

Access to Work Guide

This guide is based on my experience processing Access to Work applications and booking BSL interpreters for Nottingham Playhouse and [Ramps on the Moon](#)'s production of [Our Country's Good](#) in 2018, combined with information from the [government website](#) and [Disability Arts Online](#).

Applying for Access to Work

For *Our Country's Good*, I applied for Access to Work on behalf of the artists who needed it. This made it easier to keep track of the applications and submit information regarding interpreter costs etc. In other cases, artists may prefer to submit their application themselves. Here's my step-by-step advice for employers assisting with Access to Work (ATW).

- 1. Prepare well in advance.** Research as much as possible. Send artists an Access Audit as soon as they are cast, to find out what support they will need for the production. While some artists may be used to applying for ATW for every job, for others this may be their first experience. Ask artists if they have used any of their annual allowance yet, as ATW caps applicants' claims at £59,200 annually (figure as at April 2019).
- 2. Submit an application form.** Artists can apply with the online application form [here](#) or via phone/text-phone service. Alternatively, they can sign a Third Party Consent Form and email it to atwosu.london@dwp.gsi.gov.uk to nominate someone else to do the application for them. This is useful when multiple members of the company are applying, so the applications can all be consistent and be kept track of. It is in the theatre's best interests to make sure everyone who can apply does so, as the ATW money helps reimburse the theatre's payments for support workers, accessible accommodation etc. If there are multiple applications, ask ATW if it is possible to have one adviser for all the applications to make it more straight-forward.
- 3. Access to Work makes contact to discuss the details and request additional information.** This will be over the phone or via email with the artist, or if you are the Third Party nominee, they will contact you directly. Each applicant is given a Unique Reference Number (UTR) so have it handy every time you contact the advisor. The advisor will need the following information:
 - a. Confirmation the work is paid, e.g. the artist's contract.
 - b. The artist's latest tax return
 - c. Their UTR number
 - d. The Support Worker Record of Tasks (a form outlining the tasks for which the applicant needs a support worker's assistance)
 - e. Hours per day a support worker is needed (overestimate if unsure)
 - f. Dates a support worker is needed
 - g. Cost breakdown including three quotes (ATW will reimburse the lowest quote value)
- 4. Access to Work makes contact with the employer** if they haven't already, to discuss reasonable adjustments and additional support needs. An assessor may also visit the workplace to assess the applicant's needs. Advisors may not be familiar with theatre, so they may not know what requirements are needed for a production or tour. They may also be unfamiliar with theatre terminology so be clear and avoid theatre jargon.
- 5. Access to Work send their decision, which could include a grant offer.** This will be a letter posted to the artist, detailing what they will reimburse and the amount they will pay. The artist must complete and return the declaration to accept their offer or request a reassessment if you are not happy with their decision.

Tip: Keep evidence of every correspondence with ATW. Emails provide a paper trail so, after a phone call, email the advisor with a summary of the conversation. Always photocopy/scan paperwork before posting. Post it as 'signed for' and make a note of the date it is posted.

Suggested Timeline

In an ideal scenario, this is the timeline I would suggest for productions.

4-6 months before rehearsals:

- Organise casting earlier than usual. Support workers can book up very early, and for a consistent support worker you may need to book them 4-6 months in advance. However you won't know what support is needed until you have cast the production.
- In the meantime, start researching contacts and getting preliminary quotes for different forms of support.
- Once the director is contracted, ask them to prepare a production schedule 12 weeks before rehearsals start. You'll need to know location, dates & hours per day to send to ATW and to book support workers.

12 weeks before rehearsals:

- Finalise casting, creative team and production team.
- Send out Access Audits to assess what support the company members require.
- Remind the director to send their finalised production schedule this week.

11 weeks before rehearsals:

- Process the artists' returned Access Audits.
- Book support/accommodation as necessary over the next 7 weeks using the director's production schedule. Assume anything TBC is going ahead, as it's better to overestimate than underestimate at this stage.
- Keep a spreadsheet of the cost breakdown for each artist's support.

6 weeks before rehearsals:

- Post artists a Third Party consent form (to nominate you to handle ATW on their behalf), a Support Worker Record of Tasks form and a list of other information you need e.g. copy of latest tax return, UTR number, preferred title and contact details.

4 weeks before rehearsals:

- Contact ATW to start the process for each artist and submit their Third Party consent forms.
- Over the next 3 weeks, send all the details to ATW to assess. Advisors should respond within 5 working days so chase if you haven't had a response after 7 days.

1 week before rehearsals:

- Aim to have finalised grants with ATW so the grant declaration letters reach the artists at their home addresses before they move to another city for rehearsals.
- Ask artists to sign and bring their ATW grant declaration with them for you to photocopy.

Rehearsals begin:

- Photocopy artists' grant declaration letters and post the originals to ATW.
- Give artists a DP228JP form to sign (see below) to set up the theatre as new payee.

Every month during rehearsals & performances:

- Send ATW monthly claim forms with attached invoices/receipts. Leave enough time for the artist to sign forms and for you to take copies before posting to ATW. This takes a lot longer if the company is on tour! Claim forms must be submitted within 4 months. ATW normally take 1-2 weeks to process the forms and email a remittance notice.

4 months after end of contract:

- Final claim forms and invoices must have been received by ATW.

Access to Work Claim Forms

DP228JP: New or amended details

This form is used to set up a new payee, such as the producing theatre, to reimburse for access costs.

DP222JP: Support worker claim

This form is to detail all the support worker costs you are claiming back, e.g. costs for BSL interpreters, PAs or buddies. **Use one form per month.** ATW will not reimburse expenses (e.g. travel) unless it was explicit in your grant offer. If you are claiming back accommodation costs, use the Agreed Additional Costs box at the bottom of the form and attach the hotel's invoice.

You will need to be gathering the evidence (invoices, payslips, receipts etc.) throughout the period ready to send to ATW. Make sure the claim amount on invoices is clear and take copies of all the paperwork before you post it.

Both the artist and the employer need to sign each form, so leave extra time if you need to post the forms out to the artist on tour. Forms must be returned to ATW within 4 months.

DP226JP: Claim for travel to work costs

This form is used to claim back money from travelling to work. You must attach receipts or invoices as evidence. Receipts must show the amount paid, the person/company who provided the transport, the date(s) and the start and end point of each journey (full addresses or postcodes). Both the artist and the employer need to sign each form, so leave extra time if you need to post the forms out to the artist on tour.

Postal address:

Access to Work Payments Team
Operational Support Unit 2
Harrow Jobcentre
Mail Handling Site A
Wolverhampton
WV98 1JE

Tip: When budgeting, be aware that ATW won't always pay the full support costs. They will match the lowest of the 3 quotes provided, even if you don't use the cheapest option. They may pay the difference between public transport and taxis, or between non-accessible accommodation and accessible accommodation.

Access Support

BSL Interpreters

Interpreters are needed anytime an artist who uses BSL is required, so they will need booking for all of their rehearsals, meetings, workshops, performances etc. There are many freelance interpreters and agencies like [TheatreSign](#), but interpreters can book up fast so start organising early. It may be more cost effective to book local interpreters for each tour venue. Not every interpreter has worked in a theatre so it is important to check their experience. The [Association of Sign Language Interpreters](#) (ASLI) has a database of freelance interpreters which can be filtered by location and theatre experience.

You may also wish to appoint a Head Interpreter to help book and manage the interpreters. They could also provide resources for interpreters joining at different tour venues, such as videos introducing the show, key signs and cast and characters' sign names. This makes the signing much more consistent throughout the run.

In spring 2018, BSL interpreters charged £30-£45 per hour. For a 7:30pm show, interpreters were usually called from 6pm to 10:30pm. This could be longer if the cast members who relied on BSL were needed for extra duties such as touch tours or post-show discussions. Interpreters can be sent a letter to confirm their booking, then invoice each week. However it may be most cost effective to contract them, guaranteeing work for a length of time and paying them all the same rate. Otherwise ATW only reimburses the lowest rate, so if some interpreters charge more than others, the producing theatre must pay the difference.

Support Workers

Support workers can assist an artist when travelling, in rehearsals and at each venue. It's likely to be more cost effective to contract all support workers rather than asking for invoices. The artist may have a preferred support worker already, but agencies like [Holding Hands](#) can be helpful too, particularly for short term cover.

When budgeting for a support worker, you may include an 'out of pocket' daily allowance, accommodation, and travel costs. Keep receipts as evidence for ATW. You may also offer to book support workers' accommodation and travel.

Tip: From ATW's point of view, support starts when you are ready to start the working day. Keep this in mind when budgeting support costs.

Accessible Accommodation

ATW is unlikely to reimburse an employee's accessible accommodation, but they may reimburse a support worker's accommodation. It is much easier to apply for an ATW grant if you know how much the accommodation will cost. If it is not yet booked, initially overestimate the cost, as ATW will not pay anything over the agreed grant amount. It is also vital you receive invoices or receipts for all the accommodation bookings to send to ATW.

Tip: ATW can provide a wide variety of other support too, including: equipment such as digital hearing aids or specialist wheelchairs; taxi costs; and other support workers such as lip-speakers, travel-buddies, drivers and carers.