



[Royal College of Psychiatrists briefing on the proposed Welfare Reform Bill](#)

The Welfare Reform Bill is one of 18 proposed bills to be brought before Parliament in the Queen's Speech on 3 December 2008. The College has compiled a response to the recent consultation on this issue.

Over 2.6 million people currently receive incapacity benefit. Government wants to reform the benefit and encourage this group of people to undertake work. In October 2008, Incapacity Benefit (IB) was replaced by Employment and Support Allowance (ESA). Due to this, in 2009-2013, all claimants will be reassessed using a medical assessment, referred to as a Work Capability Assessment.

Following assessment, claimants will go down two routes. Some of the claimants will no longer qualify for ESA, but will instead qualify for Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) and gain support in going back to work. The remaining claimants will qualify for ESA and will be placed in one of two groups: either the Work Related Activity Group, where claimants will be expected to enter the Pathways to Work scheme, or the Support Group, where claimants can undertake the scheme voluntarily.

The Pathways to Work scheme will be run by a mixture of voluntary, private and public providers, who will be paid by results and on the basis of outcomes.

Currently, the highest proportion of claimants on IB is people with mental health conditions. There are doubts as to whether the reforms - which will require IB claimants to engage with the Pathways to Work scheme - will be successful for these claimants. This is partly because mental health conditions tend to be fluctuating in nature and mixed results have already been seen from the scheme to date. There are also concerns about employers' understanding of mental health issues.

The College believes the new Welfare Reform Bill should place more emphasis on improving employers' understanding of mental health issues. In addition, more effort is needed to place claimants with mental health conditions into employment that corresponds directly to their capabilities.

The new Welfare Reform Bill will also provide an opportunity to improve the uptake of the existing Access to Work, which aims to provide suitable adjustments in the workplace for people with mental health problems or learning disabilities.

Policy Unit
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