Written evidence submitted by Ranjit Singh (ATW0105)

1. I am profoundly Deaf and British Sign Language (BSL) is my first language. I applied for Access to Work when I was self employed as a photographer. I really struggled to make an enquiry as I could not type in English, I sent an email in the best English I could hoping they would understand. They replied by email and asked questions like how many hours a week I would require support, how many clients I had, how often I worked – I was not able to answer fully as I could not understand the written questions. An access to work assessment was arranged with an interpreter. I explained I wanted support to start a website to launch my business, I would need English interpretation for the website, and the woman said no, I couldn’t have that support. If I wanted help with this I needed to obtain a client database first. But I had not yet started my business so I had no clients at that time. They said they would provide the support once I had clients but how could I advertise for a gain clientele without launching my business in the first place? I ended up arguing with the assessor. Nothing was resolved and I ended up dropping my business plans as I was unable to develop; I was stuck and couldn’t move forward.

2. I am a camera technician and engineer for a charity organisation, I work full time. I am responsible for updating equipment, checking websites for new developments, making phone call enquiries for new technology or to ask technical questions. Sometimes we need to film and photograph on location, so I need to call and contact the relevant people to set this up. I have been in trouble with the police before for filming and taking photographs without permission, but I cannot arrange this without an interpreter. I will often see training that is available that would benefit my role, but I cannot attend any training without a BSL interpreter. I can use youtube to look at tutorials to help me but they are all in spoken English without subtitles. I am also responsible for health and safety of all the technical equipment used within the company, and will often go and visit retailers to have a look at tools or equipment but I cannot communicate with the people I need to without an interpreter. For all these tasks I need an interpreter to support me, translating spoken and written English into BSL that I can understand. I currently have no support from Access to Work (ATW). I made an application for support one year ago. Nothing has been sorted.

3. The ATW website is in written English; I use BSL as my first language, therefore I cannot read and understand the procedures and information given without the support of a BSL interpreter. The language used is not clear and does not explain to me how to use the system.

4. I have issues contacting ATW; I am always told to phone them yet I am Deaf, how can I do this without an interpreter? Who will speak for me if I have no communication support? Or translate the English so I can understand? ATW does not have access for Deaf people to contact them; it would be easier if they had an in-office qualified interpreter or Deaf employee who understand and could explain the procedures for ATW and have a conversation using facetime or Skype to speak to the Deaf person directly. This could also mean that Deaf people could have assessments over the phone and there would be no need to delay the
process by having someone come and visit the workplace to assign necessary provision.

4. Until I am assigned an interpreter my job becomes a waste of time and money; I cannot communicate with ATW to obtain the support I need, and I cannot carry out simple tasks quickly and efficiently as I cannot make phone calls, write emails and communicate with Hearing people in my job without an interpreter. When this support is delayed it directly affects my job and I get behind with my work.

5. If I was funded with support to use freelance interpreters I can also see this becoming a problem; if I am using different interpreters every day, they will not completely understand the jargon I use on a daily basis and the specifics of what I am asking of them. This means every time a new interpreter works with me I must start from scratch, explaining what I need and how to understand my role. What a waste of time when I could be contributing to my workload!

6. Because we have a significant amount of Deaf people who work within our organisation, it would be more helpful to have an in-house interpreter for every team. So we could share our budgets and have support throughout our working hours, instead of being limited to 2 hours of support a day. The problem is, ATW don’t work with us to negotiate our budget; they just decide what hours we should receive without any discussion or conversation with the person who needs them.

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