

The government's Access to Work (AtW) funding scheme is there to make sure disabled people can compete equally with non-disabled people in employment. For new disabled employees, the scheme meets all the additional costs associated with employing you. If you have been employed for more than 6 weeks when you apply, your employer may have to contribute. Here are the basics that you need to know:

### **What does Access to Work cover?**

- Travel to and from work
- Travel needs within work
- Support workers/communicators/readers
- Equipment
- Adaptations to the working environment

### **Who is eligible for help?**

Any disabled person who:

- is in paid employment (full, part time or self employed)
- is unemployed and needing support with job interviews
- has a confirmed start date for a new job

The person must be a UK resident and the job must be in the UK. Note that employees of central government departments and employees of the Department for Work and Pensions cannot get funding through Access to Work, but can still request advice. In this case adjustments should then be funded through your department's running costs. A recent Green Paper from the Department for Work and Pensions promised to double the budget available for Access to Work to make it available to more working disabled people. We are waiting to hear if there will be any further government announcements about changes to the Access to Work scheme.

### **How does it work?**

The Disability Employment Adviser at your local Job Centre will be able to put you in touch with the Access to Work team. You can also contact the team directly at the details below. It is your responsibility to contact Access to Work, not your employer's.

New applications for Access to Work support and ongoing payments are now dealt with by the Glasgow office if you live in Greater Manchester. They are on tel: 0141 950 5327, minicom 0845 602 5850, or email [scotland.atw@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:scotland.atw@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk).

New applicants will need to contact Glasgow to start the process. You will then be sent a form to check through and return. You will be asked for details of your line manager or other appropriate person within your workplace. Once the form is

received back at AtW, a local Access to Work Advisor will contact you to discuss it further.

If necessary, Access to Work will arrange for an assessment of your requirements. This will usually be from a specialist organisation which has a good understanding of the effects of your impairment. It will take account of your job roles and will usually involve a visit to your workplace. They may ask you if you already know specifically what you need – and if so to supply 3 quotes. In that case they will not do an assessment.

The required support is then costed and agreed. If you have had a full assessment you will be sent a report. It is up to you whether your employer sees this or just gets a summary of what is required. At this point the suggested equipment or support can be bought in by your employer and the costs claimed back from Access to Work.

People who have used Access to Work say that it is important to build up a good relationship with your Access to Work Advisor. They may be able to suggest ways round obstacles such as getting taxi fares set up on account to avoid paying them up front before being refunded.

### Meet Jane

Jane works as a manager at Breakthrough UK, a small business employing 38 people.

“I have a visual impairment. Access to Work has funded a large computer monitor, magnification software, an adapted keyboard and a video magnifier (CCTV) which helps me read standard print. Because I don't drive due to my impairment, Access to Work refunds the cost of taxis when I need to go out and about as part of my job. I also get taxis to and from the train station each working day and these costs are refunded. Access to Work has enabled me to do my job and it hasn't cost my employers a penny!”



### Top tips

Don't delay or the employer might have to pay! - All additional costs are funded for new posts. Once you have been in the job for more than 6 weeks the rules change

Further good practice information is available online at [www.breakthrough-uk.com](http://www.breakthrough-uk.com).

and your employer may have to pay something towards equipment and adaptations. Support workers and travel are always fully funded.

**Start the ball rolling as soon as you agree a start date** - some support and adjustments can take a bit of time to put in place so don't wait until you have started work.

### **What disabled people have said to us about using Access to Work:**

"It helps if you know what you want – what you think you will need. Do your research first."

"It is a good scheme on the whole. When it does work it is a very positive thing!"

"I used to get very upset and take my anger out on the Access to Work adviser on the other end of the phone. This did not have any positive effect in moving things forward. It also made my adviser 'unsympathetic.' I have found that a calmer approach works better. I try to get my adviser to understand all my difficulties and to get her 'on my side.' If there are delays I ring up every day and politely ask about progress. Don't underestimate 'Pester Power'!"

"I used to think that Access to Work was very inflexible and that if they made a decision I could not challenge it. Now I see the agreement of support as more of a negotiation."

"I have to say that each team member has been fantastic. It's the system, the forms. I've built up a good relationship over the years so they know what I need, but I haven't seen any changes to the bureaucracy"

"Organisations like Breakthrough can work with you to sort out what you need to stay in work. Getting moral support and information can make all the difference. I know that expert organisations like Breakthrough understand how 'the system' works and can offer valuable support with Access to Work difficulties."

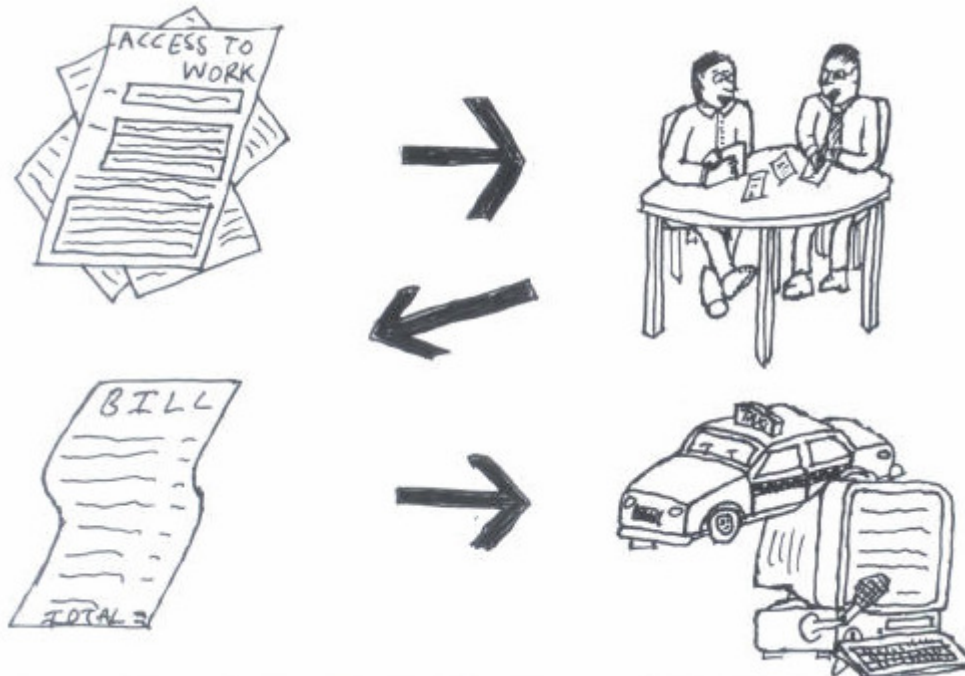
To find out more about disabled people's experiences of Access to Work, ask for our 30 page free bumper issue of Free Wire Magazine. Articles include:

- Access to Work Tips
- Employing Personal Assistants (PAs) through Access to Work
- Experiences of the Access to Work Process
- What Helps?
- Accessing Access to Work

Further good practice information is available online at [www.breakthrough-uk.com](http://www.breakthrough-uk.com).

If you have access to the internet, the Access to Work Free Wire (Issue 6) can be downloaded at the link below, or contact us for alternative formats:

[www.breakthrough-uk.com/freewire.shtml](http://www.breakthrough-uk.com/freewire.shtml)



Key Points:

- **Be informed:** analyse your work duties, do your research on what could be useful whether equipment or support. Build up your case.
- **Develop a good relationship** with your Access to Work advisor and try to see things from their perspective.
- **Use your negotiation skills** – there is usually more than one way to do things.
- **Be persistent**, don't give up.
- **Consider all the alternatives** – e.g. employing a PA via an agency, directly or through your employer. Be aware of your legal responsibilities if directly employing a PA.
- **Get support** if things don't go to plan, don't struggle on your own, organisations like Breakthrough can offer support and guidance. Many of us have been there.

For more information on Access to Work and other issues relating to employing disabled people, please contact the Independent Employment Advocacy Centre on:  
 Tel: **0161 273 5412** (voice), **0161 273 5727** (answerphone minicom),  
 Email [advocacy@breakthrough-uk.co.uk](mailto:advocacy@breakthrough-uk.co.uk).

Further good practice information is available online at [www.breakthrough-uk.com](http://www.breakthrough-uk.com).