# Access to Work

## About this factsheet

This factsheet outlines the Access to Work scheme and how it can assist you in your job. Full details are given on the process of making a claim and what you can expect at each stage of the process. Contact details for Access to Work are listed in section three.

This factsheet is part of a series of factsheets on employment issues. At the end you will find the full list, and details of where to find them.

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## For further information

RNIB Helpline can refer you to an employment specialist for further advice and guidance relating to your employment situation. RNIB Helpline can also help you by providing information and advice on a range of topics, such as eye health, the latest products, leisure opportunities, benefits advice, and emotional support.

Call the Helpline on **0303 123 9999** or email [**helpline@rnib.org.uk**](mailto:helpline@rnib.org.uk)

## What is Access to Work?

Access to Work (AtW) is a scheme run by Jobcentre Plus. The scheme provides advice and practical support to disabled people to enable them to work alongside their colleagues despite their disabilities. AtW is available across England, Scotland, and Wales. In Northern Ireland, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands, there are different programmes.

### How does it do this?

AtW pays a discretionary grant through Jobcentre Plus towards any extra employment costs that result from a disability/long term health condition.

### Am I eligible for help through Access to Work?

If you have a disability and are in a job, about to start in a job, about to start a Work Trial or are self-employed and registered with HMRC, AtW could benefit you. It applies to any paid job, part-time or full-time, permanent, or temporary. There is no minimum number of hours for eligibility for support under the scheme. In some circumstances, AtW can help with voluntary work, but support can be limited.

If your disability or health condition affects the type of work you do, and it is likely to last for twelve months or longer, contact AtW to check your eligibility for the scheme. You can also do this online. Your disability or health condition may not have a big effect on what you do each day but may have a long-term effect on how well you can do your job.

Unemployed or employed disabled people needing help with a communicator at a job interview can also get help through AtW.

### What type of help is provided through Access to Work?

AtW can help you in a number of ways. For example, it can help pay for:

* adaptations to premises and equipment
* special aids and equipment
* support workers
* travel to work where there is no practical public transport alternative, and travel within work
* awareness training for your colleagues.

### How will my needs be assessed?

An Access to Work Adviser will normally phone you at your place of work or on the number you have provided. They will then need to know more about your situation and your needs. It is important to give some consideration to the challenges you face so that your needs can be fully assessed.

The Adviser may also need to discuss the application with your employer to enable them to arrive at the most effective provision.

It is essential that specialist or technical advice is obtained. The Access to Work Adviser can arrange for a specialist contractor to visit you at work to complete an assessment and recommend appropriate support. A written and confidential report will be sent to the Access to Work Adviser, who will use the information to help them to decide on the level of support that can be approved. You will receive a copy of this report, ask for this in your accessible format.

If you are sure about the type of help you need, you may not need to have an assessment. However, an assessor may identify solutions that you are not aware of. If you’re not sure, it may be better to ask for an assessment.

Before the assessment you should think about your job, what tasks you are required to do and how your disability impacts upon them. This should ensure that you can fully input into the process of assessing your needs at work.

### How long will it take to get the help needed?

AtW aims to arrange the help needed in the shortest possible time. The length of time taken for the process varies depending on individual circumstance. However, if there is any delay the Access to Work Adviser should explore temporary alternatives, for example a support worker.

It can take two weeks for an application to be processed, so apply for support as soon as you can. All applications have to be completed within forty working days, and assessment reports have to be returned to AtW within ten days of the contractor receiving the referral.

### Who will buy the help needed?

Once the assessment process has been completed the Access to Work Adviser will send a letter confirming the amount of grant, they approve. The Access to Work Adviser may discuss your needs with you and your employer to agree what help can be provided through AtW. The Access to Work Adviser may ask you or your employer to obtain quotes in order to arrive at the approved cost.

It is usually the employer's (or self-employed person’s) responsibility to purchase and provide the support required and then to reclaim the cost from AtW, although support with travel to and from work would generally be your responsibility.

Please note that your employer should not purchase any items until AtW has notified you both that they have approved the agreed support.

Once you are happy with the report, you are normally sent two signed declaration forms, sign one and keep the other. Take a photocopy of the original and send it to the address stated.

### How much is the Access to Work grant?

AtW pays a percentage of the total cost of approved support depending on how long you have been employed, what support is needed, whether or not there is any business benefit, or whether you are self-employed.

AtW can pay up to one hundred per cent of the approved costs for:

* unemployed people starting a job
* self-employed people
* employers with less than ten staff
* people working for an employer with more than ten staff but who have been in the job for less than six weeks
* people changing jobs with a new employer.

Whatever the employment status of the applicant, AtW pays up to one hundred per cent of the approved costs of help with:

* support workers
* communicator support at an interview
* travel to work (above the normal costs)
* travel within work if the job requires you to travel around.

For people working for an employer who have been in the job for 6 weeks or more and who need special equipment or adaptations to premises, AtW pays a proportion of the costs of support, to be shared with the employer as follows:

* Less than 50 staff - AtW can pay up to 100 per cent of costs
* 50 to 249 staff - AtW can pay up to 80 per cent of costs above the first £500 up to £10,000
* 250 staff plus - AtW can pay up to 80 per cent of costs above the first £1,000 up to £10,000
* AtW grants awarded on or after 1 October 2015 are capped. The amount of the cap depends on when the grant was awarded or reviewed:

- 1 April 2021 to March 2022 your AtW grant will be capped at £62,900.

In all cases, AtW may seek more than the minimum contribution from the employer, where there is general benefit to the employer and/or individual seeking help. Either you or your employer may be asked by AtW for an additional voluntary contribution to the cost of equipment. This is voluntary, and your entitlement to support will not be changed should you choose not to pay it.

### How long is Access to Work funding available for?

AtW funding is generally available for three years. At the end of this period your needs will be reviewed to assess if continued or further funding is required. As long as you need the funding, you should continue to get it.

### How to apply for Access to Work?

Applications are made initially by phone or online. You should contact AtW as soon as you have a confirmed start date. Details of the application process and contact details are in sections two and three of this factsheet.

### What will the Access to Work Adviser need to know?

There are actions that you can take to help the Access to Work Adviser or assessor deal with the application quickly. Do not wait until you have started your new job before asking for help. The sooner AtW knows about the request for support, the more time they will have to get help ready for when you start.

The Access to Work Adviser will need some detailed information and it will help if you can ask your employer for the following details:

* A job description for the new job
* Your expected start date
* Contact details for your line manager
* Contact details for your employer’s Information Technology specialist (if known)
* Contact details for the person who will authorise the purchase and cost sharing.

## Making a claim

### Starting the process

Contact Access to Work by phone or online. Your initial application will be allocated to an Access to Work Adviser.

They will need:

* to check your eligibility
* your National Insurance number
* your workplace address, including your postcode
* the name, email address and work phone number of a workplace contact, e.g., your manager
* your unique tax reference number (if you’re self-employed)
* the name of your New Enterprise Allowance mentor (if you have one. Details can be found at [**gov.uk/moving-from-benefits-to-work/starting-your-own-business**](http://www.gov.uk/moving-from-benefits-to-work/starting-your-own-business))
* brief details of your application.

It is important at this initial contact stage to state your preferred format, so the advisers are able to meet your stated communication needs. It can also be helpful to consider the key issues at this stage and to explain the difficulties or challenges you are facing, as this will help ensure that all your needs relating to your job are addressed at the assessment.

You will be asked to provide a contact telephone number and will be contacted by an Access to Work adviser within seven working days. Ideally try to ensure you are available within this period. It is important to provide details of any dates/or times in the following seven days when you know you will not be available. Up to three attempts will be made to contact you on the number you provide, and the Adviser may leave a message or send a letter/email to say they have tried to contact you. It is possible you could be contacted at more unusual times including evenings and weekends.

Access to work may experience delays in their process for various reasons. If delays are impacting your employment, job security or job offer, please speak to a member of the RNIB employment team for further guidance.

### Assessment

The Access to Work adviser will contact you and discuss your situation and work with you to identify your needs. If you already know what you need in terms of support, it is possible for AtW to approve costs at this stage.

Only take this approach if you are sure of your needs and the most appropriate solution, as there may be options you may not know about that can be explored during an assessment. Try to identify all the areas where your disability affects your work. This can be hard if you are starting a new job, but if your needs change you can always go back to AtW to ask for further help. In addition to the tasks of your job also do consider issues such as how lighting may impact on you and travel to work/support worker needs.

### Work based assessment

The Access to Work adviser can arrange for a work-based assessment of your needs with specialist assessors to identify appropriate solutions to your needs, working with you and your employer to propose a package of help. AtW has contracts with organisations throughout the UK. They will arrange for a specialist assessor to contact you to arrange to come out to your workplace in order to determine exactly what you require to access your job.

You can get the most out of any assessment by thinking about all the aspects of your job beforehand. Do try to identify all the areas where your disability affects your work. In addition to the tasks of your job also do consider issues such as how lighting may impact on you or other environmental issues.

### Report

There should always be a formal report as a result of an assessment. This is sent to AtW outlining the results of the assessment and will contain the necessary information to enable the Access to Work Adviser to reach a decision regarding the application. If no on-site assessment has taken place, you may be asked to supply details of equipment or software you need and explain why it is needed.

### Agreeing support and costs

The Access to Work Adviser will present a final figure of necessary costs to your employer, and then agree any split of costs between the two agencies.

### Authority to proceed and purchase

AtW will send you a declaration that needs to be signed and returned confirming your agreement to AtW and approval to proceed. They will also send written permission to your employer, which will include their final agreed contribution.

### Right of Appeal

Although subject to guidance, AtW is a discretionary grant and is not a statutory benefit. For this reason, there is no right of appeal against decisions made. However, should you disagree with a decision you can ask for it to be reviewed. This should be done, in writing, to the AtW Work Choice Manager.

### Reconsideration Process

1. In rare cases the approving officer will decide that AtW support is not appropriate. Access to Work is not a statutory benefit and so there is no right of appeal against decisions.
2. If you are unhappy with the decision about your application for support, you should make a written request for a review. The review should be carried out by an officer at the next level up from the original approver.

### Making a complaint

If you have a complaint about the service you have received from Access to Work staff or believe they have not provided you with the correct support, you can make a formal complaint to the Department for Works and Pensions (DWP). Complaints are monitored through a formal process and can be very effective at resolving issues in the Access to Work process. They also highlight issues with the service to DWP giving them the opportunity to put it right. You can find more information about the DWP complaints process here:

[**gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-work-pensions/about/complaints-procedure**](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-work-pensions/about/complaints-procedure)

RNIB’s employment team can offer further guidance on Access to work complaints

### Purchasing

Your employer is free to purchase the equipment as soon as permission has been granted. They can then apply for reimbursement of AtW’s agreed contribution with supplied documentation. Either you or your employer may be asked by AtW for an additional voluntary contribution to the cost of equipment. This is voluntary, and your entitlement to support will not be changed should you choose not to pay it.

If and adviser feels you are likely to use equipment outside of work, they may feel it is reasonable for you to share the cost, but this should be discussed with you.

Travel to work and travel in work costs are rarely funded up front, and the cost of employing a support worker is not always funded by employers. In most cases you will be required to finance the costs of transport and support workers and then claim this money back from AtW.

### Set up, installation and training

The costs of these elements will have been outlined in your report, and your employer can apply for reimbursement of the AtW contribution to these through the supplied documentation. If these elements have not been approved in advance, AtW will not re-imburse them.

### Ownership, repairs, and insurance

The equipment that you use is the responsibility of, and is owned by, your employer. Agreements will be made between all involved parties if you wish to purchase the equipment or move it to your next place of employment. AtW will not pay for repairs or insurance under any circumstances.

### Does it really work?

There are many blind and partially sighted people working in a range of jobs throughout the UK, some of which may not have been as easy or even possible to do without the support available through the AtW scheme.

#### Case study 1

Steve is a HR Manager, and he is responsible for all the activities involved in supporting a network of employees. By applying for and successfully receiving AtW support, his employer has supplied him with a computer screen reader, a mobile phone with speech software, a braille display, a scanner, and a braille embosser.

Steve says: “The support from Access to Work takes the financial worries away from the employer, and it means that your skills and abilities are enhanced through the additional support that is available.”

#### Case study 2

Margaret is a lecturer at a further education college where she works part-time teaching students to sing, accompanying them on the piano. Margaret, who is partially sighted, initially contacted Access to Work because she needed to improve her access to the sheet music she needs to read while playing the piano.

Access to Work, through a workplace assessment, was able to put in place adjustments to working practice and use task-specific lighting to help Margaret access an important part of her job.

## 3. Contact details

### Access to Work claim

Website: [**gov.uk/access-to-work/apply**](http://www.gov.uk/access-to-work/apply)

Telephone: **0800 121 7479**

Textphone: **0800 121 7579**

People in Northern Ireland can find information at the following link: [**nidirect.gov.uk/articles/access-work-practical-help-work**](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/access-work-practical-help-work)

## 4. Other factsheets in this series

We also produce the following factsheets, which you may find of use:

* Looking for work
* Self-employment
* Staying in work
* Job seeking resources
* Equality Act

All these factsheets can be found in electronic form at [**rnib.org.uk/advice/equality-rights-employment**](https://rnib.org.uk/advice/equality-rights-employment)

For print, braille, large print, or audio, please contact our Helpline on **0303 123 9999** or email[**helpline@rnib.org.uk**](mailto:helpline@rnib.org.uk)

November 2021