

# Access to Work – supporting deaf and disabled people into work

Darren Townsend-Handscorn explores the steps involved in accessing appropriate support at work

## Access to Work (AtW): The most important thing for you to know about and apply for before you start work

### What work do you want to do?

- Maybe you know what work you want to do: sell cars, be a decorator, build bridges, teach maths, be an artist, work in a shop, be a doctor.
- Maybe you don't know yet.
- Maybe you feel ready to work now? Or want to develop your skills and experience and start an apprenticeship, traineeship or supported internship first?
- Maybe you want to work for yourself, or work in a company?

Whatever you want to do for work, you've probably thought about what it will be like, as a deaf person working with hearing people and customers. If you use sign language, how will you understand them, and will they understand you? If you use a cochlear implant and rely on lipreading, how easy will it be to understand people who talk too fast, or follow the conversation in a group? How will you talk to people on the phone?

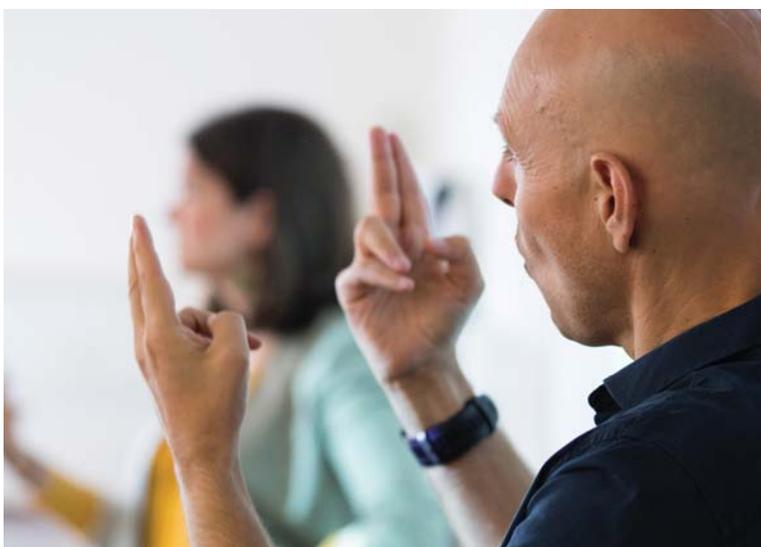
### Working with hearing people – how to make it easier

There are many ways that you can make working with hearing colleagues and customers easier. These are some of them:

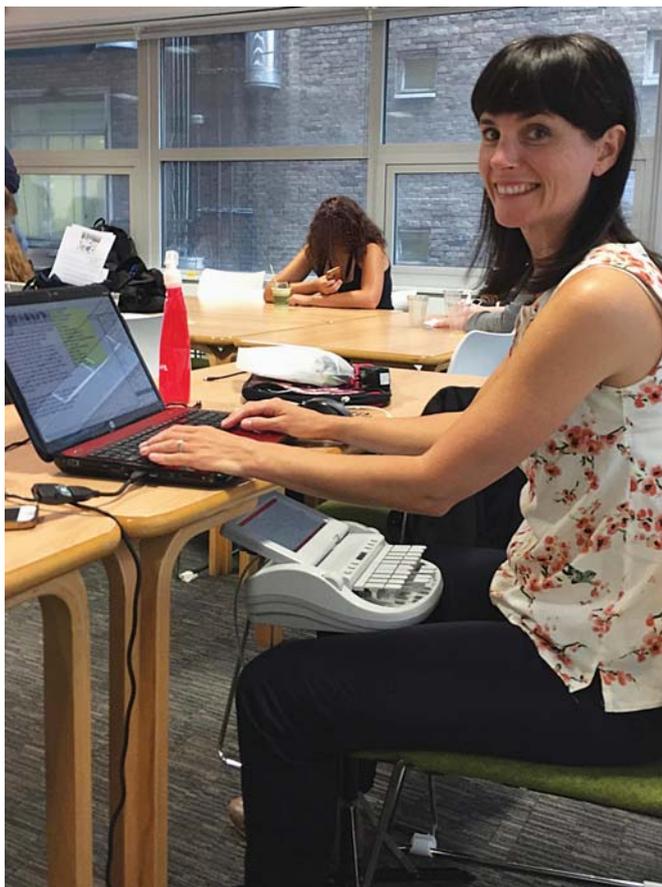
- You can have a sign language interpreter working with you, for all or most of the time if you need it for your work (eg child protection social worker), or just for meetings and training if that's what you need.
- You can also have an interpreter on your phone or computer! This is brilliant if you mainly need to use an interpreter to phone hearing people, or for short meetings with your boss. One deaf self-employed decorator uses an interpreter on his phone to talk to customers when visiting them in their homes. (This is often called VRS or VRI).
- If you prefer to use English, then you can have speech to text. This means that someone using a special keyboard can type everything that's said; this can appear on a tablet, LCD screen, laptop or as subtitles on a presentation. They can be in the room with you, onsite eg at a large meeting, or be somewhere else – remote speech to text. Remote speech to text is where the person transcribing the meeting is not in the room with you but can hear the meeting. You will receive the text of the meeting on a digital device such as a phone, iPad, laptop or tablet. Or you may prefer to use a lipspeaker.
- There is also equipment that can help, including listening aids such as a Roger Pen or portable loop, hearing aid compatible phones, etc.
- Electronic note taking. Some deaf people who use BSL interpreters find that if they are at an important meeting, or doing detailed training, they cannot take good enough notes at the same time as watching the interpreter. In those situations they may want to use an electronic notetaker. This is someone who takes detailed notes using a normal keyboard. At the



Using a remote interpreter



Using an interpreter



Speech to text in a classroom



Speech to text on a tablet

moment AtW sometimes agrees that people can have electronic notetaker support as part of their AtW support, and sometimes says that people can't.

### Who pays for this support?

The government runs a scheme called Access to Work (AtW).

If you are deaf or disabled, AtW will pay for things that you need to help you be able to work. If you need interpreters or speech to text, AtW will pay for it. If you have extra needs eg you have Ushers and need travel support, then AtW can pay for this too.

AtW may even pay for Deaf and Interpreter Awareness Training if you think your new employer needs this.

When you apply for AtW, they will agree with you what support you need, and then will agree a budget for this support. AtW then pays for your communication support and equipment from this budget. There is a maximum amount that how much AtW will award you (called a 'cap'). In April 2018 the cap was set at £57,200.

AtW will pay for the communication support you need for:

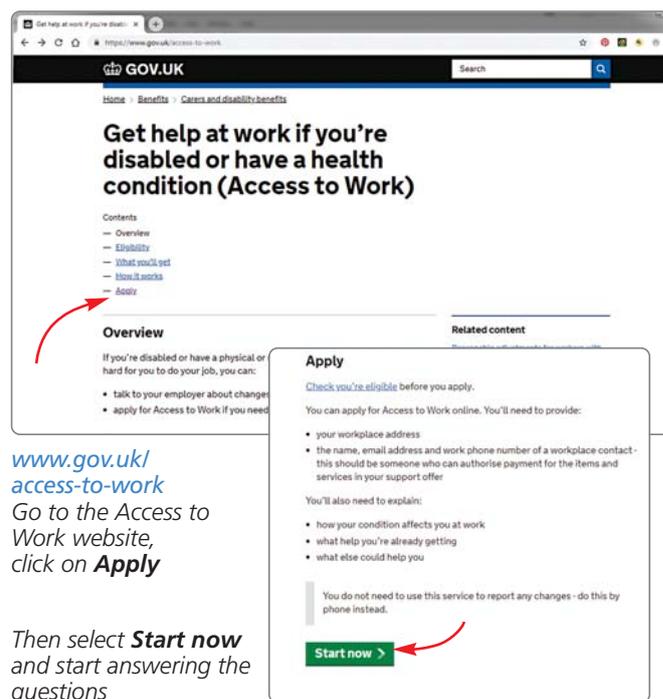
- Job interviews (this is known as Communication Support at Interviews – CSI)
- Working
- An apprenticeship, traineeship or supported internship
- Self-arranged work experience<sup>1</sup>.

If you're not sure if AtW can help, contact them and ask.

### How do I apply for AtW?

Contact AtW as soon as you know you might need support. You can ask for communication support for an interview as soon as you know the date for the interview, and you can apply for AtW support for work, 12 weeks before you start work, an apprenticeship, etc.

You can apply for AtW online here: [www.gov.uk/access-to-work/apply](http://www.gov.uk/access-to-work/apply). There's some more information about how to apply online in 'How to apply for AtW'. This will be on the BATOD website.



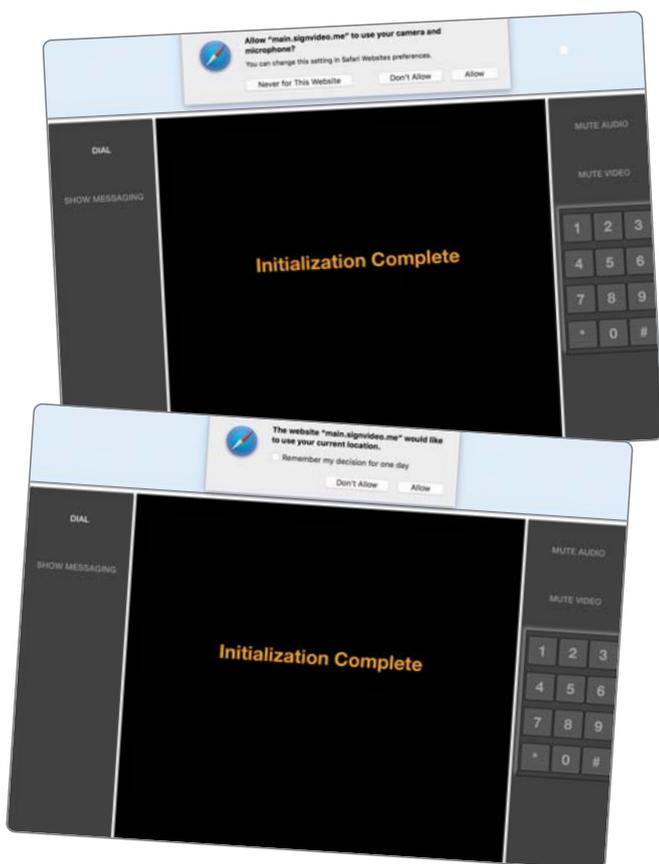
[www.gov.uk/access-to-work](http://www.gov.uk/access-to-work)  
Go to the Access to Work website, click on **Apply**

Then select **Start now** and start answering the questions

You can also phone AtW to make an application. You can also do this using a BSL interpreter (explained below) or NGTR (Next Generation Text Relay). You will find telephone numbers on the [www.gov.uk/access-to-work/apply](http://www.gov.uk/access-to-work/apply) page

You should also read 'How to apply for AtW' even if you are going to apply on the phone, or using a paper form, as it gives lots of examples of things that you may need to say.

If you want to contact AtW using sign language, then scroll down the page until you see: *British Sign Language (BSL) video relay service* and click where you see go to the video relay service. Say yes when the screen appears, and



an interpreter will appear on your screen, and will interpret your conversation with AtW. (This is free).

In 2018 AtW started something called the Techfund. You should ask about this if you need any assistive devices, as this may be useful.

It is very important to remember that once the cost of your support is agreed by AtW, called your budget, you will be responsible for making sure that you do not spend more than your budget. If you spend more, AtW will not pay, and you or your employer will have to pay the extra amount.

### Top tips from deaf people who have had AtW?

Many deaf people have had brilliant jobs with the support of AtW. Here are their suggestions for how to make sure AtW does the same for you.

- 1) Apply for AtW as early as you can. If you don't apply early enough, you might start your work before the funding is ready to pay for the support you need.
- 2) If AtW doesn't reply to you quickly, then contact them again. Phone them up, email again. Don't wait too long for a reply.
- 3) When you apply, you may not know exactly what support you need in your new job. Ask the AtW adviser to agree a support package that you can review after three to six months when you know what you need for your job. Make sure they say in writing that you can do this.

Remember, you can ask for more than one kind of support. Maybe you want to try face to face interpreting and remote interpreting, to see which works best for you.

Or try using a listening device and remote speech to text.

Then once you know what kind of support and assistive technology you need for your job, and how much of it you need, contact AtW again and agree your new package.

- 4) Keep copies of all letters to and from AtW, and don't delete emails you send them or receive from them. Sometimes things go wrong, sometimes things get lost, so keep a copy to make it easier to send again.
- 5) If you think AtW has made the wrong decision because they haven't listened to what you need, or don't understand what you need for your work, you can ask AtW to reconsider your AtW application. This means that someone different at AtW will look at your application again.

If AtW has not replied to you for a long time, or has made mistakes and not put them right, etc. then you can make a formal complaint.

If you want more information about making a reconsideration request or complaining, then look at [www.DeafATW.com](http://www.DeafATW.com) This has information and examples of letters to help you in English and BSL. You can also ask National Deaf Children's Society to help.

- 6) If you have a complicated job, maybe with lots of jargon, then it really helps to find the right communication support, and have them work with you regularly eg once a week or fortnight. This means they get to know your work better. For example, many deaf professionals have a team of five to ten freelance interpreters they regularly use.
- 7) Keep a simple spreadsheet with your AtW budget, and then every time you use communication support, put their fee on your spreadsheet. Do the same with monthly invoices (eg for remote interpreting). This way you will never spend more than your budget.

### AtW makes the difference:

Many deaf people say that AtW is the best thing that ever happened for work. Deaf people using AtW include chief financial officers (connecting to their interpreter on a lap top from their meeting in Hong Kong!), complaints investigators in the NHS, and run their own companies.

What will *you* achieve with AtW? ■



*Darren Townsend-Handscomb is a sign language interpreter, who runs DeafATW, and also a project with deaf people and interpreters in The Gambia. He was lucky enough to have a Deaf mum who used BSL, which is how all of this started.*

### Notes:

- 1 To qualify for AtW support, self-arranged work experience must be arranged in line with Job Centre Plus guidance and approved by the job centre.

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