



Access to Work

A Step-by-Step Guide for Employees



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What is Access to Work

Access to Work (ATW) is a government grant scheme that provides practical and financial support for people with disabilities, long-term health conditions, or neurodivergent traits to help them start, stay in, and thrive at work.

This scheme can be life-changing by providing tailored support to help you manage your workload effectively, reduce stress, and improve your productivity. Despite its availability, many eligible people don't apply – don't miss out on this opportunity to get the help you need!

You do not need a formal diagnosis to apply for Access to Work support. Whether you are self-diagnosed, on a waiting list, or have a confirmed diagnosis, ATW can still provide support based on the challenges you experience in the workplace. While employers are legally bound to make reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010, ATW offers additional support for employees whose work-related needs go beyond what an employer can reasonably provide. For further details on reasonable adjustments please see the GOV.UK guide.

[GOV.UK information on reasonable adjustments](#)

What to consider before applying

The ATW assessment focuses on your needs and how to make your job easier, not on changes your employer might need to make. Your employer verifies your employment but isn't directly involved in the assessment process.

To get an ATW assessment, you need to be currently employed or have a confirmed job offer, including self-employment. This means the scheme can help you at any stage of your career, whether you're starting a new job or already in the workforce.

What help is available

Access to Work grants vary based on individual needs, with no fixed amount. However, grants are subject to an annual cap. For instance, between April 1, 2021, and March 31, 2022, the cap is £62,900.

Examples of popular ways ATW can help you

Support is tailored to your individual needs and can include a range of solutions such as coaching, assistive technology, and physical adjustments to your workspace.

Specialist software:

- Transcribing software compatible with Microsoft Teams, Skype, and YouTube.
- Mind mapping tools such as XMind to help with visual organisation and planning.
- Digital notebooks like the reMarkable tablet to capture notes electronically and keep everything in one place.

For example, an office administrator struggling with focus might receive funding for noise-cancelling headphones and a digital planner to stay on track.

Support workers:

- Hiring a job coach, reader, or notetaker to assist you at work.
- Virtual Assistants (VAs) to support with diary management, prioritising tasks, and handling administrative work.

For example, a marketing professional with ADHD might receive support through a job coach to help with time management and prioritisation.

Workplace Training:

- Disability awareness training for colleagues to foster a more inclusive work environment.

Travel:

- Work-related travel costs, such as taxi fares between work sites for meetings or training sessions.

Mental health support:

- Access to counselling or tailored support to help manage workplace-related stress and anxiety.

Ergonomic equipment:

- You may be offered an ergonomics review to identify simple changes that make your workspace more comfortable.
- If needed, ATW can fund specialist equipment like supportive chairs, large print keyboards, ergonomic mice, or monitor arms.

For example, someone with chronic pain might receive an ergonomic chair and keyboard setup to reduce strain and support posture during long work sessions.

Support is not limited to traditional office environments. If you work from home or have a hybrid work pattern, Access to Work can fund adjustments that support your working style, such as ergonomic home office equipment or software to assist with remote communication.

How to apply

Applying for Access to Work is simple. Follow these steps:

1. **Prepare your information:** Gather your National Insurance number, employment details, and an idea of the challenges you face at work.
2. **Apply online or via phone:**
 - Online: [GOV.UK Access to Work application page](#)
 - Phone: 0800 121 7479 (Textphone: 0800 121 7579)
The ATW helpline is open Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm.
 - If you are unable to contact Access to Work by telephone, you can use the contact details below to write to them:

Access to Work
Operational Support Unit
Harrow Jobcentre Plus
Mail Handling Site A
Wolverhampton
WV98 1JE

3. **Initial contact:** An ATW advisor will get in touch to discuss your needs and guide you through the next steps.
4. **Workplace assessment:** If needed, an assessor will evaluate your work environment and recommend suitable support.
5. **Decision and funding:** Once approved, you and your employer will receive details of the recommended support and how to implement it.

When you contact ATW, it will be useful to have the following information at hand:

- How your disability or health condition affects you
- What help are you getting
- What kind of help you think you need to do your job
- any current coping strategies
- employment details, if you're self-employed, you'll need your Unique Taxpayer Reference (UTR) number. You can get help finding your UTR [here](#)
- [Your National Insurance number](#)

While the application process might seem overwhelming, ATW aims to make it as straightforward as possible. You don't have to know exactly what support you need; the assessment process will help determine this for you.

What happens next

An ATW advisor will contact you about your application. Typically, you can expect to hear from an ATW advisor within 12 weeks of submitting your application, with full support arrangements in place within 4-6 months. It's important to be patient during this period and keep any relevant documentation.

The ATW Advisor will be your guide through the eligibility process. They'll also chat with you to learn about the difficulties you experience at work and explore potential solutions to help you succeed.

If you find it difficult to talk on the phone, you can ask the ATW to contact you by email, or to contact someone else who can talk to them about your application.

The ATW advisor might want:

- more information about your work, your disability or health condition
- to ask if it is ok for them to speak to your employer
- to arrange an independent holistic workplace assessment with a specialist.
This will either be carried out via phone or in person.

It's worth discussing your intention to apply for ATW funding with your employer. Remember, seeking support for your disability is a valid and empowering step. The best way to approach this conversation depends on your individual circumstances and comfort level.

Assessment

Upon confirming eligibility, ATW authorises a workplace needs assessment to identify challenges and recommend support. The assessor will either visit your workplace or conduct an over-the-phone assessment, depending on the complexity of your needs. Their report with recommendations goes to your ATW Advisor for evaluation.

The independent workplace assessment is conducted by a specialist who will assess your work environment and needs without employer involvement, unlike Occupational Health assessments, which are employer-led. However, remember that your employer still has a separate responsibility to consider your needs and make reasonable adjustments. This could include flexible working hours, administrative support, or anything else that helps you perform your job optimally.

You and your employer will get a letter which will tell you if you get help from ATW.

If you can get help from ATW, the letter will provide you with suggested alterations, adaptations, or equipment. Typically, this includes a list of qualified providers and cost estimates. This way, you and your employer can choose the option that best suits your needs and preferences.

If the assessment recommends and ATW approves a specific type of support, such as counselling or virtual assistance, you can choose your preferred provider. Simply have your chosen provider send an invoice to ATW for payment.

It's then up to you and your employer to order/arrange the support. Your employer will need to purchase any equipment and arrange payment for any other support you're entitled to. You will probably need to liaise with your HR department or equivalent to get this arranged.

Costs

Applying within your first 6 weeks of employment ensures that ATW covers 100% of eligible costs. If you apply later, ATW may cover up to 80% of the costs, with your employer contributing the remainder.

ATW will also consider paying grants of up to 100% of the cost of certain types of provision, including:

- Support workers
- Coaches
- Additional travel to and in work
- Communication support at interviews
- Administrative support

Your employer will need to contact ATW for reimbursement of most of the costs.

How long does this last for?

Typically, funding agreements under the ATW scheme cover up to three years. ATW will review your needs and funding after one year and periodically thereafter. If you still need support, you'll need to apply to renew your grant before it expires. You can also reapply if your work circumstances change.

What happens if I don't agree with the decision

Firstly, your adviser may discuss their reasoning with you, which gives you an opportunity to share your thoughts.

While most decisions are informed by thorough assessments, understanding your specific needs is paramount. If you feel the proposed support doesn't perfectly align, you have 4 weeks to request a reconsideration from ATW. Don't hesitate to explain your concerns, whether it's about the procedural aspects (guidance can be found [here](#)), the level of personalisation, or how the recommended support helps you in the long run.

Is this what my employer should use to make reasonable adjustments

No. An employer is required to make reasonable adjustments to remove any substantial disadvantages a disabled employee is experiencing at work. These are essentially changes which are considered 'reasonable', given their size, resources, and other factors.

Some examples of reasonable adjustments that could be made by an employer could include flexible schedules, regular 1-1 with your manager, standing desk, easy access fidget toys, providing clear written instructions for work, or a quiet workspace to minimise distractions.

There may be cross-over with what ATW could provide, but essentially, this is additional - not instead of.

Frequently Asked Questions

Do I need a formal diagnosis to apply for Access to Work?

No, you do not need a formal diagnosis. ATW supports individuals based on workplace challenges rather than a medical label.

How long does it take to get support?

The current waiting time to be contacted is approximately 12 weeks, with full support typically in place within 4-6 months.

What if I am self-employed?

You are eligible to apply if you have a Unique Taxpayer Reference (UTR) and can demonstrate your business viability.

Will my employer have to pay for anything?

Employers may be required to contribute a small percentage of costs, depending on the size of the organisation and the time since you started employment.

Common Myths About Access to Work

"I need a formal diagnosis to apply."

No, you don't. ATW bases support on the challenges you experience, not just a diagnosis.

"It's only for people in full-time jobs."

ATW supports part-time, self-employed, and freelance workers as well.

The process is too complicated."

While there are forms to fill in, ATW advisors are there to guide you through it, and support is available to help you apply.

Final Thoughts: Taking the First Step

Taking the first step to apply for Access to Work can feel daunting, but remember, you deserve the right support to succeed in your job. Don't hesitate to advocate for yourself and explore all the options available to help you thrive at work.