

ESA -EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT ALLOWANCE

Information for people with serious mental illness

Note: this leaflet does not set out all the details of ESA but offers some advice specifically for people with serious mental illness

WHAT IS IT?

Employment and Support Allowance is the new benefit which has replaced Incapacity Benefit and Income Support.

While you are getting the allowance, support and financial help can be offered via Jobcentre Plus. Here you will have access to a specially trained personal adviser. You will also have access to a wide range of other services designed to help you move into suitable work.

If your mental illness or disability severely affects your ability to work, the allowance can provide extra financial support.

Hafal believes that many people recovering from a serious mental illness can work, train or engage in further or higher education, but for those people who are not able to do so, ESA is an essential part of their income and this guide identifies how to overcome some of the challenges in applying for the benefit.

HOW TO CLAIM ESA

Before doing anything, take advice from your Dr/Psychiatrist/CPN/SW or staff at Hafal projects before completing any forms. You should discuss with them whether they feel you are fit to work. If they feel that you should not work, or you cannot work, or that if you went to work it would be potentially harmful to your health and well-being or the health or well-being of someone else then ask them to write to Job Centre Plus on your behalf stating this.

If you are going to make a claim

1. Phone Jobcentre Plus, they will ask you questions over the phone or if you prefer you should ask for claim form ESA 1 that you can fill in yourself or with support via Hafal's Short Step Project. If you are unsure it is always better to get a copy of the form sent to you to complete with help.
2. If you provided information over the phone a letter will be sent to you confirming this information. If you asked for a form to be sent, take it to your Hafal project or CAB or other similar source of help and ask for their assistance in completing the form. Remember when you are completing the form you need to make it clear to the staff in Job Centre Plus how your illness affects you when you are unwell and how often you are unwell. You should not make misleading statements but you should also not be pressured into stating your health and ability to work is better than it really is. Sometimes people who have been in mental health services for some years feel they have to tell people what they want to hear - but this assessment form is about telling the Job Centre Plus how difficult things are with a mental illness and you should remember that when completing it.
3. There is a period of assessment lasting 13 weeks and during this time you will get the basic rate of ESA. As part of the assessment you may also have to fill in form ESA 50 and send it back to Job Centre Plus within 4 weeks. You may be sent an appointment with a doctor or nurse, if you don't keep this appointment you will need to have a good reason.

Remember during the appointment with the doctor to explain all the relevant problems that your illness causes. It may be useful here to get some help to write them down in advance so you don't forget them.

4. Jobcentre Plus will then make a decision that could be:

- You are unfit to work and you will stay on ESA: if you do you will get more money after the 13 week period
- Being able to work without any support
- Being able to do some kind of work, if so what would you need to help you

Depending on the decision you will be allocated into either:

1. **A Support Group**, if you would find it hard to get paid work
2. **A work - related activity group**, if with the right help you could get paid work, you must attend 6 interviews with an advisor who will talk and help you into work.

If you don't agree with the decision you can appeal and you should ask for help from your local Hafal project who will be able to signpost you to specialist support.

For more information see:

www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk