Response to the Pathways to Work consultation

By Business Disability Forum, June 2025

# About Business Disability Forum and our response

Business Disability Forum (BDF) is a business membership organisation, representing over 600 businesses. We work with businesses, Government, and disabled people to improve the life experiences of disabled employees and consumers by removing barriers to inclusion. We are focussed on making policy as practical as possible to businesses so they can increase inclusion for disabled people in how they operate. Our policy and research team works with our member businesses, and the disabled people who work in and with them, to discuss and debate policy proposals, identify the challenges, and propose as practical solutions as possible that work for everyone.

We have focused on chapter 4 of the consultation, which is the section focussed on the future model and delivery of Access to Work. Business Disability Forum has an Access to Work Forum of over 150 employers. We engaged this forum to inform our response to the consultation. During this consultation period, to gather insights specific to the consultation questions, BDF held the following:

* **Three discussion groups** – with a total of **52 employers** who use Access to Work in their organisations.
* **Eight depth conversations** – with a total of **8 professionals** using and/or managing employees who use Access to Work.

We have tried to show how much employers are already doing to support disabled people, but that they want their efforts to be matched by that of the government where Access to Work and making adjustments are concerned. Employers are increasingly removing barriers to social care, individuals’ financial situations (‘charge your devices days’ and managers doing employees’ laundry, for example), and inaccessible travel – all the while they feel the narrative from government is that they are not doing enough and they must do more. Many employers involved in informing this response are “converted” in terms of recruiting and supporting disabled employees and doing as much as they can to create inclusive workplace for their workforce. We show how they are doing a lot already. For this reason, it is even more important for government to hear what they are saying as they are the least likely to “slip back” but will do so if they do not get the right support.

We set up our Access to Work forum because we wanted to understand how far some of our members are ‘automatically’ referring adjustments requests to Access to Work rather than “exhausting” their own resources and processes first, and, if they are doing this, why they are doing this. We have therefore presented our ten-week research project on Access to Work as a way of evidencing our answers to questions 14-16 of the Pathways to Work consultation paper. We have used a lot of first person quotes from employers and employees. This is for the purpose of showing the government the weight of a point of view and to also illustrate that we are putting forward the perspective of our members.

BDF remains confident that Access to Work is a world leading asset and should be protected and invested in, and that its demand is a signal of its success instead of a signal simply of overuse or overreliance on by employers.

# Key points in summary

* **The key question that should be leading changes to Access to Work are, in one employers’ words, “What stops people getting into work and staying in work and what is Access to Work’s role in that?”**
* **Many employees are spending a lot of money and dedicating roles to provide support and make adjustments for disabled employees. Employers wanted clarity on what they should and should not be doing, what the government specifically wants them to do, and for there to be balance for where the boundary is between what the employer does and where government-provided support picks up – but also that government does have to ‘do their bit’ somewhere.**
* **While smaller, local adjustments can be cost free, the reality is that it costs a lot to employ disabled people who need multiple, ongoing, and specific types of adjustments. Policy problems – and arriving at solutions – come when we shy away from that. For employers who are recruiting the ‘easier to employ’ disabled people, they are less likely to experience the situations we have outlined in this paper. Employers who are recruiting disabled people who need a variety of adjustments or human support and the people who are most vulnerable to non-employment are the employers most hit by the costs. This is really important in the context of the disability employment gap, which has multiple additional condition-specific gaps under the overarching figure. Deaf people who are British Sign Language (BSL) users and people with learning disabilities are some of the very least likely to be in work – and they are also the people who are likely to have the most costly adjustments for which Access to Work support is critical.**
* **Access to Work is a job-saving scheme for disabled people and is at a point at which transforming it is within reach to meet the needs of a much changed, more diverse labour market of disabled people than the scheme’s first beginnings. The overall approach from government seems to be to reduce the costs of Access to Work by putting more on employers instead of seeing the opportunity for an enhanced, more inclusive and more productive labour market that fiscal investment can provide alongside some ‘easy win’ cost-cutting changes (which we cover in this paper).**

# Many employers are already doing a lot – but they want clarity

Employers’ instinctive reactions to the consultation paper’s discussion about Access to Work was that the government’s plans are increasingly making disabled people unattractive to recruit – expensive, needing accreditation to be inclusive to disabled people (Disability Confident), and also needing to use Access to Work less. It is easy to interpret current policy proposals as implying that disabled people and employers are the problem. Employers in the discussion groups discussed how the ‘not so good’ employers would give in to this and just not employ disabled people. In employers’ words:

*“We are the minority of employers that want to get this right. Most will go the easier route of only employing non-disabled people.”*

*“The government should make it as easy as possible for employers to employ disabled people, not making it so unmanageable as to put them off employing us altogether.”*

*“Just reflecting that companies represented on this call are, by default, positive about employing disabled people. Sadly, we know that most aren't, and if more responsibility is put onto employers, they will be even more reluctant to employ us.”*

*“Basically, the waiting times and increasing push backs from Access to Work mean that companies either just arrange and pay for everything themselves, or disabled people struggle for months affecting their performance and mental health, or companies just don't employ disabled people because it's too expensive and time-consuming. The latter will be the majority response - the exact opposite of what DWP are trying to achieve.”*

And from a small employer:

*“[We are] tiny and we only employ disabled people. We are increasingly paying for stuff ourselves due to the long waiting list [for Access to Work]. But how many other smaller organisations can afford to do this or are willing to? And SMEs make up 90 per cent of the employers in the UK.”*

## Employers valued Access to Work’s joint employer-government approach

Employers said they really valued Access to Work support and felt it was a scheme that – although needing improvement and investment – was designed with the principle in mind that it is both the government **and** employers’ combined support which keeps disabled people in work. Employers described how they are fulfilling this joint responsibility and how they are doing a lot, but they also need the government’s backing and support through Access to Work. In employers’ words:

*“In addition to bypassing Access to Work for any equipment/software support, we have also been funding interim job coaching support, and the cost of this is growing significantly. We have been funding this on the assumption that Access to Work will eventually fund further sessions when going forward. Whilst we have been able to cover costs and expand our workforce for the time being, it is not to say that we will always be in a position to do this or that it will be sustainable in the long term. If Access to Work withdraws further support for employers financially, I anticipate this will present significant challenges in the [the] sector.”*

*“We have 13,000 employees. We have been encouraging people to go to Access to Work when they have needed in-person support – such as a support worker or a BSL interpreter. But we have worked on our own [adjustments] catalogue as well.”*

*“I really only suggest Access to Work for workplace coaching, taxi budgets, and I try to think ‘In 6-12 months’ time, where will they [the employee] be?’ I hardly ever refer employee to Access to Work for equipment. I don‘t want to put the strain on Access to Work for that. We are doing a lot, and it is only anything that we cannot do that goes to Access to Work.”*

*A lot of recommendations [from Access to Work] need access to a mobile app, which we don’t allow, or for something to be installed in the cloud, which our security won’t allow for. We provide AI glasses so that Copilot doesn’t run on computers.”*

Others in the group could see that they also needed to move to doing more because of the lengthy waits for Access to Work. In one employer’s words:

*“I've recommended that we start funding all lower cost adjustments and go to Access to Work for anything at a higher cost whereas before the employee would wait to be assessed and then they would come back with a full list of recommendations that we could have put in place far sooner.”*

Alongside this was the view that government did not understand how much employers are currently doing to support their disabled employees, even when they also call on Access to Work for ‘back up’. In employer’s words:

*“As employers we are already doing a lot more. We have specialist advisor roles, central budgets for reasonable adjustments funding, dedicated resources, project groups [on adjustments]. So what else is the government expecting [us to do] would be interesting to understand. Much of what we are already doing is in response to challenges with the Access to Work scheme.”*

There was evidence that employers had already pulled back on using Access to Work because it was taking too long:

*“Given that so many employers who have even a little flex in budgets are bypassing Access to Work already and increasing outgoings on access needs, the Access to Work backlog is unlikely to be full of applicants with needs that fall within the employer's remit.”*

There was also evidence that employers are acting as advocates for employees beyond the business function of an employer. One employer described how they needed to involve their MP for an Access to Work application to get moving:

*“I just had a recent case. A colleague had been waiting and chasing Access to Work having applied in November 2024.[[1]](#footnote-1) Last week I contacted MP for [our area] and within 24 hours, an assessment was set up and done within 48 hours”.*

# Who provides adjustments at the start of and during a job

When the groups discussed the section in the consultation paper about whether the balance of Access to Work provided into work support should be the focus rather than supporting disabled people who are already employed with an employer,[[2]](#footnote-2) Some employers and disabled employees said that, in one employer’s words, *“If too much ownership is on the employer, nothing will happen.”*

Others, however, said there were practical reasons for this. In one employer’s words:

*“We don’t know what is going to be provided at the start of a job. We have to consider firewalls, systems, and software.”*

This led another employer to conclude that, *“A change is needed, but it’s not to give it to employers”.*

# Employers have already seen awards reduced and withdrawn

Employers said they did not feel the decision to make employers provide more was a new proposal. Many had been seeing push back from Access to Work increasingly during the last twelve months. In employer’s words:

*“We are already getting more push back from Access to Work with us being asked for evidence of occupational health support before an [Access to Work] Assessment.”*

*“Access to Work are withdrawing existing support worker support when staff are submitting renewals.”*

*“We're already being asked by Access to Work about what reasonable adjustments we've put in place in great detail. We have also started getting push back on support workers.”*

Employers had also often paid for or provided support to an employee who was in a long Access to Work waiting list. However, when doing this, employers said they had been penalised by Access to Work for doing so. Two employers said:

*“We provided a support worker and travel to work as a temporary measure while [the employee] waits for their Access to Work assessment. But they [Access to Work] turned around to us and said to us ‘Oh, so you* ***can*** *afford to do it then’, and then we received no funding to help at all. But we thought we were being good, supportive employers paying for the employee’s support during the wait.”*

*“We also have staff who've had applications for job coaching support declined because us as an employer have funded interim support. However, these are members of staff who would have significantly struggled in their role if required to wait 8 months for their Access to Work application to be processed.”*

As a result, employers said they really needed the government to provide clarity on what they expected them to do, and when the government would pick up from (that is, what the employer’s responsibility is and what the government’s responsibility is). Employers said they needed “consistent and clear advice” and “clarity and transparency.” Similarly, in response to the element of the consultation paper which asked how employers to develop more inclusive workplaces, another employer said:

*“The government can’t just say ‘develop inclusive practices’. What are they? What do you want us to do?”*

# Employers are part of the solution, but they are not the whole solution

Employers were doing a lot but they recognised there were gaps in support that were not being filled by anyone. The most common example was who should be providing support with getting to work:

*“I do think travel to and from work is a grant that does and should continue to go to the individual. Getting to/from work is seen as an individual's responsibility but disabled people need help and support with this. Therefore, defining it as an individual’s responsibility and providing no other means of support is ignoring and not fixing the problem.”*

Employees said the evolution of inclusive workplaces has helped. As workplaces have become more inclusive and workplace have recognised how much help employees need, many employers have responded. We have heavily quoted individuals in this section to replay their experience in their own words.

An employee had seen some periodical reduction in their award. In their words:

*“I was being awarded this money from Access to Work but I was talking to my interpreters, trying to negotiate with them to sort out less hours, less hourly rates, just to try and say “Oh please can you do this, otherwise I won’t be able to have this time”. [My employer] at the time agreed to cover the shortfall of the bill but that meant I lost my independence a little bit if you like – because. In one way, ‘I am accepting this, and you are helping me with the support hat I needed’, but on the other hand there is lot of an extra burden that the employer is having to take on and I don’t know if that’s the right approach.”*

This employee continued:

*“We now have a workplace adjustments lead and that has helped massively. [They] took on the recording of invoices coming in, managing payments. The sad thing is, I was doing all of that for 10 years… at that time an agency took over the booking of interpreters and the admin which was great, but you can compare those tenures of me doing it by myself to now – but that agency sent costs high. It’s an additional 42 per cent on top for fees for them to sort out the admin stuff, so it wasn’t cost effective. So the strange thing is, Access to Work refuses to pay VAT which I just don’t understand. I don’t know how this happened. You are trying to create something inclusive and then the organisations has to pay the VAT for these agency fees, so Access to Work is only really paying for half of the item. So we recently had to stop that because it was eating up my budget too quickly. Having an Access Officer really helps, because they are seeing what adjustments people needs, working out what is fair for everybody and also sorting out the payments for interpreters or for other needs that people have, and the claims go direct in and are paid by [the employer] and you can get the claims back.”*

This employee also told us that Access to Work award reductions meant having to share a hotel bedroom with her interpreters when they go to external meetings or conferences. Currently this employee funds one interpreter through Access to Work award and her employer funds the other. They also told us about another BSL user who has lost 60 per cent of their Access to Work award.

# Deaf admin, BSL admin, disability admin, a second job, hidden labour

A key “norm” (an employee’s words) that must be edited out of any future Access to Work provision is how much time it takes for individuals to manage their Access to Work award, particularly for Deaf employees. One employer said they have an employee who is Deaf and a BSL user and they spend 5-6 hours each week sorting out their BSL support. This, in effect, means that they are given an additional workload by the very nature of their support. Help with this should be covered by an Access to Work award, otherwise it is removing disadvantage and creating another. When their Access to Work award was reassessed, it was taken away. The employer is now funding support for “BSL admin”. Employees said:

*“Access to Work will pay for my access needs, but I became my own Access to Work coordinator, which means I have two jobs. It became the norm of what I had to do.”*

*“I became my own Access to Work coordinator on top of my every day job. So I had to do two jobs when everyone else only had to do one just to level up the playing field to be able to access a job in the same way anyone else would. I had to organise all of my support, all of the admin – that was obviously quite a lot of stuff. I had  to also create all of my own accounts for that in terms of organising Access to Work budgets, in terms of how many thousands of pounds I had; I had to make sure there was an interpreter, that they were paid, if there was a shortfall I had to cover it while ATW caught up with their admin so I had this extra burden of responsibility. But it just becomes part of the norm of what you do and that “Oh well I just have to do this.”*

*“I need to sort out the claims that are linked to my name and that’s all admin. So I call it “deaf admin”, or “disabled admin” or “hidden labour” – the admin going on in the background that no one is aware of, and that‘s part of our everyday responsibility. And has been for all the years I’ve been in employment.”*

One employee said they would like to progress to become a CEO and a Board member of other organisations. However, they cannot do more with reducing Access to Work awards, plus the award is not available to support them with communication for a voluntary position. Their conclusion was:

*“So I’m stuck again. There is a question mark over your ability to do that as a Deaf individual, but at the same time we are clamouring for more Deaf and disabled people to be in higher positions of influence, so it’s a clashing scenario.”*

# Size of organisation is not an indicator of funds or profits

There was significant frustration across the discussion groups and depth conversations that the government appeared to there “are just three types of organisations” – small, medium, and large. There is a huge difference between income or turnover and profit or surplus. A small private sector law firm, for example, is likely to have a lot more “disposable” income than a large social care provider. One example is that universities are often registered charities and not-for-profits yet are seeing a lot of push back on Access to Work grants. Two large employers said the following:

*“We challenged Access to Work on whether an employee needed an Apple watch and we got push back on that.”*

*“Large doesn’t mean money. Will we ever be able to say something isn’t reasonable? Employing disabled people in [this organisation] will be affected.”*

# The value of job coaching

The future availability of job coaching was heavily discussed. When Access to Work had reduced or not renewed job coaching support, employers had tried to provide this themselves.

There is also a difference between (a) employers providing what is reasonable and Access to Work providing anything else that would help, and (b) employers providing everything they can, even when beyond reasonable, before going to Access to Work. This is illustrated by the following comment which shows job coaching was sought from Access to Work because it is beyond a reasonable adjustment:

*“I would hope that strategy coaching would remain Access to Work funded as that is crucial and outside the scope of reasonable adjustment.”*

*“When is job coaching an adjustment and when is it professional development?”*

However, another employer said they are providing job coaching because they can see how much it helps employees. They explained how job coaching for employees with neurodiverse conditions now takes up 40 per cent their adjustments budget. Another employer could see why this would be the case; they said they have people entering their workforce who are not job ready and who should be receiving job coaching *before* they are helped into work.

This is another point employers need clarity from government on:

* Are employers expected to provide everything they reasonably can plus anything else that would help as far as they can? **Or**
* Should employers only provide what is reasonable (that removes the identified barrier and is affordable) and Access to Work is available for anything else, regardless of whether the employer could provide more?

# Tech helps sometimes but it does not solve the problem

Employers recalled how the assistive technology sector used to provide more opportunities for employers and employees to trial assistive technology. Employers generally felt that they cannot be expected to be experts on emerging technologies and assistive technology software, and they asked whether the government could instead broker regular on demand and peer training sessions which are open access for both employers and employees on the in-built assistive features of packages such as Microsoft, Apple, and Google. There was general agreement with this point in the discussion groups, although some employers said they already provide this internally.

It was generally felt by employers that, while in-built accessibility and assistive technology features of these suites were just as good as more expensive software, Access to Work was recommending they purchase for an employee, this was only the case where there was a single, identifiable technology-related barrier. This means that employers felt it was not right for technology to be recommended as a cheaper alternative to human support if human support is what someone really needs. In addition, some employees knew of situations in their workforce where disabled workers had been provided with technology instead of human support and the technology had broken down meaning one person immediately could not work at all until it was fixed, and another could not communicate to tell anyone that their technology had broken. Therefore, they were clear technology could also not be provided as a single solution to communication either. In employers’ words:

*“If you are Deaf BSL user or you need a support worker, it is a real battle to get those things. A piece of tech is not the solution. For certain disabilities, tech is not going to help. It could even make things worse.”*

*“A few hours of support worker support twice a week is not enough. When a document is not accessible, their support worker will read it to them. They were provided with a screen reader, but that’s not enough. The person needs a proper scripting assessment and support.”*

# Awarding directly to individuals

We discussed the pros and cons of the option in the consultation paper about proposals to award funds directly to employees. There were very mixed views about this. A core discussion in response to this question in the paper was the principle that Access to Work has said, in the past, that the individual is the ‘owner’ of their award and the support has therefore been able to stay with the individual when they move jobs:

*“One of the principles of Access to Work in the past has been that the individual can port their aids and equipment with them when they move jobs, removing barriers throughout their career. Awarding the grant to the individual is consistent with this principle so there are pros and cons to grants to individuals.”*

An employee spoke about their views on having their award come directly to them:

*“Access to Work really helped me to keep the organisation employing me and my access was totally separate. I could reassure [the employer] and say ‘No don’t worry about that, you’re employing me, but I can sort out my access and that’s absolutely fine, that’s dealt with.’ Then, in interviews as well, employers could see the value of me as ‘a person’, not a person with access needs’ as an extra burden. Always I had to say, from school to university, ‘I’m a deaf person, I’m a deaf person’ – having to repeat that again and again, and it was nice to finally go ‘Actually I am this person separate to the needs that I have’.”*

This chimed with an employer’s view that “maintaining boundaries as an employer” was important. However, employers had more concerns with the approach of giving the award directly to the employee:

* “Different people bringing in different bits of kit” to the workplace would be unmanageable. One employer mentioned a situation where an individual had bought their own chair into the workforce which was not suitable at all, and they could see more of this happening if individuals were given the money to purchase their own equipment.
* It would lead to delays. Employers were concerned that, if an employee is applying for Access to Work, they are most probably doing so because they are struggling with something – so applying for that support did not feel right to put entirely on them at the very time when they needed help.
* Some employers were worried about a safeguarding issue of giving large sums of money to individuals. One employer said, *“A disabled employee was given a £10,000 Access to Work award the other week. That person cannot manage that sort of money”.*

# Making the admin and claiming back more manageable

Employers recalled many situations where they had not been reimbursement by Access to Work and where when they are paid back, they do not know where in the organisation the money is going back to. Some of the discussion groups explained that they had 12,000-18,000 staff and it was impossible to find where that money went back to, let alone allocating it back to a department or individual. Others mentioned Access to Work causes them to need to move lots of money around to cover costs while waiting for reimbursement. In the words of one Access to Work user:

*“I have been doing this [getting Access to Work] since June [2024] now and only one payment has hit my account so far. People get into debt at this stage.”*

One employer said they are missing almost £20,000 in Access to Work reimbursement and another said they are missing “more than that”. Another said they have not received reimbursement of nearly £19,000 for between August-December 2024, and they were struggling to get in touch with Access to Work to discuss it.

# The impact of removing or reducing human support

Employers identified those with awards for support workers and those with British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter support as those who are being or will be most impacted by Access to Work reducing or withdrawing awards. In employers’ words:

*“Staff with sensory loss (sight and hearing) would be adversely disadvantaged by removing human/transport support.”*

*“We have Deaf BSL users with Access to Work support. We would not be able to support them Anymore [without Access to Work support] It will be a total disaster – not even a disaster, worse – we wouldn’t be able to support those people any longer.”*

*“We cannot say ‘We cannot have this person because of the cost of their support’. But it absolutely will factor in how we hire staff.”*

*With Access to Work and recent changes to Personal Independence Payments, I would probably have to give up my job and go onto benefits, which is the opposite of what the government are trying to do.*

As per above sections, travel to work support was also a concern and most felt this element of Access to Work really needed maintaining and protecting. One employee who gets an Access to Work award for support with travelling to work said:

*“I would have had to give my job up if it wasn’t for Access to Work.”*

One member commented further, again, in keeping with members’ first reactions that the whole approach of the questions in the consultation paper are not the right way around:

*“Are we starting from the right place? The equality element of this is not front and centre. The starting point is a right of access under the UNCRPD and right to good work should not be contingent on a grant… We need to take the precariousness and job insecurity away from this”.*

# The fundamental approach of the consultation questions needs to change

Employers felt discussions about changing Access to Work were starting from the wrong place:

*“The consultation questions are asking things the wrong way around. It should be asking, what stops people getting into work and staying in work and what is Access to Work’s role in that?”*

*“If the government want to get disabled people into work, they have to invest in Access to Work. By taking this away, disabled people will miss out. Large employers may be able to offer these employment opportunities and adjustments, but those large organisations might not be the right environments for that disabled person. The question [should be], how should Access to Work be creating those employment opportunities for disabled people?”*

Employers said similar to the above in relation to Access to Work current policy regarding employees on long term absence and who are due to return – that is, the process does not lend to the government’s’ current policy ambitions to get people on long-term absence back to work:

*“You can be fast tracked if you are starting a job in 4-6 weeks but not for someone who looking to return to work [after long-term sickness absence]. They have to go back into the ten-month waiting list.”*

*“[I have] situations where it is two months before someone returns to work, and [Access to Work] is no good, because that person will not get the support in time. The team is supporting as much as they can.”*

This employee said they had tried to speak to Access to Work repeatedly to try and explain an individual’s circumstances who was due back to work, and Access to Work confirmed that the process sis that these individuals must “go to the back of the queue”.

# Options for Access to Work’s sustainability and future delivery

Consultation questions we answer in this section:

* Question 14: What should DWP directly fund for both employers and individuals to maximise the impact of a future Access to Work and reach as many people as possible?
* Question 15: What do you think the future role and design of Access to Work should be?
* Question 17: What should be the future delivery model for the future of Access to Work?

The costs and demand for Access to Work is not a signal that it needs radical reform. The very fact that recipients of Access to Work awards say their award is the difference between them being in work and having a job and leaving and needing to rely on benefits is evidence of this.

## Investment in Access to Work

Access to Work cannot support government, employers, and disabled people to increase economic activity if there is no ongoing fiscal investment in a model that provides workplace adjustments assessment, support and advice to both employees and employers. Access to Work cannot continue as it is – for all of the reasons the consultation paper sets out and what our members have told us – and it cannot be overwhelmed and reduced any further, because it is impacting employers, employees, and civil servants involved in its administration.

We have identified from our discussions with members a three-fold approach to sustain Access to Work while making it more effective and consistent:

1. Identify and remove the immediate and obvious cost savings and the processes that remove duplication or high-cost products, particularly when individuals do not want them and employers cannot use them (we have expanded on this below).
2. Adress the procedural issues and invest in the current model of Access to Work, which includes building in the non-negotiable elements which provide balance between the employer and government responsibility (below).
3. If longer term reform for Access to Work is the policy ambition, consider how Access to Work could become a core part of and delivered within the National Careers Service (we have expanded on this below).

With this comes an acceptance that the support that some need is expensive, and that that needs to be accounted for in the fiscal budget. The responsibility for moving forward includes everyone involved:

* **For government** – fiscal commitment, realisation that employers cannot keep being put on if they are already providing support, and ‘meeting employers’ where they cannot help further. An appropriate way of Access to Work assessing that employer action may be needed.
* **Employers** – need to ensure they have fit-for-purpose support for their workforce, which includes a centrally budgeted workplace adjustments programme which does not routinely rely on Access to Work to provide affordable, non-complex, non-human solutions every case.
* **Employees** – those who use Access to Work for support must do so on the agreement that their employer is part of the application, implementation and award review process.

**The goal is to remove barriers for individuals to work and remove barriers for employers to recruit them.**

### Identify and remove the immediate and obvious cost savings and the processes

The employer has to be involved because it is their legal duty to make, provide and review adjustments for their employees. Sometimes, though, employees described that Access to Work awarded staff with things they did not need. We have quoted employers at length here as these were all given as situations where employers felt Access to Work has overspent or “wasted” money:

*“Access to work is obsessed with recommending expensive, specialist chairs. Does a chair really cost £1,200?”*

*“We provided an adapted chair and desk [for an employee] and then they went to Access to Work and [were] awarded exactly the same”.*

*“Our employees have been given things they don’t even need. One of our employees applied to Access to Work for a support worker but was instead given a Braille keyboard, and they are not even fluent in Braille”.*

*“Someone was recommended an Apple watch. Do we need to buy that for an employee? They didn’t even want it because they then get work notifications all the time on their wrist.”*

*“[My employee] has been recommended an Apple watch and [they] do not want it but she has to pay a £60 contribution. This is misuse of Access to Work.”*

*“ReMarkable tablets are being recommend a lot. But they are expensive”.*

*“An employee of ours was given mobile apps to help them. But they couldn’t use it, because they are not allowed their mobile with them [at work] and there is no Wi-Fi where they need to work.”*

### Building in the non-negotiable elements of Access to Work

There remain two non-negotiable elements of the future of Access to Work for employers:

* Access to Work must remain a scheme available to help employers fund adjustments that they struggle to make. This could include more rigor at assessment stage for employers – such as asking what they have done so far for an individual and what they intended to do to support the applicant in future.
* Where a disabled individual is employed by an employer, that employer must be able to be involved in the Access to Work process. The process and provision of adjustments too easily falls down when an employee is off work and the employer cannot get in touch with Access to Work to continue the process of putting adjustments in place for them to return to work, or where the employer’s input is helpful to fully explain the working environment and job to an assessor. In addition, expensive recommendations are raising costs for the government as well as for employers’ contributions to the award.
* Access to Work should remain in place to support the most expensive adjustments, such as BSL interpreters and support workers.

### Longer term: The National Careers Service and Access to Work

Some employers questioned what the role of the new National Careers Service in equipping employers and employees was. They suggested the vision of the National Careers Service as the holistic body of support, assessment, and advice for both workers (and prospective workers) and employers. Access to Work would sit within this Service and deliver the aforementioned career-long access to a workplace adjustments assessment, help with looking for and finding a job (at whatever stage of career), and be a body of expertise advice available to support any employer to remove disability-related barriers in their workplace and make more adjustments more regularly and in a more timely way for their workforce. The repositioning of the National Careers Service would then combine training, apprenticeships, work experience, job support and advice for any employer and for individuals to access at any stage of their working life, whether or not they are currently connected to an employer. Within this model, it could be a choice whether Access to Work is managed by the individual or by the employer, while considering the pros and cons of doing this discussed above.

With any long-term changes to Access to Work must come a phased approach of a properly mapped out programme for change and clarity on what each party’s – government, employers, providers, and individuals – roles are in that, together with the support needed to get them to a place where they are genuinely able to fulfil that role.

# Further questions

BDF will continue to work with our members to help them embed fit for purpose workplace adjustments provision and create more disability inclusive working environment for their workforces. To discuss our response further, please contact Diane Lightfoot, CEO, at [dianel@businessdisabilityforum.org.uk](mailto:dianel@businessdisabilityforum.org.uk)

1. This data were collected in June 2025, which indicates this individual had been waiting for an assessment for seven months. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. There were some comments about how this would affect self-employed people – “when you are asking for the Access to Work support but you are also the employer”. BDF has not looked into the perspective of self-employed people, but all types of employment and the use of Access to Work should be looked into, particularly in the changing labour market landscape of more people looking to become self-employed or start their own business. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)