Written evidence submitted by Lina Kankeviciute (ATW0026)

1. The application process is not accessible for Deaf people that rely on BSL Interpreters, so feel discriminated from the outset, English is actually my forth language. Even contact via email is difficult for a lot of Deaf people, especially those like me that have moved to the UK from other European countries. They system is dated and heavily reliant on paper based documents and the postal system – thus creating lots of delays in actually applying. This does not reflect modern working life and the fact that jobs can be an instant start. We are being disadvantaged even more so nowadays, as AtW only accept initial contact and it can take weeks to be allocated an Advisor and then even longer to be assessed.

2. As for the ‘assessment’ of Deaf people – this is very questionable. Virtually all AtW staff seem to have either none or very limited insight into Deaf people that require BSL Interpreters at work. They are patronizing and only seem to focus on when I won’t need an interpreter, this is perceived as cost cutting to me. Being asked if CSWs could be used is a direct contradiction to the AtW guidance (using qualified interpreters only) and shows motivation towards cheapest support as opposed to what best meets my needs at work.

3. The questions and attitude of AtW are very questionable. They are fundamentally patronizing and some of the questions are borderline offensive. Feels like I have to justify and proof my deafness – I have enough barriers in everyday life without the government treating me like this.

4. I experienced major delays after being awarded an interim budget, my role changed and increased to full time. AtW were not responsive to this. This created lots of delays and quite frankly an unacceptable amount of my work time is taken up with questions, repeating myself, justifying my deafness and administration processes. I am paid to do a job and not in post to spend 20% of my time dealing with AtW – you are creating barriers and not providing access in this respect.

5. The hourly rate offered for support did not reflect the rates of pay in London, again time wasted to get this reviewed and addressed. The AtW Managers are quite frankly awful at responding to approval of budgets and requests – they don’t seem to care about people stuck at work without any support. It is alright for them, they have a secure job and don’t rely on others to approve their ability to function at work. No empathy whatsoever and our situation are met with complete apathy from them.

6. My role went full time and I was subject to the arbitrary “30 hour rule” and was told that I must recruit a salaried interpreter. There was no advance notification of this, no negotiation and the demands of this were unrealistic and I have to fight and appeal to get an extension of my support to at least give me time to advertise the position and to recruit. I was unable to get any interest in the advertisement of my post.
7. As a Deaf professional, having a sole interpreter work with me is not appealing. The salary offered is substandard for the BSL interpreting community – they are not Support Workers. There was no clarity about the Terms and Conditions of employment. Not one person responded to the advertisement – what does this tell you? The salaried policy does not reflect other things in addition to the pay, annual leave, CPD for interpreters, supervision and management of them (they need professional guidance), inability to develop skills and their linguistic progression, annual leave and sickness – we are two separate people that can’t be expected to be ill or on holiday at the same time.

8. Also, there are occasions when I will need 2 interpreters (attending training sessions, delivering training sessions, networking and conferences to promote my company) and there is no scope for this within the present policy. This again puts me at a lower stance than my hearing peers.

9. I have been without any interpreters since the beginning of May due to the incompetence and total apathy from AtW Advisors and their managers. I am lucky in that my employer is also Deaf and has full empathy. Even her emails to Managers and Senior Managers were ignored for over a month – resulting in having to contact the Head of ATW directly. Whilst my employer is patient and understanding, there are limits to this, and I need interpreters all the time. I manage and coordinate interpreting services and our clients are majority hearing – I have missed lots of opportunities and income and work has been lost as a result of this. My job is now at risk due to the negative impact of AtW’s ill thought policy about provision.

10. I would not be able to progress my career with a salaried interpreter only – and given present circumstances my own job is at risk. Deaf people only really get interpreter support consistently at work (well historically) and we are now being reduced to being second-rate professionals. I work to contribute to my own mental health, well being and social status – plus I also contribute to society and don’t rely on benefits. AtW are creating lots of problems and I know of several people that have lost jobs or refused them due to the difficulties with AtW restrictions and lack of insight.

11. AtW never communicate any changes of policy with its customers, changes the guidance and decisions without consultation, create severe delays with the payments of invoices, having any contact with a dedicated person is now impossible. We are being treated like cattle and there is no personal touch or empathy from the staff. There is never any consultation formally with deaf people and the interpreting profession – despite ‘claims’ from AtW that they do just that.

12. The DWP gives lots of positive praise to itself about AtW and supporting disabled people – yet they are now preventing Deaf people that rely on BSL Interpreters any equal access, effective service that is responsive and assumes I can spend 20% of my working time dealing with them.

13 June 2014