Written evidence submitted by Helen Faulkes (ATW0077)

Introduction:

This is a personal evidence submission. I have always worked since leaving University in 1992, with no gaps in employment. As I am profoundly deaf and rely mainly on BSL for communication, I have always needed qualified BSL/English interpreters to access what is going on around me both in a personal and the workplace setting.

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

(What is the AtW application and assessment process like for Deaf and disabled people, and for their employers? (This can be for the first time you apply, or when you are being re-assessed).

1. The AtW scheme simply enables me to work on an equal par with my hearing colleagues. Without AtW, I cannot do my job and cannot contribute to the country’s economy as a working adult.
2. My previous experiences of assessment processes have always depended on the person who is doing the assessment which shows inconsistency in the system. A postcode lottery?

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:

(Is AtW support for Deaf and disabled people good enough, and does it meet your needs? This is for both the help and advice they offer you and your employer, and the support they offer – interpreters, other support workers, aids and adaptations.)

3. The AtW scheme in its present format is no longer fit for purpose – it is a very bureaucratic system with no transparency and lack of communication from AtW leads to unfair decisions for a lot of deaf and disabled working individuals.
4. Having no named contact at AtW means that there is a lot of "passing from post to post" with letters received with no names mentioned, no means of two-way interaction - a lot of unnecessary time wasted on chasing up paperwork at AtW. We need a system which is accessible for deaf workers – direct email contacts with a named person to contact means we don’t have to rely on the goodwill of hearing colleagues/friends to call AtW to try track down who we need to communicate with at AtW.
5. The paperwork around AtW claim forms adds on unnecessary stress for deaf individuals. Hearing colleagues do not need to do this work to do the same job as we do. There are now more efficient ways of completing necessary paperwork via electronic means, or even better get away
without having to provide evidence to ensure that BSL/English interpreters are paid what they are due.

6. As a Deaf professional, I simply need to ensure that qualified BSL/English interpreters are present whenever I meet a hearing colleague/colleagues for effective two-way interaction. This means that for meetings longer than an hour, two interpreters are needed to co-work, and all interpreters needs to be recognised for the standards they are expected to work at. AtW should not try to cut corners by reducing the “maximum” they would pay for interpreters, you need to look at cutting corners at interpreting agencies not interpreters themselves.

7. Why is the mileage fixed at 25p a mile for interpreters? This is in contravene of the 45p a mile which is the expected mileage approved by Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs. Why aren’t car parking fees or accommodation paid for by AtW? All this has resulted in interpreters submitting one fee to cover their interpreting fee, travel and accommodation costs for each invoice which does not show transparency in the system.

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

8. Since leaving University in 1992 I have always worked and contributed to the British economy and have every intention of continuing to do so. The AtW scheme has enabled me to work in terms of providing access through BSL/English interpreters for both hearing colleagues and for myself as a Deaf professional. However without an effective AtW scheme in place to enable deaf and disabled people to work on an equal par with their hearing counterparts, this may bring about negative effects in the working population.

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

9. I only knew about the AtW scheme through word of mouth. Not enough deaf and disabled people know about their entitlement to AtW.

10. Funding from AtW needs to be looked at – it should be used to fund communication support for Deaf professionals in the workplace, in apprentice schemes, in job interviews, freelance work and for voluntary work to enable Deaf people to function on an equal par with hearing counterparts.

11. Have a look at other countries to see what they are doing, e.g. in Finland they have a voucher system in place which appears to be effective?
My Recommendations:

12. For the whole AtW scheme to be re-organised to make it much more accessible for deaf and disabled people in terms of initial assessments, re-assessments, payment processes, and to have named individual contacts with more deaf-friendly means of communication. It is stressful enough having to work and try to achieve the same as non-deaf and non-disabled people in the workplace.

13. To have transparent and consistent guidelines on what will be paid and how much AtW will pay.

19 June 2014