Written evidence submitted by Michèle Taylor (ATW0089)

Access to Work - my experience as a user

- I run a successful business as a trainer and consultant for a range and level of clients that would be impossible without support from AtW
- I need ongoing support from AtW to ensure that my transport requirements are met
- My business is only sustainable because of AtW
- As a hearing trainer, I rely on high quality interpreting services from fully qualified interpreters when I run training courses which include Deaf participants

1. I have been receiving AtW support for a few years. I run my own business and am capable of working around an 80% week with the support I receive from AtW. My business is as a trainer and consultant in disability and equality issues and as an executive coach. I am submitting evidence because I believe strongly that I have the right to work, and that my life and the life of society in general is better if I am in paid work. I contribute significantly to the finances of my family and am about to begin to support my son through university. I am delighted to be able to do that and am able to only because of the success of my business. I am convinced, would not be able to run my business without AtW.

2. My clients include organisations local to where I live in the East Midlands (for example, Nottinghamshire County Council) as well as large national organisations (for example the British Museum, the Royal Opera House) and international agencies such as the National Museum of Serbia.

3. AtW has provided me with ergonomic furniture in order that I can work efficiently, and also funds taxis so that I can get around without having to rely on underground or bus systems - which often assume the ability to walk long distances and to navigate steps, both of which are impossible for me. Without AtW funding, I would not be able to do the work I do or I would have to charge on these extra transport costs to clients which would price me out of the market. Without AtW, then, my business would almost certainly fail. My business is only sustainable because of AtW. Neither would I be able to commit to a full time employed situation without AtW support since my energy and pain levels are sporadic and my travel support needs fairly substantial.

4. I found the assessment process very useful and fair, primarily because the person assessing me had the time and expertise to listen to me describing my needs rather than making assumptions about what they might be. My impairments are complex and my needs not immediately obvious so this time was vital.

5. I have found the ongoing support to be helpful, courteous and appropriate. It would be ironic if the process of administering my AtW claims itself became so onerous that it took energy away from managing my professional life. Currently, it does not do that because it is straightforward and somewhat flexible.

6. My career would not be at the level it is without AtW and my business has developed over the last few years only because that support has been in place.
7. In addition, as a hearing trainer, I often work with interpreters when there are Deaf people in my training sessions. I have a certain level of BSL myself and am very aware of when participant’s communication needs are not being met. I have been concerned in the past when a fully qualified interpreter has not been supplied and I know that my training is not being mediated competently or appropriately. In effect, the Deaf person has not had access to the training and, as a hearing client, I have not been well served by the ‘interpreters’.

8. I strongly recommend that the Committee takes seriously the Government’s responsibilities to support disabled and Deaf people to have meaningful and productive involvement in the labour market by ensuring that AtW is protected in the form in which it currently exists, that it becomes even easier for employers and recipients to use it and that appropriate agencies (for example those representing Deaf people) are, as a matter of protocol, involved in any decision-making with implications for their inclusion in the workplace.

9. I hope this is helpful information as you consider the future of Access to Work.

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