HOUSE OF LORDS

Revised transcript of evidence taken before

The Select Committee on the Equality Act 2010 and Disability

Inquiry on

EQUALITY ACT 2010 AND DISABILITY

Evidence Session No. 7 *Heard in Public* *Questions 66 - 71*

TUESDAY 27 OCTOBER 2015

3.30 pm

Witnesses: Terry Riley and David Buxton

Members present

Baroness Deech (Chairman)
Baroness Browning
Baroness Campbell of Surbiton
Lord Foster of Bishop Auckland
Lord Harrison
Baroness Jenkin of Kennington
Lord Northbrook
Baroness Pitkeathley
Baroness Thomas of Winchester

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Examination of Witnesses

Terry Riley, Chair, and **David Buxton**, Director of Campaigns and Communications, British Deaf Association

Q66 The Chairman: Good afternoon, everybody. Mr Riley and Mr Buxton, welcome. This is the first time that a Committee of the House of Lords has taken evidence in British Sign Language. We are very glad that this gives us the opportunity to take evidence from you that you could not otherwise have given to us. A warm welcome, too, to the interpreters, who are making this possible, and to the members of the public. A webcast of this session goes out live via the parliamentary website, which will show members, witnesses and the signers.

A verbatim transcript will be taken of the evidence and will be put on the parliamentary website. A few days after this session, you will be sent a copy of the transcript to check for accuracy. It would be helpful if you could advise us of any corrections as quickly as possible. If, after this evidence session, you wish to clarify or amplify any points made during your evidence or you have any additional points to make, you are welcome to submit supplementary evidence to us in writing. We are very grateful for the very full and helpful written evidence from the British Deaf Association, which explained to us the work you do.

I should warn you that there may be Divisions, i.e. voting, this afternoon. You will see a sign on the screen if that happens. If that is the case, in order for us to go downstairs and vote, there will be an adjournment for about 10 minutes.

As I said, we will declare our interests when asking a question. For the sake of speed, I am going to read out the interests of Baroness Campbell, because she has so many more than the rest of us. Her interests are, patron of Just Fair; patron of Disability Archive UK; founder and member of Not Dead Yet UK; recipient of a social care personal budget, disability living allowance and Access to Work; Disability Rights Commissioner throughout the life of the Disability Rights Commission; and Commissioner of the Equality and Human Rights Commission for three years.

I am going to kick off, as Chair, with the first question. In your submission, you argue for legal recognition of BSL. Can you explain where the current gaps are and what form such recognition should take? What would be the relationship of such recognition to the Equality Act? If, at any stage, you have information for us about your relationship with the Equality and Human Rights Commission, we would be pleased to hear it.

David Buxton: My Lord Chairman, thank you very much for inviting the BDA to give evidence. The BDA has published this document about the legal recognition of BSL. The

reason that we have published this is that we have looked at why the Equality Act does not sufficiently support sign-language users, i.e. those who use sign language as a first or preferred language.

The Equality Act addresses access to buildings and services, et cetera, for physical purposes, but the Equality Act does not cover BSL users. For us, it is access through our preferred language that gives us access. We believe that hearing dogs for the deaf have more protection than deaf people. People do not have a good understanding of what BSL is. They see it only as a disability issue, but we see it as an issue that enables inclusion into mainstream society. We believe that a BSL Act would protect and promote sign-language users' rights in the same way as Welsh and Scottish Gaelic are protected. The Equality Act does not cover BSL use.

Terry Riley: Madam Chair, you said before that this is the first and only occasion you have had evidence given via sign language. To me, that is proof of why we need a BSL Act. You have shown, by your positive attitude, that we can be equal. You have provided interpreters and paperwork for us, in order that we can say what we want to say in our first language, which is sign language. Sometimes we do not need legislation; sometimes a positive attitude, as is shown here, can be helpful as this is a good example of reasonable adjustment.

Importantly, we have research that proves that sign language, BSL, is a language. It has a grammar; it has a syntax. It is not just waving your hands. There are regional dialects as well, in the same way as the other indigenous languages have: Welsh, Scottish Gaelic and Cornish. We are the fourth language. There are more BSL users than there are Gaelic speakers. To us, sign language gives us empowerment; it gives us pride in our language; and it gives us access. We will talk more about this later.

David Buxton: The final point I want to add here is that this paper describes the evidence and the stories of why the Equality Act needs to be strengthened. I will give you examples. Last week, BBC *South Today* had a news story about a deaf couple who have a four-year-old child, a hearing child. They were looking for a school placement for their child and wanted to visit schools, ready for next September. They asked whether a sign-language interpreter would be provided for the information evenings, and the schools were quoted on the news item as saying that they would not give interpreting support. The parents thought the Equality Act would give them the right to an interpreter, but they were told, "It is a school's responsibility to provide interpreters". That is what the council said. They went to the Department for Education, and they said, "It is the school's responsibility". The Equality Act says that it is clearly the responsibility of schools to provide access via sign language, but that has not happened; the Equality Act simply is not strong enough.

The Chairman: Is there a central fund that provides for this? Have you ever been in touch with the Equality and Human Rights Commission about this?

David Buxton: This news happened last week, but the British Deaf Association will speak to the EHRC and ask for clear guidance. But, at the end of the day, it all comes down to the individual school's responsibility, using the Equality Act, to provide a reasonable adjustment, which means that the school can simply argue that it does not have the money. It is not really about money; it is about the parents wanting to get the right school for their child. Under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Articles 19, 21 and 24 talk about giving equal rights, freedom and education.. The British Deaf Association believes there should be a central Government responsibility to provide funding for interpreting. In countries like Sweden and Finland, the Government provide a voucher system for

interpreting services. Deaf people can use that to go to parents' evenings and other occasions. It is a more relaxed and flexible system. If the Government would learn from those models, I feel it would be hugely beneficial.

The Chairman: Are you saying that you are treated worse than, for example, parents who arrived at a school and spoke, let us say, a not very well known foreign language?

Terry Riley: Yes. It is a fact of life. The UK is a very diverse country. Many people do not use English as a first language. Those people would automatically be provided with an interpreter and other forms of access. When it comes to deaf people, people become resistant. They do not recognise our language; they do not recognise our cultural needs. They believe that we are assimilated. You also get situations where children are asked to interpret for their parents. Where are the child's rights in all of this? How can a child interpret about access to a new school or about a disciplinary matter?

We sit between two stools, where the school has responsibility and will say to the Government, "We do not have the money", and the Government will say, "No, it is the school's responsibility". We get stuck in the middle. Both sides expect the other to do something in order to provide interpreters. Schools are placed in a situation where they have to choose between paying for an interpreter and buying books for their library. I do not blame them for refusing to provide interpreters. The Government should be centrally responsible for interpreting services.

Q67 Baroness Pitkeathley: I declare an interest as Vice-President of Carers UK. You refer in your evidence to the BSL (Scotland) Bill, which has been enacted by the Scottish Parliament. This requires the Scottish Government and a wide range of authorities to prepare a national plan for the use of BSL. I have three questions following from that. First of all, what practical results do you think this will have as far as health and education are concerned? Secondly, would you like to see similar legislation in England and Wales? Thirdly, will this give adequate legal status to BSL?

Terry Riley: I will answer the third one. The BSL (Scotland) Bill does not really recognise BSL as a language per se in the same way as Scottish Gaelic. Gaelic is a recognised language. The Scottish Bill now is an acknowledgment of BSL. The Scottish plans will certainly raise the profile of BSL and the deaf community. More and more people will be aware of BSL. We think that access will improve, and public authorities will start to recognise the issues in health and post-16 education and think about how to address these issues in their plans. It is not just about BSL; it is also about changing attitudes and recognising the language as a language in its own right and BSL as a culture.

As time goes on, we will see what arises in the plans. The plans will have to involve the deaf community itself. Decisions will be made for the community, and the community will be actively involved in this. They will have to support hospitals and education authorities in how to provide services. Health and education are both very important issues. In health, you have to have full access to information; you have to be informed about your condition, your problems and the diagnosis. That means you have to have full access to information. You cannot make decisions on the basis of a lack of proper information. If you provide interpreters at doctors' interviews, et cetera, the person can then make an informed choice. Often, deaf people, through lack of education, will sign a consent form, for example, without really knowing what it says. That can have huge implications if there is a lack of information in what you have been told. I am sure that any individual has the right to have full information to make an informed choice.

In education, many deaf people have a poor experience because they have been taught via an oral educational method or where sign language is denied. In that situation, they do not have full and meaningful access to the curriculum; they do not have access to the teachers. They may not have full access to the teaching assistants. It may be that the child has a more fluent use of sign language than the person who is supporting them. It should be the other way round. Why do we allow that to happen in 2015? If it happened to other sorts of children, people would be up in arms. Parents would demand equality, but deaf people do not know how to assert their rights, so they had to put up with it.

A BSL Act would change the status of BSL, so that it would become one of the British indigenous languages. It would put deaf people on the same basis as disabled people, who are protected by the Equality Act. We would be protected by a BSL Act. It would also encourage the Government to promote and facilitate the use of BSL, such as we see here today. An Act would hopefully lead to the appointment of a commissioner, who would make it their responsibility to ensure there was proper public provision, working together with the BSL community. BSL is sometimes seen as an inferior sub-language. As I said before, it is a language. It has its own grammar. I can fluently use this sign language. The only difference is that you access me through a sign-language user. I can give you my views; I can express my frustrations.

A BSL Act would therefore improve the quality of interpreting. It would become a regulated profession. At the moment, there are no proper standards supported by Government. There is no investment in interpreting. There was a £1.2 million investment made about 15 years ago. Since then, there has been no Government investment in interpreting. In Scandinavia, they invest very heavily in sign-language interpreting training, because they know that a penny spent now will recoup a pound later on.

David Buxton: I would just like to add, on the subject of education, the British Deaf Association has compiled a paper that talks about the education of deaf children in Scotland . This was published in April 2015. We have a number of case studies, which outline very concerning stories about deaf children in mainstream environments rather than special education. There are certain deaf children who cope well in this environment, but there are others who do not. They have access to their education through a communication support worker, who maybe has BSL level 1; that is an introductory level of British Sign Language. You are talking about a child who has access to education through somebody who does not sign very well and cannot match their own signing levels.

As we have seen now in Scotland, with the Bill, it is important we have more people learning BSL to a higher level. It is important because, without access to education, deaf children will not achieve the potential they could achieve. Ultimately, the investment they put back into society later in life is not as much as it could be. In Scotland, we are talking about 92% of teachers who did not have fluent British Sign Language when teaching deaf children. What is very important in this environment is that we are looking to provide teachers and those who provide education to deaf children with the language needed.

Terry Riley: I would like to ask the Committee an impertinent question, if I may. Would you, yourselves, as parents, prefer your child to speak or to write the English language? In terms of access, would you rather that they could speak or that they could write? That is the question that many hearing parents face when they have a deaf child. The information they are given is that, if they take the oral education route, they are going to give their child access to being able to speak. Actually, this situation is incorrect, really. We are talking about language. Language will get me a job; language will give me quality of life; language

will give me access to society. Speech in itself, without an understanding of language, will not do that.

The Chairman: Can I ask a quick question, out of curiosity? Is modern technology coming to your assistance? I remember, when the late Jack Ashley was a Member of this House, there was some arrangement—others may remember better than I do—whereby words came up on the screen for him. Surely, in this modern age, one would have thought there could be some investment that would at least be of partial help.

Terry Riley: Absolutely. Technology has changed so quickly in recent times. Up until 20 years ago, telephones were completely inaccessible for me as a deaf person. I could not speak to my parents; my parents were both deaf. I never spoke to my parents on the phone until I was 40, because we could not use the phone. We never had a phone; we did not have a landline at home. 20 years ago, there was a new piece of technology called a Minicom, a text phone, where we could communicate using the written word. Now, fast forward to 2015, we have iPhones with which we can communicate. I communicate with the Board of the British Deaf Association, who are located across the UK, using things like Skype, FaceTime or ooVoo. These are platforms through which we can sign to one another from different parts of the UK.

What is really important about technology is that it is a tool. It gives us access, but it cannot replace an interpreter who can provide face-to-face interaction between interlocutors in that way. Technology is very useful, but an interpreter can break down those barriers. Of course, we have to feed our interpreters with tea and biscuits; you do not have to do that with a form of technology, so both have their advantages.

Q68 Lord Harrison: Madam Chairman, I too was going to raise the question of Jack Ashley, whom I remember being in the House of Lords. Most party political conferences have sign language at the side. What more can we politicians do in order to bring the deaf into the political process?

David Buxton: The British Deaf Association very much welcomed the coalition Government's Access to Elected Office for Disabled People Fund, which was vitally positive for deaf people in getting involved in the political process and having access to the election process. It was very successful, so I wish to commend that process, but I know that it has not yet been agreed to continue that. It is a shame to provide something and take a step back so soon afterwards.

The Government need to look very carefully at how they are being equal and inclusive towards deaf people in the political process. There is a real challenge for any deaf person who wants to get involved in politics, whether that is local politics or national politics. Having an interpreter on a platform is useful, but it is not necessarily the answer. It does not give me the opportunity to discuss with delegates in the hall. This is where I need somebody with me at my side to be able to talk. As we all know, the main work happens on the floor through networking. That is where we need to have an opportunity, and that is where there is a gap in terms of bringing the deaf community in to engage with politics in this country.

Terry Riley: I knew Lord Ashley very well. I worked with him in my time at the BBC. What happened with Lord Ashley was fantastic in terms of technology. Initially and still to this day, the rules of Parliament are that you are not allowed an interpreter on the Floor of either of the Houses. If David or I, let us say, had an ambition to become a Member of Parliament, it would be an impossibility, because we would not be able to bring an interpreter on to the Floor. There has been an MP in Canada; there are two MEPs currently in the European

Parliament. In all of those situations, they are allowed sign-language interpreters on to the floor with them in terms of access.

There is a certain degree of irony that in court, as well, I could not be a juror. There are 12 jurors, as we know. You are only allowed 12 people in the jury room, so you are not allowed an interpreter because that would introduce a 13th person. In terms of my civil duty, I cannot take part in that process. As has been mentioned, we are talking about technology; we are talking about different things that can remove barriers. When the system itself is what is preventing access, that is a real concern. While traditions of certain features are understandable, that is a concern.

Q69 Baroness Campbell of Surbiton: Maybe, Mr Riley, you and I ought to get together, because, as you will know, I was the first person in the House of Lords to bring a PA into the Chamber. I see no difference between a PA and a sign-language interpreter. When you arrive in the Lords, you and I will work together on this one. That is a promise.

It is very good to see you both. I am an old friend and sparring partner of Mr Riley. He and I have had many discussions about the issue of "deaf or disabled". I promise you, today, that we will not have that philosophical debate, but I want to ask you whether there are barriers other than language recognition that deaf people face in accessing employment, services and other areas covered by the Equality Act. For instance, we would both say, I believe, that, as you would not want your child to be your interpreter, a disabled parent would not wish for their child to be their carer. I see this as the same issue; I see it as a reasonable adjustment.

Could you give me some examples of perhaps some of the issues that we share other than that which is different, i.e. sign language? I mean things like attitudes to employment of deaf people. I know it is not just a language issue; there are huge issues such as, "Would they fit in? Would they make the other members of the staff group uncomfortable, because they cannot speak sign language?". These are often issues to do with attitudes, so perhaps you could give me some examples of that. Is the current legal framework adequate to address these other issues? Try not to talk too much about language and more about the other issues and barriers you both see deaf people facing, if you could.

David Buxton: Thank you very much for the question. You are right. Outside of sign language, there are other barriers with attitudes, particularly in employment. We are very fortunate now to have the Access to Work scheme, which is a fantastic scheme. It gives deaf and disabled people the ability to progress within their professional careers. I know that is the same for me. I know, when Terry was at the BBC as the editor and series producer of the *See Hear* programme, he had an interpreter provided by Access to Work.

But the budget for Access to Work has remained the same, even though the number of users and the demands on the service have increased. In terms of providing people opportunities to get on into work, that is a real concern where we face a barrier, which is that support into the work environment. Access to Work is about providing support for equality in the workplace, where we can work together to change the world for the better.

Secondly, we have spoken about technology and the positive developments in technology, along with some anecdotal things Terry has already mentioned. Yet a telephone is clearly still a barrier for a deaf person. We now have video-relay services; you can use interpreters in that way, and that would remove a barrier. I could give an example. If I want to make a phone call to talk about my pension or my benefits, or if I want to book an appointment, if video-relay services are not available, it is impossible to make those telephone calls. There is

also the point of attitudes towards access and inclusion and how we seek to remove those barriers.

Terry Riley: What is interesting is that we face barriers in everyday life. David has mentioned video-relay services as a potential solution, but, in terms of modern society and barriers we face in modern society, let us say that a person has a subscription to cover their central heating in the event of a breakdown. If that happens, you make a phone call and they make that repair. For a deaf person, it breaks down. You ask your daughter to make the phone call on your behalf. "Sorry, we cannot take this via a third party". I have a subscription I pay for that pays for the event of a breakdown, but I cannot actually make the phone call for this to happen.

Take my bank, for example. If I need to make an important call to my bank, they will not accept my wife to speak on my behalf; they will not accept my daughter to speak on my behalf. You may have a situation where somebody does not have English as a first language. They can make that call and it is acceptable. For a deaf person, can they come on to the phone? Can they confirm who they are? No, because we cannot hear the person on the other end of the phone. These are everyday barriers.

Imagine you are standing on a train platform and you hear an announcement: "Sorry, the train is going from platform 15 rather than 13". As a deaf person, I am stood there and, before I realise it, I turn around and everyone has left the platform because they are all on the train two platforms down, and I have missed it. I have heard examples of people who have missed planes. I have in fact missed two planes because there has been an announcement of a change of gate.

All it takes is something like subtitles or captions on certain announcements. That would make all of the difference. The really important point to subtitles and captions is the value added it would provide to society. It is not only for deaf people or those with difficulties hearing or who are hard of hearing. Those people who do not have English as a first language would benefit from having things like captions and subtitles.

We strongly feel we are not seen as being equal; we are seen as being defective in some way. I have hearing impairment; I have some impairment to my hearing; I am "defective". I am not defective. I am a deaf person. I do not have a problem. I am perfectly fine. I have a language. I can communicate. I see myself as an equal.

Baroness Campbell of Surbiton: Mr Riley, do you see that as truly different from the kind of barriers that disabled people face? For instance, if there is an announcement of a change, and a train is on platform 3 and I am on platform 1, there is no way I will get to platform 3 in time. I will be on that platform with you, watching the train disappear. I cannot use my hands anymore; otherwise I would have greeted you in sign language. I cannot sign my name, even. My bank will not accept the fact that I cannot sign my name on a cheque and that I use a stamp. Where is the difference in discrimination? Do you really think disability discrimination is so different from that discrimination faced by deaf people? Answer without going into the long philosophical debate, which you and I have often talked about.

Terry Riley: You have the Disability Discrimination Act, which recognises you as a disabled person. I am not disabled in the same way as you. I am linguistically impaired. Also, you know how to use legislation; you know your way through it. Deaf people become passive. It is a fact of life. Deaf people do not know how, or are afraid, to argue. They feel that, if they argue, they will lose the service. We train deaf people in how to make decisions, how to be assertive, how to be involved and to bring about change.

The BDA has published a BSL Charter document. We use that with local public authorities in order to change their services: health, education, police and hospital services. We are working with disabled groups as well. What suits them might well suit us, and we work in partnership.

Q70 Baroness Thomas of Winchester: It is very nice to see an old friend, David Buxton. I have to declare some interests. I receive DLA; I am a trustee and Vice-President of Muscular Dystrophy UK; I am on the disabled access committee of the MCC at Lord's Cricket Ground; and I am a patron of Thrive.

I now have two questions about reasonable adjustments. Your submission argues for the Equality Act to be strengthened to ensure a clear interpretation of what reasonable adjustments are in the context of deaf BSL users. Why do you believe this to be necessary? What would such a change look like?

Terry Riley: Part of the question gives us the answer. What is a reasonable adjustment? Who decides? Is it me, the provider or the funder? We have pen and paper. That is considered a reasonable adjustment. A lot of deaf people are very resistant to using English, because it is not their first language. Reasonable adjustments can have lots of positives. You can see changes over time. You can see changes in technology. In schools, we have seen changes over time, but we have not seen any way in which we can decide whether a reasonable adjustment is working. You have an example of the school and the parents. Who decides whether this should be provided or that should be provided? It is left up to individuals, and people fall between two stools.

Parliament needs to think about becoming more assertive in order to make sure that, for example, every five years, reasonable adjustments keep pace with technological change. Parliament has an obligation to make it very clear what a reasonable adjustment is. The words themselves are open to interpretation. If we had a clear interpretation of what BSL and reasonable adjustments meant, and how deaf people would benefit, that would enormously improve the quality of our lives.

David Buxton: I just want to add to this important point about reasonable adjustments. Sign language, BSL, is my first or preferred language. How do you define reasonable adjustments in relation to that if you discount BSL? Just translating things into English is not a reasonable adjustment. The Equality Act is talking about access to buildings, but BSL does not really fit into that. What does a reasonable adjustment mean in relation to BSL? Parliament needs to look at that very clearly.

For example, imagine if a group of Lords went to meet the President of France. Special arrangements would be made. A reasonable adjustment is to book a French interpreter. Let us say they were only good enough to understand chit-chat about holidays and so on. Would you think that was a reasonable adjustment? Would you accept that? No, you would not. You want somebody who is fully qualified; you want somebody who would fully inform you so you could make whatever decisions you had to make in order to meet the President of France. At the end, you would get positive action and positive change, and move forward. That is how the deaf community sees BSL. That is why Parliament needs to look more carefully at what reasonable adjustments mean in relation to deaf people.

Baroness Thomas of Winchester: You do not think that the word "flexible" is important. That is what some people think. They think reasonable adjustments need to be a bit vague so they have flexibility to be interpreted year on year.

Terry Riley: Flexibility is important. You cannot be too rigid about things. Yes, of course you need flexibility. For example, some deaf people can cope well using speech to text. They

might be able to cope using a video-relay service, working from a screen. What if I do not want those? What if I want a BSL interpreter? I should have the right to say, "I want that. That is my preferred mode".

Technology can let you down. I know that some deaf people are not happy with technology. It is not reliable; it does not always give you access. Sometimes things are not clear. It is about choice. Deaf people should have that choice. Technology also has its limitations. Flexibility is important, but the question is really about this word "reasonable". Who decides what is reasonable? Is it you, me or someone over there? It is just not clear.

I am not allowed to drive without a seat belt. The law is very clear on that. "Reasonable" would mean I could wear it or not; I make the decision. It would be left open to individuals. It is open to misinterpretation.

David Buxton: This is important. When we are talking about reasonable adjustments, who has the power? It is usually the provider. We are powerless in that relationship. We want access. They decide what to provide. My opportunity to be involved is reduced. They win the argument. They have used the argument of reasonable adjustments, but it is an excuse. I accept, yes, that there should be flexibility, but we need the law and its interpretation to be clear. Parliament needs to be clear about that. It should not be the case that the provider always wins.

Terry Riley: I just want to add one further point. In the health arena, providers will say, "Interpreters are too expensive. We will use a less qualified interpreter". They will say, "That is fine; that looks like a reasonable adjustment". Who is saying they have to provide a highly skilled, qualified interpreter? The law does not say that. They can just provide an interpreter. Therefore, they use people with level 1 or level 2, a very basic level of sign-language skill. There is misinformation or misunderstanding. This is really about safety, is it not? It is not about money. It becomes a numbers game.

Most of the complaints that deaf people have are about the low quality of interpreters. I would not call them interpreters. They are people who can sign, but they have not been trained and do not know how to interpret. The problem is this word "reasonable". The service provider says, "I am providing you with someone. That is reasonable".

The Chairman: That takes us neatly to Lord Northbrook's question, which comes to the heart of the matter.

Q71 Lord Northbrook: What makes an adjustment reasonable can depend, to some extent, on its cost. How has this operated in the context of BSL? Where providing a BSL interpreter is not possible either because of availability or cost, would alternatives be acceptable? If so, what would they be? In particular, I am thinking of the case cited by the BDA of Cordell v Foreign & Commonwealth Office.

David Buxton: That case is quite complicated and it is at a very high level. This woman had an opportunity to get a job as a Deputy Ambassador—what an achievement. Deaf people thought, "How great", and then the deaf people were let down. If you want the opportunity to train as a lawyer or some other sort of profession, you think, "No, my progression is blocked because of cost". Of course, we accept that it is about cost. That is a reality. But there are alternative ways. You could have used video-relay services, for example. Technology has improved so much. There are better technological solutions.

In the Cordell case, it was the beginning of the way in which the Equality Act was changing. This woman is now a freelance worker, but her prospects have been reduced.

Terry Riley: We have talked about costs and expenditure, but we have not talked about income. For example, if I use an Access to Work interpreter, it means I am working, I pay my

tax and I am an important part of society. I have self-esteem; I am not on benefits. If you take away my reasonable adjustment, what am I left with? Perhaps I will have an inferior job; perhaps I will face dismissal because I cannot do the job. I will go back on to benefits; I will not pay tax.

It is about the positives as well as the negatives of expenditure. You cannot consider one without the other. There is a flaw in any argument that just talks about the costs. If you have one, two or three children—it is about cost, yes, but there are also benefits to having more children. You have to balance these positive and negative aspects.

David Buxton: I want to make an important point about cost. It is an important one, whether you are employed or not. If you invest that cost in that person, that person will generate income far greater than the cost of that. It is an investment in that person and the economy. We need to change the attitudes of people. What benefits are there to the British economy of someone doing a decent job? We need to look at the value for money. That is what we should be working with.

Terry Riley: In the mental health area, research shows that one in four people will have enduring mental health problems. We see many children who have mental health problems because of lack of access to a language and lack of access to support. That cost will continue of those deaf children throughout their lives. It would be much better if you provided the child with access to a language and support via interpreters. That would benefit the child and save the Government money in the long term. As I say, it is a penny spent now and a pound benefit later on.

Baroness Campbell of Surbiton: Can I just ask a question? Have you ever conducted a cost-benefit analysis of providing the access that deaf people require in society? You talk about it in terms of investing in deaf people. Has there ever been a cost-benefit analysis as such?

David Buxton: The only reference we would be able to show is our Access to Work report, which we published some 18 months ago now. That is where we showed it was a positive investment when you saw the progression of people within employment, the levels of jobs they received, how involved they became in decision-making within society. Using an example of our BSL Charter, once local authorities took on board our charter, we saw a really big improvement in the lives of deaf people within those regions. The Access to Work model is something we have.

Terry Riley: I could give you an example here. I am a living example. My dad was a presser. He could not find any other job. It was manual labour whereas I was a series editor at the BBC. I have been a chief executive. That is all because I have been given correct, reasonable adjustments throughout my career. I did not have these aims to achieve the things I have when I was 15. I did not have those aspirations in that way. But the world has changed, and those changes have been positive. They have given me exposure and I have taken those opportunities every step of the way.

We might have deaf children in schools today who would aspire to be Members of Parliament. They do not have that opportunity. There are six such Members of Parliament in the world. That is not because deaf people do not have the ability to do it. Provide deaf people with the correct tools and they can do what they want to do. Being told they cannot do things is the problem we have.

If you take this year's International Week of the Deaf theme "With Sign Language, Deaf Children Can" —we are talking about sign language and recognition of sign language—we know what we can achieve, given the right tools. And I have not changed.

The Chairman: On that optimistic note, I would like to thank you very much. This question of cost is a really serious one and our report will try to get to grips with it. We all understand very clearly what you are indicating about cost benefit. We have found this very illuminating and helpful. We are very grateful for the work you do. It is very heartening to see that you have been able to take advantage of what has been on offer to help you up the professional ladder, and we hope for more of that for the next generation, in the future.

David Buxton: Thank you.

Terry Riley: Thank you for having us.

The Chairman: It has been a successful first BSL session in the House of Lords. Thank you.