Written evidence submitted by Frank Barnes School for Deaf Children

(ATW0321)

This submission has been translated and transcribed from British Sign Language

Executive Summary:

- Frank Barnes School for Deaf Children is one of a very few schools in the UK that teach deaf children in BSL.

- We believe deaf children have a right to the maximum possible fluency in both BSL and English in order to have the widest possible choice in communication.

- We have been rated ‘outstanding’ by Ofsted three times in a row, and are an internationally recognized Centre of Excellence, and have been designated a Beacon School.

- 14 of our staff have ATW.

- We have experienced issues with communicating with ATW, and problems with paperwork handling, including ATW issues that have put the school in debt.

- We recommend ATW:
  - move to a single point of contact for organisations that employ many deaf staff,
  - allow deaf employees to handle their cases and paperwork online
  - allow deaf employers and employees to interact with ATW in BSL

Responses to ATW Inquiry questions:

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

1. N/A

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:

2. ATW has been a huge support for the teachers and staff of Frank Barnes School for Deaf Children. The children at our school benefit most from a curriculum delivered in BSL by fluent signers. We hire deaf teachers and support staff with high linguistic fluency in BSL so that deaf children can absorb the maximum information, in a language they understand fully.
3. Even at a deaf school that teaches in BSL, deaf teaching staff would not be able to do their jobs without ATW because of the amount of contact and interaction with hearing people required to do a professional job.

4. Deaf teachers and staff need ATW for communication support in interacting with hearing colleagues, parents, specialist peripatetic staff, and attending meetings with 1:1 support staff, child annual reviews, parent meetings, Occupational Therapy & Physiotherapy meetings, Special Educational Needs meetings, casework and teaching forums, professional training courses, constant updating on educational reforms, and so on.

5. However, we have experienced severe difficulties in communicating with ATW. They prefer phone calls, which immediately places our deaf teachers and staff at a disadvantage, because contacting ATW requires sourcing an interpreter first, so making a phone call requires a considerable amount of work, organisation and expense.

6. Our line manager responsible for dealing with many ATW issues on behalf of deaf staff, is also deaf herself, so ATW themselves have created considerable access barriers for her in performing her job of administering ATW paperwork.

7. At times we have to ring every day for a week before getting through to someone. Or we are placed on hold for long periods then put through to ATW caseworkers who cannot access our casefiles.

8. We have also experienced issues with paperwork. ATW require invoices state hourly rates, which is problematic as BSL interpreters usually invoice per day or half day. Notetakers invoice us per meeting, which can lead to varying or unclear hourly rates.

9. We are currently experiencing a significant issue in that we received a call from ATW disputing a batch of ATW support invoices, and refusing to pay them until an unspecified issue was clarified. We double checked the invoices, but could not see any issue. We contacted a senior ATW who also could not see any problem with the invoices, but could not authorize payment, saying we had to speak to the same person who raised the issue.

10. This contradicted ATW’s own policy of not contacting specific advisors. We rang ATW many times, but still have not been able to trace the original person who raised the issue. This has left the school with a large debt because we have already paid the invoices ourselves and are awaiting reimbursement from ATW. This situation is ongoing.

11. So, in summary, whilst AtW is of critical importance to us, we find it is unnecessarily bureaucratic, obstructive and cumbersome in practice, leading to unnecessary work and expense. In our view it should be more
flexible in terms of the supporting paperwork that is required to support claims, and the ability to communicate with AtW staff by way of BSL.

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

12. N/A

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

13. N/A

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

14. N/A

Frank Barnes School recommendations for improving ATW:

15. A single contact person for organisations that employ large numbers of deaf people - as opposed to having to phone different people in different departments. At the moment, we are dealing with someone in the payments team, someone else for renewals, someone else for new claims, and so on, plus different staff members have different ATW caseworkers or advisors.

16. The ability to interact with ATW via email.

17. The ability to interact with ATW via BSL – this would greatly help our deaf staff resolve issues.

18. The ability to manage ATW paperwork and case details online.

19. That ATW accept invoices for reimbursement that have already been paid by Frank Barnes School.

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Submission prepared by Catherine Drew, Thomas Lichy, and Jeremy Johnson for Frank Barnes School for Deaf Children, July 2014.