BATA

Response to BIS Consultation

Review of targeted support for Higher Education students

May 2013

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1. Our Credentials

(i)   The British Assistive Technology Association ("BATA") is a not-for-profit organisation formed in January 2010 with the following objectives:

   (a)   To campaign for the rights and interests of those needing Assistive Technology;

   (b)   To provide expert and impartial support and advice to government departments and agencies;

   (c)   To educate and inform widely on the benefits of Assistive Technology; and

   (d)   To promote British Assistive Technology products and expertise at home and overseas.

(ii)   BATA fee paying membership reflects the full spectrum of provision of Assistive Technology ("AT") including:

   (a)   AT Assessors

   (b)   AT Developers

   (c)   AT Distributors

   (d)   Disability Charities representing the full range of disabilities

   (e)   Higher & Further Education

   (f)   Schools

   (g)   Other 3rd Sector Organisations

(iii)   BATA non fee paying membership (subscribers) reflects the following:

   (a)   Parents

   (b)   AT users

   (c)   Corporations

   (d)   Charities

   (e)   Higher & Further Education

   (f)   Schools

   (g)   Researchers

   (h)   Other 3rd Sector Organisations

(iv)   The BATA council, which is responsible for development and execution of strategy, is a volunteer Board drawn from senior positions across the British AT sector.

(v)   One BATA council member, Graham Coiley, is a participant on the Disabled Students Stakeholder Group – Assistive Technology ("DSSG-AT") sub-group established by the Student Loans Company for the purposes of stakeholder engagement, representing all AT stakeholders involved in the DSA and working closely with and advising Student Finance England.

(vi)   A significant number of BATA members participate in the Disabled Students Allowances ("DSA") programme. In order to properly provide a forum for this member group, who previously had no formal voice or structure, in 2011 BATA established a special interest group, the DSA AT Providers Sub-group, chaired by BATA council member, Ian Litterick. The DSA AT Providers Sub-group reports monthly to the BATA Council. This response to the BIS request for evidence has been compiled on behalf of the BATA Council and BATA Members by the DSA

AT Providers Sub-group following consultation and consideration of members' views and evidence presented.

2. Preamble

BATA welcomes the opportunity to respond and provide evidence in this BIS consultation. As the representative body of a number of companies and organisations that either provide products and services or are users of AT supplied under the DSA it is particularly appropriate that BATA submit evidence.

Prior to responding to the specific questions raised, BATA requests that BIS consider the following:

(i)   We acknowledge the need for regular review of government expenditure in all walks of life, but would urge BIS to consider the compelling evidence that highlights the effectiveness of the DSA programme in supporting disabled students through to high achieving, motivated, work ready individuals.

(ii)   BATA has a strong motivation to further the widening participation agenda in higher education through the use of technology and is proud that members have contributed to the success of the DSA programme which is widely considered a great success in terms of disabled student retention, achievement and employability. The part that AT plays in ensuring that disabled students can study on the same footing as their non-disabled peers is well recognised, with research clearly demonstrating both improved retention and success with high satisfaction rates reported by students themselves. BATA has received strong representation from members that has focused our attention on the vulnerability of some disabled students, perhaps those with mental health problems, Asperger's or dyslexia, who often require significant levels of technology support for the duration of their course.

(iii)   As has been mentioned in the call for evidence document, technology has evolved rapidly over the past decade, with some BATA members at the forefront of these developments, some with worldwide markets. In higher education, students are often the early adopters of this technology with smart devices, cloud, and connectivity anywhere now being a standard expectation. It is refreshing to see that BIS are requesting input on what other technologies might be made available to students and BATA would recommend the broadest view from BIS on what constitutes AT to encompass the trends in mobile, touch and app technologies.

(iv)   In the BATA response to the consultation questions, we would like to draw the attention of BIS to several key aspects of DSA equipment supply and hope that BIS give this full consideration:

(a) The system approach.

(i)   The separation of generally required IT equipment from extra or additional is artificial. The single 'One-Stop-Shop' concept is an effective and efficient model. This replaced the earlier model where students had to shop around various suppliers, resulting in inadequate solutions of poor quality and in unclear responsibility for long term support and training; adding further burdens for the disabled student.

(b) Student ownership of AT.

(i)   Student ownership allows flexible, individual learning at a time, place and pace that is tailored to the student.

(c) The alternatives.

(i) The consequences for students must take precedence in our thinking.

(ii) The effect on the expertise and innovation of suppliers and manufacturers is relevant.

(d) Actual spend on 'general IT'.

(i) Spending on general IT equipment is a small proportion (10.3%) of the overall DSA spend and any potential saving would be much smaller still.

(e) New technologies.

(i) There is an array of new IT, both AT and mainstream that when combined can offer solutions to overcome barriers to study for disabled students.

3. Response to Questions

15. Based on your knowledge of Disabled Students' Allowances, disabled students and the general student population, is there any IT equipment currently supplied through DSAs that you think is generally required by the majority of students entering HE?

(i) No.

(ii) The System Approach.

(a) BATA is keen to convey the important message that equipment supplied under the DSA is very much a system of support; a package of IT and AT that includes course-long support with training, and is not merely a set of individual items. We recognise that some elements of the equipment supplied to disabled students could be considered as generally required by students, however, it is crucial to appreciate that these individually tailored systems are not available 'off-the-shelf' and are supplied as 'one-stop-shop' solutions. Each individual student has unique requirements, identified through a disability and then a needs assessment. These needs and barriers to learning can to a large extent be overcome by the bespoke AT system approach.

(b) BATA sees the equipment supplied under DSA as providing students with the means of studying anywhere, at any time, promoting independent learning, and, in combination with personal support, enabling the vast majority to study successfully and to achieve their potential.

(c) The availability of, and the access to, IT is certainly a prerequisite of studying at university, but BATA members often witness the fact that disabled students are frequently without any IT of their own or, in some cases without any IT experience. This is explained by the characteristics of disabled students who are more likely to be older, be living at home, studying part-time, and from less advantaged socio-economic groups.

16. If you haven't done so in response to Question 15, please indicate what IT equipment you feel is generally required by all students. Please try to be as specific as possible and give reasons or evidence supporting your view.

(i) Student ownership of AT.

(a) BATA is reluctant to take a view on what IT equipment is generally required by all students. The determinants could include course requirements, personal budget of the student, the latest trend in technology or the student's IT competency. However what is

clear is that disabled students benefit from the specialist AT approach that the DSA provides, and they also have the advantage of integral, course long support for their AT which ensures rapid help, repair or replacement, when they need it, so that they can continue their studies.

(b) The concept of personal ownership of the AT is important for disabled students, as often there are barriers in accessing the general IT facilities in universities and colleges. These barriers may be environmental, physical or noise related as in the case of a students with anxiety, mobility or organisational challenges. Additionally, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) can only provide access at certain times to IT suites. Often during evenings, weekends and holidays the facilities are closed. With disabled students owning their AT they can study at times and in places that work within the limitations of their impairment.

(c) BATA is not aware that HEIs stipulate that students must have their own computer equipment. There may be recommendations from some and BATA is aware that some universities and colleges have incentivised students on application with the gift of a laptop.

(d) BATA feels it is appropriate to highlight other implications and costs for HEIs if DSA equipment was further restricted:

    (i) HEIs will have to assume more responsibility for reasonable adjustments and ensuring provision for disabled students.

    (ii) HEIs are likely to have to field and resolve more technical queries for students with AT equipment.

17. What types of IT equipment do you believe should continue to be regarded as additional i.e. it is required specifically by disabled students as a result of their disability? Please refer to any evidence to support your answer.

(i) The alternatives.

    (a) BATA believes that the current approach of providing an assistive technology system is vital. An attempt to differentiate between what is additional or specifically required and what is generally required is artificial and could lead to considerable confusion.

    (b) It may also be a dis-incentive to some disabled students in seeking the support that they require through the DSA. For many students the DSA application, eligibility and entitlement process is a long one, with some students not receiving support until at an advanced stage of their course. Any additional burdens on them to source and to arrange their own AT could impede their progress.

    (c) BATA members have other concerns on behalf of students:

        (i) Students may be left to source certain products and we question whether this is a realistic expectation?

        (ii) Students will be left to download and install their own software.

        (iii) Students may be left with incomplete assistive systems that may not be appropriate to support their learning.

        (iv) Overall, a negative effect on a student's ability to study on a level playing field, resulting in consequences for retention, achievement and employability.

(d)   The BATA-AT providers sub-group is aware of an increasing number of requests for students' existing computers to be used as the basis of an AT system. The group wishes to highlight the practical consequences, and to pose some key questions about this approach:

(i)   Assistive software often necessitates more powerful computers than general IT.

(ii)   There can often be compatibility issues with pre-owned and installed software and newly supplied AT software/hardware.

(iii)   Conducting a health check on a student's existing computer is an inefficient and inexact activity.

(iv)   The use of a student's existing computer raises questions regarding who is to provide the course-long technical support, the insurance and the warranty. It is potentially difficult to identify responsibility for support and repair where there is a mix of pre-owned and newly supplied equipment.

(v)   The additional costs of administrating a fragmented supply of IT and AT must be given consideration.

(ii)   Actual spend on 'general IT'.

(a)   Based on the BIS figures on DSA paid (Year 2010/11 data), combined with information on the current supply patterns from BATA-DSA suppliers, we can estimate that the expenditure on general IT equipment is £12.9m, 27% of equipment and 10.3% of overall DSA expenditure (Appendix 1).

(b)   When the typical AT system costs are broken down (Appendix 1) we see that £330 is spent on general IT computer costs, which represents 27% of a typical DSA system cost that a student may receive.

(iii)   The BATA-AT providers group is positive in wishing to continue to provide the 'one-stop-shop' approach as this leads to:

(a)   A sustainable business model supplying a broad range of IT/AT systems and solutions.

(b)   Maintaining the importance and integrity of offering course-long support.

(c)   Maintenance of experienced, professional, accredited companies providing a quality assured service.

(d)   Protecting crucial AT and disability expertise across the sector.

(e)   Promoting the innovation in products and services from companies working in the DSA sector.

(f)   See Appendix 2 for our recent submission to BIS on the role of the DSA-AT provider/supplier.

18. Is there any IT hardware or software that you feel disabled students need that they are currently unable to get? Please refer to any evidence to support your answer.

BATA members have been at the forefront of the development and improvement of technologies that help disabled people to get on in life. Several members continue to be highly innovative in AT for the educational setting.

(i)   BATA feels that a broad view should be taken on the availability of new technologies; there shouldn't be a one-size-fits-all approach, but a consideration of any technology that helps a student to pursue their studies. Once the student's disability is confirmed, the needs

assessment becomes vital in ascertaining the individual strategy and solution; at this stage all available and appropriate technology should be considered.

(ii)   New types of technology that disabled students might require are mobile apps, accessible (light and portable) tablets and smartphone devices. Other examples include eye gaze technology, switches and communication aids, all of which are improving and coming down in price.

(iii)   Training on the AT system is a key component in ensuring the student uses their AT in an optimum way. Some BATA members see the benefit to the student of a more flexible approach to training, with 'top-up' sessions made available to back-up the initial sessions.

For and on behalf of British Assistive Technology Association:

Graham Coiley: Member of Disabled Students Stakeholder Group – Assistive Technology Sub-group and BATA Council member

Ian Litterick: Chair of BATA's DSA AT Providers Sub-group and BATA Council member

Mark McCusker: Chair of BATA Council

30th May, 2013

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Appendix 1: Analysis of DSA Equipment Costs

Analysis of DSA Equipment Costs

Evidence to support the cost calculations presented in the BATA – DSA providers response.

What is the proportion and amount of DSA paid that is represented by 'general' ICT equipment?

Table 1

DSA element	Spend (£m)	Total (£m)
All DSA	125.7	125.7
Less Non Medical Helper / general / travel	77.8	47.9
Less Assistive Technologies and 'one-stop-shop' components.	35.0	12.9

These figures are based on the figures for 2010/11 given in the Call for Evidence and the 27% figure derived below. Note that the latest equivalent provisional figures for 2011-12 show a 3% drop in the cost of the equipment allowance and a 7% increase overall in the DSA. Therefore the relative value of the equipment allowance in general and any "general" ICT in particular are both smaller than presented here.

NB. Data available for post graduate students is incomplete and so this calculation is based on 38% of amount paid to post graduate students represented by equipment costs, in line with the proportion paid to other students.

What proportion and amount of a typical DSA AT system is represented by 'standard' or 'general' ICT equipment?

Table 2

Component	Price (£)	Total (£)	Comment
Full system (3 year support package)	1200	1200	All hardware, software and peripherals.
Less assistive software	-380	820	
Less warranty and support	-70	750	Course long warranty /maintenance / support.
Less insurance	-50	700	Specialist no excess, all risks insurance.
Less system build, software install, delivery and installation/familiarisation	-100	600	Comprehensive 'one-stop-shop' approach.
Less assistive hardware	-160	440	£440 (37%) could be considered as standard IT equipment.
Less IT peripherals	-50	390	May be specialist keyboards / mice etc.
Less printer/scanner	-60	330	May be specialist printer/scanner for VI.
Less computer	-330	0	£330 (27%) is represented by the computer.

N.B. The computer cost of £330 correlates reasonably to the £338 calculated by Ian Litterick of iansyst Ltd in his sample of 231 DSA computer systems (see response from iansyst).

Appendix 2: The contribution made by the Disabled Students Allowance Assistive Technology provider companies to disabled students' success and the UK economy

(Paper originally submitted to BIS on 27th March 2013 on behalf of BATA DSA AT Providers Sub-group.)

British Assistive Technology Association
www.bataonline.org

The contribution made by the Disabled Students Allowance Assistive Technology provider companies to disabled students' success and the UK economy

Executive Summary

- The Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) programme is a highly effective, value for money programme of support for disabled students studying in Higher Education (HE). Through access to individually-recommended specialist technologies, students are equipped to study alongside their non-disabled peers.

- Disabled students receiving DSA have similar retention rates and improved success rates compared with their non-disabled peers.

- Assistive Technology provider companies (AT providers) have supplied some 300,000 disabled students with specialist AT equipment, thus providing a key element of DSA success.

- Quality, innovation and expertise are the hallmarks of AT provider companies working under the DSA programme.

- Several UK DSA AT provider companies have developed innovative products that benefit disabled people whether in education or work, and now have worldwide export customers.

- 750 people are employed in high-quality professional jobs within the AT provider companies, generating in excess of £55m in revenues per annum (DSA only). This business activity and ambition is a significant boost to the UK economy.

- Amongst the AT provider companies there is a reservoir of unmatched knowledge and expertise of assistive and enabling technologies that benefit disabled people.

- Beyond DSA, many of the AT providers engage with schemes such as Access to Work and school SEN supply, all making a difference to disabled people's learning and training, and contributing to them finding and retaining employment.

- Students have a high degree of satisfaction (87.6%) with the DSA programme.

Introduction

Disabled Student Allowances (DSAs) are grants to help students with the extra costs they might face as a result of a disability, mental health condition or specific learning difficulty. Part of the allowance can cover the cost of specialist equipment to support a student's study.

Since its beginnings in 1996 the DSA programme has constantly evolved to a point where it is now widely seen as a great success story, particularly in terms of the widening access and participation agenda. At the UKTI's 'Britain is Great' event during the 2012 Paralympic Games, Executive Director of the British Assistive Technology Association (BATA), Barbara Phillips, gave a presentation [1] to an international audience in which she described the DSA programme as…

> "a world-leading approach to levelling the playing field in Higher Education… that 0.5% of (total Higher Education) spend bought an awful lot of effectiveness..."
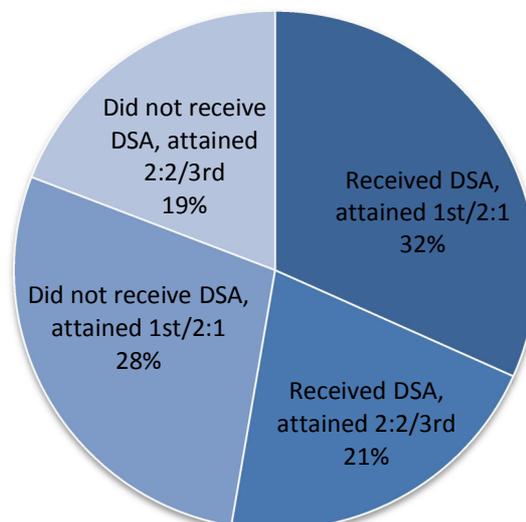
Barbara Phillips CBE
Executive Director, BATA

In 2010/11 some 170,000 HE students (7.6% of the student population) declared a disability [1]. A broad range of disabilities are reported, with approximately half represented by learning difficulties, but all are different and each individual student may be challenged in their studies or disadvantaged without the correct support.

The evidence of the effectiveness of DSA is compelling. HE students who declare a disability and receive DSA are more likely to obtain a first- or upper second-class honours degree (60.2%) than disabled students who do not receive DSA [2]. Overall, the retention, completion and success of disabled students receiving DSA is comparable to their non-disabled colleagues and better than students who disclose a disability but do not receive DSA [2]. It should also be noted that disabled HE students tend to have lower qualifications on entry than those without disabilities [3].

Degree attainment of students declaring a disability

Received DSA, attained 1st/2:1 32%
Received DSA, attained 2:2/3rd 21%
Did not receive DSA, attained 1st/2:1 28%
Did not receive DSA, attained 2:2/3rd 19%

The benefits to students of disclosing an impairment and accessing DSA has been emphasised by the Higher Education Funding Councils for England, Wales and Scotland [4].

The additional contribution to the Exchequer of a graduate compared to an individual with A-levels over a working lifetime is approximately £180,000 [5], and so for the 300,000 students supported through DSA an additional £54bn has been added to GDP.

A vital component of the DSA support that disabled students receive is the assistive and enabling technologies supplied and supported by the BATA-DSA AT providers.

Assistive Technology Providers

The AT provider companies have made a major contribution to the development of the DSA programme; currently there are 21 accredited AT providers. Accreditation is overseen by the Disabled Students Allowance Quality Assurance Group (DSA-QAG), who validate, audit and monitor the standards of products and services delivered by the AT provider companies.
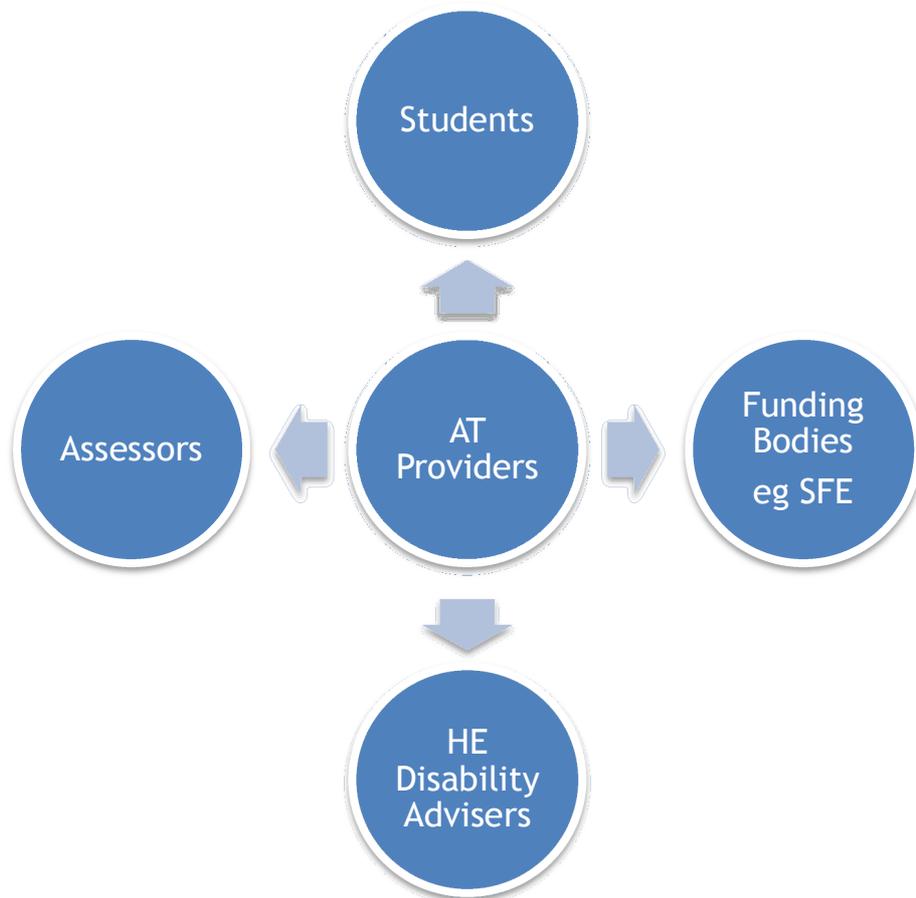
AT providers...

- …have supplied AT equipment, support and advice to more than 300,000 students since the inception of the DSA programme (estimate from Student Loans Company data).

- …give 'course-long' support services to students receiving DSA. The unique concept of course-long support includes technical advice and troubleshooting, insurance, warranty, loans and repair services.

- …receive approximately 5000 support calls every month (source: BATA–DSA AT providers group).

- …prepare in excess of 100,000 bespoke quotations for AT equipment each year (source: BATA–DSA AT providers group).

- …source, configure and install a package of equipment specific to each student's needs, often dealing with multiple suppliers from the UK and abroad. Delivery and training is student-centred, with the time and place decided by the student.

- …demonstrate working practices that encourage a cohesive team approach across the private, public and voluntary sectors. All AT providers work in a cooperative and collaborative way with DSA assessors, disability advisers based at universities and colleges, funding bodies (e.g. Student Finance England), and other stakeholders.

Paul Doyle, Access Centre Manager at Hereward College says:

> *"In my experience as an Assessment Centre Manager, DSA Assessors appreciate AT providers reaching out to engage with and consult them, seeking their opinions and suggestions.*
>
> *"Working in this cooperative and inclusive manner ensures student issues and changes in teaching and learning practices are quickly and efficiently embedded into the product and service development process."*

- …maintain a product portfolio comprising hundreds of assistive and enabling technologies

- …understand all types of disability. From a visual disturbance due to dyslexia to someone with complex physical and health needs, suppliers provide informed, expert solutions and empathetic advice. In a Guardian article of January 2012 [6] a disabled student says…

> *…without the support of welfare benefits and the academic support provided through DSAs university would have been out of the question. "It wouldn't have been possible."*

- …regularly support other DSA disability professionals through product updates, training and accredited courses; all contributing to their continuous professional development.

- …all have links to and support other organisations, nationally recognised schemes and quality programmes, such as National Association of Disability Practitioners, Two Ticks, ISO 9000, British Educational Supplier's Association, Training for Good, Mindful Employer, Go On, British Dyslexia Association, The Employers' Forum – Disability Standard.

87.6% of students recently surveyed showed a high degree of satisfaction with the DSA programme [6]

Quality service

- AT providers were the first to develop the quality assurance framework under the DSA programme, and continue to be at the forefront of improving this.

- As well as submitting monthly Key Performance Indicators, all AT providers undergo an annual audit by BDO to quality assure against the agreed standards (audit takes up to four days)

- In a presentation by Viney, Draffan and Wilkinson (2012) [7], following a survey of almost 1300 students who have received DSA, student satisfaction levels were high and the use of AT equipment was considered an important part of a student's success.

89% of DSA recipients surveyed
used their AT equipment daily or often [6]

Innovation and expertise

- The AT provider companies embody a concentration of expertise and experience in assistive and enabling technologies. The impact of this reservoir of knowledge has extended beyond disabled students in HE through to support for disabled people in all walks of life, for example in the workplace, to school-age children and to the elderly.

- As well as developing and marketing specialist products of their own, AT providers have been vital in the success of several UK companies that now have world class reputations and export products across the globe.

- Mark McCusker is the CEO of Texthelp, a software company that exports to many English-speaking countries. He says:

> "…the core engine is based upon the technology solution for the UK. The UK solution has evolved over a number of years; however one of the primary markets within the UK is the DSA. New products/updates often have their origins in a need identified for the DSA market.
>
> "An intangible, but very valuable and exportable product developed from working within the DSA is the knowledge of the challenges faced by students with disabilities and how assistive technology can be applied to resolve these challenges. Although we tend not to recognise this, the UK is a world leader in this area and that this knowledge is arguably as valuable as the technology solutions. Indeed, without the knowledge, it would be impossible to sell the technology."

- Other innovative technologies that benefit disabled people generally have originated in DSA, including software products such as ClaroRead, Sonocent Audio Notetaker, Global AutoCorrect and others.

UK plc

- AT provider companies employ some 750 people in high quality professional jobs (source: BATA –DSA AT providers group).

- A further 500 skilled, accredited and disability-aware people work on a self-employed basis in conjunction with AT providers (source: BATA –DSA AT providers group).

- The 21 accredited AT provider companies are all small to medium enterprises, and generate revenues of around £55m per annum (source: BATA–DSA AT providers group).

- With projections indicating a rise in the number of disabled younger adults through to 2030 [9], coupled with the demographic shift to an older population, the people who could benefit from using assistive technology will rise. AT providers can have a key role in advising and supplying innovative technology to support disabled people in leading independent lives.

- If the employment rate for disabled people was moved to the national average, an estimated additional 1.3 million disabled people would be in work, boosting the UK GDP by at least £13 billion[8]

The challenges and hopes of BATA-DSA AT providers

- To see further evolution of quality measures.

- The current decision making on which DSA-AT provider supplies does not allow for choice and/or quality to be considered; it has created an entirely price-driven system that sacrifices quality for low cost.

- Investment, innovation and finding creative solutions are curtailed under the current system.

- The uptake and completion of student training could be improved, so that disabled students can benefit from the full potential of assistive technology.

Summary

DSA is a highly effective, value-for-money programme of support for students with disabilities and challenges. Through access to individually-recommended specialist technologies, students are equipped to study alongside their non-disabled peers.

AT providers give a unique and skilled service built on the foundation of decades of accumulated knowledge and expertise. Using this they support disabled students with technological solutions that promote success, achievement and employability.

AT providers have and continue to make a significant contribution to the UK economy, to provide high quality employment and to innovate through new and commercially viable products.

Note

The BATA-DSA AT providers is a subgroup of BATA, with agreed aims and objectives:

1) To campaign for the rights and interests of disabled students and others who need assistive technology in order to access learning, particularly in the UK.

2) To provide expert and impartial support and advice to government departments, agencies and the public on the benefits of assistive technology and how it can best be used to ensure access to education.

3) To promote the highest standards of ethics and service quality in supplying assistive technology, specialist support and training to students and others with disabilities.

4) To take all steps necessary to ensure that we are able to work with high standards and to create long-term sustainable organisations that offer value for money and meet the needs of all stakeholders including individual customers , employees, professionals , suppliers, partners, funders and our environment.

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