Written evidence submitted by Edward John Richards (ATW0315)

Executive Summary:

Introduction:
- Information about myself as a Deaf BSL user of AtW

AtW application and assessment process:
- Lack of transparency or clear award criteria.

Adequacy of ongoing support:
- Not fit for purpose and processes inherently discriminatory.

AtW's effectiveness:
- Protracted and complicated administration and lack of clear efficient communication.

Recommendations:
- A radical change in policy and process, creating criteria which are clear and transparent and fit for purpose. In order to achieve this and before any decisions are made which effect Deaf people, AtW need proper consultation with representative organisations and individuals and the information gleaned, then acted upon. (Rather than holding conversations in camera on which Deaf people have no information until it's too late to be heard.).
- To ensure that all AtW staff are properly trained to understand the needs of this cultural and linguistic minority.
- AtW staff, dealing with Deaf people, to learn a minimum of Level 1 BSL, funded by AtW.
- To be aware of translation and interpreting processes, the time these take and the domains in which interpreters carry these out, along with their professional ways of working.
- To research and create a knowledge base of all relevant agencies, their cost effectiveness and their ability to provide Deaf people with voice, thereby empowering them.
- Employ a Deaf BSL user to consult on all matters affecting Deaf award recipients.
Introduction:

I'm Edward Richards, Managing Director of my own graphic design company, Cutting Edge Design Ltd, established 9 years ago. When I began there was no support in place from AtW.

The reason for submitting this evidence is largely because of the unnecessary difficulties and red tape both in the beginning to get any support and more recently to justify my profitability as a business (either current or forecast), and has had a negative effect on my own well being, mental health and therefore my ability to focus on the day to day activities of my business. When support was at it's height, my business thrived and now, when my need for support is constantly being questioned, my business is suffering. There may indeed be other factors in play, but the change in support is one that can be linked directly to my business success.

Finally, frustrated with the lack of choice for me as a Deaf person, the inefficiency of agencies and their inflated fees and charges, I set up the bookONE web app, which transfers the power and choice, back to the service user, i.e. the Deaf person.

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

(What is the AtW application and assessment process like for Deaf and disabled people, and for their employers? (This can be for the first time you apply, or when you are being re-assessed).

The application and review process is not transparent and complicated. No effort is made to explain the criteria simply on which decisions will be made, or who will make them.

Communications are long winded and vague and make it difficult for Deaf people to have a clear idea of each stage of their application process. There is no consistency between a decision make in one case and another in a different one. The granting of support, therefore seems arbitrary. Deaf people are required to engage in endless email conversations which themselves take up valuable support time as questions are often asked more than once, simply because of a lack of care in reading responses. AtW have no facility to receive communication in Deaf people’s native BSL.
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:

(Is AtW support for Deaf and disabled people good enough, and does it meet your needs? This is for both the help and advice they offer you and your employer, and the support they offer - interpreters, other support workers, aids and adaptations.)

No, it is not fit for purpose. As far as it's possible to glean, no member of AtW staff can communicate directly with Deaf people in BSL and their advice is not based on circumstances of individuals and often belies a lack of knowledge of interpreters, the interpreting processes, the needs of Deaf people or basic Deaf awareness, or indeed of cultural and linguistic differences which affect the advice and help given. Indeed, often the advice is more like pressure to do what suits AtW, rather than the Deaf person concerned and is often discriminatory in its nature.

AtW's effectiveness in terms of helping disabled people to: secure a job, stay in employment, and develop their careers:

Because of the protracted nature of AtW’s processes and communications, which often don't ask for everything which they require in one simple, well written email, but requiring several, Deaf people are forced to spend hours out of their working days dealing with matters which detract from the daily tasks of their employment, thereby limiting effectiveness and reducing the possibilities for advancement.

To further investigate the possibility of integrating an interpreter booking system (such as bookONE (EU) Ltd), with their own systems in order that the efficiency of payments and administration, and most importantly Deaf people’s right to choose are maximised.

My Recommendations:

A radical change in policy and process, creating criteria which are clear and transparent and fit for purpose. In order to achieve this and before any decisions are made which effect Deaf people, AtW need proper consultation with representative organisations and individuals and the information gleaned, then acted upon. (Rather than holding conversations in camera on which Deaf people have no information until it's too late to be heard.)

To ensure that all AtW staff are properly trained to understand the needs of this cultural and linguistic minority.
AtW staff, dealing with Deaf people, to learn a minimum of Level 1 BSL, funded by AtW.

To be aware of translation and interpreting processes, the time these take and the domains in which interpreters carry these out, along with their professional ways of working and preferred employment status.

To research and create a knowledge base of all relevant agencies, their cost effectiveness and their ability to provide Deaf people with choice, thereby empowering them.

Employ a Deaf expert and BSL user to consult on all matters affecting Deaf award recipients.

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