



Northern Ireland

Benefits Fact Sheet: Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)

What is Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)

Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) is a benefit paid to people who are too sick or disabled to work and who meet certain conditions. It's paid by the Department for Social Development (DSD). For most new claims, it replaces Incapacity Benefit and Income Support paid to people who aren't well enough to work. If you're already getting Incapacity Benefit or Income Support, you can carry on getting it as long as you still meet the qualifying conditions.

There are two types of ESA. You may be able to get either or both, depending on your circumstances. The two types of ESA are:

- contributory ESA, which you can get if you have paid enough national insurance contributions. However, if you become unfit for work before you are 20 (25 in some cases), you do not need to meet the national insurance contributions
- income-related ESA, which is paid if your income and capital are low enough.

Who can get ESA

You can get ESA if:

- you're 16 or over and under state pension age, and
- you can't work because of sickness or disability, and
- you're not entitled to Statutory Sick Pay (SSP), and
- you have satisfied certain tests - see page 2.

You or your partner must **not** be getting Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance or Pension Credit. You must be ordinarily resident in the UK. For income-related ESA, you must not have any immigration controls on your stay here that would stop you getting the benefit.

How to apply for ESA

You can claim ESA by telephoning ESA. Their telephone number is **0800 085 6318** or textphone **0800 328 3419**. When they've spoken to you, they'll send you a statement of your situation to check but you don't need to sign or return this.

You can also download a claim form from the nidirect website at www.nidirect.gov.uk. You will have to print off the form and post it to ESA.

You will need to provide certain information when you make your claim. This **includes**:

- a valid medical certificate saying why you can't work
- your national insurance number
- evidence of who you are, for example, a driving licence or birth certificate
- any other information ESA asks you for.

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FACTSHEET

What happens when you have made your claim

During the first 13 weeks

When you first make a claim for ESA, a period of time called the **13-week assessment phase** starts. During this time, healthcare professionals will usually test how your illness or disability affects your ability to work and carry out day-to-day activities. This is called a **Work Capability Assessment (WCA)**.

There are two parts to the WCA although not everyone will have to do all of them. These tests are called:

- the limited capability for work assessment
- the limited capability for work-related activity assessment.

The limited capability for work assessment

Most people will have to have a medical examination to decide if they satisfy the limited capability for work assessment. There are some people who don't have to have a medical examination because they are automatically considered to have limited capability for work. You'll be told if you need a medical examination.

This test looks at your ability to carry out certain activities. It looks at both physical factors and mental health problems you may have that make you unable to work. If you don't satisfy the limited capability for work assessment, you won't qualify for ESA. You may want to consider applying for Jobseeker's Allowance instead, although you can appeal against the decision.

The limited capability for work-related activity assessment

The second test is called the limited capability for work-related activity assessment. It's usually carried out at the same time as the limited capability for work assessment but it is slightly different. After this test, some people (but not many) will be put in a group called the support group. If you're not put in the **support group**, you'll be put in a group called the **work-related activity group**.

Work-focused interviews

You'll usually have an initial **work-focused interview** after your Work Capability Assessment. This will take place about eight weeks after your claim. However, you won't have to have a work-focused interview if:

- you've been put in the support group following the limited capability for work-related activity assessment, or
- you are a woman who has reached state pension age
- you are a man who has reached the state pension age of a woman with the same date of birth as you.

If they decide you qualify for ESA, you may have more work-focused interviews every month.

After the first 13 weeks

After the first 13 weeks, if you're found to have limited capability for work, you'll carry on getting ESA. You'll get more money than you did during the first 13 weeks of your claim.

How much is ESA

How much ESA you get will depend on a number of factors. These are:

- whether you're getting contributory ESA or income-related ESA or both
- whether you're in the first 13 weeks of your claim
- what level of support you are considered to need after the first 13 weeks
- whether you are aged 25 or over
- whether you live with a partner. It doesn't matter whether they are of the opposite sex or the same sex.

More people will get less money in the first 13 weeks of a claim. After 13 weeks, if you qualify for ESA, you'll get an extra amount called a **component**. If you've been put in the work-related activity group, you'll get a work-related activity component. If you've been put in the support group, you'll get a support component which is more money than the work-related activity component.

If you get income-related ESA, you'll get more money if you live with your partner. You may also qualify for one of four premiums, depending on your circumstances. For example, you might get a severe disability premium. If you own your home, you may get help with your housing costs, for example, help with mortgage interest.

You can find out the current rates of ESA from the nidirect website at www.nidirect.gov.uk.

Backdating ESA

If you qualified for ESA before you made your claim, you may be able to get it for an earlier period. This is known as **backdating**. ESA can be backdated for up to three months before the date of your claim.

How is ESA paid

ESA is usually paid direct into your bank or building society account. If you can't open an account or if you have difficulties with this method of payment, you should let your local Jobs & Benefits or Social Security Office know. They can pay you by cheque in some cases.

Working while getting ESA You may be able to do certain types of work and still get ESA. This

Contact Details:

Citizens Advice, 46 Donegall Pass, Belfast, BT7 1BS

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