

*'making benefits
understandable'*

we aim to promote social
justice through training and
consultancy

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Free Benefits Newsletter for professionals

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No More Legal Aid for Benefits Advice

The Government is proposing to cut all Legal Aid in welfare benefit cases, as well as most housing, employment and debt cases.

The proposals are likely to hit the independent advice sector particularly hard, with a reduction in advice provision to many vulnerable clients.

Ian Mearns, MP for Gateshead, tabled an [early day motion](#) about the effect it may have, as an example, on Gateshead Advice Centre. '...to cut legal aid represents a sharp break from the long-standing bipartisan consensus that effective access to justice is essential to underpin the rule of law.'

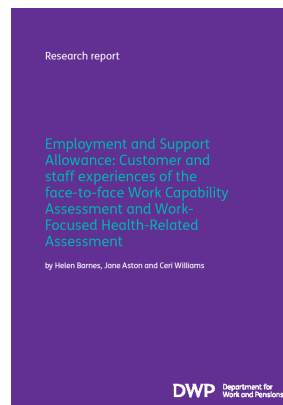
The changes are likely to come into affect some time in 2012.

A [white paper](#) was released in November 2010, with consultation running until 14/2/2011. click here to [email](#) your views

What Clients Think of ESA

A DWP research report ['Employment and Support Allowance: Findings from a face-to-face survey of customers'](#) makes some interesting reading about how our clients try to make sense of the ESA claim process.

- Around half found the ESA50 difficult or impossible to complete without help. The findings suggest that some groups (those with literacy or English language problems, claimants aged 18-24, and people with mental health conditions) may benefit from additional information and/or support at various stages of the claim process.
- Around 60% of those found fit for work appeal the decision.
- Only under a third of those in the Work Related Activity Group (WRAG) saw themselves working again in the short-term.



- Health Conditions of client's can be broken down into 4 categories- Mental health conditions (32%), Conditions related to bones, muscle problems or physical injury (37%), Long-term conditions that affect major organs or the whole body (16%), Other condition or disability (15%).
- Those in the FFW group might also potentially benefit from the types of support available during work focussed interviews.

£300 million contract

Atos Healthcare, responsible for the independent medical reports in the assessment process of health related benefits, have just had a 3 year contract extension agreed by the DWP worth over £300 million.

ATOS say

'Atos Healthcare will continue to deliver medical advice and assessment services to support the UK Government's welfare reform agenda to help people to move into and progress in work, while supporting the most vulnerable.'



DWP Department for Work and Pensions

Public consultation
Disability Living Allowance reform
Executive summary

Cold Weather Payments Due



Many claimants have already received £25 per week of cold weather payments.

[Click here](#) to check how many weeks of cold weather payments are being paid in your area.

- payments are made automatically
- take about 12 days to process
- to 'trigger' the payments the average daily temperature at your specified weather station must be recorded as, or forecast to be, 0°C or below for seven consecutive days
- must be in receipt of pension credit or in receipt of income support/ ESA(IR), JSA(IB)/ ESA(IR) tax credits and have certain premiums, elements or have a child age under 5.

DLA to be Replaced

The Government has begun a public consultation on replacing DLA with 'Personal Independence Payments'.

Plans are-

- To introduce the new benefit in 2013/14, beginning to reassessing the working age (16-64 year olds) caseload.
- Consider whether to reassess children and people aged over 65.
- 2 components- one for mobility , one for daily living. Each paid at one of 2 rates.
- An objective assessment to measure which rate of component should be payable, probably similar to the ESA points system.

A [consultation document](#) was released in December 2010, with consultation running until 14/2/2011. [click here](#) to [email](#) your views

New Course Programme

[e mail](#) us to book a place giving name of participant, their email address, job role, organisation name and any dietary/ accessibility requirements. We will invoice you. £95 per place.

[Introduction to Welfare Benefits](#)

Southampton 25/1/2011 Exeter 27/1/2011 Cardiff 8/2/2011 Birmingham 15/2/2011
London 17/2/2011

[Maximising Disability Living Allowance & Attendance Allowance](#)

Cardiff 22/3/2011 Birmingham 17/1/2011 & 21/3/2010 London 16/3/2011

[Maximising Housing Benefit](#)

Cardiff 28/3/2011 Birmingham 29/3/2011 London 6/4/2011

[Maximising Employment and Support Allowance](#)

Cardiff 26/4/2011 London 27/4/2011 Birmingham 28/4/2011

**Book
Now**

Course-Introduction to Welfare Benefits

"Excellent course content, very understandable, tutor very willing to answer questions."
Jacqui Roughton, Motor Neurone Disease Association

The British Social Security system is notoriously complex due to the huge number of qualifying conditions, the many changes each year and not least the interaction between the different benefits. There is a clear structure that can be learned whether you are looking to signpost claimants in the correct direction or provide basic advice. A guide to proposed benefit changes by the Coalition Government is included.

This course will include—

- why we have different categories of benefits
- the structure of the benefits system
- the qualifying conditions for some of the main benefits including job seekers allowance, employment and support allowance, income support, housing and council tax benefit, child and working tax credits
- valid claims and appeals
- maximising benefits; underclaimed benefits and premiums
- how to sign post and refer cases
- at a glance guide to structure of the benefits system
- at a glance guide to proposed benefit changes

"for non benefits specialists, those needing a refresher and inexperienced advisers"

Course- Maximising Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance

"Very informative and useful for practical application with service users" Robbie Bell, Gofal Cymru

These benefits are for disabled claimants. They are the most underclaimed of all benefits and are paid in addition to other benefits. A successful claim can lead to a large increase in income as new premiums of means tested benefits may then become payable. They may also lead to an increase in a carer's benefits.

This course will include—

- common misconceptions
- the non disability tests
- the disability tests
- tactics for completing claim forms and the claim process
- typical awards for certain 'claimant groups' for example those with mental health problems, visual and hearing impairments
- maximising benefits; underclaimed benefits and premiums
- at a glance structure of the disability tests

"ideal for both non benefits specialists and specialists"

Course- Maximising Housing Benefit

"Excellent course! Practical!" Kuldip Gill, Huggard

A detailed overview focusing on the most problematic areas for professionals. How to use this knowledge to maximize the housing benefit of service users and to reduce rent arrears.

This course will include—

- housing benefit basics
- qualifying conditions, including the right to reside and habitual residence test
- how and when to claim
- how to calculate benefit including premiums, non dependents, local housing allowances and eligible rent
- maximisation of benefit, including backdating/ overpayments
- challenging decisions
- new/ Future Changes
- reference materials

Course- Maximising Employment and Support Allowance

"Started course very confused, completed course more confident and knowledgeable"
Linda Carpenter, Solihull Carers Centre

This course examines the recent major overhaul to the sickness benefits system. Employment and Support allowance replaced income support and incapacity benefit for new claims from 27/10/2008. 2.3 Million claimants under the old system are scheduled to be 'migrated' to the new system from Spring 2011 with a completion date of 2014. There is a whole new set of rules relating to rates of benefit and 4 new tests to understand. The government aims to reduce the number of people on benefit and require most claimants to undertake work related activity.

This course will include—

- a brief history of the old system of sickness benefits and the reasons for change
- the two new medical tests; the limited capability for work assessment and the limited capability for work related activity assessment
- Work Focused Health Related Assessments and Work Focused Interviews
- sanctions
- exempt claimants
- maximising benefit-tactics for improving your client's chances
- at a glance differences between the old system and new

"for those who are new to the benefits system as well as more experienced staff "

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