

Work Coach Reference Guide for the Health & Work Conversation

This document brings together the different elements of the Health & Work Conversation (HWC) and summarises how they fit together, what their purpose is, and how to do them. It also covers the evidence behind these elements and the benefits associated with them.

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What this document is for

You can use this document as a quick and convenient reminder of the different parts of the HWC that you covered in the 1-day facilitated training.

If you need a quick refresher about a particular part of the HWC, or you want a reminder of how the different elements fit together, this document will help you with that.

This document is just a quick reference resource you can use following the facilitated training. This document alone is **not** sufficient for learning the skills required to deliver the HWC. You must attend the 1-day facilitated training before using the techniques introduced in the HWC.

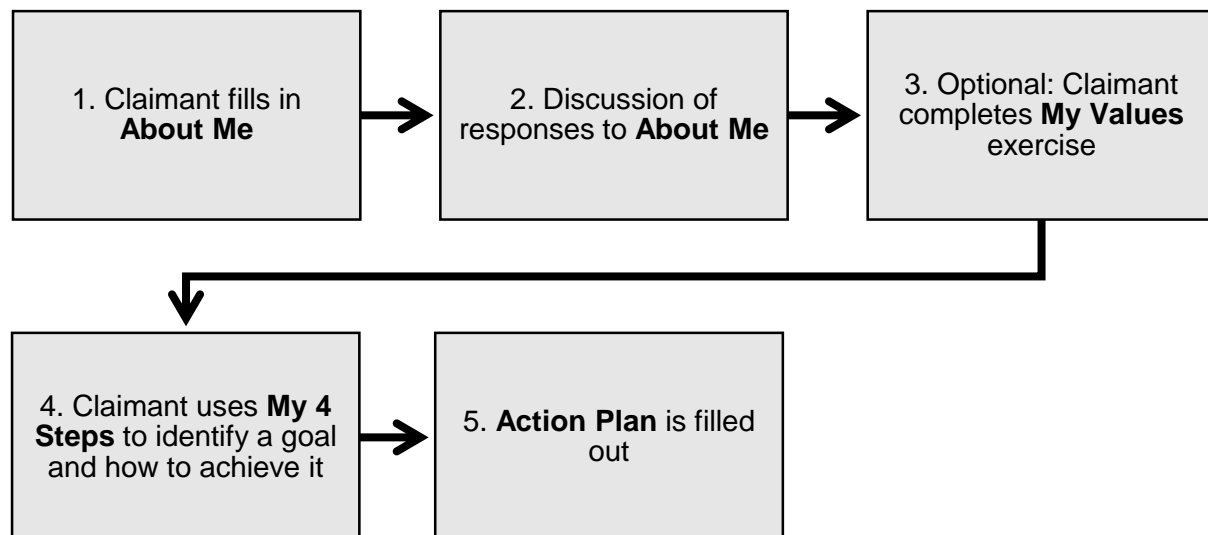
Other documents to help you

This document covers *what* the HWC elements are. For information on *how* to deliver the HWC, you should refer to the [Work Coach HWC booklet](#), which is available on the intranet. It’s the same as the claimant version of the HWC booklet, but has additional guidance for you about how to go through the HWC with a claimant.

For additional help, there’s also a [HWC Frequently Asked Questions document](#), which is also available on the intranet. This covers the most common questions that work coaches have had about the HWC, and is another convenient document for you to refer back to if you are unsure of anything.

Overview of the Health and Work Conversation – how the different parts fit together

The HWC is a 40-minute interview for new ESA claimants. It consists of the following elements:



Main principles of the HWC

- The HWC is a conversation - not an interview. It is a two-way discussion where the claimant gets plenty of opportunity to talk about their thoughts and opinions. The session should not be about form-filling. The HWC is first and foremost a conversation, and the HWC Booklet has been developed to guide you and the claimant through the conversation. You should be verbally walking the claimant through the different parts of the conversation and inviting them to share their responses and their thoughts.
- The HWC is claimant-led – the claimant gets many opportunities to consider their own values and goals and to come up with their own answers and responses. The HWC is focused on the claimant considering what they think will be helpful for them, but it still has scope for you to provide support and guidance too.
- The HWC is holistic – it looks at the claimant as a whole, including their goals and aspirations that are not work-related or health-related.
- The HWC is calm – an important part of the approaches used in the HWC is that the claimant should feel as calm and safe as possible. This means that you should make sure to answer any questions or concerns that they have at the start of the conversation so that the claimant can feel relaxed and calm during the conversation. Where possible, you should consider booking private interview rooms for the HWC so that the claimant can feel comfortable sharing information with you. Finally, don't be afraid of silences during the conversation – if the claimant needs some time to think about their responses during the exercise, that's fine. Give them that time, rather than jumping in to fill the silence.

About Me – what it's for and how to do it

Purpose: The About Me is a short form that asks a range of questions about different areas of a claimant's life. It explores their strengths and interests as well as the challenges they're facing. This is in keeping with the HWC principle of being holistic rather than focusing on only health or work.

How to do it: When the claimant comes in, you hand them the HWC Booklet, explain briefly what the HWC is about and ask them to take about 10 minutes to fill in the About Me. Depending on what your office decides, it may also be that the Booklet is handed to the claimant by an admin person and the claimant comes to you once they've already filled in the About Me.

The idea is that the claimant answers the questions independently, but you should be nearby in case they have questions or they need help. It is worth noting that this time isn't part of the 40 minutes allocated to the HWC so you can use it to do other admin tasks on your computer.

Benefits:

- It helps to break the ice and build rapport.
- It provides a starting point for the conversation.
- It encourages claimants to open up.
- It helps to identify wishes for My 4 Steps.
- It gives an overview of the person as a whole – including things other than work or their health.
- It focuses on things the claimant can do and their strengths.
- It allows you to focus on key information about the claimant.

Note: In summary, once you have discussed the About Me with the claimant you should have an overview of their strengths, as well as some of the obstacles they face.

My Values – what it's for and how to do it

Purpose: My Values is an exercise that encourages claimants to feel more open to taking on challenges. It is based on over ten years' worth of evidence that shows it is an effective way of helping a wide range of people take on all different sorts of challenges.

Evidence: Research has found it to be effective for people facing challenges in terms of health (such as quitting smoking, managing their high blood pressure or heart condition, or understanding their risk for diabetes) and in many other settings (for example, the exercise can improve personal and professional relationships by helping people be more open to others' opinions and to discussing problems).

How to do it: Once the claimant completes the About Me and you have discussed it with them briefly, you can give them the My Values exercise (which is on a separate sheet and isn't included in the HWC claimant booklet). Introduce the exercise to the claimant using the guidance in your HWC work coach booklet. The claimant then spends 10 minutes completing the exercise. You can work on something else during this time, but you may need to offer support or guidance to the claimant if they ask for it during the exercise.

Once the claimant has finished filling out the My Values sheet, ask them if they would like to discuss the values they chose. However, remember that the claimant does not have to share their chosen values with you, as this information can be very personal. If the claimant is happy to share their values, discuss those values for a couple of minutes.

Benefits:

- It helps claimants feel more open to taking on challenges.
- It helps claimants focus on things that matter to them, which is an important part of the HWC.
- It helps with My 4 Steps – the values the claimant chooses in My Values can provide starting points for thinking about goals they'd like to work towards using My 4 Steps (e.g. if they choose "relationships with friends and family" as an important value, they could think about goals related to friends or family that they would like to achieve using My 4 Steps).

Note: My Values is an optional exercise – the claimant does not have to complete it. However, we recommend that you do try the exercise with the claimant, as many people value the opportunity to spend some time thinking about the things that matter to them. If you choose not to use the My Values exercise with a claimant during the HWC, you can still give it to them to complete at home if they want.

My 4 Steps – what it's for and how to do it

Purpose: My 4 Steps is a goal-attainment strategy that helps people move towards goals that they want to achieve. It does this by helping them stay motivated and by helping them to overcome obstacles that might come up as they try to reach their goal.

My 4 Steps is the backbone of the HWC, and the aim is for claimants to learn about this simple strategy that can help them move towards goals. During the HWC, the claimant does not have to choose a goal related to health or work – the goal can be anything that they care about and want to achieve. However, the idea is that once claimants try My 4 Steps and find out how it can help them, they will use it in other areas of their lives, including potentially work and health.

Evidence: It is based on several decades' worth of evidence about how to maintain motivation and how to successfully achieve goals. Research has shown that it can help a wide variety of people achieve a wide range of goals. For example, it has been found to help people reach goals related to increasing their levels of physical activity, managing their depression symptoms, managing their diabetes, completing their physiotherapy exercises, reducing stress, reducing social anxiety, seeking support when it's needed, and improving the quality of relationships.

How to do it:

The 4 steps are...

Want – the goal they want to achieve.

Outcome – how they would feel if they achieved their Want.

Obstacle – a problem or challenge that might come up and stop them from achieving their Want. Remember that this should be an internal obstacle (e.g. a habit, belief, or feeling).

Plan – an action they can take when the obstacle comes up that will help them overcome that obstacle.

Once the claimant has completed My Values, guide them through My 4 Steps using the guidance in the HWC work coach booklet. If the claimant comes up with external obstacles rather than internal ones, make a note of the external ones, as you may be able to help with those in the Action Plan section of the HWC (e.g. if they don't have enough childcare support, this is an external obstacle that you can give them advice on during the Action Plan section). During My 4 Steps, however, make sure you guide the claimant towards identifying internal obstacles.

Benefits:

- It is a strategy that claimants can use in any area of their lives to move towards goals they care about. Encourage them to continue using it beyond the HWC.
- It is simple and easy to remember.
- It helps claimants feel empowered by putting them in control of moving towards goals that they personally care about.
- It helps claimants to overcome internal obstacles, which are a type of obstacle that holds many of us back from achieving our goals. Other goal-attainment strategies do not necessarily deal with how to identify and overcome internal obstacles.

Action Plan – what it's for and how to do it

Purpose: The Action Plan involves discussing with the claimant what other things they could do, beyond My 4 Steps, to achieve their goals. Whereas My 4 Steps was about planning how to overcome internal obstacles, the actions in the Action Plan are about planning how to overcome external obstacles. This is where you provide advice and guidance on how to access relevant provision and support.

Evidence: Research has shown that the more specific an action plan is, the more likely a person is to carry out the action. This is why you should discuss with the claimant **what** they're going to do (the **action**), **where** they're going to do it, and **when** they're going to do it.

You should make sure that the claimant comes up with their own answers for when and where they're going to carry out their action. This gives them ownership over the action plan, which makes them more likely to carry it out.

How to do it: Much like the Action Plans you're used to using with claimants, you should support the claimant to come up with any actions that they can take to move closer to goals that relate to work or health. For example, these would be actions that would help them with **external** obstacles such as training needs, housing, debt, health management or child care.

This part of the HWC is where you draw on your existing knowledge and experience to provide support to the claimant and to direct them to useful resources. You can also consider information from earlier parts of the HWC:

- Think back to the About Me – did the claimant mention anything where they could do with help or a referral?
- Think back to the My 4 Steps – did any external obstacles come up that you could discuss now?

You should also consider if there are any other actions that you think the claimant would benefit from based on what you know about them.

It is fine to make suggestions in this part of the HWC. In My 4 Steps it's important that the claimant comes up with their own answers (their own Want, Outcome, Obstacle and Plan), but in the Action Plan section of the HWC you can help the claimant come up with actions that you think would be helpful for them.

You should make sure to add 2-3 feasible actions but ensure that the claimant understands that these are voluntary. You should record these actions on the LMS Action Plan and issue the ESA49 letter with the agreed voluntary actions.