Written evidence submitted by Paula Fye (ATW0136)

Executive Summary:

- Why the ‘30’ hour rule is not a good idea
- The need for team interpreting
- The cost of interpreters

1. I am a self employed RSLI and deafblind manual interpreter. I work in the areas of community, education and ATW interpreting. I enjoy working for myself as it gives me a sense of purpose and it allows me to accept and decline work based on my skill level and what I deem to be an appropriate booking.

2. I have been getting more and more concerned recently with the apparent mixed messages and attitudes coming from the ATW arena. As a self employed person I do not want to become salaried.

3. One of the reasons I became a freelance interpreter was that it gave me a variety of bookings so that myself and my skills did not stagnate. By doing this there is less chance for me to become disillusioned and leave the field.

4. I do not want to have my Terms and Conditions and fees dictated to me. Nor do I want to be paid £10.00 + per hour less than an agency when there are free accessible websites available for Deaf, deafblind and hearing people to contact interpreters directly. In England these are: VLP (Visual Language Professionals - www.vlp.org.uk), ASLI (Association of Sign Language Interpreters - www.asli.org.uk) and the NRCPD (National Registers of Communication Professionals working with Deaf and Deafblind people - www.nrcpd.org.uk)

5. I believe working thirty hours plus with one individual is very risky; the relationship between a Deaf/deafblind person and their interpreter is not like that of work colleagues. The interpreter’s role is to facilitate communication between two or more people who do not share the same language. Interpreters strive to be as impartial as possible. I believe this could be at risk under a 30 hour salaried position. I believe it to be unhealthy and could lead to a conflict of interest.

6. Employing freelance interpreters allows Deaf and deafblind people the autonomy to decide which interpreters they wish for certain aspects of their job. As for interpreters, it allows them to only accept the assignments they are appropriately skilled to do.

7. I am have heard from self employed Deaf and deafblind people currently in receipt of ATW support that they may no longer be eligible as they have not made a profit. I find this scandalous given many people take a number of years to turn a profit.
8. Predominantly I have been fortunate to interpret half and full day training courses and meetings with a team interpreter. This is standard practice and interpreters usually work in 15/20 minute slots with the 'off' interpreter at the ready to support the 'on' interpreter should the need arise.

9. Working between languages is taxing and highly skilled, working between different modalities adds to this and this amount of concentration can be very tiring.

10. Fatigue can lead to misinterpretation and the quality of the interpreting being substandard leading to misunderstanding, confusion and possible injury. However, it has been reported to me on several occasions that Deaf people are being asked to employ freelance interpreters in block sessions throughout the day so they don’t need to pay for two interpreters. This again can lead to the above issue in relation to the quality of interpretation, I do not believe many interpreters could work under this system.

11. It is very difficult to accept an interpreting assignment for a job interview when a Deaf person is unable to make contact with ATW or the funding for the interview has not been approved. This clearly puts Deaf and deafblind people at a disadvantage.

12. I am convinced ATW has made major changes to the lives of Deaf and deafblind people in regards to their ability to access the wider job market. However, I feel that this is changing and not for the better. It may be salient for ATW to be more flexible in its usage if a person is working less than 16 hours a week, doing voluntary work to gain experience and indeed attending work experience. It would appear that Deaf and deafblind people are missing out on work experience as there is not the funding available to cover the communication support needed.

13. I am not convinced that ATW at present has a clear understanding as to the difference between a qualified BSL interpreter and a communication support worker. BSL interpreters have had training and been assessed to a certain standard to do this work. Communication support workers have varied to no training and should not be pushed onto Deaf and deafblind people if they want a fully qualified interpreter.

14. I would like ATW to stop perpetuating the myth that freelance interpreters are expensive; freelance interpreters do not often work 40 hour a week, if they are sick they do not get paid, if on holiday they do not get paid, if no work is offered - they do not get paid. Most interpreters I know have not had an income increase for at least 5 years. I would suggest that the following two websites are looked at in relation to interpreter income:
   www.vlp.org.uk - you can request a copy of a report.

15. I have seen very little evidence of any marketing by DWP in regards to ATW.

My Recommendations:
I suggest that the committee may like to look at the following:

Recommendation 1.
DWP/ATW consult with VLP (Visual Language Professionals) and ASLI (Association of Sign Language Interpreters) in regards to interpreters.

Recommendation 2.
A comparison into the costs of using interpreter agencies as opposed to booking interpreters directly. Both historically and in future.

Recommendation 3.
Those in control of the budget and making decisions on ATW rules and regulations in regards to interpreter and communication support receive training on basic Deaf awareness (delivered by Deaf people, deafblind awareness (delivered by deafblind people) and how to work with interpreters (delivered by interpreters). This training to then be rolled out to all ATW staff.

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