



Department for

Communities

An Roinn

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Department for

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Specification

Access to Work (NI)

Specification for the delivery of assessment services for people who are deaf or hard of hearing

November 2024

ACCESS TO WORK (NI)

Access to Work (NI) assists people who are in paid employment or who have a job to start, through the provision of practical support and by helping to meet the additional costs that are associated with overcoming work-related obstacles that may result from having a disability.

Department for Communities (DfC) – Competitive Grant Call Specification for the delivery of assessment services under the Access to Work (NI) – AtW (NI) Programme for people who are deaf or hard of hearing

1. PURPOSE OF GRANT

The purpose of the Grant is to deliver AtW (NI) assessment services for clients of the Department who are:

- deaf or
- hard of hearing

The objective of this service is to identify the minimum support appropriate, this could be equipment, software, job adjustments, adaptation to premises or a combination of these that enables this group of clients who are about to start a new job or are currently working and experiencing difficulty in their job due to their disability, to compete on an equal basis in the workplace.

2. SCOPE OF THE GRANT

The scope of this Grant is to fund AtW (NI) assessment services for people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

The AtW (NI) Process

This grant is for AtW (NI) assessment services for people who are deaf or hard of hearing. Applications to the AtW (NI) programme are client led. Clients contact the AtW (NI) team directly for an application form. The AtW (NI) Adviser then contacts the client to ascertain what support a client requires to assist

with their employment-related disability barrier and which element(s) of the AtW (NI) programme can best address this. The AtW (NI) Adviser then completes a Referral Form for an assessment, if appropriate, detailing the client's disability, the effects of their disability in work and the reason for the referral. This referral is forwarded to the assessment provider to request an assessment relating to the areas detailed in the **“Nature of the Services”** section below.

The assessment provider identifies the most appropriate, cost effective AtW (NI) solution for the client. The AtW (NI) Adviser negotiates and agrees a package of financial assistance with the employer/client, the AtW (NI) Adviser then completes a profile outlining costs for management approval.

Geographical Distribution of Assessment Services

AtW (NI) provision is delivered across the whole of Northern Ireland, split across 2 regions covering the Jobs and Benefits offices and Job Centres within each region. The service provider is required to deliver the service across both regions. The two regions and their offices are outlined below:

Belfast Area

Andersonstown, Bangor, North Belfast, Newtownards, Falls Road, Holywood Road, Knockbreda, Newtownabbey, Shaftesbury Square, Shankill Road, Larne, Carrickfergus, Lisburn.

Regional Area

Antrim, Ballymena, Ballymoney, Coleraine, Foyle, Limavady, Lisnagelvin, Magherafelt, Cookstown, Strabane, Armagh, Newry, Banbridge, Newcastle, Kilkeel, Downpatrick, Ballynahinch, Dungannon, Enniskillen, Lurgan, Portadown, Omagh.

3.NATURE OF THE SERVICES

AtW (NI) Assessment Services for people who are deaf or hard of hearing

The assessment provider must deliver assessment services for clients who are deaf or hard of hearing, who have been identified by AtW (NI) Advisers as potentially requiring technical equipment/training to start or retain a job. The assessment provider must ensure they are up to date with relevant advances in assistive technology. The assessment must provide guidance on issues such as minimum equipment/ aids/software requirements, adjustments to job tasks/job description, hours of work, health and safety, disability awareness training and compliance with disability discrimination legislation, to enable clients and to assist employers to support clients to fully carry out their work duties.

The table below shows the number of 1st and 2nd assessments (now renamed follow-up visits) requested by the Department from 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024 for people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Table 1

Assessment Year April 2023 to March 2024	1st	2nd
Total	41	5

However, as AtW (NI) is a demand-led programme, this volume of referrals must not be taken as a clear indication of future trends.

4.COMMISSIONING AND INITIATION OF ASSESSMENTS

The Department will contact the assessment provider via email to advise them that a referral has been uploaded via Secure File Transfer Process (SFTP) by the AtW (NI) Adviser responsible for the client’s geographical work area.

Each referral document will have been completed by the AtW (NI) Adviser for the Department. It will provide the name of the person to be assessed, location of their work, details of the condition and its impact on them in work and the reason why the assessment is needed, as detailed in the Referral Form at **Appendix 1**.

On receipt of the referral, the provider must set up and maintain for each individual client, an electronic file containing the following:

- the original referral from the Department;
- detailed notes of assessments and discussions undertaken by the assessment provider; and
- a copy of the client's Assessment Report.

In accordance with UK GDPR and Data Protection requirements, all information must be stored securely on computer and locked down by password. Access must be restricted to provider staff. Hard copy versions of reports or other information gathered must be destroyed on completion of the report.

- The provider must contact the client within 3 working days to arrange an appointment to call and carry out an assessment.
- The provider must contact the clients Line Manager/Supervisor prior to their visit to advise of appointment.

5. GRANT REQUIREMENTS

After the assessor has downloaded the referral from SFTP, they must carry out an assessment as detailed in the Assessment section and complete a report as detailed in the Report section.

A first assessment requires the assessor to conduct an assessment as directed in the reason for assessment section of the Referral Form, recording detailed information gathered from the client regarding their current situation as well as their and its impact on them **in the workplace**, they are also required to discuss potential solutions including but not limited to:

- equipment including software
- adjustments to the job
- adjustments to the current work environment
- the benefits of these suggestions before agreeing the most suitable solutions given the client's minimum needs and work environment. The assessor then is required to compile a report detailing their discussions and give their final recommendations.

If a follow-up visit is required, the AtW (NI) Adviser must give their approval and the reason for the follow-up visit.

If the follow-up visit is for a setup of equipment recommended from the initial assessment this requires the assessor to conduct an assessment as directed in the reason for the assessment section including but not limited to:

- ensuring that the equipment purchased is the recommended equipment
- checking the clients set up with all their equipment is suitable

- checking the client is using the equipment properly
- providing the client with advice on how to adjust the equipment to enhance, alter the support if appropriate

The assessor then compiles a report detailing their discussions and giving final recommendations.

6. ASSESSMENT AND REPORT

Assessment

Each assessment must include the following elements:

- The assessor must assess the client **in their workplace** to discuss the difficulties identified in the AtW (NI) Adviser's referral, to get a full picture of the tasks, the environment and the equipment currently available.
- The assessor must discuss with the client, the difficulties that they experience in work and provide observations on the ability of the client to carry out their normal daily duties.
- The assessor must interview the client to establish clearly all the facts that are relevant to the assessment. This will include any medical history appropriate to the assessment and may include the collection of information relating to the work environment and job design.
- The assessor must **NOT** make any comments, verbal or in writing, about any other general aspects of the workplace layout or other workstations not covered by the assessment in question.

- The assessor's comments in the Assessment Report must relate specifically to the reason for assessment section in the AtW (NI) Adviser's referral, e.g. aspects of workplace layout, ergonomics, health and safety, if bespoke equipment is required etc. that impact upon the client being assessed and their ability to carry out their job role.

Report

The assessment provider must provide the Department, with an Assessment Report on each individual assessed, within a maximum of **20 working days** of the referral via SFTP. In producing the report, the assessment provider must take account of the information in the referral and any specific questions asked by the referring AtW (NI) Adviser.

The report must be returned to the Department electronically, only via SFTP (email will not be accepted), presented in Arial 12 with 1.5 spacing and include the following sections:

- the client's name;
- the name of the AtW (NI) Adviser who made the referral;
- the name of the assessor who carried out the assessment;
- the date the assessment took place;
- the specific location of the assessment;
- information on the client's job and duties;
- a summary of the client's disability in relation to the job

- specification in the referral;
- details of all equipment and reasonable adjustments discussed between the client and the assessor and reasons why the suggestions were not suitable;
- detailed findings on the appropriate solution (where suitable, copies of diagrams, photographs of equipment recommended and/or web-link showing equipment, measurements and drawings which support the report and recommendations);
- detailed findings on why bespoke equipment is required;
- detailed notes of observations made by the assessor;
- recommendations – these should be the minimum wheelchair/equipment/aids/software required (if any) to enable the client to carry out the job or range of jobs in their current workplace;
- equipment specifications (if appropriate); i.e. a detailed specification of the type of chair or other corrective equipment;
- the original quote including the name, address and telephone number of a minimum of one supplier which is the best value for money per piece of equipment recommended (including an estimate of costs) when the cost is below £400, excluding VAT;
- the original quote including the name, address and telephone number of a minimum of two suppliers which are the best value for money per piece of equipment recommended (including an estimate of costs); when the cost is £400 and above, excluding VAT;
- at all times the assessment provider must ensure that its officers, employees and agents shall not, shall not, receive any commission, fees, rebates or consideration from any employee, officer or agent of suppliers of recommended equipment or services;
- the assessment provider shall not permit a supplier of recommended equipment to favour any employee, officer or agent of the assessment provider with gifts or entertainment of significant cost or value;
- each report must be signed by the assessor who completed the assessment;
- each report must be quality assured by an additional assessor who is equally qualified or experienced or by someone of a more senior position in the company such as Director. The person quality assuring the report must also sign the report specifying their name and position/grade.

All reports must be clearly structured and formatted as above and must be dated, signed and returned to the AtW (NI) Adviser who made the referral using SFTP (required report layout see appendix 2).

7. ASSESSMENT RATES AND PAYMENT

Rates

The unit cost per assessment is as set out below.

- 1st assessment cost is set at **£585** for a face-to-face assessment of need.
- Follow-up visit cost is set at **£335**.
- The Department for Communities cannot provide any guarantee as to the level of business under this agreement.

Follow-up visit fee

If a client cancels their appointment within 48 hours of the time of their assessment and the provider is unable to fill this slot, or if a client does not attend their appointment with no warning given, then the provider can claim a follow-up visit fee of £335. The Provider must send an email to let the AtW (NI) Adviser know including the reasons for the cancellation as soon as they are made aware of the cancellation, or in the case of a client not attending an appointment without warning, once the assessment has not taken place.

Payment

Payment will be made monthly on receipt of an invoice from the **assessment provider** sent via SFTP detailing the number of assessments, initial and follow-up, completed during the period and after confirmation is provided by the referring AtW (NI) adviser that the report has met their referral requirements.

8. KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The assessment provider must make contact with the client within **3 working days** of receipt of referral, to arrange a mutually convenient time to undertake the assessment – the target for this KPI is 95% within **3 working days**. The Provider must send monthly data showing client contact dates. This should be sent via SFTP by the **5th working day** of the following month.

An assessment must take place and the Assessment Report including all solutions discussed and final recommendations must be completed in the agreed format, quality assured and returned by the assessment provider, via SFTP to the referring AtW (NI) Adviser within a maximum of **20 working days** of receipt of the referral. The target for this KPI is 95% within **20 working days**.

The assessment provider must notify the Department, as soon as they become aware, if a report will be outside of the **20 working days** period and the reason why.

9. GRANT MANAGEMENT AND REVIEW

Prior to the commencement of the four-year grant award period on 1 April 2025, the successful provider will sign a Grant Funding Agreement for the coming year that will set out the requirements of the grant and provide an estimate of the amount of the grant for that year that may vary subject to demand. A Grant

Funding Agreement will be signed by the successful provider at the start of each year of the grant period.

The AtW (NI) Programme Manager has overall responsibility for the management and implementation of the agreed grant.

Prior to the commencement of the Grant, the assessment provider must forward the name and contact details of the provider's main point of contact for administration purposes.

At commencement of the Grant, the AtW (NI) Programme Manager shall hold a Grant Management initiation meeting to ensure that the assessment provider clearly understands the grant requirements re the KPI's in section 8. At this stage, the assessment provider will be advised of the steps that will be taken to manage poor performance. The AtW (NI) Programme Manager should keep a written record of this meeting.

For monitoring purposes, periodically the AtW (NI) Programme Manager and/or an AtW (NI) Adviser will accompany the assessment provider's assessors when they are carrying out an assessment with the client, any such visits will be agreed in advance. The Department will have the right to monitor the assessment services to determine the efficiency and effectiveness of the grant in terms of quality and agreed protocols.

The Department reserves the right to carry out spot checks on the quotations provided for the recommendations.

The assessment provider must provide the Department with statistics and other relevant information determined by the Department as and when required, e.g. number of clients referred and details of the current position of cases.

The AtW (NI) Programme Manager and the assessment provider will conduct quarterly update reviews covering performance:

- number of referrals
- number of clients the assessment provider has contacted within the **3 days**, 95%
- number of completed reports submitted within **20 days**, 95%
- number of completed reports outside the **20-day** turnaround time and specific reason why the **20 days** was missed
- any issues identified by the AtW (NI) advisers regarding the reports
- plus, any ad hoc current or emerging issues identified.

In the event that the AtW (NI) Programme Manager assesses the Provider's delivery of the grant to be unsatisfactory in relation to the KPI's in section 8, they shall make the Provider aware of its unsatisfactory performance, at an update review meeting. At this meeting, the AtW (NI) Programme Manager and the Provider will agree how to resolve the performance issues identified and the timescale for the improvement.

If, at the end of the agreed review period, the AtW (NI) Programme Manager assesses the delivery of the grant is still unsatisfactory, they will issue a First Written Warning of Unsatisfactory Performance letter. If, at the end of the agreed review period, the AtW (NI) Programme Manager assesses the delivery of the grant is satisfactory, they will issue an Improved Performance letter.

If, at the end of the agreed review period, the AtW (NI) Programme Manager assesses the delivery of the grant is still unsatisfactory, they will issue a Second Written Warning of Unsatisfactory Performance letter and discuss with Senior Management for advice.

Where performance has not improved, the matter shall be escalated within the Department.

The Department reserves the right to terminate the Grant Funding Agreement at any time by giving 3 months written notice to the Organisation of termination. Any liabilities properly incurred or earned before the date of termination will be payable by the Department in accordance with the terms of the Grant Funding Agreement.

It is to be noted that prior approval must be sought from the Department before a new assessor can commence in the role.

10. INFORMATION ASSURANCE: SAFEGUARDING OF INFORMATION

The assessment provider must agree to the principles of the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) 2018.

Table 2

Description	Details
Subject matter of the processing	The purpose of this service is to identify the minimum support appropriate for people with disabilities in the workplace. Using personnel information regarding their disability to determine solutions which could be equipment, software, job adjustments, adaptation to premises or a combination of these that enables this group of clients who are about to start a new job or are currently working and experiencing difficulty in their job due to their disability, to compete on an equal basis in the workplace.
Duration of the processing	The assessment provider will hold the data for the duration of the grant.
Nature and purposes of the processing	<p>A referral to an external assessor is completed, this contains information regarding the client's disability, their place of work and type of employment and the impact of their disability on them in the workplace. The purpose is to enable solutions to workplace difficulties to be identified.</p> <p>The referral is currently uploaded to the assessors via SFTP.</p> <p>The completed report is returned via SFTP.</p>
Type of Personal Data	<p>Name of person to be assessed, workplace, name of line manager, work phone number, date of birth, diagnosis/details of disability and the nature of difficulties in work, name of referring adviser.</p> <p>The workplace assessor completes a report which provides further details on the client's disability and its impact on them in work plus provides recommendations on solutions.</p>
Categories of Data Subject	<p>Personnel details on the client referred for assessment.</p> <p>The client's line manager's telephone number and place of work.</p> <p>The Data Controller's email and telephone number.</p> <p>The assessor's email and mobile numbers.</p>
Plan for return and destruction of the data once the processing is complete UNLESS requirement under union or member state law to preserve that type of data	<p>Data containing personal information is disposed of 3 years from the date of the last paper. Financial information is disposed of 7 years from the date of the last paper.</p> <p>The assessment provider will retain and destroy all personal documentation in line with current legislation, namely GDPR and DPA 2018. Data can be held for no longer than is necessary, ensuring the security of information.</p>

It is the responsibility of the assessment provider to destroy all personnel information 3 years from the date of the last paper referring to the client. Financial information must be destroyed 7 years from date of last paper.

11. SECURITY SCHEDULE

This grant has been given a security clearance of:

Baseline Personnel Security Standard – Basic Disclosure

As a consequence, the assessment provider is required to take forward the process for security clearance.

Where any interaction with potentially vulnerable adults is to take place, you are required to ensure that the correct level of security clearance is in place.

12. GRANT PERIOD

The four-year grant award period will commence on 1 April 2025. The successful provider will sign a Grant Funding Agreement for the coming year that will set out the requirements of the grant and provide an estimate of the amount of the grant for that year that may vary subject to demand. A Grant Funding Agreement will be signed by the successful provider at the start of each year of the grant period.

APPENDIX 1

ACCESS TO WORK (NI)

CLIENT ASSESSMENT REFERRAL FORM

Client's Name: _____ **Employer:** _____

Position: _____ **Employment status:** (please tick as appropriate)

Work Address:	New Job:
WorkTel. No Client	Part-time
WorkTel. No Line Manager	Full time
DOB:	Self Employed

Duties:	
Effects of disability in work:	
Diagnosis/Disability as described by the client:	
Additional Information for eg reasonable adjustments already in place, equipment already tried:	
Reason for assessment:	
AtW (NI) Signature:	Date
Address:	Tel. No:

Date Received: _____

APPENDIX 2

Access to Work (NI) Assessment Report

Assessors name:	
Assessment date:	
Client Name:	
Occupation:	
Work address:	
Telephone:	
Referring AtW (NI) adviser:	
Referral date:	

Reason for referral:

Details of client's disability:

Current occupation and impact of disability on role:

Current work environment and issues to be addressed :

Details and reason for final recommendations:

Specification

Objective	Recommendation (Images Attached)	Cost (Quotes Attached)	Supplier

Report Compiled by	
Date	
Signature	

Report Checked by	
Grade/Position in Company	
Date	
Signature	

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