Written evidence submitted by Liana Lloyd (ATW0135)

Executive summary
1) Introduction and reason for evidence
2) The difficulties of imposing a 30hr rule
3) General issues with ATW
4) The positive aspects of ATW

1) I work as a fully qualified British Sign Language/English Interpreter. I am submitting this evidence as an individual as I have previously worked for myself in a freelance capacity in London although I now work for the agency, Deafinite Interpreters based in Exeter, Devon. The reason for my submission is that I have and continue to support a number of Deaf people who currently rely on ATW funding to access aspects of their job roles. I have therefore been witness to a number of situations where the mere structure and process of ATW has become a barrier to the Deaf person being able to access their work. I feel strongly that Deaf people should not lose out due to changing rules and regulations of ATW that have not been adequately assessed and through.

2) There are many aspects of the 30hr rule that ATW do not seem to have considered and without adequate consultation;
   * If interpreters are there as an employee rather than acting on a ‘consultancy’ basis and brought in as and when necessary then there is no doubt going to be issues around boundary of role.
   * Confusion over who will manage the interpreter if they are a full time member of staff? Will the Deaf person be expected to do this? And would this mean that the interpreter would be an employee of ATW or would they become a member of the Deaf person’s team? How would holidays/sickness/supervisions and potential other aspects of employment be managed? Would ATW provide second interpreters to co-work with the employed interpreter as and when necessary, i.e. at long training days and times when it is not appropriate for one interpreter to work alone? What would happen if an employed interpreter went on maternity leave, would ATW employ a replacement during this time? And what, in fact would happen if a Deaf client went on maternity leave, what would the interpreter do for this time? Would the Deaf person be expected to act as the ‘employer’, in submitting paperwork and so on? And if so, would the Deaf person be compensated for this since it would add more workload onto their already full time job role.
   * Lack of awareness that Deaf people’s jobs vary massively and that certain interpreters might be better suited to certain aspects of their work than others. The control of Deaf people’s work no longer remains their own. Deaf people know who they work with best and many Deaf people have expressed that they would not want to use the same interpreter every day. Rather, they prefer to use a small group of interpreters who get to know them and the way they work.
   * Lack of variety of work for the employed interpreter which in turn has a danger that their skills will stagnate.
   * There is already a national shortage of interpreters compared to the numbers of Deaf people who use their services and if a number of interpreters are employed on a full time basis then it could leave other services, such as the health service without interpreters.

3) General issues with ATW
a) Lack of understanding of Deafness within the ATW departments managing Deaf cases
I have worked with a number of clients who have found ATW advisers to lack knowledge of Deafness and how it impacts on their everyday life. This has made making enquiries and clarifications problematic. I have also found that when interpreting on the phone for Deaf clients talking to ATW there is a lack of understanding of an interpreter’s role and many have not had any knowledge of why a Deaf person may need to access ATW. The experiences of Deaf people also varies in that some are lucky and are allocated an adviser who understands their situation and others who are not who have constant battles with ATW, so much so that it causes them undue stress on top of already stressful jobs they may have. Some Deaf people rely on agencies to manage their bookings for them to lessen the amount of time they have to spend in finding an available interpreter for a certain meeting or training course.

b) There is a lack of understanding of the natural flows of work
I worked with a client whose ATW allocation was on the basis of a number of hours of interpreter support they could claim over a month period. This person went over this allocation on a particular month as they had a high number of meetings during this period. This caused a delay in the system and though he explained to his case worker the situation and that he had in the previous 3 months not used his allocation and that therefore spread over the year his usage of interpreter hours was actually under his allocation they still refused to sort the situation out for over 8 months. This client sent several letters to ATW explaining the situation and each time the case worker said that it had got lost in the system. This person found it incredibly difficult to find who the next person above his case worker he could contact, when he eventually did they were friendly and helpful and sorted the issue within the week! There is a lack of consistency with case workers and I have personally experienced many as rude and lacking awareness of the system, who it is for and how people use it.

c) ATW adds more workload for the Deaf person than is necessary
I understand that ATW needs evidence of what people are spending their money on, i.e. what tasks interpreters are supporting clients with and so on. However, the current ways that they are expected to do this are often poorly managed and not asked for upfront. For example, I know of many cases where a Deaf person has been asked to produce a timetable of dates and times that they had an interpreter and what they used their interpreting for a period of time 3 months previous. Therefore the Deaf person then has to trawl through their diary to pick out meetings, ad-hoc conversations with colleagues they had etc.

There is also a lack of ways of submitting ATW forms. There should be provision for Deaf people to submit these via email so that there is a system in place to see when an email has been sent/received. There has been many instances where Deaf people have been told that their forms have been lost in the system and therefore they have to keep duplicate copies which again adds to their paperwork.

4) ATW is a positive for Deaf and disabled people and no-one wants to lose this resource.
I think it is frustrating because with very little effort the system could make life much easier for many Deaf and disabled people and many of the issues that ATW have had in the past could be easily resolved. ATW enables many Deaf people to access the workplace and I very much hope that it can continue.