Written evidence submitted from Rev Catherine Nightingale (ATW0074)

Executive Summary:

- AtW is an excellent scheme so far that has given me employment
- Recent changes to AtW gives loss of flexibility
- Current decisions in AtW take too long to make
- The changes in AtW makes me worried about job security

Introduction:

I am a profoundly Deaf full-time Anglican priest working in the Diocese of Manchester. I am Priest-in-Charge of a hearing parish as well as working as Chaplain among Deaf people. I use BSL as my preferred language and need specialist equipment to help me do my job.

The AtW application and assessment process, from the perspective of employees and employers:

1. When I first applied, I was given a full assessment when someone came and interviewed me and this assessment was useful in suggesting equipment that could help me that I didn’t know was available.

2. I was recently re-assessed by email and even though my Access to Work support has now ran out early June, no firm decision has yet been made to continue the support. This means I can't plan ahead without knowing what support I will have. I am also restricted to finding freelance interpreters that are happy to work for £25 an hour.

The adequacy of ongoing support, both in terms of the aids, adaptations and support workers provided through AtW, and the help and advice offered by DWP:

3. AtW so far has met my needs and enables me to do my job. It has given me the flexibility to book interpreters for particular settings. It's given me the freedom to book interpreters that are happy to interpret in religious settings and can understand religious jargon.

4. It has also so far provided equipment that I need that I hadn't thought of, like using VoxSci on my landline which transcribes voice calls into text messages, which now really helps me deal with urgent calls like when people are dying and want me to visit.

The effectiveness of AtW in supporting people with mental health conditions and learning disabilities:

5.

AtW’s effectiveness in terms of helping disabled people to: secure a job, stay in employment, and develop their careers:

6.
7. So far, AtW has meant that I have enjoyed job security by providing me with the interpreters and equipment that I need to do my job. Without it, I can't do my job effectively, it puts me on an equal footing with hearing people.

8. Currently, AtW is making it difficult to give me job security as before when I would request interpreters for a work conference the decision would be made fairly quickly. I submitted a request for interpreters at a residential work conference on the 24th of May for a conference starting on 7th of July that all of the priests in the Diocese of Manchester have to go to. I am still waiting for a decision and my employers have been very patient holding the room. My employers needed to know the decision early June. This conference is a requirement in my job description and it will look bad if I can't be there. I cannot attend without interpreters. It also makes it difficult to explain to my employers that the decision is out of my hands.

9. If I can't take part in continuing development, it will be difficult for me to stay in employment. I am also trying to persuade them to employ another Deaf person and any extra costs of employing a Deaf person would put them off. If I can't take part in continuing development, I can't advance my career.

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

10. I think the scheme could be more widely advertised and used as it will help Deaf people (and other disabled people) to get employment and put them on an equal footing with other people.

11. It's a pity that over the last few months that a scheme that has worked so well has been tinkered with and made less effective. AtW is not a benefit as it helps people to do their jobs well.

My Recommendations:

12. That AtW continues but keeps the flexibility that Deaf people have enjoyed over the last few years

13. That current re-assessment done face to face by people who know what they are doing so that they can suggest equipment that will help and decisions made about conferences made quicker than they are at the moment.

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