



The Work Capability Assessment

Our final report (year 5)

February 2015



Easy Read



Department
for Work &
Pensions

Important

Green writing

In this easy-read booklet we sometimes explain what words mean.

The first time we mention any of these words, it is in **bold green** writing. Then we write what the words mean in a **light purple** box. If any of the words are used later in the booklet, we show them in **normal green** writing.

These words and what they mean are also in a Word List at the back of the booklet.

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What this booklet is about

The **Department for Work and Pensions** asked Doctor Litchfield to check how the **Work Capability Assessment** is working. And then write a report for Parliament.

Department for Work and Pensions

This is the part of government that is in charge of welfare and pensions.



Work Capability Assessment

This is when people talk to a health expert about their health and how it affects them. The health expert then sends a report to the **Department for Work and Pensions**, giving their advice on whether a person can do some work or not.

Doctor Litchfield was asked to write the report because he does not work for the **Department for Work and Pensions** and he is an expert on the health of people at work.

How the Work Capability Assessment has changed

There have been lots of changes to the **Work Capability Assessment** since it started in 2008.

The **Work Capability Assessment** has changed for the better since it started. But a lot of people still think badly about it.

After so many changes have been made to the **Work Capability Assessment**, it may be a good idea for the **Department for Work and Pensions** to think carefully before making more changes.



Mandatory reconsideration

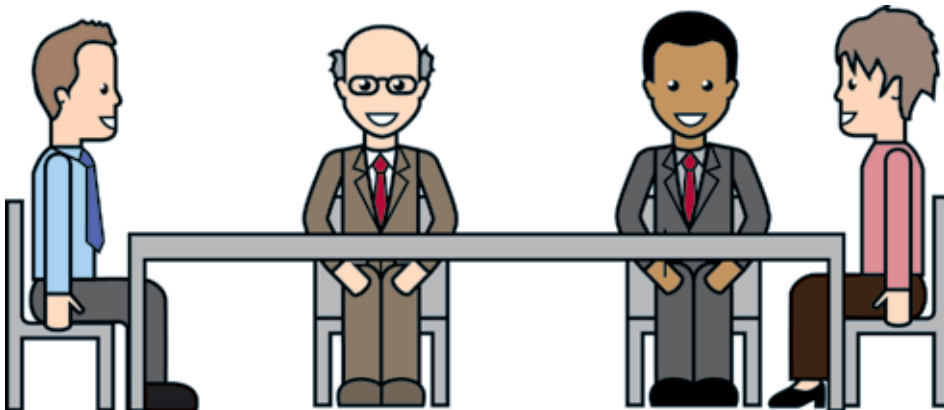
In 2013 a process called **mandatory reconsideration** began.

Mandatory reconsideration

This happens when someone thinks the decision on their claim is wrong. Before they can **appeal**, the **Department for Work and Pensions** must look again at the decision to check they got it right.

Appeal

This is when someone asks a group of people who do not work for the **Department for Work and Pensions** to look at the decision on their claim to make sure it is right.



A lot of people think badly of **mandatory reconsideration**.

Evidence-based review

The **Department for Work and Pensions** looked at whether the **Work Capability Assessment** got it right when it found people fit for work or not fit for work.

The **Department for Work and Pensions** compared it with another assessment, that had been made by other groups, to check how well it worked.

This was called an evidence-based review.

The evidence-based review found that the **Work Capability Assessment** was the better system.

But there are some things that need to be looked at. Like the way the assessment is carried out.

Changes that have been made to the Work Capability Assessment

The **Work Capability Assessment** has been looked at every year for the last 5 years.

Each time the **Work Capability Assessment** was looked at, some changes were suggested. These were called recommendations.

Not all of the suggested changes have been made yet. The **Department for Work and Pensions** is working on this.

This year will be the last time someone who does not work for the **Department for Work and Pensions** will look at the **Work Capability Assessment**.

The **Department for Work and Pensions** must work out how it will check that the suggested changes have been made.

Doctor Litchfield has made 7 suggestions about changes that have been made since the **Work Capability Assessment** started in 2008.

The Support Group

The **Work Capability Assessment** is a test that looks at a person's health and whether they can work. It looks at what a person **can** do and what they **cannot** do.



The **Department for Work and Pensions** uses the **Work Capability Assessment** to help decide

- if a person can work straightaway.
- if a person could become ready for work with some extra help.
- if a person cannot work because of a disability or health condition.

If a person cannot work, the **Department for Work and Pensions** decides if they should be put into the **Support Group** or the **Work Related Activity Group**.

Support Group

This is a group of people who get **Employment and Support Allowance** and who are not able to work. But they can get help to find work if they want it.

Work Related Activity Group

This is a group of people who get **Employment and Support Allowance** and who may be able to work in the future. They will get help to become ready for work.

Employment and Support Allowance

This is a benefit for disabled people and people who have a health condition that means they cannot work at all, or cannot work now but could work some time in the future.

If the result of the **Work Capability Assessment** is that the person can work straightaway, they can apply for Jobseeker's Allowance.

People who are in the **Work Related Activity Group** must have regular meetings at the Jobcentre, or with groups who provide services for the **Department for Work and Pensions** to get the person ready for work.

People who are in the **Support Group** do not have to do this. But they can ask for help to find a job if they want to.



Since the **Work Capability Assessment** started there have been a lot more people put into the **Support Group** and far fewer people found fit for work.

Also, a lot more young people are being put into the **Support Group**. This seems to be because more people are thought to be at risk of harm.

Most of these decisions are being made without seeing the person face to face.

Doctor Litchfield made 3 suggestions about the **Support Group**.

What people think about the Work Capability Assessment

The last time the **Work Capability Assessment** was looked at, it was found to be very important that people think it is fair.

The best way to get people to think about the **Work Capability Assessment** in a good way is to make sure people have up-to-date information.

We asked a wide range of people what they thought about the **Work Capability Assessment**.



We also looked at things like Facebook and Twitter. And we asked people who work on **Employment and Support Allowance** at the **Department for Work and Pensions** what they thought.

Things like Facebook and Twitter show that people do not think very highly about the **Work Capability Assessment**.

People are worried about information the **Department for Work and Pensions** gives to people before they go to a **Work Capability Assessment**.

Doctor Litchfield made 5 suggestions about what people think about the **Work Capability Assessment**.

Decision making and processes

Last year's report showed that in more and more cases the people who make decisions, called decision makers, were going against what the person who carried out the **Work Capability Assessment** recommended.

This happened more often in the **Work Related Activity Group** than in the **Support Group**.

When the decision makers go against what the person carrying out the **Work Capability Assessment** said, people are hardly ever moving from the following groups.

- **Work Related Activity Group** to Fit for work.
- **Support Group** to the **Work Related Activity Group**.
- **Support Group** to Fit for work.

Doctor Litchfield made 5 suggestions about what people think about decision making and processes.

Groups of people who need more help

People who have a learning disability come across **barriers** in the **Work Capability Assessment** process. This includes the way information is passed on.

Barriers

These are things that stop disabled people and people who have a health condition living like other people. For example, the ways other people think and act towards disabled people.

One way to get around this is to make sure the information is written using easy to read words.

People with a learning disability can have problems when talking to someone face to face. This is because they sometimes say they can do more than they really can.



Other groups of people, such as people who spend a long time in hospital, people who leave the armed forces and people who leave prison, can come across **barriers** in the **Work Capability Assessment** process.

Doctor Litchfield made 8 suggestions about groups of people who need more help.

Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland the **Work Capability Assessment** is run by the Social Security Agency.

Doctor Litchfield was asked to look at how well the **Work Capability Assessment** is working in Northern Ireland, as well as in Great Britain.



Some of the same things seem to be happening in Northern Ireland as in Great Britain. For example, a lot more young people are being put into the **Support Group**.

In Northern Ireland, after a person has had a **Work Capability Assessment**, only a small amount of information is passed to the Jobs and Benefit office. This means that a lot of information has to be asked for again and again.

Doctor Litchfield made 5 suggestions about the way the **Work Capability Assessment** works in Northern Ireland.

What will happen to the Work Capability Assessment?

This is the last time the **Work Capability Assessment** will be looked at by someone who does not work for the **Department for Work and Pensions**.

Since the **Work Capability Assessment** started there have been a lot of changes.

- The average age of people in work is changing. There are more older people in work and fewer younger people in work.
- There have also been changes to the kind of work that people are doing.



This means the types of illness and disability in the workforce will keep changing as the population changes.

Doctor Litchfield's check of the **Work Capability Assessment** works looked at the way assessments for **incapacity benefits** work in other countries.

Incapacity benefits

These are benefits that are paid to people who are out of work and are disabled or have health problems.

Some countries do not look at if a person can work and what benefits they can get, at the same time. They look at them separately.

If the **Department for Work and Pensions** make another version of the **Work Capability Assessment** it should do these things.

- Make sure the **Work Capability Assessment** is seen to be fair.
- Make sure the aim of the **Work Capability Assessment** is clear.
- Make sure the **Department for Work and Pensions** plays a bigger part in the **Work Capability Assessment**.
- Make sure that information from different benefits is shared across the **Department for Work and Pensions**.

Word list

Appeal

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Barriers

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Department for Work and Pensions

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Employment and Support Allowance

This is a benefit for disabled people and people who have a health condition that means they cannot work at all, or cannot work now but could work some time in the future10

Incapacity benefits

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Mandatory reconsideration

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Support Group

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Work Capability Assessment

This is when people talk to a health expert about their health and how it affects them. The health expert then sends a report to the **Department for Work and Pensions**, giving their advice on whether a person can do some work or not.4

Work Related Activity Group

This is a group of people who get **Employment and Support Allowance** and who may be able to work in the future. They will get help to become ready for work10

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