

Government announces new welfare reforms to help thousands into work

3 years ago



A consultation, launched on Tuesday 5th September, will consider changes to the Work Capability Assessment, with proposals to ensure it is delivering the right outcomes for supporting those most in need.

The consultation will look at updating the Work Capability Assessment's categories so they better reflect the modern world of work and the opportunities more readily available to disabled people.

Earlier this year, Government confirmed investment worth £2 billion to support disabled people and those with long-term health conditions into work, while delivering on the Prime Minister's priority to grow the economy. Today's consultation will go further to facilitate appropriate work opportunities for people, by reviewing a range of categories in the assessment – representing its first significant update since 2011.

These categories are designed to determine what activity people can do and how that affects their ability to work. This then informs assessors' decisions on what additional financial support people can receive through their benefits, and if claimants need to do anything to prepare themselves for work.

The consultation's proposals include updating the categories associated with mobility and social interaction, reflecting improved employer support in recent years for flexible and home working – and minimising the risk of these issues causing problems for workers.

Those who were found capable of work preparation activity in light of the proposed changes would receive tailored support, safely helping them to move closer to work and ensuring a significant proportion of people are not automatically excluded from the support available.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak MP said: "Work transforms lives – providing not just greater financial security, but also providing purpose that has the power to benefit individuals, their families, and their communities.

"That's why we're doing everything we can to help more people thrive in work – by reflecting the complexity of people's health needs, helping them take advantage of modern working environments, and connecting them to the best support available.

“The steps we’re taking today will ensure no one is held back from reaching their full potential through work, which is key to ensuring our economy is growing and fit for the future.”

Secretary of State for Work and Pensions Mel Stride MP said: “Health assessments haven’t been reviewed in more than a decade and don’t reflect the realities of the world of work today. That’s why we’re consulting on reforms which will mean that many of those currently excluded from the labour market can realise their ambition of working.

“Anyone helped towards work through these proposals would receive appropriate support tailored to their individual circumstances, allowing them to safely access the life-changing impacts that work can provide.”

Jane Gratton, Deputy Director of Public Policy at the British Chambers of Commerce, said: “Across the country, businesses are crying out for workers to fill job vacancies. Being employed has many positive benefits for people, so it makes sense to help everyone who wants to work to find a good job that meets their needs and personal circumstances.

“Employers understand this and want to be as flexible as possible to assist. To be effective, it’s crucial that, both sides, have the right support in place for as long as needed to help people find work, stay in work and have fulfilling careers.”

The Government is spending £25.9 billion on incapacity benefits this year, a 62% real-terms rise on 2013/14 (£15.9 billion), with current projections predicting a further 13% real-terms rise to £29.3 billion – with an extra 500,000 people coming onto these benefits – by 2027/28 if nothing changes.

This is fuelled in large part by the proportion of new claimants for incapacity benefits assessed as the highest possible award (no work-related requirements) rising from 21% in 2011 to 65% in 2022.

The Work Capability Assessment is being reviewed to ensure it reflects the latest opportunities for employment support, so that growing numbers of people are not missing out on the help available, particularly given the known health benefits from working. This is especially important when research shows that one in five of them would like to work at some point in the future.

Representing the latest step to support people with health conditions into work, this follows last year’s [milestone](#) of getting over one million more disabled people into employment compared to five years ago.

Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work Tom Pursglove MP added:

“I am incredibly passionate about supporting disabled people to have the most fulfilling life possible, including through work, and these proposals would enable us to provide help to people who could benefit greatly from it.

“We will continue to look at ways to safely support more disabled people into work, unlocking all the positive wellbeing benefits that brings, whilst meeting the Prime Minister’s pledge to grow the economy.”

These proposed changes, due to come into force in 2025, come as part of the Government’s wider multi-billion pound plan to tackle inactivity and boost economic growth.

One of the measures the Government is also consulting on is the substantial risk category, where claimants who would otherwise be capable of work-related activity are excluded from work preparation

requirements, on the basis that this could put them at risk to themselves or others.

The consultation will consider whether the application of this category is being applied too broadly, in turn excluding a significant number of vulnerable people from support that would prepare them to move closer to work, financial independence and a more fulfilling life.

This cohort could also benefit from the Government's £2 billion investment to help those with long-term illnesses and disabilities get into work, and also from funding for work coaches to help people who need further support.

This includes the new Universal Support programme, which will help disabled people and people with health conditions by matching them with vacancies and providing support and training to help them start and stay in that role.

[The Individual Placement and Support in Primary Care programme](#) is part of this scheme, with £58 million being invested to help more than 25,000 people in this group start and stay in work.

The DWP is also currently running [a consultation on occupational health](#), which is looking at ways to encourage employers to expand their occupational health offer.

And the Spring 2023 Budget provided around £250 million of funding to modernise and digitise mental health services in England, providing wellness and clinical apps, piloting cutting-edge digital therapies and digitising the NHS Talking Therapies programme.