



BRIEFING PAPER

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Access to Work scheme for disabled people

By Andrew Powell

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1. What is Access to Work

Access to Work provides practical advice and support to disabled people and their employers to help them overcome work-related obstacles resulting from disability. Access to Work was launched in June 1994 and is delivered by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) through Jobcentre Plus. Access to Work is available to those aged 16 years or over who live and work in Great Britain.

There are two main types of Access to Work provision:¹

- 1 **Assessments** involve exploring workplace-related barriers to employment and making recommendations on how these can be overcome.
- 2 **Elements** are put in place to provide the additional support that is required.

In some, but not all cases, an Assessment is required to assess whether a customer is eligible to receive an Element.

Access to Work provision was approved for 32,000 people in 2018/19.

1.1 What support is provided?

An individual may be able to get Access to Work if their disability or health condition makes it hard for them to do parts of their job, or get to and from work. To be eligible, they would need to be in a paid job, or be about to start or return to one.

The paid job could include self-employment, an apprenticeship, work trial or work experience, or an internship; and it must be based in England, Scotland or Wales.²

As part of the [Equality Act 2010](#), employers must make **reasonable adjustments** to support disabled job applicants and employees. Examples of reasonable adjustments are included on the gov.uk page [Reasonable adjustments for workers with disabilities or health conditions](#).

Access to Work will contribute to the **additional employment costs** resulting from disability that the employer would not normally be expected to cover.

The provision provided in 2018/19 included elements such as:³

- Communication support for interviews
- Special aids and equipment
- Adaptations to premises and vehicles
- Help with travel costs
- Support workers

¹ DWP, [Access to Work Statistics: April 2007 to March 2019](#), 7 August 2019

² DWP, [Access to Work: eligibility](#)

³ DWP, [Access to Work Statistics: April 2007 to March 2019](#), 7 August 2019, table 1

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- A mental health support service

The maximum annual amount that an individual can receive has been set at £59,200 from 1 April 2019. This is updated annually every April.

1.2 Exceptions

People who are in receipt of **certain benefits** are generally not able to get Access to Work support. These benefits are:⁴

- Incapacity Benefit (IB), including the award of National Insurance credits only.
- Employment Support Allowance (ESA) including the award of National Insurance credits only.
- Severe Disability Allowance.
- Income Support paid as a result of illness.

In some cases they are able to get this support, for example if they have found a job and will stop claiming when this employment begins, if they are going to an interview or if they are starting a Work Trial.

Access to Work support is generally not available to **employees of Ministerial departments**. This is because these departments have agreed to fund all adjustments for staff directly employed by them.⁵

Non ministerial departments do not fund adjustments for staff employed by them, and therefore their employees are eligible for Access to Work support.

Access to Work can provide assessments for people employed in all ministerial departments except the Department for Work and Pensions.

Access to Work support is not provided to people in **voluntary work**.⁶

1.3 Mental Health Support Service

The Access to Work Mental Health Support service was introduced in 2011, with the aim of supporting individuals who are absent from work or finding it difficult to stay at work because of a mental health condition.

This part of the service is provided by two organisations: Able Futures and Remploy.⁷

Mental Health Support Service referrals are available to employees of ministerial departments, but the cost of any recommendations would not be met by Access to Work.⁸

1.4 Cost sharing with employers

Employers may be expected to pay some of the cost of the elements that are implemented by Access to Work. In general, this will depend on

⁴ DWP, [Access to Work staff guide](#), February 2020, p13

⁵ DWP, [Access to Work staff guide](#), February 2020, p31

⁶ DWP, [Access to Work staff guide](#), February 2020, p15

⁷ DWP, [Access to Work: What you'll get](#)

⁸ DWP, [Access to Work staff guide](#), February 2020, p32

how long the employee has been in paid employment, and the type of element.⁹

If the employee has been in paid employment for less than six weeks then any costs would be met by Access to Work in full. If they have been in paid employment for longer than this then the employer may be expected to pay some of the costs.

Employers will generally be expected to cost share for applications involving Adaptations to Premises and Equipment, Special Aids and Equipment and Miscellaneous support. Employers may also be expected to cost share for applications for other elements, but this will be determined on a case-by-case basis.

The proportion of the costs that the employer will generally be expected to pay will vary according to the number of people they employ:

- A small employer (with less than 50 employees) will pay 20% of costs, up to £1,000.
- A medium sized employer (with between 50 and 249 employees) will pay the first £500 of the costs, and will pay 20% of remaining costs, up to £1,800.
- A large employer (with more than 250 employees) will pay the first £1,000 of the costs, and will pay 20% of the remaining costs, up to £2,800.

If the Access to Work support also provides a general business benefit to the employer, then a contribution will be sought in addition to the above.

1.5 Funding cap

In October 2015, the Government introduced a cap on the amount of Access to Work funding that any new applicants could receive each year. The cap was only applied to those who were already receiving Access to Work funding in April 2018.¹⁰

In the announcement of the cap, the Government reported that “1% of users with awards over £35,000 per annum account for 15% of the budget”. The cap was deferred for those already receiving Access to Work funding to enable the user, and their employer, to adjust to the new level of support.

The cap was originally set at £40,800 per person per year, although it has been increased each year. It increased from £42,100 to £57,200 between 2017/18 and 2018/19. In 2019/20, the cap has been set at £59,200 per person per year.

The then Chair of the Work and Pensions Committee welcomed the increase in the cap to £57,200 in 2018/19, stating that at its previous level it had acted “as a cap on aspiration”. The Committee reports that,

⁹ DWP, [Access to Work guidance for employers](#)

¹⁰ [HCWS 372](#), 12 March 2015

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although the cap only directly affects around 200 users, it has a wider cultural impact.¹¹

The Access to Work cap directly affects just 200 users, who are primarily D/deaf, but evidence to the Committee suggests it has a wider cultural impact. The Committee heard that its personal impact on those users is disproportionate, and risks stymying their careers. It may also fuel a perception that people with complex communication needs cannot be accommodated in employment.

Many of those affected by the cap are senior professionals at the tops of their fields, who act as role models for other D/deaf and disabled people, both within and outside their organisations, and in the words of Inclusion London, demonstrate to disabled people that they can aspire to "work full time, to progress in a career of [their] choice, to take on additional responsibilities at work and perform on an equal playing field with colleagues". Contrary to these aims, the cap at its current level makes D/deaf and disabled people feel that employment—especially in higher paid, senior roles—is not for them.

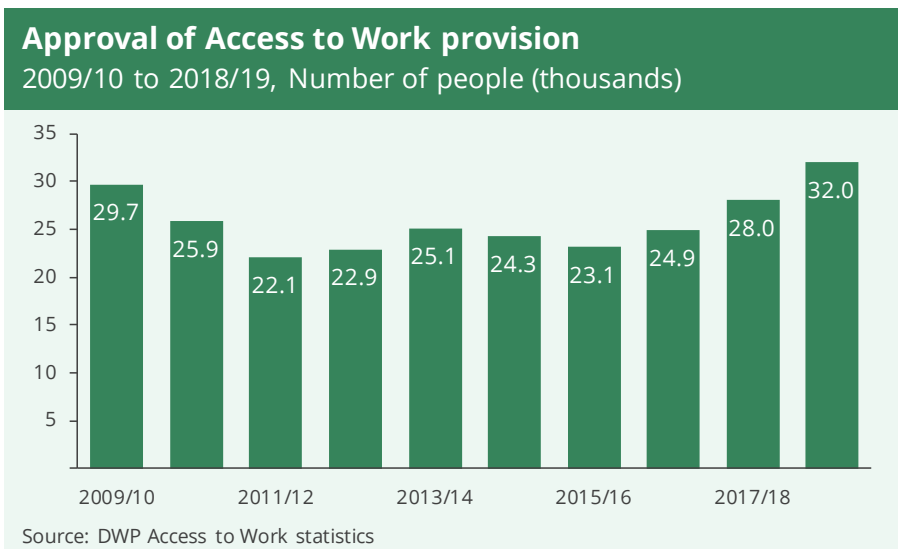
¹¹ Work and Pensions Committee, [Chair welcomes new higher Access to Work cap](#), 20 March 2018

2. Take-up of Access to Work

Access to Work provision was approved for 32,000 people in 2018/19. This provision consisted of the approval of elements for 30,000 people, while assessments were carried out for 15,100 people.

The number of people for whom Access to Work provision was approved increased by almost 4,000 between 2017/18 and 2018/19, an increase of 14%.

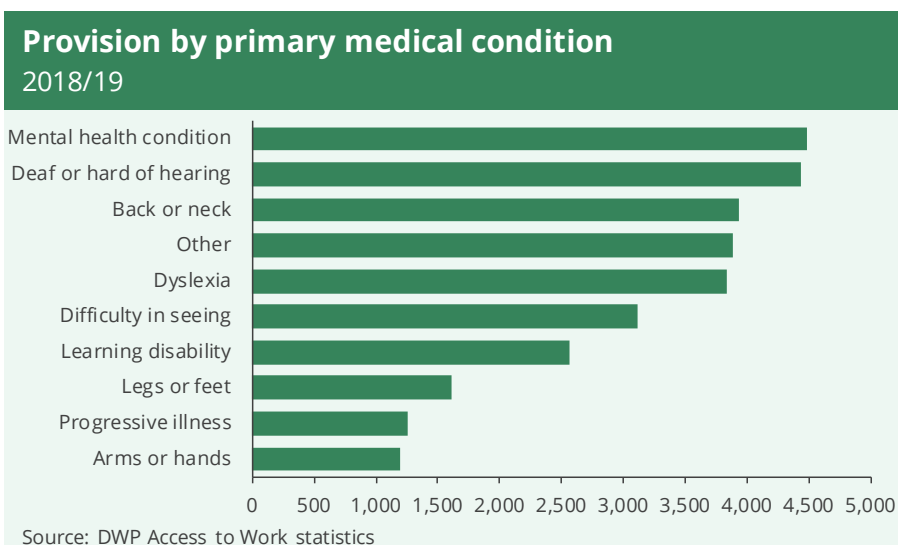
The chart below shows how provision has changed over the last ten years:



2.1 By medical condition

In 2018/19 the most common primary medical condition of those people who have provision approved was a mental health condition.

The table below shows the ten most common primary medical conditions:



There has been a large increase in the number of people with a mental health condition as their primary medical condition, from just 350 in 2010/11 to 4,490 in 2018/19.

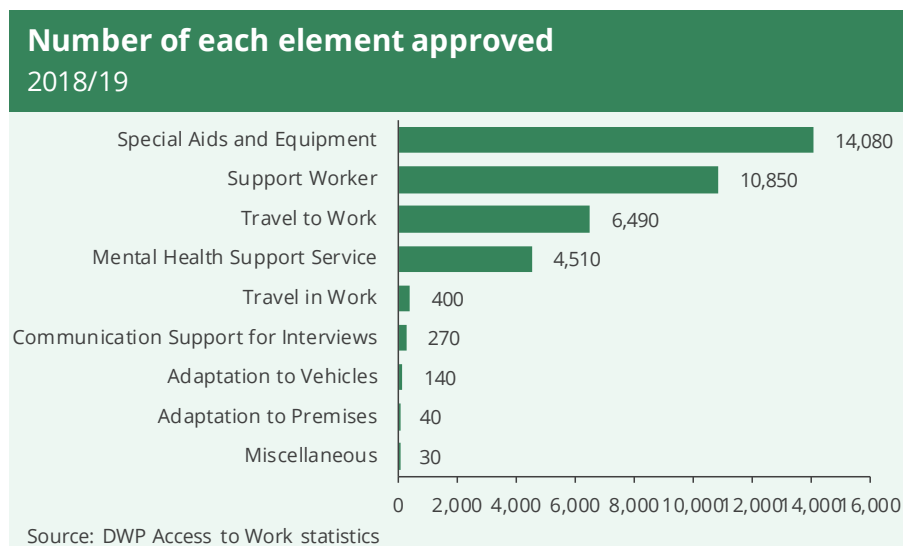
2.2 By element

36,810 Access to Work elements were approved in 2018/19.

The most common element in this year was Special Aids and Equipment, followed by a Support Worker. Between them, these two elements made up over two thirds of approvals.

98% of approvals were in four elements in 2018/19: Special Aids and Equipment, Support Workers, Travel to Work and the Mental Health Support Service. There were less than 900 approvals in the other elements.

The chart below shows approvals by type of element:

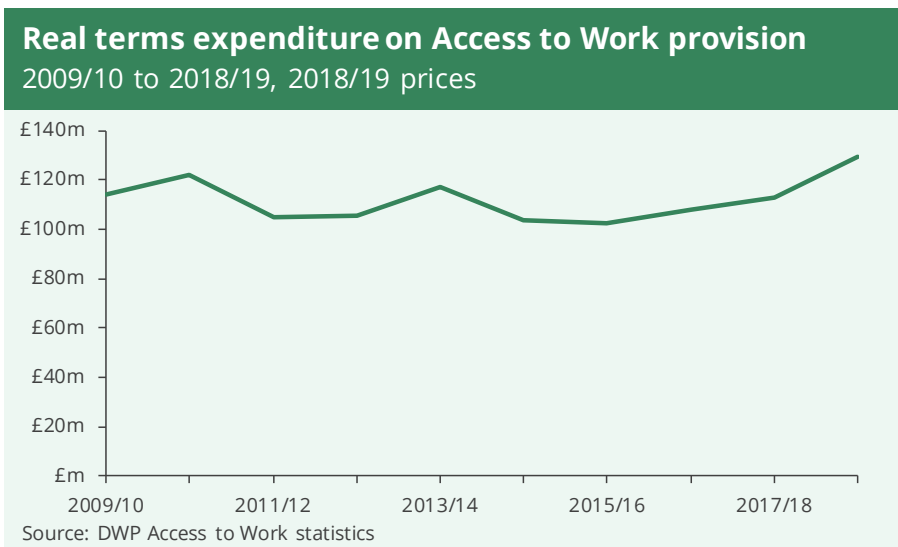


3. Government expenditure

Access to work is a publicly funded programme. The Government spent £129 million on Access to Work provision in 2018/19. In real terms, this was an increase of £16 million from 2017/18.

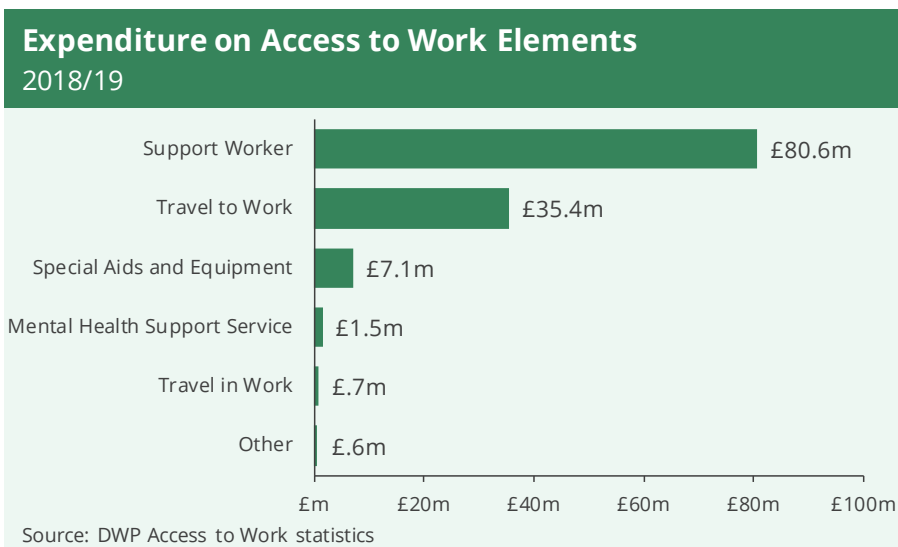
Of the £129 million, £126 million was spent on the costs of the elements provided as part of the provision, while the remaining £3 million was spent on assessment costs.

The chart below shows how government expenditure on Access to Work provision has changed over the last ten years:



The majority of the spend on elements was spent on just two of the elements: 64% was spent on Support Workers and 28% on Travel to Work. A further 6% was spent on Special Aids and Equipment, meaning only 2% of spend was on the other elements.

The chart below shows spend by element in 2018/19:



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