

Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) Customer Account Management (CAM) System

Operational Guide for Local Authorities

Version no: 7

Date: May 2010

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 In October 2008 Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) was introduced for customers claiming benefit on the grounds of incapacity or disability. To support its introduction Jobcentre Plus established a programme to design, develop and implement ESA through four key deliverables:
- A simplified and effective Employment and Support Allowance business process;
 - An underpinning Information System/Information Technology system to support delivery of the process;
 - Products to enable staff to deliver the new service;
 - The definition and delivery of a new customer service process.
- 1.2 Although the introduction of ESA changed a number of processes within Jobcentre Plus, those directly impacting LAs are the:-
- technical detail of the way the benefit to support those who are unable to work due to illness will operate
 - customer claim process before output is generated and transmitted to the LA
 - method by which claims are received by LAs.
- 1.3 Initially customers who wished to claim HB/CTB were provided with a clerical HCTB1 claim form. However, on 26 October 2009 a facility for customers wishing to claim HB and/or CTB at the same time as their claim to ESA was introduced.
- 1.4 Information to support the claim(s) is normally gathered over the telephone and the information gathered is recorded on the Customer Account Management (CAM) system. Alternative methods to claiming are available to the customer and these are covered in the guidance at **Section 4**.
- 1.5 The purpose of this document is to provide detailed guidance on the impact on Local Authorities of the ESA process and the further enhancements implemented in ESA CAM Release 10.1 on 31 May 2010.
- 1.6 Guidance on the changes of ESA and how this affected the administration of HB/CTB was issued in circular A11/2008, available at::

<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/local-authority-staff/housing-benefit/user-communications/hbctb-circulars/2008-adjudication-and-operations/>

This includes a full set of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) on the general changes that the benefit involves.

2. The Scope of the CAM based ESA gather

- 2.1 In October 2009 the Jobcentre Plus process was enhanced to allow ESA customers, who also wanted to make a new claim to HB and/or CTB, the opportunity to claim all benefits at the same time. This single integrated information gather for multiple benefits supports government initiatives to provide a single point of contact and promote benefit take-up.
- 2.2 The full gather applies regardless of the ESA sub-type they claim. A customer indicating that they wish to claim ESA (Income Related) naturally undergoes a full means tested gather, but also specific additional questions that apply solely to the HB/CTB aspect of the claim. Equally a customer claiming ESA Contributory Only ESA (C), who indicates they would like to claim HB and/or CTB, also undergo a full means tested gather including HB/CTB specific questions, even though this is not required for the primary benefit gather.
- 2.3 This full gather principle applies only to information and does not extend to evidence. Therefore although details about the partner's circumstances are collected in ESA (C) claims evidence is not requested to support this and it is the responsibility of the Local Authority to gather this information.
- 2.4 The full gather principle applies to new and repeat claims to ESA only. If the customer has contacted Jobcentre Plus to report a change of circumstances the integrated gather process is not applied, customers are advised to contact their LA direct with this information. Notifications issued to the customer reiterate this, please see <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/local-authority-staff/housing-benefit/claims-processing/closer-working-with-dwp/employment-and-support-allowance/> (Under ESA Seminars 2009 Documentation).
- 2.5 Notifications of change of circumstance do not change the current Electronic Transfer of Data (ETD) process. However, LAs are notified of some changes to ESA entitlement, including cessation, through the ETD process
- 2.6 If the customer is making a claim within 12 weeks of a previous claim ceasing, the Rapid Reclaim procedure is invoked. The customer is asked a series of questions to establish, from the customer's responses, their eligibility to make a rapid reclaim. If this applies an electronic gather does not take place for the HB/CTB element but a clerical HBRR1 is issued to the customer for completion and return directly to the appropriate LA.

- 2.7 If the customer makes a claim for ESA but it links back to a previous IB claim (see link to guidance at paragraph 1.8 for detail on linking rules) a claim for IB is taken and any appropriate gather will not take place via the CAM system but will be gathered via CMS with the appropriate outputs being produced by that system.
- 2.8 The intention of the integrated gather process is to promote benefit take-up and the CAM system has been designed to elicit informed responses from the customer to improve the quality of the information gathered over and above that which may be provided by a standard clerical claim. Further detail of the CAM system and the gather process is covered in the following section.

3. The CAM System and the Process changes for customers claiming HB/CTB and ESA

- 3.1 In normal circumstances the customer initiates their claim to benefit by calling a generic 0800 number which supports a wide range of benefit claims. The number is 0800 0556688. This is a freephone number from landlines and the majority of mobile providers.
- 3.2 Benefit claims involve a lengthy range of questions to elicit the customer's precise circumstances. Claims made for ESA and HB/CTB often take in excess of 45 minutes. For this reason if the customer is incurring a charge for their call and they indicate this is an issue Jobcentre Plus will take their contact details and call the customer back.
- 3.3 When the freephone number has been dialled the customer is presented with an Integrated Voice Response (IVR) indicating that they should select various options depending upon their circumstances.
- 3.4 The customer is then routed to one of several national Contact Centres (CC) who have Customer Service Agents (CS Agents) trained to deal with the call. The network is virtual so the customer is routed to the first available CS Agent regardless of their geographical location. The location of the CC Agent has no impact on the process output from an LA perspective.
- 3.5 Initially customers are asked questions which establish their eligibility to claim ESA. This involves basic questions such as establishing if illness is preventing them working. These are referred to as 'strike out' questions.
- 3.6 If 'strike out' questions identify the customer is not eligible to make a claim to ESA they are either transferred to the First Contact line to make a claim for JSA or IS or sign posted to the relevant DWP department.
- 3.7 If it appears that the customer is eligible to make a claim to ESA personal details are pulled from the Customer Information System (CIS). This prompts the CS Agent to ask the customer a minimum of three and a maximum of five random security questions drawn from a number of variables, dependent on what the Customer Information System (CIS) holds on the customer. Correctly answered security questions constitute verified identity for the customer, because their identity will have been verified previously by the Department.

- 3.8 Failure to answer security questions results in the call being terminated and the customer cannot progress their claim. No claim to HB/CTB has been initiated and no output is received by the LA. The usual output received by the LA, can only be produced if the security questions have been answered and identity therefore confirmed.
- 3.9 For security reasons precise detail of the range of questions that may be asked of the customer is not reproduced in externally available guidance.
- 3.10 Based on the customer's responses, the system establishes which ESA sub-type (Contributory and/or Income Related) the customer should claim. The CS Agent establishes if the customer wants to claim HB and/or CTB and if appropriate the HB/CTB gather is triggered. However, they are asked if they are already receiving or in the process of claiming HB and/or CTB and if the answer is positive the gather will not be undertaken for that particular benefit(s).
- 3.11 Once the customer has identified their intention to claim ESA, details of their request are recorded on the Customer Account Management (CAM) system, used by Jobcentre Plus staff to record ESA claim information.
- 3.12 The CS Agent works through a series of screens to gather the appropriate details to support the customer's ESA claim. These screens are mirrored for the partner if applicable.
- 3.13 When these screens are complete customers who have indicated that they want to claim HB and/or CTB are advised that some additional questions will now be asked.
- 3.14 The CS Agent works through the following screens asking the appropriate HB/CTB questions.
- HB/CTB Case Summary View
 - Previous HB/CTB Details View
 - HB/CTB Customer/ Partner Details
 - HB/CTB Other Benefits/ Credits/ Allowances
 - HB/CTB Hospitalisation
 - HB/CTB Employment
 - HB/CTB Education and Training

- HB/CTB Abroad
- HB/CTB Pension Income
- HB/CTB Housing Costs
- HB/CTB Housing Costs More
- HB/CTB Dependants
- HB/CTB Non-Dependants
- HB/CTB Savings and Investments
- HB/CTB Other Income
- HB/CTB Other Property/ Land
- HB/CTB Method of Payment

3.15 Many of these screens require information already established and input in support of the ESA claim. This information is automatically copied across to the HB/CTB screens to avoid duplicate questioning and CS Agent input. However, these screens also contain additional HB/CTB specific questions for the customer to respond to.

3.16 For ESA (IR) cases the additional questions asked are quite limited with the only screen containing significant additional questions being the HB/CTB Housing Costs and HB/CTB Housing Costs More screens.

3.17 For ESA (C) only cases the additional information gather is more significant, if applicable a partner will have to be linked to the case and all their information established. This also applies to areas such as dependants, non-dependants, income and capital details for the customer themselves.

3.18 The questioning in the CAM system is intelligent, for example if the customer indicates they are not employed, questions relating to employment are not enabled and if they rent from a LA, Local Housing Allowance (LHA) questions are also not enabled.

3.19 CAM does not have large tracts of mandatory text and questions are not fully scripted e.g. Severely Mentally Impaired? This creates greater flexibility in the management of the system as the appropriate explanations for each question (or sensitivities) can be explained in training modules staff undertake before using CAM.

3.20 Furthermore the CAM screens have links to “Help” screens to aid the CS Agent to get the appropriate response from the customer. For

example when establishing if the customer (or their partner) is a close relative of the landlord (or the landlord's agent) a help link actually gives the HB/CTB definition of a close relative. The Learning and Development module undertaken by Jobcentre Plus staff also gives background information about the HB/CTB scheme and explanations about why specific questions are asked to give the CS agent a genuine understanding of the importance of the HB/CTB aspect of the gather.

- 3.21 The CAM system has been built with flexibility as a core component. For this reason if a customer cannot answer a question the electronic gather still continues to encourage as complete a gather as possible. Mandatory questions would effectively stunt this aim as the system does not allow the gather to continue if a mandatory question is not answered. In some circumstances, particularly where the claim is being conducted by a representative of the customer, a number of questions may not be answered, so the number of mandatory questions in CAM is low. However some crucial questions are still mandatory e.g. Do you want to claim HB and/or CTB?
- 3.22 To allow the customer to give the maximum amount of information, they have the opportunity to take a 'mini- break' to allow them to locate further pieces of information. The CS Agent calls the customer back after a short interval to continue the data gather.
- 3.23 During the call it is made clear to the customer that all of the relevant questions will need to be answered in full to progress their claim to benefit. The system does not allow partial dates to be input. If the customer cannot recall an exact date but knows the month, the CS Agent will complete the entry as the first of that particular month.
- 3.24 All ESA related calls to the Contact Centre are digitally recorded; this also applies to follow-up calls made to the Benefit Delivery Centre (BDC).
- 3.25 As all calls are recorded, it is these conversations which constitute the customer's claim. All supporting documentation issued to the customer is for their information only; no signature in support of the claim is gathered. Instead the customer is read a legally approved declaration which they must agree to in order to continue with their ESA claim. The full text of this declaration appears at **Appendix 1**.
- 3.26 This declaration is also approved for HB/CTB purposes so the LA will not receive a signature in respect of HB/CTB claims gathered on the CAM system. If in the unusual circumstance that the customer does not agree with the declaration, no ESA claim has been made. However

Jobcentre Plus cannot make a decision in respect of the HB/CTB aspect of the claim and a LACI is still issued to the LA. However, it is clear that the customer has not agreed the declaration as the LACI claim status will read 'Claim Not Made'.

- 3.27 At the end of the call a customer statement is triggered by the CS Agent. The customer statement is a copy of the questions asked to support their claim along with their responses. Unanswered questions are left blank. At this point the claim is transferred from the Contact Centre to the appropriate BDC based upon the customer's address.
- 3.28 This customer statement is sent via electronic overnight batch to a central Service Delivery Centre (SDC). The following working day this is printed off and sent via first class post to the correspondence address stated by the customer. An example customer statement is included on the ESA website at <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/local-authority-staff/housing-benefit/claims-processing/closer-working-with-dwp/employment-and-support-allowance/> (Under ESA Seminars 2009 Documentation). The customer statement indicates that all the outstanding questions must be answered to allow the ESA claim to proceed. Furthermore it specifies the evidence the customer must provide to support their ESA claim.
- 3.29 The customer statement explains that the customer has made a claim for ESA and indicates the next steps the customer must take to progress it. This includes stressing the importance of providing answers to all of the questions and supplying the supporting evidence as indicated. It includes a pre-paid reply envelope, addressed to the appropriate BDC, for the customer to send their evidence to. It also provides a contact number for them to provide any further information.
- 3.30 The customer will then gather the missing information/evidence and return it to the BDC. The customer should also check that the customer statement is indeed correct and that no transposition of data has taken place during gather. If the customer statement is correct the customer need only provide the evidence requested in the associated cover note. If there are omissions or errors they must advise Jobcentre Plus immediately.
- 3.31 The BDC then commences the next stage of the processing action. The CAM system is updated with any new information provided or if appropriate any existing information adjusted. Details of any physical evidence provided is also recorded. CAM shows outstanding evidence as 'NV' for Not Verified. Evidence provided is shown as 'V' for Verified. No other values can be held in respect of evidence.

- 3.32 Background medical action also takes place. The customer is issued with a medical questionnaire which they return to our health care partner ATOS and a Work Capability Assessment (WCA) is scheduled for the customer to establish if they should be allocated to the Work Related Activity Group or the Support Group following the assessment phase.
- 3.33 If all of the customer's information and evidence is complete their claim will be 'pushed' from the information gathering system (CAM) to the processing system (JSAPS) where benefit is put into payment at the appropriate rate. The case can then be closed down on CAM. If there is an associated HB and/or CTB claim, the act of closing a case automatically triggers a LACI to the appropriate LA. This ensures that a LACI is received in all appropriate cases.
- 3.34 The LACI is automatically issued to the LA that is associated with the postcode of the customer's address. Failure to close a case on CAM results in an error message for the user. If this is not rectified this warning is then automatically pushed to the user's line manager.
- 3.35 In some cases the customer does not provide all of the evidence and/or information required for their ESA claim. If after one calendar month all the required information and evidence has not been received the claim is regarded as defective. The claim is 'pushed' to JSAPS for a nil benefit decision to be made. The claim is also closed on CAM, again triggering the issue of a LACI. The status of the LACI clearly shows that the case has been transferred even though, for ESA purposes, this is an incomplete claim. The LA should treat this as per any other claim they receive through the various existing channels they have. The list of options that will populate the LACI "Case Status" field are shown in the full LACI Guidance - <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/local-authority-staff/housing-benefit/claims-processing/closer-working-with-dwp/employment-and-support-allowance/#esa>
- 3.36 All LAs now have a secure Government Connect network (GCSX/GSX) and a Data Transfer Appliance (DTA) server installed. The normal method of transfer of the LACI is now electronic via the secure network to the DTA server.
- 3.37 When a LACI is triggered it is sent by overnight batch to the central SDC and the SDC then electronically transfers the file to the DTA server at the LA. For information on how to access the DTA and retrieve the LACI please refer to the DTA user guide which can be

obtained from the Local Authority Support Team (LA-ST). This transfer takes place with the LACI being provided in PDF format.

- 3.38 The PDF can either be printed off or routed into the LAs Document Management System (DMS). It is the strategic intention to move to electronic transfer in XML format as well as PDF which will allow the data to be pushed directly into the LAs own IT systems as soon as practically possible.
- 3.39 If electronic transfer cannot take place the LACI is still sent to the SDC via overnight batch. It is then printed off and issued to the appropriate LA in paper format via first class post. This facility is always available as a contingency measure.
- 3.40 Although the LACI is normally triggered automatically through closure on CAM the facility to produce a LACI in advance exists. For example if the customer indicates they may be under the threat of eviction the transfer of the LACI is triggered following their call. Though information may be missing and evidence not verified in these circumstances the LA should be aware of the customer's claim as promptly as possible.
- 3.41 Similarly if a LACI is lost or becomes corrupted a replacement LACI can be issued by requesting this via the relevant contact at the BDC.

An Example Summary - The Customer Journey Timings

Below is an example that summarises the potential timing of a customer's claim. The precise timing is dependant on how quickly the customer supplies evidence and any missing information.

DAY 1
Customer rings 0800 number to make a claim for benefit. The customer selects the new claim option for sick/disabled people. Jobcentre Plus receives the call, confirms identity and takes the claim. They identify if the customer wishes to claim HB and/or CTB and gather the information as appropriate. The call is recorded, which means that a customer signature is not required.
DAY 2 – 3
The Customer receives a printed Customer Statement for checking, and gathers any further evidence required.
DAY 5
The Customer continues to gather required evidence. Jobcentre Plus receives a medical services report for 'Special Rules' customers and makes a decision on Limited Capability for Work.
DAY 8/9
The Customer sends required evidence to the Benefit Delivery Centre in the envelope provided. Evidence received in Benefit Delivery Centre. The CAM is updated as appropriate. Medical Certificates are received and considered for early entry to the Work Capability Assessment process by Jobcentre Plus.

DAY 11

The Customer's claim to ESA is processed. The case is closed on CAM and a LACI issued via overnight batch then transferred electronically.

The Customer receives payment on the due pay day.

The Local Authority is also advised of the customer's ESA entitlement. For both ESA Income Related (IR) and for ESA Contributory (C) awards this will be via Electronic Transfer of Data (ETD).

DAY 33

If customer has not returned the required evidence the claim may be considered as defective.

DAY 36

Customers allocated to the Support Group, from the information on the questionnaire, receive their decision.

DAY 45

The customer receives their benefit payment decision.

DAY 92

The customer enters the main phase of Employment and Support Allowance and is paid at either the support component rate or the work related activity component rate.

4. Alternative Claiming Routes

- 4.1 Jobcentre Plus is aware that claiming via telephone is not always the most appropriate nor convenient method of making a claim to benefit. If, while making the joint ESA/HB/CTB claim, the customer indicates they do not wish to conduct a long telephone conversation they can request a clerical form be issued to them. This may also apply to vulnerable customers who may be struggling with a telephone based claim. This triggers the issue of a clerical HCTB1 from a central Service Delivery Centre (SDC) overnight. A cover note issued with the HCTB1 details the date of customer contact and provides the address of the relevant Local Authority for the customer to return the form to. The HCTB1 provided is the current form in issue.
- 4.2 The customer is advised to complete the HCTB1 and return it to the relevant LA with the required evidence to support their HB/CTB claim.
- 4.3 The facility exists for customers to complete a claim form face to face in a Jobcentre Plus office however these 'high street' Jobcentres do not have access to the CAM system and this results in the claim being made clerically, including the issue of a clerical HCTB1. Jobcentre Plus is not resourced to provide this service on a wide scale basis.

5. Electronic Transfer of Data

- 5.1 Where a HB/CTB interest is present on Departmental IT systems LAs are notified of certain changes of circumstance, including the cessation of benefit, by an Electronic Transfer of Data (ETD) notification. This is triggered for both ESA (C) and (IR) customers and assists LAs to determine benefit entitlement accurately.

6. Voice Recording Retrieval

6.1 ESA operates a signatureless system. Details captured during all claims made by telephone are digitally recorded and stored.

6.2 Retention

- For new claims, where an HB/CTB interest is identified the recording is stored for six years from the primary benefit effective date of claim **OR** 14 months from the ESA claim end date, whichever is the later.
- For non-HB/CTB claims the recording is held for 14 months after the ESA claim has closed.
- For all other contact (e.g. changes of circumstances) the recording is held for 14 months from the date of that contact.

6.3 The customer is required to verbally agree to a declaration which states the information that they have given over the telephone is correct. As a consequence, there is no requirement for the customer to sign and return a customer statement to Jobcentre Plus.

Recording Requests

6.4 HB policy, departmental solicitors and LA colleagues have advised that where a customer is under investigation, LAs should only need copies of documentary evidence rather than requesting (and transcribing) a copy of the call (unless it is the call itself and whether it was made by the customer that is under dispute). However in exceptional circumstances the LA may still require a copy of the customer's voice recording.

6.5 To obtain a copy of the call recording you should contact your designated Benefit Delivery Centre contact. This should have been agreed at the liaison meeting held with Jobcentre Plus (if no such contact has been agreed please contact your Regional External Relations Manager (RERM - list at Appendix 2) to initiate this. The contact will then arrange for a request form to be issued to a designated recipient with your LA. (Again the specified LA contact should have been agreed at the liaison meeting, if this was not completed it can be agreed at this stage.)

6.6 The request form will only be issued on request, due to the sensitive nature of information transfer. Only requests from the agreed LA contact point will be accepted.

- 6.7 The request form requires
- Customer Name
 - Customer NINO
 - The date range of customer contacts that are required
 - The reason for the request
 - Name of authority requesting the information
 - Contact details of person within the LA requesting information.
- 6.8 The request will be passed to a security expert for consideration. The request will either be accepted, or rejected with a reason given. It has been agreed that this action will be taken within 10 working days of the request being received.
- 6.9 Until 26/10/09, this was provided as a written transcript. For HB/CTB claims initiated after this date the file is transferred in digital format. This is via an encrypted CD. The encryption package used is Pretty Good Privacy (PGP) for which all LAs hold two licences to allow this file to be unencrypted. This CD is delivered by secure (signed for) courier.

7. Timetable

- 7.1 Articles and bulletins will be produced in the period prior to the introduction of ESA Release 10.1. Additionally HBSD produced a section on ESA on the LA resource area on the DWP website. In the meantime if you have any queries about this guidance please email us on **HBSDMP.WWEG@dwp.gsi.gov.uk**

8. Appendices

8.1 Appendix 1 - Your Declaration Statement

You have agreed to the following declaration regarding your claim:

- If you knowingly give information that is incorrect or incomplete, you may be liable to prosecution or other action.
- If your circumstances change you must promptly inform the office that pays your benefit, because this may affect your entitlement to benefit or the amount of benefit that you receive. This includes notifying your Local Authority of any changes where you have made a claim to Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax Benefit.
- The Department for Work and Pensions may ask any of the people or organisations mentioned in this claim for information which is needed to deal with your claim to benefit, this includes health care professionals who advise the Department and organisations the Department has a contract with for the provision of medical services.
- If there is any request for your claim to be looked at again, the information may be given to that health care professional, organisation, department or any other government body as permitted by law.
- The Department may use any current or future information to decide whether you are entitled to the benefit you are claiming – including Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit, any other benefit you have claimed or any other benefit you may claim in future.
- Your doctor, or any doctor who has been treating you, being informed about the Secretary of State's determination on your limited capability for work.
- The information you have given is correct and complete as far as you know and believe and you have included all of your income and savings.
- Under section 16 of the Social Security Fraud Act 2001, it is an offence to fail to notify a change of circumstances promptly. Failure to tell us about a change in your circumstances promptly may result in action being taken against you.

You were asked if you give permission to share information about your claim to Housing Benefit with your landlord. You replied [<Permission for LA>](#)

8.2 Appendix 2 - List of Regional External Relation Managers

REGION / NATION	RERM	LANDLINE	EMAIL
Wales	Huw Thomas	02920 804055	Huw.thomas2@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk
Scotland	John Reid	0141 207 3202	john.1.reid@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk
South West	Phil Harrison	0117 945 6944	phil.w.harrison@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk
East Midlands	Richard Libecans	0115 989 5960	richard.libecans1@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk
West Midlands	Martin Bolt	0121 452 5250	martin.bolt1@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk
East of England	Julia Nix	0122 388 4634	julia.nix@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk
North East	Dave Wright	0191 211 4458	Dave.wright1@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk
North West	Peter Jamieson	0161 873 1365	peter.jamieson@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk
Yorkshire & the Humber	Alison Knight	0113 3078013	Alison.knight1@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk
London	Rilesh Jadeja	0207 7342 3021	Rilesh.jadeja@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk
South East	Lynda Jones	0148 344 6080	lynda.jones4@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk