

# Access to Work

*A practical guide for employers and HR*

## USE THIS GUIDE WHEN

An employee is considering, applying for or receiving Access to Work support and you want to understand the employer role, costs, implementation and review.

## This guide helps you:

- understand what Access to Work does and what remains the employer's responsibility
- support an employee's application without diagnosing or deciding their needs for them
- understand assessments, support categories and employer cost sharing
- implement an award so the support can actually operate in the job
- review whether the support addresses the intended workplace barrier

UNDERSTAND

SUPPORT

IMPLEMENT

CLAIM

REVIEW

## A starting point, not a compliance manual

Access to Work is an employment support scheme, not a substitute for HR, Equality Act, occupational health or legal decision-making. Awards are case specific and scheme rules change over time.

## 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. Current GOV.UK guidance takes precedence over this PDF.

# 1. Access to Work and employer responsibilities

Access to Work can provide practical and financial support where an employee has disability- or health-related work barriers that require eligible support above and beyond reasonable adjustments. It does not replace the employer's own duties or ordinary responsibility for managing the job well.

| EMPLOYER                                                                                      | ACCESS TO WORK                                                                      |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>understands the job, workplace, essential demands and operational constraints</b>          | assesses the individual Access to Work application under scheme rules               |
| <b>considers and implements applicable reasonable adjustments</b>                             | does not pay for reasonable adjustments the employer is legally required to make    |
| <b>provides ordinary equipment, management, training and safe systems of work</b>             | may fund approved additional disability-related support or extra costs              |
| <b>decides employment, performance and organisational matters using appropriate processes</b> | does not make legal findings about whether the employer has met Equality Act duties |
| <b>helps implement agreed support in the workplace</b>                                        | may reimburse agreed costs according to the award                                   |

## AN ACCESS TO WORK AWARD IS NOT A LEGAL DETERMINATION

The fact that Access to Work agrees support does not mean the employer has automatically met its Equality Act responsibilities. Equally, an Access to Work recommendation should not be treated as a regulatory instruction about a particular employment decision.

[GOV.UK: reasonable adjustments for disabled workers](#)

## 2. Supporting an employee to apply

The employee normally makes the application. The employer's role is to provide accurate workplace information, discuss how the job operates and help agreed support work in practice.

### A useful employer response

- Make Access to Work information easy to find without pressuring anyone to disclose a diagnosis.
- Help describe the actual task, environment, working pattern and barriers rather than offering a standard "ADHD" or "autism" support list.
- Provide a workplace contact who can confirm employment and discuss implementation.
- Be clear about what the organisation has already changed, what is ordinary provision and what may be an additional disability-related cost.
- Respect confidentiality. Share only the information needed for a legitimate workplace purpose.

#### NO FORMAL DIAGNOSIS IS REQUIRED

Current GOV.UK eligibility guidance says an applicant does not need a formal diagnosis to apply. Do not make diagnosis a condition for ordinary support conversations or for providing the workplace information Access to Work needs.

#### WORKED EXAMPLE | Separating a system problem from additional support

|                       |                                                                                                                                        |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>SITUATION</b>      | An employee misses tasks because work requests arrive through email, chat and an informal messaging group.                             |
| <b>EMPLOYER FIRST</b> | Clarify which system is authoritative and how priorities are assigned. That is ordinary job and process design.                        |
| <b>THEN ASK</b>       | Does a disability-related barrier remain that requires eligible additional equipment, human support or another Access to Work element? |
| <b>WHY</b>            | Access to Work should not be used to individualise a problem the organisation can reasonably fix at source.                            |

### 3. What Access to Work may fund

Support depends on the employee, job and scheme rules. Current GOV.UK guidance includes the following broad categories.

| CATEGORY                          | POSSIBLE DIRECTIONS                                                                                              |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Special aids and equipment</b> | Eligible additional equipment or assistive software linked to a defined work need.                               |
| <b>Adaptations</b>                | Some adaptations to premises or equipment where these are not already an employer reasonable-adjustment duty.    |
| <b>Support workers</b>            | Job coaches, interpreters, note takers, travel buddies and other approved human support.                         |
| <b>Travel</b>                     | Additional disability-related travel to work or within work where the criteria are met.                          |
| <b>Communication at interview</b> | Eligible communication support for job applicants.                                                               |
| <b>Mental health support</b>      | A separate Access to Work mental health support route, with current providers and application details on GOV.UK. |

#### **ASSESSMENT IS NOT AUTOMATIC**

If the employee already knows what support is needed, GOV.UK says a separate workplace assessment may not be necessary. Where needs are unclear, an assessment can be by phone, video call or in person at the workplace.

#### **What an assessment should not become**

A workplace assessment is not a diagnosis of the employee and should not be treated as proof that every difficulty comes from the condition. Use recommendations to address a defined work barrier and review the result.

## 4. Costs and reimbursement

Employer cost sharing is narrower than many summaries imply. Current GOV.UK employer guidance says compulsory cost sharing applies only to special aids/equipment and adaptations to premises/equipment, and may apply where the employee has worked for the employer for more than 6 weeks.

| NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES | EMPLOYER THRESHOLD |
|---------------------|--------------------|
| 0 to 49             | £0                 |
| 50 to 249           | £500               |
| 250 or more         | £1,000             |

Where compulsory cost sharing applies, the employer pays 100% up to the threshold and 20% of the approved costs between the threshold and £10,000. Access to Work refunds up to 80% in that band. Any balance above £10,000 is normally met by Access to Work. A further contribution may be sought where the support also provides a general business benefit.

### SUPPORT THAT CAN BE FUNDED DIFFERENTLY

Current employer guidance says Access to Work will consider grants of up to 100% for categories including support workers, additional travel, communication support at interviews, the Mental Health Support Service, self-employed applicants and people who first apply within their first 6 weeks in the job.

### CURRENT ANNUAL CAP

The published cap for awards granted or reviewed between 1 April 2026 and 31 March 2027 is £69,260 per year. Check current GOV.UK guidance before budgeting around this figure.

## Claims

Current GOV.UK employer guidance says the employee has 9 months to claim eligible costs. The award letter should be used to confirm who pays up front, what evidence is needed and how reimbursement works in that case.

## 5. Implement the award in the actual workplace

Approval is only the start. Support can fail because equipment is incompatible, a process is not followed, nobody owns implementation or the original barrier was misunderstood.

### Agree the practical details

- What exactly has Access to Work approved?
- Who will order, arrange or coordinate the support?
- Does equipment or software need IT, security, procurement or health and safety approval?
- What information needs to be shared with the team, and what should remain confidential?
- What barrier is the support intended to reduce?
- What outcome will show that implementation is working?
- When will you review it with the employee?

#### WORKED EXAMPLE | Software support that needs coordination

|                      |                                                                                                                                                                     |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>BARRIER</b>       | An employee misses actions because important information is spread across several digital systems.                                                                  |
| <b>AWARD</b>         | Access to Work approves assistive software intended to help capture and organise information.                                                                       |
| <b>EMPLOYER ROLE</b> | Check compatibility, arrange installation and training, and clarify which workplace system remains the authoritative source for work requests.                      |
| <b>REVIEW</b>        | If actions are still missed, check whether the software is being used, whether the wider workflow is still fragmented or whether another barrier is more important. |

#### DO NOT JUDGE AN UNIMPLEMENTED ADJUSTMENT

If agreed support is inconsistently provided, blocked by systems or not properly set up, poor outcomes do not tell you that the employee “failed” the support. Fix implementation before drawing conclusions.

## 6. Review support, changes and renewals

Access to Work support should be reviewed in relation to the barrier it was intended to address. Review is not a reason to remove useful support; it is a way to check fit and respond when the job or employee's circumstances change.

| REVIEW QUESTION                                           | WHY IT MATTERS                                                         |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Did the intended workplace outcome improve?               | Check the barrier, not just whether the item or service was delivered. |
| Is the support being implemented consistently?            | A good idea can fail through poor implementation.                      |
| Did it create a burden or new problem elsewhere?          | Consider the employee, team, service, safety and administration.       |
| Has the role, location, employer or support need changed? | The employee may need to report the change to Access to Work.          |
| Does the original explanation still fit?                  | A failed intervention can reveal that the main problem sits elsewhere. |

### Changes and reconsideration

- The employee should contact Access to Work if their support needs or job circumstances change in a way that may affect the award.
- A change of job role can trigger review of the award. Some support transfers differently when an employee changes employer.
- If the employee disagrees with the level of an award, current GOV.UK guidance provides one reconsideration by a different case manager.
- Current employer guidance says Access to Work normally contacts the employee before support is due to end so they can renew if ongoing support is needed.

#### SUPPORT AND ACCOUNTABILITY ARE NOT OPPOSITES

An Access to Work award does not remove normal management responsibilities, and a performance or capability process does not make relevant barriers disappear. Where employment consequences are material, use appropriate HR, Acas, occupational health or legal advice.

## 7. Employer checklist

Use this page when an employee is considering or receiving Access to Work support.

### WORKPLACE BARRIER

What concrete work barrier or extra cost is being discussed?

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### EMPLOYER ACTION

What ordinary management, job design or reasonable-adjustment action is ours to consider?

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### ACCESS TO WORK

What eligible additional support may need to be explored through the scheme?

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### WORKPLACE CONTACT

Who will confirm employment and coordinate practical implementation?

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### IMPLEMENTATION

What needs procurement, IT, safety, confidentiality or team coordination?

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### INTENDED OUTCOME

What should be different if the support works?

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### REVIEW

When will we review fit, burden and whether the original barrier has reduced?

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### Current official information

[GOV.UK employer factsheet](#)

[Access to Work staff guide](#) - detailed DWP scheme rules

[Access to Work eligibility](#)

[Reasonable adjustments for disabled workers](#)

### CORE PRINCIPLE

Access to Work is additional support. Start with the actual workplace barrier, separate employer responsibilities from scheme funding, implement approved support properly and review whether it changes the intended outcome.