Case Study

I am a Dual Sensory Impairment Support Worker, employed by Nottinghamshire County Council and based within the ADVIS team. I am profoundly Deaf and British Sign Language (BSL) is my first and preferred language. I need the support of BSL/English interpreters to enable me to carry out my role and these have been funded through the AtW scheme. I am responsible for promoting the quality of life and independence of people with a dual sensory loss. I work 37 hours per week, and I am currently on a fixed term contract until March 2015. This submission details my experiences of the AtW process and outlines a number of considerations as to how the scheme could be enhanced and improved. This submission has been translated from BSL, by an interpreter.

Application and Assessment

My application for AtW funding was conducted by email and telephone. This was not an ideal way of my access needs. Many Deaf people have BSL as a first language and written English can be difficult to understand. For a true and accurate assessment to take place it would be better for a face-to-face interview to be conducted. Assessments should take in to account the Deaf person’s need to socialise and integrate with their hearing colleagues so that they feel fully included in their workplace (e.g. be able to engage in informal, ad hoc discussions/ join in with casual conversations etc).

Administrative procedures

I have had a number of problems with contacting and engaging with Access to Work on an administrative level. Many of the issues are outlined in the example I have provided below:

Management of Budget

I have had serious problems with my Access to Work budget. In March 2014 I was informed that I had used the majority of my awarded budget, up until June 2014 and had only £1490 remaining. This left me in a situation whereby I have been unable to pay outstanding invoices for the interpreting service I receive. From the beginning of my claim to date, I have never been told that I had a fixed sum for a set period. When I first applied for AtW, on the 28/06/12 I clearly stated that my working hours would be 8.30am, to 5pm, Monday to Friday and that the position was temporary until March 2015. I believed that my AtW award was based on this information. I was subsequently informed that I had been awarded a budget for weekly support for a qualified RSLI interpreter for 37 hours per week, at a rate of £45 an hour for the first 2 hours, and then £35 per hour for any hours thereafter. This award was up to 15th July 2013. Thereafter I did not receive any notification that my budget was for a fixed term, or that it would expire on the 30th June 2014. I was never informed that my
budget was for a set amount. I therefore continued to book the support I need to enable me to undertake my role, assuming that the rate was as per the original agreed amount.

AtW’s communication with me over this issue has been appalling. I have been made to feel at fault for not managing my budget correctly. I feel that it has been impossible for me to manage my budget when I have never been provided with the correct information and guidance that would allow me to do so. I am currently in a situation where I am unable to guarantee funding of the interpreting service I receive and I feel that this is putting my job in jeopardy.

The way in which my AtW claim has been handled has caused me a lot of stress and has interfered with my ability to do my job. I have had to try and deal with this issue, whilst also attempting to actually undertake my role. This is something which a non-disabled employee would never experience.

**Thirty hour rule**

There are a number of problems with the ‘salaried interpreter/ 30 hour’ policy recently introduced by Access to Work. I have been told that I will have to employ a salaried interpreter at the rate of £18.19 per hour from July 2014. This has never been discussed with me, and the reasons for this decision have never been communicated. A salaried interpreter has been mentioned in past email exchanges with AtW and my manager, but I have never been formally told that must take this option. The first time I was made aware of this decision, was on the 15th April 2014, when I rang the department to try and resolve the problem with AtW refusing to pay outstanding invoices. The standard of communication with AtW regarding this issue has been unacceptably poor. It is my understanding that the 30 hour, salaried interpreter rule does not apply to Deaf people on temporary contracts. My job will cease in March 2015. This will make it extremely difficult to recruit a full time qualified RSLI. I currently use a range of RSLIs to meet my access needs and I depend on being able to use qualified interpreters for my role. That will not be possible if I employ one full time interpreter. It will have an impact on my ability to perform my job to the expected standard, as I will not be able to recruit an interpreter whose skills and experience are equal to the interpreters I use currently.

By using qualified, registered interpreters I know that I will be getting a professional who will understand about the important issues of role, ethics, boundaries, as well have having the necessary linguistic and interpreting skills (BSL and English). The interpreter is my ‘voice’ when I meet hearing colleagues and clients. I need them to have the skills to represent me accurately and to reflect my professional ability. Someone who does not have the right level of skills or professional interpreter training will not be able to do this.

There are a number of unanswered questions about the employment of a salaried interpreter, including; how will cover be funded when the interpreter is on annual
leave, sick leave, maternity leave etc; what happens if the interpreter or the deaf employee is on long term sick leave; how will the costs of co-workers (e.g. for team meetings etc) be funded; how will the interpreter be able to access their rights as an employee (e.g. attend team meetings in their role as employee NOT interpreter).

Support in work

I feel that AtW could provide other support for disabled employees once they have secured a job. In terms of Deaf employees this could include training on how to work in hearing workplaces (norms of behaviour, expectations, unwritten ‘rules’ of the workplace etc). It would also be useful to provide Deaf Awareness training and ‘How to Work with an Interpreter’ training to the rest of the workforce.

Positives

My experience of AtW has not been entirely negative. It is important to recognise that funding of interpreters through the AtW scheme allows me to undertake my role, engage with my hearing colleagues and generally promotes a degree of equal access with my hearing peers. I can feel a part of the workforce. By working I can contribute to both the economy and to society. Working improves my mental health and general wellbeing. I can act as a role model for other Deaf and disabled people, which can encourage diversity in the workplace. I have also been able to show the hearing clients that I work with that Deaf people can work on an equal level with hearing people and achieve their goals. Despite the fact that many of my clients are elderly and have never worked with a Deaf person and an interpreter before, they have been very accepting and positive about my support. AtW funding therefore has implications which go beyond the impact to the individual.

Recommendations for improvement

- AtW advisors to have training so that they understand the support needs of Deaf employees.
- All AtW paperwork to be simplified and provided in Plain English format.
- AtW policies/procedures/guidance to be standardized and made available to stakeholders. AtW advisors to apply said documentation in a standardized way (e.g. stop inconsistent decision-making).
- Consideration given to the administrative costs and resources needed to manage AtW paperwork.
- Deaf employees to be given clear guidance/and or training on how to manage their budget.
- Award information to clearly state the amount per hour, inclusive costs (e.g. travel, car-parking etc), period of the award (from and to) and how this has been calculated.
- Clear details provided on any budget extension agreements.
- Notification procedures to be put in place if the employee is exceeding their agreed budget.
- Named caseworker for all queries.
- Specialist team dealing with Deaf employee’s access needs.
- Face to face assessment process.
- Information provided in BSL.
- Budgets to reflect the cost of employing qualified, registered interpreters
- Deaf employees to have choice as to how they use their budget (e.g. employ a salaried interpreter/ use freelance interpreters/ contract with an agency etc), and their budget reflect these costs.

References

This link may be of use:

**BDA Consultation:**


29 May 2014