



# Access to Work

## The ultimate guide

A practical, plain English guide for  
neurodivergent people in the UK

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# Access to Work: Introduction

I have helped many clients secure ADHD coaching and workplace support through Access to Work. A lot of people either have never heard of it, or they have, but the details are confusing. This crops up with my clients again and again, so I wrote this to help as many people as possible.



Access to Work (ATW) is a government scheme that funds practical support so disabled and neurodivergent people can start work, stay in work, or become self employed. This includes ADHD, autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia, Tourette's, and other profiles.



Official gov.uk overview and application page:  
<https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work>

In plain English, ATW helps remove barriers so you can do your job well. It can fund support like coaching, a support worker, specialist software, or help with travel. Below are real examples so you can see how it works in practice.



Check out our free ADHD & neurodivergent resources, you can start using today.

[adhdaptive.org](https://adhdaptive.org)



# Access to Work: What can it fund?

## ADHD or executive function coaching

**What this looks like:** Regular one to one coaching to improve focus, organisation, planning, prioritising, motivation, and follow through.

**Example:** Weekly planning, simple task tracking, routines. Online or in person.



## Workplace support workers

**What this looks like:** Help with planning, note taking, task tracking, meeting prep and follow up.

**Example:** Weekly check-ins to break work into steps and keep a shared task list up to date.

## Specialist software and assistive tech

**What this looks like:** Speech to text, mind mapping, structured planning tools, reminder systems.

**Example:** Mind mapping to plan reports, plus dictation for first drafts.

## Travel support

**What this looks like:** Help with travel costs when public transport is not workable due to anxiety, sensory overload, or executive function issues.

**Example:** Taxis to and from work to arrive calm and on time.

## Adjustments to the work environment

**What this looks like:** Screens, lighting changes, or quieter space for focus.

**Important:** Items seen as standard business tools are usually not funded. See the limits below.



## Already have support in place?

You can apply even if you are already receiving workplace adjustments or disability support. Access to Work looks at what extra help would allow you to work more effectively, safely, or with less stress.



# Employed vs Self-Employed: What's Covered?

## Employed vs Self-Employed: What's Covered?



Access to Work funding works a little differently depending on how you're employed. Whether you're on payroll, freelance, or running your own small business, the process and payment routes vary. This quick comparison helps you understand which parts apply to your situation before you apply.

### Employed

You apply with your employer's support. Funding is usually paid to your employer, who arranges the support or equipment. Examples: ADHD coaching, assistive software, support worker, travel, adapted equipment.

### Self-employed

You apply directly as an individual business owner. Funding is paid to you or directly to suppliers once approved. Examples: Business-related coaching, admin support, assistive software, or travel.



**Tip:- If you're self-employed, describe your work clearly and show that you're actively trading.**



# Access to Work Eligibility: Who Can Apply?

Access to Work is open to anyone in the UK who has a disability, health condition, or neurodivergent profile that makes some part of work harder than it should be. You do not need a formal diagnosis, but it helps to have evidence that you are affected in a way that meets the Equality Act definition of disability.



In simple terms: if your ADHD, autism, dyslexia, or any other condition means you find work harder than others might, you are probably eligible.

## Basic criteria

- You must be aged 16 or over.
- You must live in England, Scotland, or Wales (there is a separate scheme in Northern Ireland).
- You must have a paid job, be about to start one, or be self-employed.
- Your condition or difference must affect your ability to do parts of your job or travel to work.

Access to Work support is not means tested and it does not depend on your savings, benefits, or income. The funding is there to make sure you can do your job on equal terms with others.

## Examples of when you might qualify



**ADHD:** You struggle to plan, organise, or manage time, which affects meeting deadlines or staying on top of admin.

**Autism:** You find communication, sensory environments, or changes in routine difficult, which impacts meetings or teamwork.

**Dyslexia or dyspraxia:** Reading, writing, or structuring information takes longer, or written instructions are hard to follow.

**Chronic anxiety or depression:** You experience fatigue, overwhelm, or focus problems that make daily work inconsistent.



# Access to Work: How to apply

The Access to Work process is straightforward once you know what to expect. You don't need your employer or GP to refer you, you can apply yourself online or by phone. The form takes about 30 minutes, and you can save and return to it later if you need to.

## Where to apply

Apply directly through the GOV.UK website:

<https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work/apply>



## Prefer to apply by phone?

Call the Access to Work helpline on  
0800 121 7479 (Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm).  
Textphone and Relay UK options are available if calls are difficult.



## What you'll need before you start

- Your National Insurance number
- Your employer's name, address, and contact details (or your business name if self-employed)
- Your workplace address or main work location
- Your job title and a short description of your daily tasks
- A clear explanation of how your condition affects your ability to work or travel
- Having this written down before you start makes things easier. Treat it like a short script for your application form.



# Access to Work: How to apply



## What to say on the form

Be specific about what's difficult, why, and what would help. Keep your answers work-focused. Avoid medical language. You're explaining what you need to do your job better, not writing a clinical report.

### Instead of: "I have ADHD and find it hard to concentrate."

Say: "Because of ADHD, I lose focus during long meetings and admin tasks, which leads to missed details and delays. Structured ADHD coaching would help me create systems to stay on track and manage my workload."

### Instead of: "I struggle with organisation."

Say: "I often misplace documents and miss deadlines because I find it hard to plan and structure tasks. A support worker could help me set up weekly planning systems to keep projects moving."

### Instead of: "I get anxious when travelling."

Say: "Public transport triggers anxiety and sensory overload, leading to lateness and panic. Regular taxi travel would let me reach work reliably and manage my condition."



**Tip:** Use examples that show how your condition affects your work, not your diagnosis itself.



# Access to Work: After you apply

## Confirmation email:

Once you submit your application, you'll get a confirmation email and reference number. Then, be prepared to wait! The website says you'll hear back in a few weeks, but most people wait months, and it can be up to a year.



## Adviser contact:

When your case moves, it moves fast. It can feel sudden. You'll get a call or email from an Access to Work adviser. It's a short, informal chat, around 15 to 30 minutes, to confirm your details, your job, and what support might help. It's not an interview.

## Workplace assessment:

After that, you'll be referred for a workplace assessment. This is done by a third-party Occupational Health specialist, not your employer. They'll write a report recommending support such as ADHD coaching, assistive technology, or travel help.

## Act quickly when contacted:

After months of waiting, things can suddenly move fast. When I got my call, I was told if I couldn't attend the assessment within a week, I'd go to the back of the queue, and that's common.

## The assessment call:

It's usually done by phone or video. The assessor will ask about your role, the parts of work you find challenging, and what would make them easier. Their report then goes back to Access to Work for review.

## Grant award letter:

If approved, you or your employer will get a letter confirming what's been funded and how to arrange it. This can include ADHD coaching, software, or other adjustments.

## Chasing progress:

If months pass with no update, email them quoting your reference number. It might not speed things up, but it helps keep your case visible. Prepare quotes for coaching, software, or equipment early so you're ready when they ask.



# Access to Work: The application timeline



There is often a huge backlog and in practice, the process can take up to a year (as of October 2025), although it can be as little as a few weeks.

## The application - key steps

### 1. Submit application

Apply online  
Keep reference number  
Confirmation email



### 5. Decision and award letter

DWP reviews report  
Grant letter confirms what's funded



### 2. Waiting period

Can take months (6-12 typical)  
No updates during this time



### 6. Set up support

Choose providers  
Keep quotes and invoices



### 3. Advisor Call

Confirm details, job, support needs  
Be ready to discuss challenges and solutions



### 7. How payments work

If employed, your employer claims for you  
If self employed, claim through the portal  
Using an invoice or proforma



### 4. Workplace assessment

Conducted by third-party specialist  
Phone/video  
Report recommends coaching, support worker, software, travel



### 8. Ongoing support and renewal

Usually lasts up to three years  
Reapply if needed



Need support while you wait? Explore our affordable ADHD coaching options — ideal for getting started before your Access to Work grant is approved.



# Access to Work: The adviser call



After the long wait, the first real contact can arrive quickly. There are two parts, the adviser call and the workplace assessment. They work together and both matter.

## Adviser Call

Short triage chat  
15–30 mins  
By DWP adviser  
Confirms eligibility  
Can happen by phone

## Workplace Assessment

In-depth discussion  
Around 60 mins  
By third-party assessor  
Full report/recommendations  
Usually by video

## The Adviser Call

**Short triage chat:** Often 15 to 30 minutes by phone or email. If self-employed, additional proof of trading activity will be discussed (see self employed section)

**Purpose:** Confirms details, roles, and whether a workplace assessment is needed.

**Not a test:** Be yourself, keep it about the work, and say what would help.

### Example dialogue

**Adviser:** Can you tell me a bit about how your ADHD affects you at work?

**You:** I find it hard to manage competing priorities and switch between tasks. I start several things at once and lose track, which causes stress and missed deadlines. ADHD coaching would help me plan better, stay focused, and manage my workload.

Answers like this work, because they link impact to a practical solution.



# Access to Work: The workplace assessment



## The Workplace Assessment

**Who runs it:** Independent third-party specialist, not your employer.

**Format:** Usually by phone or video. Sometimes an on-site visit.

**Booking:** Accept the earliest date offered. Turning one down can set you back.

## What to expect

- About an hour, longer for complex roles.
- Questions about your job, tasks, and the hardest parts of your week.
- They will ask for real examples and what you've already tried.
- Outcome is a report with clear recommendations such as ADHD coaching, support worker time, or specialist software.

## Common questions

- What does a typical working day look like?
- Which parts are most stressful or time-consuming?
- How does your condition affect planning, communication, or focus?
- What strategies or tools have you tried and how did they go?

### Example dialogue

**Assessor: Where do you struggle most?**

You: Managing deadlines. I underestimate time and smaller tasks get lost. Coaching would help me plan realistically and track progress each week.

**Assessor: What has helped before?**

You: Structure and external accountability. With regular sessions, I stay consistent.



# Access to Work:

## Accessing your funding

When your grant award letter arrives, you can finally start using your approved support. The letter lists what's covered, how long it's valid for, and how payments work. The process is slightly different for employees and the self-employed.



### What to expect

#### For employed people

- Funding through your employer: The grant letter goes to both you and them.
- Your employer pays for agreed support such as ADHD coaching, software, or travel, then claims it back from Access to Work.
- They'll need to keep invoices and receipts and submit them with the claim form.
- Reimbursement usually takes a few weeks once submitted.
- If it's their first time using the scheme, help them understand the process. Once they've done it once, it's easy.



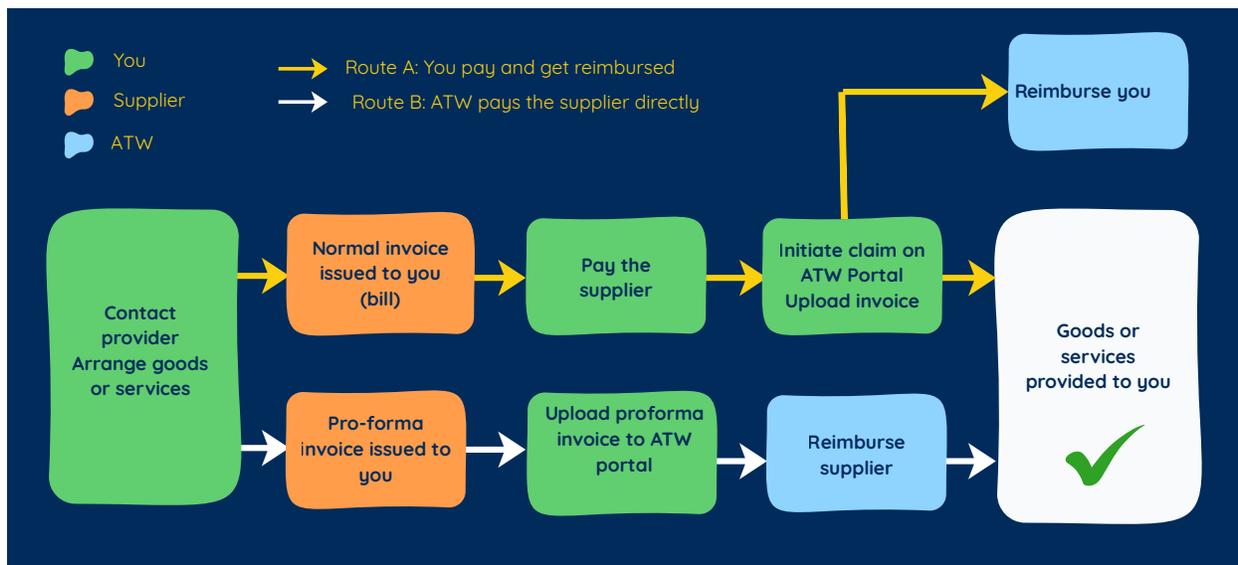
#### For self-employed people

If you're self-employed, it's a little more complicated because you'll manage the funding yourself. There are two main payment routes depending on whether you prefer to pay first or have Access to Work pay your supplier directly.



# Access to Work: Accessing funding - self-employed

## Access to Work payment routes - self-employed



### Route 1: You pay first, then claim back

- Your provider gives you a normal invoice once the work is agreed.
- You pay the invoice yourself.
- Upload the invoice and proof of payment to the Access to Work online claims portal.
- Access to Work reimburses you directly, usually within a few weeks.
- Best for when you can afford to pay up front and want full control of the transaction

### Route 2: Access to Work pays your provider directly

- Your provider gives you a pro-forma invoice (a quote with an invoice number).
- You upload it to the Access to Work portal with the provider's bank details and contact email.
- Access to Work approves the claim and pays the provider directly.
- The provider contacts you once payment clears to arrange the support.
- Best for when you don't want to pay upfront or your supplier prefers to be paid by ATW.

This method avoids suppliers sending unpaid invoices before payment is confirmed, which is why most ADHD coaches and support providers use it.



# Access to Work: Coaching

Access to work will often fund ADHD coaching.



They will often refer to this as ADHD coping strategies. Here are some tips to help you gain the right funding and get the right coaching for you.



## ATW coaching key facts

- Access to Work often funds a block of sessions of an hour, usually 6 or 12, to be used within 6 to 12 months.
- The aim is to build workplace structure and coping strategies, not ongoing therapy.
- You can choose your own ADHD coach, you're not restricted to a list.
- You may be asked to provide quotations from suppliers
- Once approved, your coach provides a standard or pro-forma invoice depending on the payment route.
- Sessions can be online or in person. Mention your preference during your assessment.
- Access to Work usually funds ADHD coaching once only, so focus on developing skills that last.
- If Access to Work only covers part of what you asked for, you can top up privately. Many people start with funded sessions and continue privately once they see the benefits.



# Access to Work: Limitations



## Common limitations and refusals

Access to work advisers follow strict rules and guidance about what can be funded and what cannot. Below are some of the reasons ATW applications may be rejected.

- Access to Work only covers specialist, disability-related support. Standard business equipment and everyday costs are not included.
- Standard business tools aren't covered. Laptops, desks, headsets, or office software are seen as normal business costs. Even noise-cancelling headphones are often refused.
- ADHD coaching is often funded only once. This appears to be relatively new guidance, and they view ADHD coaching as a one-off series of sessions to work on ADHD coping strategies, rather than the ongoing and reflective journey. ATW usually approves a short block (6-12 sessions).
- ATW will only fund activities directly linked to your job, so this excludes support such as therapy, rehabilitation or personal wellbeing.
- Requests for flexible working, flexible hours or quiet workspaces should be made by requesting a change with your employer under the Equality Act.
- Self-employed roles may require additional evidence, such as invoices or recent contracts. You'll need to show that the support is for paid work, not general admin or start-up tasks. They might ask for invoices or contracts as proof.
- Access to Work focuses on removing barriers to work, not replacing standard employer equipment.



# Access to Work: When things go wrong

## What If Something Goes Wrong?

If your award letter doesn't include everything your assessor recommended, don't panic. It happens. Sometimes they only approve part of it, or the case manager (adviser) misunderstands. That's when you can request a reconsideration.



## How to request a reconsideration

- You can ask for a review within one month of your award letter. Even if you're late, try anyway, especially if you've been waiting for clarification or a response.
- Email your Access to Work contact or regional inbox (for example, [NORTHEAST.ATW@dwp.gov.uk](mailto:NORTHEAST.ATW@dwp.gov.uk)).
- Say clearly you're requesting a reconsideration of your award decision and include your ATW reference number.
- Explain what was recommended, what was approved, and what was missing.
- Attach or quote the relevant part of your assessor's report.

## Example Email requesting a review of your decision letter

Dear Access to Work Team,

I'm writing to request a formal reconsideration of my Access to Work award decision. The assessor's report recommended a support worker, but this wasn't included in my award letter. I'd be grateful if this could be reviewed.

Kind regards,  
Your name



# Access to Work: When things go wrong

## What happens next

Your request first goes to the Reconsideration Team, but they can't act while your case manager is still working on your file. If you are already working with your case manager on a change, your reconsideration is paused.



## Tips for smoother appeals

- Keep every email and document, especially your assessor's report and award letter.
- Be polite but firm, and quote the exact recommendation that wasn't followed.
- Attach the evidence yourself, don't assume they'll find it.
- If you don't hear back after 10 working days, resend and copy the regional inbox.

Reconsiderations often take a few weeks. If you still disagree after that, you can make a formal complaint to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The address is in your award letter.

Access to Work decisions aren't always perfect, but many do change when challenged clearly and calmly. A concise email with the right details often works better than a long complaint.

**Be patient but persistent — polite follow-ups make a difference.**



**Tip:-** Keep your appeal message short and factual. Focus on what was missed and what you're asking them to review.



# Access to Work: Tips for the self-employed



The process for self-employed people is significantly more complicated.

As part of the application process, Access to Work needs proof that your business is active, trading, and earning above the Lower Earnings Limit (LEL), currently £6,396 per year. Your advisor will discuss this with you.

## What evidence do I need?

- You'll need to prove your trading income is above the LEL. The easiest options are:
- A recent **Self Assessment tax return (SA100)** showing your annual turnover
- A signed **Profit and Loss report** or **company accounts** if you're limited
- Recent invoices or business bank statements showing trading income
- These documents **must show turnover** before expenses. They're checking total income, not profit. If you've changed structure (for example, from sole trader to limited company), you can combine the figures to show your total annual turnover.
- You don't need an accountant to provide this information, although it could simplify things if you're not comfortable with accounts.
- They only need to see that your total income exceeds the threshold.

If you have one, your company accountant can provide this information in a format that ATW will accept. If you do your own accounts then here is an example of a statement you can make, along with providing your documents.



### Example of acceptable evidence

"My Self Assessment return shows sole trader turnover of £7,500. My company Profit and Loss report confirms £3,100 turnover for the same year. Combined, this exceeds the LEL of £6,396."

## Do you have to contribute towards the funding if I am self employed?

Not usually. Access to Work normally covers the agreed costs directly or reimburses you through their claim process.



# Access to Work: FAQs



## How long does it take to hear back after applying?

Officially a few weeks, but many people wait months, sometimes close to a year. Once progress starts, things move quickly, so have your documents and quotes ready.

## Do I need a diagnosis to apply?

No. You only need to show that your condition affects your ability to work. Diagnosis helps, but it's not required.

## Can I apply if I'm in training, such as an apprenticeship?

Yes. Apprenticeships and paid training programmes are covered. The application must be in your name, but your provider can help with details.

## Can I apply if I'm a student?

Only if you're also working or self-employed. Full-time students aren't eligible, but part-time students who work can apply for job-related support.

## Can I apply if I'm a job seeker?

No. You must be in paid work, self-employed, or have a confirmed job start date. Access to Work doesn't fund job searching or interviews.

## Can I apply before starting a new job?

Yes. As soon as you have a confirmed start date, you can apply. Doing this early helps your support start on time.

## Can I change my coach or provider later?

Only before payment is made. Once Access to Work pays, funding can't be redirected. Raise any concerns with your case manager early.

## What if I move to a new employer?

Your award is linked to your job, not you. Some support may continue temporarily, but most items (like equipment or coaching) require a new application. Contact your case manager quickly.



# Access to Work: FAQs



## Is there a time limit for submitting claims?

Yes. Your award letter includes a claim deadline. Missed deadlines can mean losing funding, so submit early and keep a record.

## Can I get more ADHD coaching later?

Usually not. Coaching is funded as a short-term skills programme. Focus on creating lasting systems and habits. If your role changes, re-apply.

## What happens if I disagree with my award?

Ask for a reconsideration within one month. Include evidence from your assessor's report and explain what was missed. Most reviews are resolved at this stage.

## Do I have to tell my employer everything about my condition?

No. You only need to share what's relevant to your work or adjustments. Access to Work treats all information confidentially.

## What if my provider needs payment before starting work?

Ask them for a pro-forma invoice. You can upload it to the portal so they're paid directly rather than you claiming it back.

## Does Access to Work affect benefits?

No. It's a grant, not a benefit or loan, and doesn't affect Universal Credit or other income-based support.

## Can Access to Work fund software or equipment?

Yes, if it's specialist. They fund assistive tools such as mind mapping or speech-to-text software, but not standard business items like laptops or desks.

## Can I reapply if my job or condition changes?

Yes. If your role or needs change significantly, you can reapply or ask for your current award to be reviewed.

## Who do I contact for updates?

Email or call the Access to Work Service Centre with your reference number. Keep your messages short and factual. Follow up if there's no reply after a few weeks.



# Access to Work: Glossary

## **Access to Work (ATW)**

A government grant that funds practical support for disabled or neurodivergent people to start, stay in, or progress in work.

## **Adviser / Case Manager**

The person at the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) who looks after your case, contacts you, and arranges your funding.

## **Application Reference Number**

The unique number you receive when you submit your Access to Work application. Quote this in every message or email.

## **Assessment**

A meeting with an independent specialist (not your employer) who recommends what support, adjustments, or equipment would help you do your job.

## **Award Letter**

The written confirmation from Access to Work showing what's been approved, how long it lasts, and how payment will work.

## **Business Evidence**

Proof that your self-employed work is active and earning, such as invoices, bank statements, or a tax return.

## **Coaching / ADHD Coaching**

Regular one-to-one support that helps you improve focus, organisation, planning, motivation, and follow-through at work.

## **Claim Portal**

The online Access to Work system used to upload invoices and request payments or reimbursements.

## **DWP (Department for Work and Pensions)**

The government department that runs Access to Work.

## **Equality Act 2010**

UK law that protects disabled people from discrimination and requires employers to make reasonable adjustments.

## **Evidence**

Documents showing how your condition affects your work or proving your business activity.

## **Grant**

Money that does not have to be repaid. Access to Work is a grant, not a loan or benefit.

## **Occupational Health Assessor**

An independent specialist who carries out your workplace assessment and writes a report with recommendations.

## **Pro-forma Invoice**

A quote with an invoice number that allows Access to Work to pay your provider directly before work starts.

## **Reasonable Adjustment**

A change that makes it easier for a disabled person to do their job, such as flexible hours, quiet workspace, or equipment.

## **Reconsideration**

The process of asking Access to Work to review your decision if something was refused or missed from your award.

## **Self-Employed**

Working for yourself as a sole trader or through your own limited company.

## **Specialist Equipment**

Items that directly support your disability needs, such as speech-to-text or mind-mapping software.

## **Support Worker**

Someone who helps with admin, note-taking, planning, or practical day-to-day tasks linked to your job.

## **Supplier**

The company or person providing your approved service, such as a coach or software vendor.

## **Travel Support**

Help with travel costs when public transport isn't workable because of anxiety, sensory overload, or executive-function issues.

## **Workplace Adjustment**

Any change to your job, environment, or tools that helps you work effectively, often arranged with your employer.

## **Workplace Assessment Report**

The document written by your assessor that outlines recommended support, equipment, or coaching.



# Access to Work: Application Checklist



- Check that your job, training, or self-employment qualifies
- Gather your National Insurance number and employer or business details
- Write down how your condition affects your work and give real examples
- Apply online at <https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work/apply>
- Save your reference number somewhere safe
- Prepare short quotes for coaching, software, or support services
- Wait for your adviser call and respond quickly when contacted
- Attend your workplace assessment (phone or online)
- Review your assessor's report and flag any errors immediately
- Read your grant award letter carefully and note claim deadlines
- Choose your payment route, claim back yourself or have ATW pay the provider
- Upload invoices or pro-forma invoices through the ATW portal
- Keep copies of all emails, reports, and receipts
- Follow up politely if you don't hear back for several months
- Submit all claims before the stated deadline
- If something is refused, request a reconsideration within one month

**You've got this. Keep copies of everything, and follow up calmly if things slow down.**