Written evidence submitted by the Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters (ATW0117)

Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters (SASLI) is the registering organisation of British Sign Language (BSL) / English Interpreters in Scotland. BSL/English Interpreters work to provide equality of linguistic access for Deaf people. SASLI regulates and sets standards for BSL/English Interpreting in Scotland. SASLI's role in training and registration links directly with quality and standards. Our work includes:

- maintaining the Scottish Register of BSL/English Interpreters, including Deafblind Manual Interpreters and Guide Communicators
- setting quality standards for Registration and Continuing Professional Development (CPD)
- representing BSL/English Interpreting in Scotland, to develop a fully inclusive society
- linking together a network of Deaf and Deafblind users of BSL/English Interpreting in Scotland
- defining and maintaining quality and standards in BSL/English Interpreting in Scotland, and
- developing the profession of BSL/English Interpreters in Scotland.

SASLI writes to the Department of Work and Pensions to respond to the Access to Work Inquiry raising concern about decisions by the Access to Work team which has made an impact on employment prospects of Deaf and Deafblind job applicants, employees and employers.

One of SASLI’s concerns refers to the 30-hour rule, currently suspended while the consultation is underway.

SASLI has worked closely with the Scottish Government for many years to ensure registered interpreters are employed to provide BSL/English interpreting and to increase the number of registered interpreters to meet the continuing and increasing demand of registered interpreting services in Scotland. The Scottish Government funded a project – ‘Building Bridges’ - to increase the number of interpreters in Scotland and also to establish a degree-level interpreting course at Heriot Watt University. SASLI fear that the decisions by the Access to Work team are making an impact on the work by the Scottish Government and SASLI.

The 30-hour rule is an example. SASLI has a responsibility to ensure that its interpreting members maintain, develop, update and enhance their skills and knowledge in order to provide an efficient service to both Deaf and Deafblind BSL users as well as the hearing community. Continuing Professional Development (CPD) achieves this. CPD is now a requirement SASLI Interpreting members must undertake every year to ensure continued registration with SASLI.

The 30-hour rule reduces hugely the opportunity for interpreting members to develop and enhance interpreting skills if they remain with the same person for 30 hours per week in the same domain and environment. New and
updated vocabulary and regional signs will not be learnt in this position, thus not meeting the requirements of SASLI for continued registration. Also, interpreter will have little opportunity to

The main purpose of SASLI and other registering bodies is to ensure appropriately qualified and skilled persons are employed as interpreters to enable BSL users to be treated as equal citizens in the society. The Scottish Government shares this view.

Despite recommendations in the Access to Work Guidance, unqualified and unregistered Communication Support Workers are recruited in place of registered interpreters to meet the hourly costs decided by Access to Work. Many SASLI members are reluctant to work for 30 hours in the same position and reduced hourly rates. SASLI is concerned that in the long term, Deaf and Deafblind people will be the persons most affected with employment of uninsured and unregulated CSWs in place of insured, trained and regulated Interpreters. The quality of service provided by CSWs will vary due to lack of training and qualifications to provide an effective interpreting service.

This is a particular worry for Deaf and Deafblind BSL users who are in skilled or demanding jobs. Effective and immediate communication skills are required for these types of jobs which can be matched by BSL/English Interpreters who have worked for many years in this job, having acquired skills and coping strategies to cope with unexpected situations. Hourly rates should match the skills required to meet the needs of the BSL user. CSWs cannot be relied to provide a similar service and professional stance as registered BSL/English Interpreters.

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