



ACCESS TO WORK FUNDING

A HELPFUL GUIDE FROM
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Access to Work funding

[Introduction](#)

[AtW application for employed or soon to be employed people](#)

[Applying](#)

[Next Steps](#)

[Useful supporting documents](#)

[Determining your needs](#)

[Getting quotes](#)

[Cost contributions](#)

[Award approval](#)

[Award Letter](#)

[Capped awards](#)

[AtW Renewal](#)

[On the job](#)

[Managing your support workers](#)

[Sending support worker claim forms](#)

[Known AtW claiming payment issues](#)

[Cancellation fees](#)

[Problems with AtW](#)

[Third party consent](#)

[Disagreeing with AtW decisions](#)

[My AtW adviser is not answering my emails](#)

[Self employment](#)

[Year 1 of self employment](#)

[Year 2 of self employment](#)

[Year 3 of self employment and thereafter](#)

[Self Employment AtW renewal](#)

[Communication support at interview \(CSI\)](#)

[Useful resources](#)

Introduction

This leaflet was put together to assist you with accessing deaf equipment (such as radio aids) and services (such as STTR or interpreters) from Access to Work (AtW). This covers England, Scotland and Wales. If you are in Northern Ireland, this is a separate system and outside the scope of this leaflet.

AtW is available for people in various kinds of paid work (but not voluntary work) as outlined at <https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work/eligibility>.

If you are about to start or are in a **new job** you need to apply for AtW within **6 weeks** or your employer may have to pay more contributions towards equipment and travel support - a system called "cost share rules".

The AtW process can take quite a long time. We hope the advice in this leaflet will prepare you for what is needed, help you manage the process and speed things up as much as possible.

It is likely AtW will ask you to provide the same information in different ways during the process, this is normal.

AtW application for employed or soon to be employed people

The first step is to go to the GOV.UK Access to Work webpages at <https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work>.

Applying

While AtW prefer you to apply using the online form, you can also use SignVideo, textphone, and telephone (directly or via text-relay or communication support) - so choose which method works best for you.

For the initial application you will have to answer questions about

- Your disability:
 - What impairments and conditions you have.
 - How they make it harder for you to do your job.
 - How you manage/struggle at the moment.
- Your employment:
 - Type of employment - employed, self-employed, director.
 - Job title.
 - Name and address of employer.
 - How long you have been in your job.
 - Your usual working hours/days.
- Your personal details:
 - Name, address, date of birth, national insurance number etc.
 - How you want to be contacted including assigning a third party.

An AtW adviser should respond to you via your preferred contact method within 5 working days of your application being completed.

Next Steps

Useful supporting documents

To prove that you have a paying job, your working hours and the tasks you need to carry out you may wish to send your AtW adviser copies of:

- Contract of employment
- Anything showing pay/hours
- Job description

Determining your needs

If you do not know what you need

If you do not know what is available or what you need, ask AtW in your application to arrange for an assessor to visit you in your workplace.

Be aware that not all assessors are as knowledgeable about deafness as they should be, so you should still do your own research and double check any recommendations that are made.

If you know your needs

You can make your own requests. AtW may suggest you have an assessment but you are permitted to refuse.

Keep records of what you struggle with and how often those situations arise, or how often you are unable to carry out your job properly. AtW like to have information broken down into "every week I need X hours of Y". An example of this kind of activity could be a weekly team meeting. If you can present your weekly, monthly, yearly and ad hoc activities in a spreadsheet showing your calculations for your total support needs, this can help to make your case.

AtW advisers' knowledge of deafness

AtW advisers do not receive detailed training about deafness equipment or services. They may not understand why a radio aid doesn't stop you needing communication support, or understand the difference between text-relay (NGT) and STTR.

You will have to explain clearly (with credible links)

- What you need,
- How it works,
- Why you need it and
- How it will help you in carrying out your work duties.

Getting quotes

If you request equipment or services it is likely that AtW will ask you to get two or three separate quotes for each item or service. AtW will always choose the cheapest quote (probably excluding the VAT amount) unless you can justify a more expensive quote.

When getting quotes you should ensure the equipment or services are appropriate. Ask the supplier lots of questions. If you require verbatim speech to text (STTR), we can recommend suppliers to approach for quotes, to ensure you are given quotes for appropriate services - and not respeaking or electronic notetaking passing themselves off as verbatim STTR services.

Number of hours

Ensure you apply for enough hours to carry out your job role. Monitor your usage so that when you renew your AtW support you can explain why you need more hours, or have not used all the approved hours.

If you do not use all your hours, AtW will cut your award at renewal, sometimes even when you have provided a good reason such as long term sickness or substantial employer disruptions. If this happens, you should document how you are using your hours and insist on a review shortly into your award citing the reasons you initially gave and challenging AtW's refusal to increase your award with evidence that your needs are higher than allowed for.

Support Worker travel costs

AtW will not pay for support workers' travel time or travel expenses (set at 25 pence per mile) as a separate item - **these have to be rolled into the hourly or other rate quoted for support**. Parking costs cannot be reimbursed at all.

VAT

Quotes must include VAT and show if the supplier is VAT registered. AtW sometimes say VAT is not payable by them, but this is incorrect - if your adviser claims this, challenge it.

AtW Caps

From 1st October 2015 all new AtW awards are subject to a lower or upper cap.

	Yearly cap amount	Award length
Lower	Up to £47,500	3 years
Upper	Between £47,500 and £52,200	1 year

Cost contributions

Employer contributions

AtW advisers are encouraged to ask you to ask your employer to make a voluntary contribution to any award. You can refuse this.

The **limited** circumstances where your employer **must** pay for support are:

- The employer meets certain size criteria.
- Equipment or adaptations to premises are recommended.
- Recommended items are deemed to have a general business benefit.

As this criteria can change, we recommend you search for "**Access to Work factsheet for employers**" online to get the latest published guidelines or check the latest **Access to Work Staff Guide** at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/access-to-work-staff-guide>.

Personal contributions

AtW have sometimes started asking deaf people to personally pay a contribution for portable equipment such as radio aids claiming that you could use them at home. We advise you to keep refusing this demand and if necessary make a formal complaint.

Award approval

Award Letter

When AtW and you agree your award is correct, they should send you a letter to officially confirm:

- The kind and amount of support, and funds approved.
- Award time period.
- Any agreed employer contributions.

If the letter is correct, you need to sign the letter, keep a copy for your own records, and return this **within 4 weeks** or your funding will be stopped.

If the letter is not correct or you do not receive a letter, you need to contact AtW and ask them to send you a correct letter.

Sometimes AtW advisers will claim a letter has been sent when it hasn't - keep chasing until you have a letter on headed paper. Email evidence of what has been awarded may not be sufficient if you have a disagreement with AtW so you need a copy of a signed letter.

AtW guidance says that advisers should not make changes to your award within the agreed award time period.

Capped awards

If you have a capped award you can spend the AtW award on approved support as you wish - this means you don't have to break your invoices down to hourly rates when you claim.

AtW Renewal

AtW will not necessarily remind you that your award period is coming to an end. AtW will not start your renewal until 6 weeks before your expiry date. We recommend you set a reminder for this 6 weeks before your expiry date so you can contact AtW to find out what you need to do.

On the job

Managing your support workers

It is okay to clarify your preferences once you have decided on your supplier. Not all suppliers are on the NRCPD list and not all suppliers on the NRCPD list will necessarily be a good fit for you.

You can feed back to any agency and say “I don't like X, please don't use them again because Reasons” and “I really like A and B, can I have them where possible in future.”

Sending support worker claim forms

You will need to send claim form DP222 to ATW for services on a monthly basis. You need to use a separate form for each type of support.

Complete each form with the number of hours used per day and attach the matching invoices.

Claims must be submitted within 6 months of the date of the original spending.

Your invoices must match the wording of your award letter so do send a copy of your letter to your agency or support workers so they can match their invoices.

It is important to be organised and stay on top of your AtW paperwork as your support workers, agency and AtW adviser won't be able to do this for you.

AtW policy is to retain documents but often they ask you to resend them.

Known AtW claiming payment issues

AtW are known for claiming not to have received claim forms, or saying that you have not completed them correctly. They apparently do not keep records of your paperwork.

- Keep copies of all your signed claim forms (a scan, photocopy or photo) before sending to AtW.
 - This is proof you signed, dated and completed them correctly.
- Keep copies of all your invoices.
 - You may need to resend them with new/copies of claim forms.
- Keep all your email correspondence with your AtW adviser.
 - If you use your work address, forward them to a home email address as you may still have outstanding payments after leaving a job.

A spreadsheet to track each invoice/claim and keeping copies of everything in an online folder service like Dropbox or Onedrive may be a good idea. That way you can quickly and easily track and re-send information/documents to AtW as needed.

If AtW claim not to have your personal data or that you have not sent it, another option is to tell your adviser that “under Article 5 of the GDPR they are required to process your personal data 'securely' which means not losing it”. Ask them to look for your "missing data" again and if they cannot find it, advise them that you will raise a data protection breach with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). It is astonishing how often "missing" data is suddenly found!

This [article by Jess Thom](#) outlines some of the complex, time consuming and stressful difficulties that can arise with AtW through no fault of the claimant.

Cancellation fees

While AtW guidance says they will normally pay support worker communication fees, in practice this depends on the reasons for the cancellation.

- If your employer cancelled a meeting at short notice but forgot to tell you or cancel your support worker then this cannot be claimed from AtW.
- If the cancellation is unavoidable, for example because you were ill at short notice, then AtW should pay the cancellation fee.

Problems with AtW

Third party consent

Unfortunately trying to deal with any complex issues or disputes with AtW by email can be extremely time consuming or impossible. Having a hearing person who can phone AtW up and discuss issues directly can result in a much quicker resolution.

AtW allows you to give consent for third parties to talk to them on your behalf - you can add as many people to this list as you like.

Disagreeing with AtW decisions

If you think AtW's decision is wrong you should raise this with the adviser you have been dealing with in the first instance.

If that is not successful, then you should ask the "AtW Reconsideration team" to review the decision. Their contact details will be in your award letter.

If that is still not successful we recommend you follow the complaints advice in the Deaf AtW website at www.deafatw.com which has information in English and BSL.

My AtW adviser is not answering my emails

Sometimes people report their AtW adviser doesn't respond to their emails. In this instance make a complaint or ask someone on your third-party contact list to phone AtW and ask for an email contact.

If at any time AtW say you have to phone for yourself and that they can't do email, make a complaint as this is a "failure to make reasonable adjustments for disability under section 20 of the Equality Act 2010". It is AtW's duty to adjust, not ours!

Self employment

Dealing with AtW for anyone who is self-employed or a company director can be even more complex than for a regular employee. AtW advisers are not knowledgeable about business or tax and HMRC doesn't understand AtW so you may need to seek independent advice and document your attempts to show what you did if issues arise later.

For sole traders (such as entertainers who do not see themselves as a business), providing a Unique Tax Reference (UTR) number and a Curriculum Vitae should be acceptable to AtW.

A self-employed person or business owner/director wishing to access AtW support is required to demonstrate their business is a "viable and legitimate concern".

HMRC will send you a UTR when you register for self-assessment or set up a limited company.

Year 1 of self employment

You will need to provide AtW with:

- UTR number and;
- A business plan showing expected **turnover** (not profit).

New businesses starting up do not have a minimum turnover (Lower Earnings Limit (LEL)) for the first 12 months. This is called a **disregard**.

Each individual is only allowed to claim one disregard for a new business every 5 years. This means if you start a second or further new business within this time, you can still apply for AtW support, but you will have to meet minimum turnover requirements from the start because you cannot claim the disregard.

Year 2 of self employment

You have to provide AtW with

- Your 1st year set of accounts
 - If you pay VAT, send your previous year's VAT returns to provide sales income if your accounts are not ready.
 - There is no minimum turnover (disregard).

Year 3 of self employment and thereafter

During year 3 and every year after that you will have to provide AtW with:

- The previous year's accounts
 - Showing turnover that meets the LEL.
 - It is worth specifically asking AtW directly what the LEL is for the current tax year.

If your business turnover is less than the Lower Earnings Limit (LEL) for two years in a row, AtW will decide the business is not viable and will stop your AtW support for that business.

Self Employment AtW renewal

As a self-employed person, when you renew your ATW support they will ask for:

- A cashflow forecast.
 - AtW advisers are not financial experts, so keep it simple - annual totals are sufficient.
- An updated third party consent form.
- A completed support worker record of tasks detailing how much support is required and what you need it for.
 - They may come back and ask you for more detail.
- 3 quotes inclusive of VAT for the types of support you require.

If you have spent less than the amount approved for the previous year, you will have to provide reasons for this because your adviser has to justify the levels of support they authorise for you.

Communication support at interview (CSI)

AtW can provide "Communication Support at Interview" (CSI) for external and internal promotion interviews. CSI cannot be used for anything else like workplace induction or some jobcentre or workfare situations.

You must apply for CSI before the interview. Normally up to two hours support is approved. If the interview will last longer than that for any reason, you will need to ask the prospective employer to confirm details and expected timescales in writing so you can send this to AtW and get approval for more hours.

AtW advisers are instructed to process CSI applications rapidly due to the limited time between notice of interview, date of interview and the time needed to find communication support. You should get a quote for a communication support professional so you can provide it quickly to AtW and have them agree to your choice of how to recruit an appropriate provider from the start.

Keep any evidence of CSI approval in writing so you can ask AtW to make the payment for the communication support provider.

Useful resources

[Deaf ATW](#)

[Deaf ATW - Self employment](#)

[DWP - ATW Staff Guide](#)

[DWP - ATW Factsheet](#)

[Third party consent form](#)

[Support worker record of tasks v21](#)

[DP222 claim form](#)

[Stop Changes 2 AtW](#)