Written evidence submitted by Tamsyn Hockaday (ATW0154)

Executive Summary:

- Renewal process is unnecessarily rushed and stressful
- A distinction between a Support Worker and an interpreter need to be made clearer
- Clarity is needed regarding consistency of rates, cancellations and expenses

Introduction:

I am completing this response as a fully qualified, Registered Sign Language Interpreter (RSLI). I regularly undertake work in a variety of domains including office support, training courses, conferences, medical appointments and social service matters. While I am currently a freelance interpreter, as a trainee, I have previously worked as ‘salaried interpreter’.

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

1. I have been booked to interpret job interviews for deaf job seekers and my experience of AtW through this process has been generally slow and unclear. While I have undertaken the work, it has usually been done with the understanding that AtW had been applied for and payment would be delayed until the process had been completed. In today’s economic climate, the time between application and interview is very short and the AtW process can be quite protracted.

2. At the time of renewal, there is no reminder notice sent out to the recipients, whether in letter format or emailed. With AtW agreements being, generally, three years long there is a very large chance that the date of the renewal will slip the mind of a hard working deaf person who has enough to think about while doing their jobs.

3. I have often been the reason a deaf person discovers their agreement is due for renewal after I ask about a delay in paying an invoice. This then leads to days, or sometimes weeks, of back and forth between the deaf person and AtW while the renewal process takes place. The resulting rushed process does not help either party or the interpreters that the deaf person books in the meantime in order to continue with their job. By alerting the recipient that the award is coming to an end, it allows a calmer, more reasoned renewal process and would be easier for both the deaf person and AtW.

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:
4. There needs to be some clarity on the difference between a Registered Sign Language Interpreter (RSLI) or a Trainee Sign Language Interpreter (TSLI) and a ‘Support Worker’. RSLIs will have undertaken approximately seven years of study and thousands of pounds in order to become fluent in British Sign Language. They will also have studied for a Post Graduate Diploma or its NVQ equivalent to learn the skills necessary to listen to one language and simultaneously convert it into a second language and still listen to the original. The training also consolidates interpreter's understanding of the Code of Conduct and principles such as impartiality, confidentiality and the ability to self-monitor and accept assignments appropriate to their ability.

5. Support workers do a very valuable job and there are various qualifications that they could have, however these are not the same as those for interpreters and as such the market standard cost for interpreters is generally higher.

6. The insistence of AtW to force the 30 hour, salaried interpreter rule has harmed many interpreters and the deaf people seeking support. Having been a salaried interpreter, there are many conflicts of interest inherent in the role. The interpreter is torn between protecting the confidentiality of the client, assured in their Code of Conduct, while simultaneously being held accountable to senior staff members.

7. Repetitive work in the same setting leads to the degradation of an interpreter’s skills. There is often no prospect for advancement and the sense of complacency affects the quality of the interpretation which, in turn, negatively affects the deaf client’s work.

8. I was told that I had to take my Annual Leave at the same time as my deaf client. I was unable to be involved in Team meetings as a staff member as I had to interpret them and there was no training budget to enable me to advance in my interpreting training.

9. Co-worker. If a booking will last longer than an hour and a half, a second interpreter is needed to co-work due to the strain of mentally processing between two languages. I am aware of situations where AtW have denied funding for a co-worker due to the cost implications. I have also interpreted a conversation between a deaf person and their advisor where the advisor told them that the deaf person was allowed to book two interpreters but they had to have one in the morning and one in the afternoon.

10. AtW advisors lack any meaningful Deaf or Interpreter awareness. My interpreting colleagues have told me of instances where the advisor has interrupted an interpreted phone call and started asking questions directly of the interpreter.

11. A general lack of consistency. I have worked with three deaf people in the same office whose rates vary from £25 an hour to £45 an hour. Although I would normally charge full day or half day rates, this has been challenged.

12. There is also no consistency in the payment of travel expenses. Some of my clients allow me to charge travel costs and some do not. There is no
clear guidance on what can and cannot be claimed under AtW for either the interpreter or deaf person.

13. Most interpreters have a cancellation fee if cancelled within a certain timescale and they are unable to find alternative work. There is confusion as to whether AtW will pay cancellation fee and, if they do, under what circumstances.

14. In the age of internet banking, the ability to organize tax payments for the HMRC online, online utility bill payments, why do AtW rely on a paper based system and all the flaws inherent in it? I have lost count of the number of times I have had to ask clients to repost my invoices after they have got 'lost in the post' or 'lost in the system'.

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

15. The Sayce Report states that for every £1 spent by AtW, the treasury receives £1.48 in return from the taxes paid by both the disabled person and the people employed to support them. With a government scheme that is actually making money, why is there being an effort to cut the funding available?

16. While the extension of AtW to cover work placements and apprenticeship schemes is very much needed, how are the recipients of this extension able to financially contribute back to the scheme?

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