



THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

NATIONAL CHURCH INSTITUTIONS

Archbishops' Council

Remuneration and Conditions of Service Committee

Guidance on Access to Work

Guidance summary

These are suggestions to help dioceses and employers support Deaf and disabled ministers in applying for support from the Government's Access to Work scheme.

The rules of Access to Work are set by the Department for Work and Pensions. Any questions about the rules should be addressed to them

It will generally be the minister (whether an employee or a stipendiary office holder) who has to make the application, but dioceses and employers should offer help in doing so.

See also <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/access-to-work-guide-for-employers/access-to-work-factsheet-for-employers>

If you have any questions, contact the Access to Work helpline Telephone: 0800 121 7479

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Contents

Guidance summary.....1

Introduction.....3

Purpose.....3

Scope.....3

Definitions.....3

Guidance.....4

Approval and review.....8

Revision history.....9

Introduction

1. Access to Work is a scheme run by the Department of Work and Pensions providing practical and financial support for Disabled people to start or stay in paid work. It provides grants to enable Deaf and disabled people to carry out paid work. For further details, see the Department for Work and Pension's (DWP) website: <https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work>.

Purpose

2. The purpose of this guidance is to help dioceses support Deaf and disabled ministers in applying for support from the Government's Access to Work scheme and to remind them that they may need to provide support to those who are not eligible. It includes ordained and lay ministers, employees and stipendiary office holders.

Scope

3. Under the rules set by the Government, support is only available for ministers (ordained and lay) in paid roles (whether holding office or employed, or full or part time). Self-supporting ministers and volunteers are not eligible for Access to Work and may need additional support from the Diocese.
4. Access to Work is not available while training for ordination as ordinands are not being paid or paying National Insurance Contributions. Disabled students should be encouraged to apply for the Disabled Students' Allowance if their TEI is eligible.

Definitions

5. The schemes cover all ministers who are paid, whether employees or office holders, lay or ordained.
6. "Deaf ministers" means lay or ordained ministers who communicate primarily in their first language of British Sign Language (BSL) along with lip reading. Disabled ministers includes those who are hearing-impaired and more likely to use methods of hearing and communicating other than BSL.
7. The Access to Work rules state that, in order to qualify, "you must have a disability, illness or health condition that means you need support to do your job. This can include for example:
 - a physical disability, for example if hard of hearing or using a wheelchair
 - a learning disability or related condition, for example if you have Down's syndrome
 - a developmental condition, like autism spectrum disorder
 - learning difficulties or differences like ADHD or dyslexia
 - an illness such as diabetes or epilepsy
 - a temporary condition, like a broken leg

- a mental health condition, for example anxiety or depression”
8. Quotations are all from the Government website Access to Work: get support if you have a disability or health condition: What Access to Work is - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Guidance

1. Access to Work is a scheme run by the Government which provides grants to enable Deaf and disabled people to carry out paid work. For further details, see the Department for Work and Pension’s (DWP) website: <https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work>.
2. Through Access to Work, Deaf and disabled ministers can apply for a grant to help pay for practical support with their work. The support they get will depend on their needs, and might help pay for things like:
 - “BSL interpreters, lip speakers or note takers
 - adaptations to your vehicle so that you can get to work
 - taxi fares to work or a support worker if you cannot use public transport
 - a support worker for someone who is blind to help you in your workplace”.
3. Access to Work is not a benefit (and is not included in the benefits that someone receives) but is a grant paid to enable someone to work. It does not matter how much someone earns provided that they are stipendiary or salaried. If they get an Access to Work grant, it will not affect any other benefits they get and they will not have to pay it back. It is also not taxable.
4. In the case of a person entering new employment or stipendiary office, Access to Work, if appropriate, will give up to 100% financial help towards support. If an application is made up to 3 months before starting a job or before a person has been employed in a post for 6 weeks, ATW will pay 100% of the cost. Applications can be made up to 12 weeks before commencement of employment/holding office
5. If someone has been employed, or has taken office for 6 weeks or more, and applies to Access to Work for financial/practical support, there is a formula for calculating an employer’s contribution to the cost of equipment, and the scheme will offer appropriate reduced financial support for things such as equipment and the Diocese or employer will have to pay some of the cost
6. Access to Work will continue to provide 100% support grants for other support - such as BSL interpreters and support workers for ministers who are blind – but this support will be reviewed every three years.

Who applies?

7. Generally, the minister applies. Dioceses should offer help and support to ministers making applications. Sometimes it is appropriate for the diocese to apply, for example, if equipment is needed.
8. If a Deaf or disabled minister attends meetings organised by the Diocese as a participant who happens to be Deaf or disabled, the minister should apply through Access to Work to fund the cost of a BSL interpreter or other support as necessary.
9. If the diocese is holding a meeting to enable dialogue between Deaf or disabled Church leaders and the diocese, it would be for the diocese to provide BSL interpreters and pay them directly.

Eligibility

10. There is a mistaken belief (based on the references to employer in the DWP's guidance) that Access to Work is not available to stipendiary clergy and lay office holders. It is actually available to both stipendiary clergy office holders and employees of PCCs and DBFs, as they have paid Class 1 National Insurance contributions.
11. The Church relies greatly on self-supporting ministers, clergy with Permission to Officiate, and volunteers, but the Access to Work scheme is only available to people who are paid, and not available to self-supporting ministers and volunteers. Dioceses and parishes are encouraged to make adaptations to enable people without stipends to minister within their setting and participate in mandatory training within the diocese.
12. Stipendiary office holders may not be eligible for Access to Work in roles that are part of their duties, but which might be perceived as voluntary, for example acting as School Governors. Dioceses and Treasurers are encouraged to be supportive here.
13. Evidence of the condition or disability is only required if applying for help with transport costs.
14. It may be necessary to explain that the home is often the place of work. But the rules state that "Your workplace can include your home if you work from there some or all of the time".

Applying for Access to work.

15. The initial application to Access to Work is usually made by the person requiring assistance. They may find it helpful to consult the Diocesan Disability Adviser¹ (DDA) and/or Diocesan HR adviser.
16. Access to Work will need the name and contact information for an ‘employer contact’ and it may be helpful to use the diocesan HR adviser/DDA for this.
17. Access to Work claims require a counter signature. This needs to be someone who knows what work is happening as they are agreeing to the hours and pattern of work carried out. It could be the HR adviser, the DDA, the area dean or the archdeacon. It is important that the counter-signatory receives appropriate training to understand the issues for example the importance of carrying this out promptly and being aware that there can sometimes be delays in the claim being reimbursed by Access to Work, which could sometimes result in the applicant having to borrow or go into debt.

Supporting applications

18. Misunderstandings by some within the Church about disability can often act as a barrier to the flourishing of Deaf and disabled people in ministry. A report by SCOPE suggests that some disabled people on average face extra living costs of £583 per month². This is distinct from the additional working costs which Access to Work will pay for.
19. The way that Access to Work operates means that ministers have to pay costs up front and claim them back later. Access to Work are not always able to reimburse ministers within the prescribed 10-day period, which is often in practice 15-20 days or more as claims are only processed Monday – Friday. Late payment is often an ongoing problem. This can result in ministers who have paid support workers and who are waiting for reimbursement going into debt. Dioceses are encouraged to respond helpfully. Credit cards are not a workable solution when the money is often required to pay support workers.
20. One possible solution is for the Diocese to provide a loan or float to the minister for paying support workers where Access to Work has already agreed that they are required and has paid for them in the past. The float/loan should be kept in a separate bank account. This enables the minister to draw down the money when he or she makes an application to Access to Work and then credit the account when the reimbursement is received.

¹ Every diocese should appoint and provide training for, advisers on disability issues in accordance with General Synod motion 1663 on 9th July 2007 that asked each diocese to ensure that a ‘lead person’ on disability is appointed and that disability issues are integral to diocesan structures

² Scope, “Disability Price Tag policy report 2019”, available at: <https://www.scope.org.uk/scope/media/files/campaigns/disability-price-tag-report-2019.pdf>

21. It is entirely appropriate for Deaf and disabled ministers to use a family member who might be their spouse or civil partner as a paid support worker, and for them to be reimbursed by Access to Work. It should not be assumed that family members would do this for free or will be happy to be paid late if there are delays with reimbursement.
22. Support workers are sometimes self-employed but, where they are not, it might be necessary for the minister to run a payroll. Help and support with running a payroll should be provided by the diocese if asked for. Not all ministers will have the skills or knowledge to do this, without advice and support. The absence of proper support could be a barrier to claiming, or it could mean that people get support in an informal way, which is not so useful in the long term.

What Access to Work will not pay for: Reasonable adjustments

23. Access to Work will not pay for reasonable adjustments.. These are “the changes your employer³ must legally make to support you to do your job”. Access to Work will advise if changes should be made as reasonable adjustments.
24. Employers and DBFs must make reasonable adjustments “to make sure workers with disabilities, or physical or mental health conditions, are not substantially disadvantaged when doing their jobs”.
25. Reasonable adjustments include:
- “changing the recruitment process so a candidate can be considered for a job
 - doing things another way, such as allowing someone with social anxiety disorder to have their own desk instead of hot-desking
 - making physical changes to the workplace, like installing a ramp for a wheelchair user or an audio-visual fire alarm for a Deaf person⁴
 - letting a disabled person work somewhere else, such as on the ground floor for a wheelchair user
 - changing equipment, for instance providing a special keyboard if they have arthritis
 - allowing employees who become disabled to make a phased return to work, including flexible hours or part-time working
 - offering training opportunities, recreation and refreshment facilities”.
26. Access to Work may pay up to half of the cost of assistive technology which might include a Personal Computer (PC). It may be necessary for the diocese or parish to meet the other half of the cost. Parishes have a duty to reimburse all authorised appropriate expenses, but sometimes the DBF may need to help in cases where parishes are having difficulty reimbursing expenses.

³ In the case of clergy office holders, who do not have an employer, this will usually be the DBF.

⁴ This might include modifications to clergy homes to make them habitable by a disabled minister.

27. It will be helpful to have diocesan disability policies and to brief diocesan HR and diocesan disability advisers so that they can advise on what will be available.

Encouraging applications to Access to Work

28. It is important to be proactive and encouraging. Some Deaf and disabled ministers may not wish to cause trouble by asking for help in applying for support to which they are entitled. However, it is particularly important to encourage them to do given the additional living and working costs that they face.

29. As an increasing proportion of the population gets older, there is an increased likelihood of disability and an increased need to be aware of Access to Work.

30. There is also a strong advantage in encouraging ministers to claim and make use of Access to Work as soon as they enter paid ministry. In particular, the employer (or the equivalent of the employer for an office holder) does not need to make a contribution if the application is made within 6 weeks of beginning work. See paragraph 4.

31. There can be an understandable reluctance on the part of ministers to mention that they have a disability, including when they apply for a post. This can result in a reduced take up of Access to Work. It is therefore desirable to encourage ministers to do so and to support them in making an application.

32. If applicants have any questions, they should contact the Access to Work helpline Telephone: 0800 121 7479 Textphone: 0800 121 7579
Relay UK (if you cannot hear or speak on the phone): 18001 then 0800 121 7479
British Sign Language (BSL) video relay service
Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.

33. If phone calls are difficult for applicants (for example, because they are Deaf or hard of hearing), they can ask for all communication to be by email.

Approval and review

Approved by	RACSC
Policy owner	RACSC
Policy author	Patrick Shorrock
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Revision history

Version no.	Revision date	Previous revision date	Summary of changes