

The application and assessment process

Employment and Support Allowance

Working for  a better life

Employment and Support Allowance is a new way of helping people with an illness or disability move into work, rather than stay on benefits. Employment and Support Allowance will be introduced in October 2008 and replaces Incapacity Benefit and Income Support paid on incapacity grounds for new customers.

What is the application process for Employment and Support Allowance?

Most people will just need to make a single telephone call, with no initial claim forms to complete or sign, to start their application process. Customers with speech or hearing difficulties can contact us using a textphone to make their claim. Customers unable to claim by phone can claim via a representative or interpreter, by completing a printed claim form or through most Jobcentres, where a claim may be made face to face.

What happens after an initial application?

When someone applies for Employment and Support Allowance, they will enter a 13-week assessment phase.

What happens during the assessment phase?

We will ask the customer to provide us with a medical certificate from their doctor confirming that they are unable to work and we will determine their entitlement to financial support during the assessment phase.

Within the first few weeks we will ask the customer to complete a questionnaire so that we can find out more information about their illness or disability and whether they need to attend a Work Capability Assessment. Most customers will be required to attend a Work Capability Assessment within the assessment phase.

As soon as possible after week 8 of the assessment phase most customers will also be required to attend their first work focused interview.

What is a Work Capability Assessment (WCA)?

The Work Capability Assessment is a face to face meeting, lasting up to 75 minutes, which will explore how an individual's illness or disability affects their ability to work and carry out day-to-day activity. The Work Capability Assessment is made up of three parts and will assess what someone is able to do, rather than simply what they cannot.

The three parts of the Work Capability Assessment are:

- The ‘assessment of limited capability for work’ – this is to understand the affect on the customer of both mental and physical disabilities, and will determine whether Employment and Support Allowance is appropriate for their needs.
- The ‘assessment of limited capability for work-related activity’ – this part identifies, through a series of descriptors, those customers with the most severe limitations arising from their illness or disability. These customers will become members of the ‘Support Group’ of Employment and Support Allowance and will not be expected to prepare for work.
- The new ‘work-focused health-related assessment’ – this part provides the customer with access to a healthcare professional specifically to discuss their views about moving into work, and also identify any health related support that may support this.

What is a Work Focused Interview (WFI)?

The first work focused interview will take place with a customer’s personal adviser at their local Jobcentre Plus office. The purpose of a work focused interview is to discuss the customer’s views on returning to work and the package of support that may be required. Personal advisers will discuss with the customer the type of work that might be most suitable for them, and can refer them for employment, training or condition management support, to help them manage and cope with their illness or disability in a work context. During these discussions the customer and personal adviser might explore the customer’s:

- Job goals.
- Skills, strengths and abilities.
- Factors preventing them from finding work or limiting the work they can do, then helping them to overcome these barriers.
- Ideas, problems and issues.

The customer may attend up to five further work focused interviews as they prepare to return to work. These will be at approximately monthly intervals, to be confirmed by the customer and their personal adviser.

What happens after the assessment phase?

The results of the Work Capability Assessment will allow us to decide if the customer is entitled to continue to receive Employment and Support Allowance. It will also allow us to determine whether the customer enters either the ‘Support Group’ or the ‘Work-Related Activity Group’ of Employment and Support Allowance from the beginning of week 14 of their claim. The level of benefit they receive will depend on whether they enter the Work-Related Activity Group or the Support Group.

What are the Work-Related Activity and Support Groups?

If someone is able to undertake some form of work-related activity, then they will enter the Work-Related Activity Group. They will be expected to attend regular work focused interviews with their personal adviser to help them prepare for work.

Personal advisers will discuss the type of work that might be most suitable with the customer and can refer them for employment, training or condition management support, to help them manage and cope with their illness or disability in a work context.

If the customer has an illness or disability that means they are unable to undertake any form of work-related activity, then they will enter the Support Group. People in the Support Group will receive a higher rate of Employment and Support Allowance. They will not be required to take part in regular work focused interviews and work-related activity but they can volunteer to do so if they wish.

Is there anybody who doesn't have to attend a Work Capability Assessment?

Some customers will not need to attend the full Work Capability Assessment, including individuals with a terminal illness and those we can identify as having limited capability for work or limited capability for work-related activity without the need for them to take part in the full assessment. We will work with the customer and their healthcare professionals to gather the necessary information about their illnesses or disabilities to determine whether a full Work Capability Assessment is needed.

Customers with a terminal illness will be fast-tracked into the Support Group of Employment and Support Allowance so that we can ensure they receive everything that they are entitled to as quickly as possible. They will not be required to participate in a work-focussed health-related assessment or any other work-related activity.

Where do I go for more information?

For more information on Employment and Support Allowance visit www.dwp.gov.uk/esa