

An introduction to EPA

EPA is a way that alpha members can take control of their retirement planning.

By paying higher contributions, members are able to take part of their pension earlier than their Normal Pension Age (NPA) without any early payment reduction.

In alpha your NPA is the same as your State Pension Age (SPA) and if you choose to take your alpha pension benefits before your NPA they would be reduced as they may be paid to you for longer.

EPA allows you to pay more on top of your normal pension contributions, to build up an EPA portion of your alpha pension that can be paid one, two or three years earlier than your NPA without any early payment reduction.

Age 65 is the earliest that an EPA can be paid in full without any reduction. If your NPA is age 67 you cannot choose an EPA that could be paid three years early, as this would be before age 65.

NPA = 67

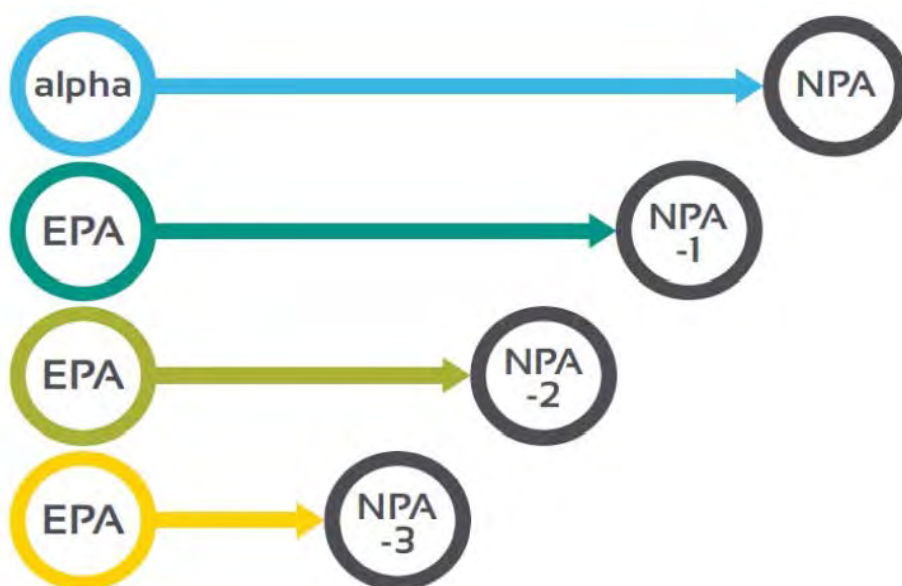


About EPA

The EPA application form is available on the Civil Service Pensions (Northern Ireland) [CSP(NI)] website.

How it works

- You pay for an EPA portion of your alpha pension by making extra contributions, on top of your normal alpha contributions.
- Your EPA portion builds up as a separate alpha pension, at a rate of 2.32% of your Pensionable earnings each scheme year.
- When you buy an EPA you only build up the EPA portion of your alpha pension. You are still an active member of alpha, although you do not build up any main alpha pension.
- The EPA portion of your pension can be taken without reduction one, two or three years before your alpha NPA, depending on the option you choose, but not before age 65.
- You can only buy one EPA portion at a time. But over the course of your scheme membership, you can choose to change which option you are buying, and build up another EPA portion of your pension under one of the three available options.



Cost

When you buy an EPA portion of your alpha pension you will have to pay an additional regular EPA contribution for 12 months, and cannot cancel the EPA part way through a scheme year.

The amount you pay will vary, depending on which EPA option you choose, your age, and how long you have to build it up. These contributions get tax relief in the same way as your normal alpha contributions. Your payroll will normally apply the tax relief for you.

CSP(NI) will provide an estimator tool on the CSP(NI) website so you can see how much the extra contributions will be for the different EPA options.

The cost of buying an EPA is fixed each scheme year. However, the cost can change. CSP(NI) will tell you every year what your contributions will be for the following 12 months.

When you select one of the EPA options you are agreeing to continue your payments until the end of the scheme year, this is 31 March.

If you want to change or cancel your EPA, this can only take effect from the end of the scheme year.

You can access the Effective Pension Age (EPA) Calculator, which will give you an estimate of the cost of buying your EPA, on the '[Members Calculators](#)' page. A link to the application form is also under the EPA section.

Buying your EPA

An EPA can only start at the beginning of the scheme year, 01 April. However, you can apply for an EPA at any time (it just won't start until the start of the scheme year).

If you want to buy an EPA that will build up from your start date, you must apply within the first three months of joining alpha.

EPA contributions will be collected once your application has been processed.

Changes to State Pension age (SPA)

SPA has been undergoing changes since April 2010. Current legislation states that over the coming years, SPA is set to rise to age 68 for both men and women.

Your SPA may change, and this means that your alpha NPA will change too.

When you buy an EPA portion of an alpha pension, you choose an EPA option that is a number of years before your NPA. You are not buying a fixed retirement age. If your SPA changes, your NPA changes with it, and the age that the EPA portion of your alpha pension can be paid without any early payment reduction also changes.

For example, if your NPA was 68 and you decided to buy an EPA of NPA minus two (two years early), the EPA portion of your alpha pension that you are building up is payable in full from age 66.

If in the future your SPA changes to 69, your NPA changes with it and your EPA portion of your pension would still be payable in full two years early, which would now be from age 67.

Added pension

Please note: If you have bought the maximum amount of alpha added pension, you cannot buy an EPA. If you buy an EPA, this could affect how much added pension you are able to buy.

Death benefits / Ill-health

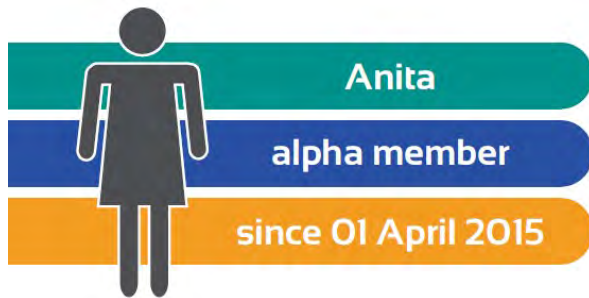
If you buy an EPA it does not affect the pension benefits payable to your dependants if you die. Dependants' pensions are a percentage of the pension you have built up, including any EPA portions of your pension and the main alpha pension too.

Buying an EPA has no effect on the way the death in service lump sum is worked out, as this is usually equal to two years' pensionable earnings.

If you retire through ill-health, the EPA portion of your pension has no effect on how your benefits are worked out, or the age used in the tests by the scheme medical advisers. They will use your SPA.

They will still check to see if you will be able to return to employment by your NPA, not the age you could take the EPA portion of your alpha pension.

EPA Case Study 1



- Anita joined alpha on 01 April 2015
- She was a new entrant
- Her SPA is 67 years 6 months

Anita has a SPA that includes a part year. Her alpha NPA matches her SPA, so this also includes a part year.

Anita decides she wants to buy an EPA. Because her NPA includes a part year, this affects the EPA options she can choose from.

Anita cannot choose an EPA option of NPA minus three, because that EPA portion could be paid without reduction before age 65. However, because of the part year in her NPA there is a special option available, Anita can choose an age 65 EPA option.



Anita is not buying a fixed age EPA. If in the future her SPA changes to 68 her NPA changes with it. The age 65 EPA option will automatically become an NPA minus three EPA option.



This EPA portion of her alpha pension is still payable without any early payment reduction from age 65. But if her SPA changes again, this time to 69, her NPA will change too. The NPA minus three EPA portion of her pension is now payable without any early payment reduction from age 66.

EPA Case Study 2



- Andrew was aged 39 at 01 April 2012.
- He has been a classic member since August 2000.
- He moved to alpha on 01 April 2015.

On 01 April 2016, Andrew chooses to buy an EPA of NPA minus two years. The EPA portion of his alpha pension he builds up can be paid without reduction two years earlier than his alpha NPA. His pension looks like this:

1. An alpha pension with the alpha NPA, which will not build up any further whilst Andrew is paying for his EPA. However, it will be adjusted each scheme year in line with inflation; and
2. An EPA of NPA minus two years, which will build up whilst Andrew is paying for his EPA. The EPA will also be adjusted each scheme year in line with inflation, in the same way as his NPA alpha pension.

Andrew's NPA in alpha is 67. The earliest his EPA portion of his pension could be taken without an early payment reduction would be 65.

He continues to buy his EPA for nine years. During the ninth year, Andrew decides that he no longer wants to pay the additional EPA contributions. His EPA cancellation takes effect from the start of the next scheme year, in this case 01 April 2026.

His alpha pension now looks like this:

1. His alpha pension with the alpha NPA. Andrew is now only making standard alpha contributions from 01 April 2026 so this pension will start to build up again. It will continue to be adjusted each scheme year in line with inflation.
2. The EPA of NPA minus two years. This pension will not build up from 01 April 2026 as Andrew is no longer paying for his EPA option, but it will be adjusted each scheme year in line with inflation in the same way as his NPA alpha pension.

Andrew's classic benefits are not impacted by him purchasing an alpha EPA option.

Andrew has a number of choices about when he takes his pension benefits.



Andrew could choose to take his benefits at his classic NPA of 60.

At this point, his pension benefits would be made up of:

1. An alpha pension – this would be reduced for early payment as it is being paid earlier than his alpha NPA of 67. He can exchange some of his alpha pension for a tax-free cash lump sum within limits set by HM Revenue & Customs; and
2. An EPA – reduced for early payment as this is being paid earlier than his alpha NPA minus two years (65). He can exchange some of his EPA for a tax-free cash lump sum within limits set by HM Revenue & Customs; and
3. A classic pension (based on service built up before 01 April 2015 and final pensionable earnings worked out at, or close to, the date that he takes his pension) – paid in full without any early payment reduction; and
4. A classic lump sum of three times his classic pension – paid in full without any early payment reduction.



Andrew could choose to take his pension benefits two years before his alpha NPA.

At this point, his pension benefits would be made up of:

1. An alpha pension – reduced for early payment as this is being paid earlier than his alpha NPA of 67. He can exchange some of his alpha pension for a tax-free cash lump sum within limits set by HM Revenue & Customs; and
2. An EPA – paid in full without early payment reduction. He can exchange some of his EPA for a tax-free cash lump sum within limits set by HM Revenue & Customs; and
3. A classic pension (based on service built up before 01 April 2015 and final pensionable earnings worked out at, or close to, the date that he takes his pension) – paid in full without any early payment reduction; and
4. A classic lump sum of three times his classic pension – paid in full without any early payment reduction.



Andrew could choose to take his benefits at his alpha NPA of 67.

At this point, his pension benefits would be made up of:

1. An alpha pension – paid in full without early payment reduction. He can exchange some of his alpha pension for a tax-free cash lump sum within limits set by HM Revenue & Customs; and
2. An EPA – paid in full without early payment reduction and including late payment additions because it is being paid later than alpha NPA minus two years. He can exchange some of his EPA for a tax-free cash lump sum within limits set by HM Revenue & Customs; and
3. A classic pension (based on the service built up before 01 April 2015 and final pensionable earnings worked out at, or close to, the date that he takes his pension) – paid in full without any early payment reduction; and
4. A classic lump sum of three times his classic pension – paid in full without any early payment reduction.

EPA FAQs

What is EPA?

If you are an active member of alpha, you can choose to pay extra contributions to buy an EPA option.

The extra contributions let you build up an EPA portion of your alpha pension that can be paid in full (without any early payment reduction) one, two or three years earlier than your standard alpha pension.

Pensions from alpha are usually payable at your Normal Pension Age (NPA). This is normally your State Pension age (SPA), or age 65 if that's later.

The EPA portion of your pension builds up in the same way as the 'standard' alpha pension - at a rate of 2.32% of actual pensionable earnings. The pension that is built up is added to the EPA portion each year EPA contributions are paid. EPA portions of alpha pensions are also adjusted each scheme year in line with inflation, just like the standard alpha pension.

How early can you access an EPA portion of your pension?

When you buy an EPA option, you don't choose a set age to retire.

You select a number of full years before your Normal Pension Age (NPA) that you want to take your EPA pension.



Can anyone buy an EPA?

You can only buy an EPA if you are an active member of alpha.

If you have already bought the maximum amount of added pension for alpha you cannot buy an EPA.

You can have the maximum added pension from classic, classic plus, premium, or nuvos, if you were a member before moving into alpha.

Are there any other restrictions?

You must not be older than the age you could claim the EPA portion of your alpha pension in full.

For example, if your NPA is 68, and you are age 66 you could not buy an EPA option of NPA minus three, because it would be payable in full at age 65. You cannot buy an EPA that could be paid in full before age 65.

For example, if your NPA is 67 you could not buy an EPA option of NPA minus three, because it would be payable in full at age 64.

What happens to an EPA option if your NPA changes?

Your EPA option will always stay as the one, two or three years earlier than your NPA that you select.

If your NPA is, for example, age 67 and you buy an EPA option of NPA minus one year, the EPA portion of your pension could be paid in full from age 66 (NPA 67 minus one).

If your NPA increases to age 68 (because your SPA increases), the EPA portion of your pension could only be paid in full from age 67 (NPA 68 minus one).

How much do I pay for EPA contributions?

The amount varies depending on the EPA option you choose, but they will be higher than standard alpha contributions. CSP(NI) will tell you how much you will be paying towards your EPA before your contributions start.