

Access to Work Simplified:

A 5-Step Guide for the Self-Employed

By Get Ahead – Helping you turn your Access to Work grant into real, practical support.

If you're self-employed and living with a disability, long-term health condition, or neurodivergence (like ADHD, autism, or dyslexia), the UK Government's Access to Work (AtW) scheme can help you get the support you need to thrive in business.

Access to Work is a grant - not a loan - designed to cover the extra costs of working that arise because of a disability or health condition.

This guide breaks down the process into five simple steps, explains what to expect, and shows how services like Get Ahead can fit into your Access to Work plan.

Step 1

Understand What Access to Work Covers

Access to Work provides financial support for adjustments that help you do your job effectively. As a self-employed person, you could get funding for:

- Support Workers or Virtual Assistants – sometimes called a job aide – to help with admin, communication, planning, or focus
- Specialist job coaching - productivity or executive-function coaching and/or coping strategies for ADHD, autism, or mental health
- Assistive technology - such as dictation software, screen readers, ergonomic equipment that address specific disability barriers
- Travel support - if you can't use public transport
- Communication support - interpreters or note-takers

The key test: it must directly relate to overcoming a work-related disability barrier, not general business growth.

Step 2

Apply for Access to Work

You can apply online at www.gov.uk/access-to-work or by calling 0800 121 7479.

You'll need to provide:

- Your National Insurance number
- Details about your business (name, nature of work, trading start date)
- Description of your health condition or disability
- How it affects your work day-to-day
- The kind of support you think you need

There is a minimum annual turnover threshold for the self-employed, which in 2025 is £6500; for new businesses, there is a three-year grace period, BUT you may need to provide a business plan and three-year financial forecast.

You don't have to know exactly what help you need - your adviser can help identify suitable options.

Step 3

Assessment and Approval

After applying, you'll be assigned an Access to Work Case Manager, who decides the award. The Case Manager may arrange a Workplace Assessment, either by phone, video call, or in person, to discuss your work setup and what support might help. The Workplace Assessment is carried out by an independent company and not Access to Work itself; this assessment can be constructive if



you're unsure what support you need, as the WP assessor will make recommendations. This can really help strengthen your case as the workplace assessor's report must evidence why the item is required. You can mention that you'd like:

- Admin or organisational support (such as a job aide, VA or support worker),
- Assistive technology or specialist equipment,
- Specialist coaching, or
- Help managing Access to Work paperwork.

Your assessor will recommend what's approved and what proportion of the cost AtW will cover.

Typical timelines: Access to Work aims to respond within a few months, but delays are common and can extend far beyond official targets, particularly in busy periods or more complex needs. We're hearing of cases where this is stretching beyond a year. **So, apply early.**

Step 4

Use Your Funding Wisely

Once through the approval process, you'll receive a confirmation letter with:

- Your award details (what's covered and how much),
- How to claim reimbursements,
- Time lines for using your support, and
- The reference number for invoices and forms.

You need to carefully review the award details, as the clock starts ticking. The key things to note are:

- You must start using the awarded support within 13 weeks.
- If you disagree with the details of the award you must request a reconsideration within 4 weeks.
- You can then hire the approved support (like a Virtual Assistant) and start claiming the costs or purchase approved items such as technology.

For admin or organisational support:

- Ask your provider to give itemised invoices showing the hours and tasks completed.
- Keep all receipts and timesheets for DWP audit purposes.
- Claims are usually made monthly and can be made using paper forms (with wet signatures!) or using the online portal (photo ID is the easiest way to set this up).

Some approved items, like ergonomic equipment, can be costly. If you buy them and wait for the claim to process, you might be out of pocket for a while. To avoid this, you can use a pro forma invoice, allowing the supplier to invoice ATW directly. However, this method may take longer than purchasing directly.

Tip: Get Ahead VA provides DWP-ready invoices and timesheets, making the process quick and compliant.



Step 5

Keep Your Support Sustainable

Access to Work awards typically last up to three years (sometimes less).

You'll receive a renewal reminder before your grant ends.

To make sure your support continues smoothly:

- Keep your paperwork organised
- Review what's working every few months
- Let the DWP know if your business or needs change
- Ask your support provider for a short progress summary when renewing

A good support provider will help you stay compliant and make renewals easier.

Extra Tips for Self-Employed Applicants

Apply as soon as you start or plan to start working - don't wait until problems build up.

- If you are setting up a new business, apply four weeks before your planned start date as AtW have a fast-track service, but you must apply BEFORE you start trading.
- Be clear about how your condition affects your work tasks.
- Ask for communication in writing if phone calls are difficult.
- Keep a simple folder or spreadsheet to track your AtW paperwork.

How Get Ahead Can Help

We help self-employed and neurodivergent professionals use their Access to Work funding effectively.

Our team provides:

- Admin and organisational support (funded as a Support Worker role)
- Help with Access to Work paperwork and reimbursements
- Productivity coaching and structure building
- Clear reports and timesheets for DWP claims

We make the admin manageable, so you can focus on running your business.

Learn more: www.getaheadva.com/access-to-work

Book a free 15-minute consultation: info@getaheadva.com

Disclaimer Get Ahead is an independent support provider. We are not affiliated with or endorsed by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). All information in this guide is for general understanding and may change — please refer to GOV.UK for official guidance.