



Department
for Work &
Pensions

Statistics to support the Fourth Independent Review of the Work Capability Assessment

Data on assessments and decisions

December 2013

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Introduction

This release is published alongside the fourth independent review of the Work Capability Assessment (WCA), which was carried out by Dr Paul Litchfield and published on 12 December 2013. It presents a fuller picture of the main analyses used in this report.

The WCA is a part of the Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) regime. It assesses how a person's sickness or disability affects their capability for work.

The Welfare Reform Act 2007, which legislated for the introduction of the WCA, states that:

“The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions shall lay before Parliament an independent report on the operation of the assessment annually for the first five years after those sections come into force.”

This release gives the previously unpublished statistics underlying the analysis in the fourth report. These statistics are:

- outcomes of initial functional assessments by Atos Healthcare advice;
- outcomes of initial functional assessments by points score in the Atos Healthcare assessment;
- claims with an outcome by method of assessment.

Background

Overview of the Work Capability Assessment

A key part of the ESA regime is the Work Capability Assessment (WCA) process, which is used to assess capability for work and eligibility for benefit. Within this Atos Healthcare healthcare professionals undertake an assessment and, following the assessment, their advice is passed on to DWP. A DWP Decision Maker then considers the advice, alongside the other evidence relating to the claim (including that provided by the claimant or by a medical practitioner or someone who knows the claimant) and makes a decision on the claimant's eligibility for ESA. The Decision Maker may go with or go against the Atos Healthcare HCP's advice.

The outcome will be one of the following:

- Claimants can be found fit for work.
- 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.
- 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 Support Group. Claimants in this group have the most severe functional impairments and so are provided with unconditional support.

A claimant may challenge a decision, first by requesting a reconsideration by DWP, and subsequently by an appeal to Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunal Service (HMCTS).

Sources of data

Figures used in this data release come from:

- DWP's benefit administration datasets for ESA (starting from 27 October 2008); and
- Atos Healthcare's assessment data.

Results

Claims where the outcome differs from the Atos advice

Table 1, in the associated spreadsheet, shows the outcomes of initial functional assessments by Atos Healthcare advice over time up to February 2013, the most recent data available. This data, which relates to the claimant's first assessment before any appeals, shows that:

- almost all Support Group (99.7%) and WRAG advice (96.8%) by Atos Healthcare is accepted by the DWP Decision Maker;
- Decision Makers go against considerably more instances of Fit For Work advice. In the year to February 2013, 15.1% of cases where Fit For Work advice is given result in the claimant being placed in the WRAG;
- over time, DWP Decision Makers have gone against an increasing percentage of Fit For Work advice.

Table 2 shows the outcomes of the WCA over time by the points score allocated in the initial functional assessment. This data covers the period up to February 2013, the most recent data available.

The data, which relates to the claimant's first assessment before any appeals, shows that DWP Decision Makers go against an increasing proportion of Atos Healthcare Fit For Work advice, the closer the claimant is to the 15 point threshold for entry into the WRAG. In 2013, the Decision Maker went against the Atos advice in 10% of cases where there was a 0 point score, rising to 62% at 12 points.

Claims with an outcome by method of assessment

Every time the DWP refers a claim to Atos Healthcare for a WCA, the claimant is automatically issued an ESA50 questionnaire. When this is returned, a trained healthcare professional carries out an initial paper-based assessment. In some cases the healthcare professional may send an ESA113 to the claimant's GP, and on the basis of the returned form, and any other medical evidence submitted, advise the DWP decision maker without the need for a face-to-face assessment. All other new claimants are required to undergo a face-to-face assessment, the majority of which are carried out at an Atos Healthcare Assessment Centre.

No claimant can be found fit for work without undergoing a face-to-face assessment. In addition, for new ESA claims, at the initial assessment, only Support Group and 'treat as limited capability for work' advice can be made using paper evidence only. At repeat assessments, both Support Group and WRAG advice can be made using paper evidence only.

Table 3 shows that 20% of initial claims with an outcome are decided without a face-to-face assessment. For repeat claims, 45% are decided without a face-to-face assessment. More repeat claims are decided without a face-to-face assessment because the re-referral process allows claimants placed in the WRAG or Support Group at initial assessment to remain there without a face-to-face where the evidence supports this. This data covers the whole of 2012, as more recent data will have been affected by the increased focus on quality by the current assessment provider.

Shaun Donaghy
Shaun.Donaghy@dwp.gsi.gov.uk
Department for Work and Pensions
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