

UKCoD | Access to Work Group

Meeting 24 July 2014 | Minutes

In attendance

- Dan Sumners, Signature (minutes)
- David Buxton, BDA (chair)
- David Wolfenden, ASLI
- Eva Fielding Jackson
- Jane Cordell, Getting Equal
- Jen Smith, NUBSLI
- Jim Edwards, UK Council on Deafness
- Laura Arrowsmith, Action on Hearing Loss
- Lidia Best, NADP
- Linda Ahmed, VLP
- Lorraine Gailey, Hearing Link
- Michael Price, BID
- Natasha Charles, ANP
- Roger Wicks, Action on Hearing Loss
- Sally Paull, Positive Signs
- Sara Scanlon, ALS
- Susan Daniels, NDCS
- Vikki Bridson-Vice, VLP

Introduction

1. Mark Harper MP was the new Minister for Disabled People. Responsibility for Access to Work had passed to the Minister for Employment, Esther McVey MP.
2. The UK Council on Deafness and the BDA continued to be in contact with DWP staff about the review of Access to Work. DWP would publish a discussion paper soon.
3. DWP confirmed the Access to Work budget would not be increasing. DWP wanted to increase the number of people benefiting from Access to Work.

4. DWP would suggest solutions to the problems deaf people were experiencing with Access to Work. The UK Council on Deafness had to
 - a. identify principles on which it felt any solution needed to be based;
 - b. develop its own solutions it could suggest; and
 - c. consider solutions DWP might suggest and develop responses so it would be prepared.

Brainstorming session

5. The meeting identified possible solutions:
 - a. efficiency savings in administration and delivery of the service, including the use of online accounts for customers;
 - b. deaf awareness training for Access to Work staff who dealt with applications from deaf people;
 - c. Access to Work understanding of what it's like for deaf people in the workplace, including the 'package' nature of support required by many deaf people;
 - d. the use of technology such as VRS/VRI to deliver the service;
 - e. an improved assessment process with a greater role for self assessment;
 - f. improved information, advice and guidance (IAG) about the options available for deaf people and how to access them, including
 - i. types of communication services available; and
 - ii. technology for supported and enhanced hearing;
 - g. more and better stakeholder engagement to develop the service;
 - h. the issuing of a standard package at job commencement which could then be tailored over time;
 - i. the replacement of Access to Work with tax relief;
 - j. delivery of support by an individual budget;
 - k. integrate support for disabled people in work into the benefits system; and
 - l. make the employer the Access to Work customer rather than the employee.

National contract

6. The possibility of a national contract was also discussed. Many organisations were opposed to a single 'one-size-fits-all' contract.

7. In particular, ASLI, NUBSLI and VLP members were opposed to a national contract. They would provide detail about the negative impact of contracts elsewhere and the opinions of their members that could be used in lobbying the DWP.
8. A national contract was likely to be a solution suggested by DWP. The Crown Commercial Service was putting in place a framework agreement for the procurement of translation and interpretation services. The UK Council on Deafness needed to be ready with a response.
9. If contracts were to be awarded they
 - a. should be regional;
 - b. would need to be coproduced with all stakeholders;
 - c. would have to provide a level playing field for SMEs, especially agencies with knowledge and experience of working with deaf and hard of hearing people; and
 - d. would need to include terms and conditions that
 - i. were fair for communication professionals; and
 - ii. recognised quality standards.
10. NADP would ask members of the European Federation of Hard of Hearing People to provide more details. In Nordic countries there was no financial exchange. Support for employment, health and social care was delivered by a single framework.

Solutions working group

11. A working group would consider and develop these solutions. It would report back by the end of August.
12. Subject to confirmation, the working group members would include
 - a. Action on Hearing Loss;
 - b. ALS;
 - c. ANP;
 - d. ASLI ;
 - e. BDA;
 - f. BID Services;
 - g. Eva Fielding-Jackson;
 - h. Hearing Link;

- i. NUBSLI;
- j. Positive Signs; and
- k. VLP.

Action points

13. ASLI, NUBSLI and VLP to provide detail about

- a. the negative impact of contracts elsewhere; and
- b. the opinions of their members about a national contract.

14. NADP to ask members of the European Federation of Hard of Hearing People to provide more details about the delivery of employment support in other countries

15. Dan Sumners to coordinate the establishment of a working group to develop solutions.