

Guide for UNISON  
disabled members

# Access to work

This guide has been developed to assist members and activists in understanding and applying for support under the Access to Work scheme. Its contents are based on publicly available information from the official Access to Work website and the DWP staff guide, as at the date of publication. The information in this guide does not constitute legal advice or benefits advice and the information is provided with no guarantee of its accuracy. All information should be checked directly with Access to Work before being relied upon.

### What is access to work?

Access to Work is a government funded scheme that gives grants to pay some or all of the costs of support for disabled people either to get a job or to remain in a job. The scheme pays for adjustments such as adaptable office equipment, computer equipment and software, work related transport and mental health support.

The scheme is run by the government's Department of Work and Pensions (DWP).

### What support can you get?

The support you can get will depend on your personal and employment circumstances but Access to Work can give you or your employer a grant to help pay for things like:

- specialist software, such as screen readers
- a BSL interpreter, lip speaker or note taker if you're Deaf or face communication barriers
- specialist equipment (or alterations to existing equipment such as chairs or desks) to suit your particular need
- help towards the additional costs of taxi fares or adaptations to your vehicle if you cannot use public transport to get to work
- a support worker, for example to help with travel to work or personal care at work, or a job coach to help you in your workplace
- support from Access to Work's dedicated Mental Health Support Service.

There is no set amount for an Access to Work grant. How much you get depends on your specific case.

However, there is an annual cap on the total amount of support that can be provided under Access to Work which is currently set at £65,180 (1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023 rate).

Access to Work is not a 'means tested' benefit so it doesn't matter how much you earn or have in savings. If you get an Access to Work grant, it will not affect any other benefits you get and you will not have to pay it back or pay income tax on it.

However, you or your employer may need to pay some costs up front and claim them back later.

Access to Work will also give practical advice and guidance to employers to help understand the needs of workers with specific impairments and how to support these employees.

Disability awareness training is available for employers and work colleagues to gain an understanding of changes they could make to allow disabled workers to participate fully in the workplace.

## What if you work from home?

Your workplace can include your home if you work from there some or all of the time.

## Tell me more about the kind of support I could get?

There are five different types of support Access to Work can offer. These are:

### 1. Communication support at interview

You can get a grant to cover the full cost of employing an interpreter or communicator to go with you to a job interview, including internal promotion interviews, where you find it difficult to understand or to make yourself understood. This is particularly useful for learning disabled workers or those with mental health problems who may need an advocate and for Deaf workers who need a British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter. There is a BSL video explaining more at <https://youtu.be/EorMVj0EgKs>. You will need to apply before your interview and pay the upfront costs but the money will be paid back to you after the interview takes place.

### 2. Travel to work including travel in work

Access to Work can pay for extra costs you face travelling to work or travelling as part of your job. This can cover both one-off travel costs and ongoing costs such as:

- additional cost of taxis to and from work if you are unable to use public transport. You will need to provide three quotes, including VAT, from local authority registered taxi firms
- purchase of, or cost of adaptations to, a vehicle you use to get to work or while doing your work, although you may be asked to make a contribution to this if you also use the vehicle outside work

- mileage for car travel to work and within work if you can no longer use public transport. If you previously drove to work you will only be reimbursed for part of the mileage
- travel training while you get used to travelling to work independently.

They will not pay car parking costs or fares to interviews. Support is also available where you get a lift to work from a friend or relative, although tier normal car journey will be taken into account when assessing the amount.

If you have a PIP assessment then Access to Work will use this to evidence your need for help with travel. If you do not have a PIP assessment they may ask you for medical evidence.

### 3. Support worker

Access to Work will pay for the full cost, including VAT, of providing assistance from support workers in the workplace and to assist the worker to travel to and for work. This could include a job coach to assist a struggling disabled worker with learning and retaining their job, a BSL interpreter, lip speaker or video relay service for a deaf worker, a communication support worker to rewrite emails for a dyslexic employee, an out of hours support worker to help with coping strategies for a worker with complex autism, a driver to help with transport to work, or a job aide to carry out up to 20% of a worker's contracted hours if they are unable to do aspects of the role. A support worker could also include a carer to help with toilet breaks and mobility in the workplace, although Access to Work will also look at whether you get help from elsewhere for this.

You can have more than one support worker. Support workers cannot give nursing care or help you to get up and ready for work in the morning and they cannot support you while you are doing overtime.

The support worker(s) can be employed by you, by an agency or by your employer. Access to Work will pay for support worker holiday pay, sick leave, absence cover, pension contributions and redundancy costs in addition to recruitment costs. If you are the employer you may be eligible for additional support to pay for the costs of being an employer.

### 4. Adaptations to premises and equipment

Access to Work will pay for adaptations to premises and equipment where this is not already something the employer should be providing under the Equality Act 2010, such as disabled access to public areas of a building.

Adaptations Access to Work can fund include:

- upgrades of computers and other equipment
- ramps for wheelchairs
- lifts
- the widening of doors
- disabled toilets and washrooms
- non standard chair, mouse, keyboard or motorised rise and fall desk.

If your workplace is your home you may also qualify for support where adaptations are for employment needs. Where this also assists with daily living needs or increases the value of your property you may need to make a contribution to the cost.

### 5. Special aids and equipment

Access to Work will help buy specialised aids and equipment needed for employment purposes, such as:

- hearing aids – you will need to supply an audiology report when requested and you may be asked to contribute to the costs where appropriate
- medical equipment not currently available through the NHS – but only if this is vital to help you do your job and does not involve surgery or treatment
- wheelchairs – you will need to have an NHS assessment and you may be asked to make a contribution to the cost if you bring your wheelchair home, regardless of whether you use it.

If your employer purchases the equipment then they are the owner and are responsible for insurance, maintenance and running costs. If you are the purchaser then you will need to pay for these things.

Equipment can be moved to a new employer if appropriate to the new job. Access to Work can pay removal costs.

Access to Work will not pay for standard equipment that would be needed by anyone doing the job and will not pay for 'medical aids' such as insulin pumps, cochlear implants or electric scooters.

### 6. Miscellaneous support

This covers short term or one off support that does not come under other areas, such as consultancy fees.

### Who pays for your support?

Access to Work will fund 100% of the cost of the following for all sizes of employers up to the cap of £65,180:

- travel to Work including Travel in Work
- travel to interview
- support Worker
- special aids and equipment included in the 'Tech Fund', that are alternatives to human support from a support worker.

For the following support it will depend on how long you have been in your job and the size of your employer:

- adaptation to Premises and Equipment
- special Aids and Equipment not included in the Tech Fund
- miscellaneous Support.

If you have been in your job for less than six weeks, or you are a job seeker or about to start a new job then Access to Work will pay 100% of the costs needed for these items.

If you have been in your job for more than six weeks then Access to Work will usually pay a proportion of the costs, with some paid by your employer. This will depend on the size of your employer as follows:

For the first £10,000 -

- **Employers with less than 50 staff:** Access to Work can pay 80% of the approved costs.
- **Employers with 50 to 249 staff:** The employer will have to pay the first £500 and Access to Work can then pay 80% of the approved costs up to £10,000.
- **Employers with 250 or more staff:** The employer will have to pay the first £1,000 and Access to Work can then pay 80% of the approved costs up to £10,000.

If your support needs are over £10,000 Access to Work will usually pay the full amount of anything over and above this amount, up to the cap of £65,180.

Access to Work won't pay for anything they believe the employer should already be providing under the Equality Act 2010 or standard equipment that would be needed for the job where the worker was disabled or not.

You may need to make a contribution towards costs in some cases if there is an additional benefit to you outside of work.

### Who is eligible for access to work?

You are eligible to apply for Access to Work if you can say **YES** to **ALL** of the below:

- you have a mental or physical impairment or health condition
- your impairment or condition has already lasted, or is likely to last, 12 months or more
- your impairment or condition impacts on your ability to work
- you are aged 16 or over
- you live in England, Scotland or Wales - there's a different system in Northern Ireland called Access to Work (NI) which has its own rules and Access to Work does not apply in the Channel Islands or Isle of Man
- you are in paid work, about to start work or are self-employed.

Paid work includes both full and part time work, fixed term and temporary contracts and also includes agency workers. Starting a traineeship, apprenticeship or JobCentre Plus work trial counts as paid work, as do Department for Education supported internships and work experience. Elected local Councillors may also be able to claim Access to Work.

About to start work can include having a job offer or start date or a confirmed interview.

Volunteering does not count as paid work. Civil Service and other government agency employees have a different employer provided system and therefore cannot apply for Access to Work

If you are a disabled person claiming Universal Credit you can still apply for Access to Work.

You can apply for Access to Work if you claim any of the following benefits:

- incapacity Benefit, as long as you work more than one hour a week
- employment and Support Allowance (ESA) – you must work less than 16 hours a week
- severe Disablement Allowance, as long as you work more than one hour a week



- income Support, as long as you work more than one hour a week
- National Insurance Credits, as long as you work more than one hour a week.

If you are doing 'permitted work' while claiming benefits you may be able to claim, for a limited time, to help you move off benefits completely. Ask the disability employment advisor (DEA) at your local Job Centre.

## How do you go about applying?

Applying for Access to Work is something you need to do yourself – it is not something your employer can do and you do not have to wait for your employer's agreement. However it will help if you speak to your employer about what support you need.

You will need to complete an online form at <https://www.get-disability-work-support.service.gov.uk/apply/> or make a telephone application on 0800 121 7479. You can also ask for a paper form or for other formats such as Braille by calling the Access to Work helpline.

You will need to provide Access to Work with the following as part of your initial application:

- your contact details
- your workplace address and postcode
- the name of a workplace contact who can confirm you work there (they will not be contacted without your permission)
- the email address or work phone number of your workplace contact
- information about how your condition affects your work and what support you think you need
- If you are **about to start employment** you will need a job offer letter or email that includes your start date (you can apply for Access to Work up to 12 weeks before your start date)
- If you are a **job seeker** then you will need a letter or email confirming a job interview date.

### **Access to Work Helpline**

Opening hours: Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm

Telephone: 0800 121 7479

Textphone: 0800 121 7579

Relay UK (if you cannot hear or speak on the phone):  
18001 then 0800 121 7479

British Sign Language (BSL) video relay service if you're on a computer - <https://connect.interpreterslive.co.uk/vrs?ilc=DWP>

## **What is the process of assessing and agreeing your needs?**

When your application has been received or recorded, an Access to Work advisor will call or email you to discuss support needed. If you need someone else to speak to Access to Work on your behalf then you can tell them this when you fill in the online form or have your initial phone call. You can also say whether you want to be contacted by phone or email.

Access to Work will then contact your employer to agree a 'cost sharing agreement' which will set out how much of your support will be paid for by Access to Work and how much will be paid for by your employer. You will be advised what has been agreed.

An assessment date will be confirmed with you. Once the cost sharing agreement has been completed, an advisor will carry out the assessment of your needs. An independent holistic workplace assessor may visit your workplace depending on the kind of support you have said you need.

After the assessment you will receive an award letter which will confirm the support you have been assessed as needing.

If you are not happy with the assessment and the award decision in the letter, you have the right to ask for it to be looked at again by a different advisor. This is called 'reconsideration' and can only be done once per claim.

If you are happy with the award then you will need to sign it to accept the support and return it to Access to Work.

You employer should then purchase the agreed equipment or arrange the agreed support.

If Access to Work have agreed to pay for some or all of the cost of the support, your employer will need to complete the grant refund claim form if applicable

### How long does funding last?

Access to Work funding agreements can cover up to three years and the date your funding ends will be on your award letter. Access to Work will contact you 12 weeks before your support is due to end and will review your circumstances and support needs.

If your circumstances change – such as if changes in your impairment or you change employer or your job role - you can ask for your award to be reviewed.

A new assessment may be required, depending on what has changed.

### How to claim for ongoing support

If your Access to Work grant covers ongoing support such as a support worker, you will often need to pay upfront and then submit regular claim forms requesting re-payment.

You will need to complete a monthly claim form for each type of support you receive. Your line manager will need to sign the employer declaration and you should send the completed claim form(s) and the supplier invoice(s) to Access to Work. Make sure you keep a copy for your records. You should normally receive payment within 3-4 weeks.

You may be able to get Access to Work to pay the supplier directly so that you do not have to pay upfront costs but you will need to request this.

During the Covid pandemic the need for manager signatures and for paper copies of invoices proved unmanageable and Access to Work is trialling a computer based system. In the meantime, you may be able to negotiate to send claims electronically.

### Mental health support

Access to Work offers a free and confidential 'Mental Health Support Service' to anyone with a mental health problem. The scheme is provided by Remploy and offers:

- work-focused mental health support for up to nine months tailored to your needs
- an assessment of your needs to identify suitable coping strategies

- a personalised support plan, detailing the steps needed for you to remain in, or return to, work
- ideas for adjustments in the workplace or of working practice.

You do not need to be diagnosed with a condition to apply for mental health support.

You can contact Remploy direct and they will contact Access to Work on your behalf. They will contact Access to Work on your behalf. You will not need to tell your employer.

Remploy also offers a free service supports apprentices who are feeling low, upset and struggling to keep up with their apprenticeship. It is completely confidential and run by fully trained professionals with expertise in mental health.

To qualify for this service, you must:

- be in an apprenticeship (attending or signed off sick); and
- have a mental health condition that has resulted in absence, or is causing difficulties to remain in your apprenticeship.

You can find out more at <https://www.remploy.co.uk/employers/mental-health-and-wellbeing/workplace-mental-health-support-service-employers/>

## Top Tips

- If your impairment is fluctuating, make sure you explain in detail how it impacts you at work and travelling to work on your most difficult days.
- Consider whether you need to get a friend or supporter to make your application for you if you feel unable to do so yourself.
- If you are unhappy with your award, make sure that you ask for 'reconsideration'. It may help if you approach your local MP to write a letter to the DWP on your behalf.

## Further Resources

- General information on Access to Work: [www.gov.uk/access-to-work](http://www.gov.uk/access-to-work)
- DWP staff guide to Access to Work: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/access-to-work-staff-guide>
- Citizens Advice: <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/>

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Published and printed by UNISON, UNISON Centre,  
130 Euston Road, London NW1 2AY.  
CU/January 2023/27153/4441/UNP 16300.