1) My name is Jackie Griffiths I am a freelance sign language interpreter with 27 years’ experience, I am NRCPD registered and a Fellow of the Association of Sign Language Interpreters (FASLI), this makes me one of the longest standing interpreters in the UK, notwithstanding the role of translating between Deaf and hearing people undertaken prior to this profession by missioners and clergy.

2) The 30 hour rule vs salaried interpreter is not feasible. Some Deaf people do require an interpreter present for all of their working day. I did work with a client up until recently who had a different interpreter every day and on occasion two interpreters for meetings. Those of us who worked with him agreed we would not have been able to work with him every day and that once a week was sufficient. Our reasons were A) colleague fatigue - sitting with someone all day everyday can only breed contempt, B) Interpreters need space and time to be themselves and have a view, if sitting in the same office every day we wouldn’t have that space which could lead to mental health issues, C) when the Deaf person is on annual leave what would the interpreter do? I would never have my annual leave dictated to by the deaf person…what will the deaf person do when I’m on annual leave, attending training or off sick? D) If I was employed by an organisation I’d require external supervision from another interpreter, this would be a cost to whom? E) I’ve worked hard to maintain my skillset, working in one organisation doing the same work every day would mean I would become unemployable within months F) interpreters by our nature are gregarious people, we don’t like the routine of same place, same time, our personalities have drawn us to a job that takes us out to meet new people and new challenges daily. G) when we as a profession talk about salaried interpreters we mean interpreters employed by an organisation to provide interpretation in many areas with many clients, one who acts like they’re freelance but under the umbrella of an organisation

3) The £25.00 an hour rule. As a business owner I dictate my fees, not AtW. Who plucked this figure out of which fantasy air? ASLI has a fees and salaries survey which clearly shows Qualified Registered interpreters charge far more than £25.00 an hour. As a self employed person I have to save up for NI contributions, tax, sick pay, holiday pay, training, professional association membership, registration with NRCPD, pension, car and business expenses. I cannot work 40 hours a week (see paragraph 4), based on how much I am able to work both physically and mentally my yearly average income is around £28,000 not a king’s ransom, it has been that for several years and I don’t see it increasing. I won’t be cutting my fee and as the people I work for are all employed by either central or local government the shortfall from AtW comes from the public purse but this time it comes from cutting services directly to the community as opposed to from the AtW budget. I do charge and will continue to charge mileage, parking and cancellation fees, the £25.00 are already a shortfall and with the rest is a huge shortfall.

4) Working hours Whilst I do understand for someone sitting in an office for 40 hours a week they cannot imagine why I do not work that many hours yet earn the same wage. Firstly my health is paramount, Upper Limb Disorder is rife in our profession and can require an operation (see paragraph 3 for expenses incurred) thus time off work and not earning an income (we’re not entitled to any government benefits apart from income support and there is no private health insurer who offers the cover required) therefore I have limited time I am able to undertake interpreting, I have to
factor in driving time to where my Deaf client is based, there is insufficient work to be occupied all day every day, I work evenings and weekends to ensure I bring home a living income.

5) I work regularly with three Deaf people in the same organisation, who therefore split my fee between them, one has been awarded the hours she requested at £35.00 per hour, the second was awarded her requested hours at £30.00, their team leader was awarded half her required hours at £25.00 (when she queried it her advisor told her his line manager had given him a list of how much AtW would award per hour). She has proof that she uses more hours than was allocated however she’s been told to sign the declaration or appeal, in the meantime her AtW payments have been stopped from January (the delay was due to AtW not sending her the declaration when she renewed her claim since December 2013) so her employer is paying my fee but asking her when it’ll be resolved as it’s effecting their budgets and as a statutory body they must provide a service but are not recruiting to an essential post while they cannot reclaim the AtW monies owed. Considering the consequences of the added pressure the team leader has been placed under, the time consumed by the administrator, her line manager and the hours spent on the phone with me interpreting and then rewriting emails to reflect the latest discussion. We all could have been doing more productive things with our time.

6) It appears that some Deaf people have been encouraged to book a Communication Support Worker (CSW) to cover the work of an interpreter. CSWs have achieved Level 3 BSL which is equivalent to an A level in BSL. If I were to be admitted to a hospital abroad and offered someone with A level English and no interpreter training to interpret for the doctor I would insist on having a qualified interpreter who is fluent in both languages….wouldn’t you? Why should Deaf people accept any less than full access like their hearing colleagues enjoy? Level 6 is equivalent to a degree level in BSL which is the qualification which interpreters hold.

7) Deaf people and interpreters work closely together and we try to ensure public money is spent effectively; taking money away from disabled people is not the way to balance a spreadsheet.

16 June 2014