The Access to Work (AtW) application and assessment process

1. The application process for making a claim is very slow. For example, I submitted a claim in February for BSL interpreter support and didn't receive a reply until April. This is a wait of over two months for a response for a fundamental service to my employment. This is an unacceptable waiting time and feel this process should be much quicker in order to ensure either a) the provision of interpreters is met (some employers may refuse to provide interpreters until the funding is agreed) or b) the employer does not have to foot the bill for the provision of interpreters for such a lengthy period before receiving the funding.

2. The assessment process does not gather enough information with regard to the costs of interpreters (i.e. the interpreters' hourly rates that are available to provide the support I need).

3. The service is not Deaf-friendly as the application has to be made over the telephone – this process relies on the involvement of a hearing person or Typetalk. If the application process was available online this would offer more choice for a Deaf person to make a claim themselves.

4. When contacting the AtW offices it takes a long time to receive a reply – sometimes a wait of up to 3 days to get a return phone call. This is too long to have to wait. Sometimes when messages have been left for a return call they are never returned at all. E-mailing is no better, with e-mails unanswered.

5. I had funding in place and then my contract transferred to a new company that was owned by the same directors, in the same role, therefore I was expecting the same funding provision for the support I require, however, to my astonishment the funding budget had been reduced to almost half in a matter of weeks. This is an ongoing issue myself, and my employer are trying to resolve.

Ongoing Support

1. I have had problems with ongoing support as the funding I have applied for has been dramatically reduced resulting in a massive shortfall to the costs of my support. I am currently appealing this decision but ultimately this could affect my employment.

Effectiveness in terms of helping disabled people to
Secure a job
Stay in employment, and
Develop their careers

1. As stated above the lengthy application process, and massively reduced funding has had a negative effect on my employment. For the last four months this has added a lot of pressure to my work. Without the necessary support I would most definitely struggle to communicate with my clients via telephone, face-to-face, and through e-mails and marketing materials, as I require support with written English. I also need support when visiting clients and attending supervision meetings with my team members. The whole process has had a physical affect on me by raising my stress levels and blood pressure. I am extremely concerned about what my future career would hold without the right level of support in place.

Marketing and Funding of the AtW Scheme

1. I feel the scheme could be marketed more to employers, as many are unaware that this scheme exists and could improve employment prospects of Deaf people if employers were aware that they could appropriately support Deaf people in the workplace. Also there are still many Deaf people
who are unaware that they can apply for funding. I feel that the funding of this scheme is vital to Deaf people in the workplace. Deaf people have a lot to offer in the workplace and can be a valuable asset in the same way a hearing person can be.

I feel that the continued and strong funding of the AtW scheme enables so many people to undertake a wide variety of fulfilling part-time and full-time roles. The alternatives of low investment or lack of investment in this scheme would result in people being out of work and therefore potentially claiming benefits, or needing the support of Mental Health Services (which are already under pressure), therefore the costs to the government could be much higher than supporting people in the work place through this scheme. Also employment is good for the individual, their family, their community and the country. If a person is able to bring in an income then they can pay their mortgage or rent and bills and be a constructive member of society contributing to supporting other services through having the financial ability to take part.

20 June 2014