

Access to Work is a scheme funded by the UK government that helps people in employment whose work may be affected by their health or a disability. The scheme provides advice to employees and employers and will pay for any changes to be made to workplace or for new equipment to cater for individual needs. The scheme is designed to help employees with a disability to start work and stay in work.

How can Access to Work help?

For autistic employees, Access to Work can often help to cover the full cost of:

- A specialist assessment
- In work support for your employee
- Training on autism for other colleagues
- Autism specific mentoring and advice for you as an employer.

Are we eligible for an Access to Work grant?

The only eligibility criteria are that your employee is over 16 years of age, in (or about to start) paid work and has a diagnosed disability, health condition or mental health condition which affects their ability to do a job.

How can Autism West Midlands help?

We can provide Specialist Assessments for autistic employees across the West Midlands. We can provide ongoing in-work support to autistic employees within Birmingham and the surrounding areas (Solihull, Sandwell, Dudley, Wolverhampton, Walsall etc.).

How do we apply for the grant?

The process for accessing an Access to Work grant is:

Step 1: Discuss with your employee and agree to make an application for the grant.

Step 2: Your employee or you (with your employee present) need to make an initial application by calling 0345 268 8489. They will need to take contact details, details of employment and National Insurance number. They will ask questions about the employee's disability and how it is affecting them at work. They will ask what support may be beneficial. If you would like Autism West Midlands to provide the support, you should state your preference at this point. The initial application call should take around 20 minutes to complete.

Step 3: The employee will receive written information taken from the initial application in the post. They will need to read, check, sign and return this to Access to Work. This is usually received a few working days after the initial phone call.

Step 4: Once Access to Work have received the returned paperwork, both you and your employee will be contacted by an advisor who will confirm the details provided and discuss what measures may have already been taken to help your employee. They may be able to make suggestions or recommendations for support. The advisor is the decision maker, they will decide whether a grant is required for support, what sort of support is needed, how much support is needed and a timescale for the support to be delivered. Again, if you want Autism West Midlands to provide the support, please discuss this with the advisor during the phone call. They may need to contact Autism West Midlands to check the cost of our support. Please feel free to give them our contact details in order to do this. You should have received this phone call within 7 working days from the return of your paperwork.

Step 5: Both you and your employee will receive a letter with a decision on the grant and with details on amounts and timescales etc. If you have requested Autism West Midlands to provide the support, it should also detail this on the letter. The process up to this point typically takes around 2 weeks.

Step 6: If we have been approved by the Access to Work advisor to provide the support, please get in contact with us to discuss and make arrangements. If the Access to Work advisor has recommended a different organisation to provide the support, then you will need to contact them. If you are unsure, please contact the Access to Work advisor to discuss.

What happens next?

Step 1: The employee will receive written information taken from the initial application in the post. They will need to read, check, sign and return this to Access to Work. This is usually received a few working days after the initial phone call.

Step 1: If Autism West Midlands have been approved to provide your support, please contact us and we will arrange for an initial meeting to get the assessment and/or support underway. Specialist assessments are usually conducted over 1-2 visits where we will meet with both you and your employee and provide a follow up written report. Ongoing support is usually provided weekly or fortnightly (however this is flexible in line with need) and typically for 1-2 hours a time.

Step 2: We will partially complete a monthly claim sheet with dates of support, number of hours and total cost. These will be sent to you (or your employee directly if that is what has been agreed) along with an invoice for our support. Both you and your employee will need to sign the claim form and send this to Access to Work to claim against the grant. Please note, the invoice will be addressed to you as the employer (or to the employee if that is what has been agreed) and you (or your employee) are responsible for the payment of this invoice and claiming against the grant.

Step 3: We will continue to provide support as needed. You will need to be aware of the conditions of the grant, specifically the period of time for which the grant runs and the number of hours of support available. If we deliver support outside of these, you may be unable to claim this back from Access to Work. If the grant is due to run out, but it is felt ongoing support is needed, a further claim will need to be made.

Step 4: We will work closely with you to keep you informed of progress with support and, where required, attend review meetings. We may need to discuss with you possible reasonable adjustments required to help your employee complete their work and if/ how they can be implemented. The support works best when we can help you and your employee build a strong working relationship with open lines of communication. We always work towards the employee being independent of our support and will aim to phase support out over time.

Why choose us?

Across the West Midlands, we are the only autism specific provider of in-work support. Established in 2001, we have extensive knowledge of helping autistic individuals to find work, and of providing support in the workplace. Our staff are highly trained and experienced. We take a person centred and autism specific approach.