Written evidence submitted by Julie Fletcher (ATW0068)

Executive Summary
As an interpreter I have seen the detrimental unjustified effects the cuts to deaf people’s allowances are having on their livelihood. AtW advisors are disorganised, inconsistent and do not follow their own guidelines. Their payment system is ad hoc and they are fee fixing below the market rate. They do not engage with Deaf people and dictate their allowances.

Recommendations
1. For AtW advisor’s to understand Deaf people’s needs and not base assessments upon paper guidelines.
2. For AtW to pay interpreters the current market rate and travel expenses.
3. For AtW to understand the complexities of the interpreting task in a complex high achieving environment and how this is imperative to a professional deaf persons’ responsibilities.
4. For there to be open to negotiation and not dictating needs.

1. I am a registered BSL/English interpreter and provide a service to Deaf people in their work place. As I work with several Deaf people I have seen the detrimental effect Access to Work cuts and poor assessments are having on individuals.

2. AtW are cutting people’s allowances to arbitrary figures and are disorganised, inconsistent and do not follow their own guidelines. The future of Deaf people’s successful employment is becoming compromised due to this.

3. From an interpreters perspective payments are often delayed and reduced without explanation. You can't chase up payments directly with them therefore it has a massive impact on business cash flow.

4. One example of poor practice is a Deaf woman who engaged my services, she works in a high-ranking research team with great responsibility and her support allowance has changed significantly since commencing her role.
   - When she started this job in October 2013 she was given 37.5 hours of BSL Interpreter time at a rate of £45 hour plus travel expenses.
   - In January 2014 this was reduced to 29 hours and £35 per hour plus expenses. She wasn't happy but she managed and felt this support did in fact meet her bare minimum needs. When in work she regularly used 26 hours 'banking' the other hours for occasions where she might need 2 interpreters.
   - 30 April 2014 her review was due, she emailed her advisor on the 8th May 2014 then after 2 weeks her gave her a figure of 23 hours a week at £25 inclusive of travel with no date of when this would be implemented. She was horrified and emailed his manager to register her complaint. The manager did not respond within the 7 days, as set out in AtW guidelines, so she emailed again and was told it was being passed to another advisor.
12th June a different advisor contacted her saying her allowance was now 16 hours a week at £25 inclusive of travel. The Deaf person asked the reason why it had reduced – they said it was calculated on past usage which is obviously inaccurate, what the start date was - was told the 1st May 2014, retrospectively!! She had been using interpreters following her old rate as she was waiting to be formally told her new rate, leaving interpreters out of pocket.

5. This Deaf person also doesn’t know how she will function effectively on reduced support and doesn’t know where she can find high quality registered qualified interpreters who are able to work in the world on academia limiting her success and career progression in this role. AtW budget will no cover the cost of BSL/English Interpreters but support workers with limited sign language that is wholly inappropriate for her role.

6. Another example is of another Deaf person who had moved house and forgot to tell AtW she was moving. A month later she realised this and subsequently found out her AtW support allowance was due a review a month previously. When she contacted them she was told she would be assigned an advisor in 6–8 weeks time. They have not paid for any support since the review date and she is now in limbo with interpreters needing payment and herself needing to know what support she can have.

7. AtW claimed to have undertaken a survey of interpreter charges and are stating this is £25 per hour. I have never been involved in such a survey nor do I know of any other registered qualified interpreter who has. I also do not know of any registered qualified interpreter who charges £25 inclusive of travel expenses.

8. AtW claim to support disabled people in the workplace but my recent experience has show they are putting barriers up by reducing hours to an arbitrary figure and not paying the commercial market rate for qualified interpreters. The use of qualified registered interpreters in some people’s work place is essential. The gravity of consequences by using unqualified interpreters is immense. You could liken it to being treated by a first aider rather than a Doctor. I know which I’d prefer.

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