**Written evidence submitted by Nick Beese (ATW0030)**

A little bit about myself first before I detail submissions on the areas the committee is interested in.

I have just started a new job as a Senior User Experience Designer for Amazon. Previous to Amazon I enjoyed a ten-year career at the BBC. At the BBC I was the Lead Designer for BBC Weather & Travel, BBC iPlayer on TV and numerous other high profile public facing projects.

I am profoundly deaf and have always worked with a BSL interpreter. I use an interpreter to communicate and receive communication from my colleagues.

My daily job as a Senior User Experience Designer involves attending up to four meetings or conference calls day, participating and running design workshops, collaborating with other designers and colleagues from around Amazon. In the UX profession, communication skills are very important - conversations are happening all day long. My role is a very senior role within Amazon and it is absolutely imperative I have a highly skilled BSL interpreter working with me every working hour.

My submissions.

1. **The AtW application and assessment processes, from the perspectives of employees and employers;**

   **The process is currently inadequate and slow**

On securing a new job with Amazon I notified AtW that I would be starting a new job at Amazon in 11 weeks times. 2 weeks later a caseworker from AtW replied to my email saying:

"I am dealing with cases in strict date order and I have 33 prior cases. I will contact you to progress your application as soon as I can."

Seven weeks then passed (1 week before I started my new job) before I heard from the caseworker again who then notified me that they were looking at my employer taking on a salaried interpreter but in the meantime I could continue to book freelance interpreters.
The huge delay caused me great stress; at one point I thought I was preparing myself to start my new job without any support, thus making a weak and chaotic first impression to my new employer and colleagues. I have a friend who have been denied the support they needed from AtW and went on to lose their job - this led to me fearing that I would struggle to make it past my three month probation at my new job.

When it was first proposed that Amazon took on a salaried interpreter, I sent my concerns about the proposal to my caseworker, asking questions about how it worked in practice. My caseworker couldn’t give me any answers and said it was a management decision. I asked for and was given contact details for two managers and I emailed my concerns to both managers, one responded but refused to offer any explanation about the decisions that they had made.

Knock on effects still being felt

I am still suffering the consequences of the huge delay for the new agreement to be put in place as my new team has yet to have any deaf awareness training. Deaf awareness training should always happen either before the deaf person starts their new job or in the first week for it to be of benefit. It has been 9 weeks and we have only just been able to book the training. Communications with my colleagues who have never met a deaf person before has been very difficult and strained at times.

I have an agreement, which only runs to July 13th (1 month from now). The specialist freelance interpreters I use need to be booked a month in advance before they are booked elsewhere and without an agreement in place for July I am left in a limbo yet again and have no idea what if any support I will have in from July onwards.

Desperate measures

One month before I started my new job I notified my caseworker that my new job required me to travel to Seattle in the US several times a year. I was told to let AtW know as soon as I had details of a trip.

I started my new job and was soon notified that I would need to travel to Seattle. I notified AtW straight away and provided all the details for the trip. I sent four chaser emails to my caseworker and did not get a reply.

One week before the scheduled trip, an advisor from AtW got in touch regarding the new agreements; I asked if they were aware of my emails and request for support. An apology was given and investigations are now
underway regarding the lack of response.

As I had no response, acknowledgement or support from AtW, it was then too late for me to find a BSL interpreter to accompany me for the trip. I have booked an ASL (American Sign Language) interpreter in Seattle to work with me from 8am to 2pm. This is the only option I had. Booking an ASL interpreter for the full day would have gone over AtW budget.

I am now very anxious about this trip, booking an ASL interpreter was a very desperate act, as I do not know any American Sign Language. I have no idea how I will cope; communication for me in Seattle is going to be very painful and strained both for me and for my colleagues and managers who I have never met and need to make a good impression on. My ability to work will most definitely be affected. I intend to excuse myself from any important meetings to protect my professional reputation and save myself from embarrassment.

The current process has and continues to cause me a lot of stress. As a result of the poor processes in place I have lost sleep, and have been living in a constant state of anxiety. I have spent far too much time chasing responses through email and via phone. Because of the proposed changes and poor communication from AtW I am after working for 14 years for the first time ever - worried that I will not be able to keep or progress in my job and in turn be able to provide for my young family. I want to be able to develop my career in line with ambitions and have a prosperous career – just as any other person desires to.

• AtW’s effectiveness in terms of helping disabled people to:
  1. Secure a job;
  2. Stay in employment; and
  3. Develop their careers; and

It has always been difficult for deaf people to secure employment. There are many barriers in place - here are some examples:

a. AtW support is very unreliable, in my case I had to wait seven weeks for a response to an email and many of my emails are ignored.

b. Most new jobs come with a 3 month probation - the delays in getting communication support and deaf awareness in place puts deaf people on a back foot from the start - stress and anxiety stays with them throughout
and this impairs ability to work.

c. Deaf people are discouraged from developing their careers as any change in circumstances requires a new agreement. With a new agreement comes the risk of their support being cut.

• The steps taken so far by DWP to extend AtW, including its marketing and funding of the scheme.

a. AtW support is inaccessible to the monolingual deaf BSL user. The monolingual deaf BSL user will not be able to write letters or email to AtW to organise an agreement. The current AtW website is totally inaccessible to the BSL user.

b. Finding a job is made almost impossible because AtW currently do not provide an easy way of securing communication support for job interviews. Any delays or poor communication always reflects badly on the interviewee.

• The salaried interpreter proposal - ATW have proposed that I take on a salaried interpreter on a salary of £28-£29,000.

This proposal shows a total failure in understanding of the role of the British Sign language interpreter on AtW’s behalf.

I'll explain why this doesn’t work for me:

a) I rely on a highly proficient Level 6 BSL interpreter for all my communication needs, which I have already explained. Such interpreters who have been in the industry for 8+ years will never accept a salary as low as this. It is public knowledge that job adverts for salaried interpreters have attracted absolutely no interest, not even from trainee interpreters. The salary fails to take into account the actual costs that come with being an interpreter.

b) £28-29k does not cover the costs of employing an interpreter. This salary will leave interpreters with very little after they have paid their mandatory annual costs such as interpreting association and professional body affiliation costs, travel costs, training and personal development
costs, peer support, office equipment costs.

c) What happens when an interpreter is sick - Who pays for the cover interpreter? What happens if I need to work longer than usual hours or work at weekends? If my interpreter goes on holiday or takes paternity/maternity/special leave, who pays for the freelance cover? Who line manages the interpreter? What if the interpreter turns out to be very unsuitable? All these complexities throw up major issues, which AtW have so far been unable to provide answers for.

d) Interpreters who work with me regularly complain that working with me is very demanding and they make it clear that they are happy to work with me for no more than two days a week. This is not a criticism of interpreters; this is an example of why a salaried interpreter is an unsuitable proposal. At Amazon, the meetings are very frequent and sometimes long, a lot of UX jargon is used along with Amazon business jargon, this requires a lot of processing and translating by the interpreter to be able to give me the access I need. I also partake in conference calls with Seattle every day, I take part in or facilitate daily design workshops and reviews.

• Access to Work no longer fund second interpreters

Second interpreters are needed for meetings that are longer than an hour, for example conferences, all day design workshops, days when I have back-to-back meetings.

To not fund second interpreters is a dangerous decision, I'll explain why:

a) You are risking affecting the wellbeing of the salaried interpreter by using him or her continually for excessive periods of time. Interpreters are at risk of RSI when asked to sign for long periods of time. An interpreter who developed RSI as a result of excessive demands at work could legitimately claim that this is an industrial injury.

b) No interpreter will want to work for a deaf person if they know they will be put at risk of injury though being made for excessive periods of time.

c) You cannot expect my employer to add breaks into meetings to allow interpreters to rest. This puts me as a deaf employee at a big disadvantage.
Conclusion

The recent changes and uncertainty around the support from AtW has shaken my confidence in my ability to follow my ambitions and develop my career.

It is extremely important that the scheme is properly funded and run so the right support can be tailored for deaf people in the UK to allow them the same opportunity to work and achieve their dreams such as any non-deaf person.

AtW is a pioneering concept that finally gives disabled people equal opportunities at work as rightfully ought happen in this day and age of human rights in the U.K and allow disabled people to contribute to society. It needs protecting and valuing.

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