

Employment and Support Allowance: Work Capability Assessment Outcomes by Physical and Mental Health Condition

19 November 2012

Introduction

This statistical release presents information on new claims for Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) in Great Britain. It provides information on the Work Capability Assessment (WCA) outcomes by showing outcomes broken down by medical condition. The figures are derived from administrative data held by the Department for Work and Pensions and assessment data provided by Atos Healthcare. This analysis presents information on new claims for ESA only. It does not contain incapacity benefits reassessments to determine eligibility for ESA.

The Department regularly publishes official statistics on ESA and the WCA. The latest report was published in October 2012 and can be found on the internet at the link below:

http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/workingage/index.php?page=esa_wca

Tables 1a and 1b of this publication show the outcomes of the initial WCA for new ESA claims starting between October 2008 and February 2012. Tables 2a and 2b of this publication shows all claims based on the calendar month that the assessment was completed between October 2008 and May 2012. It is consistent with the information shown in Tables 1a and 2a of the October 2012 publication (see link above).

Background

A key part of the ESA regime is the WCA process, which is used to assess capability for work and eligibility for benefit. Within this Atos Healthcare health care professionals undertake an assessment and, following the assessment, their recommendation is passed on to DWP. A DWP Decision Maker then considers the WCA, alongside the other evidence relating to the claim, including that provided by the claimant when making a decision on the claimant's eligibility for ESA. This outcome can be one of the following:

Claimants can be found fit for work, meaning that despite their illness or disability they are able to undertake some forms of work. In this case their claim:

- closes and the claimant can move to Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA); or
- remains open following receipt of a challenge against the decision (either a reconsideration by DWP, or an appeal to Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunal Service (HMCTS)). If redress is sought, the pre-assessment rates remain until closure;

Claimants can be found to have limited capability for work. In this instance, they are allowed the benefit and placed in the Work Related Activity Group (WRAG). Those in this group are not expected to work, but are provided with help and support to prepare for work where possible. They receive a higher payment than those on JSA. Claimants can also appeal the decision to be put in the WRAG instead of the Support Group (SG); and

Claimants can be found to have limited capability for work and, in addition, limited capability for work related activity. In this situation, claimants are allowed the benefit and placed in the SG. Claimants in this group have the most severe functional impairments and so are provided with unconditional support and receive a higher rate of benefit than those in the WRAG.

Both WRAG and SG claims run until the initial or latest 'prognosis period' ends, which is usually, but not always, a standard length of time such as 3, 6, 12, 18 or 24 months based on the individual claimant's health and then have a repeat assessment.

Type of medical condition

- Tables 1a and 2a in this publication show those WCA outcomes for claimants whose primary condition is a physical health condition. Tables 1b and 2b show outcomes for claimants whose primary condition is a mental health condition.
- Entitlement to ESA is based on functional capabilities, not on condition per se. The medical condition recorded on a claim form does not in itself confer entitlement to ESA.
- The data on health conditions is based on the information recorded on the medical certificate ('fitnote') provided by a person's GP when they first make a claim for ESA. This represents what their GP considers to be the reason a person cannot work at that time. However, many people applying for ESA will, in fact, have more than one condition, and these conditions may affect each other. Where someone has more than one diagnosis or disabling condition, only the predominant one is currently recorded.

Results

Initial WCA outcomes of claimants with physical health conditions, by claim start date – Table 1a

The initial assessment outcomes relate to the claimant's first assessment before any appeal. The results are for cohorts of claimants with physical health conditions based on the date claims were started. Data for the most recent months should be treated with caution as the exclusion of in progress cases would be expected to have more impact on recent months.

For claims started from December 2011 to February 2012 outcomes of the initial assessments for claimants with physical health conditions show:

- 42 per cent of claimants have an outcome i.e. decisions have been made on their claims;
- 38 per cent of claimants had their claim closed before having a face to face assessment; and
- 19 per cent of claimants were still undergoing assessment.

Claimants with an outcome for their claim can be broken down as follows:

- 45 per cent of claimants with physical disabilities and illnesses were entitled to Employment and Support Allowance. Within this –
 - 20 per cent of claimants were placed in the Work Related Activity Group, and
 - 25 per cent of claimants were placed in the Support Group; Scope: initial functional assessment, of claimants whose primary health condition is related to physical conditions, that were completed - the first assessment of the Employment and Support Allowance claim where that assessment was completed.
- 55 per cent of claimants were assessed as Fit For Work.

Figure A shows a time series of table 1a.

Figure A: Outcome of initial functional assessment by date of claim start, Great Britain. Claimants with physical primary health conditions only.

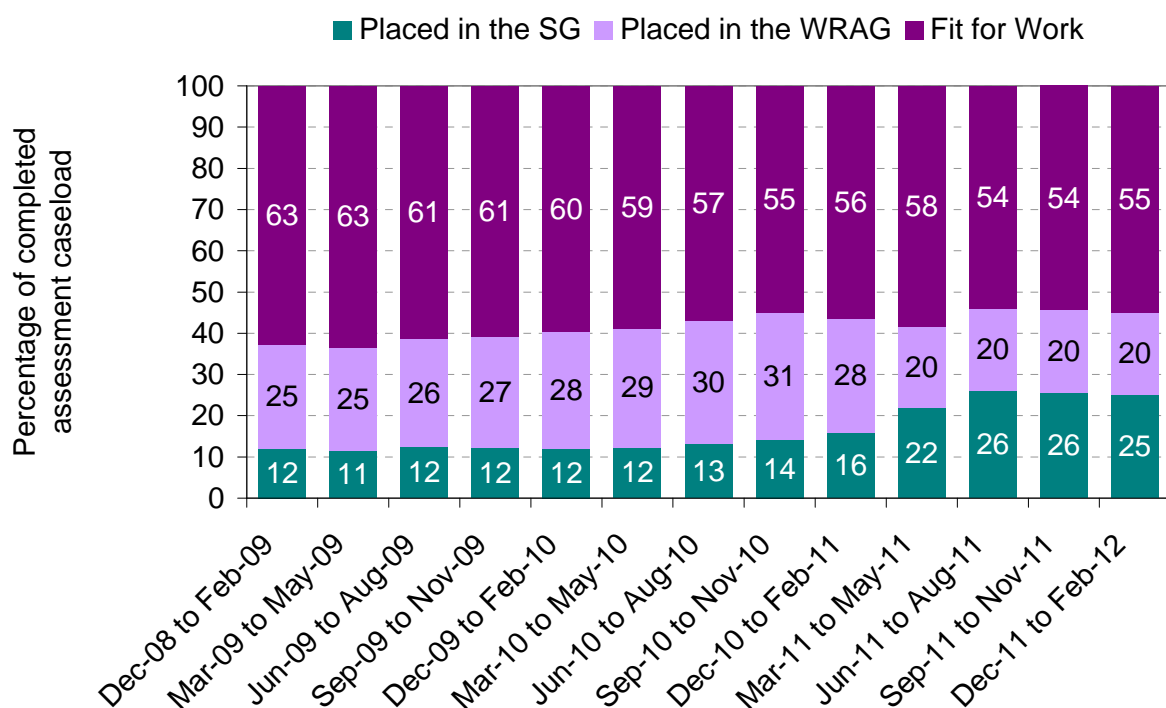


Figure A shows that since the introduction of ESA there has been a decline in the proportion of ESA claimants with physical health conditions being found fit for work and a significant rise in the number of people being placed in the SG. Between the quarter ending in November 2010 and the quarter ending August 2011 there was an upward shift in the proportion of SG placements, with a corresponding decrease in the proportion of WRAG placements during the same period. Data for the most recent three quarters shows that WCA outcomes have remained stable for claimants with physical health conditions. Only the last quarter shows a slight increase – one percentage point – of those found fit for work.¹ It is hard to attribute these patterns to particular causes, but it –

might reflect changes in decision-making since the introduction of this new benefit. This would be consistent with other findings – please see last section on initial outcomes by assessment date;²

there is recent growth in the proportion of claimants assigned to the SG. It is not possible to say what is behind this with absolute certainty, but it –

might be that this is due to a combination of changes to the Work Capability Assessment, including implementation of the Department-led review and others following implementation of the first Work Capability Assessment independent review's recommendations.

These statements should not be interpreted to mean that the above are anything more than possible reasons behind the series, and there may also be other undetected factors at work.

Initial WCA outcomes of claimants with mental health conditions, by claim start date – Table 1b

The initial assessment outcomes relate to the claimant's first assessment before any appeal. The results are for cohorts of claimants with mental health conditions based on the date claims were started. Data for the most recent months should be treated with caution as the exclusion of in progress cases would be expected to have more impact on recent months.

For claims started from December 2011 to February 2012 outcomes of the initial assessments for claimants with mental health conditions show:

- 43 per cent of claimants have an outcome i.e. decisions have been made on their claims;
- 27 per cent of claimants had their claim closed before having a face to face assessment; and
- 29 per cent of claimants were still undergoing assessment.

¹ Data for the most recent months should be treated with caution as the exclusion of in progress cases would be expected to have more impact on recent months.

² For more details see section 3.3 in the quarterly official statistics release 'ESA: Outcomes of WCAs, Great Britain – new claims', which can be found at the following link:
http://statistics.dwp.gov.uk/asd/workingage/esa_wca/esa_wca_oct2012.pdf.

Claimants with an outcome for their claim can be broken down as follows:

- 47 per cent of claimants with physical disabilities and illnesses were entitled to Employment and Support Allowance. Within this –
 - 21 per cent of claimants were placed in the Work Related Activity Group, and
 - 26 per cent of claimants were placed in the Support Group; Scope: initial functional assessment, of claimants whose primary health condition is related to physical conditions, that were completed - the first assessment of the Employment and Support Allowance claim where that assessment was completed.
- 53 per cent of claimants were assessed as Fit For Work.

Figure B shows a time series of table 1b. It shows that since the introduction of ESA there has been a decline in the proportion ESA claimants with mental health conditions being found fit for work and a sharp increase in the number being placed in the SG. Between the quarter ending in August 2010 and the quarter ending August 2011 there was an upward shift in the proportion of SG placements, with a corresponding decrease in the proportion of WRAG placements during the same period. Data for the most recent three quarters shows that WCA outcomes may have stabilised for claimants with mental health conditions. Only the last quarter shows a slight increase – two percentage points – of those found fit for work.³ It is hard to attribute these patterns to particular causes, but it –

might reflect changes in decision-making since the introduction of this new benefit. This would be consistent with other findings – please see last section on initial outcomes by assessment date⁴;

there is recent growth in the proportion of claimants assigned to the SG. It is not possible to say what is behind this with absolute certainty, but it –

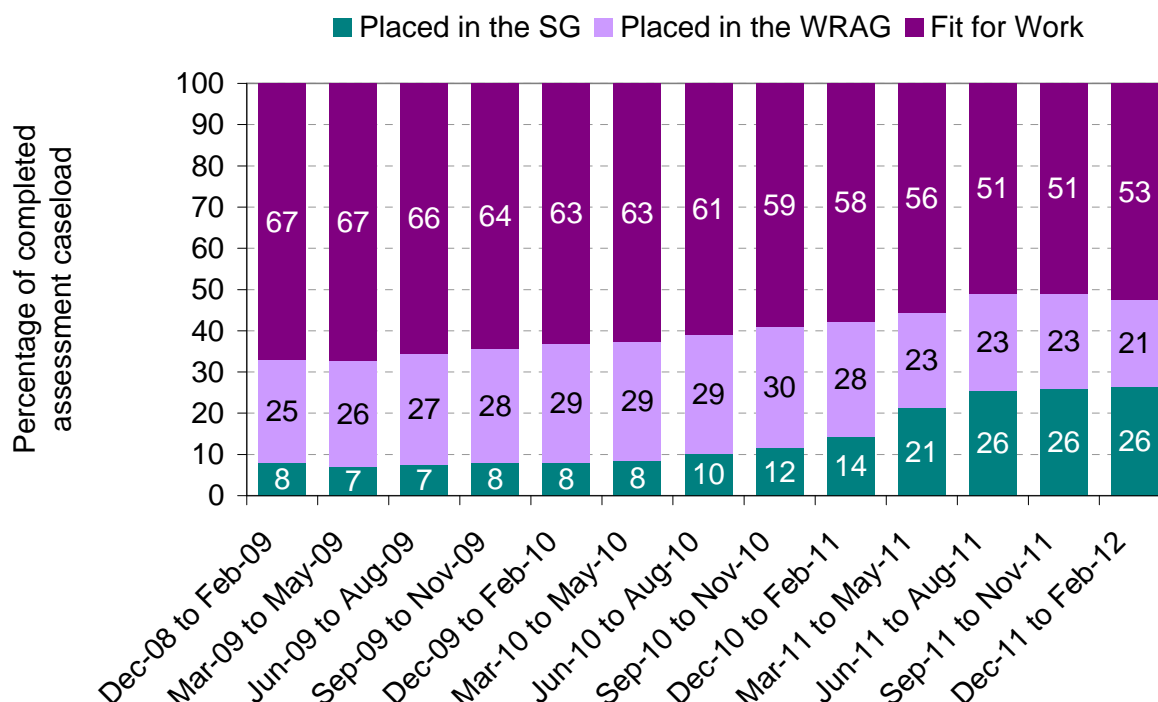
might be that this is due to a combination of changes to the Work Capability Assessment, including implementation of the Department-led review and others following implementation of the first Work Capability Assessment independent review's recommendations.

These statements should not be interpreted to mean that the above are anything more than possible reasons behind the series, and there may also be other undetected factors at work.

³ Data for the most recent months should be treated with caution as the exclusion of in progress cases would be expected to have more impact on recent months.

⁴ For more details see section 3.3 in the quarterly official statistics release 'ESA: Outcomes of WCAs, Great Britain – new claims', which can be found at the following link:
http://statistics.dwp.gov.uk/asd/workingage/esa_wca/esa_wca_oct2012.pdf.

Figure B: Outcome of initial functional assessment by date of claim start, Great Britain. Claimants with mental health problems only.



Initial outcomes by assessment date – Table 2a and 2b

The following results are for cohorts based on the date assessments were completed rather than when claims were started. This removes one inconsistency in the time series of data, as no period has outstanding assessments. Assessment date analysis also shows whether the change in outcomes observed in Figure A and B can be attributed to a certain period when assessments took place.

Figures C and D below show the time series of Table 2a and 2b where:

There was an increase in the proportion of claimants placed in the SG starting in the quarter ending November 2010 and accelerating in the quarters ending August 2011 and November 2011. This trend is observed for both claimants with physical and mental health conditions.

There was an increase in the proportion of claimants placed in the WRAG since the introduction of the benefit up to the quarter ending February 2011. Thereafter the proportion of claimants placed in the WRAG declined again. This overall trend is observed for both claimants with physical and mental health conditions. However, for claimants with mental health conditions the proportion placed in the WRAG increased slightly in the two most recent quarters, whereas it did not increase for claimants with physical health problems.⁵

Since the quarter ending May 2009 there has been a downward trend in the

⁵ Data for the most recent months should be treated with caution as the exclusion of in progress cases would be expected to have more impact on recent months.

proportion of claimants found fit for work, reaching the lowest level in the quarter ending November 2011. Since then this trend seems to have reversed with an increase in the proportion of claimants being found fit for work. This trend is observed for both claimants with physical and mental health conditions.

It is not possible to say what is behind this with absolute certainty, but it –

might be due to a combination of changes to the Work Capability Assessment, including implementation of the Department-led review and others following implementation of the first Work Capability Assessment independent review’s recommendations. The most marked outcome changes seems to follow implementation of the Department-led review on 28 March 2011.

The recent rise in fit for work outcomes –

might be due to the higher number of assessments still in progress in the previous period. Shorter processing times for SG cases mean that those decisions may have been completed earlier than those resulting in fit for work outcomes.

Therefore the most recent periods included higher proportions of assessments resulting in fit for work decisions.

These statements should not be interpreted to mean that the above are anything more than possible reasons behind the series, and there may also be other undetected factors at work.

Figure C: Outcome of initial functional assessment by date of assessment, Great Britain. Claimants with physical conditions only.

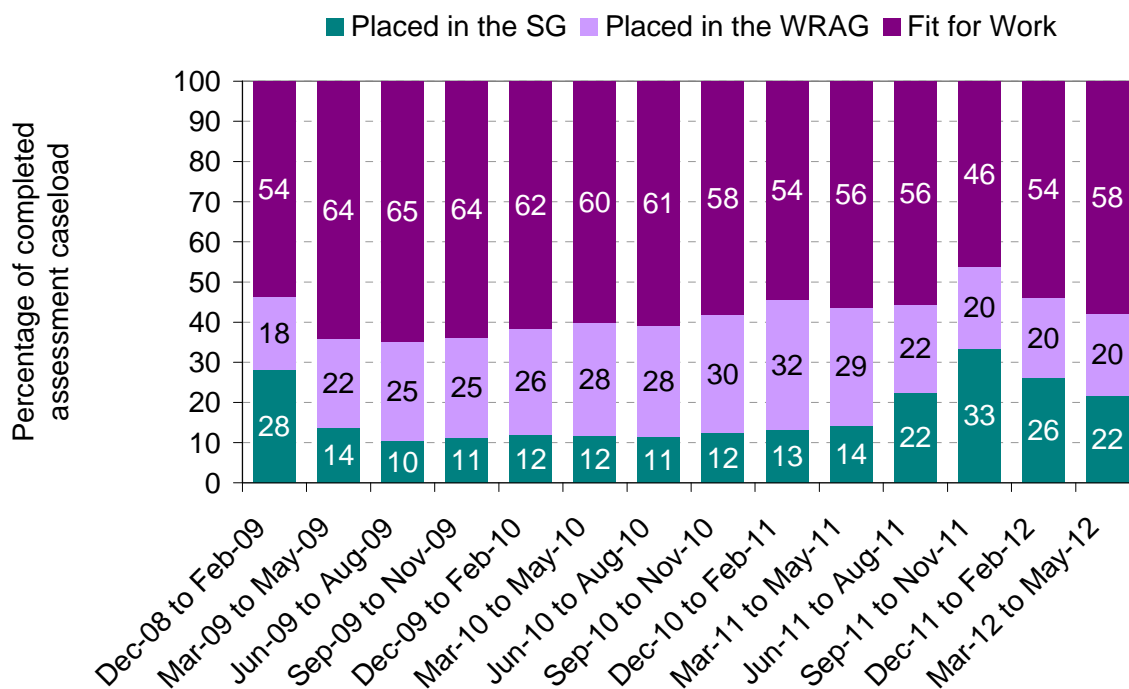
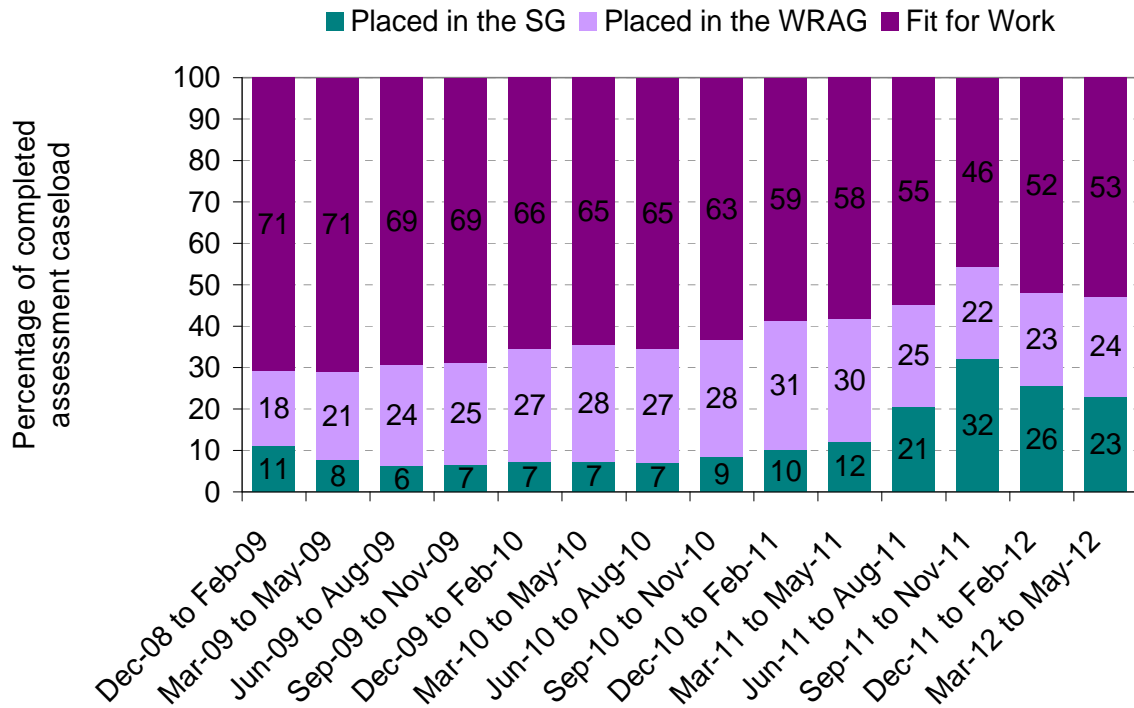


Figure D: Outcome of initial functional assessment by date of assessment, Great Britain. Claimants with mental health problems only.



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19 November 2012