# Access to Work

## About this factsheet

This factsheet describes Access to Work and how it might assist you in your job. Contact details for Access to Work are in section three.

## What is Access to Work?

Access to Work (AtW), operated by the Department for Work and Pensions, can provide practical support for people with disabilities and long-term health conditions, enabling them to start or remain in work. 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 towards any extra employment costs that result from having a disability or long-term health condition.

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

If you have a disability or long-term health condition and are in a job, about to start a job, or are self-employed and registered with HMRC, AtW could benefit you. It can apply to any paid job, part-time or full-time, permanent, or temporary. There is no minimum number of hours for eligibility for support, but there will be an expectation that your employment will generate enough income for you to move from “non-work” benefits.

We recommend that you contact AtW to check your eligibility, as the rules can change. For example, people who work for central government agencies are not currently eligible.

### 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 (including software)
* support workers
* travel to work (and sometimes within work) if you cannot travel by public transport or drive
* awareness training for your colleagues.

### 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 circumstances. The AtW case manager may ask you or your employer to obtain quotes so they can calculate the approved cost.

### Who will buy the help needed?

Once the assessment process has been completed, the AtW case manager will send a letter confirming the amount of grantthey approve.

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. If AtW is supporting your travel, you will have a personal responsibility to organise the travel (taxi or driver), as you are the “hirer”, and must submit regular claims.

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

### 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 there is any business or personal 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 fifty staff
* people working for an employer with fifty or more staff but who have been in the job for less than six weeks

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 (above employer’s normal expenses).

For people working for an employer who have been in the job for six 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.

In all cases, AtW may seek more than the minimum contribution from the employer where there is a 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 over a three year period. When it expires, your needs will be reviewed to assess if continued or further funding is required.

## Making an application

### How to apply to Access to Work?

Applications are generally made online, but can also be made by phone. You should contact Access to Work as soon as you have a confirmed start date.

When you start your application, you will need to provide the following:

* your National Insurance number
* your workplace address, including 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)
* brief details of your application.

It is important at this initial contact stage to state your preferred format, so they can provide information and communicate with you in the best way.

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 make sure that all issues relating to your job are addressed.

You will be asked to provide a contact telephone number for the AtW case manager to reach you. Let them know of any dates when you know you will not be available. Up to three attempts will be made to contact you on the number you provide, and they 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.

AtW may experience delays in their process for various reasons. If delays are impacting your employment, job security or job offer, you should let them know.

### What will the Access to Work case manager need to know?

The AtW case manager will need some detailed information and it will help if you have:

* a job description for the new job
* your expected start date
* contact details for your line manager

### How will my needs be assessed or agreed?

An AtW case manager will normally phone you 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.

It is likely that the case manager will need to discuss the application with your employer so they can offer the right support and discuss any cost sharing.

If you know what type of help you need, the case manager can often approve this quickly. If it is not clear, the AtW case manager can arrange for a contractor to complete an assessment and recommend appropriate support. A written and confidential report will be sent to the AtW case manager, who will use the information to help them to decide on the level of support that can be approved.

### Agreeing support and costs

The AtW case manager will give a final figure of the grant they can pay to you or your employer.

### Authority to proceed and purchase

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

**Renewal applications**

Access to Work should contact you around twelve weeks before your support is due to end. It may help if you keep a note of the expected date in case there are any delays hearing from them. If you would like support to continue, you need to [apply to renew it](https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work/renew). You can apply to renew an application either online or by telephone.

After you apply for a renewal, an AtW case manager may contact you to ask about any changes in your job or circumstances. If you are offered a new grant, you will be told what has been approved and for how long.

### Right of Appeal/Reconsideration

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 reconsidered. This request should be done in writing, using the details at the top of your award decision letter.

### Making a complaint

If you have a complaint about the service you have received from AtW staff or believe they have not provided you with the correct support, you can make a formal complaint to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Complaints are monitored through a formal process and can be very effective in resolving issues in the AtW 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 procedure here:

[Complaints procedure - Department for Work and Pensions - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-work-pensions/about/complaints-procedure)

### 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 by supplying the necessary 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 an AtW case manager feels that you are likely to use equipment outside of work, they may ask 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 need to pay costs of transport and support workers and then claim this money back from AtW. Some taxi firms can provide an account and invoice you at agreed times. It is very important that you make regular claims, to avoid delays in payments.

### Ownership, repairs, and insurance

In most cases, 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. AtW may pay for the reasonable costs of removal/delivery of the equipment if you move to a new job.

### Does it really work?

ATW can make a big difference to people at work. There are many people with sight loss working in a range of jobs throughout the UK that rely on AtW so they can carry out their jobs.

#### Example one

Steve is an 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, 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.”

#### Example two

Margaret is a lecturer at a further education college where she works teaching students to sing, accompanying them on the piano. Margaret, who has sight loss, initially contacted Access to Work because she needed help to access the sheet music she needs to read while playing the piano.

Access to Work, through a workplace assessment, was able to suggest adjustments to working practices and fund task-specific lighting to help Margaret access an important part of her job.

## 3. Contact details

### To make an Access to Work application

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

Telephone: **0800 121 7479**

Textphone: **0800 121 7579**

Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm

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)

## For further information

RNIB Helpline can offer you 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**

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