

Employment and Support Allowance Factsheet

An Overview

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.

Who is affected?

Since 27 October 2008 Employment and Support Allowance applies to new customers, replacing Incapacity Benefit and Income Support paid on incapacity grounds. Existing customers will initially continue to receive their existing benefits, so long as they continue to satisfy the entitlement conditions.

Why is the system changing?

In the United Kingdom, over 2.6 million people depend on incapacity benefits, and yet nine out of ten new customers say they want to return to work. With the introduction of Employment and Support Allowance the government is improving the package of support to help people return to the workplace. Employment and Support Allowance builds on the New Deal for Disabled People, and Pathways to Work which provide the practical support needed to help customers into work. There is also evidence which shows being out of work can contribute to poor health, whereas being in work can deliver real benefits, not only financially, but in terms of people's health and well-being, their self-esteem and the future prospects for themselves and their family.

How is Employment and Support Allowance different from other benefits?

Building on the success of the Pathways to Work initiative, which has been fully rolled out across Northern Ireland since April 2008, Employment and Support Allowance offers personalised support and financial help for customers who are not working due to an illness or disability. Central to Employment and Support Allowance are new medical assessments which examine what the customer can do, rather than what they can't.

Pathways to Work helps people with an illness or disability into work, if they are able. This includes the support of a Personal Adviser from the Department for Employment and Learning who can provide access to a range of financial support, return-to-work programmes such as the New Deal for Disabled People, and specialist provision, including access to the Condition Management Programme. The Condition Management Programme is delivered by healthcare professionals and helps customers to manage and cope with their illness or disability in a work context.

The personal adviser can also help the customer to find the right job with the support needed to sustain employment.

Employment and Support Allowance is focused on support, and people will not be forced to take a job, or undertake any other work-related activity which may be detrimental to their health.

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 their local Jobs and Benefits/Social Security Office, where a claim may be made face to face.

What happens after an application?

When someone becomes entitled to Employment and Support Allowance they will enter a 13-week assessment phase. During this period they will receive a basic rate payment of up to £64.30 a week for a single person aged 25 or over, £50.95 a week for a single person aged under 25, or, where income-related Employment and Support Allowance is payable, £100.95 a week for a couple.

What happens during the assessment phase?

A doctor appointed by the Department for Social Development (not the customer's own GP) will carry out a Work Capability Assessment with most customers, which is an assessment of how an individual's illness or disability affects their ability to work and carry out day-to-day activity. The Work Capability Assessment helps us determine the customer's eligibility for Employment and Support Allowance and their capability for work-related activity.

Customers who are deemed able to undertake some form of work-related activity will also take part, at a later date, in a 'work-focused health-related assessment', which explores their views about moving into work and identifies any health related support that may help with this transition.

As soon as possible after week 8 of the assessment phase, the customer will be telephoned to arrange a work focused interview, during which a personal adviser will discuss the customer's views on returning to work, and the package of support that may be required to help them into work.

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-focused health-related assessment or any other work-related activity.

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 'Work-Related Activity Group' of Employment and Support Allowance from the beginning of week 14 of their claim. The level of benefit the customer receives will depend on whether they enter the Support Group or the Work-Related Activity Group, and on whether they receive contribution-based or income-related payments, and will be back-dated to week 14 of their claim if the results of the Work Capability Assessment were not known at that date.

What are contribution-based and income-related payments?

Customers are entitled to contribution-based Employment and Support Allowance payments if they have paid enough National Insurance contributions.

Customers will receive income-related Employment and Support Allowance payments if:

- 1) They have not paid enough National Insurance contributions
- 2) They do not have substantial capital, for example savings of more than £16,000, or if their household income (including that of any partner) is below the level of Employment and Support Allowance they would be entitled to.

Customers may also receive income-related Employment and Support Allowance if they require additional financial support for specific reasons, for example, because of housing costs or as a result of disability or caring responsibilities.

What are the Support and Work-Related Activity Groups and how much will customers receive?

If the customer is able to undertake some form of work-related activity, then they will enter the Work-Related Activity Group from the beginning of week 14 of their claim, on completion of the Work Capability Assessment. Customers in the Work-Related Activity Group will receive a weekly payment of up to £89.80 a week. If customers receive income-related Employment and Support Allowance, we may be able to pay extra money for their husband, wife or civil partner.

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 from the beginning of week 14 of their claim, on completion of the Work Capability

Assessment. These customers are able to volunteer to take part in further work focused interviews and work-related activity, although they will not be required to do so.

Customers in the Support Group will receive up to £95.15 a week. The poorest Support Group customers who are receiving income-related payments can receive a higher rate of Employment and Support Allowance dependent on their circumstances.

What further support does the Work-Related Activity Group receive?

Customers in the Work-Related Activity Group will participate in up to five further work focused interviews with their personal adviser, focused on helping them back into work. These interviews will usually happen every month and they will be informed by the work-focused health-related assessment. 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.

Where do I go for more information?

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