

Access to Work

A practical guide for employees

USE THIS GUIDE WHEN

You are considering Access to Work and want to understand whether it might be relevant, how to apply, what support it may fund and what happens afterwards.

This guide helps you:

- check whether Access to Work may be relevant to your situation
- describe the work barrier before jumping to a particular product or service
- understand the main types of support and how the application process works
- know where your employer may need to be involved
- review an award, report changes or ask for a decision to be reconsidered

CHECK

DESCRIBE

APPLY

AGREE

REVIEW

A starting point, not a promise

Access to Work is a government employment support scheme. Eligibility and awards are decided case by case. The examples in this guide are possibilities, not entitlements or recommendations for a particular diagnosis.

CURRENT SCHEME INFORMATION

This guide covers Access to Work in England, Scotland and Wales. Northern Ireland has a different service. Civil servants receive workplace support through their employer instead of Access to Work. Scheme rules can change: current GOV.UK guidance takes precedence over this PDF.

1. What Access to Work is - and what it is not

Access to Work is a publicly funded employment support scheme for people whose disability, physical or mental health condition creates extra work-related barriers or costs. It can help someone start, stay in or return to paid work.

ACCESS TO WORK CAN	ACCESS TO WORK DOES NOT
fund agreed practical support linked to a work barrier	replace or subsidise an employer's legal duty to make reasonable adjustments
support paid employment, self-employment and some other eligible work situations	guarantee a particular item, coach, software package or service because of a diagnosis
consider support for home or hybrid working where the eligibility rules are met	fund diagnosis or treatment of a condition
use an assessment where the support needed is unclear	require everyone to have a workplace assessment before an award can be made

Could I be eligible?

- You need to be 16 or over and normally live and work in England, Scotland or Wales.
- You need to be in paid work, about to start or return to paid work, or meet another eligible work category. Voluntary work is not covered.
- Your disability or health condition must affect your ability to do the job or create work-related costs. ADHD and dyslexia are explicitly included as examples in current GOV.UK eligibility guidance.
- You do not need a formal diagnosis to apply.
- If you are self-employed, additional eligibility and business-viability rules apply, including a current annual turnover threshold.

IF YOU ARE A CIVIL SERVANT

Current GOV.UK guidance says your employer provides workplace support instead of Access to Work. Public servants are not automatically the same as civil servants, so check the current eligibility page if your status is unclear.

2. Start with the work barrier

You do not need to arrive with a shopping list. A clearer application starts with what is difficult about doing or getting to the job, when it happens and what consequence it has. A diagnosis can be relevant, but it does not tell Access to Work exactly what support you need.

TOO BROAD	CLEARER STARTING POINT
"I have ADHD and need coaching."	"Priorities change across several systems and I am repeatedly missing which task has become urgent."
"I need noise-cancelling headphones."	"Background conversations make it difficult to hear calls accurately and errors increase during the busiest part of the shift."
"I am dyslexic and need software."	"Dense written job information takes much longer to process and key steps are difficult to locate quickly."

Questions that can help

- What part of the job or journey to work is difficult?
- When does the difficulty happen, and when is it less of a problem?
- What are you already doing to manage it?
- What has your employer already changed or considered?
- What kind of additional support might reduce the barrier?
- What would be different if the support worked?

WORKED EXAMPLE | When Access to Work may not be the first answer

SITUATION	A worker is missing tasks because three supervisors give conflicting priorities during the same shift.
START WITH	The work system is creating competing instructions. A clearer prioritisation process may be an ordinary management or job-design change.
THEN ASK	After that process is improved, does an additional disability-related barrier remain that needs equipment, human support, travel support or another Access to Work route?
WHY	Access to Work is additional support. It should not turn a fixable organisational problem into an individual diagnosis-based intervention.

3. What support may be available?

The support available depends on the work barrier and the scheme rules. Current GOV.UK guidance includes the following broad categories.

TYPE OF SUPPORT	POSSIBLE EXAMPLES
Equipment or adaptations	Specialist equipment, assistive software, changes to equipment or some physical workplace adaptations where these are above and beyond employer duties.
Support workers	Job coaches, note takers, interpreters, travel buddies or other practical human support where approved.
Travel	Extra disability-related costs of getting to work or travelling within work, where the scheme criteria are met.
Job interviews	Communication support for eligible applicants who need it at interview.
Mental health support	Access to Work has a separate mental health support route. Check GOV.UK for the current service and application route.
Other practical support	Other support may be considered where it meets an eligible work-related need and the scheme rules.

EXAMPLES ARE NOT ENTITLEMENTS

A familiar ADHD, autism or dyslexia recommendation is not automatically an Access to Work recommendation. The useful question is what barrier the proposed support would address in this job.

CURRENT ANNUAL CAP

For awards granted or reviewed between 1 April 2026 and 31 March 2027, the published annual cap is £69,260. The cap and other scheme figures can change, so check the current customer factsheet before relying on this amount.

4. Applying

You can apply online or by phone. You do not need to know the final solution before you apply, but it helps to describe the job, the barrier and any support you think may be useful.

Have these details ready

- your contact details and National Insurance number, if you have one
- your workplace address and postcode
- information about how your disability or health condition affects your work
- what support you think you may need, even if you are not certain
- a workplace contact who can confirm your employment, if you are employed
- your Unique Taxpayer Reference if you are self-employed

YOUR WORKPLACE CONTACT

Current GOV.UK guidance says a workplace contact will not be contacted without your permission. Access to Work may need employer information to confirm employment and discuss how agreed support will work in practice.

APPLY

CASE MANAGER

DISCUSS

ASSESS IF NEEDED

DECISION

Accessible communication

Access to Work offers alternatives such as Relay UK, British Sign Language video relay and different communication formats. If phone calls are difficult, GOV.UK says you can ask for communication by email instead.

[Apply for Access to Work on GOV.UK](#) - current application details and helpline information

5. Assessment, award and implementation

After you apply, a case manager will discuss what help might be available. A workplace assessment is sometimes useful, but it is not automatic.

IF...	THEN...
the support needed is already reasonably clear	a case manager can discuss the award without requiring a separate workplace assessment
the barrier or support is unclear	an independent workplace assessment may be arranged
an assessment is needed	it may be by phone, video call or in person at the workplace
support is agreed	the award sets out the approved support and how costs are handled

Implementation matters

- Check what the award actually approves before buying equipment or arranging services.
- Be clear about who will purchase, organise or claim for the support.
- If equipment or software needs to work with workplace systems, involve the relevant employer contact before purchase where necessary.
- Keep your award letter, receipts and relevant claim information. Current GOV.UK guidance gives 9 months to claim eligible costs.
- If the agreed support is not reducing the barrier, review the problem rather than assuming you simply need more of the same.

AN AWARD IS NOT A DIAGNOSIS

An assessment or award is about work-related support. Access to Work does not fund diagnostic assessments and its recommendations should not be treated as proof of why every workplace difficulty occurs.

6. Costs, changes and decisions

Funding varies by the type of support, how long you have been in the job and whether you are employed or self-employed. You should not need to calculate the whole scheme yourself: your award should explain the agreed funding and any employer contribution.

EMPLOYER COST SHARING

Compulsory employer cost sharing applies only to special aids/equipment and adaptations to premises/equipment, and only in relevant circumstances. Current employer guidance says it may apply when you have worked for the employer for more than 6 weeks. Other support categories can be funded differently.

If your situation changes

- Tell Access to Work if your job, employer or support needs change in a way that may affect the award.
- A change of job role or employer can require the award to be reviewed; some equipment may be transferable, while other support may need a new decision.
- If support is due to end and you still need it, follow the renewal process in your current award information. GOV.UK says Access to Work normally contacts customers before support ends.

If you disagree with the award

Current GOV.UK guidance says there is no formal appeal against the level of an Access to Work award, but you are entitled to one reconsideration by a different case manager. If your circumstances later change, you can ask for the award to be reviewed again. Complaints about service or handling use the separate complaints process.

[Access to Work customer factsheet](#) - current cap, reconsideration, changes, assessments and claims

7. Before you apply

Use this page to prepare your application or a conversation with Access to Work. It is not an eligibility decision.

THE JOB

What do you do, where do you work and what are the important demands of the role?

THE BARRIER

What is harder to do, access, tolerate or manage because of your disability or health condition?

WHEN / WHERE

When does it happen? What makes it better or worse?

CURRENT SUPPORT

What has your employer already changed or what support are you already using?

POSSIBLE ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

What might help, even if you are not certain?

INTENDED OUTCOME

What would be different if the support worked?

WORKPLACE CONTACT

Who can confirm your employment and help implement agreed support?

Current official information

[Access to Work - main GOV.UK guide](#)

[Eligibility](#)

[Apply](#)

[Customer factsheet](#)

CORE PRINCIPLE

Start with the work barrier. Use Access to Work for eligible additional support, not as a diagnosis-based shopping list. Be clear about what the support is meant to change and review what actually happens.