

# UK Council on Deafness | Access to Work Group

## Meeting 30 May 2014 | Minutes

### In attendance

- Caroline Player, SignHealth
- Craig Crowley, Action Deafness (chair)
- Dan Sumners, Signature (notes)
- Jane Cordell
- Jim Edwards, Signature/UK Council on Deafness
- Laura Arrowsmith, Action on Hearing Loss
- Lidia Best, NADP
- Michael Price, BID Services
- Susan Daniels, NDCS

### Introduction

1. The meeting was originally called as there was a meeting with Access to Work scheduled for 22 May. As the Minister for Disabled People agreed to the call for a review of Access to Work, that meeting was cancelled.
2. The meeting was kept as some organisations weren't able to attend previous meetings. It was a further opportunity to discuss decisions made at the 20 May meeting.
3. Access to Work and Office for Disability (ODI) officials were working on the details of the review for the Minister. There would be a written ministerial statement after the recess, which ended on 3 June.
4. The review should not be confused with the Work and Pensions Select Committee inquiry into Access to Work. That would be discussed later in the meeting.

### Minutes of 23 April meeting

5. The most important decisions at the 23 April meeting were
  - this would be a UK Council on Deafness campaign; and

- the UK Council on Deafness would propose the Minister for Disabled People establish a review of Access to Work.

### **Update on action points from 23 April meeting**

6. Most of the actions from the 23 April had been completed. In addition
  - the UK Council on Deafness was in the process of adding Access to Work pages to its website;
  - the UK Council on Deafness and the BDA were exploring options for making the Access to Work web pages available in BSL;
  - a proposal for an application to the Backbench Business Committee for a Parliamentary debate about the impact of government policy on deaf and deafblind people had been sent to Stephen Lloyd MP, chair of the APPG on Deafness, and would be discussed with him after the Parliamentary recess;
  - a cumulative impact assessment of government policy on deaf and deafblind people would also be discussed with Stephen Lloyd MP; and
  - the survey to collect quantitative data about the impact of Access to Work on deaf and deafblind people would be drafted after the Minister had made his statement.

### **Update on action points from 20 May meeting and activity since**

7. The suggested terms of reference agreed at the 20 May meeting had been sent to Rilesh Jadeja and Hugh Pullinger at the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Rilesh and Hugh were drafting the terms of reference for the Minister. They had also been sent to Stephen Lloyd MP.
8. Guidance on the types of case studies needed would be circulated after the Minister had made his statement.
9. No additional issues for potential immediate action by the Minister had been suggested.
10. Guidance for individuals on submitting evidence to the Work and Pensions Select Committee inquiry was included in the pending UK Council on Deafness Access to Work web pages.

11. Dan Sumners was in the process of contacting the Employers Forum for Disability.

**Suggested terms of reference for the DWP review of Access to Work**

12. The minutes of the 20 May meeting included the agreed suggested terms of reference for the review.

13. The suggested terms of reference were received and approved by the meeting.

**Skills and knowledge the review required**

14. ODI officials had confirmed the review would be led by DWP. An independent chair would not be appointed. This was non-negotiable.

15. The 20 May meeting decided we could accept that if

- a. there was distance between the delivery of Access to Work and whoever led the review, such as a senior civil servant; and
- b. if the review was, and was seen to be, objective, finding solutions all stakeholders could accept.

16. The meeting was reminded that whilst an independent review would have been preferable, the review was the result of lobbying by deaf and deafblind people and UK Council on Deafness members. We had the opportunity to influence the terms of reference and the review group. With the Work and Pensions Select Committee inquiry there were two opportunities to make the case.

17. The minutes of the 20 May meeting included details of the skills and knowledge the meeting thought the review required:

- the economics of the industry;
- the market;
- deaf people in an employment context;
- the employer perspective;
- employment and equality law; and
- general deaf awareness.

18. The suggested skills and knowledge the review required reference were received and approved by the meeting.

### **Collecting evidence**

19. At the meeting on 23 April, it was agreed more case studies needed to be collected, in particular

- positive stories of people who had successfully challenged Access to Work;
- examples of people who had lost their job as a result of an Access to Work decision; and
- those which demonstrated all the problems that had been identified.

20. All UK Council on Deafness members were reminded to collect case studies. A Googledoc spreadsheet had been set up so case studies could be stored centrally. Dan Sumners had the link.

21. Further guidance on the types of case studies needed would be circulated once the terms of reference of the review had been announced.

22. It was also agreed on 23 April that more quantitative data was needed. A survey would be drafted once the terms of reference of the review had been announced.

23. At the 20 May meeting it was agreed, if possible, we would use the evidence collected to draft an exemplar of how Access to Work should operate.

24. The government would be looking to the UK Council on Deafness for solutions as well as details of the problems. Our submissions would include potential solutions.

### **Responding to the Work and Pensions Select Committee inquiry**

25. On 12 May the Work and Pensions Select Committee announced the 'Employment support for disabled people: Access to Work' inquiry. The current deadline was 20 June but Committee officials had said this was likely to be extended to September.

26. Jim Edwards, as chair of the UK Council on Deafness, had written to the chair of the select committee, Dame Anne Begg, to urge the inquiry to accept video submissions.

Members had begun encouraging individuals to submit evidence in video format if necessary.

27. It was agreed it should be left to the select committee to manage the evidence submitted in video format. The UK Council on Deafness would make sure the select committee was doing so.
28. The 20 May meeting agreed messages submitted to the inquiry and the review needed to be consistent. The same evidence should be submitted to both in the spirit of openness.
29. The UK Council on Deafness would make a submission. Laura Arrowsmith at Action on Hearing Loss was coordinating the drafting. Laura would circulate a draft for comment by 6 June. It would include
  - a. the most powerful case studies;
  - b. a section on the application and assessment process (inaccessibility and lack of awareness);
  - c. a section on the adequacy of ongoing support and effectiveness in helping people to find or stay in work (30 hour rule, funding restrictions, inappropriate use of communication support workers, two interpreters at one meeting, lack of understanding of the role of communication professionals, impact on employees and employers, low awareness of the scheme, employer contributions);
  - d. a section on the impact of steps taken to extend the scheme (negative impact on deaf people, inadequate data collection by DWP);
  - e. suggested potential solutions, such as the extension of individual choice in solutions adopted, direct payments, a proper complaints procedure, better data collection, helping people to make cost effective choices, greater take up of VRS and VRI by government, deaf awareness training for DWP staff, funding for training in the communication professions and clearer guidance.
30. Laura asked members to provide
  - a. case studies they felt were strongest;
  - b. case studies that demonstrated problems with the application and assessment process; and

- c. relevant data, especially that relating to the changing nature of the deaf population and its needs, eg the number of cochlear implant users.

31. Once the draft had been circulated, member organisations could use it to frame their own responses if they wished to draw attention to other, or specific, issues. They should include a paragraph stating they are signatories to the UK Council on Deafness submission. They should urge the Committee to call on the UK Council on Deafness to give evidence.

32. The UK Council on Deafness would explore making the submission available in BSL with the BDA.

### **Next meeting**

33. There was no plan for another meeting. Once the minister had made his statement about the review, members would be contacted.