

UK Council on Deafness | Access to Work Group

Meeting 3 March 2015 | Minutes

In attendance

- Bob Marsh, Clarion
- Dan Sumners, Signature (minutes)
- Jayne Oakes, BID
- Jean Gough, AVSTTR
- Jennifer Smith, NUBSLI
- Jim Edwards, UK Council on Deafness
- Jude Mahon, VLP
- Kate Fitch, Sense
- Laura Arrowsmith, Action on Hearing Loss
- Lidia Best, NADP
- Roger Wicks, Action on Hearing Loss
- Sally Paul, Positive Signs (chair)
- Simon Pearse (NADP)
- Susan Daniels, NDCS

Apologies

- ANP
- David Buxton, BDA

Minutes of 28 October meeting and notes of meetings between Action on Hearing Loss, BDA, NDCS, Signature and DWP

1. The minutes and notes had been circulated and agreed as appropriate previously. They were included to inform discussion.

Update on meeting between Action on Hearing Loss, BDA, NDCS, Signature and DWP 26 February 2015 (for information)

2. At their meeting, Action on Hearing Loss, BDA, NDCS, Signature and DWP discussed
 - a. the Crown Commercial Service language service framework agreement: if they used it the DWP would want to work with stakeholders who did not have a commercial interest to develop a call off;
 - b. personal budgets: there was little detail at the moment but they would want to pilot them if they went ahead;
 - c. determining the correct levels of high intensity support; and
 - d. self employment: DWP was considering using turnover rather than profit as the indicator of a successful business, exempting the first year.
3. DWP had not provided any information about service improvements yet. We would ask the Minister to provide it.
4. It was important we kept reminding DWP that Access to Work represented a return on investment. We would recommend making a joint case to the Treasury.

DWP suggested policies: cap on awards and cost sharing (for discussion)

5. The Minister had listened to concerns about cost sharing so was not intending to extend it to support workers.
6. He was attracted to a cap on grants though. DWP was suggesting linking it to average salaries. They would do an equalities impact assessment.
7. We would oppose a cap on grants as going against the spirit of the scheme and government policy objectives.
 - a. It would cause problems for both the employer and employee when it wasn't enough to keep the latter in their job.
 - b. As the aim of the scheme was to provide support or adaptations beyond the reasonable adjustments employers were legally obliged to provide, a cap would require them to make an unreasonable adjustment, or alter or withdraw employment.

- c. That would have a negative impact on a significant number of deaf people, especially those in senior positions and those with multiple or complex needs.
8. But we had to be pragmatic and try and influence the policy. If we did not negotiate we would not be doing all we could for deaf people. We would tell DWP that a threshold, if introduced, should be
 - a. a trigger for a review of an individual's requirements; and
 - b. high enough not to have a negative impact on a large number of people.
9. We would remind DWP that more could be done to make awards efficient in the first place. They should have a robust assessment process combined with good assessor knowledge of the communication and language marketplace.
10. We would wait for the Minister's response to the Work and Pensions Committee before deciding on what to do next.

Adaptations (for discussion)

11. We had been informed Access to Work now deemed equipment that alerted deaf people to a possible fire to be a reasonable adjustment. They therefore wouldn't fund it. We had asked DWP officials to confirm the information was accurate.
12. If this was a policy change, potential responses included
 - a. it was not a reasonable adjustment so Access to Work should pay the full cost;
 - b. it was not a reasonable adjustment but it is an adaptation so Access to Work should pay but employers should share the cost;
 - c. it was a reasonable adjustment so employers should pay;
 - d. it was a reasonable adjustment so employers should pay but receive a reduction in their tax liability for making the adjustment;
 - e. it was a reasonable adjustment but one that will lead to deaf people not being employed so Access to Work should pay the full cost; and
 - f. Access to Work should assess whether or not it was a reasonable adjustment in each case rather than have a policy that applied to all types and sizes of employer.
13. We would wait for the confirmation from DWP officials before deciding how to respond.

UK Council on Deafness Code of Conduct

14. The UK Council on Deafness had recently agreed a revised Code of Conduct for Board members and special interest groups.
15. We clarified that 'confidential information' referred to information clearly marked 'confidential'. If a member was not sure if they could share some information they should ask the chair of the special interest group.