

National Association of Deafened People

Response to DWP consultation document "Improving Specialist Disability Employment Services"

NADP represents people who have lost most or all of their useful hearing after acquiring speech and who obtain little or no benefit from hearing aids. We have invited our members to contribute their own experiences of employment advice and Jobcentres and what follows is based partly on their replies, partly on our own experience as an organisation.

The consultation asks for replies to a series of questions but we have not found it easy to express our concerns within such a framework and prefer to offer a general response.

The changes in the application of specialist disability employment services outlined in the consultation document seem to be aimed at moving away from trying to fit people into pre-determined categories and towards a more integrated approach which regards each customer as an individual.

This is undoubtedly a move in the right direction but it does little to engage with the major concerns of NADP in the field of employment help and advice. These are as follows:

1. The staff at Jobcentres are often lacking in deaf awareness and need training in how to communicate with people with hearing impairment. Deaf Awareness training should be an essential part of the training of all Jobcentre staff.
2. Disability Employment Advisers (DEAs) are often not fully informed about the needs of deaf people in and seeking employment. The notion that all that is required is either BSL interpreters or some form of amplification (what might be called the Sign or Shout approach) is all too common. DEAs must be aware of the full range of accommodations which might be required by deaf people with different types of deafness and if necessary be prepared to refer the customer to an appropriate adviser.

We have had reports in the past of a deaf customer with other disabilities being dismissed by a DEA with an abrupt "Sorry, there is nothing we can do for you".

3. Access to Work. We have encountered cases where the availability of help under Access to Work was never mentioned and it is common knowledge that the funding available for this varies widely across the country.

In the case of deaf people, Access to Work funding is most likely to be needed to assist with the provision of BSL interpreters, lipspeakers, note-takers or speech-to-text reporters. There is often little understanding of which of these Language Service Professionals (LSPs) would be appropriate and even less of

where and how their services can be obtained.

This leads into the more fundamental problem that the number of LSPs available is woefully inadequate. Some effort is being made by the Government to increase the number of BSL interpreters but there is an urgent need to extend this training provision to other LSPs. On this topic, a report on Access to Communications in English, prepared by a consortium of UK deaf organisations, was presented to the Minister for Disabilities, Anne McGuire, in December 2006 and she responded to the recommendations contained therein but there appears to have been no action taken since. This needs to be given high priority.

At the same time, many of the responses we received from our members were full of praise for the service they had received from their local Jobcentre. Here, the main concern is to ensure that the standard of service is upheld and where necessary improved. In addition customers should be able to have a periodical review to take account of their changing circumstances and the availability of new services and technology.

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