# Using a Support Worker

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### What is a Support Worker?

As part of the Access to Work (ATW) Scheme, a Support Worker can be provided as part of the grant. Support Workers can be provided to support with areas of a claimant’s work that cannot be reasonably completed by the claimant with specialist equipment, reasonable adjustments in the workplace or assistive technology.

Blind and Partially Sighted people use Support Workers to offer sighted assistance in all aspects of their role. These include driving, admin support where screen readers or screen magnifiers are ineffective, reading print and sighted guiding, but this is down to the individual needs of the person with sight loss.

### How to apply for a Support Worker

You can apply for a Support Worker as part of your ATW application. Claimants can apply when they are starting a new job role if they are employed or self-employed.

Applications for a Support Worker are made through the usual ATW application process. When starting a new role claimants should make an ATW application as soon as a start date has been agreed.

ATW will cover the entire cost of the Support Worker. This includes their hourly rate and any agency costs if the Support Worker is employed through a recruitment agency. Employers can also claim back the costs of a Support Worker, which is funded through ATW.

### Support Worker Job Description and Person Specification

When employing a Support Worker, claimants should firstly consider all the tasks that they may need sighted support with. This will enable them to create a tailored Job Description and Person Specification for their Support Worker.

Also, they should consider the skills, abilities, knowledge and experience that they want their Support Worker to have, as this will help to negotiate the Support Worker’s hourly rate of pay.

### Support Worker Pay and Working Hours

Claimants should consider the hours that they will require their Support Worker for during a working week. Writing a job description will help when considering this. Claimants should think about all the ad hoc opportunities when they might need some extra support, like attending training or conferences outside their normal working hours. This could be added to their claim under ad hoc support.

ATW will fund a Support Worker for full-time hours and in some instances over the working hours of the person that they are supporting if their job includes travel and overnight stays. ATW will also fund additional hours if the Support Worker is used as part of the ATW travel to Work component of the grant.

When considering the hourly rate of a Support Worker, consider the skills required to complete the tasks expected of them. Also, remember that supporting a blind or partially sighted person in the workplace is a specialist role and therefore will pay more than the living wage.

### Support Worker Responsibilities

The current guidance is confusing as it states that a Support Worker can be provided via the scheme for 20% of a claimant’s working hours.

This is incorrect, it should say that a claimant could have a Support Worker that supports them with up to 20% of their tasks but it can be for the full duration of their working hours.

For example, the claimant might need a driver as their job involves getting to different places during their working day. The Support Worker could be with them for all their working hours, but they only do one task – driving them to their meetings.

Please see the quote below from the ATW-Staff Guide.

“68. If the job aide is providing support which the customer cannot do themselves and requires the assistance to complete that whole task, then AtW can only consider paying up to 20% of the customer’s contracted hours in total for the role.”

This can be found on:

[Access to Work: staff guide - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/access-to-work-staff-guide/access-to-work-staff-guide#support-workers) Paragraph 7 under Job Aide.

### Travel to Work Scheme

As part of the ATW Scheme the grant will fund travel to and from work. In most cases this enables the claimant to use a taxi on their working days. When taxis are unavailable, a Support Worker can be provided instead, whichever is the most cost effective.

This is either an extension of the responsibilities laid out in the Support Worker Job Description, or they can be employed solely for this purpose.

If the Support Worker is only employed to drive the claimant to and from work, their hourly rate should be included in one of the 3 taxi quotes as part of the claim.

### Employing a Support Worker

There are several ways you can secure a Support Worker:

* self-employed, a friend, member of your family or by recruiting a Support Worker by advertising the position
* recruitment agency
* employed by the claimant’s employer
* the Claimant employs them

The Claimant can choose the method of employment for their Support Worker which best suits their circumstances. ATW will request 3 quotes from the claimant as part of the application process and they will use the cheapest quote. If the claimant has someone lined up for the role, please ask them to provide one of the quotes and ensure that it is the cheapest.

When calculating the hourly rate, a claimant wants to pay, they should consider the tax and National Insurance contributions paid by their prospective Support Worker. Any agency fees can also be reimbursed and included in the ATW grant.

### Support Worker Travel and Overnight Stays

If the claimant’s role includes travel and overnight stays, the costs accrued by their Support Worker can also be funded by ATW.

When making the initial application for Access To Work, the claimant should ensure that this is understood by their advisor and that a budget for these additional Support Worker costs are included in the overall grant.

ATW will fund hotel stays, dinner when there is an overnight stay, train fares and other travel costs including flights. ATW have a list of these costs but may ask the claimant to provide average travel costs so a budget can be set.

### Support Worker Agreement

After the application process is complete and Support Worker funding has been provided as part of the ATW grant, it will be the responsibility of the claimant to find and employ their Support Worker. Once this person has been identified and a start date has been agreed, a Support Worker Agreement should be created.

The Support Worker Agreement lays out the responsibilities of the Support Worker, their hourly rate, hours of work and holiday entitlement. Avoid calling this an employment contract as this may leave the claimant liable as an employer in any potential dispute.

Depending on the claimant’s role, it may also be necessary for the Support Worker to sign a non-disclosure agreement or honorary contract of employment for the organisation the claimant works for. For example, if the claimant works for the NHS.

### Support Worker Claims to Access to Work

Access to Work will ask claimants to make claims for Support Worker costs on a monthly basis. It is beneficial to make regular claims as this means that the Support Worker, recruitment agency or employer will receive payments in a timely manner.

Claims to ATW for Support Worker Hours and travel costs are made on the same form. It is recommended to send different forms for each type of claim. This form will need to be signed by the claimants line manager if they are employed, no line manager signature is required if the claimant is self-employed.

Ensure the form is completed correctly otherwise ATW will return it and ask for it to be resubmitted. The forms will be provided by ATW by email when the application has been agreed.

### Access to Work Renewals and Change of Circumstances

Access to Work grants can last up to 3 years. It is important to make a note of the end date of the claim as ATW will not contact the clamant when their grant is due to stop. This can result in Support Workers not being paid for the services they provide.

If the claimant has a change of circumstances during a grant period, they should contact ATW and inform them as soon as possible. This is because ATW may wish to carry out another assessment before approving any further support.

If the claimant is getting a new job, please submit a new claim.

Change of circumstances only apply when the claimant is staying with their current employer, but something changes like their role, working hours, job location or the claimant is experiencing changes with their sight and/ or with their general health.

### Appealing an Access to Work Decision

As Access to Work is a grant and not a benefit, there is no official appeal process. Claimants can, however, ask for their claim to be looked at again but there is no guarantee that any grant offer will change.

### Conclusion

The use of a Support Worker is a great way for blind and partially sighted people to work independently within their role. Having a Support Worker to offer sighted support in all aspects of the person’s job cannot be underestimated.

When a blind or partially sighted person starts to struggle with aspects of their job, a Support Worker can bridge the gap and can help the person with sight loss to stay employed.

Support Workers, when used in the right way, can be a real asset to the person that they support. It is very important to choose the right person as the claimant will be spending a lot of time with their Support Worker, so it is important that the Support Worker has the correct skills but equally important that the two people get along.

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