Written evidence submitted by Kay White (ATW0132)

Executive Summary:

- Deaf people often face inconsistencies in information provided by ATW staff, with slow response times
- ATW provision used to sufficient for Deaf people to do their jobs well
- The provision is no longer adequate. A support package of a salaried interpreter or equivalent funding is not sufficient or realistic.
- Deaf people are not able to find interpreters to work with them under the new rules, and therefore are not able to do their job

Introduction:

I am a freelance registered BSL/English interpreter. I am submitting evidence because the new ATW rules have an impact on me and because I know many Deaf people who cannot do their job effectively under the new rules.

The AtW application and assessment process, from the perspective of employees and employers:

1. I have interpreted many phone calls for Deaf clients wanting to contact ATW about their support package. The advice often seems to depend on who the Deaf client speaks to on the phone, with inconsistencies in information given and how ATW rules are applied. Deaf people from across the country report the rules are applied differently in the same situations.

2. The process of being able to correspond with an advisor often feels very slow, with clients waiting for days or weeks to hear back from them.

The adequacy of ongoing support, both in terms of the aids, adaptations and support workers provided through AtW, and the help and advice offered by DWP:

3. The support for Deaf people generally used to be sufficient for that person to do their job well i.e. enough interpreter hours were allocated at a realistic hourly rate and there was provision for extra hours to be allocated when needed (for example if a training day necessitated a second interpreter be booked).

4. The support allocated now is no longer sufficient. Requiring the Deaf person’s employer to hire a salaried interpreter, or allocating funding equivalent to the cost of this, is not appropriate for the Deaf person or for the interpreter.

5. A salaried interpreter role does not work for the following reasons:
a. There is no funding in place to provide a replacement when the
interpreter is sick (short or long term), on holiday or on maternity
leave etc. Equally, there is no guidance on what should happen to
the interpreter if the Deaf person is on long term sick leave,
maternity leave etc.
b. There is no provision for extra hours the Deaf person may be
required to undertake, e.g. working at weekends or during
evenings.
c. Deaf people undertake a range of activities within their
employment and need to be able to match the varying skills of
interpreters or support workers to those tasks. Interpreters are
not ‘one size fits all’ and the Deaf person should be able to book the
appropriately skilled interpreter for the task at hand.
d. As in interpreter, I would not work with the same Deaf person all
day every day. This is because I need to work with a variety of Deaf
people in a variety of situations in order to maintain my skills. It
would be very intense working with the same person all the time
which I don’t think is healthy for either party. Interpreting is
physically demanding and working so many hours would put me at
severe risk of developing an Upper Limb Disorder such as
repetitive strain injury.
e. Employers will see that recruiting a Deaf person means they must
hire an interpreter as well – they will not want the extra work and
cost this entails and therefore will be reluctant to take on Deaf
staff.

6. Allocating funding equivalent to the cost of a salaried interpreter does
not anywhere near cover the fees charged by interpreters and agencies.
Deaf people are now being told that cannot spend the funding flexibly (i.e.
pay the fees and use fewer hours) – the hourly rate is being limited to £11
to £18 an hour. No qualified interpreter would work for those rates; the
Deaf person would have to use someone woefully under-trained in order
to match those costs. This would result in the Deaf person having very
poor access due to the limited skills of the ‘interpreter’, risking mistakes
and ultimately risking the Deaf person’s job if/when the communication
mistakes impacted their performance. Qualified interpreters have spent
years and thousands of pounds on training to become qualified, and this is
reflected in their fees. Cutting the hourly budget will only result in poor
quality communication support being used, to the detriment of the Deaf
person.

7. It’s important the budget will cover agencies’ fees because when a
directly-booked interpreter texts their Deaf client at 7am saying they are
ill that day, the client stands virtually no chance of finding a replacement.
When interpreters are booked through agencies, the client has the
reassurance that a replacement is much more likely to be found.
Organising interpreters takes a lot of work and many Deaf people depend
on using an agency for this as they don't have time to do it during their working day.

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

8. It is good that ATW will provide communication support at for an unlimited number of interviews, to help them secure a job. It is very important that a prospective employer understands ATW exists and can provide support for a Deaf employee, so they are not put off recruiting a Deaf person. This should remain in place.

9. The new ATW rules are making it very difficult for Deaf people to stay in employment or progress their careers because they rely on adequate interpreter hours to communicate with the hearing world. When insufficient hours are provided, or an unrealistic hourly rate is provided, the Deaf person cannot find an interpreter to work with them. They are then unable to do their job and are then at risk of losing their job.

My Recommendations:

10. I recommend that the concept of a salaried interpreter is dropped. Deaf employees need to be able to choose from and book a range of interpreters according to the varying needs of their job.

11. The cap of £30k funding if a Deaf person chooses not to employ a salaried interpreter should be removed. The budget needs to realistically reflect the hourly rate charged by agencies and freelance interpreters.

12. ATW needs to make sure all staff are applying rules consistently and fairly so that Deaf people know where they stand and are treated equally throughout the country.

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