



Understanding Access to Work - UK Guide

**A Practical Guide for Neurodivergent
People in Employment in the UK.**

**Support to help you thrive at work,
with or without diagnosis.**

What is Access to Work?

Access to Work is a government scheme providing practical, psychological, or financial support to disabled or neurodivergent people in employment. It's designed to help you work comfortably and sustainably, removing barriers that might make your job harder than it needs to be.



Importantly, Access to Work does not affect your salary or benefits in any way. It exists purely to help level the playing field, ensuring you have the same opportunities to succeed at work as anyone else.

The support is tailored to your individual needs and circumstances.

Whether you need equipment, coaching, or workplace adjustments, Access to Work can help fund the solutions that make your working life easier and more manageable.

You do not need a formal diagnosis to apply.



You simply need to describe how work can be difficult for you. This is about your lived experience, not medical labels.

Who Can Apply for Support

Access to Work is designed to support a wide array of individuals in various employment situations.

Employees

This includes anyone in paid employment, whether full-time, part-time, temporary, or on a fixed-term contract. It covers agency workers and those in supported employment settings, working more than 1 hour per week.

Self-Employed & Freelancers

Individuals who work for themselves, including sole traders, contractors, and business owners. There may be some criteria considered such as you need to be earning over £6,500 per year (or evidence you are working towards this with a business plan)

Remote & Hybrid Workers

People working from home, in a hybrid model, or from various locations. Support can cover adjustments needed for your home workspace to ensure comfort and productivity.

Apprentices & Trainees

Those undertaking an apprenticeship, traineeship, or any recognised training programme that involves work experience. Support can help you succeed in your vocational journey.

Students on Placements

Students on a work placement or internship that is an essential part of their course, even if it is an unpaid role, may also qualify for support.

Starting a New Job or Changing Roles

You can apply if you're about to start a new job, are changing roles within your current company, or are returning to work after a break.

Access to Work supports people with a wide spectrum of health conditions . This includes, but is not limited to:

- **Neurodivergent conditions such as ADHD, Autism, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, and Tourette's Syndrome.**
- **Mental health conditions like anxiety, depression, and PTSD.**
- **Chronic illnesses, including ME/CFS, fibromyalgia, and long COVID.**
- **Physical disabilities, sensory impairments (e.g., visual or hearing impairments), and mobility challenges.**
- **Learning disabilities and difficulties.**

☐ **Your eligibility is based on the practical difficulties you experience in your job, not the name of a specific condition or a formal diagnosis.**



What Support Can Be Funded

Access to Work can fund a wide range of support tailored to your specific needs. Here are some examples of what's commonly funded for neurodivergent employees:



Workplace Needs Assessment or bespoke Disability Impact Training

A comprehensive evaluation of your needs by a specialist assessor who recommends appropriate support or training created specifically for you.



Specialist Coaching

Neurodivergent coaching focused on executive functioning, organisation, and sustainable working strategies

If you would like to request Neurodiversity coaching, put specialist Neurodiversity or ADHD Coach in the Support Worker Section and fill in once per week on the application form.



Assistive Technology

Speech-to-text software, organisation apps, timers, mind-mapping tools, and other helpful technology



Sensory Aids

Noise-cancelling headphones, desk dividers, lighting adjustments, and other sensory supports



Support Workers & Virtual Assistants

Job coaches or support workers to help you navigate workplace challenges



Transport Support

Funding for alternative transport if public transport is difficult or overwhelming



Important: You can choose your own support providers. You are not required to use those automatically suggested by Access to Work.

Disability Impact Training: Fostering Understanding and Support

Access to Work doesn't just provide individual support; it can also fund bespoke Disability Impact Training for your managers or colleagues. This invaluable training is designed to educate your team about your specific needs and challenges, fostering a more informed and supportive work environment.

Tailored to Your Needs

The training is completely bespoke, focusing on your unique disability or condition and how it impacts you in the workplace. It provides practical insights and strategies for your team.

Building Empathy & Awareness

This training helps managers and colleagues gain a deeper understanding of your lived experience, promoting empathy, challenging misconceptions, and encouraging supportive interactions.

Your Choice, Your Control

Crucially, this training is entirely optional. You decide if you want your team to receive it, ensuring your comfort and privacy are always prioritised.

Creating a Truly Inclusive Workplace

By equipping your colleagues with the right knowledge, this training contributes to a workplace culture where everyone feels valued, understood, and supported, leading to greater productivity and well-being.

Investing in disability impact training is a proactive step towards building a workplace where neurodivergent individuals, and those with disabilities, can thrive without unnecessary barriers. It transforms workplace dynamics by shifting from reactive adjustments to proactive understanding.



Remember: This training is solely for the benefit of creating a more supportive environment for you. Your comfort and decision on whether your team receives this training are paramount.

How support provided can help

Access to Work recognises that neurodivergent people often face specific challenges in workplace environments. The support available is designed to address these difficulties in practical, meaningful ways. These are some ways Neurodiversity coaching, equipment, software and Workplace accommodations can help:

Executive Functioning

Support with planning, organisation, memory, time management, and task prioritisation

Reducing Overwhelm

Tools and strategies to prevent burnout and manage workload sustainably

Sensory Adjustments

Modifications to noise levels, lighting, and workspace setup for comfort

Communication Support

Help with confidence, processing time, and expressing needs clearly

Sustainable Working

Coaching and tools that help tasks feel manageable rather than draining

Social Interaction Support

Help with workplace relationships, team dynamics, and social communication

Routine and Structure

Support with creating predictable workflows and managing change

Energy Management

Strategies for managing fatigue and maintaining consistent performance

Confidence Building

Support with self-advocacy, imposter syndrome, and workplace confidence

You don't have to be struggling "badly enough" for support to be justified. Comfort matters. You deserve to work in conditions that allow you to do your best without unnecessary strain or stress.

How Much Funding Is Available



Generous Annual Support

Support can be funded up to a maximum annual amount, typically **£60,000 or more**, updated each financial year to cover most neurodivergent support needs.



Full Coverage for Most Needs

For most neurodivergent support, funding is provided **in full**, with some elements requiring employer contribution, removing financial burden from you. Most support requires no contribution.



Needs-Based Approach

Funding is needs-based, ensuring you have access to the appropriate coaching, equipment, or adjustments required to work well and sustainably.



Flexible Payment Options

Funding can be provided upfront or reimbursed, with various payment arrangements to make the process as smooth as possible for both individuals and employers.





The Application Process



Apply Online

Visit gov.uk/access-to-work and complete the online application form with basic details



Provide Information

Share basic information about your employment and the difficulties you experience



No Diagnosis Needed

If you don't have a diagnosis, write I have difficulties but no diagnosis, explain how these affect you in the workplace, what you suspect may be going on or if you are on any waiting lists for assessment.



Phone Assessment

You'll be offered a phone assessment to talk about how work affects you



Support Plan Created

A support plan is developed and agreed based on your conversation



Support Begins

You select your support providers and your support starts



This is a conversation, not a test. You do not need to prove your struggles. The assessor is there to understand your needs and help you access appropriate support. Applications can take around 6 months to process.

You do not need a formal diagnosis to apply.

Information You'll Need for the Form

Gathering the right information before you start your application will make the process smoother and less stressful. Don't worry if you don't have everything immediately, you can often add details later.

1

Job Details

Your job title and workplace address (or home address if you work remotely)

2

Employer Information

Contact details for your employer or HR department

3

National Insurance Number

Your NI number for identification purposes

4

Brief Explanation

A short description of the difficulties you experience at work, focus on effects, not labels

Remember: **diagnosis is optional**. An effects-based explanation is completely acceptable. Focus on describing how work feels for you and what makes certain tasks challenging.



Health Conditions & Diagnosis Information

When applying for Access to Work, providing information about any health conditions you experience helps the assessor understand your specific needs and how they impact your work environment. This section clarifies what information is helpful to share, emphasizing that a formal diagnosis is not always required.



Diagnosed Conditions

Please include any health conditions you have received a formal diagnosis for. This provides a clear starting point for understanding your established needs and the types of support that have proven effective in the past.



Self-Identified Conditions

It's equally important to mention any conditions you identify with, even if you haven't received a formal diagnosis. Your lived experience is valid, and these self-identified traits can significantly affect your working life. Describe the difficulties you experience, and what you suspect may be causing them.



Waiting Lists for Assessment

If you are currently on a waiting list for an assessment or diagnosis, please provide these details. This demonstrates a proactive approach to understanding your neurotype and informs the assessor about your potential future needs.

The goal is to create a comprehensive picture of your workplace challenges and how support can best be tailored to you. Focus on describing the effects these conditions have on your ability to work effectively and comfortably.



No formal diagnosis is strictly required. Access to Work focuses on how your conditions affect you in the workplace, not on a label. If you don't have a diagnosis, simply describe your difficulties and suspected conditions thoroughly.

Your Job Role & Responsibilities

Providing a clear overview of your job role and daily responsibilities is crucial for the Access to Work assessor.



Your Job Role and Title

Clearly state your job title (e.g., "Software Engineer," "Marketing Manager") and a brief description of what your role entails within your organization.



Key Responsibilities and Duties

List your primary duties and responsibilities. Focus on the core tasks you are expected to perform regularly, such as "managing client accounts," "developing code," or "creating marketing content."



Main Skills Required

Highlight the essential skills needed for your role, whether they are technical skills (e.g., "proficiency in Python," "data analysis") or soft skills (e.g., "problem-solving," "communication").



Typical Daily/Weekly Tasks

Describe what a typical day or week looks like. Include activities like "attending team meetings," "responding to emails," "working on project deliverables," or "client consultations."



Specific Challenges Within Your Role

Identify any particular aspects of your role that you find especially challenging due to your neurodivergence or condition. This could be anything from "difficulty with open-plan offices" to "struggling with time management for complex projects."

Access to Work If You're Self-Employed

Self-employed people are fully eligible for Access to Work, the scheme isn't just for employees. Whether you're a sole trader, freelancer, or running your own business, you can apply as long as you meet the standard eligibility criteria. This support can be crucial in ensuring your work environment is fully accessible and enables you to thrive.

You Are Eligible



Self-employed people aged 16+ who live and work in Great Britain can apply. You must have a disability, health condition, or neurodivergent condition that affects your ability to work. There is no minimum number of hours you need to work to qualify for support.

What You'll Need: Your UTR Number



Unlike employed applicants who provide employer details, self-employed applicants must provide their Unique Taxpayer Reference (UTR) number when applying. This is how the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) verifies your self-employment status, so have it ready.

What Can Be Funded



The same comprehensive support available to employees applies: specialist equipment, ergonomic software, workplace adaptations, support workers (e.g., a mental health coach), coaching, and assistance with travel to work. However, Access to Work cannot fund general business start-up costs or day-to-day running expenses.

No Employer Contribution Required



For employed applicants, their employers may be asked to contribute a percentage to the costs of recommended support. Self-employed individuals are exempt from this requirement; you are not required to pay an employer contribution, meaning the full grant can cover eligible costs.

How to Apply



Apply online at gov.uk/access-to-work or by calling 0800 121 7479 (Monday to Friday, 9am–5pm). Ensure you have your UTR, detailed information about how your condition affects your work, and specifics about the support you believe you need ready before you begin.

Starting a New Business



If you are in the process of becoming self-employed, you can proactively apply up to 12 weeks before you officially start your business. Access to Work is designed to support your transition into self-employment, helping you get set up for success from day one.

Understanding Your Specific Difficulties

Providing a clear and comprehensive overview of your specific difficulties is key to a successful Access to Work application. This section outlines common challenges and how they might manifest in the workplace, particularly for individuals with conditions like ADHD.

Executive Functioning Challenges

- | | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| • Self-awareness | • Motivation | • Focus |
| • Organisation | • Administration | • Emotional regulation |
| • Impulsivity | • Inattention | • Hyperactivity |
| • Problem solving | • Memory | |

These difficulties often translate into specific workplace challenges:

How These Show Up at Work

- Diary & inbox management
- Forgetting meetings, instructions or tasks
- Administrative tasks, especially for important areas like tax, invoicing, or time tracking
- Managing your time
- Burning out by taking too much on
- Struggling to meet deadlines or finish tasks
- Communication with colleagues, especially re feedback / management
- Travel, sensory overload, being easily distracted by sounds etc
- Breaking tasks down without becoming overwhelmed
- Struggling to work from certain locations or at certain times
- Forgetting to eat or take breaks due to hyper-focusing
- Following instructions
- Setting clear expectations with others

Example Wording

Navigating the Access to Work application requires clear articulation of your functional challenges and the specific adjustments that would help you thrive. Below are sample phrases which you can adapt to describe your own needs.

Describing Challenges

- I experience difficulty maintaining focus in busy or noisy environments, which can reduce my productivity and increase stress.
- I find it challenging to break tasks down into manageable steps without guidance, which impacts my ability to meet deadlines consistently.
- I often need additional processing time during verbal communication, especially in meetings or fast-paced discussions.

Describing the Impact

- Without support, I may become overwhelmed or fatigued, which affects the quality and consistency of my work performance.
- My ability to stay organised can decrease without structured tools or guidance, resulting in delays or reduced clarity in completing tasks.

Describing Support Needed

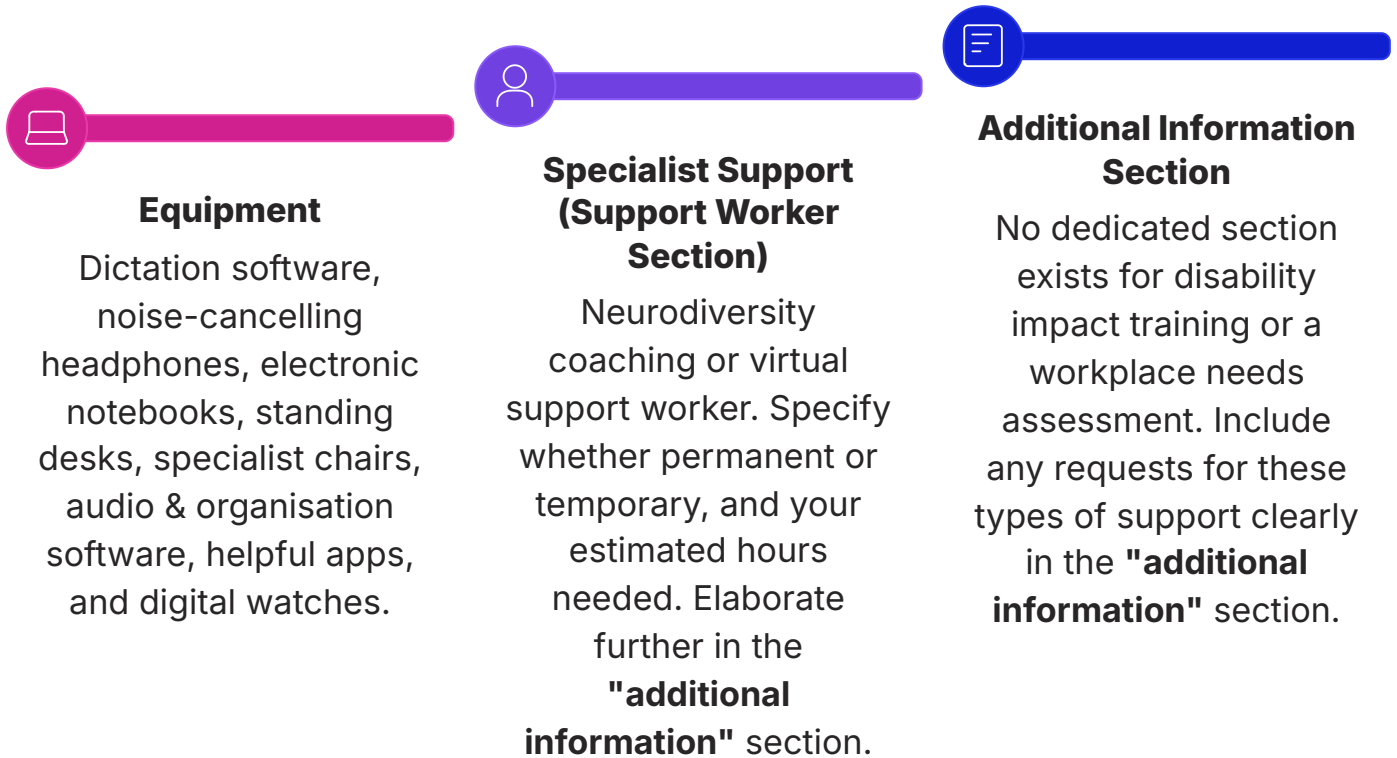
- Regular workplace coaching sessions would help me develop strategies for structuring tasks, managing workload, and communicating effectively.
- Noise-cancelling equipment or access to a quieter workspace would allow me to maintain concentration and reduce sensory stress.
- Access to assistive software (e.g., text-to-speech or mind-mapping tools) would help me organise information and manage tasks more effectively.

Neurodiversity Coaching and Virtual Assistant Support

Neurodiversity coaching can provide tailored strategies and tools to help individuals manage executive function challenges, improve communication, and build self-advocacy skills. Additionally, virtual assistant support can be crucial for task management, organisation, and administrative duties, freeing up mental energy for core job responsibilities and reducing cognitive overload.

Navigating Support Options

The application guides you through sections covering equipment, support worker, and transport. If you're unsure what you need, select **"I don't know"** - an assessor will discuss your needs during your phone assessment.



Benefits of Support

Specialist ADHD Coach

- Learn how ADHD affects you and receive personalised strategies
- Stay accountable to learning and applying new strategies
- Help with calendar, inbox, time, and people management
- Develop workplace coping skills

Virtual Assistant

- Support with executive functioning tasks
- Help manage inbox, diary, schedule appointments, and reminders
- Regular support calls to organise daily tasks

If you would like to request Neurodiversity coaching put specialist Neurodiversity or ADHD Coach in the Support Worker Section and fill in once per week.

Self-Reflection: What Do I Find Difficult?

This self-reflection template can help you identify and articulate the challenges you face at work, whether or not you have a diagnosis. Tick anything that applies to you:

Initiation & Completion

- Difficulty initiating work even when you know what needs doing
- Struggling to complete things once started, or losing motivation partway through
- Finding it hard to shift focus from one activity to another

Sensory & Focus

- Being affected by noise, lighting, movement, or other environmental factors
- Forgetting what you've been asked to do or losing track of multi-step processes

Structure & Planning

- Losing track of time, underestimating how long tasks will take
- Keeping track of files, emails, deadlines, or materials

Communication & Energy

- Difficulty explaining what you need or advocating for yourself
- Feeling drained, burnt out, or unable to cope with demands

Self-Reflection: How Does This Show Up?

Once you've identified what you find difficult, the next step is to describe *how* these difficulties show up in your actual working day. This helps you communicate your needs more clearly.

"I lose track of tasks without visual reminders or lists to keep me on track"

"Open office noise makes it really hard to concentrate for more than short periods"

"I forget what was said in meetings unless I have written notes to refer back to"

"Switching between emails and my main work constantly disrupts my focus and productivity"

Write Your Real Examples

Think about a typical work day or week. When do you notice these difficulties? What situations make them worse? What happens as a result?

Your examples might include:

- Specific times of day when you struggle
- Particular types of tasks that feel overwhelming
- Environments or situations that increase difficulty
- The impact on your work output or wellbeing

Be honest and specific. The more clearly you can describe your experience, the better the support you'll receive.



If You Don't Have a Diagnosis

Many people worry that they can't access support without a formal diagnosis. This is not true. You can absolutely apply to Access to Work without a diagnosis, and many people do.

The scheme is designed to support people based on the difficulties they experience, not on medical labels. What matters is *how work affects you*, not what a doctor has written on a form.

When you're filling in the application, you'll see options for people without a diagnosis. Selecting "**I don't know**" or "**I have difficulties but no diagnosis**" is completely valid and acceptable.

A report from your therapist, GP or other professional can support your application, although it is not mandatory.

Focus on Effects

Describe what's difficult and how it impacts your work, not what you think you might have

The Assessor Will Help

During your phone assessment, the advisor will guide you through exploring your needs

Effect-Based Language Examples

"I forget steps in processes unless information is written down clearly for me to refer to"

"Loud or busy environments make it hard for me to focus for long periods"

"I struggle to prioritise tasks when I have multiple things to do at once"

"Unexpected changes to plans or routines make me feel overwhelmed and anxious"

Notice how these statements describe *experiences* rather than conditions. This is exactly what Access to Work needs to understand.

Taking the Next Step

You Deserve This Support

Access to Work exists to make your job fair, sustainable, and accessible.

You're not asking for special treatment, you're asking for the adjustments that help you do your job as well as you're capable of doing it.

Many neurodivergent people report that Access to Work support has been transformational, helping them feel more confident, less exhausted, and better able to contribute their skills and talents.

1

Review Your Self-Reflection Notes

Use the exercises in this guide to identify your needs clearly

2

Gather Your Information

Collect your employment details, NI number, and employer information

3

Complete the Online Form

Visit gov.uk/access-to-work and fill in the application

4

Prepare for Your Phone Assessment

Think about how to describe your experiences in your own words

5

Choose Your Support Providers

Research and select the providers that feel right for you

You're Not Alone in This

Thousands of neurodivergent people across the UK use Access to Work to help them thrive in employment. You're joining a community of people who have recognised that working comfortably matters, and that asking for support is a sign of self-awareness, not weakness.

Many people report feeling anxious about applying, worried that they're not "disabled enough" or that their difficulties aren't significant. If you're feeling this way, please know: **your needs are valid**. If something about work is difficult for you, that difficulty matters.

 Diagnosis is optional	 The phone assessment is supportive, not a test	 You choose your own providers
 Most support is fully funded	 Comfort at work matters	 Support is transformational Many people find Access to Work support life-changing, helping them thrive rather than just survive at work.

Support isn't just for people in crisis. It's for anyone who would benefit from adjustments, equipment, or coaching that makes work feel more manageable and less draining. You deserve to use your energy for your actual work, not for constantly struggling against barriers that could be removed.

Access to Work is designed to help you succeed. It exists because the government recognises that disabled and neurodivergent people bring valuable skills and perspectives to the workplace and that reasonable adjustments help everyone benefit from those contributions.

Your next step: Visit gov.uk/access-to-work when you're ready. Take your time, use this guide to prepare, and remember that you deserve support to help you work sustainably and well.

What Happens After You Submit an Access to Work Form (UK)

After meticulously preparing and submitting your Access to Work application, understanding the subsequent steps is crucial for managing expectations. The process involves several stages, and it's important to be aware that wait times can be significant, often extending to **six months or more** in some cases. Patience is key as your application moves through the system.

Application Received



Once you've successfully submitted your form, you should expect to receive a confirmation via email, text, or letter. While this typically happens promptly, occasional delays in sending confirmation can occur. At this initial stage, no further action is usually required from your side.

Typical Wait Time: This stage can span several weeks to a few months before progression.

Adviser Contact



An Access to Work adviser will contact you, most commonly by phone or email. They will delve into details about your job role, your health condition or disability, and specifically what support you believe would enable you to perform your duties more effectively at work.

Typical Wait Time: This phase can take several months, with many applicants currently reporting waits of six months or even longer.

Assessment (If Needed)



Not every application requires a formal assessment. However, if deemed necessary, a specialist may engage in a detailed discussion with you, review your job tasks, and suggest specific equipment or other forms of support that could be beneficial.

Typical Wait Time: This usually occurs after the initial adviser contact and can add an additional few weeks or months to the overall timeline.

Decision & Support Offer



The final stage involves receiving a formal letter or email outlining the approved support. This will detail the specific equipment or assistance you will receive, along with information on how the payment and procurement processes will be managed.

Typical Wait Time: This can take weeks to months following the completion of any necessary assessments.

While the process can be lengthy, each step is designed to ensure that the support provided is tailored to your individual needs, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and productive working environment.

How to Access Your Access to Work Support: Coaching & Support Workers

Once your Access to Work application has been approved and you've received your award letter, the next crucial step is to activate the support. For coaching and support worker assistance, the process differs slightly depending on whether you are employed or self-employed.

If You Are Employed

Your employer plays a key role in facilitating coaching or support worker arrangements.

01	02	03
Review Your Award Letter Carefully read your Access to Work award letter to understand the specifics of the approved support, including the type of coaching or support worker, the number of hours, and any other relevant details.	Inform Your Employer Share your award letter with your manager or an agreed contact within your organisation. Discuss the approved support and agree on who will be responsible for arranging and overseeing the support worker or coach.	Provider Onboarding If you haven't already selected a provider, do so at this stage. Many providers will require you to create an online account or portal for scheduling and communication. This can often be done with assistance from your employer.
04	05	
Book & Attend Sessions Coordinate directly with your coach or support worker to schedule sessions according to your award and work needs. Make sure to attend all scheduled sessions to maximise the benefit.	Invoice & Payment Process After each session, your coach or support worker will submit an invoice. This invoice will typically be sent to your employer (or the agreed contact) for their approval and signature before being forwarded to Access to Work for payment. Access to Work will then reimburse the provider directly.	

If You Are Self-Employed

As a self-employed individual, you have more direct control over arranging your support.

01	02
Consult Your Award Letter Thoroughly review your Access to Work award letter to confirm the details of your approved coaching or support worker provision, including the scope and duration.	Select & Contact Provider Choose a suitable support worker or coach. It's often beneficial to have an initial consultation to ensure they meet your needs. Set up any necessary online accounts with their platform.
03	04
Arrange Sessions Directly You will be responsible for scheduling your sessions directly with your chosen provider, managing your own calendar and ensuring consistency with the approved award.	Invoice Approval & Submission Following each session, the coach or support worker will send you an invoice. You will need to approve or sign off these invoices before submitting them to Access to Work for their review and direct payment to the provider.

FREE A2W APPLICATION SUPPORT AVAILABLE

Flourish with Neurodiversity can guide you through the process, and through A2W funding can provide flexible coaching/consulting sessions and support for adults with Autism, ADHD, AuDHD and Tourettes Syndrome.

Navigating the initial Access to Work application process can feel daunting. That's why Flourish with Neurodiversity is here to offer you free, no-obligation support through this first stage. Our aim is to help you successfully apply for the support you need, without any pressure to work with us or select us as your provider.

Should you decide that our services align with your needs later in the process, we would be delighted to provide ongoing support tailored to you.

For more information, please visit our website:

flourishwithneurodiversity.com

or contact us via email at:

info@flourishwithneurodiversity.com

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