

Trevor Phillips OBE
Chair
Equality and Human Rights Commission
3 More London
Riverside Tooley Street
London SE1 2RG



27 March 2012

Dear Mr Phillips

Deaf consumers research – sign language interpreters

I am writing to share our forthcoming research report on the experiences of deaf and hard of hearing people when obtaining legal services, which we are due to publish on Thursday. The research was jointly commissioned from the Deaf Studies Trust by the Panel, the Solicitors Regulation Authority and Action on Hearing Loss and highlights for the first time the key issues these individuals face.

A key theme relates to the provision of interpreters. In particular, the report highlights confusion around who is responsible for finding and paying for sign language interpreter services when clients are not eligible for legal aid. We understand there may be some case law in this area, but there remains a lack of clarity around how the Equalities Act 'reasonable adjustments' requirements apply where clients are seeking legal advice and paying for it privately.

We should be grateful if the EHRC would provide much-needed clarity in this area. While our project has focused on deaf and hard of hearing people, it seems likely this problem also faces individuals in other contexts, for example those for whom English is a second language. Therefore, bringing some certainty to this issue would deliver benefits for a diverse cross-section of our community.

More widely, I hope you will agree that this partnership project, which focuses in depth on the needs of a specific group of people at risk of disadvantage, has been a valuable exercise. The Panel wishes to repeat this research for other groups of consumers in vulnerable situations and we would welcome the opportunity to work with the EHRC on future initiatives.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elisabeth Davies', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Elisabeth Davies
Chair