Written evidence submitted by Ian Reynolds (ATW0259)

Introduction:

My name is Ian Reynolds. I have been profoundly deaf since birth and need equal access to communication in employment in order to perform my job to the best of my ability and to be on the same footing as my hearing contemporaries.

The Access to Work (AtW) application and assessment process, from the perspective of employees and employers:

1. It is not an easy process and can be extremely unfair due to the fact that the application and assessment is often handled by someone who has no understanding or awareness of deafness and the difficulties that a deaf person may face in employment. They also follow a rigid script which is not helpful. The recent changes and withdrawal of support is detrimental to deaf people. Also asking them to fund interpreters out of their own salary is totally unacceptable.

2. The proposed changes all seem to be geared to reducing costs. Due to the expenses involved it will exclude most deaf people from employment and prevent them from making a valuable and meaningful contribution to society. There is also a lack of flexibility and some seriously misguided misconceptions as to the role of interpreters and the costs involved in using them. Interpreters perform a valuable role in ensuring equal access for Deaf people.

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:

3. AtW support for Deaf people as it currently stands it fulfills its brief to a large extent in my case. But because we are ‘expensive’, the proposed changes in reducing our support will be counterproductive.

4. The use of interpreters at work enables me to communicate effectively with my hearing peers and to make an equal contribution. Without interpreters I would fail to fulfill my potential and my contribution at work would be less significant. The other alternative would be to be unemployed and a financial burden on the state. Why change a system that is working well for disabled and Deaf people?

The effectiveness of AtW in supporting people with mental health conditions and learning disabilities:

5. N/A

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

7. Without AtW I would not have reached the position I am in today. I have been able to attend training courses with interpreters (2 interpreters a day) and this has been invaluable in giving me the necessary tools and knowledge to perform my job effectively. This has also been true of team meetings, talks, seminars or conferences that I have had to attend due to the nature of my job. AtW has been great for me, it has supported me and other Deaf people to get into work, and to get promotions, and work on an equal footing with the hearing people I work with.

8. AtW has provided the necessary support to me at work and consequently have allowed me to remain in employment and progress in my career. AtW is not a benefit and it brings more money back to the government than they spend on AtW (according to the Sayce report), because it means Deaf and disabled people are earning and paying in taxes, instead of being unemployed and claiming benefits.

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

9. The proposed changes to AtW are a great concern as employers will not employ Deaf people as they will be deemed too expensive.

10. DWP should scrap its proposed changes to AtW and leave it alone as it has made a significant contribution and improved the working lives of Deaf and disabled people and benefited society at large.

My Recommendations:

11. Recommendation 1. To listen to Deaf people and their support needs in employment. The impact of the proposed changes will affect my ability to keep my job, get promotion, and to get other jobs in future.

12. Recommendation 2. DWP have failed to listen to or work with deaf people in making these changes. They have not made it clear about how we can complain or appeal against misguided decisions in reducing our support, especially when we need interpreters. My advice would be to leave AtW alone and not change it as it has had an enormous positive effect on the working lives of deaf and disabled people in the UK. Keep it and return it to the old way it worked.

20 June 2014