

WORKPLACE SUPPORT • ARTICLE 6

ACCESS TO WORK AND ADDITIONAL WORKPLACE SUPPORT

A COMPASSIONATE EXPLORATION

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Having a disability, long-term health condition or mental health condition should never prevent someone from having a successful and fulfilling career. While employers have a responsibility to make reasonable adjustments, sometimes additional support is needed to help an individual carry out their role effectively.

In the UK, one of the most valuable sources of support is the Access to Work scheme. Despite helping thousands of people every year, many employees and employers are still unaware of what it offers or mistakenly believe it is only available for people with physical disabilities.

In reality, Access to Work can provide practical and financial support for people with a wide range of physical, mental health and neurodevelopmental conditions, helping individuals remain in work, start employment or become self-employed.

Understanding what support is available can make the difference between simply coping at work and truly thriving.

What Is Access to Work?

Access to Work is a government-funded programme that provides practical support for disabled people and those with long-term health conditions when their disability affects their ability to work.

The scheme is designed to remove workplace barriers by funding support that goes beyond what an employer would normally be expected to provide through reasonable adjustments.

The aim is simple:

To help people stay in work, return to work or start work by providing the additional support they need to perform their role effectively.

Access to Work recognises that removing barriers benefits not only the employee but also employers, colleagues and the wider economy.

Who Can Apply?

Access to Work may be available if you:

Have a disability.

Have a long-term physical health condition.

Experience a mental health condition.

Are neurodivergent.

Are self-employed.

Work full-time or part-time.

Are about to start a new job.

Are returning to work following illness.

Are undertaking paid work.

Support is based on how your condition affects your ability to work rather than the diagnosis itself.

Two people with the same diagnosis may receive very different recommendations depending on their individual needs and job role.

Conditions That May Be Supported

Access to Work can support individuals living with:

ADHD

Autism

Dyslexia

Dyspraxia

Dyscalculia

Anxiety disorders

Depression

PTSD

Bipolar disorder

OCD

Hearing impairment

Visual impairment

Long COVID

Chronic fatigue syndrome

Fibromyalgia

Multiple sclerosis

Arthritis

Physical disabilities

Learning disabilities

Many other long-term health conditions

The focus is always on reducing workplace barriers.

What Support Can Be Provided?

The type of support varies depending on the individual's circumstances.

Examples include:

Specialist Equipment

Funding may be available for equipment such as:

Ergonomic furniture
Specialist keyboards
Adjustable desks
Screen-reading software
Speech-to-text software
Amplified telephones
Specialist lighting
Assistive technology

These tools can improve comfort, accessibility and productivity.

Support Workers

Some people benefit from additional human support during their working day.

A support worker may assist with:

Organisation

Planning

Prioritisation

Administrative tasks

Communication

Reading or note-taking

Executive functioning

Time management

Support workers are particularly valuable for many people with ADHD, autism or sensory processing differences.

Mental Health Support

Employees experiencing mental health difficulties may receive specialist workplace support to help them manage the impact of their condition while remaining in employment.

This may include practical strategies to improve confidence, communication and workplace wellbeing.

Workplace Assessments

An assessor may review an employee's role and recommend adjustments that would improve accessibility and reduce barriers.

These recommendations help employers understand what practical changes may be beneficial.

Travel Support

For some individuals, travelling independently presents significant challenges.

Support may be available where public transport is inaccessible or unsuitable because of a person's disability or health condition.

Communication Support

Employees with hearing or communication difficulties may receive support such as:

British Sign Language interpreters

Lipspeakers

Communication support workers

Specialist equipment

This helps ensure equal access to meetings, training and workplace communication.

How Access to Work Differs from Reasonable Adjustments

It is important to understand that Access to Work does not replace an employer's responsibility to make reasonable adjustments.

Employers are still expected to provide adjustments that are reasonable within the workplace.

Access to Work provides additional support where needs go beyond those responsibilities.

For example:

An employer may provide flexible working hours or a quieter workspace.

Access to Work may then fund specialist software, a support worker or workplace coaching if these are required because of the employee's disability.

The two forms of support work together.

The Importance of Individual Assessments

Every person's experience is different.

Someone with ADHD may need support with organisation and planning.

Another person with ADHD may benefit more from a quieter working environment and structured supervision.

Likewise, two autistic employees may have completely different sensory, communication and workplace needs.

Effective support always starts by asking:

What barriers are you experiencing?

What helps you work at your best?

What adjustments have helped before?

What support would make the greatest difference?

Support should never be based solely on diagnosis.

Other Sources of Workplace Support

Access to Work is only one part of the wider support available.

Employees may also benefit from:

Occupational Health

Occupational health professionals assess how health affects work and recommend practical adjustments to support employees and employers.

Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs)

Many organisations provide confidential services including:

Counselling

Financial advice

Legal guidance

Wellbeing support

Telephone helplines

These services can often be accessed free of charge by employees.

Workplace Wellbeing Initiatives

Many employers now offer:

Mental health first aiders

Wellbeing champions

Peer support groups

Flexible working arrangements

Mindfulness sessions

Health and wellbeing workshops

These initiatives help create healthier workplace cultures.

Coaching and Mentoring

Some individuals benefit from workplace coaching to improve:

Confidence

Leadership skills

Executive functioning

Communication

Organisation

Career progression

Coaching focuses on building practical strategies and maximising strengths.

The Benefits of Early Support

Seeking support early often prevents small challenges from becoming much larger problems.

When barriers remain unaddressed, employees may experience:

Increased stress

Burnout

Reduced confidence

Poor performance

Sickness absence

Leaving employment unnecessarily

Early intervention helps employees remain productive while protecting their health and wellbeing.

Benefits for Employers

Supporting employees benefits organisations as much as individuals.

Employers often see:

Improved productivity

Better staff retention

Reduced recruitment costs

Lower sickness absence

Higher morale

Increased employee engagement

Greater diversity

More inclusive workplace cultures

Investing in support is an investment in people.

When employees feel valued and equipped to succeed, organisations benefit from their skills, experience and commitment.

Final Thoughts

No one should have to choose between their health and their career. With the right support, many people who face physical, mental health or neurodevelopmental challenges can flourish in the workplace.

Access to Work, reasonable adjustments and supportive employers all play an important role in creating workplaces where everyone has the opportunity to succeed.

The most effective workplaces recognise that people do not all work in the same way. By removing barriers, providing practical support and focusing on individual strengths, organisations create environments where employees can contribute with confidence, dignity and purpose.

A truly inclusive workplace is one that recognises ability, not limitation, and understands that when people are supported to thrive, everyone benefits.

A gentle reminder

This resource offers general information and reflection. It is not a diagnosis or a substitute for individual medical or therapeutic care. If you are worried about your safety or someone else's, seek urgent professional support.

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