

## Response to DWP's Pathways to Work: Reforming Benefits and Support to Get Britain Working June 2025 by Fiona Christie, Market Engagement Director, TBS

### Overview

This document sets out the response of Sopra Steria ("SSL") to the [Pathways to Work](#) open consultation ("the Consultation") on reforming the welfare system to support and encourage a thriving and inclusive labour market.

### About Sopra Steria

As a strategic supplier to His Majesty's Government and a Disability Confident 'Leader,' Sopra Steria Limited is pleased to respond to the Government's Get Britain Working green paper. As a technology and business process services (BPS) provider, we are committed to supporting the Department for Work and Pensions' (DWP) vision of making work accessible and fostering a society where disabled individuals and those with health conditions can thrive through inclusive employment.

Sopra Steria brings deep insight into the labour market and extensive expertise in the resourcing sector. In 2023, we were the largest resourcing supplier to the government sector, recruiting more than 55,000 public servants for some of the largest UK employers across the UK in one year. This response specifically addresses questions 13-17 of the consultation, with additional considerations on Chapter 3, Supporting People to Thrive, and proposes how technology can enhance outcomes in the employability market.

### Our Response

Question	Response
<b>Chapter 4 — Supporting employers and making work accessible</b>	
<b>1</b> <b>3</b> How can DWP support and ensure employers, including Small and Medium Sized Enterprises, to know what workplace adjustments they can make to help employees with a disability or health	<p><i>Diagnosis:</i> The green paper rightly recognises that the current system is failing young people, disabled people and people with health conditions, failing taxpayers and denying people the opportunities they need to get back to work.</p> <p>The employability ecosystem can be reframed to enable everyone to reach their potential. At a national level, our perspective is that the current procurement approach drives a sub-optimal delivery model, because it might not foster genuine collaboration from the market.</p> <p>This unintended consequence creates a disparate market that is segmented</p>

condition?	<p>regionally, or by participant need and/or characteristic i.e. musculoskeletal conditions. This creates a varying supply chain of providers which requires the employer to navigate across the silos that the market has created, rather than taking a more holistic approach with true applicant outcomes in mind.</p> <p><i>Solution:</i> DWP should shift the employability ecosystem from a predominantly supply-led (job applicant) approach to an equally balanced supply and demand-led (employer) one at the national level.</p> <p>According to our engagement in the market and with our supply chain, employers are broadly aligned with the need to consider alternative ways of working and attracting future talent. However, they are unclear on what action they should take to enact meaningful change. For example, what good looks like, pitfalls to be aware of, and how to overcome obstacles that can be barriers to success. This is where Sopra Steria’s deep digital reach can help, and below we set out three specific areas where our expertise could support Government:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. Develop a technology platform:</b> Specifically, we suggest the development of a technology platform that aggregates workforce data and insights. The platform could enable employers to better understand the skills available in their region and/or virtually, and identify and anticipate the adjustments needed to support employees with disabilities or health conditions.</li> <li><b>2. Aggregate the data and insights at a national level:</b> This technology platform should provide practical, employer-centric guidance on creating inclusive work environments and help employers and Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) plan their talent pipelines with greater accuracy. As data and technology revolutionise the workforce and reduces the number of entry-level positions across the economy, technology to highlight skills gaps will become even more important.</li> </ol> <p>Specifically, data can be used to analyse sickness absence and, with AI, could be used to predict the statistical likelihood that short-term issues could become chronic absences. This could enable earlier and more effective interventions. An example of where Sopra Steria has been successful in applying this type of technology platform is in our Joint Venture, NHS Shared Business Services (NHS SBS). Our workforce analytics tool has successfully predicted leavers in Medway NHS Foundation Trust with an impressive 95% accuracy and allowed an NHS organisation to calculate the likelihood of their current employees leaving, for example, a nurse with a 75% flight risk based on statistical analysis, <a href="#">case study here</a>. This gives management the insight to determine when to deploy effective interventions protecting staff retention and improving morale.</p>
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		<p>Once aggregated, the data could help spot trends, find issues, and even spread best practice from one employer or sector to another, identifying where certain changes or incentives can have more effectiveness and contribute to the UK’s productivity. We should recognise there are always limitations – everyone is an individual, situations are dynamic, and such platforms and analysis work best on a large scale to create overall improvements at a national level. We believe however that this data-led approach could support pathways to work as well as the government’s mission to ‘pivot to prevention’ with the health of the nation.</p> <p><b>3. Health and workforce culture:</b> Organisations of all sizes can benefit from a strong and dynamic labour market which leverages technology to support matching the right economically inactive people with the right job roles. One such as example is using AI tools to match applicants to roles based on their potential through ‘fuzzy matching’ techniques. This flexibility within the job market contributes to an optimum workforce and culture of work in which all employees deliver more productive hours, their mental health is improved, churn is reduced, and skills and experience are retained by the employer. Moreover, new recruits can be upskilled over time to ease their adjustment into work or offer a more flexible work pattern to accommodate workplace adjustment requirements. Cumulatively, this will contribute to the Government’s primary mission of growing the UK economy.</p>
<p><b>1 4</b></p>	<p>What should DWP directly fund for both employers and individuals to maximise the impact of a future Access to Work and reach as many people as possible?</p>	<p><i>Diagnosis:</i> Current resources for Access to Work are not optimally targeted, and employer engagement remains fragmented. Many employers — especially SMEs — lack the knowledge and understanding of reasonable adjustments or how to embed Access to Work provisions into their recruitment processes. Furthermore, the lack of a coordinated approach to training and knowledge-sharing among employers and SMEs limits the effectiveness of the scheme, preventing broader participation and hindering successful outcomes for individuals with disabilities or health conditions.</p>
<p><b>1 5</b></p>	<p>What do you think the future role and design of Access to Work should be?</p>	<p><i>Solution:</i> Sopra Steria encourages the Government to consider redirecting funds, saved by the introduction of a new technology delivery model, into the following areas to maximise the implementation of Access to Work in a more targeted way. Specifically, we propose:</p>
<p><b>1 7</b></p>	<p>What should be the future delivery model for the future of Access to Work?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Employer and SME upskilling.</b> DWP should fund targeted initiatives to upskill employers, particularly SMEs, on reasonable adjustments and how to integrate Access to Work adjustments as a standard part of their recruitment processes. This could include providing tailored training on how to conduct interviews and assessment days that account for disability or long-term unemployment.</li> </ol>

2. **Prioritise the focus on employer and SME upskilling:** Awareness could be provided to help employers understand a vast range of health and/or disability conditions, but the fastest benefits would come from prioritising the most prevalent conditions for inactivity: mental health, musculoskeletal, and cardiometabolic conditions. Employers should be able to access information, so that they can help make to make accommodations for existing employees who have become long-term sick, as well as attract new or returning talent into their workforce. This 360-degree approach addresses workforce culture and mindset as well as physical, technological and process change. This can contribute to changing the workplace culture to be increasingly inclusive and accepting around individual needs and contribute to society's education around disability.
3. **Knowledge sharing and engagement.** DWP should leverage its Disability Confident Scheme and provide funding for knowledge-sharing platforms, such as employer forums, where businesses can exchange best practices on implementing reasonable adjustments. This could also involve facilitating cross-organisational collaboration between Access to Work, the Health and Safety Executive, ACAS, and the Equalities and Human Rights Commission.
4. **Train-the-Trainer Approach.** Money saved by the implementation of new technology should support a 'train-the-trainer' model to expand reach without a significant increase in resources. This would involve training key personnel within organisations to disseminate knowledge and support further employer engagement, thereby creating a compounding impact on employer behaviour and applicant outcomes. Use virtual and mixed reality to bring ideas visually to audiences. Sopra Steria has used these technologies to dramatically raise recruitment outcomes, including training prison officers.
5. **Practical support for neurodivergent candidates.** Redirected funding should also focus on educating employers about reasonable adjustments for neurodivergent individuals. Including but not limited to, providing support for candidates in roles that may otherwise set unnecessary barriers to entry (e.g. social interaction requirements that are not necessary for the primary objectives of the role) or adapting lighting and creating quiet spaces in the workplace. Research shows these adjustments can help everybody, but especially those who are neurodivergent. These approaches would promote a more inclusive and mature hiring process, benefiting the 1-in-5 people with neurodivergence.

<p><b>1</b> <b>6</b></p>	<p>How can we better define and utilise the various roles of Access to Work; the Health and Safety Executive; Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service; and the Equalities and Human Rights Commission to achieve a cultural shift in employer awareness and action on workplace adjustments?</p>	<p><i>Diagnosis:</i> The current system lacks a coordinated approach to fostering a cultural shift in employer awareness and action regarding workplace adjustments. Agencies like Access to Work; the Health and Safety Executive (HSE); Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS); and the Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) play key roles, but their efforts are not fully integrated, resulting in fragmented support for employers. There is also a gap in encouraging employers to take greater ownership of workplace adjustments, with a tendency to focus more on the unemployed individual rather than the employer's role in making adjustments.</p> <p><i>Solution:</i> Drawing on Sopra Steria's experience as a strategic supplier to central government, we have a number of recommendations to improve awareness and actions on workplace adjustments. Our solution could be enacted with limited cost, by redirecting and refocusing existing resources on new ways of working, harnessing technology and focusing on achieving better outcomes for job applicants.</p> <p>Specifically, Sopra Steria recommends that DWP and other relevant agencies adopt a more integrated and strategic approach to encourage a cultural shift among employers regarding workplace adjustments by taking the following actions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Cross-agency collaboration.</b> There should be clearer and more defined roles for Access to Work, HSE, ACAS, and EHRC in supporting employers. These agencies must collaborate to provide consistent training and guidance to employers on reasonable adjustments and how to implement them effectively. Their collective role should focus on raising employer awareness and responsibility, while ensuring a seamless process for employers to access the resources they need.</li> <li>2. <b>Employer-centric focus.</b> The emphasis should shift from focusing solely on unemployed individuals to emphasising the employer's role in creating an inclusive workforce. This could include better defining the skills required by employers and providing guidance on how to draft tenders that promote workplace adjustments as part of the hiring process. By embedding this into procurement and tendering practices, employers would be encouraged to take a more proactive role in shaping inclusive employment practices.</li> <li>3. <b>Social value evaluation and knowledge sharing.</b> DWP should leverage the new procurement act and social value guidance to create stronger incentives for employers to commit to workplace adjustments. By reframing procurement to encourage a culture of inclusion and responsible employment, DWP can incentivise the</li> </ol>
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