



## Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee

**Petition Number:** [PE 1508](#)

**Main Petitioner:** Sean Clerkin

**Subject:** ATOS as a sponsor of the 2014 Commonwealth Games

Calls on the Parliament to urge the organising Committee to drop ATOS as a sponsor for the 2014 Commonwealth Games because ATOS have taken disability and sickness benefits away from poor and vulnerable people, reducing them to penury and extreme poverty. In addition, many people have died before the ATOS Fit for Work Assessment has been completed. The practices of this company are not compatible with Scottish social democratic values and therefore we call on the Petitions Committee to put our case to the Scottish Parliament so that the Parliament can reflect the opinions of many people in Scotland that ATOS be dropped as a sponsor for the 2014 Commonwealth Games.

### Background

Securing sponsors is a matter for the Games organising committee. Atos is an international information technology services company. The [Glasgow 2014 website](#) states that Atos will use its technology capability to provide accreditation software for athletes, officials and media staff; a programme to facilitate and manage the volunteer workforce as well as a system that will provide instant games results information, statistics and records.

The healthcare subsidiary of the company works on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to undertake independent assessments to determine whether claimants are eligible for health-related benefits. The idea behind the [assessments](#) is that “eligibility should not be determined by the description of a person’s disability or health condition but rather on how their ability to function is affected, which may vary considerably between individuals with the same diagnosis.” The contract between the DWP and Atos Healthcare was first awarded in 1998 and is currently scheduled to run until 2015. It was [announced on 22 July 2013](#) that as part of continuing improvement to the Work Capability Assessment (WCA), the DWP is to bring in additional providers to carry out assessments.

The Work Capability Assessment (WCA) has been controversial and the subject of a number of campaigns by equalities groups and disability rights campaigners. [Critics have suggested](#) that the assessments use a flawed methodology which does not accurately reflect the life of the claimant, have caused undue stress leading at times to a worsening of impairments and even in some extreme cases [claimant suicide](#). A [report by the Public Accounts Committee](#) in February 2013 stated that the DWP is getting “far too many decisions wrong on claimant’s ability to work. This is at considerable cost to the taxpayer and can create misery and hardship to the claimants themselves”.

DWP [released figures](#) through FOI in 2012 on the numbers who have died while completing a WCA assessment or who died while being part of the work related activity or support group. In total, between January 2011 and November 2011, some 10,600 claims ended and a date of death was recorded within six weeks of the claim end. This represents about 1% of the total ESA caseload in November 2011, which at that point was the latest caseload data available.

The UK Government has to date undertaken 4 independent reviews of the Work Capability Assessment which have contained recommendations for improvement. More information on the review and the reports can be found on the [gov.uk website](#).

## **Scottish Government Action**

Deputy First Minister Nicola Sturgeon was present at the unveiling of ATOS as a Games sponsor. She [said that](#):

*“This latest supporter deal, the fourth to be announced, is great news and will ensure the IT at Glasgow 2014 is amongst the best in the world. The confirmation that this is the first Olympic and Paralympic Partner to come on board as an Official Supporter of Glasgow 2014 is also a significant step forward for the Games, and its support, alongside that of the other sponsors, will help to ensure that we see a fantastic Games in Glasgow, delivered on time and on budget.”*

Further information on the Scottish Government position on the issue can be found below.

## **Scottish Parliament Action**

There has been a range of parliamentary activity on the wider issue of ATOS and the WCA. The particular issue of Commonwealth Games sponsorship was raised in a PQ by Jackie Baillie on [question S4W-16578](#) in August 2013. In response Shona Robison, Minister for Commonwealth Games and Sport, stated that

*“The SG has every sympathy with individuals and families who have been adversely affected by the UK Government’s welfare reforms. Whilst appreciating that an assessment process is necessary, the alarming stories of people’s experiences suggest that what is in place just now is causing a great deal of undue stress and hardship to people across Scotland.”*

Ms Robison also highlighted a letter written by the Housing Minister to the UK Work and Pensions Secretary regarding the Government’s concerns around how the WCA has been administered. It urged the Secretary to take steps to ensure the worrying cases reported are never repeated. However, she then went on to state that

*“Securing sponsors is a matter for the organising committee and it should be acknowledged that Glasgow 2014’s contract with Atos does not relate in any way to the services it provides on behalf of DWP. In addition, securing sponsorship is vital to the success of the Games and to reduce the need for additional public funds to stage them.”*

## Key Organisations

Scotland's Trade Union Congress (STUC) has [called](#) for ATOS to be removed as sponsor for the games alongside organisations such as Citizens United, [the Black Triangle Campaign](#), [Glasgow Against Atos](#), the [Glasgow Games Monitor](#) and the [Scottish Tenants Organisation](#). There is a [facebook group](#) calling for people to boycott the Games if ATOS remains sponsor.

Glasgow City Council [debated a motion calling for ATOS to be removed as sponsor](#) which was defeated on 31 October 2013. The motion was moved by SNP Councillor Billy McAllister and was defeated with the final vote 29 for and 42 against.

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**18 February 2014**

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