Written evidence submitted by Jennifer Smith (ATW0141)

Executive Summary:

- Only NRCPD Registered Interpreters should be used
- Registered Interpreters should not be classed as Support Workers
- Investigate ways to gain more value for money from AtW without reducing the level of support from Registered Interpreters or cutting funding below levels at which Interpreters can afford to stay in the profession.
- Consult with Deaf and interpreting organisations BEFORE operational decisions are made that cost Deaf people their livelihoods as has happened (See BDA report, 2014)

Introduction:

I have been a registered interpreter since 2006 and prior to this worked in education supporting Deaf students from 2002. I am a member of the National Union of British Sign Language Interpreters. I have set up bookONE, an online booking service for Deaf people to source and pay for interpreters.

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:

1. Interpreters should be classed as separate from support workers. Some of the support guidance when applied to interpreters has caused problems both for interpreters and Deaf people.

2. In other areas of government the move has been towards only using registered interpreters (NRCPD) for services funded by public money – ie courts and police work, fraud investigations, NHS meetings and appointments. It is recognized that NRCPD registered interpreters have been trained to the correct level of competence, are safe to practice and are covered by DBS checks and professional indemnity insurance. Access to Work is one area of government policy that is lacking behind the other areas. Many Deaf people work in the aforementioned areas as well as schools, social services and other areas where they come into contact with vulnerable people and therefore need to have access to professional interpreters who offer that protection over and above someone with a level 2 sign language qualification.

3. Signers or Communication Support Workers should not be used for AtW for the previously mentioned reasons and because they have not yet passed qualifications on the National Occupational Standards for Interpreting. These are well defined and someone with a sign language
qualification is not yet fluent or trained in interpreting. As many signers charges are not that much less than Registered Interpreters this represents a waste of public money. When I was in training and working in education with Deaf students I was not ready or capable of working with Deaf people in employment. There has been a move since for more Deaf people to be encouraged to use this lower level of provision that does not meet their communication needs and therefore they are not fit for purpose.

4. There was an operational decision that Deaf people should be asked to find a salaried interpreter if their support was over a certain amount per week. Few interpreters are employed due to other commitments and the challenges this presents for staying in the profession. There was no consultation with interpreters regarding this decision. A recent Association of Sign Language (ASLI) report of interpreters found that 86% of respondents could not take a salaried position due to factors such as childcare, deskillling from not working with a variety of Deaf people in different situations, lack of availability for other work in courts and other areas, not wanting to work with one person and not being able to fund their registration and ongoing professional development. There are the obvious practical problems of employing an interpreter and who then manages them and when they take annual leave or if the interpreter or Deaf person then goes on sick leave. Decisions such as these should have been consulted on with Deaf organisations as well as interpreters via ASLI or the National Union of British Sign Language Interpreters.

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

5. The paperwork is onerous and Deaf people spend a lot of their work time sorting out AtW issues, claims and invoices. The whole process could be made easier with online claims. The redundancies seen in operational staff have only made things worse and call centre staff have led Deaf people to believe their matters are being dealt with when they are not Advisors and are only reading notes from a screen.

6. AtW is a brilliant scheme that allows Deaf people access to employment. Without it they would rarely be able to participate effectively and on an equal basis in work. It has allowed Deaf people to hold positions such as nurses, support workers, social workers, management and this has a subsequent effect on raising the profile of Deaf people in society and showing that Deaf people should be treated equally. There needs to be more work to ensure this scheme is more effective and represents more value for public money such as consideration of other ways of booking interpreters (not using expensive agencies but rather online systems such as www.bookone.co.uk), use of pools of freelance interpreters, allowing Deaf people more flexibility with using their budgets so they can use two
interpreters when needed, allowing teams of Deaf people to share interpreters and promoting use of video relay services such as Sign Video.

The steps taken so far by DWP to extend AtW, including its marketing and funding of the scheme:

7. The Sayce report has already stated that AtW was not well known. This does not seem to have changed and employers are often not aware of the scheme.

My Recommendations:

1. Only NRCPD Registered Interpreters should be used as this represents value for public money and fulfills the communication need that AtW is designed to resolve for Deaf people.

2. Before applying operational decisions or creating/changing policy should consult with both Deaf and interpreter organisations including the Association of Sign Language Interpreters and the National Union for British Sign Language Interpreters.

3. Not try to force Registered Interpreters to become salaried employees when this does not suit most interpreters and Deaf people do not want the added burden of becoming employers.

4. Investigate how to get more value for money from budgets using online systems, avoiding use of expensive agencies, using online interpreting, allowing shared budgets and pools of freelance interpreters.

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