

PE1508/F

Scottish Trades Union Congress

**Written Submission to the
Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee
Public Petition PE1508 – Commonwealth Games Sponsorship**

Introduction

The STUC welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on this petition and the continued involvement of Atos as a sponsor of the 2014 Commonwealth Games. The trade union movement in Scotland and, in particular, the STUC Disabled Workers Committee has long standing concerns in relation to Atos' participation in carrying out both Work Capability Assessments and, more latterly, assessments for Personal Independence Payments.

Overview

The STUC believes that Atos were fundamentally, ethically and morally wrong to enter onto these Government contracts when the key driver was not to assess an individual's capacity to participate in the modern labour market but to justify withdrawing benefits from many sick and vulnerable people in order to achieve a 20% reduction in disability benefits.

The United Kingdom Government has made it clear on a number of occasions that it is their assessment and, as such, any criticism about the process should be reserved for them and not Atos as their contracted provider. This was the view of the former Minister for Work Chris Grayling when we met in January 2012. We do not agree with this position, Atos have fully complied with the Government's agenda at every stage until recently when they asked to be relieved of the contractual obligations ahead of the termination date in August 2015. Furthermore, We believe ATOS have fully participated and condoned the more rigorous and aggressive approach to WCA adopted by the coalition Government since coming to power in 2010.

In 2012/13 Atos were quite happy to accept £112 million pounds of tax payer's money to carry out these wholly inadequate assessments on behalf of the United Kingdom Government. The tax payers also had to meet the cost of the tribunal system to hear appeals against benefit sanctions taken on the back of these assessments, a further £500 million. We would question whether any genuine healthcare organisation would be content to be involved in assessments where the professional judgement of their staff was being undermined continually by a computer based system that provides no flexibility or opportunity for professional medical opinion to be considered as to an individual's fitness to actively participate in long term and sustainable employment.

A further reason for questioning the ethical standards of this organisation are the reasons given for exiting the contract, particularly the levels of violence and abuse against Atos staff. While the STUC would never condone any form of verbal or

physical abuse against ATOS staff the company appear to be selective in the information provided to justify this position.

We would doubt whether this alone would result in the decision to ask for early termination of the contract and we believe that Atos Healthcare, as the petitioner stated, has become a toxic brand as a result of being associated with WCA. Disability organisations, trade unions and more recently GPs have called for WCA's to be scrapped. Had Atos acted as we would have expected an ethically sound healthcare to do they would have walked away from the contract far sooner than they have done. If they had questioned the DWP about the lack of flexibility in WCAs and the absence of medical ethics in having people with complex medical conditions assessed by healthcare professionals with no understanding of their condition, the DWP may have terminated their contract but we doubt we would be having the debate today about whether Atos were a suitable organisation to be seen to be supporting the biggest sporting event Glasgow has ever hosted.

The STUC believes that Atos has put profit before principles and are now paying the price, they have rebranded their occupational health provider as OH Assist in order, we believe, to separate this from Atos Healthcare that remains to carry out WCAs ahead of new providers being identified. In the past arguments have been put forward that Atos Healthcare is a separate organisation to Atos IT Services UK Limited; the latter being the public face of Atos at major events such as the Olympics in 2012 and the forthcoming Commonwealth Games.

Atos Healthcare is a trading name and the wholly owned subsidiary of the parent company, Atos IT Services UK Limited and as we would suggest the parent company was presumably fully aware of the implications of their continued participation in these assessments, a process that has ultimately caused severe distress to some of the most vulnerable people in the United Kingdom regardless of whether their organisation was the final arbiter of any decision to withdraw benefits or not. We would also suggest that they would be aware of the profit levels derived from the DWP contract. Furthermore, they were quite happy for continued involvement of the Atos name in the contract despite the strict conditions imposed by the DWP regarding how these assessments were to be carried out. We believe that, at every level within Atos to distance themselves from this draconian process but chose not to do so.

The question for the Glasgow 2014 Organising Committee is whether they are satisfied the actions of Atos are compatible with their published values

Ours is an inclusive organisation which epitomises the values of integrity, responsibility and endeavour and in which all our people are valued. We will engage our Games partners in the spirit of trust and openness. We will be passionate in our work, and encourage flair and creativity in all that we do.

At the STUC Congress in Perth in 2013 a decision was taken to seek removal of Atos as a Commonwealth Games sponsor and this has been raised with the organisers. The STUC has expressed our concern over the continued involvement of ATOS in Glasgow 2014 and would welcome any moves by the Petitions Committee to raise this matter with the Organising Committee.