Written evidence submitted by Deafinite Interpreters (ATW0225)

We are contacting you in regards to the ATW inquiry and would like to submit the following information about our concerns with the recent changes to ATW for the Deaf community.

Deafinite Interpreters was established in 2007 and is run by 3 fully qualified interpreters, who, together have over 20 years of experience. We also have a further nine ‘staff interpreters’ that all work full time. All are either fully qualified or trainee interpreters, and are members of the Association of Sign Language Interpreters (ASLI) and registered with the National Register for Communication Professionals working with Deaf and Deafblind People (NRCPD). In addition to our staff team we also hold a comprehensive database of freelance interpreters to complement our provision.

The agency supports the needs of the Deaf community alongside service providers. Interpreters are able to offer interpretation services in a wide range of settings including; Health, Police, Social Services, Education, Professional meetings, Training Courses to name but a few.

1. Salaried interpreter / 30 hour rule.

We believe that working with the same clients exclusively can also lead to compromising interpreter impartiality. In addition if the interpreter is a paid member of staff they have the right to attend work related meetings such as team meetings etc to express their views. They are unable to do this if they are attending those meetings as an interpreter. As an employee, interpreters would then become a member of the team therefore there would be a conflict in the role as they would be attending the meeting as an employee and interpreting. As an agency we are concerned about the impact of this decision on the skill level of the interpreters due to the lack of variety of the work. We feel the interpreters would be limiting themselves linguistically but also they are limiting the domains in which they will gain experience for professional development.

If the Deaf staff have to employ an interpreter, what happens when the Deaf member of staff is on holiday, would the interpreter be restricted to only take holiday when the Deaf staff take their leave.

It is well researched that for accuracy interpreters should co-work for long / complex assignments, if the 30 hour rule is enforced will co-workers be booked in addition to this? Without a co-worker it can significantly affect the level and quality of interpretation that is provided and therefore the Deaf person’s access to the information could be reduced. From an interpreter’s perspective, it can affect our abilities and working solo with no support can lead to health issues such as RSI, stress and mental health and well being issues.

There are still only a limited number of registered interpreters in the UK compared to other countries. By enforcing the 30 hour rule it could be limiting the number of interpreters that are available even further, and we would be restricted to working with individual clients rather than serving the whole community. This will then affect the access provided in other sectors such as health, legal, education settings etc.

When surveyed, only a limited number of interpreters were keen to work solely in one domain, part of the appeal of being an interpreter is the variety of work which you would not get by working for one Deaf member of staff. Therefore, it may be that untrained and uninsured people working as “interpreters” would apply to gain experience as an interpreter, but have not followed a recognised and accredited course to gain any interpreting qualifications, which would lead to a lower level of service to the Deaf staff as these people may not have the appropriate training and support, or have the experience to know how and when to seek support if it became necessary.

As an employee the interpreter would require significant support, training, supervision etc. Would this be the responsibility of the employer? If so it would be an additional cost of employing a Deaf
member of staff so could discourage employers from employing a Deaf person over a hearing candidate at interview. Or would ATW cover these additional costs? If this were to be the case it would not save money as these are currently covered either by the agency booking the interpreter or the freelance interpreter themselves.

2. **Benefit of working with an agency.**

- Match appropriate interpreter to the job depending on the level of experience of the interpreter, background knowledge, skill set, location to reduce travel costs.
- Enables the Deaf client to have greater choice and variety, the proposal of employing 1 in house interpreter reduces the personal choice of the Deaf person and is disempowering.
- By only employing 1 interpreter this does not take into account the variety of work that many Deaf staff need the interpreter to do. For example they may find that a certain interpreter has the skill set for some assignments such as a team meetings but they may require a specific interpreter when attending conferences etc due to it being a specialist domain.
- Holiday cover, sickness etc. The benefits of using an agency is that with the large pool of resources we have we can find interpreters throughout the year so that the Deaf member of staff is not affected by the interpreter’s holidays / sickness.
- All the interpreters that work at Deafinite Interpreters have extensive training and support which we as the employer pay the costs and allow time within work time to do this. Examples of this are:
  a. Covering all training costs.
  b. Providing opportunities for CPD. To maintain registration, interpreters have to collect CPD evidence which we provide and pay for.
  c. Time to prepare for all bookings.
  d. Time and support to brief and de-brief after bookings.
  e. Mentoring and supervision.
  f. Team meetings.
  g. Case study groups.
  h. Registration fees and membership fee.
  i. Equipment for interpreters, this could be equipment for them to prepare for their assignments. For example, laptop and printer for the interpreter to prepare for assignments.

We believe that this support is essential to maintain and develop interpreter’s skills to enable us to provide high quality, accurate interpreters to both the Deaf community and the service providers. We also provide many of these services to the local freelance interpreters.

- The biggest benefit of using an agency such as Deafinite Interpreters is the lack of administration for the Deaf staff. Previously many of our clients had to spend a significant amount of their time searching for interpreters, sending the preparation materials to the interpreters, dealing with numerous invoices etc etc. This was affecting the time they had to do their actual job. At Deafinite we do all of these administration tasks as part of the normal hourly fee which allows the Deaf staff member to do their job. This also means they are getting more value for money.

- By using an agency we are able to provide a more flexible service. If the Deaf staff member has an employed interpreter and the interpreter is ill they may then be limited about getting cover, this then greatly impacts on their ability to continue to do their job for the duration of the time that the interpreter is absent. Or if the Deaf member of staff is using freelancers they may have a small pool of people that they use so again cover for holidays / sickness can
be difficult. It can also be difficult to cover last minute assignments. At Deafinite we have a
team of 12 in house interpreters and a database of over 35 freelancers so we are often able to
cover appointments in a emergency.

   - Specialist knowledge of the language, culture and interpreting.
   - Ability to know the skills set of the interpreters to place the right interpreter for the
     booking. Thus preventing the need to re-do assignments due to communication
     breakdowns, another cost saver.
   - Ability to provide appropriate, continuous support to the interpreters.
   - Office staff that have signing skills, Deaf awareness and a high level of
     understanding of the role of a sign language interpreter. This enables us to provide a
     more cohesive service to the Deaf community, service providers and interpreters.
   - As we are interpreter led we are up to date with interpreter research and best practice
     so can advise clients on protocol to improve the service.
   - By being a community specialist agency, we able to provide the community with a
     consistent, highly skilled team of interpreters but still maintaining professional
     boundaries and work within our code of conduct.

4. Concerns over restriction in fees.
   - We are concerned that a national cap on fees is extremely restrictive and does not account
     for regional differences. For example in a rural area there is considerably more travel needed
     between bookings than in a city, therefore the minimum number of hours may need to be
     higher.
   - We feel that the fee being inclusive of travel also doesn’t take into account the variety of
     travel that often occurs. In the South West we have some assignments within five miles but
     others in excess of 100 miles. This is due to the large geographical area that we cover.
   - Limited resources – There are greater numbers of interpreters that populate cities, compared
     to an area such as the South West, thus enforcing the need for any interpreter that lives and
     works in this area to have to travel in order to meet the needs of the Deaf community and
     service providers.
   - As an agency we have to charge and pay VAT, it seems unfair that this is to be included in
     the fee as it’s a cost to ourselves. This shows our commitment to ensuring the buoyancy of
     the global economy.
   - The additional fees that agencies charge compared to freelancers should cover the
     administration involved in providing interpreters and the support that is provided to
     interpreters. If this fee includes VAT and travel there is no allowance for the extra work that
     we do. We are not merely a brokerage service, a great deal of time and effort is spent
     matching the correct interpreter to any assignment, great care is given to providing the most
     locally and appropriately qualified interpreter to any given assignment, thus reducing travel
     time and mileage charged.

5. Concerns in restriction of the number of hours.
   - In our experience many Deaf staff have seen a reduction in their hours even when their job
     has altered and consequently they need more hours.
   - This has led to some Deaf staff struggling to do their role.
   - This can have a significant impact on the Deaf persons chance of promotion as if they were
     promoted it is likely they will need more hours due to the extra responsibility, extra training
     needed, the need to attend more meetings etc.
• We feel it is essential that the Deaf person’s hours are agreed in cooperation with the Deaf staff, the interpreter and the line manager; this should not be linked to budget. The hours should be agreed first prior to the fees being agreed depending on the area, skill level required etc.

• Finally and more worryingly, this is having a detrimental effect on Deaf people’s mental health and well being. Deaf staff are constantly concerned about their hours, they are having their right to choose their preferred supplier of interpreters stripped away from them and sanctions imposed upon them that are restrictive to their role and causing considerable work related stress.

20 June 2014