Written evidence submitted by Lynette Rushworth, SignHealth (ATW 0126)

My name is Lynette Rushworth and I’m the Administrator and Support Worker for Deaf at SignHealth, Leeds. As well as general P/A and secretarial duties, I provide admin and communication support for my deaf colleagues who are either already in receipt of Access to Work or going through the difficult process of being assessed to “see if they meet the rules for the scheme”.

You want to hear what I think about Access to Work…
I would like to address some of the points which I read in the ‘easy read’ information.

1. **Being assessed, checked to see if you meet the rules for the scheme**
   - **Calls are often first being handled first by the DWP call centre. Problems arise when the information I provide is then being inaccurately passed on or it’s received and interpreted incorrectly by ATW advisor.**
   - **ATW staff not listening properly to the information I give to them and then making incorrect assumptions**
   - **Receiving differing information and advice from advisors**
     - eg: Assessors are awarding very differently two new members of staff starting on the same day and both doing the same job.
   - **ATW allocating insufficient hours then having problems when returning for a review months later**

   At SignHealth we are very much aware of the cost of BSL interpreters and the lack of government funds so do not ask for more hours than required. However, it often feels like it’s a non negotiable deal we are trying to cut with an advisor and that the system does not really recognise or understand the needs of a deaf person trying to work.

   I have often been advised that the deaf person can always go back and ask for a review if the hours are insufficient but sometimes this means there is a gap receiving support while the case is being reviewed.

2. **How good the scheme is at supporting people with learning disabilities and mental health problems - but in this instance, DEAFNESS.**

   - **ATW awarding a rate far below the average fee for qualified BSL interpreters who are very different to other language interpreters.**

   Expecting to find a professional BSL interpreter to work at £25 p/hr would be like going to the dentist and hoping that the hygienist would clean your teeth and accept the same pay as the office cleaner. No one would be happy for a general cleaner to do the same work as a hygienist…

   For example - I provide what I’d class as low level communication support. I’m between a level 1 and 2 standard of BSL. I do not attempt to interpret anything of a serious or legal nature.

   So many mistakes and problems have arisen due to poor communication (or lack of). It is imperative that a qualified BSL interpreter is used at the appropriate times and occasions.

   Please do not undermine the skill, expertise and extreme value of a properly qualified BSL interpreter.

19 June 2014