

New Style Employment and Support Allowance: detailed guide

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More detailed information about New Style Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) for stakeholders and claimants.

Overview

If you are ill or have a health condition or disability that limits your ability to work you may be able to get New Style Employment and Support Allowance (ESA).

New Style ESA is a fortnightly payment that can be claimed on its own or at the same time as Universal Credit (UC).

New Style ESA is a contributory benefit. Normally, this means you may be able to get it if you've paid or been credited with enough National Insurance contributions in the 2 full tax years before the year you're claiming in.

This guidance is also available in an easy read format.

Eligibility

To get New Style ESA you'll need to have been an employee or self-employed and paid (or been credited with) National Insurance contributions, usually in the last 2 to 3 years.

You can get New Style ESA on its own or at the same time as Universal Credit. If you apply for and are awarded both benefits, the New Style ESA you are paid will reduce your Universal Credit payment by the same amount.

You will not get any New Style ESA if you're getting Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) from an employer - but you can apply up to 3 months before your SSP ends. If you get New Style ESA, it will be paid as soon as your SSP ends.

How to apply

There's a different way to apply:

- in Northern Ireland
- if you're nearing the end of life (for example, due to a life-limiting illness)

Apply online

You can apply for New Style ESA online.

You'll need:

- your National Insurance number
- your bank or building society account number and sort code (you can use a friend or family member's account if you do not have one)
- your doctor's name, address and telephone number
- a fit note (sometimes called a 'sick note' or a 'statement of fitness for work') if you've not been able to work for more than 7 days in a row because of a disability or health condition
- details of your income if you're working
- the date your Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) ends if you're claiming it

You must apply by phone if you're an appointee applying on behalf of someone else.

You cannot get New Style ESA if you're getting Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) from an employer. You can apply for New Style ESA up to 3 months before your SSP ends.

Apply now

If you cannot apply online

Call the Jobcentre Plus new claims helpline if:

- you cannot make an application online
- you're an appointee for someone

Jobcentre Plus new claims helpline

Telephone: 0800 055 6688

Relay UK (if you cannot hear or speak on the phone): 18001 then 0800 055 6688

British Sign Language (BSL) video relay service if you're on a computer - find out how to use the service on mobile or tablet

Welsh language telephone: 0800 328 1744

Monday to Friday, 8am to 5pm

Find out about call charges

After you apply

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) will contact you within 10 working days of applying.

The New Style ESA Process: what to expect

1. Start your claim

Start your claim by applying online or calling the Universal Credit helpline.

2. Attend the appointment with your work coach

Attend your 'new claim appointment' and agree with your work coach what actions you'll need to take to get payments. This is called a 'Claimant Commitment'. The appointment will normally be over the phone.

You will not need to attend an appointment or make a Claimant Commitment if you're nearing the end of life (for example, due to a life-limiting illness).

3. Notification and first payment

You'll get a letter from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) telling you if you'll get New Style ESA and how much.

Further information on how much New Style ESA to expect

4. Provide updates about your health and circumstances

To keep getting New Style ESA you must send fit notes regularly and report any change in your circumstances.

Find out how to send DWP a fit note

Further information on reporting a change in your circumstances

5. Complete and return the WCA50 form

You will be sent form WCA50 in the post, usually within 4 weeks of your first payment. The WCA50 form is a capability for work questionnaire and is your chance to tell DWP how your health condition, disability or illness affects your ability to work.

You must send the form back within 28 days of the date you receive it from DWP.

If you have received an ESA50 form, you can still fill it in and send it back. You will not need to fill in a form WCA50.

Further information and advice on completing the WCA50 form

If you're also claiming Universal Credit, you'll only have one form to complete.

6. Your Work Capability Assessment

After you return your WCA50 form you may be asked to go to an assessment, called a 'Work Capability Assessment'. You will be contacted to arrange a date and time for the assessment.

You might not need one, for example if you're in hospital or if you're nearing the end of life (for example, due to a life-limiting illness).

The Work Capability Assessment is used to find out how much your health condition, disability or illness affects your ability to work. It assesses what you can do, as well as what you cannot do.

You'll be asked questions about how your condition affects you in your day to day life. It gives you the opportunity to explain if, and how, your health condition or disability may vary over time.

Assessments can be in person, by video call or on the phone. You'll be told how your assessment will take place.

You'll stay on the 'assessment rate' until a decision can be made on your Work Capability Assessment.

More information on Work Capability Assessments.

If you're claiming both New Style ESA and Universal Credit you'll only have to attend one Work Capability Assessment.

7. Decision letter

You'll get a letter with a decision on whether you have limited capability for work or limited capability for work and work-related activity, and if you will continue to receive New Style ESA. It will also tell you if you'll need to be assessed again at some point in the future.

If you do need to be assessed again in the future, you'll be sent another WCA50 form at the appropriate time. This normally happens within 3 years.

If you disagree with the decision you can ask for the decision to be looked at again - this is called a mandatory reconsideration.

If you're claiming both New Style ESA and Universal Credit you'll get 2 decision letters. If you do not return form WCA50 or do not attend the Work Capability Assessment you will not be entitled to both New Style ESA and Universal Credit.

After your claim is assessed

If you're entitled to ESA you'll be placed in one of 2 groups:

- a work-related activity group (you cannot work now, but can prepare to work in the future, for example by writing a CV)
- a support group (you cannot work now and you're not expected to prepare for work in the future)

You will:

- usually be in the support group if your illness or disability severely limits what you can do
- be in the support group if you're nearing the end of life (for example, due to a life-limiting illness)

If you're in the work-related activity group

You must attend regular interviews with a work coach. They can help you improve your skills or write a CV to help you get back into work.

If you're in the support group

You're usually in this group if your illness or disability severely limits what you can do. You do not have to go to interviews. You can tell your work coach if you'd like to take part in work-related activities.

How much New Style ESA to expect

Assessment phase

The first 13 weeks of your claim is called the 'assessment phase' and you are paid the basic allowance.

How much you'll get depends on your age:

- aged 18 to 24 years - up to £75.65 (per week)
- aged 25 years and over - up to £95.55 (per week)

Main phase

If you have been found to have limited capability for work, you will move onto the 'main phase' for New Style ESA and you will get the basic allowance, plus a 'support component' if you are put in the support group.

- basic allowance (standard rate) - up to £95.55 (per week)
- support component - £50.35 (per week)

Payment

New Style ESA is paid at the end of every 2 weeks into your bank, building society or credit union account.

Pension income

If you get an occupational or personal pension that pays more than £85 a week, your New Style ESA payment will be reduced by half of the amount over the £85 limit.

Reporting a change of circumstances

You need to report changes to your circumstances so you keep getting the right amount of New Style ESA (and Universal Credit if you are claiming both).

Your claim might be stopped or reduced if you do not report a change straight away.

A change of circumstance can include:

- any changes to your health condition or disability
- going into hospital or a care home or sheltered accommodation
- starting or stopping work, education, training or an apprenticeship
- moving house
- changing your name
- changes to your pension
- changing your doctor
- going abroad for any length of time

Call the New Style ESA helpline if you're not sure whether you need to report a change.

How to report changes of circumstances

You can report a change of circumstances by:

- calling the New Style ESA helpline
- writing to the Jobcentre Plus office that pays your New Style ESA - the address is on the letters you get about your New Style ESA

New Style ESA helpline

Telephone: 0800 169 0310

Relay UK (if you cannot hear or speak on the phone): 18001 then 0800 169 0310

Welsh language: 0800 328 1744

Monday to Friday, 8am to 5pm

Find out about call charges

If you're claiming Universal Credit as well as New Style ESA, you must report changes to both services.

Universal Credit helpline

Telephone: 0800 328 5644

Relay UK (if you cannot hear or speak on the phone): 18001 then 0800 328 5644

Welsh language: 0800 328 1744

Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm

Find out about call charges

British Sign Language (BSL) video relay service

British Sign Language (BSL) video relay service if you're on a computer - find out how to use the service on mobile or tablet.

The video relay service is available Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm.

If you're in Northern Ireland contact the NI Direct Employment and Support Allowance Centre.

If you get a sanction

Your ESA can be reduced if you do not attend interviews or do work-related activity as agreed with your work coach in your 'Claimant Commitment'. This reduction can continue for up to 4 weeks after you restart work-related activities.

You'll get a letter to say you may be sanctioned. Tell your work coach if you have a good reason for not doing what was agreed in your 'Claimant Commitment'.

You'll get another letter if the decision is made to give you a sanction. Your benefit will only be affected once a decision has been made.

You should contact your local council immediately if you claim Housing Benefit or Council Tax Reduction. They'll tell you what to do to continue getting support.

If you get a sanction you can ask for the decision to be looked at again.

You will not get a sanction if you're in the support group.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/new-style-employment-and-support-allowance-detailed-guide>