

Benefits News



You may have heard about the new benefit Employment and Support Allowance (ESA). From 27th October 2008 **FOR NEW CUSTOMERS ONLY** this will replace Incapacity Benefit and Income Support paid on incapacity grounds. This means that if you already receive incapacity benefit you will continue to receive it. The change for existing claims for Incapacity Benefit is at present planned for around 2112. The reasons the Government is giving for these changes are that it is part of “the package of support to help people return to the workplace. There is evidence that being out of work can contribute to poor health, whereas being in work can deliver real benefits, not only financially but in terms of peoples health and well being, their self esteem and the future prospects for themselves and their family”. This all sounds fine, but we hope that those people who are really not able to work because of serious problems with both physical or mental health will not feel worried that they will lose the money they need to help them to manage to buy food and be able to have an acceptable quality of life. This group should be covered by the last paragraph below, the Support Group. If you have any questions or concerns about this or any other benefits you may receive or think you are entitled to, please do ring us at the office 01883 745057

What are the main differences between Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and current benefits?

The biggest difference is that claimants will be divided into three groups: an Assessment Group; a Work Related Activity Group and a Support Group.

Who will be in the Assessment Group?

All claimants who are eligible for Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) will be in the Assessment Group, which operates the same as the current Incapacity Benefit procedure, for the first thirteen weeks of their claim. Eligibility for this group will be based on having sick notes and either having paid enough national insurance contributions or passing a means test similar to the current test for Income Support.

Who will be in the Work-Related Activity Group?

After the thirteen week assessment period the vast majority of claimants who pass the assessment will be placed in the Work-Related Activity Group and receive an additional amount of Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) which should raise their income to above the current level of Incapacity Benefit. Members of this group will have to attend work-focused interviews and draw up an action plan setting out the steps they are willing to take towards moving into work. Failure to do so will result in cuts in their benefits.

Although actually undertaking work related activities and participating in condition management programmes will not be compulsory when Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) is introduced, the government has indicated that it will consider making such activities compulsory in a few years' time

Who will be in the Support Group?

A much smaller number of the most severely disabled claimants, perhaps 10%, will be put in the Support Group. Claimants in the Support Group will be paid at a higher rate than those in the Work-Related Activity Group and they will not have to do anything in return for their benefit.