

Chairman
Treasury Select Committee
House of Commons

23 March 2020

Dear Chairman,

CORVID-19 Response - Call for Evidence

I write to you on behalf of the Chair of NRCPD and as its Director. NRCPD is the National Regulator for British Sign Language Interpreters, Translators and a number of allied communications professions who work with Deaf and deafblind people. In response to your Committee's call for evidence on the Corvid-19 response, we note that all Corvid-19 response measures have a resource implication for the Exchequer directly or indirectly so we submit that:

Financial Support for Freelancers and those on Zero-hours contracts. Whilst the Chancellor's promise of support for employees is to be commended, the response for the self-employed freelancer is wholly inadequate. We know in these testing times that challenges for the self-employed and their families come quickly and in multiples. The large majority of Registered professionals in this field are freelancers and the manner in which bookings for these highly skilled and educated individuals are made means that much of their work has dried up as businesses and individuals reduce costs at this time. Similar financial support should be provided to the self-employed as has been offered for employees. The Treasury should find a straightforward way to do this but sums based on historical earnings and tax would be one way of doing it.

Integration of BSL Interpreting into NHS Providers Pandemic response. It has come to our attention also that the already fragmented, inconsistent and uncoordinated provision of language support to Deaf people in the health system is failing to give adequate access to Deaf people at this time both for the usual range of serious health conditions but also the growing presentation with Corvid-19 symptoms. In addition, where Registered Sign Language Interpreters and Translators are deployed there is poor if any provision for appropriate PPE. We urge government and the NHS to ensure that all healthcare providers are fully integrating their interpreter provision into their main pandemic response measures to ensure Deaf people have the same access to help and support.

Lack of BSL Communication of Measures for Deaf people. There is a very concerning lack of BSL video on government and public service websites and communications channels about Corvid-19 and the current situation. Deaf people are not getting the best information that they as citizens of the UK are entitled to. Public bodies have an equality duty to Deaf people and there is an immediate need to provide all public information on the pandemic response to be available in BSL alongside the English written and spoken information. The in-vision BSL interpreter for the PMs daily updates is the barest lip-service paid – these briefings are too high-level in content to be of tangible and actionable value and all the follow-on briefings and instructions must also be published in BSL accessible format. The PMs interpreter should be there in person so other channels and repeats don't see the removal of BSL interpreting. Deaf people are part of the work force and business owners and parents and leaders of business and charity and must have access to the latest information to make informed decisions.

Closure of schools – Key Workers. The limit of school attendance to those classified as keyworkers is the right thing but some consideration must be given to the children of BSL interpreters and translators. These professionals are crucial for the successful discharge of the duties of key workers when working with Deaf people. For example if medical practitioners are unable to communicate with a sick Deaf person then that immediately becomes a weak link in the chain of protection and prevention of Corvid-19 spreading.

We would be pleased to answer any questions arising from this evidence.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Hawthorn', with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Marcus Hawthorn
Director NRCPD

And on behalf of (cc’):

Liz Duncan
Chair of NRCPD