



AUSTRALIAN FEDERATION OF DEAF SOCIETIES

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The Secretary of the Committee
House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Employment
and Workplace Relations
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

Inquiry into Employment: Increasing participation in paid work

I am writing to provide further information which may be of assistance to the Committee in considering our earlier submission dated 9 January 2004 and the information provided at the hearing held on 28 January 2004.

As will be noted from our submission and presentation, people who are Deaf and use Auslan face a number of barriers which make it significantly more difficult to obtain full time, permanent employment and to progress in their employment. The costs associated with Auslan interpreting are a particular obligation which many small to medium sized employers are unable or unwilling to meet. Therefore, of the recommendations made in our submission, AFDS recommended that there be:

- funding for employment related interpreting situations, especially for smaller, private sector employers; and
- a review of the Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services Workplace Modifications Scheme to include financial assistance for costs associated with Auslan interpreting.

In recommending the review of the Workplace Modifications Scheme, mention was made of its restriction to a small subset of the overall job seeker population and the fact that the Scheme specifically excludes the costs associated with Auslan interpreting. Mention was also made in our submission of the Access to Work scheme currently in place in the United Kingdom.

Recent collaboration with services in New Zealand has also brought to our attention a further example of a government service which may be of assistance in considering the above two recommendations, that being the Job Support program funded by the New Zealand Ministry of Social Development.

The New Zealand government's Job Support program provides financial assistance for people with disabilities to help them to gain or retain open employment by removing the financial barriers incurred because of their disability. The program is administered on behalf of the Ministry by Workbridge, a national network of employment agencies. A grant of up to \$NZ16,900 per year is available to an approved client. Once the level of anticipated support is determined, this amount is held by Workbridge which then receives and pays invoices for approved support services as they are provided. Sign language interpreting for job interviews, staff

meetings and training and development activities in the workplace is one of the many approved support services allowable under the scheme.

AFDS sees this program as having many benefits:

1. The program specifically addresses the needs of people who are Deaf and use sign language by including the provision of interpreting within the scope of the program. The Workplace Modifications Scheme currently does not allow the costs associated with Auslan interpreting to be reimbursed.
2. The focus is on the individual and their specific needs in the workplace. As such, the funds do not constitute a general 'slush' fund but an assessed range of services that will help a job seeker to gain and maintain employment.
3. Eligibility is open to any person with a disability, including people in the open employment market. As mentioned above, small to medium sized employers are particularly unable or unwilling to fulfil their obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act and such financial incentives are therefore vital if this situation is to improve.
4. Eligibility is not limited to new workers. Unlike the one-off costs associated with physical modifications or the purchase of adaptive equipment, costs associated with Auslan interpreting are ongoing and arise whenever good, clear communication is required in the workplace.
5. Employers incur no additional financial or administrative costs with invoices being directed to Workbridge for payment. For smaller organisations, the reimbursement of costs already incurred (as is required under the Workplace Modifications Scheme) may again act as a disincentive.

Further details about the above program may be found at the New Zealand Ministry of Social Development website at:

www.workandincome.govt.nz/manuals-and-procedures/employment_assistance/modification_grant/modification_grant.htm#P12_209

as well as the website for Workbridge:

www.workbridge.co.nz/support-funds/index.shtml

The Committee may also be interested to know that Workbridge representatives will be attending a forum on specialist disability employment policy reform to be held in March. A brochure for the forum is attached for your information.

I would be happy to provide you with any further information required and can be contacted by telephone on (02) 9550 2029.

Yours sincerely

Joe Sabolcec
Executive Officer
16 February 2005