

# Employment and Support Allowance Factsheet

## The Work Capability Assessment and Work Focused Interview

**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 was introduced in October 2008 and replaced Incapacity Benefit and Income Support paid on incapacity grounds for new customers initially.

### Who has a Work Capability Assessment?

From 27 October 2008 most customers making a new claim for Employment and Support Allowance will have a Work Capability Assessment.

### When will someone have a Work Capability Assessment?

When someone applies for Employment and Support Allowance they will enter a 13-week assessment phase. The Work Capability Assessment will take place during this period or as soon as possible afterwards.

### What is a Work Capability Assessment?

The Work Capability Assessment is a face to face meeting, 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 consists of up to 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 is carried out at a later date, where limited capability for work has been identified and provides the customer with an opportunity to discuss their views about moving into work, and also identify any health related support that may support this.
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## **Who will carry out the Work Capability Assessment?**

Every stage of the assessment will be carried out by specially trained doctors appointed by the Department for Social Development (not the individual's own GP), to assess how an individual's illness or disability affects their ability to work and carry out day-to-day activity.

## **Where will the Work Capability Assessment take place?**

It will be carried out at a Medical Examination Centre, which will be within reasonable travelling distance of the customer's home. In exceptional circumstances provision can be made for the assessment to be carried out at the customer's home.

## **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 illness or disability 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.

## **What happens after the Work Capability Assessment?**

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. Eligible customers will then receive an additional component on top of the assessment rate of benefit and payments will be back-dated to week 14 of their claim if the results of the Work Capability Assessment were not known at that date.

Customers who join the Work-Related Activity Group will be expected to prepare for a return to work as a condition of receiving Employment and Support Allowance.

## **How will the results of the Work Capability Assessment be used?**

The assessment of a customer's limited capability for work, and limited capability for work-related activity, will go to the Department's decision maker to confirm if they are entitled to receive Employment and Support Allowance.

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Where a work-focused health-related assessment is carried out, that report will go to the customer's personal adviser carrying out work focused interviews. The customer will also get a copy of the report and will be encouraged to share this with professionals who are providing them with additional support, such as doctors, nurses and customer representatives.

### **What is a Work Focused Interview?**

The first Work Focused Interview will take place with a customer's Personal Adviser from the Department for Employment and Learning at their local Jobs and Benefits Office or Jobcentre. 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 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. 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.

Customers in the Work-Related Activity Group 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.

Customers in the Support Group will not be required to attend any further work focused interviews as a condition of receiving their full Employment and Support Allowance, although they can do so on a voluntary basis.

### **Will the Work Capability Assessment or Work Focused Interview determine the amount of benefit that a customer receives?**

The Work Capability Assessment will determine if the customer is eligible for Employment and Support Allowance and the amount of benefit that they will receive. In most cases, customers in the Work-Related Activity Group will be required to attend work focused interviews with a personal adviser as a condition of receiving their full Employment and Support Allowance.

### **Where do I go for more information?**

For more information on Employment and Support Allowance visit [www.dsdni.gov.uk/esa](http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/esa)

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