

UK Council on Deafness | Access to Work Group

Meeting 28 October 2014 | Minutes

In attendance

- Christine Archer, ANP
- Dan Sumners, Signature (minutes)
- David Buxton, BDA (chair)
- Frances Dobson, ALS
- Gail Dixon, ASLI
- Jayne Oakes, BID
- Jennifer Smith, NUBSLI
- Jim Edwards, UK Council on Deafness
- Laura Arrowsmith, Action on Hearing Loss
- Linda Ahmed, VLP
- Roger Wicks, Action on Hearing Loss
- Sally Paul, Positive Signs
- Vikki Bridson-Vice, VLP

Minutes of 24 July meeting

1. The minutes of the 24 July meeting had been approved and would be published on the UK Council on Deafness website.
2. We noted that responsibility for Access to Work had passed back to the Minister for Disabled People, Mark Harper MP.

Support for disabled people at work in Sweden and the Netherlands (for information)

3. At the 24 July meeting NADP agreed 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.

Sweden

4. When you have job interview, are you asked what support you need? If you are unemployed and have a contact person at the public employment service, he/she might ask. Otherwise you have to consider yourself if you need support.
5. How do you receive the support at work and who pays for it? First there is a Swedish law stating that the employer is solely responsible for the work environment. But employees with special needs = disabled persons, are entitled to support paid by public money. There are two alternatives: a) If you are unemployed as in the example above, and get a work, the public employment service pay; valid up to one year after the beginning of the employment. b) For all other employees: You apply to the Swedish Social Insurance Agency, for the major part of hard of hearing people this is about assistive equipment.
6. Is there any limit on support; what if somebody need communication support daily over 30 hours a week? The limit for equipment is 50.000 SEK = a little more than € 5000; but if the equipment is computer based, higher costs are accepted.
7. How do you manage your support, do you organise it yourself, by agency or your employer? There are some authorized companies/rehabilitation units; the procedure starts with a small investigation: You visit them and together with the officer you find out what kind of equipment you need; and for what purposes. You also have the possibility to test various devices. When this procedure is finished you fill in an application form where all the equipment is listed together with the total cost, which should include the cost for the investigation. The Social Insurance Agency decides upon the application, and if positive sends you a copy of the decision. The rehabilitation unit then makes their order. Finally when the equipment has arrived, you visit the unit again for the final testing and adjustment.
8. How it is decided what support and how much support you need? See the answer for point 4.
9. Do you have some Central booking system you can book support or local? The STT service is booked at the public interpretation agency run by the county council. For other kinds of support like described in p. 4, the situation varies depending on where

you live. The Social Insurance Agency works nationally and has a special department handling applications from the whole country.

10. If someone is suddenly deaf, how do they find out what support is available to continue work? The audiologist should know, or a welfare officer working at the audiological care/rehabilitation unit.
11. How long it takes to get support in place, deal with changes (hours) needed to support you at work? Difficult to answer since the STT service is limited except for real emergency situations; like a visit to a doctor etc. Also there are different conditions in different parts of the country. To get assistive equipment described in points 4 and 5, the total time can be estimated to six weeks. That depends of course on the initial investigation; for some it runs smoothly and without any delay. For others it might be extended to several weeks before everything falls in place. Normally the Social Insurance Agency needs 3-4 weeks for their handling; in that case it is not depending on where you live.

Netherlands

12. When you have job interview, are you asked what support you need? Personal I had only intern job interview and I write in my letter that I am hard of hearing. At the most job interview I explain by my self what I need. Example STTR by big meetings.
13. How do you receive the support at work, who pays for it? STTR the employee organize this by them self. All other need as a special telephone need to organize by the organization via the HRM staff.
14. Is there any limit on support, what if somebody need communication support daily over 30 hours a week? STTR = there is not an official limit. Other example Comfort audio communication system is organize by myself with a letter of the company doctor. And paid by my health service system. Too complex to given a general Dutch answer
15. How do you manage your support? Do you organise it yourself, by agency or your employer? At work by myself. In general you need to ask by yourself because the organization haven't information about this or know nothing about special access for HOH / disabled people. Via staff HRM.

16. How it is decided what support and how much support you need? For me by myself.
But in general via the staff HRM and management.
17. Do you have some Central booking system you can book support or local? Yes only for the STTR hours via UWV
18. If someone is suddenly deaf, how do they find out what support is available to continue work? Via company doctor, HRM staff, audiological centre, social worker.
19. How long it takes to get support in place and deal with changes (hours) needed to support you at work? Few weeks.
20. The system in NL is very complex. The costs are paid via
- the personal health service (paid by your self when you pay lot you receive a lot of service, when you pay a small amount you receive limited service); or
 - company service / HRM department; or
 - state social system (this organization called in NL UWV); or
 - local social system that is in every place different related to the colour of the local government; or
 - the Tax payment you can receive some money back when you had extra health service costs that is not paid by one of the other organization called in the list; and
 - in the most of the organization they have staff HRM and via the staff HRM people can organize the support/access at work.

Notes of the Solutions Working Group meeting

21. We agreed on 24 July that a working group would consider and develop a list of potential solutions to the problems deaf people were experiencing with Access to Work (Appendix 1). It would report back by the end of August.
22. The group agreed its Terms of Reference (Appendix 2) and the criteria by which the measures would be judged (Appendix 3).

The measures

23. The following measures were rejected:

- a. the replacement of Access to Work with tax relief, because it was not realistic and would not balance the needs of and resources available to the employee, employer and Access to Work;
- b. integrating support for disabled people in work into the benefits system, because it would not maximise the choice available to the employee;
- c. making the employer the Access to Work customer rather than the employee, because it would not prioritise the needs of the employee or maximise the choice available to them; and
- d. a national contract, because there was evidence it would be detrimental to all involved, in particular it would not prioritise the needs of the employee or maximise the choice available to them.

24. Jen Smith had collected evidence from ASLI, VLP and NUBSLI about the impact of national contracts. She would share it with the group.

25. Whilst the group agreed opinions on the other measures, it felt many of them could not be considered or potentially introduced in isolation. It was agreed an overall position statement would be drafted that considered them as a complex.

26. Efficiency savings in administration and delivery of the service, including the use of online accounts for customers, was very important. Whatever other measures were introduced, this was essential.

27. Deaf awareness training for Access to Work staff who dealt with applications from deaf people was important. All Access to Work staff needed basic deaf awareness. Staff dealing specifically with deaf customers needed in depth knowledge.

28. Staff dealing specifically with deaf customers needed to understand what it was like for deaf people in the workplace. That included the 'package' nature of support required by many deaf people.

- e. Action on Hearing Loss had produced a booklet about deaf people in the workplace at some point in the past. Rob Burley would try and find it.

29. Technology such as text and video relay could be used by Access to Work to improve customer support. The group also discussed the use of relay services in the workplace. Jen Smith would collate information from interpreter organisations about the impact of video relay services.
30. An improved assessment process with a greater role for self assessment was essential.
31. Both customers and Access to Work staff needed improved information, advice and guidance about the options available for deaf people in the work place and how to access them.
32. More and better stakeholder engagement to develop the service was essential. It included asking for feedback from customers, informal and formal consultation, and inclusion of representatives on any relevant DWP advisory groups.
33. The issuing of a minimally assessed – based on the job description, for example - package at job commencement for people who weren't sure of their needs could be useful. It would make sure the deaf person was not left with no support. But the focus should be getting a tailored package in place as soon as possible.
34. Delivery of support by an individual budget was an attractive idea.
 - f. Whilst it placed greater responsibility on the individual it would give them greater freedom. Individuals would need to be educated about the support available so they could make informed decisions.
 - g. The detail of how personal budgets would work was important. It would need to uphold standards. For example, it should require the use of only registered sign language interpreters.
35. The pooling of grants by employees in the same organisation or across organisations, for example to secure communication support at a conference, could be useful.
36. More research needed to be done about the potential impact of regional contracts. Jen Smith agreed to collect information from ASLI, NUBSLI and VLP. Action on Hearing Loss, the BDA and Sally Paul would also collect information. Vikki Bridson-Vice would

share research that had been done by a regional hub with Jen Smith. It would be included in the information about the impact of contracts.

37. Appendix 1 | Potential measures

- Efficiency savings in administration and delivery of the service, including the use of online accounts for customers.
- Deaf awareness training for Access to Work staff who deal with applications from deaf people.
- 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.
- The use of technology such as VRS/VRI to deliver the service.
- An improved assessment process with a greater role for self assessment.
- Improved information, advice and guidance (IAG) about the options available for deaf people and how to access them, including
 - types of communication services available; and
 - technology for supported and enhanced hearing.
- More and better stakeholder engagement to develop the service.
- The issuing of a standard package at job commencement which could then be tailored over time.
- The replacement of Access to Work with tax relief.
- Delivery of support by an individual budget.
- Integrate support for disabled people in work into the benefits system.
- Make the employer the Access to Work customer rather than the employee.
- Pooling of grants.
- National contract.
- Regional contracts.

38. Appendix 2 | Solutions working group terms of reference

The working group would

- a. discuss the potential solutions identified by the 24 July meeting;
- b. judge the suitability and desirability of those solutions against a set of criteria;
and

- c. submit a report to the chair of the UK Council on Deafness and the chair of the Access to Work group by Monday 1 September.

To do this the working group would

- a. agree the terms of reference and judging criteria by email;
- b. meet once to discuss the solutions;
- c. identify someone to write up the solutions; and
- d. refine the solutions by email.

39. Appendix 3 | Solutions working group judging criteria

All potential solutions should be judged against a set of criteria. Those criteria would help the Access to Work group decide

- a. which solutions to support; and
- b. how to prioritise those solutions.

A set of agreed principles would be most effective in doing that. It would provide

- a. a set of 'red lines' by which any potential solution could be ruled in or out; and
- b. a checklist by which the most desirable solutions could be identified.

Any solution to the problems with or caused by Access to Work should

- a. prioritise the needs of the employee and maximise the choice available to them;
- b. be based on evidence that it will be effective in helping the scheme meet its stated aim;
- c. be realistic;
- d. be cost effective;
- e. result in an equitable outcome for all scheme users;
- f. balance the needs of and resources available to the employee, employer and Access to Work;
- g. be developed in collaboration with all relevant stakeholders;
- h. take a long term view, particularly with regard to return on investment;
- i. meets legal obligations, statutory guidance and codes of practice;

- j. not have a negative impact on the availability of language service professionals.

Draft position statement on how Access to Work should operate

40. The Solutions Working Group agreed an overall position statement would be drafted. It was circulated by email to the group for comment and some changes were made. It was then circulated by email to the full Access to Work group for further comment.

41. There were two points in particular that needed to be discussed:

- a. were personal budgets the right way to make sure the service was focused on the person; and
- b. should we urge the government to remind employers of their legal obligation to make reasonable adjustments and seek to enforce those responsibilities?

42. The meeting decided the statement would be redrafted to say

- a. Access to Work should explore different ways of delivering the grants it provides, emphasising the importance of gathering evidence on the most effective methods; and
- b. the government should explore the impact of the duty to make reasonable adjustments on the employment prospects of disabled people.

43. The meeting agreed the statement would be redrafted and circulated to the full group for final comments by Friday 31 October. It was important we agreed the position statement this week because the Minister for Disabled People would appear before the Work and Pensions Committee on 29 October. We expected him to provide details about what he planned to do to improve Access to Work. We needed to be able to respond to what he said, including making our own suggestions.

Any other business

44. We noted the chair of the APPG on Deafness, Stephen Lloyd MP, had on several occasions referred to sign language interpreters earning £100,000 a year. It was agreed David Buxton would speak to Mr Lloyd to make it clear the average earnings of sign language interpreters were much lower and such misinformation should not be repeated.