Written evidence submitted by Henry Skinner (ATW0004)

Firstly I would like to thank you for the opportunity for me to enter my experiences and views on Access to Work (AtW).

I have used AtW for my work and found it very useful for my career and in developing links to wider range of people. Without it I would be out of work, at home on benefits with the possibility of low self-esteem and motivation to improve myself. I do have a mortgage and 2 lovely children and I believe I am a positive role model to them so they will aspire to develop good career for themselves when they grow up. I am also positive role model to the British Sign Language deaf community.

In my work I am involved in a number of meetings, hosting information stands, steering groups and making telephone calls. Having interpreter to support me enables me to have these skills and put myself at par with my hearing peers.

However having said how valuable the AtW is for me, there are some areas that need to be improved, such as the paperwork involved using the AtW. I am already using my work time to look for interpreter and book them for meetings, on top of this, completing the forms and collecting invoices from the interpreters and send them off to my line manager to sign off to confirm that I have used the interpreters. This is very time consuming and I believe there should be a better system in place to make it easier to sort out the AtW payments.

My concerns are that the AtW are making lots of decision recently without consulting with deaf people, interpreters/agencies and employers, for example the 30 hours maximum rule which are not ideal for deaf people who want to make calls or last minutes meeting with colleagues. There were lots of decisions which I find confusing and there are no explanations for these decisions.

I work for Action on Hearing Loss, they are a charity organisation and recently the AtW informed Action on Hearing Loss that they do not accept booking from their employees from 7th Feb, I found out about this in mid Feb and already used interpreters and had got some bookings already made which were not possible for me to cancel. I was surprised about that decision made by AtW because it is my AtW and they did not consult with me and explain why they did it. I would have liked to discuss it further with AtW and try to resolve the issue rather than having a rash decision via third party. I am the person affected by that decision and I have feared I may lose my job due to the effect on my inefficiency with my work with no correct support.

I did email the end of Feb to AtW to complain about this and did not get a response at all until I called AtW over a month later and spoke to an advisor. I was surprised with the service I had from the advisor, she could only confirm that I did send an email and nothing else. I asked for more information and they said call back to the same number I called. I explained that it is difficult and then she suggested me to email, which I reminded her that I did not get a reply from my previous one and then she said she will pass my message to ask for the reply to my complaint. Up to date I have not heard anything from them.

My concerns are AtW are not deaf friendly, the people affected were not consulted and the only response from AtW is to stop using the Action on Hearing Loss interpreter booking services after they led a campaign against AtW on the changes.

11 June 2014