Applying for Access to Work

Access to Work is a government funded employment support programme that aims to help more disabled people, and those with long term health conditions, start or stay in work. It can provide practical and financial support if you have a disability or physical or mental health condition.

You may find that your employer will put in place some adjustments that help you work, however you may need additional equipment or support beyond this. That is where AtW comes in.

An Access to Work grant can pay for practical support to help you:

* start working.
* stay in work.
* move into self-employment or start a business.

How much you get depends on your specific circumstances. The money does not have to be paid back and will not affect your other benefits.

Applying for Access to Work is something you need to do yourself; your employer can’t do this for you. You do not have to wait for your employer’s agreement. If you need someone to speak to Access to Work on your behalf, you can tell the Access to work team this when you make your application.

You can also request to be contacted by phone or email, whichever is your preference.

Access to work will need to speak with a named individual within your workplace. This could be your manager or someone from the HR team. Talking to your employer about your plans to apply to AtW will ensure they are aware and can advise who is the best person for AtW to contact.

As part of your initial application, you will need to provide Access to Work with information:

* Your contact details.
* your workplace address and postcode
* the name of a workplace contact who can confirm you work there (they will not be contacted without your permission)
* email address or work phone number of your workplace contact.
* information about your condition, how it affects your work and what support or equipment you think you need. Remember to consider times when you may need additional support if your condition fluctuates, or you experience a flare. Keep your descriptions simple and practical, don’t assume they have knowledge of your condition or the barriers you face.
* Do not worry if you are unsure what equipment would help you. AtW can arrange for an independent assessment of your work needs.
* If you are about to start work, you will need a job offer letter or email that includes your start date (you can apply for Access to Work up to 12 weeks before your start date)
* If you are a job seeker and need support to attend interviews, you will need a letter or email confirming a job interview date.

Once your application has been received, an Access to Work advisor will contact you to discuss what support you require.

Access to Work will also contact your employer to agree any ‘cost sharing.

agreement’ they may need to contribute to. This will consider how long you have been employed by them and the size of the company. This is to establish how much if anything, that your employer will need to contribute.

## **Assessing your needs**

* If you know what equipment or support, you need you can detail this within your application.
* If you are unsure what would help you in work, you can request an assessment of your workplace needs.

An independent assessment can be funded by AtW, where a workplace assessor will speak with you to understand your role and the tasks you have difficulty with. They will then recommend what could help you continue to work. This may be ergonomic tools or equipment, specialist software, training or travel support, or a combination of all of these.

The assessor will be in touch to arrange a date to meet with you. After the assessment you will receive a copy of the report and a decision letter from ATW which will outline what they have awarded. It will detail the items, the cost for each and what your employer might have to contribute. They will also advise your employer in writing what they have agreed to fund and if they are required to contribute towards the costs. This could be to fund all or part of the recommendations from the report.

Your employer will only have access to the decision of what has been awarded and how they can reclaim any agreed costs.

**They will not be sent the actual report,** if you wish you can share this with them.

## **Costs**

Claims from new employees up to six weeks from starting work will normally be paid in full. If you have been working for your employer for more than six weeks, then your employer will be expected to cover some or all of the costs or the award.

There are specific levels for cost sharing depending on the size of the business.

Access to Work will cover up to 80 per cent of the approved costs between the pre-set limit (detailed below) and £10,000.

The amount the employer is required to pay towards any award is determined by the number of employees.

* 0 - 49 employees – employer contribution is nil
* 50 - 249 employees – employer contribution is £500
* 250+ employees – contribution is £1,000.

**Example**

1 A new member of staff has applied to AtW within the first six weeks of starting work. They have been advised that ATW agrees they need:

* An ergonomic chair due to pain they experience in a standard chair.
* A roller ball mouse due to arthritis in their hands.
* Dragon naturally speaking software to enable them to speak to their PC instead of having to type, which causes pain in their hands and wrists.
* Headset and microphone to use with Dragon software.
* Training on how to use the software.

As they are within the six-week limit their employer is not required to contribute to the costs. Their employer will be advised to purchase the items and reclaim the costs directly from AtW within a specified time period.

2 An employee of two years who works part time within two areas of the office - on reception and sometimes at their desk within the main office. They have developed arthritis in their neck, and hips. This causes pain in arms, shoulders, and hips, which is now impacting on their capacity to manage some tasks. They have asked AtW for an assessment of their needs as they are unsure what would help. This assessment is funded by AtW.

The assessor recommends:

* A trolley to save them carrying folders and files across the office.
* A perch stool to use when on the reception area, instead of standing at the reception.
* A height adjustable desk to allow them to change positions to ease pain.
* An ergonomic chair.
* Ergonomic keyboard and mouse along with an angle poise monitor arm which allows them to position the screen.

As the employer has 80 members of staff and the employee has been employed with them for more than six weeks, they will need to contribute the first £500 of the costs. ATW will fund the remainder of the costs.

### **What can Access to work fund?**

Access to Work could fund a grant to help pay for things like:

* specialist equipment, assistive technology software and training
* support workers, like a BSL interpreter, a job coach, driver, or a travel buddy.
* costs of travelling to and within work if you cannot drive and/or use public transport.
* adaptations to your vehicle so you can get to work.
* physical changes to your workplace

If you need travel to work support such as taxis, you will be required to have confirmation from a health professional that you have difficulty using public transport or driving. If accepted, you will be required to submit an estimate of costs from the taxi company, for each journey required by you. AtW may ask for a contribution towards these, usually what you would pay on public transport or a mileage rate.

**If you need specialist equipment at more than one work location this can be considered. Your workplace can include your home if you work from there some or all of the time.**

It does not matter how much you earn. If you get an Access to Work grant, it will not affect any other benefits you get and you will not have to pay it back.

You can also get support to manage your mental health at work, which might include:

* a tailored plan to help you get or stay in work.
* one-to-one sessions with a mental health professional.

This is provided by an external organisation. You do not need to advise your employer that you have applied or are receiving mental health support.

## **Steps to take after the decision.**

If you are not happy with the assessment and the award decision in the

letter, you have the right to ask for it to be looked at again by a different

advisor. This is called ‘reconsideration’ and can only be done once per

claim. This will mean that a different AtW assessor will look at your claim.

If you are happy with the award, then you will need to sign the letter to accept and

return it to Access to Work.

If your employer has agreed to cost share the amount will be deducted from the overall award. Once your employer has purchased everything, they can reclaim the balance of costs.

The employer is responsible for purchasing the agreed equipment or support. They can purchase the items from any preferred suppliers; they do not need to use those suggested by Access to Work. They will, however, need to make up any difference in costs from those agreed in the original award. Access to Work will only refund the amount specified in their report to the employer.

If you have received funding for taxis or a support worker, you will need to reclaim the funds from AtW usually monthly. The forms required for this will be sent to you by AtW.

**Travel support**

If awarded taxi costs, you can ask the taxi company to set up an account and bill you direct. The taxi invoice along with the completed signed forms requesting payment from AtW to the taxi company should be sent to AtW as soon as possible to ensure the taxi firm receives their payment in time.

There is now an online portal that you can use to reclaim costs, if you prefer. Be aware not all taxi companies will set up an account and you may need to pay the costs directly to them yourself and reclaim from AtW.

**Support worker.**

If you are considering applying for a support worker or driver, you will have to detail what tasks they will help you with. The number of hours per day, week or month that they will carry out these tasks, as well as any ad hoc tasks over the year that you may need support with. To get an average weekly total you can add these together, AtW will consider times when you may need additional support and factor this in.

This will give you an idea of the number of hours of weekly support you need. Add on any extra expenses such as work travel or visits where you stay away from home due to your job and you need the support worker to accompany you.

Next consider how the support worker will be employed.

* Self-employed – their hourly rate and any related insurance costs.
* Your employer agrees to employ them direct.
* Specialist company that can provide support workers and pay them direct.
* You employ them direct and are responsible for tax, NI etc.

It will be your responsibility to ensure you reclaim the costs from AtW.

## **Who owns the items funded by AtW?**

The employer owns the equipment, which also means that the employer has the responsibility to maintain, insure and dispose of it appropriately.

If you leave your job, you can ask your employer for the items. Some employers will allow the employee to take their equipment to their new employer. Access to work can usually fund the cost of transferring these to your new workplace.

## [**Health Adjustment Passport**](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-adjustment-passport)**.**

This form can be used to make an application to Access to Work if you have a disability or health condition that makes it harder for you to move into work or stay in a job. This is a tool that may be helpful to you, however it is not essential that you use this to make the application. You can use it to:

* help you to identify what support and changes (known as [reasonable adjustments](https://www.gov.uk/reasonable-adjustments-for-disabled-workers)) you may need when you are in work or moving into work
* apply for support from [Access to Work](https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work). This could include funding for specialist equipment to support you to do your job, support getting to and from work or support when you are in work, such as job coaching.
* help you talk to employers about adjustments and in-work support that you may need.

A job could also include self-employment, an apprenticeship, work experience or a supported internship.

## **Contact details for Access to Work**

Check if you are eligible to apply for Access to work and [apply online](https://www.get-disability-work-support.service.gov.uk/apply/eligibility/check-eligible)

You can also apply by calling the Access to Work helpline.

Access to Work helpline Telephone: 0800 121 7479

* Access to work [factsheet](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/access-to-work-factsheet/access-to-work-factsheet-for-customers) for applicants.
* Access to work [factsheet](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/access-to-work-guide-for-employers/access-to-work-factsheet-for-employers) for employers.
* [Easy read](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/easy-read-get-help-at-work-if-youre-disabled-or-have-a-health-condition-access-to-work) format leaflets
* Welsh language information on [Access to work](https://www.gov.uk/mynediad-at-waith)
* British sign language information on [Access to work](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLC0aQWFFHARzJYt8cED-WX1g5jD0mApTv).

**Northern Ireland (NI)** [Access to work](https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/access-work-practical-help-work) scheme is similar, for more information on applying use this link.