Written evidence submitted by Sandwell Deaf Community Association (ATW0086)

Application assessment process

1. From evidence there are barriers to the application process as deaf people have to phone through a call centre to make the application and the information is then passed on and can take weeks to process. This means that people in paid employment and contributing to the economy are instantly restricted in performing their daily tasks at work and these delays means people are not achieving their targets. This is further exacerbated by advisors saying they will call the applicant back via the telephone. This next contact is sometimes offered to be done via email but this is not always appropriate and advisors need to have knowledge to identify with this. Solutions: advisors need to be more deaf aware. Use a remote interpreter service to contact Deaf people so that discussions are in real time ensuring equality of access with hearing people especially for Deaf BSL users.

2. Applications by employees for provision of BSL interpreters who are then offered CSW clearly shows the inexperience and lack of knowledge by the advisor of the difference between the 2 professions. Where CSW are offered and they are informed this is inappropriate the applicant has to argue with the advisor to get the correct support. This adds more stress to an already difficult process.

3. AtW advisors give very little advice to applicants such as information as to what is available to support in the workplace. It is left to the applicant themselves to ask for what they want but they may not always know what is on the market or what can be provided by AtW. Eg an applicant has an AtW budget but they were unaware that they could apply for an extra one-off budget for a specific task/target that has been delegated to them by their managers.

4. The experience of deaf staff shows that flexibility is needed, especially in the first year of a new post, as it is difficult to predict how many hours will be needed. We would recommend a review between 6 months to 1 year to see how things are going and give the opportunity to feedback regarding hours used then revert to average review period of 3 years.

5. AtW should provide applicants with an approved list or database of disability services in their area (possibly via jobcentre) so that you know that you are getting best value, quality services for the budgets you are allocating. It is reasonable to expect the Government to maintain accountability for tax payer’s money.

6. There is a long time delay in the assessment process and it affects our deaf employees as they cannot start work until the assessment is approved. In fact one of our freelance staff has had to give up a job due to long delays in the assessment process which caused a lot of stress.
Adequacy of ongoing support

7. After applications are agreed and budgets allocated there are still problems. AtW will not pay for interpreters for essential training related to job but AtW will not fund interpreters for this and state that is it the employer’s responsibility or if not in house training then the outsourced organisation is responsible for costs. This has created an uneven playing field where Deaf employees are less likely to gain promotion and lag behind their equals. There are some employers that really cannot afford to pay for interpreters for training. This also sends the message that deaf people’s training is less important.

8. Deaf people struggle to find qualified and registered interpreters and hence so do communication agencies. AtW don’t actually help with this.

9. Employers/managers etc do not know enough information about AtW so maybe you could create a special pack to be sent to employers. Equally, why is it expected that a disabled person will automatically know what AtW is?

10. In the past, employees had their own advisers but still encountered the same problem as communication with advisors relies on access to telephone and emails. For some of our employees, their second language is English and their primary language is British Sign Language, they have found it difficult to contact advisors who are often not deaf aware. BSL users often rely on other people to make calls for them and it could be a lot easier if it is done directly in real time.

11. Volunteers and work placements need AtW. There is clear evidence that many deaf people have gained permanent employment through voluntary work, temporary placements/casual work/work placements. Deaf people have to ‘prove’ themselves whereas hearing people do not.

12. There is a lot of miscommunication between AtW and the deaf people as when there were changes with the contact centres, many were not informed which caused confusion.


14. From school leaving age a deaf person requires AtW. Deaf people should not have to struggle with ‘educating’ agencies, employers, Jobcentres of the Equality Act. This is the Government’s job.

15. The Equality Act clearly has not worked for deaf people in terms of gaining Employment/Voluntary Work and they should not be responsible for enforcing the Equality Act on behalf of the Government.
Effectiveness of AtW in supporting people with Mental Health conditions and learning disabilities

16. Sandwell Deaf Community Association (SDCA) offers information and advocacy services including rights and entitlements for Deaf people. Through that work we regularly have to educate employers about AtW and what their employees are entitled to. There are large numbers of Deaf people needing access to Mental Health services in some aspect of their lives due to barriers in society. Thus SDCA encounters many deaf people needing support with their mental health and many are unaware of what they are entitled to from AtW.

17. Not enough support workers in this area with the right skills.

18. There is no current data on how many deaf people with LD know about AtW.

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

19. Sandwell Deaf Community Association has employed and worked with many deaf people over the years and Access to Work has enabled deaf people to work as independently and equally as their non deaf peers by the provision of notetakers and interpreters. SDCA are concerned about the potential changes to AtW as it will certainly affect deaf people’s ability to remain in their jobs and develop their career further. We have seen many Deaf people’s careers develop much more than before AtW began, which is something that AtW should be proud of.

Here are few ideas that we consider could improve AtW service:

20. AtW should be offered to anyone who has signed on at a Job Centre or not signed on but is actively seeking work. This will enable them to fulfil their welfare rights responsibilities and seek employment more effectively by accessing the same resources as the rest of the population.

21. SDCA is delighted that AtW will fund interpreters at job interviews as it levels the playing field. It also informs employers about the potential support that the potential employees could receive if they were offered the post.

22. Evidence from deaf people suggests that many employers who do not know how to work with interpreters will not offer the position to a deaf person. Interpreters are seen as ‘support workers’ which reflects negatively on the deaf person.

23. Better to have interpreters from the start rather than introduce later

24. STAYING IN EMPLOYMENT: appropriate AtW such as interpreters notetakers CSWs etc means deaf people can stay in employment, can gain promotion same as their peers

25. Can set up their own business

26. Contribute to the world economy

27. DEVELOP THEIR CAREERS: if no AtW support this would not happen!!!
28. AtW should also consider the impact on deaf people’s time management/performance if they were prevented from accessing Communication Agencies to book the required AtW. This means more time to do our work and achieve our targets.

29. The proposed introduction of ‘employing’ a CSW/interpreter if using 30 hours of AtW per week would have serious implications for other AtW clients who only require interpreters for several hours per week/month, as the availability of qualified interpreters would be reduced. We would be forced to use substandard, unqualified, unregistered people, for the same rate of pay (or more) at tax payer’s expense. Service providers such as banks, Local Authority, NHS etc would also struggle to get qualified interpreters.

30. Not offering reasonable adjustments for people with disabilities as some deaf people would find it easier to provide feedback in BSL on DVD.

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