

All Party Parliamentary Group on Deafness

AGM and Meeting | 5 January 2018 | Minutes

Room O, Portcullis House, Westminster

Present

- Jim Fitzpatrick MP (chair)
- Tommy Sheppard MP
- Dawn Butler MP
- Lord Borwick
- Baroness Howe of Idlicote
- Christopher Jones, Chair of Deaf Access to Communications
- Cristina Luna-Esteban, Ofcom
- Piers Martin, UK Deaf Sport
- Darren Townsend-Handscomb, UK Council on Deafness

Apologies

- Lilian Greenwood
- Lord Rennard
- Stephen Lloyd
- Liz Twist
- Debbie Abrahams
- Iain Stewart
- Mark Prisk

In attendance

- Damian Barry, British Deaf Association
- Craig Crowley, UK Council on Deafness
- Susan Daniels, NDCS
- Rob Geaney, Action on Hearing Loss (minutes)
- Katie Hanson, Ofcom

Dead Access to Communications

Christopher Jones delivered a presentation on the current provision in the UK of Next Generation Text Relay, Captioned Relay and Video Relay Services. The slides for this presentation have been circulated with these minutes.

In concluding his asked the APPG to:

- Ask Ofcom to commission a review of relay service provision and whether it is meeting the test of functional equivalence.
- Ask DCMS what consideration it has given to expanding Ofcom's remit to include the provision of Video Relay services and Captioned Telephone Relay.
- Ask BT what it proposes to do to ensure the NGTR service meets the test of functional equivalence and to report back on its investigations into the use of Automated Speech Recognition and/or Captioned Telephone Relay.
- Ask BT how it intends to improve usability of NGTR on mobile phones and reach all those who could benefit from the service.

Lord Borwick asked who approved BT as the current provider.

Katie Hanson informed the group that only BT had sought approval from Ofcom as a provider of text relay, and that nobody else has come forward. She went onto say that Ofcom is limited by its statute and the instructions that it received from Government and Parliament, and therefore it cannot stray beyond these. She pointed out that the models in New Zealand and Australia worked within different legislative frameworks. Legislation in New Zealand allows their system to be publicly funded, whilst Australia uses money raised from providers under a statutory mechanism.

Susan Daniels highlighted the gap between the KPIs set by Ofcom (with an absolute floor of 40 words per minute and an average minimum of 60) and normal speech (which tends to be around 150).

Lord Borwick then asked about the price that was paid for the service.

Katie Hanson explained that BT provides the service wholesale to communication providers (including itself) and that the price is not directly regulated. She pointed at that because Text Relay relied on human labour it is a relatively expensive service.

Actions: UKCoD to provide the discussed draft correspondence for Jim Fitzpatrick to send on behalf of the APPG.

Deaflympic Recognition

Piers Martin gave a presentation on the lack of Government recognition and support that the Government has given to the DeaflympicsGB. The slides for this presentation have been circulated alongside these minutes.

Piers concluded his slides by asking the APPG to continue to pursue their correspondence with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and ensure that the Minister is aware of the inaccuracies in the information which she has been given.

Tommy Sheppard asked about the extent that people with various levels of hearing loss were able to participate in mainstream sports and whether UK Deaf Sport worked to support athletes in mainstream competition. Jim Fitzpatrick followed up by asking why deaf athletes were not incorporated into the Paralympics.

Piers stated that there were many reasons why deaf athletes don't compete in mainstream sports. Some of this is the nature of the sport itself, with deaf athletes at a clear disadvantage. But even in events where there might not be a clear reason, such as golf, other barriers exist. He highlighted that many coaches are unable to work with deaf athletes and that other programs therefore need to be put in place, citing the work that UK Deaf Sport undertakes with NDCS.

Craig Crowley explained that the Deaflympics predates the Paralympics and that the separation is historical.

Action: Jim agreed to pursue his correspondence with DDCMS on behalf of the APPG and push for a meeting with the Minister in the near future.

Access to Work

Darren Townsend-Handscomb provided the group with an updates on the work that UKCoD and the APPG have been doing in relation to the Access to Work Cap. He explained that the APPG and UKCoD met with Sarah Newton, Minister of State for Disabled People, Work and Health, and her civil servants Monday 5th Feb and thanked Jim

Fitzpatrick MP, Lilian Greenwood MP, Stephen Lloyd MP for attending the meeting and making helpful contributions.

At the meeting UKCoD and the APPG said that we think the interests of disabled people, employers and wider society are best met by removing the cap. This is also congruent with the intended purpose of ATW (providing additional support for those furthest away from reasonable adjustments), the Improving Lives Green Paper and Roadmap aspirations (all and potential, including dual disability), and the Disability Confident campaign.

The Minister, Sarah Newton, mainly listened and said she had understanding of a glass ceiling from a gender perspective, and invited us to discuss our proposals further with her civil servants promptly, so a decision could be made in good time before end March.

UKCoD have held the first of these meeting and the next meeting will take place imminently.

Action: UKCoD will keep the APPG informed of developments and report back when there is further information or points at which the APPG can offer support.

Any Other Business

Jim Fitzpatrick updated the group on the correspondence which he has undertaken on behalf of the APPG. This included a representation to NICE on its consultation regarding the assessment process for cochlear implants for adults and correspondence with various Government Departments on BSL recognition, Deaflympic recognition and an upcoming meeting with the Department for Education on a BSL GSCE. He also thanked NDCS for their event in Speaker's House promoting the need to make assistive equipment available to young deaf children. He also said that he had received correspondence from Signly, which he would share with the group.

Damian Barry then spoke to ask about how the APPG could work more efficiently to make progress towards legislation on British Sign Language. Jim Fitzpatrick responded by listing the efforts that he has made to progress this issue and reiterating the support that the APPG has given to BSL recognition within its programme of work.

