Written evidence submitted by Clare Reed, Registered Sign Language Interpreter (ATW0209)

Executive Summary:

- I, and my colleagues, have a strong negative perception to the 30 hour policy and the reduction in hourly fees Access to Work (ATW) are willing to pay. This will have a detrimental effect to our profession as well as catastrophic implications to Deaf workers.
- ATW policies and procedures are inconsistent and ATW advisors have little, if no understanding of the interpreting profession and the needs of Deaf people in work.
- The use of Communication Support Workers (CSW) within ATW settings is inappropriate and risky. They do not contain the adequate or appropriate qualifications to be working in the vast majority of ATW settings.
- ATW are decreasing Deaf people's options of support and their need to choose interpreters based on individual work tasks, not as a job description in its entirety.
- ATW are not consulting with interpreters or interpreter led/specialist interpreting agencies.

Introduction:

1) I am a qualified Sign Language interpreter who has experience of working in a variety of settings including freelance and salaried positions. My salaried work has included working in one setting for specific Deaf and hearing people and working as a salaried agency interpreter where I work with a variety of people in a variety of settings.

2) I, along with many of my colleagues, provide work that is funded via Access to Work. We are highly qualified professionals that have studied interpreting at post-graduate level and belong to a registering body that governs our conduct.

3) This response outlines my main concerns and these are echoed throughout the interpreting community. Although I cannot give specific examples due to confidentiality, I will endeavor to give an overview of the situation.

ATW's policies, procedures and administrative issues

4) Clients' ATW hours have been decreased without consultation, assessment or warning. Deaf people are now spending their limited allocation of interpreter hours trying to contact ATW (this has to be done via telephone and therefore an interpreter is needed in order to facilitate communication). Therefore, Deaf workers are left even fewer interpreting hours to complete their actual work tasks.
5) ATW Policies and procedures are inconsistent. An arbitrary number of hours per person seem to be allocated as well as a variety of maximum hourly fees a person is allowed to spend on an interpreter.

6) Current ATW hourly provision and fee limitations require interpreters to work for extended periods of time without a co-worker. This puts the health and safety of the interpreter at risk as well as having a detrimental effect on the quality of the interpretation.

7) There is huge variation on what ATW are willing to pay including sometimes refusing to pay travel and car parking.

8) ATW are refusing to pay cancellation charges even though this is contradictory to their own guidelines. The interpreter is willing and able to work and if they have not been able to secure a replacement booking for the time they were contracted, they are being penalised for a situation out with their control.

9) ATW are inconsistent with what they are willing to pay interpreters. Budgets range from £19-£45 per hour (Statistics from the Association of Sign Language Interpreters) and yet some interpreters chose to charge a half day, full day or assignment rate. The demands of the job, the skills and experience of the interpreter and the Deaf professionals' preference are not being taken into account.

Enforcing Salaried Interpreters

10) I, along with many of my colleagues would not consider a PAYE salaried position in most environments. Whilst I have been employed to work in one setting with specific people over time, in my experience you can became de-skilled, de-motivated and have no career progression.

11) Interpreting with more than one client in one domain increases our skill set.

12) I work with clients who chose their interpreters depending on what they require for a specific job. For example a male Social worker may require a male interpreter when visiting a male prison, but request a female interpreter when meeting a mother who is experiencing domestic abuse. Again, the Deaf professional is being refused the right to choose their Support Worker.

13) There can be a detrimental impact on boundaries and both Deaf and hearing co-workers can have unrealistic expectations as to our role. As a freelancer, I have the right to accept or decline work based on my skills, experience and qualification as well as the taking into account the time, content, nature and environment of the job. In salaried work, those who know nothing about my job or the code of conduct I work to are managing and controlling my work.
14) As an employee I have the right to an opinion in meetings and to contribute to discussions as I see fit. Therefore ATW would need to provide external interpreters for meetings therefore adding to the Deaf persons ATW budget.

15) As a salaried interpreter ATW have no plans as to what would happen if my Deaf colleague went on maternity leave or holiday or how they would replace me if I were sick or unable to work for a period of time.

16) I regularly work with one colleague whose job takes her around the country. The company policy has flexible working for people to work at home, especially for those with children. As a mother and an employee I should be entitled to those benefits, but my work hours and location are dictated by another employee.

17) Registered interpreters are required to work in non ATW funded domains such as health and legal. Enforcing full time employment from the majority of our professionals will have serious far reaching consequences for others.

**Decreased Hourly fees/The use of Communication Support Workers**

18) ATW guidance recommends the use of registered, qualified interpreters, however some clients are having their fees reduced to the extent that they can only afford Communication Support Workers (CSW’s). Although seen as a cost effective alternative, CSW’s have only undergone training in sign language competency (equivalent to a GCSE which assess ‘conversational’ level of ability)) and therefore do not have any interpreter training. As well as not processing adequate skills in both English and BSL, they are also not registered with any governing body and therefore are not subject to a complaints procedure or covered by indemnity insurance.

19) Interpreting training covers not just the linguistic knowledge needed to work between English and BSL, but also ethics, professional boundaries, reflective decision making and translation. These are skills not seen at CSW level.

**Interpreter led Agencies**

20) Many Deaf professionals rely on the experience of agencies as well as their vital role of decreasing administration time.

21) Interpreter led agencies know interpreters across the country and provide critical experience and knowledge for clients and are essential for those that need an interpreter at short notice.

22) Experienced interpreter-led agencies significantly reduce wasted work
hours of booking and organising interpreters as well as providing interpreters at very short notice. The proposed 35% cut to agencies is not sustainable and could potentially lead to companies closing. This would decrease Deaf people’s options for support and increase administration duties out with their employment contract. In addition, if they are unable to find support they are unable to fulfill their requested work duties.

23) Interpreter led agencies are working within the communities that they serve and have a good working relationship with both the Deaf and interpreting communities.

My Recommendations:

1. ATW to recognise the professional status of interpreters and that this is reflected in the quality of our work and fees.

2. ATW advisors to understand the need for two interpreters in specific assignments and adequate funding for this be provided.

3. Interpreter Awareness training be available for all ATW advisors.

4. The decreased fees (CSW budget) be withdrawn and the ATW budget reflect the need for registered interpreters.

5. ATW consult with the interpreting profession regarding industry practices such as fees and Terms and Conditions.

6. Better use of interpreter led/specialist agencies that primarily provide BSL/Eng interpreters and have an awareness of the cultural and access issues facing Deaf employees.

7. AtW consult with interpreter led agencies/specialist agencies regarding industry practice such as fees and Terms and Conditions.

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