

# Access to Work

## Fact sheet



### 1. What is Access to Work?

Access to Work (AtW) is a scheme run by the Department of Work and Pensions which provides funding to support disabled people in overcoming work-related obstacles arising from their disability or medical condition.

### 2. Am I disabled?

Under the Equality Act 2010, people are defined as being disabled if they have a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse impact on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. 'Long-term' means that the condition has lasted longer than a year. The definition includes people with long-term medical conditions.

The definition includes:

- people with chronic medical conditions e.g. epilepsy, diabetes, arthritis;
- people with musculoskeletal problems e.g. back problems, RSI;
- people with mental health issues such as depression;
- people with dyslexia or other specific learning difficulties;
- people on the autistic spectrum;
- people with cancer, multiple sclerosis or HIV, all of whom are covered from the time of diagnosis.

### 3. How do I get help?

Please tell your manager if you are disabled or have a long-term medical condition, and discuss whether you need any support. They may refer you to the University Occupational Health Service for advice or you may want to speak to the service directly in confidence. You may also speak in confidence to the Staff Disability Adviser.

Your department will provide simple equipment such as a different mouse or a monitor stand. If you need more extensive help, they may suggest you apply to AtW.

When you apply to AtW for help, they may suggest some possible support, or may send someone to assess your needs, look at your workplace and discuss possible solutions.

Support is normally agreed for three years, but if your condition or work role change, or you are experiencing difficulties in the workplace, then contact your AtW Adviser to review your needs.

### 4. Seven types of support provided by Access to Work

- Special aids and equipment e.g. assistive software and training, a height-adjustable desk; a digital voice recorder.
- Adaptations to premises and equipment

- Travel to work e.g. taxis if someone cannot use public transport due to a disability.
- Travel in work i.e. support with travel you need to do for work, such as attending conferences.
- Support worker e.g. someone to assist with the bits of your job you cannot do due to your disability.
- Communication support at interview e.g. a British Sign Language Interpreter.
- Mental health support service.

If you have unusual support needs because of your condition or your role, then do discuss these with your AtW adviser. They are open to considering unusual arrangements.

## **5. How the process works**

### **a. Your first contact with Access to Work**

- You phone Access to Work to request support.  
Telephone: **020 8426 3110**  
Textphone: **020 8426 3133** Fax: 020 8426 3134  
Email: [atwosu.london@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:atwosu.london@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk)
- Initial contact must be made by the disabled person, not by their manager.
- You will be taken through a questionnaire, which asks questions about your difficulties in the workplace. Don't worry too much about this: you will have a chance to give further detail later. The phone call normally takes 20-30 minutes.
- You may be asked for your National Insurance number and date of birth. You may also be asked for an employer contact, who will normally be your manager.
- You are sent a paper copy of your responses to sign and return.

### **b. Discussion with AtW Adviser**

- You are assigned an AtW Adviser, who contacts you to discuss your needs in more detail. If your requested support is simple, this may all be done by telephone.
- The AtW Adviser may arrange for a specialist assessor to come and visit you at work. They may also want to talk to your manager about your role.

### **c. AtW decision on support**

- AtW sends you and your manager a letter telling you which costs they will meet.
- The letter includes quotations from suppliers. AtW usually agrees to meet the lowest costs. Your department may use a different supplier, such as an existing supplier.

#### **d. Purchase of support**

- Your department purchases the equipment or training.
- Your department completes the claim forms supplied by AtW and submits them with evidence of purchase to AtW for a refund.
- For agreed travel costs, submit a claim form and receipts regularly.
- For agreed support worker costs, submit a claim form and receipts regularly.
- The total time from application to reimbursement should be within 60 working days.

#### **6. Who pays for the support I need?**

**New starters:** If you contact them before you start or during the first six weeks of employment, AtW will meet 100% approved costs.

Contact AtW as soon as you accept a job offer, to ensure that any support is in place before you start, and to reduce the costs incurred by the University.

**Existing employees:** AtW will meet some costs in full, but requires an employer contribution to equipment and adaptations to premises. A large employer like the University of Oxford is expected to pay the first £1,000 of costs and 20% costs above that threshold up to £10,000. These costs would normally be met by your department.

#### **7. Information for managers**

The Equality Act 2010 requires employers to make 'reasonable adjustments' where a disabled person is placed at a disadvantage in the workplace by a practice, criterion or policy.

If you become aware that an employee is or becomes disabled or has a long-term health condition that affects them in the workplace, discuss with them what support is needed. You may want to refer them to the University's Occupational Health Service. AtW support may be especially helpful where an employee becomes disabled and is unable to continue their previous role without adjustments.

Much support may be provided at little or no cost. Where a cost is involved, the department would normally be expected to meet this, with the individual applying to AtW where it is anticipated that equipment costs will exceed £1000 or where there are disability-related training needs. Managers are encouraged to maximise use of external funding through AtW.

AtW will only refund costs they have agreed in advance. They normally agree support for a three-year period, which is reviewed once a year or sooner if the employee's needs change.

It is your responsibility to purchase any support that has been agreed by Access to Work as soon as possible. When the support has been purchased, send the completed claim form, and original invoices and receipts or certified copies, to AtW so that they can refund costs. Claims made more than six months after costs have been incurred may not be accepted.

If an employee who has received AtW support moves to another job, and asks to take equipment to a new job, please discuss this with AtW. Normally such a request would be agreed, since the University may benefit similarly from new employees bringing existing equipment.

## 8. Examples of AtW support for staff

### ***Existing employee newly diagnosed with dyslexia***

Her difficulties include taking notes, reading lengthy reports and prioritisation.

*AtW agrees support including:*

- Digital voice recorder and TextHelp Read&Write text-to-speech software.
- Half-day training on how to use TextHelp software effectively.
- One day of work-based skills training on prioritisation from a dyslexia specialist

*Department pays equipment costs (under £1000). AtW pays training costs in full.*

### ***Academic with a chronic back problem for which he has had surgery***

*AtW agrees support including:*

- A custom-designed chair, ergonomic keyboard and accessories;
- Voice recognition software;
- Four half-day sessions of training on voice recognition software;
- Taxis to work during convalescence, while he is unable to use buses.

*Department pays equipment costs up to £1000 and 20% costs above that. AtW pays 80% equipment costs over £1000 threshold, and all training and taxi costs.*

### ***A new employee with a visual impairment***

The manager and new employee meet before the individual's start date to discuss support needs. The individual contacts AtW to arrange a support package including assistive software, equipment and an occasional note taker. This support should be in place from the individual's start date.

*Since this is a new starter, AtW will meet up to 100% approved costs. AtW agrees a set number of hours per week of note taker support, which the manager and individual can arrange when needed. They recruit a note taker through a local employment agency.*

## 9. Further information

Please see the Access to Work website: [www.direct.gov.uk/accesstowork](http://www.direct.gov.uk/accesstowork) or contact:

Occupational Health Service <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/uohs/>

Email: [enquiries@uohs.ox.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@uohs.ox.ac.uk) Tel: 01865 (2)82676

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12/2/13