disabled employees. In the first instance, DWP administered an 'opt-in' exercise to all previous AtW recipients using contact details from the AtW database. Initially, DWP asked the HR leads to check the accuracy of the contact details held for staff. Once the data were updated, DWP wrote to previous AtW recipients to tell them about the research and invite them to participate by completing and returning an opt-in and access form to IES. For two of the MGDs included in the study there were no previous AtW recipients on DWP's database. Also, there were no opt-in forms received from staff in three of the MGDs. From a total of 233 opt-in forms sent out, 69 were returned (30 per cent) from staff who were working or who had previously worked for 12 of the 17 MGDs involved in the research.

Opt-in methods are well known to result in low response rates. However, other possible reasons for a low response rate in this case include confusion among some disabled employees (and HR leads) about whether the IES researchers were wholly independent of DWP, and also some concern that the research was to ascertain whether employees still needed support, and which might result in support being withdrawn. Attention must be drawn here to the particular biases that an opt-in method can bring to research findings. In this instance, we might expect that the disabled people who participated in the research were more likely to have something to say about the changes to the funding arrangements, and this may have particularly been the case for people who were dissatisfied with the changes.

In addition, a few of the MGDs agreed to conduct an opt-in exercise themselves to try and capture the experiences of disabled employees who had not been in receipt of AtW but who had become disabled since the withdrawal or were disabled employees who had been newly-recruited. It is worth noting here that many HR leads reported difficulties in identifying these staff because of a lack of systems to record this information centrally. It is unclear how many forms were sent out by MGDs for this purpose but an additional two opt-in forms were received from this method (one from a newly disabled employee and the other from an employee who had previously received AtW but who had not received the earlier opt-in from the DWP).

In total, interviews were undertaken with 71 current or previous disabled employees. Table 1.1 illustrates the key characteristics of employees taking part in the research, including their current work status, their main disability and the type of in-work support they (had) received.³

Table 1.1 Participating employee characteristics

Employee status	
Previous AtW recipient – still in MGD employment	63
Previous AtW recipient – left MGD employment	7
Newly disabled/newly recruited (with disability) – still in MGD employment	1
Type of disability (<i>note: some employees had more than one impairment</i>)	
Sensory impairment (sight, hearing)	19
Mobility impairment	17
Lower back pain or musculoskeletal disorders	18
Mental health condition	4
Other health condition (including epilepsy, diabetes, cancer and rare or unusual health conditions)	23
Support duration	
Ongoing	23
One-off purchases	32
Both ongoing and one-off	16
Type of support (<i>note: some employees received support in more than one category</i>)	
SAE	50
Adaptations to premises and equipment	3
SW	8
TtW	31

1.3.3 Line managers

The research also involved interviews with line managers about their experiences of the changes to funding in-work support. Line managers were identified by the disabled employees and ex-employees who were asked at the end of the interview if they were happy for us to contact their line manager and ask them to be interviewed as part of the research. The original intention was to interview one

³ Because of data protection constraints, we do not have any demographic or personal information on the (MGD) AtW population at the time of the funding transfer and so are unable to assess how representative our sample is of the whole.

line manager in each MGD. However, in practice, interviews were carried out with one line manager in only eight MGDs. This low number is explained by a number of factors including: employee details were not available from five MGDs in the original sample so it was not possible to interview line managers in these MGDs; interviewed disabled employees did not pass on their line managers' details in another two MGDs; and line managers in a further two MGDs were unavailable for interview due to illness or holidays. The sample included some current and some ex-line managers of previous AtW recipients. It should be noted that there is also likely to have been some bias in the selection of line managers in this study as it seemed that disabled employees were willing to involve their line managers in the research only where the working relationship had been a positive one. Disabled employees who reported more negative experiences did not generally want to involve their line managers in the research.

1.3.4 Trades union officials and representatives

Interviews were conducted at a national level with an appropriate Head Office official from each of the three civil service trades unions: Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS); Prospect; and the First Division Association (FDA). In addition five Departmental or branch union representatives (a selection from each of the three unions) were interviewed. The latter were identified through discussion with national union officials, HR staff and disabled employees.

It is important to note that due to the way the trades union representatives were identified, they have a very different relationship to the AtW funding transfer than do the other three stakeholder groups – each of the other respondent groups was chosen because of their direct experience: disabled people were experienced through receipt of AtW and/or receipt of post-AtW support; the line managers were experienced through line managing one or more of these disabled people; and the HR leads were experienced through being responsible for managing the process of the AtW transfer. The trades union representatives, however, were not necessarily chosen solely because of a direct connection with the funding transfer but also because of their general potential policy interest in the changes. The different sampling methods used to identify the various stakeholder groups need to be borne in mind when interpreting the results in this report: disabled people, line managers and HR leads were sampled because of their direct involvement and their experience of the changes, the responses of trades union officials were more likely to be based on second-hand reports, concerns or perceptions.

The structure of this report is as follows:

- Chapter 2 explores the transfer of funding responsibilities from AtW to MGDs and looks at how staff within Departments found out about the new arrangements. The chapter also discusses how MGDs managed the transition at that time.
- Chapter 3 explores the in-work support currently provided by MGDs (i.e. following the transfer of funding responsibilities) and looks at the systems in place to raise awareness of this support.

- Chapter 4 moves on to examine the application, assessment and decision-making processes for in-work support for disabled employees within MGDs, and then turns to look at the current procedures for follow-up support and reviews.
- Chapter 5 focuses on the structures MGDs have put in place to fund in-work support for disabled employees.
- Chapter 6 discusses MGDs' future plans for in-work support for disabled employees. The chapter also looks at disabled employees' plans for the future and assesses the influence of the transfer of funding responsibility from AtW to MGDs on these plans.
- Chapter 7 draws together the main conclusions from the study and outlines some possible implications of the findings for future development of in-work support services for disabled employees in MGDs.

2 Transfer of Access to Work to Ministerial Government Departments

The key findings from this chapter are:

- Most disabled employees had heard about the transfer of Access to Work (AtW) to Ministerial Government Departments (MGDs) a few months before it took place.
- Most MGDs knew that the transfer was happening two months beforehand although some MGDs could not recall receiving prior official warning.
- All disabled staff who were receiving AtW at the time of the transfer continued to receive the same amount of support once MGDs assumed responsibility for funding.
- Most MGDs experienced some difficulties setting up systems for in-work support at the time of the transfer, largely due to a lack of experience and the short notice at which the changes were introduced. As a result, some staff experienced delays in receiving support.

This chapter looks in detail at the transfer of responsibility for funding (AtW-type) in-work support for disabled employees from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to MGDs. It starts by looking at how and when key stakeholders and AtW recipients found out about the changes in funding source and then turns to respondents' views on how the transfer of funding responsibilities to MGDs went. The chapter takes a chronological approach and begins by looking at how MGDs first heard about the transfer of responsibilities before moving to look at disabled employees' (and ex-employees) and other stakeholders' experience of the process.

2.1 Finding out about the transfer

All interviewees were asked how and when they found out that AtW was no longer going to be available to staff working in MGDs. Responses are detailed below for each of the four types of interviewees and focus on events around the time of the transfer.

2.1.1 Human Resource leads

There appears to have been little systematic (and in some cases, formal) advance notification to Human Resources (HR) leads about the funding change. In a couple of cases, the HR leads involved in the research were not in post at the time of the change and were not involved in the provision of workplace support and so were unable to comment on the flow of information between DWP and the MGD. Recall was also problematic for some respondents: four other HR leads were unable to remember clearly what had happened at the time of the transfer, citing that nearly two years had passed since the changes.

HR leads who had been in post at the time of transfer and who could recall these events, seem to have heard about the change in funding arrangements at different times and both formally (from DWP) and informally (from other sources).

Four HR leads reported receiving a letter from DWP about two months before the change informing them that funding from AtW would no longer be available. Two other HR leads reported that the DWP told them about the transfer in October 2006, that is, at the time when funding responsibility for in-work support was transferred from AtW to MGDs (although both had heard about the changes via informal sources a couple of months earlier).

Three HR leads reported that they had not received any official notification of the change prior to the transfer of responsibilities:

'...this will be my gripe...They didn't tell us that they were going to withdraw the funding and all of a sudden they dropped the funding and we then had to try and identify what funding was needed, who the individuals were and how we could support them.'

(HR lead)

In two of these cases, the HR leads reported that they found out about the transfer of funding responsibilities from disabled employees themselves who came to them concerned about the changes after receiving notification from DWP. As one HR lead reported:

'The next thing we knew about it...was really when the trades unions and individuals started getting the letters telling them that it was going to be withdrawn, before we got the notification from DWP...'

(HR lead)

In another one of these MGDs, the HR lead was not informed officially about the changes but found out about the changes at a cross-government network meeting on diversity a month before the withdrawal:

'It was newly implemented and that's why everybody was so angry...it was appallingly handled. We went to a cross-government network meeting on diversity and somebody said about Access to Work stopping and we went "What? When?" and I think it was the following month it was stopping and letters had gone between ministers but nothing had been forwarded down to people in HR in a lot of cases, and it might not have happened in other Government Departments but it certainly happened here.'

(HR lead)

Understanding the changes

HR staff reported that at the time of the funding change, there was a widespread lack of awareness of the specific provisions made by DWP with regard to the transfer, primarily, the option of delaying the transfer until April 2007, the exceptional circumstances rule and the arrangement that, after the transfer, MGDs could still access AtW Business Centres for advice, guidance and/or assessments for in-work support. Only one of the HR leads was aware of the possibility of delaying the transfer and had availed themselves of this arrangement. Just two of the HR leads were aware at the time of the transfer of the exceptional circumstances rule which was put in place by DWP to enable the continuation of AtW funding for some employees for a limited time. None of the MGDs had invoked the exceptional circumstances rule and, as far as HR leads were aware, no disabled employees working within the MGDs were still in receipt of AtW. Just two of the HR leads interviewed in this study reported using the services of AtW Business Centres since the transfer of funding responsibilities to their Departments.

The internal organisation of MGDs is complex and diverse, and varies between MGD central bodies or services, and their agencies. As a result there was some confusion over which parts of MGDs were affected by the transfer of funding responsibilities from AtW to MGDs. In some MGDs, it was difficult to distinguish between the core (which would be responsible for funding AtW-type support) and the agencies (which would still receive AtW funding). As a result of this confusion, one of the MGDs decided to fund all AtW support, regardless of whether a disabled employee worked in the core or an agency. Also, the reorganisation of some MGDs in the machinery of government changes in 2007 made it difficult for these Departments to be clear about who was responsible for funding workplace support.

There was also some confusion over which elements of in-work support would be the responsibility of the MGDs to fund, and which would continue to be funded by AtW. Some MGDs had (incorrectly) believed that some elements of support would continue to be funded by AtW. In one MGD that had not received official notification of the changes, the HR lead reported that they had only recently found out that they would be responsible for the Travel-to-Work costs of disabled employees.

'One of the other things was recently, through inviting Access to Work to a workshop we were doing for HR colleagues, we then discovered that travel costs...were no longer going to be supported...and all of a sudden we found that that's what we've got to do, but we've only found that out through it being raised at the workshop and then discovering well actually that's not the case. So there are conflicting messages you get from different people that you speak to at Access to Work. I think we had been told that they were still going to be funding that part of it and then we found out that they weren't.'

(HR lead)

Informing staff

MGDs did not adopt a systematic approach to informing staff about the funding changes or to advise them about who to contact if they had any queries about their (ongoing) support needs. In many cases, MGDs were unable to inform disabled employees of the changes because HR leads were unaware of who was receiving AtW, or who had received it in the past. (DWP were unable to pass this information onto MGDs for data protection reasons.) In a couple of cases, the HR leads reported that they had not informed disabled employees about the funding transfer because they were committed to funding their support and did not want to worry them. Very few MGDs informed all (disabled and non-disabled) staff of the changes, although a couple of HR leads said a global notice had been sent to all staff, following the change, asking employees to contact them if there were any problems with their support.

2.1.2 Disabled employees

Not surprisingly, some disabled employees could not recall how or whether they had received formal notification about the funding transfer as it had occurred nearly two years prior to the research interview. However, many disabled employees remembered that they had found out about the changes in funding through a letter from DWP around one or two months before the funding changes. Amongst these employees, several recalled that the DWP letter was a short document simply stating that they should approach their Department as they would now be responsible for funding in-work support. Some disabled employees, especially those receiving ongoing support such as Travel-to-Work (TtW) and Support Worker (SW), found this lack of detailed information worrying partly because of the short notice given but also because they did not know who to contact within their department for further help. Some employees reported that when they approached their HR departments, staff there were often not aware of the changes or had only just found out about the changes themselves.

'We got the notification in September and it stopped from 1 October. I received a letter from DWP that you must speak to your Department, they will have responsibility, so I wrote a covering letter and copied it to occupational health people. First I wrote to the equal opportunities people and they guided me.'

(Disabled employee)

'So it wasn't until I went to my diversity team and said: "Are you aware of this change in my funding?" that they then looked into the matter...I got a letter from DWP and it was that letter I copied to my diversity team who didn't seem to know about it.'

(Disabled employee)

Some disabled employees remembered first finding out about the funding changes from non-DWP sources, including notification from: their own Department; their Department's Disability Network, or their Department's communication SW. A couple of employees said they had first found out about the changes in funding from the national media.

Whilst most disabled employees taking part in this research were familiar with the changes at the time they were interviewed, around one-third of disabled employees continued to be unaware that MGDs were now responsible for funding in-work support. In these cases, the disabled employees concerned had received AtW support some time before the transfer in the form of one-off Special Aids and Equipment (SAE) support. Whilst this was not necessarily problematic at the time of the transfer, a lack of awareness among these disabled employees about who to go to for any support needs in the future is more of a concern.

2.1.3 Line managers

The way in which AtW was previously administered by DWP and Jobcentre Plus meant that line managers of disabled employees were often not involved in the process, so at the time of the funding transfer, they had little knowledge of who was in receipt of AtW or of how the system worked. Only two (out of eight) line managers interviewed could recall being officially told about the funding changes by someone from HR or occupational health (OH) at the time the changes were being made, and out of the remaining six, two stated that they still did not know about the changes. The two line managers who could recall being told about the funding changes became, with little warning, responsible for funding disabled employees' workplace support, which required a considerable amount of ongoing funding with one disabled employee receiving TtW and the other a SW.

'All of a sudden we got told it was going to come out of our budget and we simply didn't have the budget set aside to do such a thing...I got no other information, all I got was that "The pot has disappeared and you'll have to find it yourself".'

(Line manager)

In a couple of other cases, line managers reported that they were told about the changes in funding by the disabled employees they managed. These managers had had no involvement with the AtW process up to that point, and neither had received any information from the MGD itself at the time of the transfer.

It would seem that line managers' awareness of the transfer was partly dictated by the type of support the disabled employee received and also the degree to which funding responsibility was decentralised within the MGD. In cases where the disabled employee received ongoing support in the form of TtW or SW costs, the disabled employees told the line manager, usually because they were concerned about who would provide their support when the responsibility for funding was transferred and they required guidance. Line managers with disabled employees who had received one-off workplace support were less likely to be aware of the changes in funding. Line managers of disabled employees with ongoing support seem to have been (subsequently) told about the funding changes by HR or OH if they became responsible for funding such support from their own division/ business unit or line manager budget.

2.1.4 Trades union officers and branch representatives

Trades union officers and branch representatives reported that information regarding the changes to funding was patchy. Not all had received official notification of the changes from DWP or the Cabinet Office or (in the case of branch representatives) from the MGD they worked in, or from their own head offices. Although one or two had been aware that in-work support funding responsibility was potentially being transferred from AtW to MGDs, trades union officers were generally surprised at the changes and in particular, at the lack of warning and time to prepare for the transfer of AtW. Head office officials from the three main unions were involved in the negotiations about the decision, but after the changes were announced. However, they expressed dissatisfaction with the consultation process which followed and felt there was still a great deal of confusion over the motives for the changes and which Departments were included.

Trades union representatives reported a lack of communication between the different parties involved in the provision of workplace support. They reported a lack of official notification from DWP to the MGDs about the changes and also a lack of follow-up information for staff within the Departments. As one trades union representative told us, he was aware of a letter which went to HR directors in September 2006, the month before the transfer. However, it does not appear that this information was always passed on to the relevant areas in the Departments.

'We were totally unaware of it. Certainly, the local line management in terms of the local budget holders were totally unaware of the situation until it was brought to their attention by the trades union side. And that followed, as I say, the letter went to HR directors back in September 2006 and speaking to colleagues who work in the relevant areas in the management side, that was not disseminated down throughout the Department.'

(Trades union branch representative)

2.2 Managing the transition

This section looks at how MGDs managed the transition to funding workplace support at the time of the change (Chapters 3, 4 and 5 look at the current processes after the transition). It provides an overview of the procedures for workplace support immediately following the funding transfer and the resultant changes to in-work support.

2.2.1 HR leads

Information and advice

Few MGDs had put alternative systems in place for the provision of workplace support at the time of the transfer of responsibility. HR leads argued that they had little time to identify disabled employees and to put any new formal systems and procedures in place. Due to data confidentiality, DWP was unable to tell HR leads in MGDs which disabled employees were receiving AtW. Moreover, HR leads and other staff in MGDs would not necessarily have been involved in the AtW application process under the old arrangements and so, again, did not always know who was receiving AtW.

It would seem that apart from a letter from DWP, there was little information or guidance for HR leads about how to organise similar types of workplace support to those previously administered through AtW. Although in some cases, depending on the type of support received, MGDs had previously paid a proportion of the costs for AtW, this typically involved an automatic approval from line managers only (for example, validating attendance records for TtW), and staff in the HR or OH departments would have had little involvement with, or understanding of, the system.

In addition to a lack of guidance from DWP and in some cases, a lack of internal experience, there seems to have been no systematic advice given to Departments from Jobcentre Plus or AtW Business Centres. Rather, this type of advice was provided on an ad hoc basis if requested by the MGD. Moreover, there seems to have been a lack of awareness in MGDs of the services offered by AtW Business Centres, particularly with regard to general information and help with assessments.

'We needed back-up information... We don't tend to go to Jobcentre [sic]. I understand that Jobcentre Plus will support us in giving advice to potential staff but we don't bother going to them at all now, we just buy it in ourselves with occupational health assessors, whereas we would probably use them more and I think if they'd have given us more back up information and said "You can still use us, this is the service that we can provide but we don't provide the money" then I think that would have helped and I think that they should do that on a regular basis...'

(HR lead)

Few HR leads had contacted AtW Business Centres for advice on how to administer in-work support and where they had, the result was not always positive or helpful. One HR lead reported that they had received conflicting advice from the Business Centre with regard to TtW support: one Business Centre adviser said that MGDs could still get help with assessments while another said assessments were now the MGD's sole responsibility.

'Yes, I wrote to [the Business Centre in November]... because we had heard nothing... At the time there were four members of staff in receipt of Travel-to-Work, taxis and stuff. I wrote to them and said "Now you have withdrawn this funding how do we process these cases? What if we get any new ones, what do we do?" I heard nothing and I chased them up and in the end I talked to another lady at the same centre and I was getting mixed messages. This went on for quite a while and in the end I spoke to someone else at the Business Centre in February [2007] because I didn't get anywhere. So I spoke to her and I said "Have you got any desk instructions? What forms have you got and can we use them?" and she said "We would provide you with some advice if you are stuck but we are not going to process any of it" but she gave me a rough idea of what sort of things to look for.'

(HR lead)

Timing and budgets

HR leads experienced some difficulties with the timing of the transfer because it occurred mid-financial year with little or no warning. HR leads argued that they had little time to find the additional financial resources, which had an impact on Departmental budgets, or to put alternative systems for the provision of workplace support in place.

'I think we had about a month and it wasn't even done in advance of a new financial year – we were expected to absorb this halfway through a financial year with no forward planning whatsoever.'

(HR lead)

Several HR leads argued that the withdrawal of funding changes had impacted significantly on Departmental finances. One, who received notification of the funding transfer about one month before the change, was immediately responsible for funding TtW costs which ran into tens of thousands of pounds:

'When all this funding ceased we suddenly found out we had five people [with TtW support]...and all of a sudden now I am landed with a £35,000 taxi bill and it is still running because I haven't had time to sit down. So all of a sudden not only had we lost the whole Access to Work funding, which wasn't a great big deal for us on other things, but it was a big deal for us on travel.'

(HR lead)

HR leads also reported that putting new systems in place was time and resource intensive which also had an impact on budgets.

'We should have had (given that our financial year starts in April), we should have had a good...I would have thought near enough a year to plan for it.'

(HR lead)

The research found only one example of a more considered and planned MGD response to the funding transfer. This MGD reported that they knew of the transfer two months before it occurred which gave them some time to consider their response. They had also had a fair amount of contact with AtW Business Centres prior to the transfer and most importantly, had only a very small number of employees in receipt of AtW at the time of the transfer.

'Well we knew...well we were aware of their support to begin with and we knew Access to Work was finishing and so we just made provisions in our central diversity budget to cover the cost of their adjustments.'

(HR Lead)

Systems in place

At the time of the transition, few MGDs had established any standard procedures or systems, especially for providing ongoing support, such as TtW or SW, either for previous recipients or for newer claims. HR departments and other key personnel in MGDs had a steep learning curve when administering these and other types of support, since they had little or no experience of doing so before.

Impact on support

In most cases, as far as HR leads were aware, all staff who had received AtW continued to receive the same level of support, by automatic transfer, following the changes and all HR leads said they were committed to supporting disabled staff who had previously received AtW funding. However, HR staff in a couple of MGDs were concerned that a few employees may have 'slipped through the net'.

One area of support that was particularly affected by the funding transfer was help with TtW costs. Because data protection constraints prevented HR staff from immediately identifying all employees previously receiving this support, some experienced delays in payment.

'I thought it was a very poor show on their part that they slipped this in in such a way that it did have an impact on the staff...I had to say I don't even know who these staff are and so there may be people out there who are no longer being funded that we don't know and they may not feel comfortable coming to me because they don't know and the reason they don't know is I haven't had an opportunity to put in place a process and a communication strategy to tell people that actually, it is no longer funded by Access to Work, it is now funded by me...'

(HR lead)

2.2.2 Disabled employees

MGD handling of the transfer

Disabled employees' views were sought on how the transfer of responsibility for funding in-work support had been handled. Due to the manner in which the transition was made, and particularly the lack of advance notification, some reported finding the transfer difficult and stressful. This was particularly the case for employees who were receiving ongoing support. Several thought that their MGD did not handle the transfer very well, and some had the impression that when they contacted HR departments about the changes, HR were not aware of them. In one MGD it was unclear for some time whether disabled employees could still get AtW funding from DWP or whether responsibility had transferred to the MGD. It would appear this has now been clarified, but, in the meantime, disabled employees at this MGD had been concerned and confused about their support and who would fund it.

In a few cases, disabled employees assumed that someone in the MGD must have known about the changes to funding but that this information had not been acted upon, or passed onto others, in time for the transfer of responsibility. As one disabled employee told us:

'I mean, they obviously knew it was going to happen, but it seemed like even when they knew it was going to happen, they still didn't do anything about it until it happened and then somebody was kind of just "Tough, deal with it" and they just had to just, kind of, do their best and HR were probably inundated from day one because there were people who were more in need of things than I was. I mean they must have known ahead of time because I knew ahead of time so... but they were like "Oh, we don't know". It seemed like people were saying "We don't know what's going to happen" and that happened until it happened and then still today...It wasn't ideal, but whose fault it was I couldn't say.'

(Disabled employee)

Impact on support

Most importantly for the research, disabled employees confirmed that at the time of the transfer, they continued to receive their in-work support and this was certainly the case for those who had received one-off support for SAE and who kept hold of these (even though they may not have known that responsibility for funding this type of support had changed).

Disabled employees who had received ongoing support from AtW also continued to get this support following the transfer, with some reporting a seamless transition. What appears most important here is that employees knew who to approach for help, even when there were no firm systems in place.

'I wrote to occupational health and it wasn't finalised but I was paid. I was never refused the money. There hasn't even passed by a week where the Department hasn't paid me...It was all a new thing. They had to have a budget depending on how many disabled people there were on the same scale as DWP did it. Still they kept on paying me. The money wasn't delayed. It has gone very smoothly. In between when I needed the large keyboard...I just mentioned it to my colleague in occupational health, my [in-work support] contact. I mentioned it to him. I said "could you tell me if it will come out from your side of things or do I need to speak to my line manager?" Everyone is very supportive, it has never been a problem for me. He said it would be from [his budget]. Within a couple of days I got the keyboard. Anything I have asked for which would make my work easier I have always been given.'

(Disabled employee)

However, as discussed above, several MGDs were slow to put alternative systems in place and this was particularly problematic for employees receiving ongoing support. A lack of procedures for organising the payment of TtW costs and SW costs (discussed further in Chapter 5) meant it was difficult for some disabled employees to know how to proceed or who to go to for advice. Under AtW, there were clear guidelines and procedures for ongoing claims.

'There was a bit of a delay, because I think, from what I can remember, I don't think Access to Work notified the Department very well in advance. So it wasn't until I went to my diversity team and said: "Are you aware of this change in my funding?" that they then looked into the matter. And then it took a good couple of weeks for them to agree how that was going to be handled, and I was quite worried about my money actually, because it is quite a lot of money, hundreds of pounds. But once it has been agreed it then became very straightforward and doesn't take long. But there was just a lack of communication initially.'

(Disabled employee)

In some MGDs, disabled employees had to wait for fairly long periods of time before they received reimbursement from the MGDs for their ongoing support:

'No one lost their support. There were concerns with a couple of people who had quite a serious lapse and even in my case it was over £120 a week and when, you know I would claim it every four weeks [under AtW]...there would always be money coming out as money was going in and then it suddenly hit the wall where I was £800 out, and they did give it to me...It is a lot of money.'

(Disabled employee)

The problems with paying ongoing support costs, and particularly TtW costs, were exacerbated in at least two Departments because of the confusion over whether AtW funding was still available to them. In one such MGD, AtW was eventually transferred back to all staff except those working in one main HQ building but in the meantime disabled employees reported problems with taxi bills which their employer had not paid. In at least one case, this delay meant the taxi firm refused to take the disabled employee any more and she had to find another taxi firm. Many of these problems have since been resolved, but at the time of the transfer they were a worry for the disabled employees affected.

2.2.3 Line managers

Line managers reported receiving little or no information, advice or training on how to proceed with organising support for the disabled employees they managed, either from DWP or their Department. At the time of the transfer of funding responsibilities, it was not always clear to line managers what the new systems were (if any) for organising workplace support, particularly ongoing support.

In one case, the line manager was managing someone who had been receiving the services of an SW and had to move from a system where everything was funded and arranged by AtW to a system where the money for the SW came from that unit's budget. This MGD has since moved to funding workplace support through a central budget but at the time of the transfer, the situation affected the disabled employee as well as having an impact on the budget:

'Well, in effect, it would have meant that it would have had to come out, for example, of our training budget or something instead. And the thing is... it was extremely unhelpful for [employee] because she didn't want to feel like people were staring at her and saying "You're using up our money". But when it was something that enabled her...in effect it was a human piece of equipment which enabled her to do her job effectively.'

(Line manager)

Line managers were generally keen, however, to ensure that the funding transfer did not adversely affect their staff.

'I don't think we took any real notice...it wasn't a major impact on us in a sense of the employee's ability to come in and do the work, because obviously the employee was being employed by us, doing a job for us and was very good at it and it was kind of secondary. You know it was a nuisance, but it didn't reflect on things, the two did not connect... "Oh no we gotta find extra money for the disabled employee", but it was never looked upon like that. We thought "Well we'll organise the budgets accordingly".'

(Line manager)

Although some respondents argued that not all line managers would have taken such an approach, particularly if they had to fund the support from their unit's budgets, the research found no examples of this.

2.2.4 Trades union officers and branch representatives

Trades union head office staff had little or no involvement in how the transition was managed within the MGD at the time of the transfer. However, trades union branch representatives' views reinforced the picture of confusion and lack of systems in place in some MGDs:

'The change has been a bit of a struggle. Policy knows what should have been happening. I don't think they found it as easy to manage it. The Department is clumsy for getting things filtered down. Although I think they knew what their responsibilities were at the centre...there's the centre where the policy is and all the other areas of the Department where you work to and it's not always clear that those budget holders, where it's all filtered down to, have the same grip on it that the centre has.'

(Trades union officer)

From the trades union officer's experience in his department, the lack of notification and warning meant MGDs were not fully able to plan alternative provision to replace AtW.

'That's our impression, that that was not communicated very well from DWP and it was a reactionary response as opposed to a response based on planning fully for the event, as it were.'

(Trades union officer)

3 Current workplace support

The key findings from this chapter are:

- Ministerial Government Departments (MGDs) offer the same types of in-work support to disabled employees as Access to Work (AtW).
- Human Resources (HR) staff within MGDs aimed to provide whatever in-work support was needed by disabled staff, including support that went beyond the help available from AtW.
- Some disabled staff reported receiving in-work support that went over and above that received from AtW.
- Information on in-work support was generally available on MGD intranet systems.
- Disabled employees who were in receipt of ongoing support were more likely to know about the in-work support that was available from the MGD.
- Many employees who had received one-off support from AtW (prior to the transfer) did not know what support was available from the MGD although most thought they would be able to find out easily from their Department if they needed to.
- Disabled employees were concerned that new members of staff or people who became disabled whilst in MGD employment would not know about the support that was available and many called for greater awareness raising and dissemination of information on in-work support.

This chapter explores the support available to disabled staff in MGDs following the funding transfer, and looks at the methods used to publicise and raise awareness of the support amongst disabled people and other relevant staff.

3.1 Types of support available

This section explores the workplace support that is available for existing employees, and for job applicants during the recruitment process.

The range of in-work support now available in MGDs is the same as under AtW, namely:

- Special Aids and Equipment (SAE);
- Adaptations to Premises and Equipment (APE);
- Travel-to-Work (TtW) grants;
- Support Worker (SW);
- Communicator Support at Interview (CSI);
- Miscellaneous Expenditure.

The support available at recruitment for job applicants to the MGDs is:

- CSI;
- interviews held in accessible premises;
- clear guidance on the support available from the MGDs on the application form;
- a guaranteed interview scheme for disabled applicants.

3.1.1 HR leads' views

All the HR leads interviewed for this research made it clear that their Departments provided all the support measures for their staff that were available under AtW. Most of the support provided since the transfer was SAE, which included specialist chairs, IT equipment and desks. MGDs had less experience of providing ongoing support, such as TtW and SWs, although staff in the MGDs still received these support types.

All the HR leads made it clear that as well as providing the same support as AtW, they would aim to do whatever was needed to support their staff, even if this support was extraneous to that offered by AtW. Examples included parking spaces close to the front of the building for staff with mobility difficulties and special paid leave for disabled staff while they waited for their in-work support to be put in place. Other support provided included flexible working patterns, although most HR leads emphasised that these were not disability specific but could be used as a tool to help disabled people avoid the rush hour or work from home if their health dictated a need for it.

It is worth noting here that many MGDs routinely provided SAEs such as chairs, desks, and IT equipment before the funding changes, and many reported that they had simply used AtW for assessments and advice before purchasing equipment themselves. While providing these types of physical adjustments was not a new

departure for many MGDs, the provision of ongoing support (for example, TtW and SW) often introduced new obstacles and problems that the Departments had to address.

3.1.2 Disabled employees' views

The views of disabled employees echoed those of the HR leads, confirming that the support available from MGDs was largely the same as that available under AtW. The research did uncover a couple of cases, moreover where the support from an MGD was perceived by employees to have gone further than that received previously under AtW. Examples included a Department agreeing with their occupational health (OH) provider that a disabled employee's sickness absence would not be flagged for review until after 20 days instead of the usual 12. Another example involved an employee who normally worked from home but who had to go into the office to access restricted documents. The Department was in the process of setting up full remote access from the employee's home system, which he felt would have a positive impact on his health. This employee thought his Department had generally been very good at providing all the equipment he needed to be able to do his job and had a positive and proactive attitude to providing support for disabled staff.

3.1.3 Line managers' views

Line managers' views were consistent with those of the other interviewees. In addition to support available under AtW, a few line managers described more informal ways of supporting disabled staff, including moving their office space around to ensure access to toilets, kitchens, fire exits and other facilities, and slight adaptations to the job role of disabled staff.

'I mentioned that we do quite a lot of proof-reading and very often those [documents] don't work on her computer...She does her darnedest to proof-read them but she shouldn't, and she can't and so I keep that for myself.'

(Line manager)

Such informal support tended to come about following conversations between line managers and their disabled employees. These adaptations to job role or work environment were not perceived by line managers to constitute (AtW-type) in-work support; rather they were seen more generally as good working practices for all staff in most Departments and as meeting the 'reasonable adjustment' requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995.⁴

⁴ As noted in Chapter 1, the line managers who participated in this research were more likely to have had a positive working relationship with their disabled employees. It is impossible to know how representative these views are of the line manager cohort as a whole.

3.1.4 Trades union officers and branch representatives

Trades union officers and branch representatives were aware of the support provided by MGDs following the changes and agreed that it mirrored the support offered under AtW. Although they had been concerned that people would be left without certain types of workplace support (particularly ongoing support) when the funding responsibility transferred from AtW to MGDs, this had not proved to be the case.

'What [AtW] would do, for example, was pay for taxis for people to get to and from work and that wouldn't have been seen as a reasonable adjustment under the DDA. Those were the sorts of issues that we were worried about for our members and our members themselves were worried about, but we haven't had any reports that that has been withdrawn.'

(Trades union officer)

Trades union branch representatives confirmed that existing staff in MGDs were, on the whole, provided with the same level and type of support as AtW and in some cases had actually received additional and proactive support

3.1.5 Other disability support

All respondents taking part in the research talked about other types of disability support available in the Departments which were designed to promote a culture of respect and tolerance among the staff. The support listed below was available in MGDs:

- Disability Champions – usually directorate level staff;
- Disability Networks or forums within the Department;
- mentoring, team support and buddies;
- alternative versions of paperwork and forms;
- access to beds and sick rooms;
- disability awareness training for staff who wanted it;
- disability support provided for training.

Most MGDs took advice on the support that they should be providing from sources such as the Employers' Forum on Disability. However, the research found some inconsistencies in the additional support available across MGDs. Although some of these types of support may have been beyond the scope of AtW, and the discrepancies observed would have existed even if the responsibility for funding in-work support had not transferred to MGDs, the fact that they exist in some MGDs, or in some directorates within MGDs, but not in others may be cause for concern.

The main area that differed between Departments was disability support for training. This included offering signers and transport to different venues. The availability of support for training largely depended on the MGD that the disabled employee worked for. A few MGDs had considered adaptations and support for training courses as part of disability in-work support and had implemented systems to routinely provide this. Disabled staff in these MGDs received excellent support for attending training courses and taking part in events designed to develop their career.

'Stuff like training courses, it's something that we are required to do, that our Learning and Development team will do; we'll make it available. If someone wants to go on a training course and they've got a particular individual need we'll make sure we manage that need basically.'

(HR lead)

In the Departments where in-work support for training had not been considered systematically, disabled employees received inconsistent support to attend these events. As no clear guidelines existed on the help that people could receive (or were entitled to), decisions to fund support for training in these MGDs tended to be taken on an ad hoc basis, primarily driven by budgetary concerns. As a result disabled employees felt they might be turned down for training support based solely on cost.

'Yes...I remember...there was a programme aiming to talk to staff about promotions and they said there were some courses and there was one course that was £2,500 but if you did the course you could possibly get a promotion and it would have been fantastic especially for disabled people but the course was a week course. I asked for it but they turned it down because it was just too expensive because obviously they would have to pay for the course and they would have had to pay the interpreter and the organisation has a budget and because they would have to pay the fee and interpreters each day, it would have been too expensive. I was really disappointed.'

(Disabled employee)

During the research, a number of employees raised concerns about cuts in other, more general support within their Departments. One MGD, for example, no longer funded a full-time CSW post which had provided an in-house, constant point of contact for staff with communication difficulties within the MGD. This Department also appeared to have stopped providing deafness awareness training for staff as part of a cost-cutting exercise.

3.2 Information and awareness

All respondents were asked how MGDs provided information and raised awareness of the in-work support available to disabled employees, following the funding transfer.

3.2.1 HR leads' views

HR leads reported that information about the in-work support available within MGDs was provided mainly via their intranet systems. Some Departments ran poster campaigns and Diversity Awareness days as a way to raise awareness and many utilised their Disability Networks and forums as an additional means of disseminating information on the help available. Most HR leads commented that raising awareness was a 'work in progress' and that there was always more that could be done:

'The service was kick-started in the September and we had a little launch at the time. We wanted to get through the six month period of reassessing everybody and having a clearer picture of where we are as an organisation in terms of disability. Once we'd got to that point we're going to have a full review of our findings. Following that we're going to launch the service officially and have a good news event, go to town on the promotional stuff.'

(HR lead)

'So there's loads of different sorts of things coming up on the intranet. It's not always ideal because people don't have time and it's just been rebranded and a lot of the articles have reappeared on the front page and been rearranged. There's probably more. We've done a lot of raising awareness but there's probably more we can do.'

(HR lead)

Several Departments reported that they used to produce magazines and newsletters which highlighted the support that was available but the majority of these had been stopped because of budgetary constraints.

A number of Departments provided specific information (available on request) for line managers to help support disabled staff and explain how to access workplace support. However, in a few MGDs, HR departments were more proactive in running awareness-raising sessions for managers or providing specific information on the intranet, covering issues such as how to appraise a disabled employee and to consider in-work support. One HR lead described their approach as follows:

'We produce a lot of awareness guides and are working up a strategy of communications to be able to run workshops for managers and trying to incorporate it into existing training as well just to get all the messages across to [all staff] so that they have a responsibility to themselves and that the little things that they can do can make an enormous difference to somebody.'

(HR lead)

3.2.2 Disabled employees' views

Many disabled employees were unaware of the in-work support available to them following the transfer of funding responsibilities. Generally, disabled employees who had received one-off equipment via AtW in the past had seen little information on the intranet but admitted not looking for it recently, and most were confident that if they needed the information they would be able to find it.

'It's difficult to answer because I haven't even made an attempt. It could be that on our intranet I would just have to put into 'X' disability and lots of guidance comes out but...I haven't tried. That is usually how things work these days. It is not like we get information on paper going round, it is more a question of going out and looking for it.'

(Disabled employee)

Disabled staff receiving ongoing support, for example TtW or SW, were more concerned about the amount of information available and importantly, how this information was conveyed to other staff. At the time of the transfer there was very little or no information available to disabled staff about the new funding arrangements however, most did report that the amount of information available to staff about disability issues had subsequently improved. Having said this, most disabled staff who received ongoing support said that they would like MGDs to be more proactive in disseminating information on disability support. In particular, disabled employees wanted more information about whom they should contact with queries.

'It would be nice if there was more information, more readily available and you didn't have to go searching the web for everything you needed to know or trying to find a person who already knows about it to use their knowledge. At the moment most of our HR staff is on the web. You get on the web; there are such a lot of places to go searching for stuff.'

(Disabled employee)

Disabled employees who received ongoing help with support costs, and who were already familiar with the advice and guidance available, reported that there was almost no information regarding the provision of ongoing support such as TtW and SWs to disabled staff in MGDs who did not already receive this sort of help. These employees reported that information for disabled employees generally focused on the one-off adjustments and SAE purchases that MGDs were used to providing, and argued that only staff with prior knowledge of AtW would be likely to request ongoing support types.

Some disabled interviewees highlighted potential accessibility problems (e.g. for staff with visual impairments or dyslexia) if information on in-work support was only available on the intranet. Others commented that information only available on the intranet might not be available to non-desk-based staff, and staff in open plan offices might have confidentiality concerns accessing disability support information on the intranet.

Many disabled staff used more informal information channels and picked up knowledge of available support through Departmental Disability Networks and forums.

3.2.3 Line managers' views

Line managers were more likely to be concerned about the type of information that was available to them, particularly now that much of the process had been devolved to them in some MGDs (see the applications section in Chapter 4 for further explanation).

Interestingly, line managers were not concerned about accessing support as, like many disabled employees, they were confident that the information would be available somewhere on the intranet. Managers' concerns tended to be about the management and softer skills required to support a disabled member of staff, e.g. how to start a conversation with a member of staff about their condition without being intrusive or offensive. While this does not directly relate to AtW and the transfer of funding it is worth mentioning as it reflects line managers' attitudes and concerns about disability issues.

'It would be helpful to get something [from HR]. I sometimes feel a bit apprehensive about how to approach people with a disability. It's to get the balance right. I'm lucky with [employee] that she's quite forthright, she could tell me and she knows I could take it and change my approach if necessary. Sometimes you can't be 100 per cent sure how much help somebody wants or doesn't want and for the HR people to come out and say "Here are the things you should be aware of. Don't forget to [do X, Y, Z]" would be helpful.'

(Line manager)

There was also some evidence that a few line managers had contacted HR departments for help with how to deal with issues related to disability and, in a few cases, the information they had received had been unclear. Managers sometimes felt unsupported and unsure of how to deal with the problems that arose. In one case, a line manager looking into a disabled employee's sickness absence reported that the advice received from HR on this matter was not very helpful.

'Her [disabled employee's] sickness absence was quite high and I phoned up and said "This is a big number, am I allowed to ask [about it]?" It was a non-committal answer [from HR], "You can ask the question or leave it and ask them if they're willing to tell you." It wasn't the most helpful answer I could have hoped for.'

(Line manager)

3.2.4 Trades union officers and branch representatives

Trades union branch representatives had very little to say about the information that was available on in-work support within MGDs, or on levels of awareness more generally. As with many members of staff, most officials thought that their contact with the Disability Networks and forums, and the information held on the intranet within MGDs provided enough information on the support that was available.

Some trades union officers had been consulted by MGDs, via disability forums, etc. on the best methods to disseminate information to disabled staff and in a small minority of MGDs, trades union branch representatives had helped to design the information that was later sent out.

4 Accessing workplace support

The key findings from this chapter are:

- Application and tracking procedures for in-work support were fairly open and flexible within Ministerial Government Departments (MGDs).
- Some disabled employees preferred the flexibility afforded by MGDs whilst other employees preferred the more structured application process operated by Access to Work (AtW).
- Disabled employees were most likely to go through their line manager to access in-work support, particularly in decentralised systems where decisions about support were taken by individual managers.
- Some MGDs operated more centralised systems and applications for in-work support were fed up to Human Resource (HR) (or similar divisions) for decisions.
- Some employees were concerned about disclosing health conditions and disabilities to line managers, as part of the in-work support system, as they felt this put them at risk of discrimination.
- Assessments for in-work support had generally gone well since the transfer and most employees were satisfied with the help they had received.
- Assessments by specialist providers were particularly well received by HR leads, line managers and disabled employees.
- There was a general lack of clearly defined decision-making processes within MGDs. Some MGDs tended to follow all the recommendations made by assessment providers whilst a few challenged these assessments and looked at alternative sources of support.
- Decisions on in-work support were usually made on a case-by-case basis and there seems to be little consistency within or across MGDs.

- Some disabled employees were beginning to experience difficulties with their ongoing in-work support which centred on delays in the decision-making process, constant reviewing of needs and changes to the support that was being provided although needs had not changed.

This chapter considers how in-work support for disabled employees is accessed and monitored within MGDs following the transfer of responsibility from AtW. It covers application procedures, workplace assessments, the decision-making process and follow-up support.

4.1 Application process

Most MGDs had designed the application procedures for accessing in-work support to be as flexible and accessible as possible so that each case could be dealt with individually.

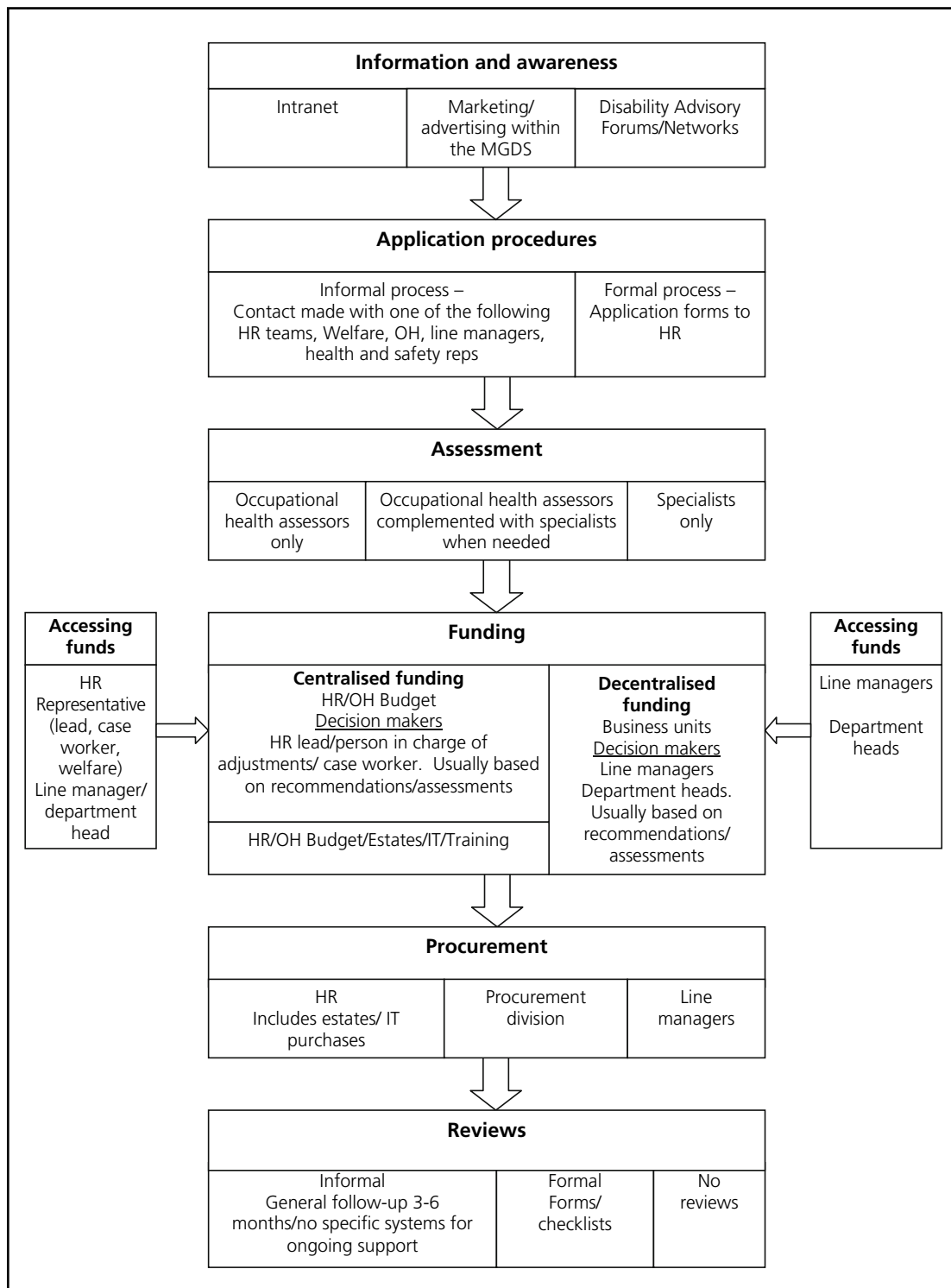
4.1.1 HR lead views

Figure 4.1 illustrates the main features of the in-work support systems and processes in place within MGDs following the funding transfer.⁵ Most MGDs had designed very informal application processes for in-work support. HR leads within MGDs perceived that these systems were less bureaucratic than AtW and easier for the disabled employee to navigate. There were examples of more formalised application routes in only one or two MGDs, including specific application forms that could be downloaded from the intranet and submitted to the HR department. In most Departments, in-work support could be accessed through several routes and sources. Initial contact could take the form of a face-to-face conversation, phone call or email, whichever was most comfortable and accessible for the disabled person, with all or some of the following personnel:

- line managers;
- occupational health (OH) professionals;
- health and safety representatives;
- welfare officers within the Department;
- HR teams and help lines.

⁵ For ease of reference, the size of the boxes indicates the approximate proportion of MGDs using that system.

Figure 4.1 Models of in-work support structures



The most common route (and in a minority of Departments, the only route) for disabled employees to access support was to approach their line manager in the first instance.

Applications for support in MGDs where a central fund was used to pay for workplace support were usually fed through to HR via one of the contacts listed above. HR would receive these applications and someone within the HR department (for example, the HR lead, the welfare officer in charge of in-work support or a case worker) would organise a workplace assessment. In MGDs where the budget was decentralised and managed by business units, applications went through line managers and occasionally on to department heads who would either sanction the adjustments or organise a workplace assessment. Chapter 5 explains the funding models for in-work support in more detail.

There were divergent views among HR staff about using line managers to access support. In a few Departments, HR leads were adamant that as the line managers benefited most directly from the employee and, in most cases, had the highest level of contact with them, they would be the most appropriate conduit for the disabled employee to access support.

'I think it does make sense and I genuinely believe that it makes sense for business units to pay because essentially they're benefiting from the work the individual is doing...If you're benefiting from the work and if this person is truly valued I think it's a bit demeaning almost to say "Yes we want you to work here, but we don't want you enough to work here to pay for the things that will facilitate you working here effectively".'

(HR lead)

However, HR leads in the majority of MGDs were concerned that leaving disabled employees with no choice but to access support through the line management route could risk discrimination, as the decision to facilitate and/or provide support was devolved to an individual manager. HR staff in these Departments favoured more central routes for accessing support, usually by applying directly to HR, and providing support paid out of a central budget.

'There was a suggestion from a previous senior manager here that [responsibility] should be devolved to the business areas and there was a bit of discussion as to whether that was a good idea or a bad one. And I didn't think it was a good idea...so that never happened. We keep it central because we were concerned that business areas wouldn't take on disabled members of staff if they thought there was an additional cost, etc. so we kept it to ensure people had the opportunity.'

(HR lead)

4.1.2 Disabled employees' views

There were mixed feelings among disabled employees about the systems for accessing in-work support. There was little agreement about whether or not the systems worked better under AtW or the Departments. The opinions expressed

by disabled employees were largely dependent on their experiences so far. A few appreciated that the systems were less bureaucratic than under AtW and that they could access support through their workplace without bringing in another organisation.

'I will just email them and just ask them probably...and just say that my circumstances have changed and I need different support and how do I do it and they're normally, they are normally quite quick to get back to you.'

(Disabled employee)

However, many others held more negative views and felt that the flexible nature of (some MGDs') in-work support systems and lack of clear structures or guidelines, could influence the support provided.

'I think if you do have a health problem or condition, you know of any type, it can be very stressful if you are having to negotiate, you know, rather than simply going through a standard process.'

(Disabled employee)

These comments differed from Departments' views that making systems flexible should ease the process for disabled employees.

Other employees reported feeling like a 'liability' to their Departments as they now had to go and request support from their line managers. The most frequent negative comments on the process were that accessing support was entirely dependent on the individual. A number of respondents felt that they had been 'left alone to get on with it'.

Another key reason why employees were less happy with the new systems was that accessing support was entirely dependent on an employee being comfortable disclosing their disability to their line manager. This applied mainly to staff who had invisible health conditions and/or conditions which might be sensitive or embarrassing to disclose. This problem was particularly pertinent for staff who had to access support through their line managers. While it was likely that line managers would have been aware of a disabled employee receiving AtW under the previous arrangements, the reasons behind this support would not necessarily have been made explicit. This is particularly true of Travel-to-Work (TtW) support as line managers were only required to sign a confirmation of attendance sheet for these claims under AtW.

'It wouldn't stop me. I would say I need this. Some people would think twice about it, and depending on their line manager as well. You might have [a manager] saying "This is a nonsense". If it's Access to Work it's nothing to do with the line manager and the employment, it's outside of that. That's far better.'

(Disabled employee)

A few disabled employees commented that some disabled people were not always best placed to communicate their support needs effectively. They worried for staff members who were less able to vocalise their needs or were not so forthright about their disability.

'You have no back up other than yourself. And you're not necessarily the best person at complaining...It's difficult for anyone that has any speech or real communication problems, they'll find that really difficult.'

(Disabled employee)

Some variety was observed in the ways different grades of staff thought they would access support in the future. Staff on a higher grade tended to by-pass line managers and go straight to internal departments such as HR to start the process. This was done for a number of reasons including (primarily) having a clearer idea about the best person to contact to provide support. Senior staff also tended to work more autonomously from their line management. Staff who were on lower grades used their line managers to access support more frequently. The system, in these cases, was often more difficult to negotiate because their line managers tended to be relatively junior too.

4.1.3 Line managers' views

Line managers interviewed were generally content with the systems for accessing in-work support and were happy to help provide workplace assessments and adjustments for staff. Some managers had been involved in the process and others were working with members of staff who had already accessed support. There was no difference between the views of the two groups.

It should be noted here that most line managers interviewed had good relationships with their disabled employees. Where relationships between employees and line managers were strained, line manager interviews were typically not completed at the employee's request. This may have skewed the results slightly towards a more positive view.

4.1.4 Trades union officers and branch representatives

Little comment was made by trades union branch representatives on the actual application procedures, although some were concerned that disabled people had to declare their disability to their employers in order to gain in-work support. Trades union officers and branch representatives felt that such a disclosure increased the likelihood of disabled people experiencing discrimination (particularly staff who had received Travel-to-Work support under AtW). Trades unions were concerned that disabled employees would find it difficult to approach an MGD and ask for a substantial amount of financial support.

'Now you've had low levels which could have not had that much of impact anyway. Line managers might not have known that people had funding and now suddenly it's like being outed. It's an uncomfortable situation for some people because what was just a harmonious relationship where nobody suffered within their team, now you have to put your hands up and say "By the way I used to get funding but I still need it" which will cause resentment, or people will struggle along without getting what they need or asking for it.'

(Trades union officer)

4.1.5 Applying at recruitment stage

The interviews gathered little information about in-work support during the recruitment process largely due to the fact that there was very little recruitment taking place in the MGDs at the time of the fieldwork. Moreover, in the majority of Departments, the HR staff member responsible for the provision of in-work support was usually not involved in recruiting staff. The HR leads who were responsible both for recruitment and in-work support reported that disability support needs would be covered at the interview stage of the process or could be discussed separately with HR and this would usually be followed by meetings with OH before the job started, to organise the workplace support. MGDs reported that they would aim, in all cases, to have support in place by the time the employee started work.

There was some concern among disabled employees and trades unions that having to request support from an employer at such an early stage could harm a disabled person's chance of getting a job. Although this issue relates more directly to the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995, under the previous funding arrangements, potential employees were able to assure employers that AtW would pay for their in-work support needs, and particularly those related to ongoing support needs. This is no longer the case under the new funding arrangements. Indeed, the research has uncovered two or three examples of existing MGD employees spending lengthy periods in the redeployment pool (after the funding arrangements changed) which they have attributed to the need for expensive in-work support from the MGDs.

4.2 Assessments

This section of the report looks at how assessments of support needs are being organised and carried out under the new arrangements within MGDs. It is worth noting that fewer than 15 disabled employees interviewed for the research had received an assessment since their MGD had assumed responsibility for providing in-work support.

4.2.1 Sourcing and accessing assessments

HR leads' views

There were three models of workplace assessment in operation within MGDs. A few Departments had opted to contract out responsibility for all their workplace assessments to external OH providers. The majority of the MGDs, however, operated a dual system and had contracts with OH assessors complemented by assessments from specialist disability organisations (Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB), Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID), etc.) when the need arose. The remaining MGDs did not contract any assessments formally through occupational health providers but approached relevant specialist assessors as and when needed.

HR leads in Departments that had contracts with large external OH assessors were generally pleased with how the contracts were working, but there was a minority of Departments that reported difficulties (for reasons of contractual confidentiality we were unable to explore why). HR leads in these circumstances commented that there were too few OH providers large enough to cope with demand generated by large employers like MGDs, and a minority of Departments battled with unsuccessful contracts because of a lack of choice within the marketplace.

'There aren't enough suppliers in the marketplace that are big enough to do this...our volumes are a bit big.'

(HR lead)

MGDs that used specialist assessors found that these could be expensive and difficult to source. Some commented that they would like some guidance or, at the very least, the opportunity to share best practice with other Departments or a guide to preferred providers.

'I am fine with it being delegated and us doing our own thing, it makes sense, but there are certain areas, and this is one area for me, where there should be a list of registered, recommended assessors that all Government Departments use.'

(HR lead)

There was very little evidence of MGDs using AtW Business Centres to source assessments and few HR leads were aware that they could still use AtW for this purpose. The Departments that had used this service found that there were often long delays between contacting AtW and receiving the assessment. As a result, in a few cases, they had ended up sourcing their own assessments anyway.

4.2.2 Quality and appropriateness of assessments

The views of respondents on the quality of workplace assessments were mixed.

HR leads' views

HR leads were not always happy with the quality of the assessments or the responsiveness of OH providers, and many Departments had called in specialist assessors at extra cost to avoid long waits or inappropriate assessments. A number of HR leads felt that occupational health assessors were not always qualified to deal with more complex health conditions.

'Again it's the difference between physical impairment and mental impairment. They're generally OK on physical ones but sometimes more difficult on the mental health side; sometimes we've had contradictory advice there.'

(HR lead)

The HR leads who were the most satisfied with the way the assessments were working were those that hired specialist assessors as and when the need arose. Building up experience of different assessors meant they had managed to compile a list of preferred providers, who offered the highest quality and most cost effective service.

'We have other options out there and we have been able to compare the reports and that is why we stick to [assessment provider's name] because they don't only write a report but they actually do all the practical aspects as well, i.e. helping the individual to use the equipment to see what suits them. So that is the additional service so we rate them much better than the others we have seen.'

(HR lead)

Disabled employees' views

Disabled employees noted a marked difference in quality between the OH assessments provided by some MGDs and the specialist assessments commissioned by AtW (or the MGDs). A few commented that the occupational health assessments were not appropriate to their support needs. In a few extreme cases employees felt that the assessors did not fully understand the effects of their health conditions.

'I actually complained and I said "Look the [OH] doctor doesn't even know". He wasn't aware of what my condition was; he didn't know anything about my condition. What's the point of sending me this when they have no understanding of how my vision affects me?'

(Disabled employee)

Disabled employees were most satisfied with the service when they had received a specialist, disability specific assessment. These assessors tended to be the same specialist organisations as those used by AtW. Employees felt these assessments

were the most thorough. The expertise of the assessor often led to recommendations for adjustments that the employee would not have considered themselves.

'They're very good. And [assessment provider's name] took this recent [assessment], which was extremely good, and not only recommended keyboards and that sort of thing, but recommended how I should sit and everything.'

(Disabled employee)

Line managers' views

Line managers were rarely involved in the assessments provided for their employees although a couple commented that they too were dissatisfied with the quality of the OH assessments provided by the contracted organisation. Line managers felt they did not sufficiently address the needs of the employees nor suggest effective solutions for workplace support.

Line managers also noted that internal assessors were likely to make their recommendations based solely on the input of the disabled person. Managers thought that OH assessors did not have the expertise to recommend equipment that was impairment-specific and would ask the disabled person what they felt they needed. This approach was not necessarily the best solution for the individual, nor provided the best value for money for the MGDs.

'But as far as I know not all of it is terribly rigorous and if somebody says "I've got a bad back and I need a chair" and then the chair comes...it's more or less "I'd like one of those please" which is probably not the best cost effective way of doing things.'

(Line manager)

Line managers favoured the specialist disability assessors that were used by AtW and by some MGDs.

Trades union officers and branch representatives

Trades union officers had little direct experience of the assessments, as they usually became involved with cases after this stage of the process. However, one or two officers doubted that OH assessors had the experience to give advice on managing a disability in the workplace. Rather, the focus for OH assessors tended to be general well-being in work and trades union officers feared that they were ill equipped to explore workplace support in relation to specific and, in some cases, complex disabilities.

4.3 Decision-making process

Decisions on the support that was provided within MGDs following the transfer of responsibility were based on individuals' circumstances and assessments (where they had been undertaken) and were made by different people in different MGDs. In most Departments, the decision to provide support was taken by an HR representative; these could be the lead officer managing the fund, an employee who was responsible for managing reasonable adjustments, or an HR case worker looking after a caseload of disabled employees. However, in some Departments the decision to fund support was taken by the employee's line manager (see Figure 4.1). The research uncovered a general lack of clearly-defined decision-making processes within most MGDs in relation to funding in-work support. The research found that some Departments provided all the support that was recommended by assessors without further considering appropriateness or cost-effectiveness, whereas a small minority often questioned recommendations and looked for alternatives offering greater value for money. Many MGDs stated that they would take each case as it came and they were unable to elaborate on the decision-making process in more detail. There appears to be little uniformity or consistency in decision-making, certainly across Departments, and in many cases, within.⁶

4.3.1 Influences on decision-making

HR leads commented that decisions to purchase equipment or provide ongoing support were mainly based on the recommendations from the assessments. There was concern among the HR leads that this approach was not the most cost effective, but they did not have the expertise to question the assessments.

'Yes and because we've not got that knowledge, we can't make any of those judgements. We've got to rely on what we get back.'

(HR lead)

Due to this lack of expertise most MGDs (there was a small minority of exceptions to this) had taken the decision to provide the recommended support without questioning the suitability or cost-effectiveness. An example of the shortcomings of this arrangement was where one MGD was told by a specialist disability charity that the equipment recommended by the OH assessor (based on recommendations from the disabled employee) did not exist. HR leads were not aware of where to get advice on this on the appropriateness and cost-effectiveness of support recommendations coming from assessments.

Over time, several Departments had begun to work more closely with their assessors to understand recommendations and devise an approved list of suppliers (of equipment and compatible software, etc.). This liaison between MGDs and

⁶ By way of contrast, a Standard Operating Model was introduced for AtW in 2008 to ensure a more standard approach to administering AtW and to promote more consistent decision-making by advisers working with customers across England, Scotland and Wales.

assessors about appropriate equipment, etc. had helped to reduce employee waiting times and might be expected to extend to other support solutions as expertise and experience is gained.

4.3.2 Value for money

There was little evidence that considerations of value for money (i.e. of meeting disabled employees' support needs at the lowest cost) were a priority for MGDs when making decisions about the most appropriate support solutions, nor that assessment providers were required to consider value for money in their recommendations.⁷ Rather, concerns to 'do the right thing' and provide comprehensive in-work support for disabled employees appeared to dominate decision-making, and there was little evidence of any controls or check mechanisms within MGDs to monitor decisions or spending.

4.3.3 Difficulties and constraints

HR leads were not always clear about what support they should and should not fund, and where to draw the line. There was some discussion in the interviews with HR leads about how decisions were made and many posed questions about what elements of support they should be expected to fund from a budgetary point of view, rather than a value for money one. The research found a lack of consistency across (and sometimes within) MGDs in the decision-making process, often influenced by budgetary constraints. Some MGDs were clearly willing to pay for some quite expensive ongoing support, whereas others would be likely to question it. In one example, an HR lead questioned whether it was reasonable to fund one person's interpreter costs, which were going to be around £40,000 a year, when the Department's budget was only £15,000 for all in-work support. In another case, the HR department had looked into the possibility of funding a full-time Support Worker (SW) for someone with personal care needs but decided that it was not reasonable to pay for two people to do one job, whereas another MGD did fund full-time care (support) workers.

The most difficult decisions for Departments to make seemed to be those relating to ongoing support, such as TtW and SW, partly because they had less experience of organising and funding ongoing support (than of one-off adjustments), both before and after the funding changes. Departments have struggled to make consistent decisions on ongoing support and particularly on claims for TtW

⁷ The core evaluation of the Access to Work programme Dewson, A. *et al.* (2009) *Evaluation of Access to Work*, DWP Research Report No. 619 showed that AtW advisers are guided by the Standard Operating Model to get the best value for money when putting workplace support in place, that is, the best possible solution at the lowest price. Considerations of value for money include looking not only at costs however, but also at how quickly suppliers can get support in place, and assessing the level of after-care or customer service that they can provide to AtW customers subsequently.

support, and scepticism about the need for this type of support was commonly expressed. Under AtW, customers would receive TtW support for up to three years at a time whereas (some) MGDs now review the ongoing support costs of some employees at more frequent intervals. The following example illustrates the complexities and sensitivities related to this issue, and the lack of experience and guidance to MGDs about what is appropriate:

'A particular case at the moment with an individual that is suffering from [health condition]. The individual is claiming taxi fares to and from the office [and] the team has discussed the case with the occupational health doctor. The occupational health doctor sees the individual on a regular basis and the opinion of the occupational health doctor is the [health condition] is well under control...because the medication has been changed and therefore, there is not problem with this individual actually travelling to and from the office on public transport. So what we have to do now is go back to the individual and say well you really need to attend another session with the occupational health doctor and we need to discuss then whether or not we should actually be providing you with this particular type of service, so we are not withdrawing the support and we won't but we do need the individual to go and talk to the doctor.'

(HR lead)

Another issue related to ongoing support concerned how some types of support provided by the Departments were treated by tax authorities. As Departments were not familiar with providing ongoing support, they had not always devised systems that ensured that disabled employees claiming TtW paid a contribution to their fares that equated to public transport costs, as they would have done under AtW. In essence, many MGDs are paying some employees' entire travel costs. One HR lead worried that this could be classed as a benefit in kind for tax purposes and, at the time of the research they were seeking official clarification.

'It's a difficult one really because, again this is what Access to Work...could have been more helpful in giving us clarity on. There are a whole bunch of issues around Travel-to-Work because of the Inland Revenue issues around paying for someone to go from home to work and the benefit in kind issue. HMRC...are currently having a huge drive on benefit in kind payments and we have a difficulty here that we may be providing the benefit in kind or maybe it's regarded as a benefit in kind which DWP could have negotiated with HMRC up front...These kinds of issues haven't been thought through and I know they're going to blow up soon at some stage.'

(HR lead)

4.3.4 Level of decision-making

Comments on decision-making also centred on the level at which support decisions were taken and once again there were opposing views between MGDs. In MGDs where HR departments made the decisions, it was felt to be inappropriate for line managers to do this, particularly when adjustments and support were to be funded

from the business unit budget. HR leads felt this could increase the likelihood of discrimination if the line manager made decisions with conflicting interests.

'You'd be doing it as you see fit sort of thing and it could be that someone's getting different treatment in different Government Departments that may be sitting next door to each other in Whitehall for example. And there would be different levels of care given I dare say.'

(HR lead)

In another MGD, the HR lead said that decision-making was problematic for line managers as they would deal with fewer cases and have less chance to build up any expertise and develop clear procedures.

'They know that they have to provide them themselves out of their own budgets. If you said to me "How does the policy actually operate?" I would say to you "patchily". And it's partly because reasonable adjustments are relatively infrequent...and the other factor is, because it's not regularly repeated people don't have to become familiar with it...The implementation of the policies and procedures are patchy.'

(HR lead)

However, in the few MGDs that left the decision-making to line managers, HR leads felt that that was the most appropriate route, as line managers and their teams directly benefited from providing adjustments and in-work support. Line managers were generally not left to make decisions on their own: if they needed extra support they could ask HR personnel and other staff within the Department for advice.

4.3.5 Disabled employees' views

Only a few interviewed employees had had an assessment since the funding transfer and most reported that they had received all the equipment that was recommended and were satisfied with the decisions made and the support received from their Department. Most reported that they were happy with the subsequent support provided to them by the MGDs.

'I've recently had a new desk, we've had [an] accommodation change at work so I've got an adjustable desk, it's height adjustable, it's made a big difference. I've got a manually height adjustable desk at home as well so in terms of anything, I've got break software...I've got a hands free phone, I think any technology they have been very happy to provide, which is part of the reason I said I'd do it, that hasn't been an issue.'

(Disabled employee)

However, there was a very small, but important, minority of cases where the assessment and decision-making process had not gone well, or the outcome was deemed unsatisfactory from the disabled employees' perspective. In most of these examples, the decision-making responsibility lay with the line manager.

A couple of employees stated that their managers had refused to purchase equipment on the grounds of cost or because they did not believe that support was needed, even though the support needs had not changed since the transfer. One disabled employee had gone back to HR and another division within the MGD had subsequently paid for their equipment.

'Fortunately the director of the IT unit paid for it off his own business credit card in the end, because my manager would just not pay it or anything.'

(Disabled employee)

A couple of disabled employees reported that decisions about their support were being made very regularly, and their need for ongoing support was the subject of constant scrutiny even though (again) their support needs had not changed since before the transfer of funding from AtW. One of these employees was now receiving less support than they had under AtW and at the time of the transfer.

Some employees reported that they were experiencing delays in receiving new support, and particularly equipment, because funding was not yet available; equipment would be purchased but only when the budget allowed. A few disabled employees also reported that the decision-making process was being delayed because line managers did not know how to make decisions or who to go to for help on how to do so. The disabled employees who found themselves in these positions were extremely upset about the status of these decisions, and in one or two cases employees were in the process of pursuing complaints or appeals through trades unions or employment tribunals.

More generally, decisions about support needs were not always perceived by disabled employees to be taken purely on the basis of need. Some disabled employees reported that MGDs were (in some cases at least) influenced primarily by cost, or by how difficult the adjustments would be to implement. Some concern was also expressed about the level at which decisions were made. In particular, disabled employees were worried that when line managers were making decisions about support provision, they were likely to take account of factors other than simply the support needs of the employee. Such factors included:

- relationship with the employee;
- costs and budget availability;
- performance or competence of the employee;
- seniority of disabled staff member.

Almost all employees interviewed agreed that their line manager's attitude towards supporting disabled staff was critical to the likelihood of having their support needs met.

4.3.6 Line managers' views

Line managers' views (where they were responsible for decision-making) were very different to those of disabled employees with most reporting that they made decisions to provide the recommended equipment and support, and in some cases more. They appreciated that if they wanted to keep a productive team member then it was necessary to provide appropriate support. However, as mentioned earlier, the sample of line managers in this research was skewed towards those with a positive relationship with their employee.

Line managers commented that it was easier to support adjustments that were organised and purchased by other departments, such as HR, welfare support, IT departments and estates. However, they did not feel they had the expertise to make these decisions themselves and they worried about how cost effective their decisions were.

Staff seniority seems to have an impact on the decision-making process: junior line managers often referred decisions to their own line managers or departmental heads which made the decision-making process protracted. In addition, some managers worried about the consistency of the decision-making process if it was devolved to individual line managers. There was little evidence to suggest that good practice was shared between line managers both within and between Departments in relation to decisions on in-work support.

4.3.7 Trades union officers and branch representatives

Trades union officers and branch representatives expressed similar concerns to those raised by disabled employees, some HR leads and line managers. They were concerned that a lack of clarity and transparency in the decision-making processes resulted in uncertainty for employees, a lack of consistency within and across Departments and the potential for discrimination against disabled staff. As there was often little transparency in the decision-making process it would be difficult to determine the reasons behind decisions taken to award in-work support or not.

Both trades union officers and branch representatives feared that line managers would make decisions about in-work support based solely on cost. Officers and branch representatives highlighted that they were particularly concerned for staff who received ongoing support as this was often the most costly. They feared that staff receiving this support would be more likely to have it withdrawn as the costs for providing this support continued over an extended period of time, rather than a one off payment, although there is no evidence to suggest that this is currently the case.

4.3.8 Implications of unclear decision-making processes

As discussed above, the lack of transparent decision-making processes meant that disabled employees were often not clear about the process or of their likely entitlement to in-work support, and did not know how to challenge any decisions they felt were incorrect. In most Departments, HR leads reported that challenges

could be made through the standard grievance procedures. One interviewed employee taking part in the research had reached this stage but he did not feel that this was the best way of addressing complaints. Although this employee had completed the grievance procedure within the allotted time frame, he had not heard anything from the Department. In this example, the employee experienced increased tension in (already stressed) relationships with colleagues and suspected that he would suffer within his team for fighting for some support. A number of other disabled employees in the research were starting to involve trades unions to help access support and there were also one or two employees who were in the process of pursuing (or about to pursue) employment tribunal cases against the MGDs for failure to make reasonable adjustments

4.4 Getting support in place, reviews and follow-up support

The following section explores the issues relating to putting in-work support in place, training and immediate follow-up support, and review processes.

4.4.1 Timely support

Few MGDs had any kind of formal targets or benchmarks to track or monitor the time taken to put support in place. HR leads in MGDs without formal application processes commented that they tried to get things in place as quickly as possible.

As was also the case under AtW, the in-work support that typically took the longest to supply was Special Aids and Equipment (SAE) (particularly IT equipment and custom-made chairs and desks), and HR leads felt there was little the MGDs could do about the delays. Other delays occurred in MGD procurement and purchasing departments and this seemed to be a particular problem where staff and line managers were in more junior grades as they did not have enough seniority (or possibly confidence) to move the process along.

'Somebody in the E-delivery group was supposed to be taking it forward. I think it's moved to two to three people since. It involved a certain part of the organisation and that's it. It's going round the houses.'

(Disabled employee)

HR leads expressed particular concern with regard to SWs, again, largely due to a lack of experience of providing such support. One HR lead suggested that a central framework agreement should be established for SWs, otherwise Departments have to organise this individually, which is costly, time-consuming and can lead to inconsistencies in provision. Another difficulty arises because SWs are counted primarily as agency staff and MGD policy, due to recruitment freezes and headcount issues, states that agency staff cannot work for the civil service for more than 11 months. In one example, a disabled employee lost their SW every 11 months and had to establish a new working relationship with a new SW each

time. This case was exacerbated as the employee worked with sensitive data and each new SW had to go through expensive security checks every time before being employed.

Delays in receiving support seem to have had a negative effect on some disabled staff and the research found examples of employees feeling uncomfortable and being limited in the amount of work they could do until the support arrived. In a minority of cases, delays in putting support in place had led to questions regarding the disabled person's competence; the need for support had become confused with performance issues.

4.4.2 Training and follow-up support

As is the case with AtW, employees in some MGDs got help to use their in-work support and equipment, such as training on specialist IT equipment or adjustments to custom-made chairs, and some did not. A few Departments had organised this additional element of support routinely:

'And for some of our equipment like JAWS⁸ – a blind member of staff uses – they have regular training and updates done by our IT people.'

(HR lead)

Employees in other MGDs reported receiving software packages and being left alone to learn how to use them. In these cases, disabled employees often felt as though they were not using the equipment properly, or to its fullest potential.

'It's a question of support – there wasn't really any support to use the package, you were just left, "There it is – plug it in".'

(Disabled employee)

Disabled employees also commented that they had received special chairs and had to work out how to adjust them themselves. Many felt that they were not doing this correctly and might negate the benefits the chair would otherwise provide.

The research also threw up issues to do with the maintenance and repair of equipment. In one example, a line manager had repaired a broken chair because there were no procedures in place and it was not clear who was responsible for maintenance.

A minority of disabled employees commented that some line managers thought that providing equipment and support was the end of their role in the process, and the employees' needs were essentially met whilst others took a more proactive and ongoing approach to providing support. One employee, who had experienced both styles of management stated:

⁸ JAWS is a software programme that reads electronic documents aloud for partially sighted people.

'Some have had the view that the Access to Work stuff would cure me. It was very much the case with my last team leader. "You've had your IT kit, why do I need to bother?" Whereas the line manager I just had, she was the opposite. She tried to understand how I needed to work to get stuff done, saw that you could change the job role and work to my strengths rather than my weaknesses.'

(Disabled employee)

4.4.3 Reviewing support

HR leads' views

The review systems implemented by HR leads in Departments with more centralised systems of in-work support tended to take the form of follow-up contact with disabled employees between three and six months after the support was put in place. In some MGDs this involved simple review forms, but in most cases it involved more informal contact, such as a phone call from the HR representative dealing to ask how things were going with the support provided. After this initial check, HR leads stated that it was the disabled employee's responsibility to contact the relevant person/department if they needed any further support, which would usually result in a new assessment of needs. In MGDs with decentralised in-work support systems, reviews were expected to be conducted by line managers but there appeared to be little guidance for managers to help them to do that.

MGDs seemed to struggle the most when reviewing ongoing support needs, such as TtW and SW. Departments had much less experience of determining if an employee needed ongoing support, and how much, and importantly for how long⁹. Some HR leads were concerned that there were people within the Department who received ongoing support but who no longer required it. However, they were unsure how to review these cases.

'The ongoing stuff that we need to do some more follow-up on, which is something we need to think about, is taxi fares...Although I think off hand, probably 95 per cent who have got taxi fares have got quite severe disabilities and are not going to get any better, there might be the odd one or two that we ought to be following up. We do tend to keep an eye on those but it is not as formal as I would like it to be.'

(HR lead)

HR leads in most Departments acknowledged that more work was needed on their review systems as their initial concern at the time of the transfer had been to ensure that all the staff continued to receive their support. Their review processes were something that most were working on for the future, and particularly how to monitor and review ongoing support needs.

⁹ Under AtW, customers ongoing support needs are usually formally reviewed every three years.

A key problem faced by HR leads was that most did not have a comprehensive central record of who received in-work support. Given the informal nature of most of the application procedures for in-work support, and the fact that employees could apply for support via several routes, monitoring and tracking support was generally not possible. In the MGDs with decentralised support systems, it was mainly the responsibility of the key actors involved in assessing and providing the support to review ongoing or changing needs, and keep records updated. There appeared, in most cases, to be little guidance for these actors on how to do that (particularly for the provision of ongoing support).

A few HR leads commented that it would be hard to establish and maintain a centralised database of in-work support as much of the support was fairly small scale (for example, a mouse or a small piece of software) and it would be onerous and resource-intensive to log this type of information. In several cases, different departments within MGDs were responsible for different elements of support (such as IT departments, estates and HR) which made keeping such a database up-to-date very difficult.

Frequent staff movements at all levels and grades within and between MGDs, which applied both to disabled employees and their line managers presented another difficulty in reviewing support needs and this related to staff movement within and between Departments. Many of the line managers interviewed had already moved on from being the disabled employee's line manager and the disabled employee had to re-negotiate their support with each new line manager.

Disabled employees' views

There were mixed views from the disabled employees about the general absence of formal review processes. A few employees felt that the onus was (rightly, in their view) on them to request any further equipment they needed or to hand back equipment or support no longer required.

'[HR are] a small team. As I say, as far as I'm concerned they do check it and I think part of it is about people having to take responsibility... You can't just expect the organisation to do everything.'

(Disabled employee)

Whilst a few disabled employees felt that they were subject to excessively regular reviews others felt differently and commented that it would be useful to have more regular contact with Departments about the support that they had received.

'It might be a good idea mightn't it? Maybe just sending someone off into the wide blue yonder without actually checking up on them in however many years... Well it's not that long, but still, it does seem a bit odd.'

(Disabled employee)

A few disabled employees who had received one-off equipment commented that regular reviews would be a good idea as it would mean any changes in support

needs would be identified quickly. This would have a dual benefit, both ensuring the employee had all the support needed, and checking if they had equipment they no longer needed, which could be used to support other members of staff.

In the absence of formal reviews, some disabled employees were concerned about their support in the future. This led to feelings of insecurity and uncertainty, but employees were nervous of mentioning changes in their support needs in case support was withdrawn. Some examples of disabled employees' concerns focused on increases in Travel-to-Work costs.

'I'm concerned that they ask me for more money, I can't afford it truly, to be quite honest. So I'm thinking "I hope it doesn't go up". You know really they are asking for more contribution. And hopefully the cab will not go up this year, but it depends on petrol.'

(Disabled employee)

Some interviewees (especially more junior employees) expressed confusion about who they should speak to for reassurance about future support, about reviews and in order to access further support. In one or two cases employees made direct comparisons to the regular reviews of ongoing support under AtW and stated that they preferred this system as it meant they knew exactly how long the support would be in place for before it was reviewed.

Line managers' views

Line managers who were actively involved in providing in-work support used regular 'one-to-one' meetings and appraisal meetings to monitor and review the support needs of disabled employees. However, there was little evidence of guidance on how this should be done and this approach was not uniformly adopted.

'I rely on him to tell me if there is a problem [which he has] that I may not know about. I know about the obvious ones. I may not know about the everyday ones.'

(Line manager)

Line managers expressed concern that additional or follow-up support needs would be mentioned only by staff who were comfortable to talk about their disability and to ask to have their needs met. They believed that less confident disabled employees would not ask them for additional support. This left managers responsible for asking these more sensitive questions, which many, without appropriate guidance, felt uncomfortable and unqualified to do.

Trades union officers and branch representatives

Trades union representatives did not have a clear understanding of the review processes in place (or not) within MGDs but were concerned that without regular reviews and follow-up disabled employees would not know how to access further support.

Trades union branch representatives were also concerned that, as the MGDs had no monitoring systems in place, they lacked a clear picture of what was happening with regard to in-work support and how much Departments were spending over time.

'I've actually posed the question with my top-level budget holder of how many people are in receipt of funding for reasonable adjustments [sic]. And the response was that that information is not held at that level, which poses the question whether or not you can put into place planning strategies.'

(Trades union branch representative)

5 Funding workplace support

The key findings from this chapter are:

- Two models for funding in-work support predominated within Ministerial Government Departments (MGDs).
- Around half of all MGDs had a central fund for in-work support, usually held by HR or the diversity department.
- In other MGDs, funding was decentralised and line managers or divisional business units were responsible for resourcing in-work support.
- Human Resource (HR) leads and line managers were often concerned about how to budget for in-work support, and particularly ongoing support costs for Travel-to-Work (TtW) and Support Worker (SW), which could be expensive.
- Some disabled employees had begun to experience problems getting their support needs funded even though their needs had not changed.

Chapter 5 looks at how workplace support is funded within MGDs following the transfer of responsibility from Access to Work (AtW) to MGDs. It begins by identifying the main current models for funding in-work support after the transfer and then explores the impact that the funding changes have had on MGDs and disabled employees.

5.1 Funding structures and budgets

5.1.1 HR leads

Funding structures for workplace support in MGDs were varied and fairly complex although two models of funding predominated as illustrated by Figure 4.1.

More than half the MGDs had a central fund to pay for in-work support and this was often called the Reasonable Adjustment budget or in some MGDs, the AtW budget. In most cases this fund was held by the HR or diversity department, whilst in a few the fund was held by the occupational health (OH) department. In addition, some MGDs operating a centralised budget model shared this responsibility with other central departments, such as IT or procurement divisions, which generally paid for items of workplace support such as Special Aids and Equipment (SAE). In the centralised funding model, the annual budget for workplace support varied considerably based largely on the size of the Department (from £15,000 to £380,000 in the MGDs interviewed).

In the remaining MGDs, funding for workplace support was largely decentralised and came from a division/business unit or line manager budget. Having said this most MGDs had IT, estates or buildings departments which normally paid for adaptations to premises and specialised IT-related equipment. In a few MGDs with a decentralised funding model, HR departments retained a separate budget to cover some in-work support, a carry-over from when DWP funded AtW, although this was said to be a small budget which would reduce over time. HR departments in a few of these MGDs also have funds set aside for workplace support required by more than one person, for example, paying for a British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter to attend a Disability Network meeting or for a palantypist to come to a unit meeting. Interestingly, an MGD that started off with a decentralised (business unit) funding model after the funding transfer, had since moved to a centralised budget.

In the decentralised model no figures were available on overall spend. Line managers were responsible for funding ongoing support such as TtW and SWs. Business units would also be responsible for funding additional one-off support including parking, taxis between sites and wheelchairs used solely in the workplace. In MGDs with decentralised funding, these funds were often not ring-fenced but part of the overall divisional or line managers' budget.

One MGD adopted a hybrid model in which line managers sanctioned costs up to £3,000 but anything over this amount was agreed by HR central fund holders.

As reported above, the size of budgets in Departments which had a centralised budget available for workplace support varied immensely but it was not always clear how that budget was set. In some cases, it was based on previous spend. As a result staff in charge of organising budgets would review the spend year on year to determine trends and how much money would be needed the following financial year. This system had worked so far. However, a small number of HR leads pointed out that it would only need one employee requiring some very expensive support to upset these financial forecasts.

'The main kind of impact for us financially has been largely taxi fares because...that can impact quite heavily financially. Wheelchairs is another area which we might not think of as being quite expensive but if I give you a couple of examples, one wheelchair we purchased cost £10,000 and another wheelchair we are in the process of purchasing at the moment cost £3,000 so it is very difficult to try and predict exactly how much you are going to spend on these kind of areas. You have to leave a certain amount to be able to ensure that we can meet other costs in the meantime.'

(HR lead)

In another Department where funding was centralised, the HR lead reported that the budget for workplace support had nearly run out the previous year and when a disabled employee needed an SW, the funding had to be found by drawing on another part of the HR budget. Funding workplace support was reported to be having an impact on other parts of the HR budget in many Departments, particularly training budgets.

'Yes, there was an impact on our occupational health and safety training, there was an impact. We had just procured an initial suite of learning tools with intention to broaden that out and that's been delayed. We had also had a program of [health and safety] audits, departmental audits which we had to pull back on so, instead of doing...ten audits a year, we now are doing five audits a year.'

(HR lead)

Another concern, related to budgets for in-work support raised by HR leads, was that if they did not use all their allocation for support and adjustments during the current financial year, it was in danger of being reduced the following financial year.

'The budget is going to be reduced next year because it hasn't been utilised this year...It is ample at the moment but of course who knows when there is more advertising, I don't know...Because that is difficult isn't it? You have a pot of money but actually, if there is only one person or one tutor with a very expensive need that reduces it quite considerably.'

(HR lead)

5.1.2 Line managers

Line managers seemed fairly clear about whether their MGD operated a centralised or decentralised funding model. However, in Departments with a decentralised approach, line managers often struggled to find the resources to pay for support. Some line managers interviewed were concerned that they did not have the resources within their budgets to pay for very costly ongoing support. Although, as noted above, many Departments with decentralised structures still had central funding streams that managers could access, they were often unaware that they could draw on these additional resources if needed, as these messages had not filtered down. Managers reported that it could take a lot of time and determination

to find the right person to speak to about additional monies for in-work support. The research found some examples where managers had told employees that they would have to wait until the next financial year for their support to be funded as there were insufficient resources to cover the expenditure in the current year.

5.1.3 Disabled employees

Disabled employees interviewed were not particularly concerned about who paid for their support, or whether the funding was centralised or decentralised, but only that they were provided with support so that they could do their jobs.

'I really don't know but I got the kit so I didn't really mind who paid for it. It is all coming out of the Treasury money I guess eventually.'

(Disabled employee)

Disabled staff did, however, require some understanding of funding processes as many of them, particularly in decentralised structures, had to navigate their way through the systems to access support. Many employees seemed to have to drive the process in order to get support, so a lack of awareness was problematic. One employee with dyslexia reported that they had been waiting some time for specialist equipment; however, it was unclear whether this was coming from the central IT budget, or from the divisional budget. In this example the employee did not know who to contact to chase up the support, lack of which was affecting their ability to do the job.

5.1.4 Trades union officers and branch representatives

Trades union officers and branch representatives had concerns about the new funding structures, particularly in MGDs with decentralised funding decisions. Their main worry was that line managers would have to fund support at a time of tightening budgets. Trades union officers and branch representatives were also concerned that budget holders might not plan adequately for workplace support.

'Whether in the longer term there will be issues over...the lack of funding remains to be seen. I don't personally feel that budget holders plan well enough for it, they tend to react...Say if someone moves into their area [and] requires some reasonable adjustment funding, they react to it rather than planning for the fact...You'd hope it wouldn't be an issue.'

(Trades union branch representative)

Trades union officers and branch representatives were also worried that MGDs would fund only reasonable adjustments (as required by the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995) and would, in time, curtail AtW-type expenditure that went over and above these adjustments.

'Well I think it is worrying about how it is going to affect...members, because of the budget, and [also] whether or not the current level of support will be classed as reasonable adjustments and I think that is where line managers are going to make their decisions. As I say a lot of Access to Work funding went much further...'

(Trades union officer)

Essentially, trades unions were concerned that MGDs would begin to make decisions based on what was a reasonable adjustment because of budgetary constraints, but that they would go no further to support staff with other needs, for example, TtW or SW.

5.2 Funding issues

5.2.1 HR leads

HR leads reported that the transfer of responsibility for in-work support from AtW to MGDs has had a significant financial impact on Departmental budgets. At the same time, Departments were expected to be making savings, and many were finding it difficult to fund support which had previously been met by AtW, particularly ongoing support.

'The constraints that we have are around administration costs and that's the area that funds these kind of things. You know, for the Government on the one hand to be saying "We're not going to be giving you [AtW] any more and we're also going to take away the money you have to [fund] your own support" seems a bit illogical. I mean it makes it hard to make the right kinds of decisions, everybody does, but it means sacrificing something in other areas.'

(HR lead)

An additional cost that MGDs incurred with the funding transfer was the considerable (unforeseen) resources within Departments required to administer the service. The demands on HR budgets to provide and administer an in-work support service were a particular problem, not only because of decreasing budgets in central government, but also because the HR function was shrinking.

'I know there's an expectation in central Government Departments [that] we can afford to [administer support], but in a climate where central government has been shrinking, actually that resource becomes finite... They need to recognise that...there are added pressures on Departments that they haven't even factored in. There's just the expectation that "[AtW] don't do this any more, somebody will pick this up"...because somehow I've got a big box of people that I can open up and they will all jump out and do lots of different things...'

(HR lead)

Another HR lead expressed concerns about being able to fund the ongoing costs of supporting their disabled employees, in this example, people with hearing impairments, at a time of reducing resources. This illustrates the challenge for HR departments (and line managers in MGDs with decentralised funding) and shows how decisions about workplace support are likely to be (increasingly) influenced by budgetary factors, to the detriment of disabled employees.

'We have an officer who needs an increasing amount of lip speaker support. I'm getting to the point where I think we need to seriously review. I don't know how I'm going to afford it. I've said we'll put in a request for extra money but there will have to come a point where I make the judgement about whether the amount of support this officer is receiving is reasonable any longer. If Access to Work was still available I wouldn't have those questions in my mind.'

(HR lead)

Generally, HR leads felt strongly that more funding was needed for in-work support. One HR lead wanted to extend the support on offer, and be more proactive, by installing induction loops in more offices and meeting rooms, funding an in-house, full-time signer and introducing BSL training for staff who would like it. However, the funding transfer had impacted significantly on this MGD's budget and such 'additional' services that had been provided previously (or planned) had to be stopped.

In another MGD, the HR lead mentioned a case they were currently dealing with where a line manager was (for reasons currently unclear) refusing to fund a disabled employee's TtW costs. There was also confusion over whether the employee, based in a regional office of the MGD, was still covered by AtW.

'It's interesting because I'm currently dealing with an individual who's based in our [area] office who has gone to the jobcentre [for advice on] coming back to work and has been told she can have Access to Work. I've taken that up now with the line manager and said actually she can't have this because we're not entitled to it. I said the only thing you can think about as an adjustment item is, you know, she goes and finds three quotes for a taxi fare and I'm afraid it's funded by yourselves, and we [got] the clear response: "No we ain't", and that's my recent experience in the last week.'

(HR lead)

A number of HR leads expressed surprise at the funding transfer of responsibility from AtW to MGDs, arguing that the money necessary to support disabled employees was all public money, which suggests that more could have been done to explain the rationale for the change to those involved in implementing it.

'So DWP took a saving but that saving isn't a real saving in the public purse, I would suggest, because [the Government] are still paying. I don't know whether the costs, whether it was more effectively delivered centrally...Fair play would have been that they transfer the budget allocation. I am not against being required to deliver the initial service but one Department can't take the savings at the cost of another.'

(HR lead)

The funding situation in MGDs was exacerbated by the delayed communication about the changes which meant that Departments and, in many cases, line managers, were unable to budget for these extra costs.

'It did have an impact. There was no additional money allocated into our health and safety budget so we had to absorb it within the [existing] health and safety budget.'

(HR lead)

5.2.2 Disabled employees

Some disabled employees had experienced problems with the way in-work support was being funded within MGDs. Some, particularly in MGDs with decentralised funding systems, faced difficulties getting their line managers to fund ongoing workplace support. In one example, a previous AtW recipient had moved Departments following a period in the redeployment pool and was having difficulties because their new line manager could not find the funding for TtW costs.

'I asked my new line manager for confirmation of the cost centre code my fares should go against. Apparently there is still ongoing problems [sic]. As I was employed after funds for the financial year had been agreed, there is no budget for my taxis. The centre state that the directorate have to meet the costs but there is no provision to transfer extra funds to meet the cost. By devolving this to Departments rather than Access to Work dealing with it, as an impartial department, I do feel that it is disadvantaging those with special needs. Can you really blame line managers for not wanting this sort of aggravation?'

(Disabled employee)

A few examples of similar problems in Departments with centralised funding systems were also found. In one MGD, disabled employees reported problems getting their HR department to fund ongoing costs for an SW and TtW. In both cases, the HR department was reviewing the disabled employees' support and questioning whether ongoing support was still necessary although the individuals' support needs had not changed. The disabled employees in these examples felt that they had amply demonstrated that they needed the support and thought that the MGDs were reviewing these cases to save money. In the case of a disabled employee with a hearing impairment, the situation had not been resolved.

'HR said they'd try and find a budget but nothing has been done. They said they should have a budget but they said they didn't have a budget...I have no idea how this support will be paid for. We're waiting for HR. There's been no response from HR, they're trying to sort it out. Interpreters are waiting to be paid. It's a big problem. It's quite embarrassing.'

(Disabled employee)

In another Department, a disabled employee with a visual impairment had been having problems getting the Department to fund an SW because of the costs involved. This disabled employee had also been turned down for a job in another unit and was told explicitly this was because of the costs and complications of hiring an SW. A number of other employees reported that they had been turned down for promotion and feared this was because of the extra costs associated with their disability. In the example below, a disabled employee was turned down for a job in another MGD although she was the only candidate.

'I did actually go for a job in another Department and I'm just the only candidate and I qualified for it but they didn't give it to me and I think, in hindsight, maybe it was because of my disability. They'd be thinking...well their budget's been cut severely and it's just another factor really.'

(Disabled employee)

This employee also had experience of working within the HR function and explained how an employee's disabilities and their associated costs were taken into account when making recruitment (and promotion) decisions.

'Because I'm actually working in employee relations and we have disabled staff who we're going to offer jobs to and we think about it and say "Is it going to be too expensive?"...Also at work I note how often we get emails from line managers who basically say "Oh do we really have to employ that person? They're disabled. You know they'll need a whole load of equipment and so that's going to be extra work. Who wants to work with them? I've always ended up...I've got lumbered". They always say "I've got lumbered with somebody".'

(Disabled employee)

Most employees who had previously received AtW funding reported that they preferred the old system of central funding administered through Jobcentre Plus.

In a few MGDs, disabled employees' experiences had been more positive and few reported any problems with the funding of support.

'I'm pleased it has been a statutory change. ...I wasn't aware that that change did take place and the only comment I would have is to back up what I've said before, if what that means is that the organisation can respond more quickly to meeting an employees' needs then that would be a good thing.'

(Disabled employee)

In these Departments, the important factors seem to have been that funding was held centrally by HR and that the budgets were large enough to cope with demand. However, there was some concern that increasing demand and a few costly support items could use up the budget.

5.2.3 Line managers

In MGDs with a decentralised funding model, some line managers had experienced problems funding in-work support for their disabled employees. In one example, a line manager had found it difficult to fund interpreter costs from their own line budget and had turned to their senior management for help, which had caused some difficulties in itself.

'They don't come under the training heading, they come under the subsistence heading and subsistence is always a problem... But the bosses did question it. I said "It's required. We need it." They accept it but it came out of the subsistence part of the budget as opposed to the training part of the budget... I may say he needs it but my boss may say "Why?" If I can convince him that he needs it then he gets it. It means I have to convince them. If I say I need an interpreter because he has to go on a health and safety course or a fire training course which are mandatory they don't question it, they just sign the paper. For something else I might have to explain and justify it. It means I have to think about it.'

(Line manager)

Line managers interviewed also expressed concerns about how managers in other units had responded to the funding changes. In one MGD, a line manager reported how their disabled employee had moved to another position and had experienced problems with their new line manager struggling to cover their TtW costs, when the disabled employee started in their new role in the middle of the financial year.

'I think the problem arrived in the early days when it was no longer the Department paying centrally for things; it was then rolled out and the groups had to find the money. Obviously we were of course going to pay for the disabled employee, but some groups I know have expressed concern and I certainly now think in the disabled employee's new job I think they raised eyebrows when she first went there. It was almost like "What's this addition to funds that we need to find from the group?"'

(Line manager)

Most line managers in MGDs with decentralised budgets thought it would be better if funding was dealt with centrally to avoid some of the vagaries associated with a decentralised budget.

'I think maybe it would be better if the Department itself had a central fund for Access to Work rather than putting the responsibilities on groups which could...in some ways may deter them from taking the person on. It shouldn't do but they may have a feeling – well this person is going to (apart from of course costing the normal salary) is also going to cost us extra because we're going to pay for them coming in and setting down to work everyday, or whatever days they come in. And that is a big chunk of a budget when budgets are already being cut and slashed.'

(Line manager)

6 Future provision

The key findings from this chapter are:

- Human Resource (HR) leads planned to make improvements to in-work support systems and particularly to: monitoring support needs and spending; improving follow-up support; raising awareness and simplifying in-work support systems.
- Most disabled employees were happy in their current jobs and with the amount of in-work support they received.
- Some disabled employees were aiming to progress in their careers whilst others felt constrained to stay in their current posts because of their support needs and concerns about moving to other parts of the department.
- There were some concerns raised by staff about whether their support needs would continue to be funded in the future.
- HR leads were keen to fully support disabled people and thought that the devolution of responsibility for doing so to Ministerial Government Departments (MGDs) was the right way forward for policy.

This chapter explores how MGDs plan to provide workplace support in the future, both for existing staff members and potential recruits. The chapter also examines the future employment plans of disabled employees and any impact that the change in funding arrangements has had on those plans.

6.1 The future for in-work support

This section concentrates on MGDs' future plans for providing workplace support for both existing staff and potential recruits, with a particular focus on the responses of the HR leads.

6.1.1 Plans for workplace support systems

Many HR leads commented that improvements were needed to the systems they had implemented for providing workplace support. Only a small minority of Departments reported no future plans to adapt or improve the systems. Such plans were concentrated in one or more of the following areas:

- monitoring systems;
- raising awareness;
- streamlining current processes;
- changing the funding structures.

Monitoring systems

A number of HR leads were aiming to put systems in place to monitor the help being provided and the money spent on in-work support, in order to improve planning strategies for budgets, and to incorporate more formal follow-up processes.

'Yes, what I'd like to do is to put some more monitoring in there so that we know how much we do spend, so we can monitor trends. We can see what we are spending the money on. Is it generally software? Is it generally equipment, Support Workers or whatever, to get some sort of idea.'

(HR lead)

Raising awareness

A key area identified for future development was to improve their communications strategy and raise awareness of the service they provided for disabled staff.

'I think I'd get into more, just a bit more, communications really. And if we could increase that I think that would be helpful.'

(HR lead)

Plans included improved dissemination routes so that staff could be confident about how to access in-work support. HR leads also wanted to run information and awareness training for staff working with or managing disabled employees.

'Like everything, everything can always be improved. I think one of the things that we're working on is ensuring everyone is aware that this provision is available centrally and we don't want people with disabilities to face any obstacles in terms of funding for their reasonable adjustments.'

(HR lead)

By improving the level of information available to staff and speaking openly about reasonable adjustments, workplace support and disability, HR leads hoped they would help to foster a culture of acceptance within the MGDs. Some HR leads focused on raising awareness of specific health conditions and impairments, particularly with the most stigma attached to them, including mental health

conditions. Plans to raise awareness were still in the early phases and these Departments had yet to make clear how they would go about this task.

'We've got some plans for possibly later on this year in terms of supporting individuals with mental illness and long-term health conditions and we're thinking hard about that, it's a topical issue at the moment, plus across government...[for example] with Dame Carol Black on long-term absences.'

(HR lead)

Streamlining current processes

Most MGDs were still in the process of developing and embedding coherent systems to provide in-work support, and many HR leads talked about streamlining support services in the future and making them more efficient and easier to run. There was also an intention to make workplace support systems easier for disabled employees and others to navigate.

'It is quite resource intensive really. We know it is something we have got to do. We are always looking at ways we can streamline this really.'

(HR lead)

At the time of the research, a few Departments had already started to review their existing processes and develop more strategic approaches to providing support. Some HR leads were beginning to liaise with IT departments, for example, to ensure greater compatibility between disability software and Departmental operating systems. Others were devising policies and processes to move Special Aids and Equipment (SAE) within and between Departments because the disabled employees moved Departments and ironing out some contractual glitches experienced with assessment providers.

'It is quite difficult sometimes; a lot of the problems we have with reasonable adjustments are particularly around the Information Support systems. As far as we are concerned, it would make more sense for IS to be more involved in perhaps ordering equipment and that sort of thing, which I think should give a better result for the customer but we will have to see where we get with that.'

(HR lead)

Changes to funding structures

Most Departments had no plans to change the way that funding workplace support was structured. In most cases, HR leads were happy with the current funding systems. However, a small minority of Departments with a decentralised, line management approach to funding were exploring the idea of switching to a central fund, or a mixed model to take the pressure off line managers and budgets (and one had already changed to a centralised model).

'I'm not quite sure (I think is what I'm trying to say) whether we would continue with the current arrangements. I would like line managers to have some sort of involvement and some sort of responsibility in some way, possibly even approving adjustments even if they're paid for by us centrally, in the same way that there's a form to complete, they know what is being put in place for their member of staff.'

(HR lead)

In these cases, HR leads seemed to be responding to the complaints and concerns of disabled employees, line managers and trades union representatives, who were concerned that decentralisation increased the likelihood of discrimination.

As we have seen, many HR leads acknowledged that their in-work support systems needed to be improved. Interestingly, although HR leads were aware of (some) concerns at a grassroots level, there was almost no evidence of formal feedback from staff involved in accessing workplace support, for example, through service user satisfaction surveys, or staff surveys. Several HR leads were unaware of delays and problems within their systems simply because they had not been informed.

6.2 The future for disabled employees

Disabled employees discussed two topics related to future provision: their employment plans for the future; and how the funding changes had affected these plans and their future access to in-work support

6.2.1 Employment plans

Future employment plans for disabled employees involved one of four options:

- retire;
- stay in current post;
- progress;
- move jobs.

In all cases apart from retirement plans, the funding changes to in-work support had an affect on some employees' plans.

Staying in current post

Most disabled staff interviewed wished to stay in their current posts and were happy with their job and pleased with the workplace support that was provided. They also reported positive impressions of the MGDs and their colleagues' attitude and approach towards disability.

'So at the moment the plan is for me to continue working as I am. I am very happy within the unit but I am now working two mornings a week from home and one morning from the office. And at present I don't see any reason to deviate from that pattern because it's what works best for me and the standard of my work is fine. My line manager is happy with what I am doing from home.'

(Disabled employee)

A minority reported that they intended to stay in their current posts because this was seen to be the easiest option. These employees felt that because in-work support had been provided it made it more difficult to move jobs within MGDs as they were uncertain about moving their support from job to job. This belief was more prevalent in Departments with no clear processes for, or statements about, moving equipment or support.¹⁰ A few such employees planned to stay in their current post because of the difficulties they had experienced in getting workplace support within their MGD. One employee was very concerned that another division within the MGD would not cover the costs of their support and so would not move even if it was at the expense of progressing in their career.

Progress

Several disabled employees planned to progress in the future, many of whom reported encouragement from colleagues and managers.

'Well I am actually applying for a promotion, which might be nice. It is the same sort of job, it is still statistics which I am happy with so I have got to get my application in by the beginning of June...they [line management] were saying to me that I should go for it.'

(Disabled employee)

These employees were confident that their disability would not hinder career progression. Interestingly, these individuals tended to be staff who had received one-off support as opposed to ongoing support.

A handful of employees were interested in promotion but concerned about the processes involved in achieving that promotion, and some doubted that it was accessible to disabled employees or that assistance would be available from their MGD.

¹⁰ These concerns were not specific to MGD employees as Access to Work (AtW) customers reported similar worries about moving their support when changing jobs (Dewson, A. *et al.* (2009), *Evaluation of Access to Work*, DWP Research Report No. 619). AtW customers would have to reapply for AtW if support was not transferred or transferable to new employment positions.

'Well, because everything is so competitive nowadays...I want to apply for promotion, but I'm in a specialisation so I was thinking of the general civil service, but now they've introduced assessment centres and I don't know how I can manage with that...Because they've got an hour exam, you know, where you write, and I suppose I could ask for more time. Would that be a reasonable adjustment?'

(Disabled employee)

Whilst some of these concerns are not related to the transfer of responsibility for funding in-work support to MGDs per se, they are real concerns for disabled employees within Departments. In-work support provides (or aims to provide) a level playing field for disabled people to do their jobs but some are unsure how they go about getting additional support to help them to move up within the organisation.

Move jobs

Some employees reported wanting to leave the civil service altogether, mainly for reasons related to the desire for a change of pace or a different career route. However, some reported that they wanted to work for an organisation (including MGD agencies) where they would be guaranteed (external) AtW funding, and not feel at risk of discrimination.

6.2.2 Future support needs

There was a mixed perception among disabled employees of how future support needs would be met. Most who had received one-off support, either from AtW or from their Department, were fairly confident that they would receive additional further support from the MGDs if they required it.

'If I wanted to access funding I'm almost certain that I can. I think the [MGD] is aware under the DDA that they have to make adjustments for staff and that's the one area we're beginning to get better service because of that.'

(Disabled employee)

However, employees receiving ongoing support were much less confident that support would continue and some were worried that they would reach a point where their Department would not pay their ongoing support costs.

'But it depends on petrol, the cost of petrol as well, because they might also suddenly say they can't afford to bring me. I mean, I come from [home location] and it's £22 one way.'

(Disabled employee)

Disabled employees seemed very concerned that MGDs would, in time, question the reasonableness of paying ongoing costs, particularly those relating to Travel-to-Work (TtW) as they were not legally bound to do so. For a number of disabled staff, the withdrawal of this type of support would affect their ability to get to work to do their jobs and so left them feeling uncertain about the future.

Some employees reported feeling beholden to their employing Departments and a few commented that they would feel uncomfortable asking for additional support as their MGD had already given them so much. These employees would be reluctant to ask for help and, unless it became absolutely necessary, would probably remain quiet about any additional needs. HR leads voiced similar concerns, suggesting that only forthright employees would benefit from workplace support in the future.

'That's the whole lag if you have a disability and you have adaptations. It's about why you end up having to be extra assertive, because there's a whole load of stuff that you have to organise that's over and on top of everything else.'

(HR lead)

6.3 Concerns for the future

Several concerns have been reported throughout the report about the future for in-work support, both for disabled employees and for those looking to join MGDs. HR leads, line managers, employees and trades unions, all raised concerns about the future impact that the transfer of funding responsibility from AtW to MGDs will have on:

- the provision of ongoing support to existing staff;
- promotions within Departments;
- recruitment into Departments.

MGDs aim to increase the overall proportion of disabled staff within Departments, and within the Senior Civil Service, but have to achieve these aims against the backdrop of constrained resources. Trades unions and others are worried that the funding transfer in the current operating climate may conflict with these strategic goals. The evidence from this research suggests that the extra costs associated with employing some disabled people, could have a negative effect on Departmental recruitment, retention and promotion rates in the future.

Trades unions doubt that the reasons why disabled people are not employed or promoted can be overtly attributed to the extra cost associated with in-work support. However, they argue that it would be unrealistic to think that it would not be a factor in at least some of the decisions that will be made.

'Well, as I say, it is a concern that it might and probably will happen because of the budget issues but we can't say it definitely has because as I say nobody is going to come and say to us that they have not employed somebody because they have got a disability and it is going to cost. No one is ever going to admit that and, whilst there may well be rumours about it, you are never going to be sure because nobody is ever going to admit it.'

(Trades union branch representative)

Employees believed that the funding changes had impacted on the 'level playing field' for disabled people in employment, and for those looking for work.

'I don't expect people to bend over backwards, but it's just about creating a level playing field basically and if somebody else doesn't have my problems then I think they should make the field a bit even so I also can actually compete on the same level as them.'

(Disabled Employee)

Most HR leads were keen to fully support disabled staff and thought that devolving responsibility to Departments to provide and fund workplace support was the right way forward in policy terms. Mainstreaming disability support was accepted as the ultimate goal but there was widespread acknowledgement that this may be a long way off.

'Disability is still one of those areas that people find difficult to cope with... There'll come a time hopefully when people will be mainstreamed but that's a long time down the road.'

(HR lead)

7 Conclusions

This research set out to examine how Ministerial Government Departments (MGDs) were delivering in-work support to their staff since the responsibility for funding and organising in-work support was transferred from Access to Work (AtW) to MGDs in or around October 2006. It has explored the effects of these changes on Human Resource (HR) departments, line managers and disabled staff and has also sought the views of trades union representatives. In so doing, we have arrived at a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by MGDs and staff at all levels, both during the transition and at the present time, and some of the challenges likely to be faced in the future.

The research did not seek to determine if the transfer of responsibility for funding and organising in-work support from AtW to MGDs was a good or a bad idea. However, there is evidence to suggest that those people who understood the reasons for the policy change (that is, mainstreaming support for disabled employees) often tended to approve of it, in principle. Having said this, many people taking part in the research did not understand the reasons for the change. Irrespective of whether the policy decision was a good idea in principle, for the change in funding responsibility to succeed in practice, it seemed to require a number of conditions to be satisfied: strong communication, initially from the centre (Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)) to other MGDs and then from senior HR leads within the MGDs to line managers and disabled staff; effective budgeting; clearly defined decision-making processes for all those concerned, and reliable monitoring systems. The research showed that these conditions were often not satisfied. This chapter pulls out the main conclusions from the study and offers some tentative recommendations for improvements to policy.

7.1 Conclusions

7.1.1 **Transfer of responsibility for funding disability adjustments from AtW to MGDs**

The transfer of responsibility for administering and funding in-work support from AtW to MGDs was perceived by many of the key actors involved and affected to have been done badly. Information flows prior to the transfer were ill-timed and poor and HR leads reported that they often did not know about the changes in arrangements until one or two months before they were due to take effect. In one MGD, official notification of the transfer was still awaited at the time of the research (i.e. 16 months after the transfer). There was little awareness amongst HR departments of the special provisions or exceptional circumstances rule at the time of the transfer and few knew that they could use AtW Business Centres and their assessment providers as an ongoing resource for advice and guidance after the transfer. The timing of the transfer also caused problems for most MGDs coming as it did in the middle of a financial year. Departments had little time to plan or budget for the implementation of the new arrangements and very few had systems in place at the time of the transfer.

7.1.2 **Informing staff about the transfer**

HR departments were unable to inform individual staff about the changes to in-work support as they were not given details by DWP of who had received AtW because of data protection constraints. Most staff reported receiving notification from DWP about the transfer although many said that this information was brief and came fairly close to the funding changeover. Some people remained unaware that their Departments were now responsible for organising and funding in-work support, usually those who had received one-off support from AtW in the past. Many staff were very concerned about the transfer of AtW to their Departments, particularly those who received ongoing support: they were worried that they now had to disclose information about their disabilities to line managers and HR departments to get support. They were also worried on a more practical level as their Departments had not put clear support systems in place and so they had no idea how they would continue to receive support. In many instances, employees themselves had put forward copies of their AtW forms and suggested procedures similar to those of Jobcentre Plus because no alternative was provided by the MGD.

7.1.3 **Support at the time of the transfer**

As far as HR leads were aware, everyone who received AtW prior to the changes carried on receiving their support at the time of the transfer. Disabled employees taking part in this research confirmed that they all continued to receive the same level of support at the time of the transfer as they had done under AtW and trades union officials confirmed that they had received no complaints about loss

of support. Some MGDs struggled to get processes into place at the time of the transfer which resulted in a minority of employees experiencing significant delays in receiving support.

In-work support after the transfer

MGDs continue to offer the same types of in-work support as AtW and many offer additional support to disabled employees: most Departments had Disability Networks and forums, Disability Champions and disability awareness training, and a few (but not all) offered support to disabled employees to attend training and development events.

Information about support available and the procedures to follow was generally held on Departmental intranet systems and some MGDs had undertaken awareness-raising sessions for staff and managers. There were some concerns from disabled employees, however, that MGDs had not been sufficiently proactive in raising awareness of provision (particularly for ongoing support), nor about telling staff how to apply for support or who to go to for advice. In addition, disabled staff had concerns that some people would not be able to access information held on the intranet because of their disability, or because they would feel uncomfortable doing so in front of colleagues.

Managers were less concerned about how to access information about in-work support as they were confident that it would be available on internal intranet systems. Rather, managers reported needing more help in managing and assisting employees requiring support: they were concerned that they did not have the management or soft skills for more sensitive situations. In some cases requests for HR support had not proved to be very helpful. This was a particularly pertinent issue for line managers, many of whom now had more responsibility for assisting with and processing in-work support than before.

7.1.4 Accessing workplace support

Most MGDs had introduced fairly informal procedures for accessing in-work support in the first instance. In most cases, employees could approach a number of staff to start the process off, including line managers, occupational health (OH) professionals, health and safety representatives, welfare officers and HR teams. HR leads saw these informal systems as less bureaucratic than AtW and easier for disabled employees to navigate. Employees were less happy with the new systems as they required staff to disclose their disabilities or health problems to colleagues, which they felt left them at risk of discrimination. Interestingly, many disabled employees preferred more independent, structured and prescribed systems for accessing support, possibly because of their previous experience of AtW.

Assessments for support were undertaken in three ways within MGDs:

- Some Departments relied solely on external occupational health professionals, which was perceived to be the least satisfactory method, as assessments were often inappropriately carried out, relied too heavily on the opinions of employees themselves, and sometimes led to inappropriate support recommendations.
- Other MGDs contracted out all assessments to specialist disability organisations, and whilst satisfied with the quality of these assessments, the comprehensiveness of the recommendations and the aftercare support available, MGDs reported that they were usually the most expensive. MGDs were slowly building up their knowledge of specialist assessment providers and starting to compile lists of preferred suppliers offering the best quality and most cost-effective service (such information had not been passed on to them by Jobcentre Plus or AtW Business Centres at the time of transfer in any systematic way).
- The remaining MGDs opted for a combination of these two models with some assessments undertaken by OH professionals and some by specialist providers.

There was a general concern that OH professionals were not trained to identify ongoing support needs, and that these were at risk of being missed under the new arrangements. This concern was compounded by a perceived lack of general information on the intranet about the availability of this type of in-work support.

7.1.5 Decision-making in MGDs

Two models of in-work support provision predominated in MGDs – one was top-down and centralised and the other, a more diffuse and decentralised process. In MGDs with centralised systems, applications for support were fed up the line to HR or OH departments that, in turn, organised assessments, made decisions on support and then funded them. In MGDs with decentralised systems, whilst assessments were handled by other departments or organisations, the decisions to support and fund were made at a much lower level, usually by line managers or heads of business units.

Decision-making within MGDs was challenging in a number of ways. Decision-makers rarely had the expertise to question recommendations from assessors. Some staff in MGDs were building relationships with assessors over time to improve this gap in their knowledge, although this was only possible within MGDs with centralised funding systems. In MGDs with decentralised systems, line managers rarely saw enough cases to build their knowledge in this way. There was no evidence of any real attempt to achieve value for money in relation to providing in-work support in any MGDs and assessment providers were not systematically asked to consider value for money when making recommendations (although assessors with experience of AtW might have been expected to do so). Rather, decision-making staff were generally driven to 'do the right thing', interpreted largely as providing everything that was recommended without necessarily searching for the most cost-effective solutions. Having said this, decision-makers have struggled

to determine what, if any, limits they should place on expenditure on in-work support; the research suggests that what is seen as reasonable expenditure in one MGD, or by one line manager, may not be seen the same way by another. There is inconsistency in decision-making across, and indeed within, MGDs.

Funding ongoing support (Travel-to-Work (TtW), Support Workers (SWs)) seems to be the most problematic area for MGDs as they have little or no experience of providing, or contributing to, this type of in-work support. Although disabled employees and trades unions expressed some concerns that ongoing support would be withdrawn after the transfer, this has not proved to be the case. However, some MGDs are questioning the appropriateness of these types of in-work support (often on cost grounds), and a number of disabled employees receiving these types of support are concerned for the future.

The level at which decisions were taken was also problematic in some MGDs. In Departments with centralised systems, it was deemed inappropriate for line managers to make decisions as they may be too heavily influenced by budgetary constraints, which may result in charges of discrimination. Line managers also had little opportunity to build expertise of in-work support. However, HR leads in MGDs with decentralised systems believed that line managers were the right people to make the decisions as they knew the disabled employee better, and would benefit most directly from putting support in place. Line managers themselves, whilst reporting that they were happy to provide all the support that their disabled employees needed, also had concerns about the decision-making process. Some thought that devolving responsibility for providing support could have a negative impact on recruitment decisions, by making disabled employees more expensive for line managers to hire. Line managers were happier if support was organised and funded by other departments such as HR or OH. Some disabled employees reported being refused support by their line managers for reasons of cost or a perceived lack of need for the support. The research also found that line managers did not generally share good practice in relation to in-work support decisions or processes, and so were also worried about the consistency of their decisions.

Although most disabled employees interviewed were content with the help received thus far, some did express concerns about the future of their (ongoing) support. In MGDs with decentralised funding systems, staff were concerned that line managers would be influenced by extraneous factors (e.g. their relationship with the employee; the cost of the support; the employee's performance, and their seniority). Staff in more junior positions were the most concerned about these influences on the decision-making process. Disabled employees also worried about the consistency and transparency of decision-making and queried if they would get the same amount and type of support if they moved jobs within or between Departments. All of these concerns were echoed by trades union staff and branch representatives.

7.1.6 Tracking systems and reviews

Most MGDs did not have systems in place to record and track the support that they were providing. Spending on in-work support was often negligible, for example, for small pieces of IT equipment or one-off aids, and support may have been provided and funded by a number of different departments which made pulling monitoring information together very difficult. As a result there is currently no top level information about how much is being spent on support in the MGDs, to enable planning of budgets and monitoring of spend on adjustments.

Follow-up support was primarily informal. In MGDs with centralised systems, HR staff would generally telephone or email disabled employees to check that their support was in place, whilst in decentralised systems, some line managers, in their day-to-day dealings with staff, would do the same. No formal review processes had been put in place in any MGD to check the ongoing support needs of staff, or indeed to check if staff still had support needs. This was something that MGDs intended to work on in the future and many said that their follow-up and review processes were a 'work in progress'. Many disabled employees were not concerned about the lack of formal review procedures; they were happy to notify their HR department or line manager if their needs changed. However, other disabled staff reported that they would welcome the opportunity to discuss their support needs more regularly. Many employees were seeking reassurance that their ongoing support costs would be met, although at the same time they were nervous of rocking the boat and risking their support being withdrawn. Staff often did not know who to speak to about these concerns, and this again seemed to be particularly the case amongst more junior staff.

7.1.7 Budgetary concerns

Many MGDs have struggled to resource and fund in-work support. Not only were the changes introduced mid-financial year but they also occurred at a time of reducing budgets. HR departments have often had to fund additional posts to administer in-work support, which was an unforeseen item of expenditure. More importantly, it appears as though HR leads and line managers responsible for funding in-work support are just now realising the full financial implications of doing so, and particularly the implications of funding ongoing, and usually costly, support. Many decision-making staff questioned how sustainable this level of expenditure is in the current operating climate. Staff at all levels are concerned that disabled employees will become less attractive to employing Departments because of the costs associated with funding their support needs. The majority of those taking part in the research thought that disabled people could experience unequal treatment in the future in relation to recruitment, retention and promotion because of these extra costs. At the time of this research, some disabled staff were beginning to experience problems with their support, and some applications for additional help with ongoing TtW and SW costs had been turned down or were currently being queried although their support needs had not changed. Some disabled employees reported giving serious thought to leaving their employment

and moving to organisations that would attract AtW funding, in order to avoid such difficulties in future. Additionally, many line managers in decentralised systems would welcome more centralised funding mechanisms to remove these sorts of pressures from their decision-making processes.

7.1.8 The future

MGDs intended to improve their monitoring systems in the future, to track spend on in-work support and implement planning and follow-up strategies. They also planned to raise awareness of the support available to both staff and managers. Most MGDs reported that they were still in the process of putting coherent systems into place and that there was some way to go. A few were giving serious thought to moving away from a decentralised funding system towards a more centralised mechanism.

Many of the concerns raised by the research remain just that: concerns and they have yet to be tested. Most people interviewed in the research, that is, HR leads, line managers, disabled employees and trades union representatives, report fairly positively on the transfer of responsibilities so far. However, it seems as though some cracks are beginning to appear: a few disabled employees have applied for support since the changes were made and have been turned down, or are still awaiting decisions, even though their support needs have not changed. A very small number of employees have also reported that they are going through a complaints procedure and some have mentioned the possibility of employment tribunals. There is growing concern that the funding changes to in-work support may affect the level playing field which AtW was perceived to have provided. Although HR leads were committed to mainstreaming in-work support within MGDs, it appears some way off at the present time.

7.2 Recommendations

The research findings highlight a number of factors to be considered in developing the systems for supporting disabled employees within MGDs in the future. In particular:

- Issuing comprehensive advice and guidance to MGDs on supporting disabled employees in the workplace.

The research suggests a need for clear guidance to MGDs on how to support disabled employees in the workplace including, importantly, a clear steer on the range of support to be provided, which, as a minimum, should be the same as that available from AtW. An MGD such as the Cabinet Office could develop comprehensive advice and guidance for MGDs to ensure that support is provided appropriately and consistently across Departments, and in a timely fashion.

- Drawing on the expertise of Jobcentre Plus and AtW Business Centres to inform MGD operating procedures.

AtW has recently introduced a standard operating model for providing in-work support in order to improve the consistency and quality of decisions across Business Centres, and MGDs could benefit from drawing on the expertise of AtW staff to help them to do the same. The research found little evidence of any exchange of information and expertise between Jobcentre Plus or Business Centres and MGDs which is a missed opportunity.

- Improving the consistency of decision-making within and between Departments.

The research has provided some examples of, and discussed the potential for, inconsistent decisions in relation to in-work support. This is particularly true in MGDs where decision-making has been decentralised. This suggests a need for greater guidance on the decision-making process and sharing good practice within and between Departments to ensure much greater consistency. Most Departments would welcome greater discussion and guidance on what they can and cannot fund, in order to meet their obligations under law and also as an employer of choice.

- Greater consideration of value for money.

Whilst MGDs and line managers are concerned about the impact of in-work support costs on their budgets overall, there seems to be little systematic consideration given to value for money when assessing needs. Departments should be encouraged to develop guidance for assessors and decision-makers on achieving value for money when putting in-work support for disabled employees in place to ensure the most cost-effective solutions are found.

- Using specialist assessors where appropriate.

Experience in the MGDs has shown that where appropriate, specialist assessments are necessary to ensure the specific needs of disabled employees are identified and addressed, particularly for staff with sensory impairments. The research suggests that some guidance on the use of specialist assessors would be beneficial and this could be produced centrally for all MGDs.

- Improving awareness of in-work support.

Many HR leads intend to improve the level of awareness of in-work support within their Departments and, in many cases, to improve managerial awareness of the support. There is a case for prioritising this in all MGDs and for encouraging trades unions to inform their members. In particular, there is a need to raise awareness of the availability of ongoing support to all staff working within MGDs. Questions to test levels of awareness of in-work support systems could be included in staff satisfaction surveys. It is also important that potential recruits to the MGDs are informed of all the support available when applying for jobs in the MGDs.

- Improving review procedures for in-work support.

Many disabled employees are unsure if they will continue to receive support in the future and MGDs should be encouraged to introduce more formal follow-up and review processes, possibly in line with AtW procedures.

- Improving monitoring information.

Few MGDs were able to give any indication of the number of staff receiving in-work support, although the reasons why this was problematic are understood. However, some level of monitoring is advisable to ensure that staff are receiving equal treatment, to monitor trends and spend over time, and to follow-up and review the ongoing support needs of staff.

