

The Department of Work and Pensions evidence based review (EBR) of the Work Capability Assessment (WCA)

As part of the Independent Review of the WCA by Professor Harrington, Mencap, Mind and the National Autistic Society were asked to produce proposals for improving the 'mental, intellectual and cognitive function' descriptors used in the current WCA. You can read that report [here](#).

Another group of charities (MS Society, NAT (National AIDS Trust), Parkinson's UK, Forward ME, Arthritis Care, and Crohn's and Colitis UK) were asked by Professor Harrington to consider how the assessment might better take into account those with fluctuating conditions. You can read that report [here](#).

Both groups made proposals for reforms based on the problems with the current system experienced by the people we represent. We felt that these proposals were practical and achievable but we also flagged up that we felt a more fundamental review of the whole WCA system was needed and we, along with many others, continue to call for a more radical overhaul of the system.

What happened to those reports?

In response to the recommendations put forward by both groups, Professor Harrington called on the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) to test the proposals in his second Independent Review (November 2011). The DWP agreed to this, as a way of gathering sufficient evidence on how the proposals put forward by the charities would work. This is what DWP are calling its evidence based review (EBR).

How will the EBR work?

In June 2012 the charities were asked to regroup by the DWP, this time all together and combine our proposals into a single assessment that reflects the recommendations in the two reports. The regroup consists of : Crohn's and Colitis UK, Forward ME, Mencap, Mind, MS Society, NAT (National AIDS Trust), National Autistic Society and Parkinson's UK.

The aim of the EBR is to assess the fairness and accuracy of the existing WCA descriptors, as well as look at the alternative version put forward by the charities. The EBR is a DWP led project, and the DWP is responsible for managing the design, testing and analysis of the review, with input from the charities.

Additional information will be collected during real assessments so that both sets of existing and the alternative descriptors can be completed. The outcomes of the assessments will then be compared to the views of a panel of experts, looking at all the available evidence about each applicant.

The proposals which have been put forward by the charities have not been endorsed by the DWP - they have simply agreed to look at how the outcomes

of the WCA might be different with these descriptors compared to the current ones.

It will then be considered (in summer 2013) what changes might be made to the assessment on the back of this testing. The DWP has stated that:

“Changes to the current WCA will be considered by the Department where there is good evidence that they would significantly improve the accuracy and fairness of identifying claimants as having Limited Capability for Work.”

Why are the charities involved?

Although we believe fundamental reform of the WCA is needed, we are hopeful that the EBR offers an opportunity to gain improvements to the current system. However there is a long way to go and it will depend on the evidence as to what of our suggestions will be adopted.

Our main hope is that the EBR will demonstrate where the current WCA descriptors aren't working and whether our combined proposals would improve the system, looking at the principles behind our suggestions as much as the detailed drafting.

We aren't claiming to be experts in assessment design and the proposals are not a perfect solution to the issues of the WCA.

Draft alternative

The charities' proposed descriptors can be found overleaf. We haven't yet finalised exactly how the scoring will work, but we hope the matrix style approach should allow for better recognition of the complexity and variability of people's conditions.

Our focus has been on designing descriptors that better takes account of the fluctuation and variability of conditions. We have also tried to reduce the division between 'mental' and 'physical' impairments and recognise that, in many areas, people can experience a combination of the two, thus the reference to "global" descriptors where appropriate.

Timescales have been tight and there has been limited opportunity for wider consultation with disabled people and other representative groups, so we have been clear in our communications with DWP that we expect further stakeholder consultation will be undertaken before and if any changes are implemented as a result of this process.

Please read with interest and contact us with any questions you have. It may be helpful to have a copy of the current WCA to hand if you wish to compare which can be found [here](#).

On behalf of: Crohn's and Colitis UK, Forward ME, Mencap, Mind, MS Society, NAT (National AIDS Trust), National Autistic Society and Parkinson's UK.

Draft descriptors

1. Mobilising (Physical)

Mobilising reliably, repeatedly, safely and in a timely manner, unaided by another person, with or without a walking stick, manual wheelchair or other aid normally used, indoors and outdoors without stopping, and climbing and descending a flight of 12 steps, without significant discomfort or exhaustion.

a	None of the below apply			
		Occ	Freq	Most
b	Cannot climb and descend a flight of 12 steps			
c	Has some difficulty mobilising, indoors and outdoors, for long periods			
d	Has significant difficulty mobilising, indoors and outdoors, for long periods			
e	Has some difficulty mobilising, indoors and outdoors, for short periods			
f	Has significant difficulty mobilising, indoors and outdoors, for short periods			

2. Getting About (mental/cognitive/intellectual)

Getting to familiar and unfamiliar places reliably, repeatedly, safely and in a timely manner, unaided by another person, without distress or disorientation.

a	None of the below apply			
	Due to distress or disorientation:	Occ	Freq	Most
b	Has some difficulty getting to unfamiliar places			
c	Has significant difficulty getting to unfamiliar places			
d	Has some difficulty getting to familiar places			
e	Has significant difficulty getting to familiar places			

3. Navigating (Sensory)

Navigating around familiar and unfamiliar places without being accompanied by another person reliably, repeatedly, safely and in a timely manner, using a guide dog or other aid if normally used, without experiencing difficulty due to sensory impairment.

a	None of the below apply			
	Due to sensory impairment, without being accompanied by another person:	Occ	Freq	Most
b	Has some difficulty navigating around unfamiliar surroundings			
c	Has significant difficulty navigating around unfamiliar surroundings			
d	Has some difficulty navigating around familiar surroundings			
e	Has significant difficulty navigating around familiar surroundings			

4. Standing and sitting (Physical)			
Reliably, repeatedly and safely, using any aid that it is reasonable to expect them to use, and without receiving physical assistance from another person:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staying in one position (such as a workstation), either by standing or sitting, and • Moving a seated position in a suitable chair to a mobilising position. 			
a	None of the below apply		
Cannot reliably, repeatedly and safely, without significant discomfort or exhaustion:			
	Occ	Freq	Most
b	Stay in one position either by standing or sitting unassisted by another person in one place for more than one hour without significant discomfort, or exhaustion		
c	Stay in one position unassisted by another person in one place for more than 30 minutes, either by standing or sitting, without significant discomfort, or exhaustion		
d	Move from a seated position in a suitable chair to a mobilising position in a timely manner without physical assistance from another person		

5. Reaching (Physical)			
Reaching up and down from standing or sitting, reliably, repeatedly and safely and in a timely manner, unaided by another person, and without significant discomfort or exhaustion			
a	None of the below apply		
Cannot reliably, repeatedly and safely, without significant discomfort or exhaustion, from standing or sitting:			
	Occ	Freq	Most
b	Reach down (through bending, kneeling or squatting from standing or sitting) with either arm as if to pick up a light object situated on a low shelf 15cm from the floor		
c	Raise either arm above head height as if to pick up an object on a high shelf		
d	Raise either arm to top of head as it to put on a hat		
e	Raise either arm as if to put something in the top pocket of a coat or jacket		

6. Picking up and moving (Physical)

Picking up and moving objects of a variety of sizes from standing or sitting with one or both hands reliably, repeatedly, safely and in a timely manner, unaided by another person, and without significant discomfort or exhaustion.

a | None of the below apply

Cannot reliably, repeatedly and safely, without significant discomfort or exhaustion, from standing or sitting:		Occ	Freq	Most
b	Pick up and move a one litre carton full of liquid at arm's length with either hand			
c	Pick up and move a one litre carton full of liquid with one hand			
d	Pick up and move a bulky object (such as a cardboard box) up to 2kg			
e	Pick up and move a light bulky object (such as a cardboard box) up to 1kg			
f	Pick up and move a one litre carton full of liquid with either hand			

7. Manual dexterity/ hand movement (Physical)

Managing manual dexterity tasks reliably, repeatedly, safely and in a timely manner without significant discomfort or exhaustion.

a | None of the below apply

		Occ	Freq	Most
b	Has some difficulty in one hand with manual dexterity tasks			
c	Has significant difficulty in one hand with manual dexterity tasks			
d	Has some difficulty in both hands with manual dexterity tasks			
e	Has significant difficulty in both hands with manual dexterity tasks			

8. Executing Tasks (Global)

Executing tasks reliably, repeatedly, safely and in a timely manner, unaided by another person.

a | None of the below apply

		Occ	Freq	Most
b	Takes somewhat longer to complete some tasks			
c	Takes significantly longer to complete some tasks			
d	Takes somewhat longer to complete most tasks			
e	Takes significantly longer to complete most tasks			

9. Maintaining Focus (Mental/cognitive/intellectual)

Maintaining focus reliably, repeatedly and safely to complete tasks and in a timely manner, unaided by another person.

a	None of the below apply			
	Due to poor memory or concentration, disorganised thoughts or anxiety:	Occ	Freq	Most
b	Has difficulty maintaining focus on some tasks			
c	Has difficulty maintaining focus on most tasks			

10. Learning tasks (Mental/cognitive/intellectual)

Learning new tasks in order to undertake them reliably, repeatedly and safely, without support from another person.

a	None of the below apply		
	<i>Complexity of task</i>		
	Complex tasks	Moderately complex tasks	Simple tasks
b	Has some difficulty learning new tasks		
c	Has significant difficulty learning new tasks		
d	Cannot learn new tasks within a reasonable timeframe		

11. Awareness of Hazards (Global)

Being aware of hazards in order to avoid risk(s) of harm to self or others, or of damage to property or possessions.

a	None of the below apply			
		Occ	Freq	Most
b	Some reduced awareness of hazards leads to risk(s) of harm to self or others, or of damage to property or possessions			
c	Significantly reduced awareness of hazards leads to risk(s) of harm to self or others, or of damage to property or possessions			

12. Consciousness (Physical)			
Maintaining consciousness during waking hours reliably.			
a	None of the below apply		
		At least twice in last 6 months	At least once a month in the last 6 months
b	Has an involuntary episode of lost or altered consciousness resulting in significant disrupted awareness or concentration with a recovery time that is normally less than one hour		
c	Has an involuntary episode of lost or altered consciousness resulting in significant disrupted awareness or concentration with a recovery time that is normally more than one hour		

13. Bladder/ bowel continence (Physical)			
Managing and maintaining effective control of bowel, bladder and/or a collecting device reliably, repeatedly and safely.			
a	None of the below apply		
		Occ	Freq
b	Experiences an unusually urgent or frequent need to use the toilet (or manage a collecting device), due to an underlying health condition or the side effects of essential medication		
c	Without immediate urgent access to a toilet, suitably modified where appropriate, would experience loss of control.		
d	Has experienced unpredictable or recurrent loss of control.		

14. Understanding communication (Global)				
Understanding communication from a stranger reliably, repeatedly, safely and in a timely manner, by both verbal means (such as hearing or lip reading), non-verbal means (such as intonation or body language) <i>and</i> written means (such as reading 16 point print), using any aid normally used				
a	None of the below apply			
Due to sensory, cognitive or social difficulties:				
b	Has some difficulty understanding complex information from a stranger	Occ	Freq	Most
c	Has significant difficulty understanding complex information from a stranger			
d	Has some difficulty understanding basic information from a stranger			
e	Has significant difficulty understanding basic information from a stranger			

15. Making self understood (Global)				
Making self understood reliably, repeatedly, safely and in a timely manner to a stranger through speaking, writing, typing, or other means normally used, unaided by another person.				
a. None of the below apply				
Due to sensory, cognitive, physical or social difficulties:				
b.	Has some difficulty conveying complex information to strangers	Occ	Freq	Most
c.	Has significant difficulty conveying complex information to strangers			
d.	Has some difficulty conveying basic information to strangers			
e.	Has significant difficulty conveying basic information to strangers			

16. Social Engagement (Mental/cognitive/intellectual)				
Engaging socially with people known and unknown to the person, reliably, repeatedly and safely, unaided by another person.				
a None of the below apply				
Because of difficulties interacting with others, anxiety, distress or lack of social understanding:		Occ	Freq	Most
b	Has some difficulty with social engagement with people unknown to the person			
c	Has significant difficulty with social engagement with people unknown to the person			
d	Has some difficulty with social engagement with people known to the person			
e	Has significant difficulty with social engagement with people known to the person			

17. Organising self and planning (Mental/cognitive/intellectual)				
Organising self and planning throughout the day, reliably, repeatedly, safely and in a timely manner, unaided by another person.				
a	None of the below apply			
		Occ	Freq	Most
b	Has some difficulty organising self and planning to an acceptable standard throughout the whole of the day			
c	Has significant difficulty organising self and planning to an acceptable standard throughout the whole of the day			
d	Has some difficulty organising self and planning to an acceptable standard, even for short periods			
e	Has significant difficulty organising self and planning to an acceptable standard, even for short periods			

18. Coping with Change (Mental/cognitive/intellectual)				
Coping with planned and unplanned changes to daily routine reliably, repeatedly and safely, unaided by another person.				
a. None of the below apply				
		Occ	Freq	Most
b.	Experiences some difficulties with unplanned changes to daily routine.			
c.	Experiences significant difficulties with unplanned changes to daily routine.			
d.	Experiences some difficulties with planned changes to daily routine.			
e.	Experiences significant difficulties with planned changes to daily routine.			

19. Appropriateness of Behaviour (Mental/cognitive/intellectual)				
Displaying appropriate behaviour in the workplace reliably, repeatedly and safely without support from another person.				
a None of the below apply				
		Occ	Freq	Most
b	Displays moderate verbally aggressive or socially inappropriate behaviour			
c	Displays severe verbally aggressive or socially inappropriate behaviour			
d	Displays physically aggressive behaviour			