

Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), which replaced incapacity benefits in October 2008, offers support for ill or disabled people. Claimants must participate in a Work Capability Assessment (WCA) to check eligibility and are placed in the Work Related Activity Group (WRAG) which offers support in preparing for work, or the Support Group (SG) for those unable to work. If they are not eligible to claim ESA they are found Fit for Work (FFW). Since October 2013, if claimants disagree with their assessment outcome, they can ask for a Mandatory Reconsideration (MR). If they still disagree with the MR outcome they can appeal to Her Majesty's Courts & Tribunal Service (HMCTS).

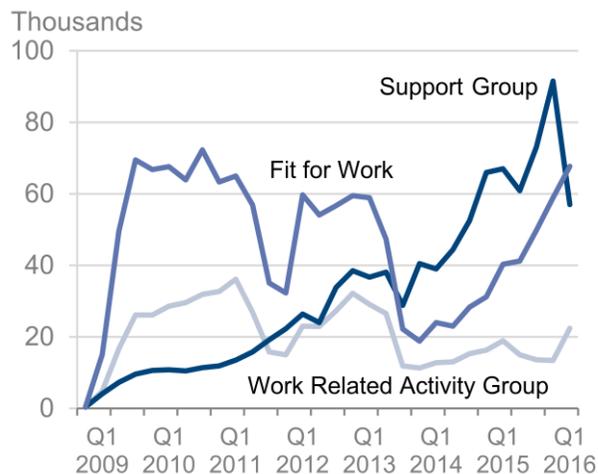
## Main stories

- Outcomes of initial assessments completed in the latest quarter to March 16 show that numbers assigned to the SG have fallen by 17 percentage points to 57,000, WRAG increased by 7 percentage points to 22,400 and FFW increased by 10 percentage points to 67,700 compared with the previous quarter.
- The number of ESA-WCA MRs registered fell by 600 in the latest month to stand at 14,400 in July 2016. 89% of MRs cleared in July 2016 were not revised.
- The number of appeals for FFW decisions on initial assessments in the quarter to June 2015 continued its gradual downward trend over the last two years to stand at 2,800. 41% of the decisions appealed in July 2015 were upheld.

## Work Capability Assessments

Support Group outcomes for initial assessments have dropped in the latest quarter

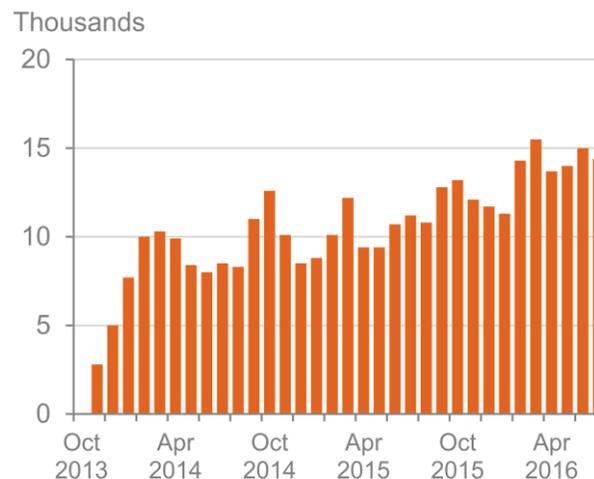
Assessments cleared by outcome



## Mandatory Reconsiderations

MR registration numbers follow an increasing trend overall, fluctuating slightly in recent months.

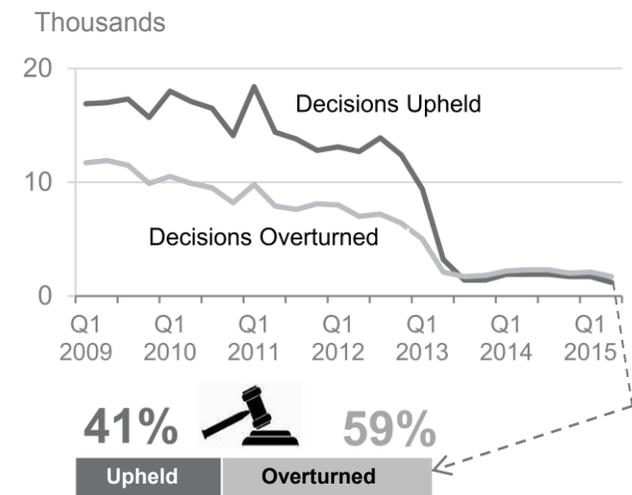
Mandatory Reconsiderations Registered



## Appeals

Appeals on initial FFW outcomes are decreasing - 41% decisions upheld in the latest quarter.

Appeals Completed (for initial assessments)



## At a glance

Page

[WCA Process Flow](#)

3

[Sankey Diagram](#)

4

[WCA clearances and outcomes](#)

5

[MR registrations, clearances and outcomes](#)

7

[Appeals clearances and outcomes](#)

9

[Health Conditions and ESA group allocation](#)

10

[About these statistics](#)

11

**Lead Statistician:** Lee McGargill

[Lee.McGargill1@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Lee.McGargill1@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

**Producer:** Louise Blake

**DWP Press Office:** 0203 267 5144

Comments? We welcome feedback

Published: 8<sup>th</sup> September 2016

Next edition: December 2016

ISBN 978-1-7825-707-1

## What you need to know

These statistics are released quarterly and cover ESA-WCA outcomes, MRs and appeals information sourced from:

- DWP's benefit administration datasets including MR data
- Healthcare provider assessment data
- HMCTS appeals data for completed appeals

In addition to the ESA-WCA official statistics contained in this release, we have developed some extra experimental ESA-WCA cohort figures by merging MR data with benefit, assessment and HMCTS data to allow us to track claimants through the stages of their ESA-WCA journey – see page 3.

To help visualise this we have also introduced a sankey diagram to display the volumes flowing through each stage of the process – see page 4.

These extra statistics have been labelled 'experimental' and users should be aware of possible methodology issues and data limitations whilst using them. See [methodology note](#) for more information.

**Note:** robust data for both the regular and experimental cohort information is only available for claims that began at least 9 months ago due to time required to complete assessments, record and process data accurately and align with other publications. **Hence, only claims made before the end of December 2015 and appeal outcomes up to June 2015 are included in these statistics.** Throughout the release, figures are presented by assessment start date, unless otherwise stated.

## ESA Work Capability Assessment, Mandatory Reconsiderations and Appeals process

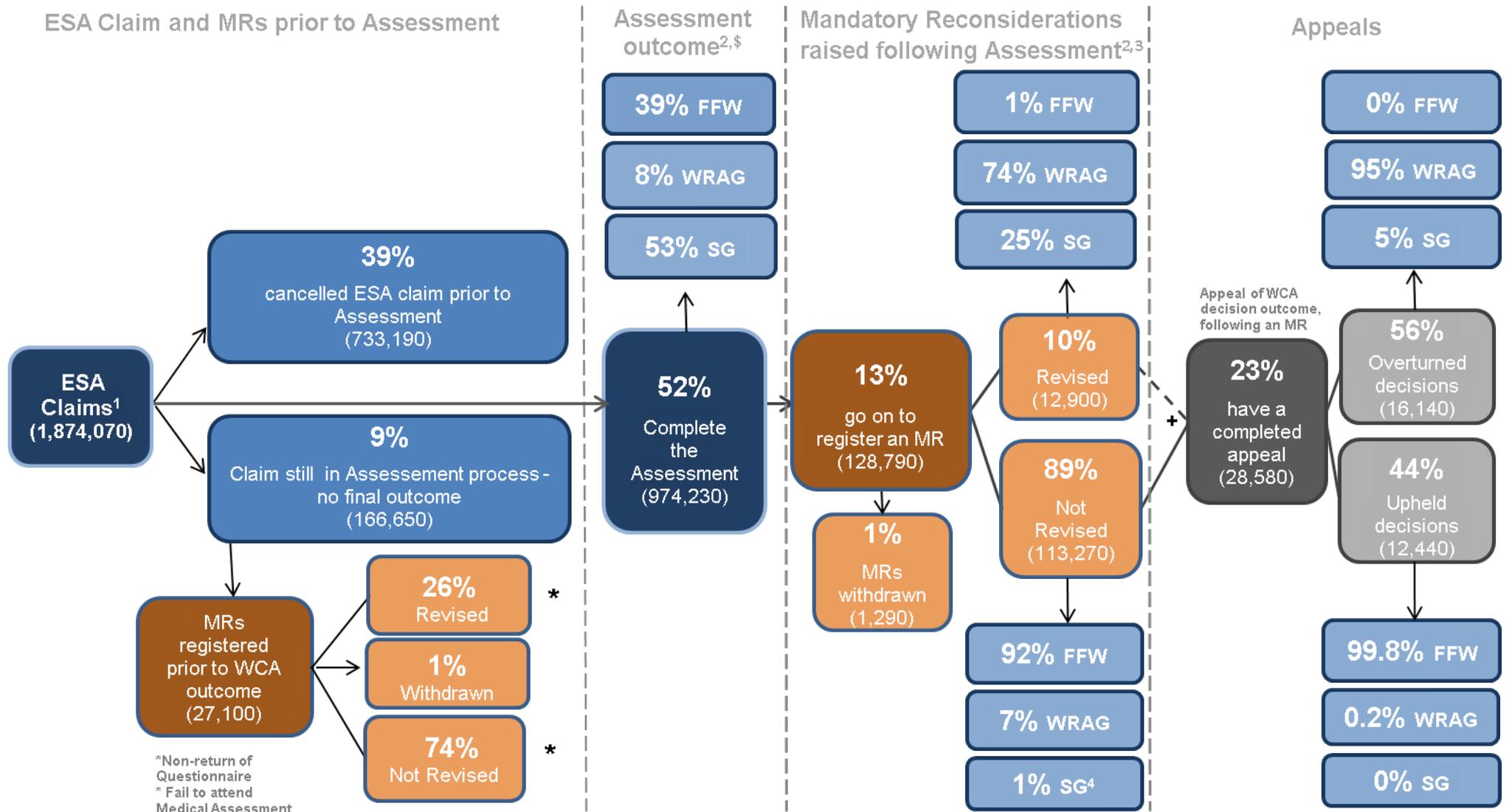
The following flow chart, containing experimental cohort data, shows the claim process to assess ESA entitlement. If claimants disagree with their assessment outcome they can ask the Jobcentre to review it by registering an MR. Following the MR outcome if the claimant still disagrees with the decision, they can appeal to Her Majesty's Courts & Tribunals Service.

There are 3 types of Work Capability Assessments:

- Initial assessment – for new ESA claims
- Repeat assessment – existing claimants must undergo regular reviews; timescales depend on medical condition
- Incapacity Benefit reassessment (IBR); all IB claimants will eventually be reassessed for ESA

The figures presented in both the flow chart and sankey diagram cover all parts of the ESA-WCA process for claimants starting their ESA claim from October 2013 to December 2015 for **initial and repeat assessments only**.

# Overview of the Work Capability Assessment, Mandatory Reconsideration (MR) and Appeals process for initial and repeat ESA claims starting October 2013 – December 2015 - (Experimental)

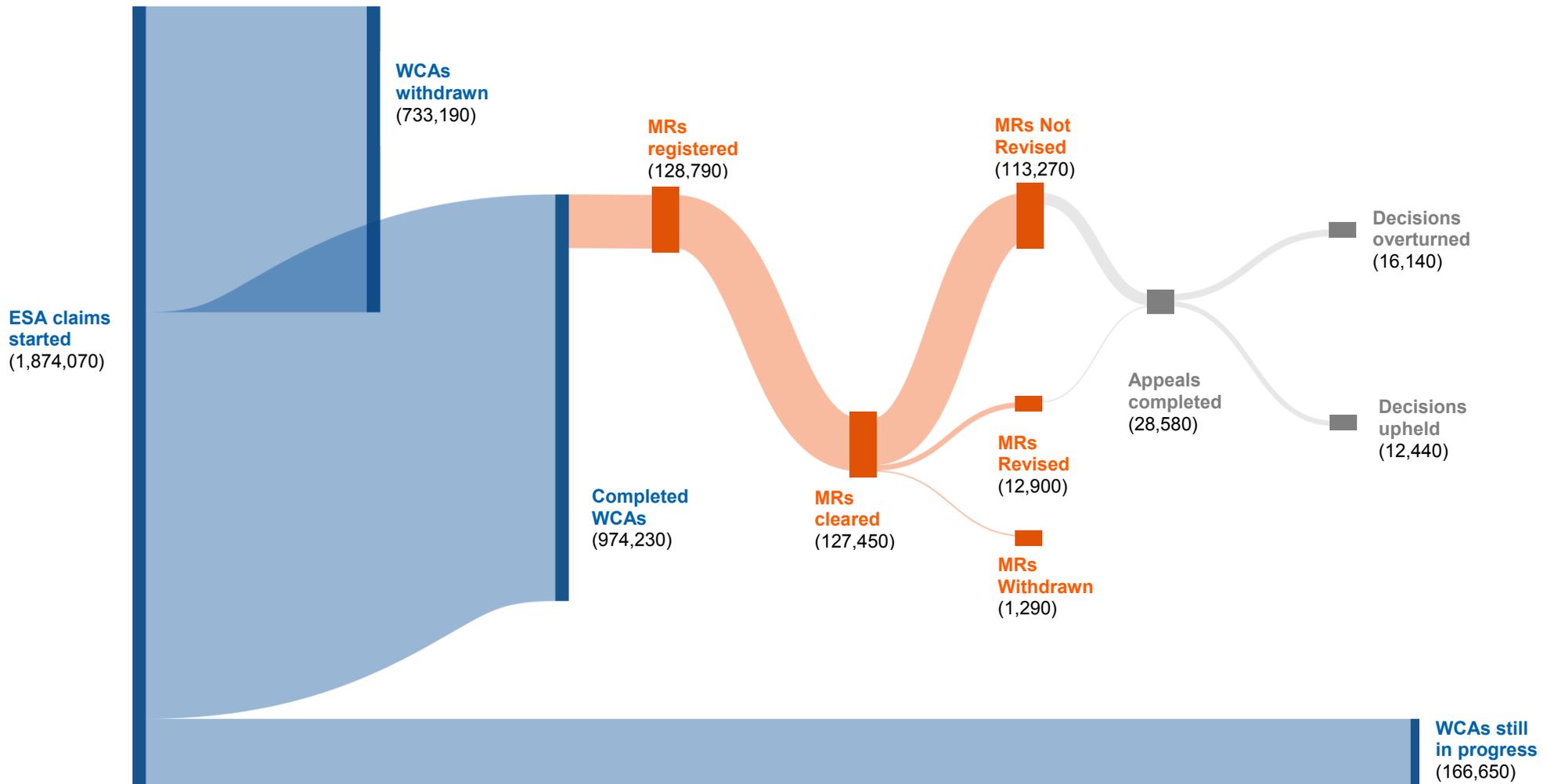


# Overview of the Work Capability Assessment, Mandatory Reconsideration and Appeals process

## October 2013 – December 2015 cohort - (Experimental)

The following diagram gives a visual representation of proportions at each stage of the ESA Work Capability Assessment (WCA) process. The relative thickness of each segment represents the volume of cases flowing through each stage. For all ESA claims which started between October 2013 and December 2015:

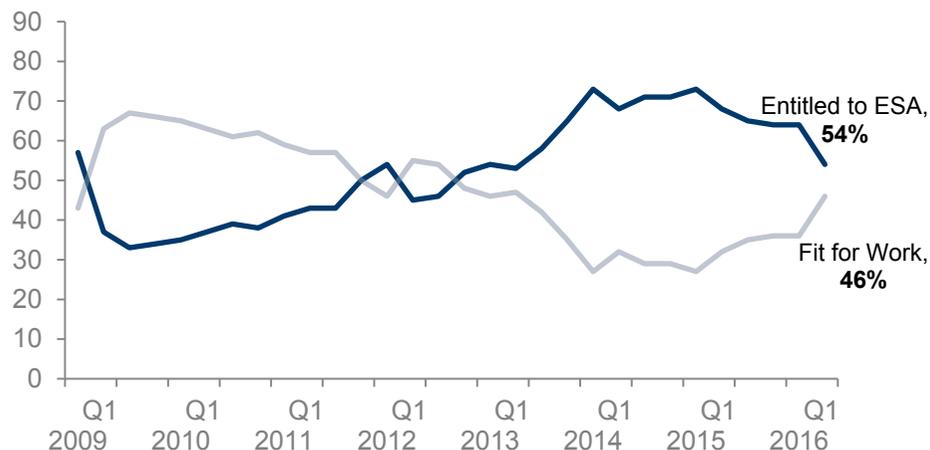
- Around 52% have had a completed WCA (974,230 assessments). WCAs relating to the remaining claims are either still in progress or have been withdrawn/cancelled.
- 128,790 Mandatory Reconsiderations (MRs) have been registered in relation to the 974,230 completed WCAs.
  - The diagram shows that 99% of these MRs have been cleared, with the decision maker's original decision being revised 10% of the time.
- Almost one in four claimants who have registered an MR, then go on to have a completed appeal. Of this group (28,580 cases), the latest case decision was upheld 44% of the time.



# ESA initial and repeat assessment outcomes, IB reassessments

The latest quarter to March 2016 shows 54% of initial assessment outcomes resulted in entitlement to ESA

Percentage of completed assessment caseload



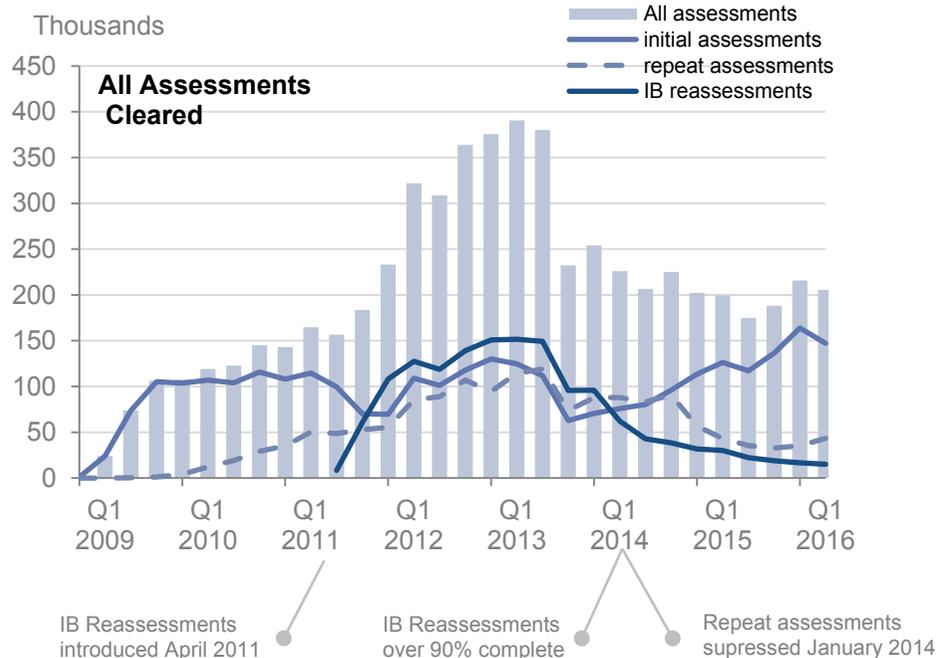
## Main Findings

From April 2009 to October 2011 there was a downward trend in claimants assessed as FFW and an upward trend in eligibility for ESA. In the quarter to January 2012 to March 2012 there was an increase in claimants assessed as FFW and a decrease in eligibility for ESA.

Outcomes of initial assessments entitled to ESA fell by 25,600 in the latest quarter to March 2016 to stand at 79,400. A fall of 10 percentage points to 54%.

Outcomes found FFW continued to increase by 8,800 to 79,400 in the latest quarter, a rise of 10 percentage points to 46%.

## 72 % of assessments cleared in the latest quarter were for ESA initial assessments



In the latest quarter to March 2016 the majority of assessments cleared were for ESA initial claims.

At the end of 2013, IB reassessment and repeat assessment volumes dropped significantly. The majority of IB reassessments were completed by that point and the focus was moved from assessing existing claims (including repeat assessments) to clearing new claims. IB reassessments are now 99% complete.

ESA repeat assessment volumes are expected to increase in future quarters as these were re-introduced in December 2015, following a suppression of 24 months to concentrate on new claim clearance.

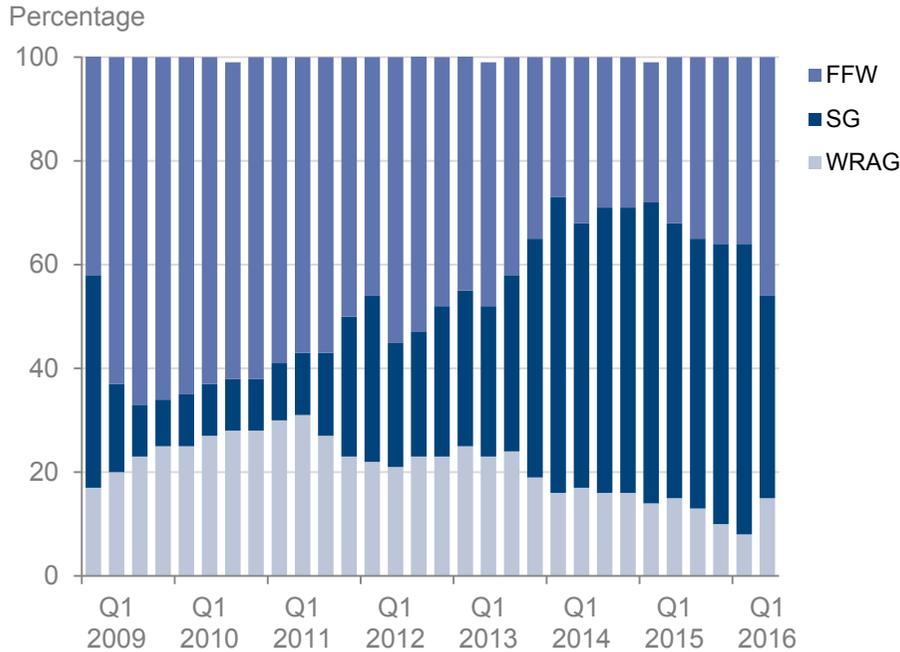
The effects of this have started to be seen where figures are tabled by assessment start date. For example in the latest quarter to December 2015 repeat assessments increased by 127,300 compared with only 36,100 for the same period a year earlier.

**The focus of this release will therefore be on ESA initial assessments.**

See accompanying [tables](#) for full data.

# Assessment outcomes for ESA initial assessments

Support Group outcomes have fallen for ESA initial assessments, whereas FFW and WRAG have increased



## Main Findings

For the 147,100 ESA initial assessments cleared in the latest quarter to March 2016:

- Support Group 39% Down 17 percentage points since previous quarter
- Work Related Activity Group 15% Up 7 percentage point since previous quarter
- Fit for Work 46% Up 10 percentage points since previous quarter

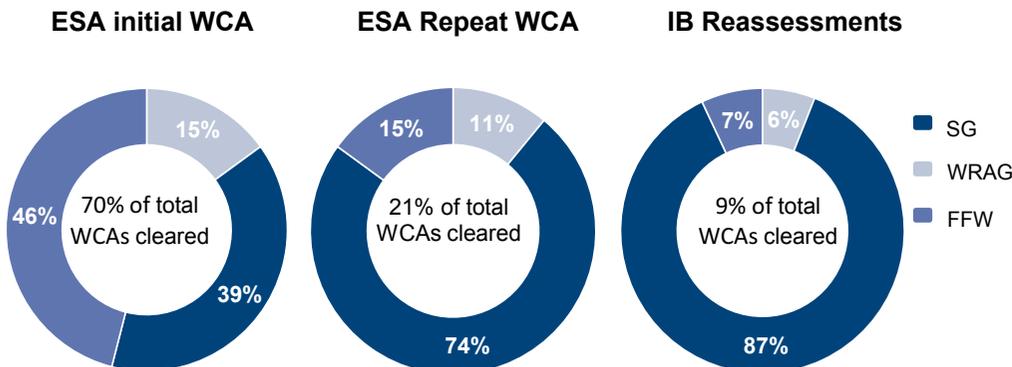
SG outcomes have gradually been increasing but fell from 91,500 to 57,000 in the quarter to March 2016.

WRAG outcomes have risen from 13,400 to 22,400 and FFW has risen from 58,900 to 67,700.

See accompanying [tables](#) for full data.

**Note:** assessment outcomes are shown by assessment date. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding

## ESA and IBR assessments: Cleared outcomes in the latest quarter show a big difference in outcomes between claim types



The majority of all assessments cleared in the latest quarter to March 2016 show 70% have been for initial ESA claims, 21% for ESA repeat assessments and 9% IB reassessments.

The vast majority of IB reassessments and repeat assessments have Support Group outcomes - 87% and 74% respectively, in contrast to 39% for ESA initial assessments. This is due to IB claimants and existing ESA claimants already receiving benefit for an existing medical condition.

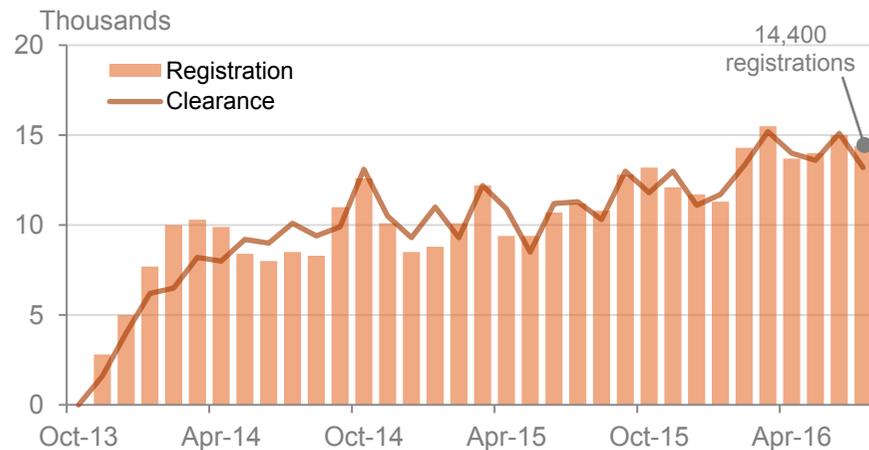
Initial ESA assessments have the highest FFW rate at 46%. This is expected as, unlike IB reassessments and repeat claims, these claimants don't have a previously known medical condition.

# ESA-WCA Mandatory Reconsideration Registrations, clearances and clearance times

If a customer disagrees with their assessment decision they have the opportunity to raise a **Mandatory Reconsideration** and ask DWP to formally review the decision. The aim of MR is to resolve disputes as early as possible without the need for an appeal hearing.

See [methodology](#) note for a more detailed explanation.

## Mandatory Reconsideration registrations have a general increasing trend but dropped slightly in July 2016



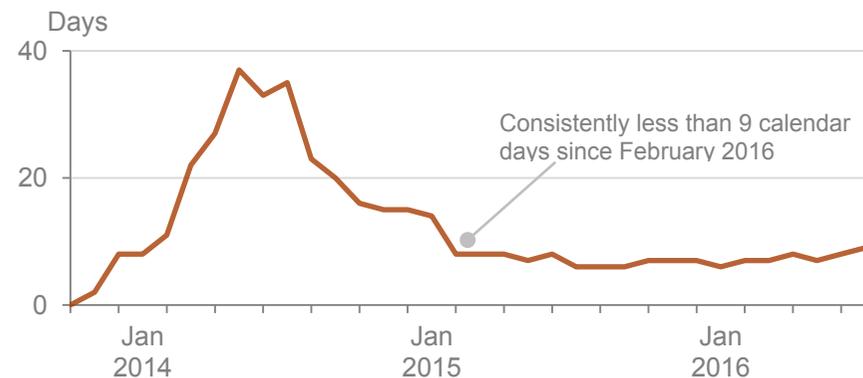
## Main Findings

Since the introduction of the MR process in October 2013 there has been an overall increasing trend in MR registration volumes. 14,400 were registered in July 2016 compared to 11,200 for a year earlier in July 2015.

The chart shows a large increase in registrations at the start of 2014 and monthly numbers increasing gradually since, fluctuating slightly each month. Since September 2015 there has been an overall increasing trend in the number of MRs registered.

At the start of the process, clearance numbers were low in comparison to registrations, however from May 2014 clearance volumes improved, probably as the process became established. Since September 2015 there is a general increasing trend in clearance volumes.

## Mandatory Reconsideration median monthly clearance times remains 9 calendar days or less



In July 2016, the median monthly clearance time was 9 calendar days.

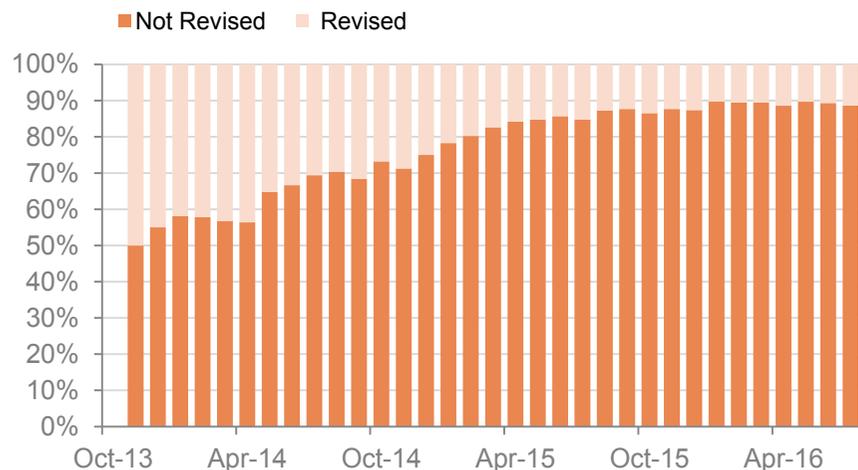
The median ESA-WCA MR clearance time initially increased steeply until May 2014 at to stand at 37 days, but since then has decreased. Since February 2015 the median clearance time has fluctuated only slightly and has not exceeded 9 calendar days.

See [methodology](#) note and page 9 for how median clearance times have been derived.

See accompanying [tables](#) for full data.

# ESA-WCA Mandatory Reconsiderations outcomes

89% of assessment outcomes were not revised at Mandatory Reconsideration in the latest month, July 2016



**Note:** MR figures require less retrospection than the cohort data and are therefore reported monthly to allow the most recent figures to be included.

## Main Findings

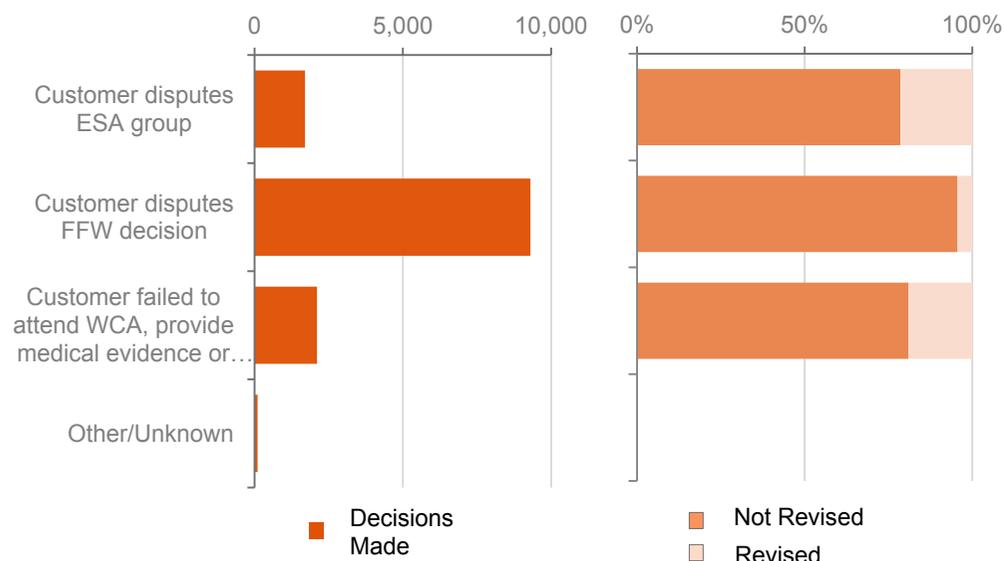
During the MR process, the DWP Decision Maker will review the evidence for the decision under dispute to either revise or not revise the decision.

Since the MR process was introduced, there has been a decreasing trend in the number of decisions being revised each month.

In July 2016 there were 89% of MRs not revised, 1,400 decisions revised compared to 11,700 decisions not revised.

See accompanying [tables](#) for further details.

## Fit for Work disputes are the main cause of ESA-WCA Mandatory Reconsideration decisions in July 2016



The vast majority of MRs raised during the ESA WCA process in July 2016 are down to FFW decisions. These types of MRs are less likely to be revised than the other categories.

In July 2016 13,200 (70%) MR decisions were made on disputes about Fit for Work assessment outcomes. Only 4% of FFW disputes resulted in a revision in July.

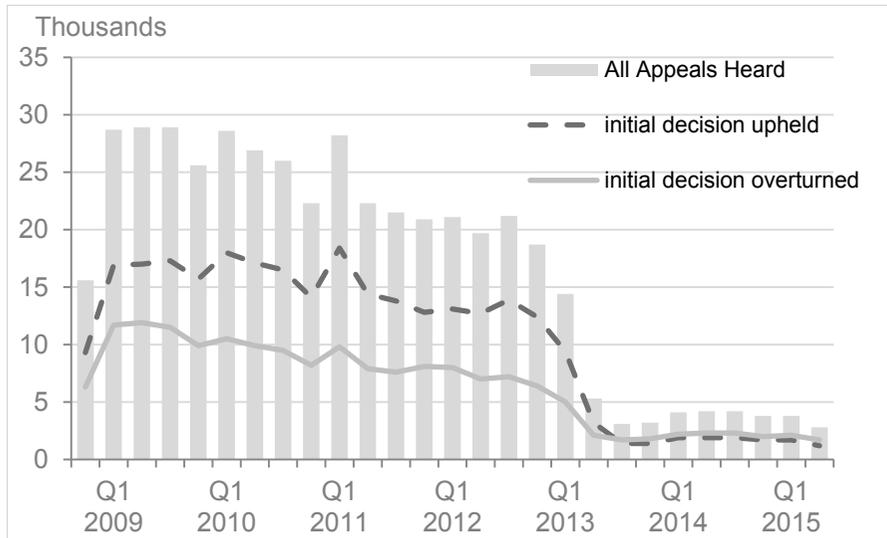
In July 2016 (16%) MR decisions were made on disputes for reasons where the claimant has not followed the claim procedures correctly. These reasons include failing to return the initial questionnaire, failing to provide medical evidence or not attending their assessment. 19% of these disputes were revised this quarter.

The breakdown of revised/not revised decisions per MR category in July is shown in the chart. See accompanying [tables](#) for further details.

# Appeals clearances and outcomes

Following an MR decision, the claimant can dispute the decision further by appealing to Her Majesty's Courts & Tribunal Service where an official appeal hearing will take place to consider the decision evidence. At appeal, the decision under dispute will either be upheld or overturned.

## Number of appeals heard on initial FFW decisions continues to fall



Note: appeals outcomes are shown by appeal start date.

### Main Findings

Being found FFW at assessment is the primary reason for claimants disputing a decision and therefore the main reason for appeal hearings. These figures focus on FFW appeals for initial assessments.

The total numbers of appeals heard on FFW decisions for initial assessments shows a steadily decreasing trend and very low numbers over the last 18 months with little fluctuation.

The chart shows that this quarter, the number of appeals heard on FFW decisions for initial assessments continues the decreasing trend. 2,800 claims were heard this quarter, a fall of 1,000 when compared to the previous quarter.

The low numbers of appeals over recent quarters may be due in part to the introduction of the MR process, although there could be other factors which have also contributed to their decline. The purpose of MRs is to give the customer an opportunity to present evidence against a decision for review without the need for formal appeal processes, therefore when the new system was introduced fewer appeals were expected.

## Almost four in ten initial FFW decisions were upheld at appeal this quarter

41%



59%

Decisions upheld

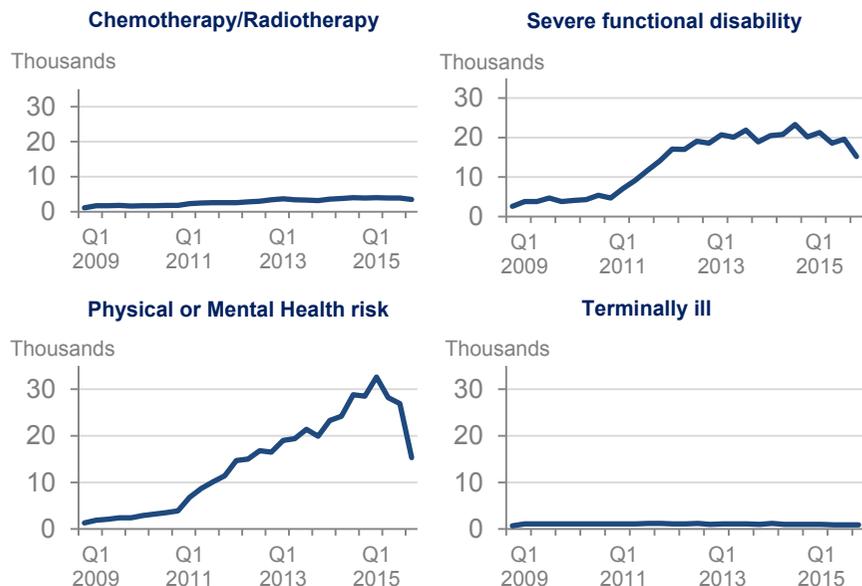
Decisions overturned

This quarter 41% of decisions under dispute were upheld at appeal. This continues the trend of slightly over half of appeal decisions on FFW disputes for initial assessment being overturned.

See accompanying [tables](#) for further details.

# Health Conditions and ESA group allocation for initial assessments

**‘Physical or mental health risk’ and ‘severe functional disability’ remain the main reasons for SG allocation this quarter**



## Main Findings

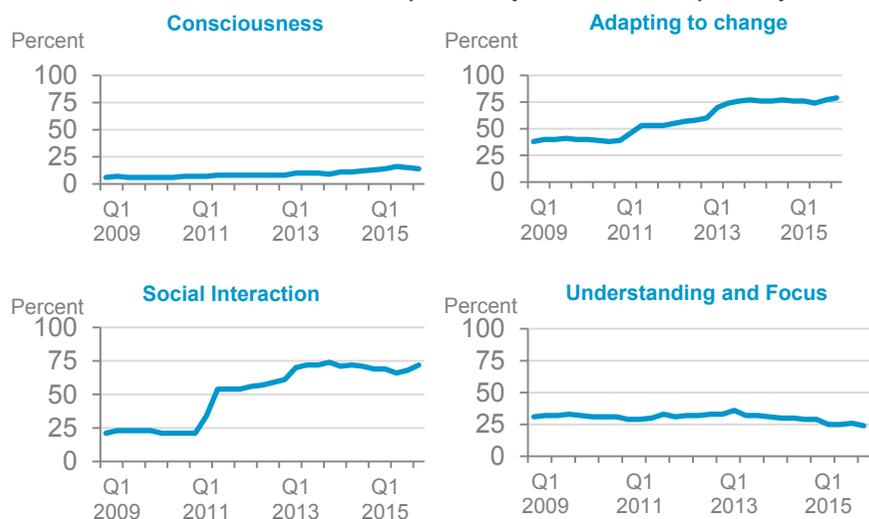
The charts to the left, show the main reasons for claimants who started their ESA claim in the latest quarter to December 2015 being assigned to the SG, is due to health conditions linked to ‘physical or mental health risk’ or ‘severe functional disability’.

These categories make up 82% of all SG allocations.

Pregnancy risk continues to be the smallest group; this quarter again sees less than 5% being assigned to the SG for this reason (not on charts due to very small numbers). There has been a decrease in allocation to the Physical or Mental Health risk group since the turn of the year.

Chemotherapy/radiotherapy and terminally ill numbers have fluctuated very slightly in the last year and the terminally ill figures remain stable at 900 (2%) and chemotherapy/radiotherapy has risen 3 percentage points to 3,500.

**‘Adapting to change’ and ‘Social interaction’ remain the main reasons for WRAG allocation (with 15 points or more) this quarter**



The charts show the four main functional impairment categories in which claimants have scored points when assigned to the WRAG, scoring 15 points or more at initial assessment. Receiving 15 points or more is the main reason for assignment to the WRAG at initial assessment however; claimants can also be assigned to the WRAG at reconsideration or after appeal.

‘Adapting to change’ and ‘social interaction’ remain the most common reasons for WRAG allocations (with 15 points or more), with 79% of claimants having an ‘adapting to change’ condition and 72% present in the ‘social interaction’ group.

**Note** that claimants can have multiple functional impairments therefore appear in more than one category.

‘Understanding and focus’ affects 24% of WRAG claimants (with 15 points or more) this quarter. Other reasons for being assigned to the WRAG (with 15 points or more) which aren’t shown (Upper Limb, Sensory, Continence, and Lower Limb) are less common.

See accompanying [tables](#) for statistics on all reasons and health conditions assigned to the WRAG.

# About these statistics

## Key uses of the statistics include:

- Providing the evidence base for assessing the potential effect of changes, monitoring and evaluation of DWP policy
- Answering Parliamentary Questions and Freedom of Information requests and Forecasting benefit expenditure (in conjunction with expenditure statistics)
- Policy development and evaluation by local authorities and other welfare to work and pensions stakeholders and providers.

## Terminology:

**Registration** - Claimant registers an application for a WCA, MR or appeal

**Clearance** - DWP decision maker has determined whether the claimant should or should not be entitled to claim ESA.

**Mandatory reconsideration** - Claimant wishes to dispute a decision made on their claim and requests DWP to reconsider the decision.

**MR clearance time** - The clearance time begins from the point the MR is raised on the DWP administrative system by the Benefit Centre as a valid MR, having considered whether they can initially change the decision in the light of any new information. The total clearance time therefore includes the time taken to transfer the case to the Dispute Resolution Team and the time taken for the decision maker to make a decision.

**Reassessment** - An existing claim that has been reassessed for ESA, as opposed to a new claim.

## MR outcomes:

- If a decision is categorised as **'Not Revised'** this means that the decision the claimant is questioning has not been changed.
- If the decision under dispute is classed as **'Revised – Allowed'** then the DM has changed the decision in the claimant's favour. So someone found FFW would be awarded ESA or someone put in the Work Related Activity Group (WRAG) claimant would be put in the Support Group (SG).
- If the decision is categorised as **'Revised – Disallowed'**, the DM, having reconsidered the decision, decides that the claimant is not entitled to ESA at all. This would apply where someone put in the WRAG seeks a revision to go into the SG but is then found FFW. These decisions are not at all common – less than 2% to date.
- If the decision is categorised as **'Withdrawn'**, the claimant has chosen to remove their MR request.

## MR Decision categories:

There are many reasons that result in an ESA claimant raising a MR. For these statistics only those reasons relating to the WCA process have been included. The main reasons have been categorised and shown in the accompanying tables as follows;

- The primary reason for a claimant raising a MR is when they are found FFW following a medical assessment. All MRs relating to this topic are categorised as 'Customer disputes FFW decision'.
- The second category 'Customer failed to attend WCA, provide medical evidence or return questionnaire' incorporates reasons where the claimant has failed to follow the required claim procedures. The MR gives them an opportunity to explain why they didn't comply.
- The third category is 'Customer disputes ESA group' and contains MRs where the claimant is already assigned to an ESA group.

## Experimental cohort statistics:

This quarter sees the addition of the MR statistics to the regular cohort data to build on the story of the end to end customer journey. The cohort MR statistics are less timely than the stand alone MR statistics due to time lags in the benefits data and assessment data they are linked to in the cohort process. Time lags are present to allow stages within the process sufficient time to complete. These statistics give a feel for the volumes flowing through each stage of the ESA WCA process. For robust figures on individual stages, please use the stand-alone figures within the published tables (not table 17).