

Access to Work

Access to Work is a government funded programme which provides practical advice to help overcome work-related obstacles, and provides grants towards extra costs, including:

- Special aids or equipment for employment;
- Adaptations to premises and existing equipment;
- Help with travel to work where public transport can't be used;
- A support worker, e.g. a reader, to provide help in the workplace;
- A communicator for support at interviews.

It is administered by Disability Service Teams (DSTs). If your RSI means you need equipment, adaptations or communication support to do a job, AtW will pay all or part of the cost. AtW does the following:

- Supports disabled people so that they can overcome problems that stop them from working.
- Enables people to compete on equal terms for jobs.
- Aims to encourage employers to give disabled people jobs or keep people on if they become disabled.
- Pays all or part of any extra cost of equipment or training you need.

Who can get help

You may be eligible if you are unemployed, employed or self-employed, and you are disabled. Access to Work uses the definition of 'disability' in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 but extends it to include disabilities that are only apparent in the workplace. The amount of support depends on what is needed because of your disability, and is granted for a maximum 3 year period, after which you can reapply. For people who have been in a job for less than 6 weeks or are about to start work, the Employment Service will pay 100% of approved costs. For people who have been in their jobs for 6 weeks or more, the Employment Service will contribute 80% of approved costs up to £10,000, and all the costs over £10,000. All the extra costs of travel to work and communicator support for job interviews and the Employment Service funds all the extra costs for self-employed people.

Help finding Work

The Disability Service Team at the Employment Service can provide individually tailored programmes of Work Preparation also called Employment Rehabilitation, to help you get work by addressing specific employment-related needs that result from your disability and prevent you from being able to enter employment or take up vocational training of a type which would otherwise be suitable.

You may be entitled to an Employment Rehabilitation Allowance and other expenses. Or you may have the option of staying on your existing benefits. The Disability Service Team can advise you on your best option. If you choose to claim the allowance, at the end of the programme you can re-claim your incapacity benefit or SDA and regain your former rate of benefit without having to serve any qualifying periods, provided you are still 'incapable of work'.

What happens next

To apply for the AtW scheme, you should contact the Disability Service Team at your local Employment Services office. They will then send you an application form. Depending on your disability, they may require you to provide medical evidence of your condition. A doctor's certificate is often sufficient.

Once the application has been processed, the disability employment advisor will contact you to make arrangements for an ergonomist to visit your place of work and carry out a workstation assessment.

The assessment report, together with equipment recommendations are passed on to the disability employment advisor who then approves the application and puts together a costing for the equipment. You are then sent a copy of the approved form. If you are already employed or due to begin employment, your employer is also sent a copy of the approved equipment form and is advised to begin ordering the equipment.

Payment is made direct to your employer once the equipment has been delivered.