Factsheet 2: Access to Work (AtW)

In this document you can find:

- An outline of the Access to Work (AtW) scheme
Information on how it can assist you (a disabled person or someone who has a long term health condition) to overcome some of the barriers encountered at work

Information about funding that may be available for additional equipment and services

Details about making a claim and what you can expect at each stage

Contact details for each regional Jobcentre Plus Operational Support Unit (OSU)

What is Access to Work?

AtW is a government scheme, funded by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and run by Jobcentre Plus. There are four regional AtW centres (OSUs) and you need to make an application to one of these units (see later for contact details of the centre in your part of the UK)

Funding

AtW can help with some equipment and services. Here are a few examples:

- One-off escort or communication support at interview
- A support worker to carry out specific jobs for you at work e.g. sign language interpretation; producing materials in your preferred format; reading/writing tasks (see Support Worker Factsheet for more information)
- Fares (taxis/other transport) to, from and within work (to places that you can’t get to by public transport)
- Adaptation of a vehicle
- Specialised equipment (software e.g. if you are visually impaired or have dyslexia: a screen reader, screen magnification or voice recognition software; a digital recorder; a Braille note-taker; if you are Deaf or hard of hearing an amplified stethoscope)
- Adaptations to standard equipment
- Adaptations to premises or equipment - but only in exceptional cases which have to be approved by the Head of AtW
- Consultancy services from a Disability Employment Adviser on how to make the work place more accessible
- One-off grant to pay for specialised training (e.g. for a disabled employee on the use of new equipment; disability awareness training for a group of non-disabled employees)
Your employer's legal duty

Your employer has a legal duty to comply with Equality legislation and Health and Safety regulations and to provide items and adaptations to the work place. These are considered to be standard and AtW does not fund them. They include:

- Computers
- Mobile phones
- Foot rests
- Keyboards
- Modified lighting - blinds, task lighting
- Installation of loop systems

What your employer has to pay

Most applications for Special Aids and Equipment are subject to a mandatory cost share system (with the exception of those made within 6 weeks of commencing work). AtW will not pay any of the costs under a particular threshold: the employer is responsible for these.

The thresholds depend on the size of the employer:

- Micro employers (1-9 employees) - AtW pays the full amount
- Small employers (10-49 employees): £300 threshold
- Medium size employers (50-249 employees): £500 threshold
- Large employers (250 employees or above): £1,000 threshold

If an employer refuses to pay, AtW funding cannot be approved unless an alternative cost sharer is found.

How does the scheme operate?

Disability Employment Advisers (DEAs) are employed at each Jobcentre Plus office. They can provide information and advice to both you and your employer.

Before contacting the AtW centre direct, it is a good idea to get in touch with a DEA at the Jobcentre Plus office nearest to your work.

Disability organisations (British Dyslexia Association, RNIB, Action on Hearing Loss, Sense, MIND, Scope) may be able to provide you with advice and/or AtW
assessments. Contact one of these organisations for more specific advice before contacting the AtW office.

The AtW adviser will work closely with you and your employer. Specialist assessors are sometimes consulted to identify specific solutions for your work related issues.

**Eligibility for the AtW scheme**

You must satisfy the following criteria to be eligible:

- Have a disability or health condition that affects your work and is likely to last for longer than 52 weeks
- Be aged 16 or above
- Live in Great Britain
- Be about to start work or
- Be in paid employment (part-time; full-time; permanent; temporary; or
- Be self-employed, or
- Unemployed or employed and requiring assistance at interview (escort and/or communicator)
- Be in a job not supported by any other Jobcentre Plus programme
- Not be receiving Incapacity Benefit (IB) or Employment Support Allowance (ESA) unless you are engaged in Permitted Work Higher Level, exempt from the Personal Capability Assessment (PCA) or Supported Permitted Work

**NB:** The (PCA) was used to decide whether to grant someone IB, Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA) or Income (IS). The new ESA has replaced all these, but the PCA may still be used to assess people.

If you are unsure about your eligibility, contact your nearest AtW centre to find out.

**Application process**

- You make the initial application. Phone the relevant OSU
- AtW personnel will fill in an application form with you over the phone
- Your eligibility to apply will be confirmed at this stage
- The form will be sent to you for signature. Return this to the OSU
- Depending upon your disability, the application will be sent to an adviser from one of these teams:
  a) Deaf Focus Team
  b) Visually Impaired Team
c) Mental Health Team  
d) Large Employers Team  
(Individual agreements have been arranged with a number of large employers. All these are different from each other. They are all managed by the South East AtW team.  
e) Pan Disability Team  
• The AtW Adviser will contact you within 24 hours of receiving the application form from the OSU

Apply as soon as possible to get the support that you need.

Assessment process

First, you will establish how your disability or long term health condition impacts on your job. Second, the adviser will offer advice and guidance to address any issues identified.

Support available is restricted to job-related obstacles.

The AtW Adviser will ask for some specific information, for example:

- A job description
- Expected start date
- Contact details for the following:
  o Line manager
  o IT department in work place
  o the person who can authorise the purchase and cost sharing

What can I expect the AtW Adviser or assessor to know about my job?

Not all AtW advisers/assessors have the same levels of knowledge and experience about disability, different impairments and individual job roles. Both you and your line manager should play a full part in the assessment process to make sure that your support is appropriate. You should meet before the assessment takes place. Make sure you discuss issues such as:

- The nature of your job (refer to your Job Description and Person Specification)
- The tasks you have to carry out
- The impact of your disability on these tasks
- Is your job role likely to change?
- Is your impairment likely to change?
What impact might this have on the job requirements?

Appropriate solutions are usually agreed in relation to obstacles identified in a specific job role. If not, you will be referred to an independent assessor who will visit you at work to try to resolve the issue.

The assessor submits a report and recommendations for support to the AtW adviser. The adviser does not have to follow these recommendations. In most cases, however, they are accepted.

A specialist or technical adviser may be consulted, particularly if access technology or software is required.

Example

A blind junior physiotherapist obtains employment in a busy out patient department. In order to carry out his job, he needs to use Braille. When the physiotherapist meets with the AtW adviser and his employer, they agree that specialist advice is needed to choose appropriate equipment. A Technology Officer from Action for Blind People carries out an assessment and makes specific recommendations to the AtW adviser. As a result of this report the funding for the equipment is agreed.

Your employer may be asked to obtain a number of quotes for the equipment as not all prices would necessarily be approved by Jobcentre Plus.

Agreeing support and costs

A breakdown of costs will be given to your employer before the final report is submitted by the AtW adviser. This provides an opportunity to agree how the costs will be allocated (i.e. what the employer has to pay and what costs AtW will cover).

Formal report

Once the package of support is agreed the formal report will be submitted to the Jobcentre Plus office for approval of funding. Letters will be sent to you and your employer, giving information on:

- type and level of support to be provided
- amount of AtW funding available
- sum to be paid as the employer’s contribution
Your employer’s responsibility

Once the letter is received, your employer (or you, if you are self-employed) should arrange your support services and purchases any equipment. Your employer then applies to the AtW OSU for reimbursement of costs (the AtW’s contribution). Proof of purchase of goods and services must be submitted with the application.

You or your employer may be asked to make an additional voluntary contribution to the cost of equipment. If you decide not to pay it, your support will not be jeopardised.

You (or your employer) should not purchase anything until you have received official notification of the approved costs.

Reimbursement of other costs

- The cost of travel (either to and from work or during work time) is rarely funded in advance by AtW
- Not all employers agree to fund a support worker

If you need either of these types of support, you might be required to pay the costs and reclaim the amount from AtW.

Alternatively your employer might be prepared to take out a contract with a local taxi firm and/or employ a support worker through an agency.

Ownership, repairs and insurance

- If your support package includes specialist equipment, it is owned by, and is the responsibility of, your employer
- A formal agreement should be drawn up to this effect
- Your employer must insure the equipment to cover the costs of maintenance/repair on expiry of the guarantee. It must also be insured against loss/damage
- Keep your equipment in a secure place
- If you want to buy the equipment, or take it with you when you move jobs – these conditions should be included in the above agreement

How long will it take for the support to come through?

AtW OSUs aim to arrange the support in the shortest possible time. The length of time varies and depends on individual circumstances. If it is held up for any reason,
the AtW Adviser may be able to organise a temporary alternative, for example, funding a support worker.

**Access to Work Grant**

Levels of funding available and for which types of support:

AtW can pay up to 100% of the approved cost if you are:

- Unemployed and about to start a new job
- Changing jobs with a new employer
- Self-employed

Whatever your employment status, AtW can fund up to 100% of the additional costs for help with:

- Fares to work (above the normal costs)
- Communicator/escort support at interviews
- Support Workers

If you have been employed for six weeks or more, AtW will fund some of the costs of support. Your employer will be asked to pay the first £300 of the approved cost and 20% of the total up to £10,000. AtW will fund 100% of the costs of over £10,000. There are no fixed limits to ATW funding.

If you are changing jobs but staying with the same employer, you should contact the regional AtW Centre to discuss whether or not your employer is required to pay a contribution to the costs of any additional support needs.

**The review process by AtW**

Following a period of between one and three years, an AtW adviser will review your circumstances and the nature and level of support you are receiving.

**What if I disagree with the AtW adviser's decision?**

- AtW is a discretionary grant and is not a statutory benefit; you cannot appeal against decisions made.
- If you disagree with a decision you can request a review
- The review team has a duty to examine your case and has the power to reverse the original decision
Should you disagree with this decision, the review process passes through various levels until it reaches the Operations Director who has the ultimate say.

Some case studies

Example

A Therapy Services Manager has dyslexia. She is responsible for all the activities involved in supporting a network of employees. After a successful application to AtW, her employer supplied voice recognition software, a digital recorder, a scanner and a support worker for two hours per day.

The employee said: “The support from Access to Work takes some of 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

A newly qualified Podiatrist disclosed that she was hard of hearing when she applied for a junior post. She had been in contact with AtW and organised a lip speaker to accompany her to interview.

On successfully obtaining the job an AtW assessment was carried out at work. Discussion with the employee and her manager ensured that the AtW adviser understood the requirements of the post. Funding was agreed for a lip speaker and to provide verbal commentary to access auditory materials. (The support worker post was covered by two individuals).

Fortunately the employer was able to fund the support worker directly and to claim back from AtW rather than the employee having to do this.

Contact details for the Jobcentre Plus AtW Organisational Support Units

London, South East England, East of England

Jobcentre Plus Access to Work Operational Support Unit
Wales, South West England, East Midlands, West Midlands

Jobcentre Plus Access to Work Operational Support Unit
Alexandra House
377, Cowbridge Road East
Cardiff
C5 1WU
Telephone: 020920 423291
Textphone: 02920 644886
Fax: 02920 423342
E-Mail: atgosu.carduff@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk

Scotland, North West England, North East England, Yorkshire and Humberside

Jobcentre Plus Access to Work Operational Support Unit
Anniesland JCP
Baird Street
Glasgow
G90 8AN
Telephone: 0141 950 5327
Textphone: 0845 602 5850
Fax: 0141 950 5265
E-Mail: atgosu.glasgow@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk

Northern Ireland

Disablement Advisory Service
5th Floor
Gloucester House
Chichester Street
Belfast
BT1 4RA
Telephone: 02890 252317
Textphone: 02890 252313
FaxL 02890 252330  
E-Mail: disablementadvisory.servicemailbox@delni.gov.uk 

Reference  
DWP Public Consultation Paper (July, 2008) No one written off: reforming welfare to reward responsibility. DWP

Web Link  
General information on help for disabled people available at: www.directgov.org.uk

Contact Us  
We welcome enquiries by phone or email.

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Acknowledgment

The Allied Health Professions Support Service (AHPSS) was launched in 1991 in response to the closure of the Royal National Institute for Blind People’s (RNIB) School of Physiotherapy which catered exclusively for visually impaired students. AHPSS’s remit was to provide support to disabled allied health profession students in mainstream higher education in the UK. It also offered information, advice and specialised disability awareness training to academic and practice-based staff.

In 2002, AHPSS staff were invited by the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (CSP) to join a team of specialists to produce a training manual specifically designed to provide guidance for practice based staff in supporting disabled students on practice based placements. The document: "Supporting Physiotherapy Students on Clinical Placement", was published in 2004 and received very positive feedback from all stakeholders.

By 2007, it was evident that the document needed updating in response to UK legislative and technological changes and the increasing use of online information. Following discussions with CSP staff, it was agreed that the AHPSS team (Jane Owen Hutchinson, AHPSS Manager and Karen Atkinson, Senior Lecturer and Manager of the RNIB Resource Centre at the University of East London), would take on this project.

Between 2007 and 2010, considerable time was spent in obtaining feedback from a wide range of stakeholders regarding the content and format of the future document. Whist it was unanimously agreed that it should be available in both hard copy and electronically, all staff identified the importance of being able to access some of the specific guidance on disability management from the AHPSS website.

"Into Physiotherapy" was published by the CSP and RNIB in 2010. Thirteen related information sheets were subsequently uploaded onto the AHPSS website (between 2010 and 2013), at which point the AHPSS was decommissioned by NHS London. As a result of the positive feedback these fact sheets received and requests from a number of organisations, Jane Owen Hutchinson and Karen Atkinson have given permission for these materials to continue to be available online.