

House of Commons: Written Statement (HCWS30)

Department for Work and Pensions

Written Statement made by: **The Minister for Disabled People (Mr Mark Harper)**
on 27 Nov 2014.

Employment and Support Allowance

Later today, I will publish Command Paper Cm 8967, the Government Response to the Work and Pensions Select Committee report on Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and Work Capability Assessment (WCA). I would like to thank the Committee for its report.

The Government is committed to reviewing and improving the service it offers disabled people and those with long term health conditions. We have made a number of improvements to these provisions over the course of this Parliament, and recently appointed Maximus as the new provider of the WCA from March 2015.

The number of disabled people in employment has increased by 259,000 in the last year to 3.07 million. However, we are not complacent and recognise that more support is needed for people in receipt of incapacity benefits. Every one of these people has something to contribute to society and we are determined to support them in realising their full potential.

Today I am announcing a series of measures to further improve the support we offer disabled people and those with health conditions. From early 2015 we will run a range of pilots to test additional approaches to supporting ESA claimants. This will include testing more intensive support during the first six months following the completion of the Work Programme; voluntary employment-related interventions and occupational health advice for those awaiting a WCA; and testing the impact of the Claimant Commitment for ESA claimants.

In April 2015 we plan to introduce a measure allowing individuals to remain on JSA for up to 13 weeks during a period of sickness. This will ensure claimants with short-term conditions remain closer to the labour market. In addition by next spring we plan to introduce a measure preventing claimants being paid the ESA assessment rate if they have already been found fit for work but have then made a repeat claim for benefit without developing a new health condition or having seen a deterioration in their current condition.

There will inevitably be some individuals whose condition affects them so severely that they may not be able to return to full time employment. We will of course continue to provide comprehensive support for this group as well as look at ways of improving the service we already deliver.